
Stretching Postcommunism: Diversity, Context, and Comparative Historical Analysis

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Abstract: Although small-N comparison has become increasingly useful in accounting for postcommunist diversity, most comparative studies tend to focus on a single geographic region (such as East-Central Europe), failing to fully exploit the comparative method and running the risk of selection bias by arbitrarily reducing the variation on a relevant variable. To guard against this risk, two political scientists adapt Sartori's logic of "conceptual stretching" to articulate a definition of postcommunism that enables a wider array of comparable cases without losing the concept's intended analytic function. The article also considers a number of atypical "postcommunist" cases as well as empirical puzzles where these cases can be fruitfully utilized.

Over the past decade, the field of postcommunist studies has moved beyond the task of defining and bounding itself to the task of accounting for diverse outcomes and trajectories (Blokker, 2005; Boduszynski, 2004; Bunce, 1999; Ekiert and Hanson, 2003; Kitschelt, 2003; Pop-Eleches, 2007). In the process, small-N comparative analysis,² generally regarded as a valuable tool for analyzing diversity across time and space (Hall, 2003; George and Bennett, 2005; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003), has come to occupy an increasingly prominent niche within the repertoire of postcommunist studies. In most such studies, however, cases of postcommunist

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transformation are drawn almost exclusively from a single geographic region, typically from Eastern Europe or, less frequently, from the region encompassing the post-Soviet nations of the Caucasus and Central Asia (henceforth referred to simply as Central Asia). A review of articles and books devoted to postcommunist studies published between 2000 and 2006 reveals that, while a sizable number of studies consider more than one case, only a tiny fraction of these feature cases chosen from different geographic regions.³

This tendency appears to reflect the presumption that the *analytically* defined concept of postcommunism may be viewed as coterminous with a *geographically* bounded space, as manifestly evident in the common use of the terms “postcommunist region” or “postcommunist area” by prominent scholars in the field (e.g., Anderson, Fish, Hanson, and Roeder, 2001, pp. 5, 153; Bunce 2003, p. 169; Fish 2005, p. 6). This is hardly surprising given that the concept originated in the aftermath of abrupt regime changes accompanying the velvet revolutions of Eastern Europe and the break-up of the Soviet Union. Moreover, in the midst of such sweeping transformations, focusing on the experiences of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union could be viewed as a practical move for the purpose of generating common problematiques and stocks of knowledge around which a scholarly community could be reconstituted. Intellectually and methodologically, too, such a move may be justified in regard to questions that assume scope conditions found primarily in a single geographic area. Selecting cases only from Eastern Europe, for example, is not only sensible but necessary in relation to studies comparing the functioning of party systems or electoral institutions (Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, and Toka, 1999; Grzymala-Busse, 2007), or the privatization of state assets in the course of market reforms (Appel, 2004; Barnes, 2003; Orenstein, 2001), or the adoption of policies as part of accession to the European Union or NATO (Jacoby, 2004; Vachudova, 2005; Murphy, 2006). Similarly, focusing on Central Asia makes sense for research questions concerning the inter-

²By small-N comparative studies, we mean studies employing some variant of the comparative method to analyze a small number of cases (anywhere from two to ten, but usually somewhere in between) for the purpose of generating, testing, or refining theoretical propositions intended to apply to a larger universe of cases. We do *not* count anthologies of separate country studies or analyses of data pertaining to all members of the universe of cases (e.g., Fish and Choudhry, 2007; Frye, 2002) since the question of case selection does not arise in these situations.

³We are indebted to Allison Evans, a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania, for this finding. Between 2000 and 2006, the journals *Communist and Postcommunist Studies*, *Demokratizatsiya*, *East European Politics & Society*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *Problems of Postcommunism*, and *Slavic Review* published 306 articles comparing at least two postcommunist countries, but only 20 of these examined cases from different geographic regions. Similarly, university presses at Cambridge, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Michigan, Oxford, Pittsburgh, Princeton, Washington, and Yale combined to publish 41 books that compared the experiences of two or more postcommunist countries, but only five featured cases drawn from different geographic regions.

action of clan identities and persistent authoritarianism (Collins, 2006; Schatz, 2006), or the effects of language policy and citizenship requirements on the behavior of Russians residing in Soviet successor states (Commercio, 2004; Dave, 2003), or the implications of state control over mineral wealth for the expansion of institutional capacity or the consolidation of democracy (e.g., Luong and Weinthal, 2001; Fish, 2005).

There are questions about postcommunist transformations, however, that do not require us to restrict the universe of possible cases to any one geographic region. This is especially true for comparative analyses designed to explain divergence in postcommunist outcomes along such dimensions as the strength and authority of state institutions, changes in the size and capacity of administrative units, the relative size of various sectors of the economy and the implications of this for economic statecraft, the common challenges and diverse responses of workers previously accustomed to full employment, and the changing character of nationalist discourse in communist and postcommunist contexts. For such questions, small-N studies focusing solely on Eastern Europe or on Central Asia not only would fail to maximally leverage the comparative method, but would run the risk of selection bias where the chosen cases capture only a small segment of the variation represented by the full population of relevant cases (Geddes, 2003, p. 97; Goertz and Mahoney, 2006, p. 185).⁴

To guard against this risk, this article follows the logic of "conceptual stretching" (Sartori, 1970; Collier and Mahon, 1993; Goertz, 2006, pp. 70-72) in order to explicitly articulate a concept of postcommunism that reduces its number of defining attributes (the intension of the concept) and enables a wider array of comparable cases (the extension of the concept) without losing the intended analytic function of the concept. Our aim in doing so is not to challenge the boundaries of postcommunist studies but rather to clarify and more systematically exploit the analytic core of that rationale: the assumption, implicitly embraced by most students of postcommunism, that reform processes in former communist regimes are influenced by a distinctive set of background conditions that justify a distinctive research agenda and a distinctive set of empirical and theoretical categories.⁵ The logic behind this assumption, while initially informed by transformations in geographically contiguous regions where Leninist regimes quickly collapsed, can be fruitfully extended to cover cases from other regions that previously bore a closer "family resemblance"⁶ to East European communist regimes than to other developmental regimes.

