Globalization of Constitutional Identity

Bui Ngoc Son

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/wilj

Part of the Comparative and Foreign Law Commons, and the Constitutional Law Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/wilj/vol26/iss3/4
GLOBALIZATION OF CONSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

Bui Ngoc Son

Abstract: This Article extends Gary J. Jacobsohn’s theory of constitutional identity to better understand the dynamics of constitutional identity in the era of globalization. The extended theoretical framework features the relation of constitutional globalization to the change of national constitutional identity. Within that framework, this Article offers an original, empirical examination of the case of Vietnam and compares it with other socialist regimes (China, Laos, North Korea, and Cuba). It argues that globalization induces adaption to the socialist constitutional identity. The socialist constitutional identity is adapted by the pragmatic incorporation of fundamental ideas and principles of global constitutionalism. Consequently, the essence of the socialist constitutional identity remains but is modified and extended in the globalizing context. Although there is convergence in the adaption to socialist constitutional identity among the five socialist countries due to the impact of constitutional globalization, there are four divergent models which these countries adopt to react to the global impact on their constitutional identity, namely constitutional globalism (Vietnam and Laos); constitutional exceptionalism (China); constitutional isolationism (North Korea); and constitutional reservationism (Cuba). This Article contributes to the scholarship on constitutional globalization, comparative theory on constitutional identity, and empirical knowledge on constitutional dynamics in the contemporary socialist world.

INTRODUCTION

The world is globalizing constitutionally. Professor Sarah H. Cleveland describes the U.S. Constitution as an “international constitution” in the sense that the U.S. Supreme Court cites international sources in its constitutional interpretation. In a recent case, Obergefell v. Hodges, Justice Anthony Kennedy of the U.S. Supreme Court cited Confucius in his majority decision, interpreting the Fourteenth Amendment to uphold same sex marriage: “The centrality of marriage to the human condition makes it unsurprising that the institution has existed for millennia and across civilizations. . . . Confucius taught that marriage lies at the foundation of government. 2 Li Chi: Book of Rites 266 (C. Chai & W. Chai eds., J. Legge transl. 1967).” Conversely, ideas of American constitutionalism have been diffused into China. In a national
constitutional debate in 2013, Chinese pro-constitutionalists advocated for the practice of American-style constitutionalism in China. Professor Mark Tushnet argues that globalization of constitutional law is now inevitable. Constitutional globalization affects not only the design of constitutional rules and institutions. More fundamentally, it induces the changes to constitutional identity. I call this phenomenon “globalization of constitutional identity.”

Constitutional identity refers to constitutional ideas and principles fundamental to a polity. It is a part of what Francis Fukuyama calls the “shared mental models,” which he conceives as “critical in facilitating large-scale collective action.” Nobel laureate Douglas North also states that: “Ideas and ideologies matter, and institutions play a major role in determining just how much they matter. Ideas and ideologies shape the subjective mental constructs that individuals use to interpret the world around them and make choices.” Constitutional identity shapes the formulation of constitutional institutions and their practices. Therefore, a study on constitutional identity change is crucial to understand the possibilities and constraints of constitutional institutions and functional changes to those institutions.

This study is connected to the growing scholarship on global constitutional law and comparative constitutional theory. Several global

---

5 Several related terms should be defined. In this study, the term “constitutional globalization” is used to refer to the global expansion or diffusion of global constitutional ideas, norms, and institutions. The term “global constitutionalism” is used interchangeably with the term “generic constitutionalism” to refer to normative constitutional ideals associated with limited governmental power which have informed constitutional design and practice around the world.
For purposes of this Article, I focus on the globalization of domestic constitutional law and put aside the related issue of constitutionalization of the global order. For the latter, see Aoife O'Donoghue, Constitutionalism in Global Constitutionalisation (2014); Ruling the World: Constitutionalism, International Law, and Global Governance (Jeffrey L. Dunoff & Joel P. Trachtman eds., 2009); Transnational Constitutionalism: International and European
constitutional studies have been conducted by collecting quantitative data for all available national constitutions during the last six decades and employing methods of econometrics to test the predictions of global constitutional diffusion. This is a significant contribution, given the dearth of empirical and quantitative studies in constitutional scholarship. However, quantitative studies of global constitutional law must be qualified. Case-studies are necessary to qualitatively understand the causal effect of global constitutional diffusion. In addition, studies on constitutional globalization focus mainly on the global spread of constitutional rules and institutions. More fundamental is the global spread of general ideas and principles of constitutionalism.

Five communist countries survived the collapse of the Soviet bloc, namely China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam. Identifying themselves as socialist countries, they have maintained distinctive constitutional systems defined by fundamental constitutional principles rooted in Marxist-Leninism and Soviet constitutional tradition. However, during the post-Soviet era, the force of constitutional globalization has compelled the socialist regimes to adapt their constitutional core. Even the communist state which attempts to be a global constitutional outlier by developing constitutional “characteristics” is not immune to the impact of constitutional globalization.

These socialist regimes have been largely ignored in comparative constitutional inquiry, leading constitutional comparativists to lament that comparative constitutional law focuses mainly on a limited set of established liberal constitutional systems in North America and Europe, as well as a few other states with similar institutional settings. In addition to linguistic and cultural considerations, the marginalization of socialist constitutional experiences stems from the epistemic assumption

---


that the socialist countries have strictly adhered to socialist ideology which restricts constitutional dynamics. This may not enrich comparative constitutional inquiry. As this study will illustrate, this assumption is flawed. Constitutional dynamics in the contemporary socialist world illustrate new aspects of constitutional law, especially the globalization of constitutional law, which can enrich global constitutional studies. For example, socialist experiences suggest that formal constitutional change processes operate as the platform for global/local constitutional dialogue.

This study is built upon scholarship on constitutional identity.14 “‘Constitutional identity’ is an essentially contested concept as there is no agreement over what it means or refers to.”15 Two different versions of constitutional identity theory are developed by Gary J. Jacobsohn and Michel Rosenfeld. While Jacobsohn—in his book Constitutional Identity—is more concerned with the identity of the constitution, Rosenfeld—in his book The Identity of Constitutional Subject—focuses more on the identity of the people as the constitutional subject. This Article focuses on the identity of the constitution, and therefore Jacobsohn’s theory is more relevant. Jacobsohn explains constitutional identity change as a dialogical process animated by the element of disharmony. Although this theory provides useful tools to conceptualize constitutional identity change, it is informed by liberal constitutional experiences and must be extended to better understand the experience of different constitutional settings.

The purposes of this article are therefore twofold: (1) to extend Jacobsohn’s theory of constitutional identity; and (2) to apply the extended theoretical framework to examine the causal effect of constitutional globalization on the change of domestic constitutional identity with specific reference to the cases of the contemporary socialist/communist regimes.

Part I establishes the extended theoretical framework featuring the relation of constitutional globalization to the change of national constitutional identity. It defines constitutional identity as constitutional


15 Michel Rosenfeld, Constitutional Identity, in THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF COMPARATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL LAW 756, 756 (Michel Rosenfeld & András Sajó eds., 2012).
ideas and principles fundamental to a polity and explains that the change to constitutional identity is the consequence of the dialogical interaction between global and local constitutional identities.

After a brief introduction of the features of socialist constitutional identity in Part II, Parts III and IV apply the above framework to the cases of the five socialist regimes. Globalization induces adaption to the socialist constitutional identity. The socialist constitutional identity is adapted by the pragmatic incorporation of fundamental ideas and principles of global constitutionalism. Consequently, the essence of the socialist constitutional identity remains, but is modified and extended in the globalizing context.

Part III illustrates this argument using the case of Vietnam. This case-study is based on original, empirical work: my interviews with constitutional scholars, constitution-makers, members of the Constitutional Amendment Committee, constitutional advisors for top political leaders, Assembly deputies, and National Assembly officers.16 This primary work is combined with analysis of Vietnamese materials: documents and statements of constitution-makers and political leaders, and scholarly writings on Vietnamese constitutional issues.

Part IV turns to a comparative context. Although there is convergence in the adaption of socialist constitutional identity among the five socialist countries due to the impact of constitutional globalization, there are four divergent models which these countries adopt to react to the global impact on their constitutional identity, namely constitutional globalism (Vietnam and Laos); constitutional exceptionalism (China); constitutional isolationism (North Korea); and constitutional reservationism (Cuba).

This Article makes three major contributions. First, for scholarship on constitutional globalization, it suggests that not only rules and institutions, but constitutional identity is also globalized. Second, this Article refines and extends the comparative theory of constitutional identity by considering the dynamics of constitutional identity in non-constitutionalist polities influenced by globalization, the disharmony between national and global constitutionalism, and the non-judicial mechanism of local and global constitutional dialogue which animates

16 Due to sensitive nature of the issue, most interviewees remained anonymous, but other details are specified. When the footnotes are addressed as “Interviews” this indicates that the statements or evidence were drawn over several interviews, which will not be specified.
constitutional identity change. Third, it enriches general knowledge of comparative constitutional law by examining socialist experiences.

I. GLOBALIZATION AND CONSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY CHANGE

A. Constitutional Identity

A commentator distinguishes two ideas of constitutional identity: 1) identity of the constitution, and 2) identity of the people as the constitutional subjects.\(^\text{17}\) I will characterize the former as the thin approach and the latter as the thick approach. In the American debate, Rosenfeld represents the latter, while Jacobsohn represents the former. Rosenfeld conceptualizes constitutional identity as identity of the constitutional subject of the people, which is “immersed in complex and ambiguous relations with other relevant identities; such as, national, ethnic, religious, or cultural identity.”\(^\text{18}\) Rosenfeld offers a philosophically sophisticated theory of constitutional subjects. However, his theory has to grapple with a number of questions: Who constitutes the people? Are the people really the constitutional subject? Who, in particular, are the authors of authoritarian constitutions that are not ordained by “we the people”? How does one distinguish the constitutional identity of the people from their national, cultural, religious, and moral identities? If constitutional identity collapses into one or more of these identities, is it still a distinctive subject for constitutional inquiry? For these confusing questions, this study does not attempt to pursue the identity of the people as the constitutional subject.

Instead, my study adopts a thin approach, which focuses on constitutional identity as presented in Jacobsohn’s work. This approach avoids the confusing conceptual questions, and is useful for empirical analysis. For Jacobsohn, constitutional identity refers to constitutional goals, aspirations, and commitments that a political community pursues which are normally codified in a national constitutional text.\(^\text{19}\) Therefore, “[t]o establish the identity of a constitution, it obviously makes sense to scrutinize carefully the text itself. This provides us with a documentary transcript of how a particular group of framers provided for the governance of their polity, and it often includes their aspirations for its subsequent development.”\(^\text{20}\) Jacobsohn distinguishes generic and


\(^{19}\) See generally JACOBSON, supra note 14.

\(^{20}\) Id. at 348.
specific constitutional identity: “All constitutional polities represent a blend of characteristics revealing what is particular to the constitutional culture as well as what are widely viewed as common attributes of a universal culture of constitutionalism.” Jacobsohn, however, focuses more on specific constitutional identity.

Jacobsohn argues that “the concept of constitutional identity should be at the center of constitutional theory.” If so, constitutional identity must be a distinctive concept. For this purpose, I submit that the concept of constitutional identity must be *distinctively constitutional* so that it can be distinguished from the concepts of national or cultural identity. Moreover, the concept of constitutional identity must be *distinctively identitarian* so that it can be distinguished from other constitutional concepts like “unwritten constitution” or “living originalism” which also concern deep constitutional principles.

With that in mind, I define constitutional identity as *constitutional ideas and principles fundamental to a constitutional system*. It is characterized by the following features. First, constitutional identity is about constitutional *ideas and principles* existing at the fundamental level, resonating with what political scientists variably call “the ‘public philosophies’, ‘public sentiments’, ‘deep core’- worldviews or Weltanschauung that undergird the policies and programs with organizing ideas, values, and principles of knowledge and society.” Second, constitutional identity is *constitutional* in the sense that it refers to deep ideas pertaining to the nature of constitution, constitutional structure, constitutional rights, and socio-economic constitutional principles that underpin quotidian constitutional practices, which are normally codified in a nation’s constitutional text. Third, constitutional identity is *identitarian* in the sense that the constitutional ideas and principles present beliefs on long-term goals, aspirations, and commitments constituting the essence of a constitutional polity.

21 Id. at 22.
22 Id. at 18.
23 Id. at 3.
25 Jacobsohn particularly underlines the aspirational aspect of constitutional identity. For his extensive treatment on this, see GARY J. JACOBSOHN, THE SUPREME COURT AND THE DECLINE OF CONSTITUTIONAL ASPIRATION (1986). For other discussions on constitutional aspiration, see
So understood, constitutional identity is a distinctive concept and a distinctive object for comparative constitutional inquiry. The prevailing trend in comparative constitutional studies is the focus on rules and institutions. However, underlying these rules and institutions are deep constitutional ideas. Not only does a constitution provide concrete guidance for political conduct of constitutional actors, but it also implicitly or explicitly includes fundamental ideas which provide a general directive of beliefs, aspirations, and commitments that propel the function of the whole constitutional system. So, a study about constitutional identity is distinctive in that it focuses not on rules and institutions but on essential constitutional ideas and principles. It may refer to rules and institutions as the embodiment of constitutional ideas and principles. Constitutional identity inquiries are also different from studies on unwritten or living constitutionalism in that they take written constitutions seriously as the textual embodiments of constitutional identity.

B. Constitutional Disharmony

Constitutional identity is not fixed, but changeable. Jacobsohn draws on Alasdair MacIntyre’s theory of tradition to develop a theory on the nature and dynamic of constitutional identity. For MacIntyre, “a living tradition is . . . a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.”27 He considers tradition as the embodiment of “continuities of conflicts.”28 In his understanding, “a tradition becomes mature just insofar as its adherents confront and find a national way through or around these encounters with radical different and incompatible positions.”29 Jacobsohn draws on MacIntyre's theory of tradition as a living thing presenting “continuities and conflicts” to support his theory regarding the nature and dynamic of constitutional identity. He argues that constitutional identity “emerges dialogically and represents a mix of political aspirations and commitments that are expressive of a nation’s past, as well as the determination of those within the society who seek in some ways to transcend the past.”30

To Jacobsohn, the dynamics of constitutional identity are animated by “the universal constitutional condition, which is that in one way or another all constitutions confront or embody the problem of

---

28 Id. at 206.
30 JACOBSOHN, supra note 14, at 7.
disharmony.”

He states that “the ‘disharmonic constitution’ does not refer to the incoherence of constitutions-though that may indeed be the condition of some-but to the dissonance within and around the constitution that is key to understand its identity.”

There are two aspects of the disharmonic constitution: internal and external. The text of national constitution is itself disharmonic in the sense that it encompasses competing commitments or “contradiction and imbalances.” So, the exploration of constitutional identity requires the understanding of alternative visions and aspirations internal to the constitutional text. The external aspect refers to the gap between the aspirational constitutional commitments or ideals and the reality, or in Jacobsohn’s parlance, “the lack of agreement evident in the sharp discontinuities that frame the constitution’s relationship to the surrounding society.” Constitutional disharmony provokes change in constitutional identity. Jacobsohn states that “to apprehend constitutional identity is to see its dynamic quality, which results from the interplay of forces seeking either to introduce greater harmony into the constitutional equation or, contrariwise, to create further disharmony.”

Jacobsohn’s theory of constitutional disharmony is heuristic to explore constitutional identity change. Other scholars share a common view, although they may use different terms. Hanna Pitkin, for example, contends that: “To understand what a constitution is, one must look not to some crystalline core or essence of unambiguous meaning but precisely at the ambiguities, the specific oppositions that this specific concept helps us to hold in tension.” Ideology theory in legal sociology also makes similar claims. Alan Hunt argues that: “An ideology is not a unitary entity. It draws its power from its ability to connect and combine diverse mental elements (concepts, ideas, etc.) into combinations that influence and structure the perception and cognition of social agents.”

The idea of disharmony also resonated with the Marxist dialectic’s thesis.

---

31 Id. at 86–87.  
32 Id. at 15.  
33 Id. at 87. For example, the commitments to both positive and negative rights. Id. at 149.  
34 Id. at 87. This is due to the fact that the constitutions are committed to “the achievement of things seemingly beyond its immediate reach.” Id. at 145. Jacobsohn gives example of Directive Principles of State Policy in India Constitution, which are nonjusticiable. Id. at 146. As we will see in the case-studies below, the socialist constitutions also include many aspirations that are disharmonic to the social reality.  
35 Id. at 88.  
38 Hunt, supra note 37, at 16.
on conflicts as the source of change, which has influenced the political ideology in socialist regimes.

