

Political Efficacy of Middle Class in Transitional States

—Comparing China and Vietnam¹

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Abstract: This paper examines the middle class' political efficacy in transitional China and Vietnam and finds that Chinese middle class' political efficacy significantly weaker than their counterparts in Vietnam. And the Chinese middle class is internally differentiated between managerial middle class and professional middle class, the former being weaker in political efficacy. However, we cannot find equivalent cleavage in Vietnam case. The author argues that middle class' socio-political attitude is strongly affected by the role of state in the transition. In China, the differentiation occurs due to the changing state role from centralization to decentralization, then back to a “regulatory state”; but in Vietnam, the decentralization is still under way.

Key words: political efficacy, managerial middle class, professional middle class

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Introduction

Political efficacy is defined as “the feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change” (Campbell, Gurin & Miller 1954: 188), thus making a crucial indicator for measuring the self-assessed effectiveness of individual’s political participation (Gilens, Glaser & Mendelberg 2001). Researchers have already established a sound positive correlation between political efficacy and the level of civic participation. Since most political systems endeavor to involve individual citizen in decision-making, the strength of political efficacy also reflects the openness of political system (Finkel 1987; Karp & Banducci 2008; Madsen 1978).

A large body of academic work has been devoted to analyzing how people vary in their political efficacy in advanced societies (Form & Huber 1971; Jackman 1970; Rodgers 1974). In recent years, some scholars start to focus on people’s political efficacy in transitional societies (Chen & Zhong 2002; Iyengar 1980; Shi 1999). Researchers argue that people’s political efficacy influence people’s civic behavior and political participation, thus having important implications for nation’s political process.

Following the western classics, these studies reflect on the political efficacy of an emerging middle class, trying to map out the future role of this particular social group. In the recent European history, the middle class plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining modern legal systems and social orders. However, whether we can foresee similar trend in transitional states, such as China, is still in debate (Cai 2005; Chen & Lu 2006; Li 2006; Li Chunling 2011; Lieberthal 1995/2010: 329; Li Youmei 2005; Zhang Yi 2008; Zhou Xiaohong 2002).

No matter on which side they stand, these researchers tend to understand the middle class as a homogeneous social group, which shares similar values and thus depicts identical behavioral orientation. They largely pay little attention to the internal differentiation within the middle class in terms of political participation and socio-political attitude.

This study departs from those predecessors in two aspects. Firstly, this paper lays particular focus on the sub-groups within the middle class, trying to delineate the political mechanism which internally differentiates this social group in the transitional states; Secondly, this paper emphasizes political efficacy instead of general socio-political attitude to better capture the civic orientation in the transition.

In this paper, we shall address several substantial questions and seek tentative answers: for transitional states, such as China and Vietnam, which lacks western representative democracy, does the emerging middle class regard their political participation as

effective? Does it vary by different sub-groups? What makes China different from Vietnam, if these two countries depict diverse patterns? How does it relate to the patterns of market transition?

Political participation, political efficacy and the Middle Class

Researchers have illustrated the relationship between political participation and political efficacy. Political efficacy was initially defined as “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, and impact on the political process” (Campbell, Gurin & Miller 1954: 187). It reflects a belief that an individual can cast influence on the political elites and decision-making process. This belief is firmly based on the ordinary citizen’s direct contact with government/political agencies (Almond & Verba 1972/2008), i.e. how profoundly and intensely s/he is involved in the decision-making process and how much influence s/he may cast on the policy implementation. Researchers find that, those who have better chances of getting politically involved usually have stronger political efficacy; on the contrary, those who are excluded from political sphere shall hardly deem their political participation effective (Form & Huber 1971; Madsen 1978; Rodgers 1974).

Apart from direct political participation, Almond and Verba (1972/2008) believe that there are other contextual variations which impact individual’s political efficacy, i.e. interaction with all forms of authority. Researchers believe that, ordinary people’s authority position and their involvement with daily decision-making process account to the “*non-political source of political attitude*” (Almond & Verba 1972/2008; Rodgers 1974). Empirical evidence points out that, organizations can be regarded as a semi-political system which entails a power structure, full of bargaining and fighting. And the actual interaction with the organizational authority, for instance, to seek greater autonomy, to dissent from organizational policies, to oppose organizational authority, to depose existing leaders, and to transform the workplace political structure, shall cast an impact on his/her general attitude towards political authority per se (Ikeda 2005; Perruci et al 1980). It denotes that, those who are more intensely involved in decision-making process or have more say in the organizational authority structure usually have stronger political efficacy. This “non-political source of political attitude” is crucial to our understanding about the internal differentiation of political efficacy and we shall come back to this issue later.