Thus, the first part of our "stretched" definition of postcommunism concerns the features commonly associated with "communism" or "social-

⁴As George and Bennett (2005, pp. 30-32) note, however, this principle does not apply to single-case studies intended to trace causal processes in specific contexts.

⁵This view owes a significant debt to Jowitt's (1992, pp. 284-305) conceptualization of the "Leninist Legacy," but similar logics are evident in Bova (1991); Terry (1993); and, especially, Bunce (1995a, 1995b). An updated version of this view also informs the analytic framework guiding the contributions to Ekiert and Hanson (2003).

ism" in diverse contexts, reducing the more specific attributes invoked to define the narrower concept of "Leninism" preferred by some. A country is considered to have previously been "communist" if it has experienced a lengthy period (at least two decades) of rule by a single party that (i) restricts political leadership to those ideologically committed to promoting international communism/socialism and transforming preexisting class relations in one way or another, and (ii) pursues a program of economic development in which central planning overseen by communist party officials is privileged over market mechanisms and participation in the international capitalist economy. The second component of our definition offers a minimalist understanding of the "post" in postcommunism, encompassing all cases where the project of building communism has ended, whether or not this is accompanied by an abrupt regime change or the consolidation of democratic institutions (especially since some postcommunist countries have either remained authoritarian or slid backwards after initially embracing democracy). That is, the postcommunist universe refers to all polities where the defining features of communism were once present but where (i) ideological commitment to communism or socialism no longer dominates the processes of elite recruitment and domestic or foreign policymaking, and (ii) there exist sustained efforts to scale back central planning in favor of an expanding role for market mechanisms and expanding participation in the global economy.

We begin by briefly tracing the shift in postcommunist studies from initial concerns over bounding the field to more confident efforts to explain the growing diversity of the postcommunist world. The logic invoked to justify this shift, we then argue, can be extended to a "stretched" concept of postcommunism and an expanded universe of comparable cases seeking to engineer economic and political transformations while coping with the legacies of something akin to communist/socialist rule. Thereafter, we consider a small sample of cases that may be justifiably considered "post-communist," including cases where communist parties similar to those once in power in Eastern Europe initiated gradual market reforms while retaining political control (e.g., China, Vietnam), where socialist dictatorships committed to autarkic development and class struggle have given way to regimes pursuing democratization and structural adjustment (e.g., Tanzania), or where locally entrenched left-wing parties are dismantling long-standing economic and social programs to stimulate productivity and foreign investment (e.g., the Indian state of West Bengal). Then we offer examples of empirical puzzles where students of postcommunism may be able to fruitfully leverage such cases to refine existing hypotheses or generate new insights. The conclusion reiterates that our motivation here is not to dismiss the rationale typically invoked to bound the study of

⁶The logic of "family resemblance" has been previously developed in psychology to identify features that, while not identical to those of existing objects in a category, are similar enough to warrant inclusion in that category (Rosch and Mervis, 1975; Tversky, 1977). For a discussion of this logic in social science concept formation, see also Collier and Mahon (1993).

postcommunism; rather, it is to make it more possible to clarify and exploit the analytic core of that rationale.

DIVERSITY AND CONTEXT IN POSTCOMMUNIST STUDIES

The field of postcommunist studies emerged in an intellectual climate in which the social sciences were embroiled in debates over whether qualitative area-focused scholarship needed greater methodological rigor and theoretical sophistication (e.g., Ames, 1996; Bates, Johnson, and Lustick, 1997; King, 1995; Shea, 1997). Partly because communist and Soviet studies had supposedly failed to predict the collapse of communism, and despite valiant attempts to defend the intellectual contributions made by these fields (Breslauer, 1992), students of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were especially sensitive to the need to validate their common enterprise. Moreover, the field had to contend with the argument that transformations following the collapse of communist regimes could be analyzed through the same concepts and analytic frameworks already being employed to examine transitions from authoritarian rule elsewhere (e.g., Przeworski, 1991; Karl and Schmitter, 1995; Schmitter and Karl, 1994).⁷

Under these circumstances, many students of postcommunism were attracted to analytic frameworks designed to simultaneously (a) distinguish postcommunist transformations from liberalization processes elsewhere and (b) explain emergent similarities (rather than differences) in trends and outcomes across the postcommunist world. No single concept served this dual imperative better than the concept of a communist (or Leninist) *legacy*. Initially articulated in the work of Ken Jowitt (1992, pp. 284–305; see also Hanson, 1995; Howard, 2006; Sil, 2006), the concept was intended to suggest that postcommunist transformations, unlike other transitions, had to contend with a distinctive historical inheritance evident only in countries that had experienced decades of communist rule. This inheritance not only was inimical to the effort to consolidate liberal democracy and free-market capitalism, but also served to narrow the range of trajectories and outcomes across the postcommunist world while distinguishing these from transformations accompanying reforms elsewhere (e.g., Bunce, 1995a, 1995b). Significantly, the purpose of the concept of a communist legacy had always been to “theoretically bound, not strangle, the diverse developments” across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Jowitt, 1998, p. 106). Yet in an environment where the value-added of having a separate field of postcommunist studies was open to question, postcommunist specialists tended to treat evidence of variation within the

⁷The most direct rebuttal against this view is in Bunce (1995b, 1995c); see also Jowitt (1998). For a more recent and nuanced treatment of the “transitology” debate, see Blokker (2005) and Gans-Morse (2004).

postcommunist world as theoretically less significant than evidence of the shared inheritances and experiences that distinguished the postcommunist universe en masse from other sets of countries worldwide (Sil, 2006).⁸