The theory of constitutional disharmony seemingly contradicts the Confucian philosophy of social harmony, which has informed political culture in such countries like China and Vietnam. In fact, Confucianism promotes the idea of “harmony but not sameness” (Analects, 13:23). Chenyang Li’s recent comprehensive treatment of the theme suggests that, in Confucian philosophy, harmony exists with creative tension and does not exclude conflicts and differences. Particularly, according to the Book of Change or I Ching, one of the Confucian Five Classics, the logics of change essentially lie on the interaction of the two conflicting forces called Yin and Yang.

However, several points in Jacobsohn’s theory must be qualified and refined. To begin with, constitutional identity dynamics are defined by the dialogical interactions between local (specific) and global (generic) constitutional identity. The universal constitutional condition of disharmony, in one way or another, manifests in all constitutions, not necessarily liberal constitutions. This is evident if we consider the generic and specific contents of constitutional identity. The legal codification of both generic and specific values and principles in a single charter constitutes conflicting aspirations and commitments. Constitutional identity emerges as the consequence of the dialogical interactions between generic and specific aspirations and commitments. Moreover, within a particular constitutional polity, there are pluralized, particularistic values and principles that govern the polity whose dialogical interactions create the dynamics of constitutional identity.

However, although Jacobsohn recognizes that the disharmony between generic and specific aspiration is the condition of change in constitutional identity, he directs most of his attention to disharmony of specific constitutional identity. The explanation for this is that his theory is developed on the experience of constitutionalist states (the United States, India, Israel, and Ireland) whose constitutions already incorporate the generic requirements of constitutionalism. If constitutional identity is understood as the identity of the constitution, not the identity of the people as constitutional authors, even non-constitutionalist polities can also acquire constitutional identity. Authoritarian polities are also committed to fundamental aspirations codified in their constitutions which inform constitutional politics and citizens’ activities. Some

40 This Confucian Classic is extensively explored by a Yale constitutional law professor, see JACK M. BALKIN, THE LAWS OF CHANGE: I CHING AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE (2009).
concrete constitutional rules may be irrelevant to the practice of the authoritarian systems and the daily lives of the citizens. However, the operation of the whole authoritarian polity is inevitably driven by the constitutionally-codified fundamental aspirations, although these aspirations may be imposed by authoritarian leaders. For example, although a Vietnamese citizen may not be aware of a concrete constitutional provision on a certain right, or a Vietnamese political leader may not be aware of a specific constitutional rule on state structure, the whole Vietnamese community is inevitably affected by the fundamental commitment to socialist aspirations codified in the nation’s constitution.

Fundamental constitutional commitments of authoritarian regimes may have the intention to limit the state power. They may be specific and disharmonic with generic constitutionalist aspirations. Socialist constitutional systems have been constructed on the base of specific kinds of underlying constitutional ideas and principles, and by that, they acquire distinctive constitutional identity. The disharmony between generic and specific aspirations is an important source of constitutional identity change in socialist polities. The gap between socialist and global constitutional aspirations engenders efforts to bridge this gap. Therefore, to understand the dynamics of constitutional identity in socialist states, it is important to explore the disharmony between specific socialist constitutional aspirations and generic constitutionalism. I call this normative constitutional disharmony. All in all, constitutional identity change is animated by the universal constitutional condition presented by three elements, namely internal, external, and normative constitutional disharmonies.

C. Constitutional Globalization

Tushnet argues that the globalization of constitutional law is inevitable due to top-down pressures (the emergence of global networks of constitutional judges, the involvement of transnational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in national constitutional matters, the incorporation of international human rights treaties into national constitutions, and transnational migration of workers) and bottom-up pressures (competitions among nations for investment and human capital).\footnote{Tushnet, supra note 4, at 987–95.} Constitutional globalization is also driven by a bottom-up factor having less to do with material calculation: constitutional disharmony.
Constitutional disharmony is crucial to the inevitable constitutional globalization. Jacobsohn contends that: “This disharmonic jurisprudential context establishes the incentives, opportunities, and costs inhering in the practice of looking abroad for interpretive inspiration.” Consequently, local actors may engage in transnational and global dialogue in defining constitutional meanings and constitutional identity. But this is not necessarily limited to constitutional interpretation. Domestic constitutional disharmony incentivizes social and institutional actors to look into the pool of global ideas and experiences to seek constitutional consistency by formal constitution-making, as the case of South Africa indicates. Especially in developing countries, the gap between national constitutions and global standards of constitutionalism creates the incentives and opportunities for looking abroad for constitution-making or constitutional amendment.

While the global spread of constitutional ideas is inevitable, these ideas are situated within the local context and balanced with local ideas. Tushnet states, “Every society's law is tied to so many aspects of that society—its politics, its particular history, its intellectual life, the institutional forms in which its activities are conducted, and many more.” Constitutional law is particularly prominent in this regard. Saunders underlines: “Constitutions are inherently local instruments. They must respond to local needs and they must be ‘owned’ both by the people of the state concerned and by their political leaders from time to time.” So, global constitutional ideas are balanced in the local context. Jacobsohn argues that global constitutional norms “need to be reconciled with the particularistic commitments of local traditions and practices; the contours of constitutional identity will, to a large extent, reflect how these disharmonies get resolved.” The consequence is the interaction and balancing of global/local constitutional identities.

D. Dialogical Change of Constitutional Identity

For Jacobsohn, constitutional identity is formulated and evolves through “dialogical enterprises” comprising “interpretive and political activity” occurring in public and private domains. Courts are the
principal, but not exclusive, shapers and articulators of constitutional identity. A wide range of actors (the courts, legislature, executive, and the people) engage in constitutional dialogue in the determination and clarification of substantial constitutional meanings and constitutional identities. This argument is supported by the theories of popular constitutionalism developed by American constitutionalists, such as Tushnet and Larry Kramer. However, as Heinz Klug rightly comments, “judicial decisions remain at the core of Jacobsohn’s empirical analysis.” Jacobsohn’s theory is informed by constitutional experience in stable, liberal polities where judicial review operates as the mechanism of constitutional change. Consequently, he has not yet accounted for the possibility of a non-judicial dialogical mechanism of change in constitutional identity.

In the socialist nations where judicial review is absent, constitutional change is normally undertaken through formal constitution-making and constitutional amendment. Especially, the moment of constitution-making creates space for constitutional dialogue among different political actors. The theory of the disharmonic constitution therefore must incorporate constitutional dialogue during the moment of formal constitutional change. Constitutional dialogue in such moments does not feature the way in which the dialogical interaction of judges with other political actors elaborates the meanings of the existing constitution. Rather, it features the way in which the dialogical interaction of the public and the government envisage the meaning of a normative constitution or a desirable constitutional order by taking the existing constitution as a starting foil. The constitutional disharmony operates as the condition of the dynamics of constitutional dialogue.

Furthermore, like Vicki Jackson and David Law, Jacobsohn tends to focus on judicial engagement in transnational dialogue. But there is also transnational engagement in constitution-making. Foreign and global sources are important for developing countries, like socialist countries, creating their constitutional identity by bridging the disharmonic gap between nation-specific constitutional identity and generic constitutional identity. But this need not take place by judicial engagement, as judicial review of constitutional questions is absent in

---

49 Id.
50 For a recent account of constitutional dialogue in Asian context, see Po Jen Yap, CONSTITUTIONAL DIALOGUE IN COMMON LAW ASIA (2015).
53 Jackson, supra note 4.
contemporary socialist countries. Alternatively, the constitution-making process allows political actors, constitution-makers, and social actors to engage in a transnational constitutional dialogue in which global and local sources disharmoniously interact and balance, provoking change in constitutional identity.

II. SOCIALIST CONSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

Before considering the change to socialist constitutional identity, it is necessary to briefly introduce its common core. The specific socialist constitutional identities are sharply disharmonic with the aspirations of global constitutionalism.

A. Constitutional Instrumentalism

In global constitutionalism, a constitution is conceived as the document of the people, which establishes written legal limitations on the public power. This is philosophically underpinned by the social contract theories of the Enlightenment era. All socialist countries have a document called a constitution, but these socialist documents are self-understood not as the legal limitations upon the governmental power but as an instrument of the party-state to structuralize and aggrandize its power so as to control and direct the society toward achieving the socialist goals. Simply speaking, while constitutionalism conceives of constitutions as a tool for the people to control the state, socialist constitutional instrumentalism uses constitutions as the tool for the state to control the people. All of the contemporary socialist countries have a written constitution that are often amended and replaced to suit the changes in ideology, policy, and leadership of a communist party.

B. Constitutional Vanguardism

In generic constitutionalism, “the will of the people is the source of authority and the basis of legitimate government.” Legitimate power is created through free and equal election. Differently, the use of the public power in the socialist world is constitutionally pre-established as the prerogative of the communist party conceived as the “vanguard” force of

---

58 Henkin, supra note 56, at 535.
the working class, the ruling class in the socialist world.\textsuperscript{59} The concept of vanguardism is attributed to V.I. Lenin, according to which “real power lay with the Communist Party.”\textsuperscript{60} Consequently, constitution, law, state, and the society are all under the control of the communist party. The communist party therefore is different from political parties in a liberal democracy. It is not a private political organization created to compete for power through free election because its monopoly of power has been established as a reality and mandated in the constitution. Rather, the communist party is an essential component of the polity, created with the aspiration to control the state and the society, and to direct the polity toward socialism.\textsuperscript{61} The leadership of the communist party remains the core of constitutional identity of the five contemporary socialist countries.

C. “Democratic Centralism”

The separation of power and checks and balances are normally conceived as the global identity of constitutionalism.\textsuperscript{62} In the socialist world, there are also three legislative, executive, and judicial powers, practiced by three different state bodies. But, the socialist constitutional structure is created according to a distinctive socialist principle called “democratic centralism,” an antithesis of the Montesquieuian tripartite government. Initially, “democratic centralism” was introduced by V.I. Lenin as the principle of party activity. Simply speaking, it aims to combine “democratic” discussions and centralized actions. After “democratic discussion,” superiors will issue a “conclusion” or order which requires unquestioning obedience from the inferiors.\textsuperscript{63} “Democratic centralism” was then applied in state organization and actions, rendered as “unity of power” as opposed to the separation of power. It is constitutionally characterized by the idea that state power is centralized in the popularly elected representative body. Within this formal scheme of united power, all other state bodies are subordinate to the supreme legislature. In this socialist constitutional arrangement, labor divisions among the three state organs are possible, but they must work together. This arrangement rejects the separation of power and checks and balances as these will weaken the power and prevent power

\textsuperscript{59} KONSTITUTSIIA SSSR (1936) [KONST. SSSR] [USSR CONSTITUTION] art. 126.
\textsuperscript{62} Henkin, supra note 56, at 535; see generally M.J.C. VILE, CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE SEPARATION OF POWERS (1998).
\textsuperscript{63} Alex Nove, Some Aspects of Soviet Constitutional Theory, 12 MOD. L. REV. 12, 19 (1949).
cooperation. The constitutional structure in the contemporary socialist world retains this identity of unitary and centralized power.

D. Rights Statism

Constitutionalism conceives of universal human rights as limits of the use of the public power. Socialist constitutions also include rights provisions, defined by a statist conceptualization of rights. Statist rights are underpinned by Marxist legal positivism, constitutional instrumentalism, and historical materialism. Marxist legal positivism leads to the idea that rights are positively granted by the state. Marxist constitutional instrumentalism suggests that rights are not the limits on the state but instead can be limited by the state for the state’s purposes. Historical materialism justifies the social determination of rights. The Constitutions of the five contemporary socialist countries include rights provisions in the line of statism.

E. Economic Statism

The protection of property rights is now considered an essential element of global constitutionalism. Moreover, the market economy is the worldwide practice, the condition of a well-functioning constitutional government. Socialist countries, however, have a distinctive constitutional economy, which rests on the assumption that to achieve socialism, the state needs to centrally plan the working of the economy and control substantial economic resources like lands and other properties. The consequence of this economic statism is the state-owned economy in the socialist world. This remains as the essential feature of the five contemporary socialist countries.

III. A CASE-STUDY: VIETNAM

A. Constitutional Disharmony

By way of background, Vietnam has enacted five constitutions under the leadership of the Communist Party: the 1946 Constitution after

66 Law, supra note 4, at 1302.
67 William A. Galston, Pluralist Constitutionalism, 28 SOC. PHIL. AND POL’Y 228, 236 (2010).
the August Revolution; the 1959 Constitution in North Vietnam after the Geneva Conference dividing Vietnam into two separate zones; the 1980 Constitution after national unification; the 1992 Constitution after the 1986 Đổi mới (Renovation) initiative; and most recently the 2013 Constitution in the context of the nation’s active integration into the global economic and political order. The first constitution was more liberal, while the four later were influenced by socialist constitutional tradition. After the first amendment in 2001, the party-state again introduced a plan to revise the 1992 Constitution in 2011, but eventually replaced it with the new 2013 Constitution. This new Constitution presents important adaptive changes to the core of socialist constitutional identity which is conditioned by the disharmony internal to and surrounding the 1992 Constitution.

The 1992 Constitution was enacted in response to the Đổi mới program initiated by the Party in 1986, which was meant to transform the centrally planned economy into the “socialist-oriented market economy.” The Constitution continued but began to modify the essence of socialist constitutional identity. Notably, it introduced competing visions which promoted both economic liberalization and socialist orientation. It recognized the role of private economic sectors, indicative of the adaption of the socialist specific identity, namely, the state-owned economy, by incorporating generic liberal values. In practice, Vietnam implemented the “socialist-oriented market economy” in nearly three decades on the framework established by the 1992 Constitution. The Constitution also included provisions which facilitated global political and economic integration and at the same time removed the commitment to exclusive diplomatic relationships with socialist nations. In practice, Vietnam has established diplomatic relationships with 186 nations throughout the world and joined major international economic institutions like the World Trade Organization (2007).

New Institutional Economics suggests that a market economy (even socialist oriented) requires the rule of law, limited government, and the protection of human rights, especially economic rights. Hence, new

---

71 Id. at art. 14.
74 See generally NORTH, supra note 7.
constitutional provisions facilitating economic reform were adopted together with the revised institutional setting. The Leninist unitary constitutional structure continued but was modified to make the power less concentrated: the government was vested with more independent administrative authorities; the prime minister had more individual authorities and responsibilities; and the individual presidency was established. The 1992 Constitution also introduced for the first time the term of “human rights” understood as being expressed in “the right of citizens.” The constitutional amendments in 2001 introduced the idea of the “socialist rule of law state.” This was an attempt to marry the specific socialist legality, a socialist form of rule by law, with the western concept of the rule of law.

Consequently, the 1992 Constitution was a disharmonic constitution. Internally, it remained a socialist document but included competing understandings of market economy, human rights, and rule of law. Most importantly, the constitutional enshrinement of the idea of the rule of law state has precipitated more substantial reformist discourse. The idea of the socialist rule of law state is an ambiguous one. The ambiguous language of the socialist rule of law state opens the door for alternative interpretations. The concept of “socialist rule of law state” has operated as the epistemic foil for reformist constitutional discourse in early twentieth century Vietnam. A member of the Constitutional Amendment Committee told me that one of the reasons for the enactment of the new 2013 Constitution was the development of the “social cognition of the rule of law state.”

The commitment to the socialist rule of law state has stipulated new visions on law, state power, rights, and public institutional arrangements. Since the introduction of the concept of socialist rule of law state in 2001 in the Constitution, there have been creative efforts among political leaders, officials, and legal scholars, as well as other public intellectuals. These creative efforts have focused on the construction of its substantial meanings and reforming arguments pertaining to party leadership, state institutions, limiting arbitrary power, constitutional review, human rights protection, and judicial independence within that framework.