Over the past decade, however, this imperative has become progressively less important as the attack on the area studies seems to have given way to a more pragmatic, constructive search for a common ground between those invested in area-specific qualitative research and those more concerned with general concepts or theories in comparative politics. This trend is associated with what Hall (2003) describes as nothing short of a fundamental "ontological shift" as students of comparative politics, rather than searching for standardized cause-effect relationships across time and space, are recognizing the pervasiveness of *causal mechanisms* whose effects are intertwined with processes embedded in spatio-temporal *contexts*. In Pierson's (2004, pp. 17–53, 79–102) analysis of institutional change, for example, the scope for a given mechanism to induce change may be diluted by self-reinforcing processes that make departures from certain paths of institutional development increasingly costly; yet in a different context, this same mechanism may suddenly produce abrupt institutional breakdowns in conjunction with "slow-moving" processes that pass a critical threshold.⁹ The growing attention to causal mechanisms and context-specific processes has had the effect of raising the intellectual status of idiographic area-specific knowledge in the absence of which any discussion about the effects of mechanisms would remain abstract and contingent. This ontological shift has also served to reinvigorate small-N comparative analysis which is now viewed not as a "weak" substitute for statistical approaches, but as the basis for a robust strategy for systematically analyzing how similar causal mechanisms can produce variable patterns of continuity and change across differently bounded temporal and spatial contexts (Hall, 2003; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003; Pierson, 2003).

Partly influenced by these currents in the social sciences and even contributing to their current momentum, contemporary postcommunist studies has evolved into a more confident and heterogeneous field, less concerned with defending its boundaries and more concerned with empirical puzzles that take seriously the emergent diversity across the postcommunist world. Although this diversity was initially thought by some to invalidate the logic behind a single category of postcommunism (e.g., Rupnik, 1999; King, 2000), others have more recently demonstrated that postcommunist diversity reflects not the declining relevance of initial conditions shared by postcommunist countries but rather the relevance of cross-national variations in those initial conditions (Pop-Eleches, 2007). If

⁸For example, Howard's (2002) study of civic activism notes differences across postcommunist countries but emphasizes the more substantial difference between Western and Eastern Europe.

⁹Our understanding of mechanisms draws upon Elster (1989, pp. 3–10), George and Bennett (2005, pp. 135–138), Hedström and Swedberg (1998), and Tilly (2001), among others.

anything, the emergent heterogeneity of the postcommunist universe is seen as presenting new opportunities to make more explicit the theoretical rationale for a field of postcommunist studies and to engage in comparative studies that take seriously the variation in communist legacies and in their effects across temporal and spatial contexts (Ekiert and Hanson, 2003).

The essays in the volume edited by Ekiert and Hanson (2003) nicely reflect this intellectual move, demonstrating not only that communist legacies are variable but that their particular effects vary significantly across time and space as a result of their interaction with context-specific factors (Kitschelt, 2003). In effect, for any given issue, a particular historical legacy is considered a mechanism whose effects may be strengthened, diluted, or deflected depending on its interaction with other processes unfolding in different temporal and spatial contexts. Employing this basic analytic framework, the studies in this volume engage in context-sensitive comparative analysis and generate compelling insights into the causes and consequences of variation along a number of dimensions: the geographic location of particular countries and the related strength of external influences (Kopstein and Reilly, 2003); the choice of policy frameworks and reform strategies in different spheres (Stanger, 2003; Inglot, 2003; Johnson, 2003); the organizational skills of leaders of communist successor parties (Grzymala-Busse, 2003); the evolution of employment patterns and managerial practices in given firms or sectors (Baxandall, 2003); and the discursive strategies of cultural and political entrepreneurs in framing history and national identity (Kubik, 2003).

We follow Pierson's (2003) assessment that these studies constitute exemplars of contextualized comparison and reflect the maturation of postcommunist studies. The substantive elevation of diversity, the theoretical elevation of temporal and spatial contexts, and the methodological elevation of comparative historical analysis all suggest to us that postcommunist studies has kept pace with, and is even helping to define, ontological and methodological currents in the field of comparative politics. At the same time, in view of the emphasis on explaining diversity across the postcommunist universe, we see no reason why the rationale and approach offered by Ekiert and Hanson should be confined to the region of "Central and Eastern Europe," as announced in the title of their volume. In fact, we suggest that comparative historical studies featuring a more diverse array of comparable cases can not only add fresh insights into particular context-specific processes but also generate more portable insights concerning the operation of particular mechanisms.

There are many questions, closely related to ones addressed by contemporary students of postcommunism, for which some of the defining features of East European postcommunism (such as the mass extinction of Leninist regimes and the emergence of party systems) can be treated not as boundary conditions but as values clustering at one end of a given axis for a larger population of cases that can be counted as postcommunist. For such questions, selecting cases from only Eastern Europe (or Central Asia) can produce a range of variation that is narrower than would be the case

in a larger cross-regional sample, essentially increasing the risk of selection bias and thereby overstating or understating the putative effects of particular mechanisms. If the study of postcommunism is to keep moving forward, it is necessary to explicitly reconsider the analytic basis for the concept of postcommunism with an eye to facilitating a larger and more heterogeneous universe of comparable cases.

EXPANDING THE POSTCOMMUNIST UNIVERSE: IN SEARCH OF DIVERSITY

As noted above, our conception of postcommunism has two parts, the first addressing the meaning of "communism" and the second having to do with what constitutes its ending. In each case, given that the objective is to facilitate a larger universe of cases and hence a wider range of variation, the concepts of communism and postcommunism are defined in as broad a manner as possible without sacrificing too much of the analytic significance implicitly or explicitly ascribed to the terms.

For the purpose of examining variation across contemporary postcommunist societies, the concept of communism serves a different purpose than it did during the Cold War, when there was a premium on establishing a clear distinction between Soviet-type societies and other developmental or authoritarian regimes. In this context, in order to distinguish their intellectual enterprise from both the normative critique of "totalitarianism" and the more universalistic models of "development," many scholars sought to emphasize the historical novelty of Soviet-type societies by focusing on the ideologies, organizational structures, and developmental programs of those quite similar "Leninist" parties that emerged in the Soviet Union as well as in such diverse places as Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, and North Korea. In the formulation of Jowitt (1992b, pp. 10–28) and Hanson (1995) among others, the distinctive features of "Leninism" consisted of a steadfast commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideology, Lenin's conception of "vanguard" leadership under a party of professional revolutionaries, and Stalin's execution of "planned heroism" combining high rewards for exceptional individual effort with centrally designated production schedules and norms (see also Ekiert and Hanson, 2003, p. 26). These features were also viewed as a novel amalgam of two Weberian categories: impersonal rational-legal features, as seen in the "scientific" character of Marxist-Leninist thought, in the rules governing party organization and membership, and in the quest for rationalization in economic planning; and charismatic features, as reflected in the sacrosanct belief in the promise of the revolutionary ideology, in the correctness of the party's decisions as expressed by its leading comrades, and in the extraordinary heroic qualities of those able to "overfulfill" the targets of the plan. This and other narrowly bounded conceptions of communism served to effectively distinguish Soviet-type societies empirically and conceptually from

the totalitarianism of Nazi Germany and from the quest for industrialization and scientific-technological development elsewhere.

In the context of analyzing trajectories of change since 1989, however, the criteria previously used to bound the Leninist or communist universe can become unnecessarily restrictive, summarily dismissing the experience of societies that may not have been previously Leninist but are now having to engineer reforms while coping with constraints, imperatives, and legacies that are comparable (not identical) to those in play across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Our contention rests on the fact that most cases identified as "Leninist," especially in Eastern Europe, acquired their similar attributes as a result of the forced replication of an institutional matrix originally established in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in Soviet Russia. During this process, key policies or institutions were frequently jettisoned, significantly modified, or unevenly enforced for the purpose of accommodating other national or local political and economic objectives (Chen, 2007; Ekiert and Hanson, 2003, p. 29; Pop-Eleches, 2007). The emergent variation may not have been theoretically significant for the kinds of questions that scholars raised during the Cold War era, but it now carries a new significance in the context of how these previously ignored differences can interact with other mechanisms and processes to produce more substantial variations over longer time horizons (Chen and Sil, 2006, p. 63). This, in turn, justifies reconsidering the candidacy of other cases that may not have met the more restrictive criteria previously used to bound the communist world but do match the broader definition of communism we have offered above.

Our definition remains clearly bounded, but, following the logic of conceptual stretching, it effectively decreases the intension of the concept and increases its extension along each of the dimensions considered in more restrictive definitions. Thus, in the place of a specific commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideology as articulated in Soviet or East European regimes, our definition of communism requires a more general commitment to a communist/socialist ideology that favors social equality, cosmopolitanism, and scientific-technological progress while rejecting preexisting sociocultural identities and institutions as well as the individualism underlying Western conceptions of modernity. In the place of Leninist party rule, we require only rule by parties that seek to employ whatever political power they can muster to effect fundamental socioeconomic transformations as well as changes in mass political consciousness even if these parties do not seek to exercise the same level of control over their political environments or apply the same degree of selectiveness when it comes to party membership. And, in the place of a Stalinist planned economy, we require only the pursuit of a socialist economy that relies primarily on centralized planning to engineer economic development, while systematically restricting economic opportunities available to individual entrepreneurs and landowners and minimizing participation in the international capitalist economy. This set of attributes may not have been sufficiently restrictive for the purpose of sharply distinguishing Soviet-

type regimes from other socialist authoritarian regimes, but retaining such a sharp distinction is neither necessary nor fruitful for the purposes of analyzing the significance of comparable historical legacies and comparable imperatives and constraints in the unfolding of postcommunist transformations.

This brings us to the question of when a communist regime becomes *postcommunist*. Once again, given the objective of broadening the postcommunist universe to enable more diverse sets of comparable cases, we do not limit ourselves to locales where communist regimes experienced a sudden collapse, whether through the overthrow or abdication of a Leninist party. Rather, we adopt the less restrictive criterion that the project of building communism (as defined above) has been halted for the foreseeable future in order to accommodate new goals and strategies previously considered anathema to the project of building communism. Key political indicators of such a shift include the willingness to admit previously excluded social groups into a party-state apparatus that was once restricted to a narrowly defined pool of professional cadres (the *nomenklatura*), as well as the realignment of the relationship between the party and the state so that the latter has a separate sphere of authority not subject to the oversight of the former. And key economic indicators include the increased reliance on market mechanisms and private entrepreneurship in order to stimulate productivity and technological progress, as well as steps to become progressively more integrated into the international capitalist economy in order to attract foreign capital and generate export-based revenue.

These shifts collectively mark the ending of communism and the beginning of postcommunism but, significantly, allow for the possibility that there may not be a single definitive boundary between the two periods marked by some sort of dramatic institutional breakdown or social upheaval. That is, the definition of postcommunism we adopt opens the door to cases where a series of seemingly inconsequential transformations ultimately reach a point where a regime's essential characteristics appear to be radically different from those that characterized the regime at the time these transformations were first initiated. In fact, the difference between the sudden collapse of a Leninist regime and the initiation of incremental reforms by a communist party that remains in power may well be one of the most significant contextual factors in determining the significance of particular institutional legacies or the capacity of a state attempting to engineer postcommunist reforms. If it is true, as Stark and Bruszt (1998, p. 4) argue, that "diverse paths of extrication" from communism contribute to divergent pathways of transformation across postcommunist cases, then this is all the more reason why students of postcommunism need to consider the implications of evolutionary or incremental processes of extrication alongside the more commonly employed cases involving the overthrow or abdication of Leninist parties.

Thus, our definition of postcommunism is intended to incorporate the experiences of locales that, while not previously considered full members of the communist or Leninist world, do have a stronger "family resem-

blance" (fn. 6) to East European postcommunist societies than to other regimes that have recently experienced democratization and/or economic liberalization. Conceptual stretching to take advantage of such a family resemblance does involve tradeoffs, but given that students of postcommunism are increasingly concerned with variation in historical legacies and their effects, these tradeoffs are not especially problematic so long as the phenomena of communism and postcommunism continue to be meaningfully defined and bounded. The following section considers a few atypical cases that could usefully populate a category of postcommunism.