76 HIỆP PHÁP [CONSTITUTION] Apr. 15, 1992, art. 50 (Viet.).
77 Interview with a member of the Constitutional Amendment Committee in Hanoi, Vietnam (Jan. 13, 2017).
78 Hà Thị Mai Hiên, Nhiệm vụ cải cách tư pháp trong điều kiện xây dựng nhà nước pháp quyền ở Việt Nam [Judicial Reform in the Context of Building the Rule of Law State in Vietnam], 10 NHÀ
Externally, the 1992 Constitution includes many constitutional aspirations (such as human rights protection and construction of the rule of law state) that are disharmonic to the social reality (such as human rights restrictions and corruption). The Constitution also includes several fundamental commitments, such as “building a prosperous life for its people, a strong country and an equitable, democratic and civilised society, ensuring the well-being, freedom and happiness of all citizens as well as conditions for their all-round development” (Article 3), which are discordant with the reality in Vietnam of a developing country with many people living in poor conditions, especially the rural population which occupied 66% of the total population by 2015. These conditions encourage a continuous struggle to close the gap between constitutional commitments and reality.

Normatively, the 1992 Constitution is dissonant with global requirements of constitutionalism in many points (such as the instrumentalist constitution, the leadership of the communist party, centralized power, individual rights, and the economy controlled by the state). These constitutional gaps provide the space for, and incentivize different actors to, struggle for constitutional consistency. To illustrate, constitutional law Professor Nguyễn Đăng Dung at Vietnam National University Law School at Hanoi criticizes the 1992 Constitution for failing to meet the normative requirements of generic constitutionalism. Professor Nguyễn Đăng Dung draws on Louis Henkin to define these requirements as limited government, whose requirements include: construction-making by a constitutional convention or special procedures, the separation of powers, judicial independence, and the protection of human rights. He then advocates that: “To have an authentic

---

constitution, we must have ‘constitutionalism.’ Simply speaking, ‘constitutionalism’ is the necessary theory which serves as the base for constitution-making and amending the authentic constitution.”

In short, the adaptive change to the socialist constitutional identity in Vietnam is animated by the universal condition of constitutional disharmony. The 1992 Constitution is a disharmonic constitution, giving rise to a socialist constitutional identity culminating in the adaptions embodied in the new 2013 Constitution.

B. Constitutional Globalization

This section considers the impact of constitutional globalization on constitution-making and constitutional discourse in Vietnam in 2013. I met and exchanged with some constitution-makers during this time and further interviewed them Hanoi in January 2017. During my interviews, constitution-makers mentioned to me several global factors that resulted in constitution-making in Vietnam, including international economic integration, Vietnam’s ratification of international human rights treaties, and the globalization of Vietnamese legal scholarship. They said that Vietnam needs to reform the constitutional system to better integrate into the global community. The Party even instructed constitution-makers to reference foreign constitutional experience. The internal contradiction of the 1992 Constitution, the gap between this socialist constitution and social reality, and especially the gap between this charter and normative requirements of global constitutionalism, creates incentives, spaces, and chances for different actors to turn to global sources for constitution-making inspirations to achieve more constitutional consistency.

In fact, general ideas of global constitutionalism have been diffused in Vietnam by various channels. One such channel has been the translation of enlightenment thinkers’ work into Vietnamese. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s The Social Contract and Montesquieu’s The Spirit of The Laws have been republished and referenced more often in the 2010s. In addition, the new century features publication for the first time in Vietnamese of works by other western liberal thinkers, such as John Locke’s Two Treatises of Government, and John Stuart Mill’s

81 Id.
82 Interviews, supra note 16.
83 Id.
84 Id.
**Considerations on Representative Government and On Liberty.** The publication of these books in the Vietnamese language is instrumental to Soviet-trained senior constitutional scholars and Vietnamese-trained scholars in gaining access to western liberalist ideas, which inspire them to envisage new ideas on the constitution, rights, and the public power. Consequently, as will be discussed below, the constitutional intellectuals advocate for a contractual constitution, constitutional referendum, natural rights, and the separation of power, which are characteristically predicated on European enlightenment liberalism, which challenges the established socialist constitutional understanding.

Translation work has also resulted in the impact of American liberal constitutionalism on the Vietnamese constitutional intellectual life. The Vietnamese version of the *Federalist Papers* has been increasingly referenced. Additionally, the twenty-first century witnessed publications in Vietnamese of Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* and James Madison’s *Notes On the Constitutional Convention of 1787*. The Embassy of the United States in Hanoi also publishes Vietnamese translations of informational work on modern constitutionalism and the American constitutional system. The particular consequences of the influence of American constitutionalism in Vietnamese constitutional intellectual life are the constitutional proposals of constitutional limitations, constitutional endurance, constituent power and constitutional convention, and judicial review. American constitutionalism is also referenced in other constitutional discourse regarding the separation of power, human rights, and judicial independence.

In addition to legal translation, the development of legal education is another factor conducive to the diffusion of generic constitutional ideas in Vietnam. Young Vietnamese constitutionalists and lawyers trained

---

86 See JOHN LOCKE, KHẢO LUẬN THỦ HAI VỀ CHÍNH QUYỀN [TWO TREATISES OF GOVERNMENT] (Lê Tuấn Huy trans., 2007); JOHN STUART MILL, BẢN VẼ TƯ DƯƠNG [ON LIBERTY] (Nguyễn Văn Trọng trans., 2009); JOHN STUART MILL, CHÍNH THỂ ĐẠI DIỆN [CONSIDERATIONS ON REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT] (Nguyễn Văn Trọng & Bùi Văn Nam Sơn trans., 2009).

87 See LUẬN VỀ HIỆN PHÁP HOA KỲ [ON THE U.S. CONSTITUTION] (Nguyễn Hưng Vương trans., 1959) (The Vietnamese selective translation of the *Federalist Papers* was first published in Saigon prior to the 1975 unification.).

88 ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, NÊN DÂN TRÍ MỸ [DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA] (Phan Toan trans., 2008).


either in European universities (such as France, Germany, and the Netherlands) or American law schools play an especially important role in the diffusion of new constitutional ideas in Vietnam. They are competent in foreign languages, particularly English, which is instrumental to their imbibing and disseminating western and global ideas. Their exchanges and publications in Vietnamese buttress senior constitutionalists’ support of western and global ideas. As Mark Sidel states, Vietnamese constitutional scholars “have also explored theory and constitutional development in Europe, North America, Asia, and elsewhere.” The publications of constitutionalists and lawyers in Vietnam have helped spread the constitutional government ideas and practices of major western nations. Western liberal constitutionalism informs new discourse in Vietnam on popular sovereignty, separation of power, checks and balances, constitutional review, human rights, and judicial independence. Many Vietnamese constitutional intellectuals invoke western liberal constitutional experiences in different ways. Importantly, Vietnamese constitutional intellectuals now no longer work purely within the four walls of academia. They have engaged in constitutional dialogues with local legislators and constitution-makers, which precipitates the pluralization of their constitutional thinking. Workshops and conferences on constitutional issues have not been purely academic: law-makers and constitution-makers have often been invited to attend these fora and exchanged ideas with scholars.

Global constitutional ideas have also been diffused in Vietnam through transnational dialogues, especially the dialogues on human rights. International human rights laws (particularly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) are important to the change of Vietnamese comprehension of human rights from a specific to a more cosmopolitan posture. Both constitution-makers and public intellectuals accept the idea that constitutional rights in Vietnam must be consistent with international human rights treaties that Vietnam has signed. The Vietnamese government has also engaged in transnational human rights dialogues with international bodies like the UN Human Rights Committee and with

91 I met and conversed with many of them.
92 Sidel, supra note 69, at 25.
94 I attended many of such workshops and conferences.
95 Interviews, supra note 16.

International legal aid programs also contribute to the diffusion of global constitutional ideas in Vietnam. As evidence of the new movement of “law and development,”\footnote{See generally Carol V. Rose, The “New” Law and Development Movement in the Post-Cold War Era: A Vietnam Case Study, 32 L. & SOC’Y REV. 93 (1998).} the United Nations Development Programme in Vietnam and some European governments have supported organizing a number of workshops on constitutional revision issues, which have created the platform for Vietnamese legislators, constitution-makers, domestic scholars, and international scholars to exchange constitutional ideas. Through this dialogical platform, global constitutional ideas have affected the thinking of local legislators, constitution-makers, and intellectuals, facilitating the emergence of alternative constitutional ideas.

Globalization has engendered what social science scholars call “social complexity.”\footnote{Gillespie, supra note 96, at 131–33.} A social system becomes significantly complex “when there are strong interactions among its elements, so that current events heavily influence the probabilities of many kinds of later events.”\footnote{Id. at 117.} Social scientists point out that: “Social complexity generated by globalization and rapid economic change compels both the state and citizens to step outside pre-existing identities and change their thinking about which groups matter most and which groups matter least.”\footnote{Id. (citing MICHAEL D. COHEN & ROBERT AXELROD, HARNESSING COMPLEXITY: ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF A SCIENTIFIC FRONTIER 7 (1999)).} Turning to the case of Vietnam, Gillespie demonstrates that the implementation of the Renovation program and the country’s integration into the global community have generated social complexity in Vietnam and stimulated the change of legal ideas.\footnote{Gillespie, supra note 96, at 116.} He concludes:

Economic reforms, socialization, and globalization have brought about rapid changes in most facets of Vietnamese life. New ideas compete with old, creating contradictory and sometimes confusing public discourse. Modernization theory suggests that the party-state might respond to this
complexity by expanding its loyalties to encompass new social groups and ideas.\textsuperscript{102}

An Assembly deputy who is deeply engaged in the constitution-making process told me that the enactment of the 2013 Constitution is a response to “the development of people’s recognition,” which reflects different understandings.\textsuperscript{103} Although the party-state in Vietnam has persisted in political monism, social complexity has compelled it to respond to pluralist ideas, pluralist interests, and demands of different social forces by accommodating alternative constitutional values. The consequence is the dialogical process of constitutional dynamics in Vietnam. Socialist ideas dialogically interact with global ideas. The party-state and the public have engaged in a constitutional dialogue to redefine and adjust fundamental constitutional aspirations that will guide the future development of the polity. This allows socialist constitutional identity to evolve.

\textbf{C. Dialogical Change of Socialist Constitutional Identity}

In Vietnam, judicial review is absent, and constitutional dialogue proceeds in popular and political fora. Even in ordinary politics, despite the state’s management, there are spaces for public discourse in which constitutional meanings and constitutional identity are defined and clarified. But the extraordinary moment of constitution-making offers great space for constitutional dialogue. In 2013, constitution-makers actively discussed substantive constitutional questions, the National Assembly’s members had different views, and they listened to the contentious debates among the public.\textsuperscript{104} Disharmonic constitution-making functions as a forum for the party, the state, and the people to debate, contest, define, clarify, and develop the meanings and the contents of the Vietnamese constitutional identity. This dialogical constitution-making allows competing constitutional visions to emerge. In that forum, socialist and global constitutional vision engages in a conversation, although its outcome is decided by the socialist leadership.

The disharmonic nature of the 1992 Constitution creates the condition for continuing constitutional debates, which eventually culminated in a new round of constitution-making in 2013. The three-year (2011–2013) constitution-making process involved a constitutional dialogue in which the party-state, legislators, constitution-makers, intellectuals, lawyers, activists, and others had controversially deliberated

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{102} Id. at 134.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} Interview with an Assembly deputy in Hanoi, Vietnam (Jan. 2, 2017).
  \item \textsuperscript{104} Id.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Socialist constitutional identity is articulated, modified, and developed through constitutional dialogue in which different actors advocate alternative socialist and global constitutional visions. This is examined in detail below.

1. Constitutional Instrumentalism

The social contract theories were introduced in Vietnam by early Vietnamese constitutionalists. Hồ Chí Minh’s 1945 decree on constitution-making also adopted this view. The 1946 Constitution incarnates this conception to some extent: its preamble acknowledges that the Vietnamese people are the author of the Constitution. The contractual concept, however, was repudiated by the subsequent 1959, 1980, and 1992 socialist Constitutions, and class instrumentalism then dominated the Vietnamese understanding of the nature of the constitution. In the 2000s, however, classical social contract theories witnessed a return in Vietnamese legal discourse. Especially around the wave of the constitution-making process in the 2010s, constitutional contractualism was a prevailing model for conceptualizing the nature of the constitution as discussed below.

Contractualism is espoused by not only younger constitutionalists but also senior Soviet-trained constitutional law scholars. To illustrate, criticizing the class understanding of constitution as flawed, Professor Đào Trí Úc, a senior legal scholar, opines that the constitution is the “legal contract of different social forces” and “the legal foundation of the entire society which recognizes and embodies the interests of the entire society, [and] the general interests of the people and the nation, although it always counts for the interests and the will of the leading class of the society in different historical periods.” Professor Nguyễn Đăng Dung presents a more radical shift to contractualism, evident in his numerous writings during the constitution-making process. To cite an example, invoking Rousseau and Thomas Paine, he suggested that the future

---

110 This is based on my many exchanges with them.
111 Đào Trí Úc, Hiện pháp trong Đời sống Xã hội và Quốc gia [Constitution in the Life of Society and Nation], in BAN VỀ LẬP HIỆN [DISCUSSIONS ON CONSTITUTION-MAKING] 12–13 (Phạm Văn Hùng, ed., 2010).
Constitution in Vietnam should be conceived of as a social contract reflecting the general will of the people, and a product of the people, not the government. Contractualism also informs the constitutional commentaries of other Soviet-trained legal scholars. The constitutional constitution was ardently hailed by the Vietnamese public. Official mass media enlivened the idea of contractual constitution by approvingly disseminating it from the academic to popular fora. Furthermore, popular constitutional petitions were strongly influenced by the idea of a contractual constitution.

As the consequence of the concept of contractual constitution, legal scholars, lawyers, senior officials, legislators, members of the government, and retired politicians as well as members of civil society, activists, and dissidents vehemently called for the people as the constitutional author and popular ratification of a new Constitution. According to a reporter, “despite in different fora and in different time, there is a convergence among many comments on the draft amendments to the 1992 Constitution on vesting the constitution-making power to the people.” To illustrate, in a public meeting, a commentator named Nguyễn Hữu Chót stated:

The nature of our state is the state of the people, by the people, and for the people, confirmed in Article 2 of the [1992] Constitution . . . the practice of constitution-making

---


115 Interview with Mr. Lê Quang Bình in Hanoi, Vietnam (Jan. 16, 2017). Mr. Bình together with other lead people submitted three constitutional petitions by civil society’s organizations and groups to the Constitutional Amendment Committee. See also Bui Ngọc Sơn & Pip Nicholson, Activism and Popular Constitutionalism in Contemporary Vietnam, 41 L. & SOC. INQUIRY 114 (2016).


through indirect democracy (through the National Assembly) as the current practice somewhat limits the people’s power and does not [reflect] the will and the desire of the people. Therefore, the Constitution must be amended to make the constituent power [belong] to the people through referendum.\textsuperscript{118}

It can be seen that the intellectual community and society understood the nature of the Constitution in the new contractual line. Intellectuals do realize that this is a new understanding. To illustrate, a senior intellectual named Phan Hữ Đạt comments:

Formerly, there were people who understood that the National Assembly is the supreme organ in our country which possesses all legislative, executive, and judicial powers. Nowadays, there is a deeper and wider understanding that the people are the supreme organ, which stemmed from the recognition of the force of the people and the people as the base of every enterprise. . . . That means the new Constitution must guarantee the people’s right to vote in referendum. Actually, this understanding is just a return to the spirit and words of the 1946 Constitution of our country.\textsuperscript{119}

It is reported that: “During the deliberation at the National Assembly in late 2012, some delegates suggested that after being approved by the National Assembly, the Constitution must be voted in a referendum to be valid. Referendum must be determined in the Constitution as a citizen’s fundamental rights.”\textsuperscript{120} My interviews also indicate that constitution-makers adopted a new understanding that the nature of the constitution is the expression of the popular will, not merely the Party’s creed.\textsuperscript{121} The Government also agrees: “It is necessary to determine that the constituent power is the expression of the people’s supreme power, including the powers to initiate constitution-making, to participate in the constitutional drafting process, and finally to ratify [the constitution] in a referendum.”\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{118} Id.
\textsuperscript{119} Id.
\textsuperscript{120} Id.
\textsuperscript{121} Interviews, supra note 16.
This new understanding about the nature of the constitution and constitutional authorship is significantly different from the Soviet constitutional instrumentalism. The state has begun to understand the constitution as something belonging to the people and reflecting the public will, rather than merely instrumental to its own interests. This understanding reflects the initial convergence with generic constitutional identity, a modification to the conventional instrumentalist recognition.