MORE CASES FOR AN EXPANDED POSTCOMMUNIST UNIVERSE

As previously noted, there may be questions with scope conditions that only apply to cases selected from a particular region (for example, questions concerning party systems in the case of East-Central Europe, or questions related to the political economy of natural resources in the case of Central Asia). Our concern, however, is with the large domain of questions that do not have such restrictive scope conditions but nonetheless concern locales that have experienced something akin to communist rule. Within this domain, there are significant intellectual gains to be had by drawing upon cases not frequently utilized in comparative studies of postcommunism. These include cases where parties once committed to building communism remain in power but with new goals and objectives, as well as former socialist regimes in the developing world which, for present purposes, may be considered to have been similar enough to regimes that were unquestionably viewed as belonging to the communist universe.

Asian Postcommunism: China and Vietnam

The most obvious examples of the former are China and Vietnam, two countries that were unquestionably full members of the communist universe but whose recent experiences have been examined more frequently in the context of the political economy of the East Asian region (e.g., Brødsgaard and Young, 2000) rather than in comparative studies of postcommunist transformations.¹⁰ In the latter context, what is at issue is obviously *not* whether China and Vietnam qualify as having been communist, but whether the continuing rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) preclude the two cases from being considered *post*communist.

¹⁰A few noteworthy exceptions to this pattern include studies that deliberately compare cases from both regions (e.g., Burawoy, 1996; Chen, 2007; Chen and Sil, 2006; Sun, 1999) or employ cases from other regions as comparative referents in analyzing aspects of a given country (e.g., Balzer, 2004; Chen, 2005; Gallagher, 2002; Walder, 2004).

In the case of China, while no single event or date marks the beginning of postcommunism, a series of crucial choices spanning more than a decade represent a gradual but decisive end to the project of building communism. These range from Deng Xiaoping's announcement of the "four modernizations" to the 1992 decision to expand the size and role of the private sector as part of "market socialism" (despite objections from hardliners frustrated by the Tiananmen Incident) to the increasingly vigorous quest for greater involvement in the international economy (culminating in accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001). On the political front, two key decisions suggest that the Chinese Communist Party, while having no desire to cede political power, has begun to function more as an ordinary authoritarian party rather than a Leninist party composed of individuals committed to Marxist-Leninist principles. These are the 1993 initiation of village-level elections that would be open to non-party members and become increasingly competitive (Shi, 1999) and, in 2001, the decision to allow private entrepreneurs, allegedly the main enemies of Leninist parties, into the ranks of the party elite. These events collectively represent a clear retreat from the project of building communism: the new party ideology of "market socialism" suggests a readiness to *permanently* incorporate institutions, practices, and interests related to capitalist production; the economy has relied increasingly upon the private sector with a steady increase in foreign investment and integration into global capitalism; and the principles of political leadership have been modified by sharply curtailing party oversight of key governmental functions and allowing private entrepreneurs to hold party leadership positions. We do not disagree with Walder's (2004, p. 208) assertion that China's transformation differs from postcommunist transformations in Eastern Europe, but we view the difference as one that increases the heterogeneity of the postcommunist universe and paves the way for more sophisticated comparative analysis, particularly for questions concerning the sources and consequences of diversity across locales previously under communist rule.

The same logic applies to the case of Vietnam, where several events and decisions over time collectively constituted an evolutionary process not unlike the one through which China became postcommunist (Chan, Kerkvliet, and Unger, 1999). The Sixth Congress of the VCP in 1986 marked the adoption of a new reform package (the *Doi Moi*, or Renovation), modeled loosely after Deng's "market socialism." The reforms included administrative decentralization, the expansion of the private sector, the introduction of monetary policies based on market signals, reduced controls over currency values and exchange rates, and the opening of the economy to foreign investment (Masina, 2006; Turley and Selden, 1993). More recently, Vietnam has become involved in regional and international economic institutions, joining ASEAN in 1995 and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in 1998, applying for accession into the WTO in 1995 (and gaining entry in 2006), and concluding a bilateral trade agreement with the United States in 2001. In the political sphere, a number of significant amendments to the Vietnamese Constitution in 1992 and 2001

have curtailed the role and influence of the VCP Central Committee and Politburo (Thayer, 2002) while the state organs, notably the office of the President and the Cabinet ministries, have become more autonomous in managing crucial economic and social policies. The National Assembly, previously a body that rubber-stamped party directives, now includes representatives who are not affiliated with the VCP and have gained their seats through direct multi-candidate elections. In addition, a growing class of capitalists has been granted the right to participate in party and state organs (Herberer, 2003), while VCP members, as of 2006, have been granted permission to engage in commercial activities without any restrictions. These changes collectively suggest that Vietnam has evolved into an ordinary developmental state, and that the VCP has evolved from a Leninist party into an ordinary authoritarian ruling party (Tønneson, 2000; Vasavakul, 1999).

“African Socialism” and After: The Case for Tanzania

A second set of cases is more problematic because these were previously not considered members of the communist universe. These encompass a number of polities, including one-party leftist regimes committed to “African socialism,” which sought to carry out sweeping social transformations inspired by policies in the USSR or China. Many of these regimes quickly devolved into military dictatorships that merely restricted the free movement of capital and monopolized rents from natural resources. However, a few implemented coherent programs for economic development and social engineering that included concrete measures to nationalize private industry, shut out multinational corporations, promote cooperative agriculture, expand job rights and organize the working class, and reduce income stratification through progressive taxation or universal welfare provisions. The exemplary candidate here is Tanzania, which experienced sustained one-party rule under leaders whose dogged pursuit of “African socialism” resembles more closely the building of communism in China, Vietnam, and even parts of Eastern Europe than it does the pursuit of national economic development across most of the developing world.

Following independence, Tanzania was ruled for several decades by a single party forged out of the anti-colonial nationalist movement TANU (Tanganyika African National Unity Party), reconstituted as CCM (Chama cha Mapinduzi, or “Revolutionary State Party”) following the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1977. In contrast to other military-backed ruling parties that emerged throughout Africa following decolonization, CCM stood out in its consistent, vigorous, and systematic efforts to promote socialist principles as outlined in the speeches and writings of its leader, Julius Nyerere (1968). Under Nyerere, CCM sought to achieve a revolutionary economic and social transformation through a program that explicitly rejected tribalism, middle class interests, and participation in the international capitalist economy. The party’s most sweeping initiative was the establishment of cooperative agriculture through the *Ujamaa* villagiza-

tion program, which was partly modeled after Chinese collectivization and involved nothing short of a complete reorganization of rural production in Tanzania (Freund, 1981; Freyhold, 1979; Shivji, 1976). In addition, although private commerce continued in a number of sectors, CCM had steadfastly relied upon the public sector to spearhead industrialization, minimized reliance on export-based revenues and foreign aid from advanced capitalist countries, and supported pro-worker legislation while restricting the influence of a mostly Indian bourgeoisie. While Tanzanian socialism may differ sharply from Soviet or Hungarian communism, the range of variation narrows considerably when we compare Tanzania to Albania or the Kyrgyz SSR. And that range becomes even narrower when CCM's conception of African socialism is compared to the manner in which the CCP and VCP sought to combine their commitment to Marxism-Leninism with broad nationalist appeals, cooperative agriculture on a national scale, and planned industrialization.

In relation to the "post" component of postcommunism, the turning point for Tanzania is 1986, when, in response to a prolonged economic crisis, CCM abandoned its program of class struggle and autarkic socialist development and instead embarked upon a market-oriented economic recovery program based in part on recommendations of foreign donors and international financial institutions. As a result, Tanzania now has a substantially larger private sector, increased foreign investment, a sharp decline in the poverty rate (Muganda, 2004), and an annual growth rate of almost 6 percent, which is comparable to the growth rates of the most dynamic economies of sub-Saharan Africa, not counting oil-exporting countries such as Angola and Equatorial Guinea. It is true that Tanzania's rank in per capita GDP (162) is much lower than that of Hungary (45) or Poland (49), which might make it difficult to imagine comparative analysis encompassing these cases but the difference shrinks considerably when we take into account the per capita GDP ranks of less urbanized Central Asian postcommunist countries such as Tajikistan (157) or Kyrgyzstan (149). In the political realm, Tanzania's Constitution was rewritten in 1992 to establish multi-party elections (Hydén, 1999), and a number of new parties have emerged, but CCM's organizational resources have helped it to gain supermajorities in every presidential and parliamentary election held since that time. Thus, while Tanzania's economic and social conditions may be productively compared to those of China or Central Asia, in terms of the establishment of multi-party democracy and the role of international financial institutions in designing reform, Tanzania's experience is more comparable to East European postcommunist regimes.

Can Sub-National Polities Count? The Case for West Bengal, India

Finally, where the research design and boundary conditions of a question permit, there is the possibility that sub-national polities might qualify as postcommunist where they have had sufficient autonomy to

enact economic and social policies. The strongest candidate is the Indian state of West Bengal, where the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) initially gained power in 1967 and has been continuously in power since 1977. Although it had to stand for elections every few years, and although it was bound by the terms of the Indian Constitution, CPI-M has used an array of tactics, both formal (coalitions with other leftist parties) and informal (deals with union leaders and rural elites who could deliver entire blocs of votes), to maintain its hold on power and make key policies for the state for over three decades.

Until the mid-1990s, these policies reflected an unwavering commitment to international communism and drew sharp criticisms not only from the business community but also from a left-of-center national government run by the Congress Party. The policies included a complete redistribution of rural assets that left 80 percent of arable land in the hands of small and medium-sized landholders (Leiten, 1993), coinciding with a steep drop in the state's poverty rate (from 60 percent in 1977 to 27 percent in 2000). In addition, the party revolutionized local governance by setting up village councils (*panchayat raj*) designed to draw the state's rural populations into mass politics through local participation and self-government (Ruud, 2003). Public enterprises owned by the state of West Bengal dominated the push for industrialization, while workers in these enterprises (as in Chinese state enterprises) were granted employment protection and welfare benefits so long as they joined unions backed by CPI-M. Restrictions on private enterprise and official support for leftist unions and labor agitation (which was far more common in West Bengal than anywhere else in India) combined to force not only foreign companies but a great many Indian firms to flee the state.

Over the past decade, the CPI-M, like the CCP in China and the VCP in Vietnam, has adopted an increasingly pragmatic approach aimed at boosting West Bengal's economic competitiveness. The state has undertaken new measures to attract foreign investment, boost labor productivity, promote the service sector, and enact new legislation intended to curtail labor militancy and make the political climate more attractive to domestic and foreign capital. In the past decade, the state has averaged a growth rate of around 8 percent, highest among larger Indian states, with the IT sector growing annually at double the national rate (Guruswamy, 2006; Ramesh, 2006). The CPI-M's policies of the late 1970s and 1980s, combined with the recent push to increase foreign investment and domestic competitiveness, make the experience of West Bengal worth comparing to China or Vietnam, a comparison made all the more plausible by the fact that the CPI-M's leadership has actually pointed to China as a model for the engineering of reforms in West Bengal (Ramesh, 2006).

It is true that many sub-national units have too little autonomy and too little political or economic significance to be included as a separate case in comparative analyses. But within the context of Indian federalism, although the center has sometimes intervened in state-level politics, state governments have a great deal of leeway in the realm of economic and

social policy. This leeway has produced substantial policy variation across India's states that is comparable to the variation across many nation-states, with West Bengal's policies considered until recently to be far to the left of policies embraced by the central government and most other states. As for West Bengal's broader significance in a global context, it is worth noting that the state's population of more than 80 million matches the *combined* populations of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, and the Baltics, and that its total state domestic product is larger than that of several postcommunist nation-states, including Albania, Estonia, Latvia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Thus, while there are questions that would rule out using sub-national units as cases in a comparative study, there are also many other questions for which there is no intellectual or methodological justification for *a priori* excluding West Bengal from the universe of useful postcommunist cases.