The regime’s new understanding of the nature of the constitution also informs the reality of constitution-making to a certain extent. As I have illustrated in length elsewhere, the 2013 constitution-making process has encouraged the most participation and has been the most open process in Vietnam. The Constitution and its formation is not merely the instrument of the party-state but becomes the base for the constitutional dialogue between the party-state and the people. This constitutional dialogue also involves the exchange of ideas and opinions about the nature of the constitution itself. In addition to practical actors, an open constitutional conversation could happen in Vietnam under the communist rule because there is a new understanding of the democratic nature of constitution among the society and the party-state.

That said, the regime does not abandon the instrumentalist identity of the socialist constitution. The party-state continues to conceive of the constitution as the instrument to express the party’s policies in constitutional terms. In reality, despite the open constitutional dialogue, the party-state rejected most popular constitutional submissions, suggestions, and petitions, including the call for constitutional referendum, and imposed its constitutional references at the last minute.

Consequently, the new 2013 constitution continues to confirm the instrumentalist essence of the socialist constitution, but incorporates new ideas reflecting a commitment to a democratic constitution. This is best expressed in its new preamble: “Institutionalizing the Political Creed of Building the Nation during period of Transition to Socialism, and inheriting the 1946 Constitution, 1959 Constitution, 1980 Constitution, and 1992 Constitution, the Vietnamese People frame, implement, and

---

123 Bui, supra note 105, at 956.
125 Bui Ngoc Son, supra note 105, at 971.
protect this Constitution for the objectives of wealthy people, powerful nation, democracy, justice, and civilization.”

On the one hand, the Constitution expressly acknowledges that it is enacted to institutionalize the Party’s socialist directions. On the other hand, the global language of “we the people” is employed to establish the commitment to popular constituent authorship. So, the Constitution reflects the dissonant tension between the socialist instrumentalist and the generic understanding of the nature of the Constitution as the document of the people.

Moreover, the Constitution is conceived as an instrument for structuring the public power. On the other hand, constitution-makers tend to subject the state to constitutional constraints: “The State is organized and operates in concordance with the Constitution and the law, governs the society by the Constitution and the law.” This is further strengthened by the new requirement of constitutional oath taken by senior politicians.

Disharmony internal to, and surrounding, the 1992 Constitution led to the identity adaption of constitutional instrumentalism in Vietnam. First, the move to constitutional contractualism is animated by the gap between the 1992 Constitution and the normative requirement of constitutionalism regarding constitutional authorship. That the Constitution stipulates that the legislature possess the constitution-making power is inconsistent with the ideal of people’s constitution-making power, and this animates the struggle for consistency. Second, the adaption to the instrumentalist identity of the Vietnamese Constitution is animated by the ambiguity and contradiction internal to the 1992 Constitution regarding the nature of the constitution and constituent power. The 1992 Constitution declared that it was the “supreme law” of the state, but it was in fact enacted by an ordinary legislature (the National Assembly) and provided that this legislature has both law-making and constitution-making power, which is discordant with the provision on constitutional supremacy. This dissonance animated the discourse on contractual constitution and constitutional referendum, which attempts to establish the constitution as the true supreme law of the land because the constituent power is vested in the people. Third, the reemergence of constitutional contractualism is

---

126 HIỆN PHÁP [CONSTITUTION] Nov. 28, 2013, pmbl. (Viet.).
128 Id. at art 70.
129 Id. at art 146.
130 Id. at art. 83.
animated by the gap between constitution-making power in paper and in reality. In Vietnam, the legislature is the supreme body of constitution-making power in text, but the Party is possessor of the constitution-making power in reality. Constitution-making is initiated, controlled, and concluded by the Party. So, the call for people’s ratification of the Constitution implicitly aims to curtail the Party’s power in constitution-making and vest it into the hands of the people, or at least demonstrates an unsatisfactory disposition toward instrumentalist identity of the socialist constitution.

These constitutional disharmonies create the incentive for the turn to global sources. The global idea of contractual constitution is diffused in Vietnam and informs the domestic discourse on the nature of the constitution and constituent power. However, this global idea is situated in the local context. The public intellectuals and citizens draw from a wide range of sources to formulate a new understanding of the nature of the constitution: classical theories of social contract, foreign experiences, nationalist sources, and local political ideology. First, the call for contractual constitution in Vietnam is informed by social contract theories. Second, the world practice of constitutional referendum was also invoked to justify its practice in Vietnam.132 Third, the legacy of the 1946 Constitution was often summoned to legitimatize popular constitution-making, as its provision of constitutional referendum is conceived as the embodiment of the idea of social contract and the principle of popular sovereignty.133 Finally, the Party’s rhetoric of “the state of the people, by the people, and for the people,” was also vindicated for this purpose. So, there is a balance between global and local source in the formulation of the new understanding of the nature of the constitution and constituent power.

The 2013 constitution-making process operated as the mechanism through which politicians, officials, lawyers, legal scholars, public intellectuals, and citizens engaged in a critical dialogue about the nature of the Constitution. This constitutional dialogue was influential enough to generate the modification of the regime’s instrumentalist understanding of the nature of the Constitution. The birth of the new 2013 Constitution is conceived as the “landmark in the development of understanding about the Constitution in Vietnam” and “the base for the

continuous renovation of the understanding about the constitution.” The language of the new 2013 Constitution indicates a modified understanding on the instrumentalist essence of the socialist constitution in Vietnam. The new commitment to popular constitutional authorship is reflective of the critical dialogue between the public and the party-state on the nature of the Constitution and constituent power.

2. Constitutional Vanguardism

The 1946 Constitution was enacted by a multi-party constituent assembly, albeit under the leadership of the Communist Party, and did not have any provision about this Party. The 1959 Constitution referred to the leadership of the Party in its preamble. The 1980 Constitution firmly mandated the exclusive leadership of the Party in Article 4. Article 4 of the 1992 Constitution continued to provide for the party leadership but this leadership was not exclusive, reading as follows: “The Communist Party of Vietnam, the vanguard of the Vietnamese working class and loyal representative of the interests of the working class, the working people and the whole nation, who adheres to Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh’s thought, is the force assuming leadership of the State and society.” Article 4 was then described as the sacrosanct gospel and was taboo in constitutional discussion in Vietnam for many years.

However, during the 2013 constitution-making process, the party-state, public intellectuals, dissidents, and the senior members of the Party participated in a critical dialogue to redefine the meaning of party leadership. At the extreme level, radical liberals, dissidents, and even retired Party’s members imputed the shortcoming of the communist party’s leadership to the lack of political competitions and the checks and balances among different political forces. They, therefore, called for a radical change in constitutional identity by establishing a multi-party

---

135 Interview, supra, note 77.
136 HIỆN PHÁP [CONSTITUTION] Dec. 18, 1959, pmbl. (Viet.).
137 Id. at art. 4.
138 Id.
system. To illustrate, a petition initiated by seventy-two intellectuals, many of whom are party-members, called for free elections and political competition, implying a multi-party system.\textsuperscript{140}

In a public letter, Lê Hiếu Đăng—a lawyer and party member, who worked for a long time in the Vietnam Father Front (the political organization closely tied to the Communist Party)—eventually called for creation of a “Democratic and Social Party” to compete with the Communist Party, which triggered wide attention.\textsuperscript{141} He reasoned that economic development would create different social groups who would form different organizations to protect their interests.\textsuperscript{142} “This is the natural trend, and therefore a multi-party system is indisputable, and Article 4 of the Constitution is senseless.”\textsuperscript{143} He also commented on the legal base for creating an alternative party: “The policy of no multi-party system is the policy of the Communist Party. There is not any law prohibiting this.”\textsuperscript{144} He then suggests that the party members who no longer want to be the party’s members can “declare the abandonment of the [Communist] Party and create a new party, like the Democratic and Social Party.”\textsuperscript{145} Lê Hiệu Đăng publicly declared himself to be an apostate in December 2013, shortly before he passed away.\textsuperscript{146}

The proponents of a multi-party system do not repudiate the role of the Communist Party, but instead insist that if the Party aspires to lead the state and the society on the legitimate base, it must participate in equal political competitions through free elections and be checked and balanced by other parties. An incumbent senior official agreed with the creation of the new party, but stated that the new party will not oppose, but cooperate with, the Communist Party “to build democracy for Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{147}

However, the mainstream trend is not to radically change the constitutional identity regarding the Communist Party, but to modify it by reconciling the disharmony between party leadership and people’s


\textsuperscript{142} Id.

\textsuperscript{143} Id.

\textsuperscript{144} Id.

\textsuperscript{145} Id.


\textsuperscript{147} Đào Trí Úc, supra note 134.
sovereignty. To illustrate, consider the notable comment by former President of the National Assembly, Nguyễn Văn An. He boldly points out that the party has interfered in state governance and even violated the Constitution. He stated that the reality that the General Secretary of the Party heads the Central Military Commission, the highest Party organ on military issues in Vietnam, is unconstitutional because the 1992 Constitution provides that the President of State is the commander of the military force. He then suggested that a law pertaining to the Party should be enacted to separate party leadership from state governance and to ensure the constitutionality and legality in the party’s action.149

Many Party scholars share the view that the new Constitution should mandate the enactment of law pertaining to the Party. This is meant to reconcile the disharmony between the principle of popular sovereignty and the principle of party leadership. The idea is that the leadership of the Communist Party must be constrained by law to avoid party arbitrariness and to make the Party accountable to the people. Consider, for example, the debate on the draft Constitution in a meeting of the Vietnam Father Front.150 A senior member named Phạm Xuân Hằng agrees on the constitutional mandate of the party leadership, but suggests that this leadership must be “guaranteed by law and defined by law” to ensure that the Party “is under the people’s supervision” and “is accountable to the people in its decisions.”151 He further underlines that: “This is not a new issue. Many cadres and party members have expressed this thought. In the trend of perfecting the socialist rule of law state, we think that this is the fundamental issue of political transparency.”152 Another senior member, Hoàng Thái, concedes, stating that: “Every organ has a law to regulate it. The Party is the core of the political system but there is no law about it. This is unacceptable. There should be such law so that the Party will operate publicly and transparently, avoiding arbitrariness.”153 In an article published in official media, Bùi Đức Lại, who used to work as a senior specialist for the Party, suggests that the class nature and the ideological foundation of the Communist Party should be removed from the Constitution because these issues should be provided in the Party’s constitution rather than the

---

148 Nguyen & Lipes, supra note 146.
151 Id.
152 Id.
153 Id.
State’s Constitution.\textsuperscript{154} This is actually meant to abolish the constitutional establishment of Marxist ideology as the dominant ideology of the polity.

Constitution-makers did receive radical suggestions, but their debates focused on the accountability of the Party.\textsuperscript{155} Consequently, the 2013 Constitution rejects the call for a multi-party system and reaffirms the Party’s leadership and vanguard role in Article 4.\textsuperscript{156} But, in order to enhance the legitimacy of this controversial Article and assuage the forces which sought to introduce greater disharmonies and challenge the party leadership, it adopts new ambiguous commitments. First, it stipulates the Party’s accountability to the public in this way: “The Communist Party of Vietnam maintains a close tie with the People, serves the People, submits to People’s supervision and is accountable to the People in its decisions.”\textsuperscript{157} Second, the Constitution is committed to the constitutionality and legality of the Party’s actions, providing that: “All organisations and members of the Communist Party of Vietnam operate within the framework of the Constitution and the law.”\textsuperscript{158} However, the Constitution does not articulate mechanisms to hold the Party accountable to the public and check the constitutionality and legality of the Party’s power. So, the commitments to the Party’s accountability and constitutionality, which reflected the public criticism and demand, are ambiguous and discordant with the persistent mandate of the Party’s leadership. In particular, the constitutional aspirations of popular and legal checks on the Party’s power contradict the constitutional mandate that the Party leadership be subject to the supervision of the people.

Another important development concerns Article 6 of the Constitution, which provides that: “The people practice the state power under the forms of direct democracy and indirect democracy through the National Assembly, the People’s Councils and other state agencies.”\textsuperscript{159} This commitment to democracy is consonant with the constitutionally established monopolist power of the Party. However, this commitment in theory allows the people to check the Party’s policies embodied in the law through their representatives and forms of direct democracy like referendum.

\textsuperscript{154} Bùi Đức Lại, Hiến pháp nên đề cập về Đảng thế nào? [How should the Constitution Provide for the Party?], BÁO VIỆTNAMNÉT (Jan. 23, 2013), http://vietnamnet.vn/vn/chinh-tri/106462/hien- phap-nen-de-cap-ve-dang-the-nao-.html.\textsuperscript{155} Interview, supra note 77.\textsuperscript{156} HIẾN PHÁP [CONSTITUTION] Nov. 28, 2013, art. 4 (Viet.).\textsuperscript{157} Id.\textsuperscript{158} Id.\textsuperscript{159} Id. at art. 8.
The condition for the modification to the identity of vanguardism is that the 1992 Constitution is a disharmonic constitution. First, the fact that the 1992 Constitution entrenched the leadership of the Communist Party is at odds with the requirement of constitutional government created by democratic process, like free and equal election. Second, the constitutional condition for emergence of dialogue about Article 4 on the leadership of the Communist Party is in disharmony with the preceding Article 2. Article 2 confirms the principle of popular sovereignty: “All power belongs to the people.”

Third, the gap between constitutional commitment on party vanguardism and the social reality creates the opportunity for dialogue about the legitimacy and meaning of Article 4. The 1992 Constitution removed the confirmation of the “exclusive leadership” Communist Party, but the single domination of the Communist Party is the living constitutional norm in Vietnam as there are not any new parties that can be established. This has also generated alternative understandings of political competition and multi-party election, which emerged during the constitutional consultation process. Moreover, while the Constitution confirms the Party as a vanguard force, the social reality reveals a discordant picture. In its 2011 XI National Congress, the Party itself realized the gravity of its actual leadership: “Our nation has still confronted with numerous great challenges . . . . The risk of further lagging behind economically compared to many nations in the region and in the world is apparent. The situation of degradation in political ideology, morality, and life-style of a negligible part of officials and party members is serious, which is closely related to the evils of authoritiveness, corruption, and extravagance.” This opened the door for critical discussion on the legitimacy of Article 4. In reality, the Party does not merely “lead” the state but interferes in the state’s affairs, which engenders rethinking about the meaning of party leadership.

The above constitutional inconsistencies inspire domestic actors to look at global sources. Several global ideas regarding democratic government, political accountability, and free and equal elections have been diffused in Vietnam and have complicated the disharmonic constitutional discussions on the Party. However, these global ideas are

---

160 HIỆN PHÁP [CONSTITUTION] Apr. 15, 1992, art. 2 (Viet.).
balanced with local conditions and intellectual sources. For example, domestic corruptions among Party members are important local factors that drive the discourse of constitutional restraints on the Party’s power. Moreover, the call for free elections and a multi-party system are justified by both global norms and the local constitutional legacy concerning the 1946 Constitution which embodied these norms.¹⁶³

Constitution-making operates as the mechanism for the party, the state, and the people to engage in a disharmonic constitutional dialogue to redefine the meaning of party leadership. There is a dialogical interaction between the socialist specific principle of party vanguardism and the generic ideas of democracy, free election, and accountability. Consequently, the identity of party vanguardism remains but is modified by new commitments to the Party’s accountability and constitutional restraints on the Party. This adaption to the identity of party vanguardism is reflective of the new emerging understanding about the Party’s leadership within Party intellectuals and society. Practically, this is instrumental to reinforcing the legitimacy of the Party’s leadership. The continued disharmony internal to Article 4 and the continued gap between the commitment to the Party’s vanguard and the social reality (especially serious corruption among Party members) creates continually shifting dynamics regarding the identity of constitutional vanguardism in Vietnam.

3. “Democratic Centralism”

The 1946 Constitution established a Montesquiean tripartite government, including the Government, People’s Parliament, and an independent judiciary.¹⁶⁴ The socialist Constitutions of 1959, 1980, and 1992 repudiated the western theory of separation of powers in favor of the Leninist theory of “democratic centralism,” expressed in the constitutional field as “concentration” or “unity” of power.¹⁶⁵ The Leninist constitutional structure established by the 1992 Constitution included: the National Assembly, the Government, the President of State, the people’s courts, and the people’s procuracies. These institutions are responsible for, and report to, the National Assembly as the supreme body.¹⁶⁶

During the centrally planned period and the early Đổi mới period in the 1980s, the Leninist constitutional structure in Vietnam had been

¹⁶³ See Bui Ngoc Son, supra note 133, at 67.
¹⁶⁴ See SIDEL, supra note 69, at 30–37.
¹⁶⁵ Id. at 51–60, 70–79, 96–107.
¹⁶⁶ Id. at 96–107.
construed through the lens of the so-called “socialist concentration of power,” which holds that state power in socialist Vietnam is concentrated in the hands of one institution, namely the National Assembly—the popularly elected legislature—located at the apex of the pyramidal structure of power while the Government (the executive) is subordinate to it.