Of course, there are many other polities, national and sub-national, that have flirted with something resembling "socialism" or "communism" before embarking on economic or political liberalization. We cannot pretend to offer an exhaustive list of those we consider to be (post)communist, but we can say that the criteria we have applied above can be applied elsewhere by asking some basic factual questions: Was the polity ruled for a period of two or more decades by a single party explicitly committed to class struggle and international socialism? Did the party undertake concrete measures to translate its commitment to socialist ideals into a set of long-standing laws, policies, or institutions within a bounded polity? And, whether that party still remains in power or not, have laws, policies, and institutions been amended so as to expand the scope for private enterprise and increase participation in global capitalism while relaxing the ideological credentials required for political leadership? Any polity where these questions can be answered in the affirmative is a candidate for the universe of postcommunist cases, and should be excluded from a comparative study only where the research design and the boundary conditions of a given question point to the availability of more suitable cases.

PUZZLES WHERE AN EXPANDED POSTCOMMUNIST UNIVERSE MATTERS

The utility of a "stretched" concept of postcommunism lies not in the greater number of cases it can cover but in the methodological leverage it offers by facilitating comparative analysis using different permutations of comparable cases. This is only true where the inclusion of novel cases serves to either (a) expand the range of variation along a given outcome of interest (in the case of a "most similar" case research design) or (b) expand the range of variation in the initial conditions under which a common outcome emerges (in the case of a "least similar" case research design). This section considers a few empirical puzzles where the inclusion of novel cases can serve one of these two functions in postcommunist studies.

One central problem concerns the strength and authority of state institutions. Although students of postcommunism have sought to correct for the lack of attention to fundamental questions of state-building in the early literature on postcommunist transitions (e.g., Ganev, 2007; Grzymala-Busse and Luong, 2002; Sil and Chen, 2004; Sperling, 2001), there is a dearth of cross-regional comparative analysis aimed at examining the sources and implications of variations in state structures and patterns of state-society relations. Certainly, the East European region already encompasses significant variation, including the especially significant difference in the legacies of state-society relations found in Russia, where the Bolsheviks sought to erase the boundary between state and society, and those found in Eastern Europe, where a fundamental tension between the communist state and society was always present (Ekiert, 1996; Grzymala-Busse and Luong, 2002). However, the range of this variation can be expanded much further to take into account the experiences of Asian cases where communist revolution and nationalist mobilization were more comfortably fused (Chen, 2007), and where the transition to postcommunism did not involve dramatic fluctuations in “stateness” or a sudden weakening of the infrastructure of governance as in the case of Eastern Europe (Ganev, 2007). In fact, the continuity in core institutional structures and elite networks in China, Vietnam and, arguably, West Bengal, point to the possibility of postcommunist transitions where the strength, capacity and authority of state institutions have remained relatively high (Balzer, 2004; Burawoy, 1996; Kerkvliet, 2001). Employing these cases alongside East European cases in a “least similar” case approach, it is also possible to explore whether, in spite of variations in levels of stateness or public authority, shared communist/socialist inheritances and the dynamics of market transition might generate common outcomes such as elite corruption and state predation (Pei, 2006; Hsu, 2005).

A related substantive issue concerns the growth in the size and capacity of bureaucratic administration, which, according to O’Dwyer (2006), grew rapidly in many East European countries, most notably in Poland, as a consequence of patronage politics abetted by a lengthy, unstable process of party-system consolidation under conditions of postcommunist state-building. In the rare instances where party systems were consolidated relatively quickly (as in the Czech Republic and Hungary), stable political competition acted as a brake on patronage-led state growth. This is a novel and insightful argument, but its logic can be refined or rendered more compelling by analyzing cases where postcommunist transformations were *not* accompanied by the consolidation of multi-party democracy. In China, Vietnam, and Tanzania, where the ruling parties of former communist/socialist regimes remain in power, evidence of growth in the size and capacity of administrative structures may well be the result of market-oriented reforms and the rapid expansion of private property in societies where property rights and tax collection were previously not a significant issue. In the case of Vietnam, a dramatic growth of the number and autonomy of provinces has been tied to the maneuvering of pro-reform

local elites and the flow of foreign investment (Malesky, 2005). The comparative method can be leveraged even further by taking into account changes in the number and capacity of governance structures in places like West Bengal, where reforms have been introduced within the framework of a preexisting multi-party parliamentary system. If administrative growth happens to be consistently present in regions beyond Eastern Europe, then the Czech and Hungarian experiences may well be "out of sample" cases, whereas Poland's experience may be viewed as more typical of postcommunist transitions everywhere. If, on the other hand, we find differences in administrative growth between Vietnam and other cases of Asian postcommunism, then this would suggest a more nuanced argument about the different modes of political competition that generate patronage-led state growth in both democratic and authoritarian contexts.

In the context of political economy, students of postcommunism have produced a great many studies on the role of the state and social policy in managing economic reforms and their consequences in Eastern Europe (e.g., King and Sznajder, 2006; Negoita, 2006; Orenstein, 2001). These analyses, too, can be tested or modified by contrasting the engineering of rapid market transitions in Eastern Europe to the experiences of China and Vietnam (and even West Bengal), where economic reforms have proceeded incrementally, where political institutions have not gone through dramatic transformations, and where the making of economic and social policy has not been at the behest of regional or international organizations. Tanzania's reform experience reflects a distinct combination of initial conditions: significant continuity in political leadership (as in China and Vietnam), but a significant role for foreign donors and international financial institutions in the implementation of reforms (as in Eastern Europe). Collectively, these cases expand the range of variation in the manner in which international factors, national political institutions, and the structure of the economy might interact to produce different strategies and outcomes of economic reform. Moreover, the addition of new cases enables us to analyze how the experiences of "first movers" in Eastern Europe can affect economic and social policy in regimes that seek to achieve the benefits of market growth without having to cope with the sharp drop in living standards seen in the initial period of reform in Russia and Eastern Europe.

A slightly different logic comes into play when a more heterogeneous set of comparable cases is introduced into the comparative study of postcommunist industrial and labor relations. Most studies of postcommunist labor to date have been starkly pessimistic concerning the chances of a vibrant corporatism or effective labor mobilization, focusing on the generally weak position of organized labor in light of the shared legacies of communist-era unionism and common pressures related to global post-Fordism (e.g., Crowley, 2004; Ost, 2000; Kubicek, 2004). The transformation of labor relations in China, Vietnam, and West Bengal, however, suggest that standard indicators of labor weakness (such as union density or labor militancy) are not particularly good predictors of labor strength in postcommunist contexts. Both union membership and worker militancy have

risen sharply in China (Chan, 2001; Lee, 2002) but without yielding the benefits workers have seen in the Czech Republic, where a single dominant labor federation was able to engage in pragmatic bargaining and lock in deals on employment levels and employee welfare at a crucial time of transition (Avdagic, 2005). Even in Russia, in spite of the low level of militancy and the apparent timidity of top union leaders, workers seem to have secured more gains than their counterparts in Asia by restricting short-term contracts, formalizing procedures for collective bargaining at the enterprise level, and putting an end to in-kind payments in lieu of wages (Chen and Sil, 2006). These contrasts do not mean that we can be optimistic about the prospects for labor incorporation, but they do suggest that the prospects for labor in postcommunist settings may be less uniformly bleak than frequently assumed.

The study of nationalism in postcommunist contexts is another area where an expanded postcommunist universe has the potential to offer increased analytic leverage. Once again, the existing literature consists mostly of single case studies and limited comparisons within Eastern Europe, with the dominant arguments emphasizing how the relative economic and political backwardness of Eastern European countries had always created fertile ground for a type of *ressentiment* nationalism rather than the civic nationalism that has taken root in Western Europe and the United States. Given that the latter kind of nationalism was more vigorously suppressed under communism, the *ressentiment* character of nationalism got unintentionally strengthened (e.g., Ramet, 1999; Tismaneanu, 1998). As compelling as this argument is, it reinforces the tendency to treat postcommunist nationalism as a relatively homogeneous phenomenon, with little scope for analyzing the sources and consequences of differences among specific countries. A cross-regional comparative study suggests the need for a much more nuanced understanding of the specific characteristics of postcommunist nationalism and of the effects of the distinctive manner in which communist ideology and nationalist sentiments were fused in particular locales (Chen, 2007).

The above discussion is not intended to suggest full-blown hypotheses concerning any of the substantive issues considered. It is only intended to identify the *kinds* of puzzles that might benefit from the stretched concept of postcommunism introduced earlier. For these puzzles, a wider array of comparable cases, in conjunction with different strategies of comparative analysis, has the potential to generate novel hypotheses and inferences concerning the sources and consequences of diverse trajectories of postcommunist transformation.

CONCLUSION

It is important to note that, in seeking to expand the postcommunist universe, our motivation has been to clarify, not challenge, the presumed rationale for a field of postcommunist studies. We relax certain assumptions that are often incorporated into understandings of postcommunism

based on the experiences of Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union. However, we take care not to "over-stretch" the concept of postcommunism. That is, we continue to recognize the existence of a distinct domain of inquiry and a distinct set of concepts and mechanisms that are concerned with transformations under way throughout locales once ruled by autocratic parties with roughly similar ideological commitments. This move facilitates a wider range of possible cases and creates new opportunities for deploying the comparative method for analyzing diverse pathways of postcommunist transformation while still distinguishing this transformation from the unfolding of political or economic reforms elsewhere.

Certainly, we acknowledge that there are a number of important questions and approaches where postcommunist cases can be meaningfully compared with other cases (Beissinger and Young, 2002; Hanson, 2006; Lijphart and Waisman, 1996; Przeworski, 1991). We also recognize that there are dimensions of comparison along which the diversity within the postcommunist universe may be so great that it matches the diversity found across the rest of the world, either rendering the category pointless or requiring further sub-classifications that allow for more meaningful comparative analysis (Rupnik, 1999; King, 2000). But in between, for a whole set of questions that are theoretically interesting to students of postcommunism, a stretched definition of postcommunism and more heterogeneous sets of comparable cases can be useful for more fruitfully exploiting different strategies of comparative analysis in search of new insights for postcommunist studies.

In all of the cases we considered outside the FSU and Eastern Europe, ideologically committed communist or socialist parties ruled more or less continuously for two decades or more; in all, these parties established laws, policies, and institutions that were intended to combine economic development with revolutionary social change; and in all, these laws, policies, and institutions have had to be abandoned or significantly modified in order to accommodate market mechanisms and facilitate participation in the international economy. At the same time, the additional cases can serve to extend the range of variation not only in terms of particular outcomes but also in terms of such independent variables as the capacity and structure of political institutions, the effects of different regional environments and influences, the pace and sequence of market reforms, the relative size of different sectors of the economy, and the sources and impact of collective protest in the course of reform. Applying the "rule of inclusion" as articulated by Goertz and Mahoney (2006, p. 186), that "cases are relevant if their value on at least one independent variable is positively related to the outcome of interest," there is no methodologically compelling reason for *a priori* ignoring the experiences of any polity where the intended analytic function of the concept of postcommunism can be plausibly operationalized. Given the growing interest among students of postcommunism in explaining diversity, including such cases in a "stretched" postcommunist universe is not only desirable but necessary if we are to gain better traction on the sizable domain of inquiry that lies between the narrower domain

pertaining to geographically contiguous cases where Soviet-type communist regimes suddenly collapsed and the wider domain encompassing any and all experiences with political or economic liberalization.

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