The reformist discourse in the 2010s, however, moved to employ the nomenclatures of “unity of power” and “distribution of power.”

Yet, this is not simply the change of habitual use of phraseology, but indicates the change of substantial connotations. The alternative reconstruction of “unity of power” claims that state powers cannot be centralized in any single institution but are “united at the people” in the sense that the powers are legitimately emulated from the people and are exercised for their general interests.

So, there has been a conceptual shift from institutional to popular base in legitimatizing unitary power.

The alternative interpretation of unitary power facilitates institutionally decentralized power, giving rise to the debate on “distribution of state power” conceived as “the reasonable element” of the Western theory of the separation of power. Constitutional law scholars call for clearer definition of the National Assembly as the holder of the legislative power, the Government as the holder of the executive power, and the courts as the holders of the judicial power, à la Montesquieu.

This is actually the call for eliminating the concentration of powers (including the executive and judicial powers) in the hands of the National Assembly and ensuring the independence of state institutions in exercising their allocated powers. It bears noting the particular implication of this constitutional proposal for judicial independence.

---


which is motivated by the global discourse and practice of judicial power and judicial review. The mobilization for the real judicial power practiced by the courts implies that the functions of constitutional supervision and constitutional interpretation have been misallocated to the National Assembly and its Standing Committee and should be reallocated to the judicial site.\(^ {172} \)

But the most important thing in the 2013 constitutional dialogue on state power is the call for a new principle of “controlling the state power,” which mirrors the western principle of checks and balances.\(^ {173} \) In the 2000s, Vietnam saw special concerns of “restraining state powers” or “controlling state power.”\(^ {174} \) As the reflection of the practical and academic demands, the Communist Party in the 11th Convention in 2011 has remarkably introduced the new principle that: “State power is unitary with distribution, co-ordination, and control among state organs in exercising legislative, executive and judicial powers.”\(^ {175} \) The Party has accepted the constitutionalist idea of inter-control of the public powers, an intriguing development of constitutional ideology in a single party polity like Vietnam. In reflection of the party’s orientation, the Constitutional Proposal suggests that the future Constitution should clearly define the mechanism of control among state bodies in exercising legislative, executive and judicial powers.\(^ {176} \) During the time of the constitution-making processes, various members of the citizenry were inspired by the endorsement of mechanisms for controlling state bodies by the party and constitution-makers. Particularly when the draft constitution was released for public comments, scholars, National Assembly delegates, and citizens vehemently discussed different mechanisms for mutual control among the three branches of the state.\(^ {177} \)

\(^ {172} \) Ngo Duc Manh, Giai thich phap luat la bao dam tinh toi cau cua hien phap [Legal Interpretation and the Supremacy of the Constitution], 11 TẬP CHÍ NGHIỄM CỨU LẬP PHÁP 5 (2008).

\(^ {173} \) In comparative constitutional law literature the language of “controlling” is also employed to describe the nature of constitutionalism. See, e.g., SCOTT GORDON, CONTROLLING THE STATE: CONSTITUTIONALISM FROM ANCIENT ATHENS TO TODAY (1999).


\(^ {175} \) See Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper, supra note 161.


To justify the controlling of the state power, some liberal constitutionalists, such as Nguyễn Đăng Dũng, underlined the imperative to limit arbitrary power and ensure government accountability, generated by concern for the human inclination to abuse power. Other scholars, such as Trần Ngọc Dương, Đình Xuân Thảo, and Đào Trí Úc, however, explain that controlling the state power stems from both negative and positive impetuses to limit misuse of power, and to promote effective and efficient state functions. This kind of discourse resonated with the international debate on negative and positive constitutionalism.

The purpose of controlling state power has been canvassed. Some liberal constitutionalists emphasized the necessity of protecting individuals’ rights. Others are more concerned with the public interests, rationalizing that to ensure that the state will practice the delegated power for their interests, the state power must be controlled.

Alternative mechanisms for controlling the state power have been discussed. The legal mechanism for controlling the state power by a special body of judicial review has also been hotly debated. In addition, a number of political mechanisms have been proposed, including internal mutual control among state bodies and external popular controls through election, removal of representatives, referendum, and the press. This Vietnamese discourse on controlling the


180 For the distinction of negative and positive constitutionalism in general, see STEPHEN HOLMES, PASSIONS AND CONSTRAINT: ON THE THEORY OF LIBERAL DECENCY (1995).

181 See Nguyễn Đăng Dũng, supra note 178, at 13.


state power aligns with the international debate on political and legal constitutionalism.\(^{184}\)

Members of the National Assembly also strongly supported the new principle of controlling state power but were confused about how to materialize it in the new constitution.\(^{185}\) A delegate agreed that the incorporation of the new principle of controlling state power is necessary, but he stated “to control whom” and “how to control” are still open questions.\(^{186}\) On these questions, another delegate distinguishes internal and external controls, “[w]e understand that internal control is the control practiced by state organs and external control is the control practiced by the people and the society. Basically, the contents of the draft Constitution have properly expressed this principle.”\(^{187}\) But according to another delegate, controlling state power means control among the three state powers: the legislative, executive, and judicial powers.\(^{188}\)

Consequently, the new Constitution continues but modifies the identity of the Leninist centralized constitutional structure. On the one hand, it continues to reject the Montesquieu principle of separation of power. This is due to the ideological practice that the party-state adheres to—using the principle of unity to maintain the socialist identity of the polity. Moreover, that rejection also has a practical purpose. Although the Communist Party can play the leading role in the separationist polity, it rejects the separation of powers because of the practical concern that separation of powers will invite greater political conflicts, which may lead to political maelstrom. This is complicated by rumors about internal conflicts among top political leaders.\(^{189}\) In addition, the separation of powers may not deprive the Party power as a whole, but may threaten it in some respects. For example, the Party may lose control of the judiciary in a separationist polity.

On the other hand, the Constitution introduces new visions disharmonic with the Leninist unitary constitutional structure. First, although the Constitution rejects the doctrine of the separation of powers, it continues the principle of “distribution of power” established by the

---

\(^{184}\) For the distinction between legal and political constitutionalism, see generally RICHARD BELLAMY, POLITICAL CONSTITUTIONALISM (2007).

\(^{185}\) Lam Nguyên, Đại biểu bàn khoán về kiểm soát quyền lực Nhà nước [Delegates Are Confused about Controlling the State Power], VIETSTOCK (Nov. 18, 2012), http://vietstock.vn/PrintView.aspx?ArticleID=248571.

\(^{186}\) Id.

\(^{187}\) Id.

\(^{188}\) Id.

\(^{189}\) Le Hong Hiep, Power Shifts In Vietnam’s Political System, EAST ASIA FORUM (Mar. 5, 2015), http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/03/05/power-shifts-in-vietnams-political-system/ (noting “the ongoing power struggle within Vietnam’s top political elites”).
1992 Constitution and goes further to employ Montesquieu’s language to clearly define the public power. For the first time, the Constitution clearly vests legislative power to the National Assembly, executive power to the Government, and judicial power to the courts.\textsuperscript{190} Courts also feature, for the first time, the constitutional function of protecting human rights and justice.\textsuperscript{191} Moreover, judicial independence is stipulated in the provision that: “The judges and assessors are independent and shall only obey the law; interference with the trials of the judges and assessors by bodies, organisations, and individuals is strictly prohibited.”\textsuperscript{192} Second, the Constitution introduces the new principle of mutual control among the three branches of power: “The state power is unified and distributed to state agencies which coordinate with and control one another in the exercise of the legislative, executive and judicial powers”.\textsuperscript{193} Although constitution-makers could not reach an agreement about the mechanisms of controlling state power, they established this as a constitutional principle and let statutes provide detailed mechanisms.\textsuperscript{194}

Disharmony in the 1992 Constitution led to modification of the identity of constitutional centralism. First, the principle of unitary power adopted in this Constitution and its lack of institutional checks and balances is discordant with the normative requirement of constitutionalist polity in which power is separated and checked to prevent arbitrariness, which triggers the debate on distributed and controlled power. Second, this Constitution adopted competing organizational principles: the principle of unity of power informed by socialist constitutional thinking and distribution of powers informed by western doctrine of separation of power. Yet, distribution of state power has only been enshrined in the revised 1992 Constitution as a principle and has not yet been reified in concrete institutional designs. This internal disharmony resulted in constitutional dialogue in the 2010s regarding a clearer definition and allocation of the powers of the three state branches. Furthermore, the fact that the Constitution adopted competing commitments both to the rule of law (which implies legal restraint on the public power) and unified state power and party leadership (which conversely implies consolidating power) provides space for dialogue on distributed and controlled power.

Third, the gap between organizational commitment and reality encourages dialogue on distributed and controlled power. To illustrate,
while the 1992 Constitution stipulated to distributed power, in reality, the power is concentrated in the hands of the Party, and the National Assembly is the forum for the Party to centralize power. This reality triggers the debate on distributed power, which is in fact meant to separate the Party power from the state power. The logic is that when the powers of different state branches are clearly defined, the intervention of the Party into state activities will be limited, as state agencies will operate according to their autonomous constitutionally defined spheres. In addition, the increasing number of serious corruption cases and similar public power abuses caused considerable popular dissatisfaction, which is disharmonic with the constitutional commitment to “combating against corruption, misspending and all manifestations of bureaucratism, arrogance, and authoritarianism.” The call for controlled power reflects this social malaise.

Those constitutional disharmonies incentivize different actors to seek inspiration from global sources. The global ideas of separation of powers and limited government have been diffused in Vietnam and induce disharmonic constitutional debates. However, these global ideas are situated in the local context. The ideas of the separation of powers and limited power are balanced with the local ideas of unity of powers and cooperation of powers. Consequently, the public power is both distributed and concentrated. The National Assembly remains the supreme body, and independence among the state bodies, including judicial independence, is not encouraged. The state bodies can mutually check, but they must cooperate with each other, and such aggressive mechanisms of checks and balances, such as the ability to veto, impeachment, and judicial review are not provided.

The constitution-making process allows different actors within the polity to not only discuss detailed issues pertaining to institutional design, but also to critically rethink, redefine, and adapt constitutional postulates fundamental to the overall constitutional structure. The socialist principle of unitary power remains the hegemonic feature of the regime, but it is balanced with generic ideas of separated and limited government. The new Constitution is reflective of the ideational adjustment to constitutional structure and includes disharmonic commitments to unitary, distributed, and controlled power, giving rise to the continuous evolution of the identity of the socialist constitutional structure.

196 HIỆN PHÁP [CONSTITUTION] Apr. 25, 1992, art. 8 (Viet.).
4. Rights Statism and Universalism

The generic idea of fundamental rights was diffused in Vietnam during the early twentieth century. The 1946 Constitution guaranteed fundamental rights familiar in Western constitutions. The subsequent socialist constitutions of 1959, 1980, and 1992 provided even more generous fundamental rights but under the influence of Marxist and Soviet rights statism.

During the Vietnamese constitutional dialogue in the 2010s, the alternative vision of naturalist human rights emerged, challenging the statist regime of human rights. Constitutional law scholars share the universalist position that human rights are natural rights recognized and protected by the state, not rights the state has granted to the citizens. Social actors also strongly mobilized for a new human rights regime consistent with universal standards.

Importantly, political leadership and constitution-makers also adopted a universal outlook on human rights. A member of the Constitutional Amendment Committee told me that the enactment of the new Constitution is necessary to reflect the state’s new understanding about human rights, which is that human rights are no longer sensitive issues and that human rights are different from citizen’s rights. Political leaders and constitution-makers agreed that constitutional rights provisions must be revised in concordance with international human rights laws. The group of constitutional drafters responsible for

---


199 Id. at 535–44. See also SIDEL, supra note 69, at 375.


202 Interviews, supra note 16. See also Bui & Nicholson, supra note 102; Bui Ngoc Son, Constitutional Mobilization (forthcoming 2017) (on file with author).

203 Interview, supra note 77.

204 Interviews, supra note 16.
drafting the bill of rights even compared word for word to the Vietnamese bill against the various international human rights treaties Vietnam has signed to ensure the bill language is consistent with international obligations. When the proposed bill of rights was presented to the Constitutional Amendment Committee, it was quickly adopted. On January 1, 2013, during the online dialogue between the Government and the people on the revised draft constitution, which was released to the public for comments, Vietnamese constitution-makers explained the universalist view adopted to write new constitutional rights provisions, stating that: “Sixteen provisions on human rights are supplemented and applied to everybody residing the territory of Vietnam. . . . Previously, to talk about human rights was sensitive. Now, the state considers human rights universal values naturally inherent to human, which the Vietnamese people have the right to enjoy.”

Consequently, the 2013 Constitution modified the identity of human statism. The Constitution attempts to establish a human rights regime in concordance with universal human rights standards. To illustrate, Article 14 attempts to dispel the image of statist rights by providing that human rights in Vietnam “are acknowledged, respected, and protected in accordance with the Constitution and the law.” This provision tries to demonstrate a cosmopolitan vision of human rights as natural rights respected by the state, not the rights “provided for” by the state as in the previous 1992 Constitution. Moreover, in a number of provisions concerning specific individual rights, the subjects of rights are referred to as “everyone” rather than “citizens” as in the previous constitutions, indicating that rights are valid not because the subject is a member of the state but because he or she is a member of the Homo sapien community. The Constitution also includes new rights in accordance with international human rights laws, such as the right to life, the right to presumption of innocence, and the right to live in a healthy environment.

The 2013 Constitution also established for the first time the principle of balancing, “an inherent part of the near-universal general conception of a constitutional right as an important prima facie claim that

---

206 Interviews, supra note 16.
208 HIЄN PHАP [CONSTITUTION] Nov. 28, 2013, art.14 (Viet.).
209 HIЄN PHАP [CONSTITUTION] Apr. 25, 1992, art. 50 (Viet.) (“In the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, human rights . . . are provided for by the Constitution and the law.”).
210 Id. at art. 19, 31, 43 (1992) (Viet.).
nonetheless can, in principle, be limited or overridden by non-
constitutional rights claims premised on conflicting public policy
objectives.” Article 14 provides that: “Human rights and citizens’
rights shall only be restricted when prescribed by statute in imperative
circumstances for the reasons of national defence, national security,
social order and security, social morality and community’s well-
being.” The adoption of this near-universal principle of constitutional
balancing attempts to limit the arbitrary restrictions of human rights by
administrative authorities, which have been subject to domestic and
international criticisms, by mandating that only legislative statutes can
legitimately establish restrictions on human rights for public interests.

However, this new view contradicts other provisions that stipulated
to a more statist vision of human rights. To illustrate, in contrast to
Article 14 mentioned above, Article 15 tries to establish a statist human
rights regime which reflects local values, providing that: “(1) Citizens’
rights are inseparable from citizens’ duties; (2) Everyone has the duty to
respect the rights of others; (3) Citizens are responsible to practice their
duties to the State and society; (4) The practice of human rights and
citizens’ rights cannot infringe national interests and legal and legitimate
rights and interests of others.” The Constitution also requires citizens
to be responsible to the state and prohibits the abuse of rights to infringe
upon the state’s interests. Provisions on specific rights often stipulate
that rights must be in accordance with the law, indicating that the rights
are provided and practiced under the state’s regulations.

So, the identity of right statism remains but is modified by the
incorporation of more universalist outlook on human rights: human rights
of everyone (not only citizens) are acknowledged (not provided) by the
state. This dynamic is animated by the disharmonic human rights regime
established by the 1992 Constitution. To begin with, normatively, this
human rights regime is discordant with international human rights
standards. Constitution-makers did realize that this document failed to
meet international human rights standards. This gap is because the
document adopted the statist conception of rights and lacked several
human rights recognized in international human rights law, such as the
right to life. Second, the human rights regime created by the 1992

211 Stephen Gardbaum, A Democratic Defense of Constitutional Balancing, 4 L. & ETHICS OF
HUM. RTS 79 (2010).
212 Hanoi, supra note 17.
213 Interviews, supra note 16.
214 Hanoi, supra note 17.
215 Id.
216 Id. at arts. 22, 23, 25, 27 (1992) (Viet.).
217 Interview, supra note 77.
Constitution included internal contradictions and ambiguity. The 1992 Constitution introduced the concept of human rights for the first time: “In the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, human rights in all respects, political, civic, economic, cultural and social are respected, find their expression in the rights of citizens and are regulated by the Constitution and the law.” The ambiguity is that human rights are equated to citizens’ rights regulated by the state. The phrase “in concordance with the law” appeared in most constitutional provisions on citizens’ particular rights. The Constitution also stipulated inseparability of rights from duties, and the citizen’s fulfilment of their obligations towards the State and society. So the citizens’ statist rights are discordant with the constitutional aspiration of human rights. Third, the constitutional commitment to human rights is discordant with the actual restriction of human rights, which has been strongly criticized by domestic activists, foreign governments, and international organizations.

The gaps between the national human rights regime and international standards, the ambiguity and contradiction internal to this regime, and the gap between formal human rights commitments and actual human rights practices create the condition for different actors to seek solutions from global sources. Consequently, the globalization of human rights impacts Vietnamese constitutional identity. Constitution-makers and social actors resort to international human rights treaties to redefine the meaning of human rights in Vietnam. However, international human rights are situated within the Vietnamese condition and local specific human rights vision. This generates the continuously ambiguous human rights regime, which mixes both universal and statist human rights commitments.

The constitution-making process operates as the mechanism for different actors in the polity to engage in a dialogue to redefine the rights identity. In this dialogical forum, the socialist statist principle of rights and the universal human rights values are disharmoniously interacting. The consequence is the modification of the statist principle of rights. Public intellectuals and political leaders expressly state that the new Constitution indicates a regime’s new self-understanding and commitment about human rights, which is more universalist. The new

218 HIEN PHAP [CONSTITUTION] Apr. 25, 1992, art. 50 (Viet.)
219 My interviews indicate that constitution-makers did realize this ambiguity.
220 HIEN PHAP [CONSTITUTION] Apr. 25, 1992, art. 51 (Viet.)
Constitution continues to establish a discordant human rights regime, the condition for the continuous evolution of the identity of constitutional rights in Vietnam.

5. Economic Statism and Marketism

Although the 1992 Constitution abandoned the centrally-planned economy, it confirmed the “leading role” of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the economy to ensure its “socialist orientation.” This provision was subjected to critical debate during the constitution-making process.

To illustrate, in the National Assembly constitutional debate, some delegates argued that the confirmation of the leading role of the state economic sectors contradicts the provision that every economic sector is equal. While many delegates agreed on the leading role of the SOEs:

Many opinions held that, during the last years, the state economic sectors have received many preferences but have operated ineffectively. Meanwhile, the private and other economic sectors are developing robustly, contributing to the economy, but have been not properly considered. Therefore, the provision that every economic sector is equal with the same legal framework will create better development to the country, create more wealth, jobs, and contribute more to the national budget.

A delegate argued that the party’s resolution confirms the leading role of the SOEs is only valid within five years, while the Constitution has a

---


224 Hien Phap [CONSTITUTION] Apr. 25, 1992, art. 15, 19 (Viet.).


“higher value.” She then concludes: “Whatever we want, the state economic sectors cannot play the leading role because this is the rule of development and a reality.” Another delegate concurs, stating that the Constitution has durable effect, and hence should provide for the equality of every economic sector.

In addition to the SOEs, land ownership is subject to contentious debate in the constitution-making process because of its social, economic, and political consequences. The 1992 Constitution introduced the principle of “the people’s ownership” of land, which actually means the state is the owner of all land. This principle was subject to critical debate. The most radical proposal—mobilized by liberal intellectuals, businessmen, and ordinary people—established a multi-form of land ownership, including both state and private ownership. Two other moderate proposals focused on the constraints of the state prerogative powers over land without adopting private property. One proposal called for acquisition with compensation according to the market price. The other petitioned for eliminating the government’s powers to acquire land for projects of socioeconomic developments so as to extinguish the root of corruption in land management of provincial authorities.

The call for privatization of land radically challenges important instruments of socialist management in Vietnam. It is understandable that the political leaders have denied the proposal of private property of land. However, the party and state’s commitment to the constraint of the state’s authority over land and the enhancement of the quality of the land-use right presents a more liberal movement unconventional to the Soviet thinking. John Gillespie observes: “The debate so far suggests that party thinking about land law has continued its incremental shift from the socialist notion of ‘people’s ownership and state management’ to a more individualized conception of private proprietary rights.”

227 Id.
228 Id.
229 Id.
230 Interviews, supra note 16.
233 The price of compensation is around 20% of the market price. In major cities, the number is around 30–60%. Phan Trung Hiền, Kiến nghị Hoàn thiện Cơ sở Hiến định về Thu hồi đất, Bồi thường, Hỗ trợ và Tái định cư [Recommendations to Perfect the Constitutional Basis for Land Acquisition, Compensation, Support and Resettlement], 3 TẠP CHÍ NGHIỆN CỦY LẬP PHÁP 46 (2013).
234 Gillespie, supra note 232.
The 2013 Constitution continues to confirm “socialist-oriented market economy” as a distinctive attribute of socialist Vietnam.\(^{235}\) To promote the market economy, the Constitution continues to include the commitments to multi-forms of ownership and multi-sectors of economic structure; equality, cooperation, and competition among all economic sectors; the protection of private property; and global economic integration.\(^{236}\) The Constitution includes new commitments to the encouragement of investment and protection of investors’ capital from nationalization.\(^{237}\) At the same time, to ensure the “socialist orientation” of the economy, the Constitution continues to confirm the “leading role” of the state economic sector, the state’s coordination of the economy, the state’s ownership of all lands, and the state’s recovery of land used by organizations and individuals for developmental projects.\(^{238}\)

The disharmony concerning the 1992 Constitution animates the economic dynamics of constitutional identity in Vietnam. First, the fact that the Constitution provided for the dominant role of the state over economic resources is discordant with the normative ideals of free market and private ownership. Second, the 1992 Constitution already included competing socialist and market commitments: market economy but under socialist direction, equal competition but under the leading role of the SOEs, private property rights but state ownership of all lands. Particularly, the constitutional provision of the “leading role” of the state’s economic sector is conceived as contradictory to the constitutional commitment of economic equality and fair corporation and competition, and this has triggered the call for its elimination.

Third, there is a significant gap between the constitutional economic commitments and practices. While the Constitution established the SOEs as the leading force of the economy, losses and corruption at state corporations were significant.\(^{239}\) Besides that, the contribution of the state economic sector has considerably declined. To illustrate, within ten years (2000–2010), the contribution of the state economic sector to the national budget was less than 20%, significantly lower than that of the private sectors. In addition, state enterprises’ contribution to GDP declined to 19% in the period 2006–2009, whereas

\(^{235}\) HIỆN PHÁP [CONSTITUTION] Apr. 25, 1992, art. 50 (Viet.).

\(^{236}\) Id. at art. 51.

\(^{237}\) Id.

\(^{238}\) Id. at arts. 51, 52, 53.

private sectors contributed at double that rate. Moreover, the rate of creating new jobs in state economic sectors decreased to negative 22%, which means that state enterprises have cut jobs down rather than created new labors.240

Similarly, while the constitutional aspiration of “people’s ownership of lands” is benevolent, to prevent capitalists’ agglomeration of lands and to ensure the use of lands for socialist collective goals, the reality is different. Commentators have pointed out that the state, under the name of public goals, has expropriated people’s fields to benefit individual authorities without offering sufficient compensation.241 The corruption in land acquisition and land allocation, other types of mismanagement of land, and the limits of the courts in dealing with land disputes have resulted in mass demonstrations, numerous collective petitions, and violent clashes between the farmers and the authorities.242

The ambiguity and disharmony of the socialist constitutional economy, both internally and externally, have created the opportunity for solutions through the use of global sources. A member of the Constitutional Amendment Committee and of the group of constitutional drafters responsible for drafting the Constitution’s chapter on economic and social principles told me that their intention is to create a chapter meeting with the (global) “standards of a market economy.”243 The global ideas of market economy and private property have been diffused in Vietnam and are balanced with the Vietnamese reality and local statist economic vision, which results in the mixture of both market and socialist elements in the constitutional economy. Similarly, the party and state’s thinking about land ownership also presents a shift to a more individualist conception of private proprietary rights but seeks to balance it with the conventional collective conception.

The constitution-making process provides the forum for different actors within the Vietnamese polity to rethink and redefine the ideational foundation of the constitutional economy. The socialist economic statism is balanced with economic marketism. Consequently, the state-owned economy remains essential to the Vietnamese constitutional polity, but is

240 Vũ Thành Tự Anh, Doanh Nghiệp Nhà nước Không đủ Năng lực đóng Vai trò Chủ đạo [State Enterprises are not Capable to Play the Leading Role] THE SAIGON TIMES (Oct. 21, 2010), http://www.thesaigontimes.vn/Home/thoisu/sukien/42114/.
243 Interview, supra note 77.
adapted by adopting new liberal and market ideas. The socialist identity of economic statism is modified by the commitment to “socialist market economy” in which the state still controls the economy, but private property rights are guaranteed, private enterprises can develop, and some limits on the state economic power are possible. Examples include privatization of the state-owned enterprises and the transparent process of acquisition and compensation of lands. Thus, the 2013 Constitution establishes a disharmonic constitutional economy, facilitative to the continuous evolution of the socialist identity of economic statism.

6. Consequence

A member of the Constitutional Amendment Committee told me that in the new Constitution substantial principles remain but are understood with “new ways and new spirit” suitable to the “new context.” This captures the adaptions to socialist constitutional identity in Vietnam.

Moreover, the new constitutional commitments have begun to inform constitutional practices. To illustrate, following the commitment to constitutional referendum and direct democracy, the National Assembly enacted the Law on Referendum November 25, 2015, finalizing the restraints on the party-state and amendments to the Constitution. But how this law is implemented remains to be seen. In addition, consistent with the commitment to state constitutionality, constitutional oaths have been taken twice in Vietnam since the passage of the new Constitution. Constitutional oaths may raise the political leaders’ awareness of the relevance of the constitution to their activities.

In addition, new constitutional commitments to distribute and control power have been realized to some extent. The National Assembly has revised a number of organic laws to make them consistent with the new Constitution, including: Law on Organization of the National Assembly (2014); Law on Organization of the Government (2015); Law on Organization of the People’s Courts (2014); and Law on Organization of the People’s Procuracies (2014). These laws do not merely repeat the constitutional provisions but go on to further clarify the

---

244 Id.
distribution of power. Moreover, these constitutional laws have had some developments with regards to controlling state power, such as strengthening the deputies’ right to interpellation of government members and the role of the National Assembly’s Legal Committee in constitutional supervision. They have also helped emphasize the independence of the government to practice its executive power and clarified the personal authority and responsibility of the Prime Minister and ministers. Furthermore, the laws have strengthened judicial independence by, for example, extending the judges’ terms to ten years, stipulating to adversarial trials, and establishing the role of the Supreme Court in developing precedents, which reflects the influence of the common law tradition. Finally, the laws have developed mechanism to control state power through stipulating the mutual checks between the courts and the procuracies.

Similarly, following the new constitutional commitments to human rights, a number of legislative acts regarding human rights have been revised. The Minister of Justice states that there are thirty-six legislative acts needing revision or replacement in concordance with the new Constitution. The new requirement that human rights can only be limited by statutes puts strong pressure on government regulations. This means the government cannot issue decrees that limit human rights. The Constitution also puts pressure on the National Assembly’s lawmaking activities. National Assembly deputies now have a strong concern for how to make sure their legislations are consistent with new constitutional rights provisions.

---


252 Interviews, supra note 16.

253 Interview, supra note 77.
That has some positive impacts. For example, the new Civil Code, Penal Code, and Criminal Procedure Code have been revised with new developments regarding human rights, which helps indicate the universalist vision. To illustrate, the new Civil Code adopted in 2015 recognizes transgender rights, minimizes the intervention of administrative authorities in civil transactions, and forces the courts to hear civil complaints even in case of absence of applicable law.\textsuperscript{254} The Penal Code excludes the application of death penalty to “under-18 offenders, pregnant women and women who are nursing children under 36 months or those who are more than 75 years old when they commit a crime or are put into trial.”\textsuperscript{255} The Code also abolishes the death penalty for seven crimes: surrendering to the enemy, opposing order, destruction of projects of national security importance, robbery, drug possession, drug appropriation, and the production and trade of fake food.\textsuperscript{256} This development is consistent with the Constitution’s new recognition of the right to life. The Criminal Procedure Code recognizes the right to silence, the detainees’ “right to have legal assistance of lawyers before making any statement,” and requires “audio and video recording during interrogation” to prevent “torture and other cruel treatments by police investigators.”\textsuperscript{257}

Yet, the above codes also echo the constitutional disharmony regarding human rights. The Civil Code continues the communitarian-statist vision of rights, evident by its emphasis on its role in protecting not only the interests of the individuals but also the interests of the state and the community. The Penal Code more clearly shows its statist vision when it “maintains controversial articles with severe punishments against government critics and human rights activists.”\textsuperscript{258} Dissidents had petitioned for removing the offence of “propaganda against the state,” as


\textsuperscript{258} Id.
this violates the constitutionally protected right to freedom of speech. This offense continues to be a feature in the new Penal Code.

Last but not least, new economic constitutional commitments have begun to inform the reality. For example, the Government has implemented the policies of equitization or privatization of the state-owned enterprises. The new Land Law, effective July 2014, has some developments respecting the larger right to use land and a more transparent process of acquisition and compensation.

New constitutional commitments and principles in the 2013 Constitution shape the scope, potential, and constraints of political, legal, and economic reforms in Vietnam. But, the constraints are not very strict, and there is ample space for the continuing dynamics of socialist constitutional identity in Vietnam. First, this is because the 2013 Constitution is a disharmonic constitution. Many ideas and principles newly introduced in the Constitution are broad and ambiguous, such as constituent power by the people, constitutional referendum, controlling the state power, and legislative constitutional review, thus opening the door for alternative constructions. Moreover, the disharmonic gap between the Constitution and global constitutionalism (for example, party leadership vs. free election, unitary vs. separated power, statist vs. universal rights, the legislative vs. judicial constitutional review) creates the condition for continuous change in the socialist constitutional identity. In addition, the disharmony between the Constitution and the social reality is facilitative of the continuing evolution of the socialist constitutional identity. Most notably, constitutional aspirations to “prosperous people” and “that all people enjoy an abundant, free, and happy life with conditions for comprehensive development,” are discordant with the fact that Vietnam is still a middle income country, replete with serious social problems, such as a polluted environment, social inequality, an underdeveloped education system, terrible transportation system, and the like. The aspiration to the “socialist rule of law state” has been discordant with the social reality of corruption,


262 HIỆN PHAP [CONSTITUTION] Nov. 28, 2013, art. 3 (Viet.).

m miscarriages of justice, and ineffectiveness of law enforcement. Also, the constitutional commitment to protect universal human rights is disharmonic with the functional human rights regime in which rights are constricted for statist purposes. These constitutional disharmonies continue to offer space for, and incentives to looking at global sources and animate the continuing shifts in constitutional identity in Vietnam.

In the near future, as judicial review is absent and the constitution-making process is not available, constitutional dynamics in Vietnam may be limited; however, these dynamics may proceed in popular and political forums. In fact, in these popular and legislative platforms, social and institutional actors have continued to engage in dialogues on the constitutional referendum, the popular checks of the party power, mechanisms to control the state powers, the protection of human rights, and the constraints of the state power over the economy. Global constitutional ideas still inform this dialogue and are situated with the local reality and interact with local ideas.

IV. COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

The experience in four other socialist countries (China, Laos, North Korea, and Cuba) also indicates that there are adaptive changes to the socialist constitutional identity. A comprehensive exploration of these changes is beyond the scope of this single article. Instead, I will briefly discuss the important trends with a focus on the post-Soviet era.

A. China


The People’s Republic of China (PRC) has enacted five constitutions in 1954, 1975, 1978, and 1982 under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The current 1982 Constitution was revised several times in 1988, 1993, 1999, and 2004. Jianfu Chen captures the instrumentalist nature of China’s Constitution in these words: “The Constitution in China has been in a constant state of flux, reflecting changes in the CPC leadership and in its policies about the kind of the future society envisaged.” Constitution-making in China is under strict party control and significantly lacks public participation. According to Jianfu Chen, only in the last constitutional revision (2003–2004) was the ongoing revision process officially reported, but even academic discussions on constitutional revision issues were closed down by the Party.

However, there is initial evidence indicating that this identity has been modified by quasi-constitutionalist understanding. During the post-Soviet period, like in Vietnam, the idea of constitutionalism together with generic elements has played a dominant role in the Chinese constitutional intellectual life. Although the political leaders rejected the global ideas of constitutionalism, they adopted a new understanding about the nature and role of the constitution, which somewhat reflects the generic constitutionalist spirit. The constitutional amendment in 2009 incorporated a new principle called “Ruling the Country According to the Law,” the Chinese version of socialist rule of law state. Following this, in the 18th Party Congress in 2012, the Party suggested a discordant understanding: “As the Constitution and laws are adopted by the Party and the people under its leadership,” “the Party must act within the scope prescribed by the Constitution and laws.” As Heike Holbig comments, “On the one hand, this passage seems to signal the willingness of the party to exercise its power only within the confines of the constitutional and legal framework, but on the other, the CCP is also clearly asserting its claim to be the originator of the constitution, and thus implicitly, the authority in control of the constitution.” On July 1, 2015, the nation’s legislature adopted a bill requiring government officials to pledge

\[\text{266} \text{ For China constitutional history in general, see QIANFANG ZHANG, THE CONSTITUTION OF CHINA: A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS (2012).} \]
\[\text{267} \text{ JIANFU CHEN, CHINESE LAW: CONTEXT AND TRANSFORMATION 90 (2016).} \]
\[\text{268} \text{ Id. at 107–8.} \]
\[\text{269} \text{ Yu Xingzhong, Western Constitutional Ideas and Constitutional Discourse in China, 1978–2005 in BUILDING CONSTITUTIONALISM IN CHINA 111 (S. Balm & Michael W. Dowdle eds., 2009).} \]
\[\text{270} \text{ XIANFA art. 5 (2009) (China).} \]
\[\text{272} \text{ Heike Holbig, China’s Unwritten Constitution: Ideological Implications of a “Non-ideological” Approach, 132 ASIEN 53, 56 (2014).} \]
allegiance to the nation’s Constitution upon taking office.273 So, China, like Vietnam, has begun to establish a culture of constitutional oath, although this is not a requirement stipulated to in the constitution as is the case in Vietnam.

Although China’s Constitution retains its instrumentalist nature, it also operates as the framework for constitutionalism debate and even for Chinese citizens to struggle for realization of their constitutional rights.274 Thus, constitutional instrumentalism remains the dominant feature of the Chinese constitutional order, but is adjusted with newconstitutionalist consciousness and practice, indicative of inchoate constitutionalism.

In addition to instrumentalism, party vanguardism is a core of the Chinese constitutional polity, but it is also adaptively changed. The current 1982 Constitution of China refers to the leadership of the CPC in its preamble rather than expressly mandating this in a constitutional provision, as did the 1975 and 1978 Constitutions.275 Although this change does not alter the nature of the party leadership, it moderates this nature and leaves space for multiparty system. In fact, party vanguardism is adapted in the Chinese context by the local specific system called “multi-party cooperation and political consultation system.”276 In China, there are eight democratic parties operating under the control of the CPC. They do not oppose the CPC and the regime. The basic principle is that “The CPC is the only party in power in the People’s Republic of China while under the precondition of accepting the leadership of the CPC, the eight other political parties participate in the discussion and management of state affairs, in cooperation with the CPC.”277 The Constitution’s preamble confirms the commitment that: “The system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation led by the Communist Party of China will exist and develop in China for a long time to come.”278 This commitment is embodied in practice by the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conferences through which the CPC consults other parties on national affairs.279 Another practical embodiment is the appointment of members of democratic parties to
government posts. Thus, the essence of the vanguard role of the CPC remains but is adapted by the aspirational principle of multi-party cooperation and political consultation.

Another adaption to the Chinese constitutional vanguardism is related to Jiang Zemin’s “three represents” doctrine. One of the three elements is that the Party represents “the development trends of advanced productive forces.” The implication is that capitalists are not enemies of Chinese socialism. The practical embodiment of this “new thinking” is the invitation of “capitalists” to join the CPC. So, the party vanguardism remains the dominant feature but is adjusted by “new thinking” that allows the pragmatic incorporation of alternative social forces into the communist party. The constitutional commitment to a multiparty system, but under the exclusive leadership of one communist Party, creates the disharmonic condition for the continuing dynamics of constitutional vanguardism in China.

On constitutional structure, an Article of China’s 1982 Constitution confirms that: “The State organs of the People’s Republic of China apply the principle of democratic centralism.” Democratic centralism is connected with the proletarian dictatorship. The supremacy of the National People’s Congress is a political form of “the people’s democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants.” The separation of power, judicial review, and judicial independence are rejected in this centralized and dictatorial constitutional arrangement.

But, within the community of Chinese constitutional intellectuals, separatism is the prevailing model of constitutional thought. For example, like the 2013 constitutional debate in Vietnam, the essential spirit of pro-constitutionalist arguments in China’s 2013 constitutionalism debate is defined by fundamental aspirations of generic constitutionalism, including the aspiration of a separationist government. The party-state, however, rejects the doctrine of the separation of powers. Democratic centralism remains the core value of the Chinese constitutional polity, but is adjusted to the new context. The party-state in China as well as in Vietnam does not reject an understanding of distribution of the public power. But different from

280 Id. at 126.
282 JIANFU CHEN, supra note 267, at 116.
283 XIANFA art. 3 (1982) (China).
284 Id. at art 1.
285 Kellogg, supra note 3, at 337.
Vietnam, the idea of distribution of power in China is substantively articulated, not through formal constitution-making, but legislation.286

More prominent adaption to the socialist principle of democratic centralism concerns vertical governmental relations, evidenced by the concepts of regional autonomy, “Special Economic Zones”, and Special “Administrative Region,” or “one country, two systems” (OCTS).287 Such pragmatic adjustment creates discordant concepts and principles. For example, Albert Chen argues that: “The story of the debate on and struggle for universal suffrage in Hong Kong thus reveals such underlying tensions behind, and the contradictions inherent in, the very concept and practice of ‘OCTS.’”288 In other words, constitutional dynamics in Hong Kong are engendered by the disharmony internal to the aspiration of OCTS.

China’s 1982 Constitution also includes rights provisions in the spirit of socialist statism. The Constitution establishes the principle of unity of rights and duties.289 The practice of rights is limited by the state and collective interests.290 Yet, China has adapted its understanding of rights, evident by the incorporation of the idea of “human rights” in the Constitution through the 2004 constitutional amendment. Chen comments: “China has now finally come to accept universal, rather than insisting on an ‘Asian’ or ‘Chinese’ conception of human rights.”291 This reconceptualization of human rights has practical implications: “The scope of human rights could be interpreted to include not only the fundamental rights as codified in Chapter 2 of the Constitution, but also those contained in at least the two International Covenants and other international human rights treaties that China has agreed to abide by.”292 Thus, rights statism remains the dominant feature of the Chinese constitutional polity, but is adapted by more universalist understanding.

Finally, economic statism remains at the core of the Chinese constitutional economy, but is also adjusted with new understanding. The ideas of “socialist public ownership of the means of production”, “State-owned economy” as “the leading force in the national economy”,
and state and collective ownership of land are all constitutionally confirmed. But Dengism has adopted a pragmatic approach to the socialist economy, leading to the practice of the opening and reforming of policy. The fundamental aspiration of the Chinese party-state is to build “socialism with Chinese characteristics” or “Chinese style of socialism.” This has resulted in the adjustment to the identity of economic statism by adapting liberal economic principles. Consequently, the Constitution is committed to a “socialist market economy,” “diverse sectors of the economy developing side by side,” the land use right, and inviolable lawful private property. These fundamental commitments have actually informed the Chinese constitutional economy, as economic dynamics in the country in the last three decades indicate. Thus, the Constitution confirms the socialist economy but at the same time adopts capitalist economic elements, creating the disharmonic condition for the continuing development of the identity of a Chinese constitutional economy.

China’s 1982 Constitution together with its amendments is a disharmonic constitution. It includes internal discordant provisions regarding the party leadership, constitutional supremacy, constitutional structure, rights, and economy. This internal disharmony, together with the gap between the socialist constitutional ideals, the Chinese society and general constitutional ideas, constitutes the condition for the continuing dynamics of socialist constitutional identity. This condition is caused by China’s speed of economic development, the emergence of new social groups and their mobilization, and the impact of globalization. Constitutional identity has changed through formal constitution-making and amendment. Chinese constitutional exceptionalism (political elite’s distinctive doctrines) defines the extent to which socialist constitutional identity is modified in China.

B. Laos

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) is another socialist country in the contemporary world. Laos goes even farther than China to amend the core of socialist constitutional identity. The communist Lao

293 XIANFA arts. 6, 7, 10 (2004) (China).
294 JIANFU CHEN, supra note 267, at 117.
296 For China’s transition to socialist market economy, see generally JOHN WONG, UNDERSTANDING CHINA’S SOCIALIST MARKET ECONOMY (1993).
People’s Revolutionary Party seized power in 1975, abolishing the royal government’s 1947 Constitution, which in turn succeeded the first 1945 Constitution of the Lao Issara (Free Lao) Government. The Party Secretary General Kaysone stated that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic should “urgently undertake the major task . . . of preparing a socialist constitution at an early date.” But it was not until 1991 that the Supreme People’s Assembly, the nation’s legislative body, enacted the socialist constitution. This charter “was strongly influenced by the socialist Constitutions of the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and the People’s Republic of Kampuchea.” The constitution-making process was under the Party’s control. The 1991 Constitution was amended in 2013, effectively leading to its replacement by the 2013 Constitution. The Constitution was recently amended in 2015 to “respond to the Party’s renovation policies and the country’s development vision until 2030.”

While the instrumentalist nature of Laos’ Constitution remains, it is modified by the involvement of the public in the constitution-making process. In this regard, Laos is distant from China and closer to Vietnam. The draft constitution was published in 1990 in a Party journal for public discussion and mobilization, albeit under party control. Public participation in the 2015 constitutional amendment process is also striking. “Leaders, senior revolutionary combatants, retired officials, civil servants, technical officials, soldiers, police officers, intellectuals, and ordinary people of all classes” had been encouraged to submit proposals for the constitutional amendment. A series of seminars were held in regions across the country where policymakers shared their views “in order to draw up the draft.” Public participation is the base for the claim in the preamble that: “This Constitution is the fruit of the process of the people’s discussions throughout the country.” Thus, the instrumentalist aspiration is moderated by the public participation in constitution-making.

298 For Laos’s constitutional history, see Gerald Leather, Laos: A Constitution in Search of Constitutionalism, in 2 CONSTITUTIONALISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA 125 (Clauspeter Hill & Jorg Menzel eds., 2008).
301 Leather, supra note 298, at 136
302 Id.
304 Leather, supra note 298, at 135.
306 Id.
307 LPDR CONST. pmbl. (Laos).
Laos’ Constitution also mandates the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP) as the “leading nucleus” of political system. But, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the communist ideology of LPRP has been considerably eroded, except the principle of the party’s monopoly of political power. The erosion of communist ideology has resulted in other constitutional variations in Laos. In regards to structure, the Constitution establishes that: “The National Assembly and other state organizations are established and function in accordance with the principle of democratic centralism.” But the delineation of the three state branches “do not imitate any particular model (neither Vietnamese, nor Russian, nor French), but it pays respect to the idea of a basic blueprint of responsibilities lodged in designed institutions.” Perhaps, the most notable adaption to “democratic centralism” is the pragmatic practice of political decentralization which allows local governments to enjoy great autonomy. This is due in part to “the limited resources and poor communication” with the central government and in part to the central government’s incentive to “encourage local government to establish direct contacts with the boarders with China, Thailand, and Vietnam, and trading agreements with neighboring jurisdictions.”

The Constitution also includes a list of fundamental rights whose practice is “provided by the laws” or “not contrary to the laws.” Laotian citizens are constitutionally required “to respect the Constitution and the laws, to observe labor discipline, [and to comply with] the regulations relating to social life and public order.” The practice of rights depends on the state’s regulatory laws, but there is no institutional mechanism for the citizens to question the constitutionality of the laws regulating their rights. This reserves the core of statist rights. But fundamental rights established in Laos’ Constitution are adaptive to the local context and seem more liberal and less statist than those in China and Vietnam. The restriction of rights in the name of state interests is not explicitly established in the Constitution. Moreover, recent constitutional amendments prohibit “all forms of bureaucratic threats and actions that undermine the physical and mental wellbeing or the dignity of the people,” and “actions that cause damage to their rightful assets,” ensure “solidarity and equal rights among the multiethnic people,” protect

308 Id. at art. 3.
310 LPDR CONST. art. 5 (Laos).
311 Brown & Zasloff, supra note 299, at 224.
312 Id. at 226.
313 LPDR CONST. arts. 34, 39, 42, 44, 45 (Laos).
314 Id. at art. 47.
intellectual property rights and the rights of foreign nationals in Laos and of those who have no nationality.\textsuperscript{315}

On the economy, the Constitution also provides for the state’s centralized management of the economy and land as “a national heritage,” which citizens are granted to use by the state.\textsuperscript{316} But, the Constitution is committed to a “market economy,” albeit “regulated by the state in the direction of socialism.”\textsuperscript{317} Commentators indicate that “the chapter on the socioeconomic system does not mention the establishment of socialism, a principal goal of earlier dogma.”\textsuperscript{318} Instead, the main goal of the national economy is to “transform the natural economy into a trading and manufacturing economy.”\textsuperscript{319} On this base, the Constitution underlines the commitments to the promotion of domestic and foreign investment, protection of “lawful assets and capital of investors” from state confiscation, seizure, or nationalization, and protection and promotion of “all forms of property rights.”\textsuperscript{320}

Socialist constitutional identity in Laos is unique. It is determined by the complex history of communism in the country, domestic ethnic diversity, the undeveloped economy, and the country’s international relationship with its neighbors—China, Vietnam, and Thailand—and the western world.\textsuperscript{321} The current trend seems to indicate that Laos does not strictly adhere to the socialist constitutional ideology, except the idea of party leadership. Ideological relaxation allows Laos to freely amend the socialist constitutional identity without abandoning its core. The fall of the Soviet Union was an important external factor that created the erosion of communist ideology in Laos. But, the erosion is, perhaps principally, determined by the local condition. Specifically, poverty and economic difficulty make socioeconomic transformation, rather than ideological commitments, the political elites’ preoccupation. Consequently, there is a significant disharmony between the adherence to socialist ideals and the real imperative of socioeconomic development, and the Laos constitutional polity tends to favor reality over ideals.

The national goal established in the constitutional preamble is generic rather than specifically socialist, namely “the objective of

\textsuperscript{315} Amended Constitution Creates Provincial Assemblies, Gives President Two Terms, VIENTIANE TIMES (Dec. 29, 2015), http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/FreeContent/FreeContent_Amended%20constitution.htm.
\textsuperscript{316} LPDR CONST. arts. 16, 17 (Laos).
\textsuperscript{317} Id. at art. 13.
\textsuperscript{318} Brown & Zasloff, supra note 299, at 225.
\textsuperscript{319} LPDR CONST. art. 13 (Laos).
\textsuperscript{320} Id. at arts. 14, 15, 16.
\textsuperscript{321} See generally KHAM VORAPHETH, CONTEMPORARY LAOS: DEVELOPMENT PATH AND OUTLOOK OF A NATION (2015).
building Laos into a country of peace, independence, democracy, unity and prosperity.”\textsuperscript{322} This objective is considered “the long-standing aspirations and strong determination of the national community.”\textsuperscript{323} The commitment to a community’s self-determination allows the people to participate in the constitution-making process as moderators of socialist constitutional instrumentalism. The justification of party vanguardism in Laos is “to defend the national interest or fight for the interests and aspiration of the people,”\textsuperscript{324} which is more nationalist and populist and less relevant to the socialist objectives. But, most importantly, the paramount concern of the Constitution is economic development, which is less meant to idealistically transform into socialism than to realistically “improve the material and spiritual living conditions of the multi-ethnic people.”\textsuperscript{325} The Constitution attempts to realize this through a strong commitment to the promotion of investment and protection of investors’ property and rights. Laos offers an example of how national constitutions are used to attract foreign investments in the globalizing era.\textsuperscript{326} But, social and economic improvement and the aspiration to attract foreign investment seem to be the dominant spirit of the whole Constitution of Laos, not merely the chapter on socioeconomic system. The Constitution seemingly tries to distance itself from specific socialist language and adopts more generic constitutional norms, especially fundamental rights, to communicate with the rest of the world where socialist polity is a minority.

Consequently, Laos’ Constitution is a disharmonic constitution. The internal disharmony concerns: the generic aspiration and the principle of the communist party as the core of the polity; “democratic centralism” and political decentralization; the market economy and the state’s direction to socialism; and rights granted and controlled by the state but also limiting authority’s arbitrariness. Externally, there is a considerable gap between the constitutional commitment to socioeconomic improvement, and even prosperity, and the real poverty and economic difficulty. Moreover, the Constitution is also discordant with many generic constitutional aspirations like free elections, universal rights, and constitutional review. These constitutional disharmonies are created by several factors, including: the post-Soviet experience and the continuing aspirations of socioeconomic transition; and the incentive to engage in the global market. These constitutional disharmonies are the

\textsuperscript{322} LPDR CONST. pmbl. (Laos).
\textsuperscript{323} Id.
\textsuperscript{324} Brown & Zasloff, supra note 299, at 214.
\textsuperscript{325} LPDR CONST. art. 13 (Laos).
\textsuperscript{326} Law, supra note 8, at 1277.
conditions for the continuing transition of the constitutional identity in Laos.

C. North Korea

Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, is a socialist country, but an aberrant case. Under the rule of the communist Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK), North Korea has six constitutions enacted in 1948, 1972, 1992, 1998, 2009, and 2012.\(^{327}\) The instrumentalist nature of the constitution is embodied strongly in North Korea. Darren C. Zook remarks: “Each of the Constitutions of North Korea has emerged out of transformative moments when cumulative political change necessitated a corresponding legal expression to legitimize and articulate the new orientation and outlook of the state.”\(^{328}\) But the unique manifestation of socialist constitutional instrumentalism in North Korea is the fact that the Constitution is instrumental to personal communist rule. Successive constitutions were adopted to legitimize the authority of successive leaders: Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un. The recent constitutional amendment in 2016 enabled Kim Jong Un to become an absolutist national leader. According to Rodong Sinmun, a North Korean newspaper, “[In] order to arrange the strong legal groundwork for the path towards the socialist powerhouse, to be lead [sic] by Kim Jong Un’s monolithic leadership, we are to review and adopt the amendment of DPRK’s socialist constitution.”\(^{329}\)

North Korea’s Constitution confirms the core of the socialist constitutional identity, namely the leadership of the communist party, centralized power, statist rights, and statist economy.\(^{330}\) These constitutional principles do inform constitutional politics in North Korea.\(^{331}\) But the fall of communism in the post-Soviet era led North Korea to abandon any reference to the Soviet constitutional values and Marxism-Leninism, and to develop its own modus operandi of socialism. The ideological principle called juche (self-reliance) was constitutionally confirmed as the guiding principle of the regime.\(^{332}\) This principle, which stresses economic, political, and military independence and self-

---

\(^{327}\) See generally Dae-kyu Yoon, Constitutional Change in North Korea, in CONSTITUTIONALISM IN ASIA IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY 101 (Albert Chen ed., 2014).


\(^{330}\) DPRK CONST. arts 5, 20, 11, 63, 64 (N. Korea).

\(^{331}\) See, e.g., Changyong Choi, “Everyday Politics” in North Korea, 72 J. ASIAN STUD. 655 (2013).

\(^{332}\) DPRK CONST. art. 3 (N. Korea).
reliance, has resulted in North Korea’s constitutional isolationism. A related ideological principle is seongun sasang (military first ideology), which aspires to create combination of political and military rule.\textsuperscript{333} The 2016 constitutional amendment, which creates a new body called Commission on State Affairs headed by Kim Jong Un and enables him to enjoy leadership roles in the military, party, and government, is the embodiment of the constitutional seongun principle.\textsuperscript{334}

North Korea is a negative example of the dynamics of socialist constitutional identity. The fundamental aspiration underpinning constitutional isolationism and domestic military ideology—the purity of socialism—inhibits the emergence of competing constitutional understandings. Therefore, the condition for the development of socialist constitutional identity in North Korea is limited. This limitation of the disharmonic condition is due to economic difficulty, which inhibits the emergence of a pluralist society, and the isolationism, which limits the diffusion of global constitutional ideas in North Korea.

However, North Korea has been confronted with economic difficulty, which necessarily prompts constitutional change. The disharmony between the constitutional isolationist aspiration and the aspiration of economic development and foreign investment has created the opportunity for growth of North Korea’s constitutional economy. To be sure, North Korea does not have a systematic vision of market reforms like those of China and Vietnam. But, a moderate modification of the state-owned economy was undertaken through the Joint Venture Act of 1984, effectively a constitutional law that allowed economic cooperation between North Korean industry and foreign enterprises. The 1992 Constitution then legitimized foreign trade and foreign investment and joint venture enterprises.\textsuperscript{335}

The current Constitution continues the commitment that: “The State shall encourage institutions, enterprises and organizations in our country to joint ventures and cooperation of enterprise with foreign corporations and individuals as well as the establishment and operation of a variety of enterprise in special economic zones.”\textsuperscript{336} The Constitution is also committed to “guarantee the legal rights and interests of foreigners in its region.”\textsuperscript{337} In addition, there are also constitutional commitments to the protection of private property, and even copyrights, inventions, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{333} Zook, supra note 328, at 146.
\item \textsuperscript{334} Choe Sang-Hun, Kim Jong-un Takes an Additional Title in North Korea, N.Y. TIMES (June 29, 2016), http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/30/world/asia/north-korea-new-agency.html?_r=0.
\item \textsuperscript{335} Zook, supra note 328, at 141.
\item \textsuperscript{336} DPRK CONST. art. 37 (N. Korea).
\item \textsuperscript{337} Id. at art. 16.
\end{itemize}
North Korean citizens “could now earn money from private economic activities, and the fruits of their economic activities.” The economic constitutional commitments have been initially implemented. Particularly, “under Kim Jong Un, Chinese-style private farming has been encouraged and large numbers of North Koreans have been sent to China to study its reform experience.” This adoption of new constitutional economic commitments enables the identity of constitutional economy in North Korea to evolve albeit under the tight control of the state.

The constitutional disharmony between the constitutional principal of *juche* (self-reliance) and commitment to foreign investment, as well as economic development, present an opportunity for the evolution of constitutional identity in North Korea. Dae-kyu Yoon comments: “If an open-door policy is the inevitable option to overcome the country’s current economic difficulty, the rule of law will be one of the most important vehicles to persuade foreigners to trust the system and economic co-operation.” Moreover, the imperative of economic development and foreign investment necessarily leads to the impact of globalization on the constitutional identity in North Korea, which is discordant with the aspiration to constitutional isolationism. This may create the potential condition for North Korea’s transnational constitutional engagement, which would engender the continuing dynamics of constitutional identity.

D. Cuba

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Cuba has continued the communist regime but has also needed to acclimate itself to a new context. The Communist Party of Cuba (Partido Communista de Cuba, PCC) met in October 1991 to consider the consequence of the collapse of the communist world to Cuba. In the meeting, the Party decided to revise the nation’s 1976 Constitution to adapt. “The leadership closely controlled the process of constitutional revision, and

---

338 *Id.* at arts. 24, 74.
339 Zook, *supra* note 328, at 144.
342 Dae-kyu Yoon, *supra* note 327, at 117.
the PCC and the National Assembly committees carried out the task.\textsuperscript{345} The constitutional amendments were approved in July 1992 by the Party and the National Assembly.\textsuperscript{346} The Constitution was amended again in 2002 to confirm that socialism is irrevocable.\textsuperscript{347} Thus, instrumentalism remains the core feature in Cuban constitutional polity.

The Constitution also confirms the common core of the socialist constitutional identity. Article 5 mandates: “The Communist Party of Cuba, Martian and of Marxist-Leninist, the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation, is the superior leading force of the society and the State.”\textsuperscript{348} The principle of “democratic centralism” is modified as “socialist democracy,” but the substantial meaning remains the same. The constitutional structure includes the National Assembly as “the supreme organ of State power”\textsuperscript{349} and other institutions (the Council of State, the Council of Ministers, and courts) subordinate to the former.\textsuperscript{350} Constitutional rights are provided,\textsuperscript{351} but its practice must conform to “the goals of a socialist society.”\textsuperscript{352} The centrally planned economy and state’s ownership of land are constitutionally confirmed.\textsuperscript{353} However, the Constitution adopts some adaptive changes as a response to the fall of the communist bloc. Fundamental national goals are redefined to be more inclusive rather than exclusively socialist. The constitutional preamble established “sociopolitical ideas of Marx, Engels, and Lenin” as the guiding principles, but now also follows “ideology of José Martí.”\textsuperscript{354} Consequently, the Constitution established a commitment to achieve José Martí’s strong desire: “I want the fundamental law of our republic to be the tribute of Cubans to the full dignity of man.”\textsuperscript{355} Article 1 then establishes the regime’s constitutional commitment to serving “the good of all.”\textsuperscript{356} Moreover, the new Article 55 eliminated the Marxist idea of “scientific materialism” and incorporates a new commitment to respecting and guaranteeing freedom of conscience and religion.\textsuperscript{357}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{345} \textit{Id.}
\footnote{346} \textit{Id.}
\footnote{348} Constitución de la República de Cuba, art. 5 (1992) (Cuba).
\footnote{349} \textit{Id.} at art. 69.
\footnote{350} For more details, see DOMINGUEZ, supra note 344, at 233–9.
\footnote{351} Constitución de la República de Cuba, ch. VII (1992) (Cuba).
\footnote{352} \textit{Id.} supra note 344, at 231.
\footnote{353} Constitución de la República de Cuba, arts. 14, 15, 16 (1992) (Cuba).
\footnote{354} \textit{Id.} at pmbl.
\footnote{355} \textit{Id.}
\footnote{356} \textit{Id.} at art. 1.
\footnote{357} \textit{Id.} at art. 55.
\end{footnotes}
But, like North Korea, Cuba is a negative example of socialist constitutional identity change. Larry Catá Backer argues that the PCC is the center of political and economic reform in Cuba. While the communist parties in China, Vietnam, and Laos have tried to become the ruling party looking forward to attain developmental goals, the communist party in Cuba has remained a revolutionary party looking retrospectively “to reserve the communist society achieved at the moment of revolutionary triumph.” Reservationism and “ossification of Cuban Marxism-Castroism” inhibit the emergence of discordant constitutional visions, which in turn limits the dynamics of constitutional identity. The ossified ideological foundation makes the constitutional polity in Cuba remain deeply Leninist.

However, like North Korea, Cuba has to deal with economic difficulties and hence the constitutional economy has been adapted for this purpose. Unlike China, Vietnam, and Laos, Cuba has rejected the marketization of the economy and has maintained the centrally planned economy dominated by state-owned enterprises. While private enterprises are not allowed, the Constitution allows the establishment of “mixed enterprises, and by economic partnerships and associations” and is committed to protect their property, which, like North Korea, is meant to attract foreign investments. Following the constitutional aspiration of foreign investment, a new law on foreign investment was adopted in 2014, but its implementation regulations depended on the state actors’ multi-level review and approval due to the ideological constraints of economic statism. Thus, revolutionary reservationism is discordant with the constitutional aspiration to foreign investment and the actual need of socioeconomic transition. This moderate disharmonic constitutional condition, the imperative of social and economic transition, and the possible global engagement (particularly

359 Id. at 110.
360 Id. at 121.
361 DOMINGUEZ, supra note 344, at 231.
362 Constitución de la República de Cuba, art. 23 (1992) (Cuba).
364 For more details, see Backer, supra note 358, at 94–100.
transnational dialogue with China),\textsuperscript{367} constitute potential elements of the dynamics of socialist constitutional identity in Cuba.

B. Comparative Reflections

The general trend shared among the five socialist countries is that core elements of socialist constitutional identity have remained, but adapted to acclimate to the globalizing world. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, all five countries had to address economic and institutional reform. This necessarily required adjustment to constitutional ideas and principles foundational to the polity. Constitution-making is the main mechanism through which socialist constitutional identity change takes place. The change involves the dialogical interaction between socialist constitutional identity and global constitutional identity. All five countries have pragmatically referenced, incorporated, and redefined some ideas and principles of generic constitutionalism, albeit with different levels. Consequently, all five operating socialist constitutions are disharmonic to varying degrees allowing for the continuous development of socialist constitutionalist identity.

There are at least two factors explaining that convergence. First, globalization compels socialist countries to adapt their constitutional identity. Constitutional globalization is inevitable, and the Vietnamese story has indicated how this affects the dynamics of socialist constitutional identity.\textsuperscript{368} Laos is more willing to engage in global constitutional dialogue, mainly due to the national economy’s heavy reliance on foreign investment. Despite constitutional exceptionalism which contributes to China’s resistance to global constitutionalism, China has also signed major international human rights treaties and incorporated the ideas of human rights and property rights into the nation’s constitution. Despite North Korea’s isolationism and Cuba’s reservationism, the imperative of economic development and foreign investment are the driving forces of at least modest global constitutional engagement.

The second factor concerns transnational engagement within the five socialist countries. There are actual signs that they have engaged in dialogue to share their experiences and visions of change. To illustrate, Dwight H. Perkins indicates that: “The leaders of Vietnam certainly knew about and learned from the reform experiences of China that


\textsuperscript{368} Tushnet, supra note 4.
preceded their reform effort.\textsuperscript{369} Laos’s dialogical engagement with Vietnam is also one of the reasons for its adoption of the idea of socialist market economy.\textsuperscript{370} As mentioned above, North Korea and Cuba have also engaged in dialogue with China on reforming issues.

Yet, there is divergence in socialist constitutional identity adaption among the five countries. The constitutional identity adaption in Vietnam is perhaps the most far-reaching among the five countries, evident by the bold constitutional commitments to popular constituent power, constitutional referendum, the party under the Constitution, distributed and controlled power, and universal human rights. Vietnam, China, and Laos have adapted to all five elements of socialist constitutional identity, while North Korea and Cuba only have moderate adaption to the constitutional economy. Consequently, the socialist countries have different models in their reactions to global impact on their constitutional identity, which can be characterized as constitutional globalism (Vietnam and Laos); constitutional exceptionalism (China); constitutional isolationism (North Korea); and constitutional reservationism (Cuba). These variations are defined by the history of communism, intellectual environment, the economic condition, the social structure, the size and population of the respective countries, and the role of the respective countries in the global economic and political order.

**CONCLUSION**

This study focuses on the impact of globalization to local constitutional identity. As the Vietnamese case indicates, socialist constitutional identity is retained through modification and extension due to the impact of globalization. I conclude with some general reflections.

The studies on constitutional globalization should go beyond the consideration of the convergence of rules, institutions, or constitutional jurisprudence. More fundamental is the globalization of constitutional ideas and principles. The studies of the causal effects require the balance between quantitative and qualitative research.

Moreover, this study suggests implications for further studies of constitutional identity. To begin with, the inquiry into constitutional identity cannot be limited to constitutionalist polities. If “the concept of constitutional identity should be at the center of constitutional theory,”\textsuperscript{371} and the inquiry into constitutional identity is just limited to

\textsuperscript{369} DWIGHT H. PERKINS, EAST ASIAN DEVELOPMENT 147 (2013).
\textsuperscript{371} JACOBSOHN, supra note 14, at 9.
constitutionalist systems, it follows that constitutional theory will be centralized around a limited set of American, European, and a few other institutional settings that have met basic requirements of constitutionalism. If this is the case, constitutional theory will ignore a number of non-constitutionalist constitutional experiences in different corners of the globe. A polity needs not be constitutionalist to acquire constitutional identity. Every constitutional system has ideas and principles fundamental to its existence, which are not simply ignored by autocrats at will. Moreover, if the condition of constitutional disharmony is universal, the potential of constitutional identity change is internal to every constitutional order. In addition, formal amendments to constitutional identity should be taken into account. In polities where judicial review is absent or weak, the evolution of constitutional identity may be taking place through formal mechanisms like formal constitutional amendments. Last but not least, global spread of constitutionalism is an important factor that animates the dynamics of constitutional identity in non-constitutionalist countries. Therefore, it is important to study the connection between constitutional globalization and domestic constitutional identity dynamics.