Now, we shall deal with the question of middle class’ general political attitude. What do we already know about the relationship between middle class’ political participation and their political efficacy?

Classic democratic theory argues that, middle class plays a crucial role in establishing and stabilizing the western democratic regime (Dahl 1971; Lipset 1959). They are usually more actively involved in politics and thus have higher political efficacy.

If we trace back the origin of middle class in the West, we shall clearly see that the rise of a western middle class is the social consequence of a rapid wealth accumulation at that time. The scale and speed of that process was unprecedented and has profoundly transformed the mode of production and consumption. Domestic trade and service sector emerged and expanded at a great magnitude, creating an elite group of managers and professionals who were to manage the newly-emerged wealth. They were the embryonic form of a modern middle class (Smail 1994/2006). In the meantime, the rational and impersonal market regulation start to dominate, and the middle class exchange their market capacity for economic and political advantages. This social group benefits from direct political participation, thus they share and inherit this democratic political culture, and actively support the current institutions. These all nurture a high level of political efficacy for the middle class.

Apart from the contextual issues, the middle class are usually better equipped in political knowledge, know a great deal more about political process and are more capable of bargaining for gains (Lijphart 1997; Lipset 1981/1997). Therefore, they can easily transform their advantages in property, education and occupational status to political advantage (Orum 1983/1989), which facilitates political participation and enhances political efficacy.

However, does this story also apply to the transitional states, or is there an entirely new version of it? A large body of academic work seeks to explain the socio-political attitude of the middle class in the emerging market. Among these volumes, there are different lines of argument.

Some researchers argue that, the middle class in transitional states emerges from a state-dominated modernization process. Since they heavily rely on the state power and directly benefit from the state intervention, they are normally suspicious of so-called political democratization in fear of losing current economic status (Lui & Wang 2003). They are not fond of acting politically or challenging the current institutional setting, so long as it doesn't negatively affect their interest (Cai 2005; Chen & Lu 2006; Li Youmei 2005; Hsiao Michael 1989; Zhou Xiaohong 2002). Therefore the middle class in transitional states have relatively weak political efficacy.

However, some other researchers oppose this argument, advocating that the middle class still plays active role in political changes. They have stronger democratic values; they are more aware of rights and duty, and thus often highly motivated to protect their legal rights (Li 2006; Hu Lianhe & Hu Angang 2008; Qi Xingfa 2010; Zhang Yi 2008). This social group usually seeks political participation and has stronger political efficacy (Shi 1999).

Different from the above *homogeneity hypothesis*, which regards the middle class as a highly homogeneous group, the *fragmentation hypothesis* proposes a clear cleavage within the middle class, mainly between managerial middle class and professional

middle class, further reflecting on the different types of assets they are possessing (Liu & Zhu 2011; Savage et al 1992). Managers possess organizational assets, while the professionals possess cultural assets. Organizational asset binds to the particular position and external to those who possess it. Once an individual loses his/her position, s/he correspondingly loses the position-bound organizational asset. On the contrary, cultural asset is intrinsic to professionals and not bound with any particular position. When the professionals shift from one place to another, the cultural asset would move along.

This fundamental difference between two types of assets actually subjects the managerial group to their hierarchical position. The position-bound organizational assets fetter the managers, making them more cautious and conservative, less likely to protest and fight for better odds. To the contrary, knowledge elites are much less restrained by the power structure and are more free to claim interest. Thus the professional middle class are more politically active than their managerial colleagues.

The *fragmentation hypothesis* offers additional explanatory power to the middle class' general political attitude, since it realizes that organizational authority structure imposes different restrictions to the sub-groups within the middle class. But restriction is only one side of the story, and the other side is empowerment, meaning that the organizational authority structure empowers these sub-groups differently as well. If we can recall the *non-political source of political attitude* previously mentioned, we shall see that those who hold managerial positions are often better equipped with decision-making power and participation opportunity in their workplace, which enhances their feeling of effectiveness in casting influence and thus political efficacy.

We have summarized the main argument about the relationship between political participation and political efficacy, and the middle class' political efficacy. Scholars have agreed upon that the more opportunity of participation people are endowed with, the higher political efficacy they shall have. But researchers disagree on whether the middle class is political active or not, thus on the level of political efficacy. Oppose to the *Homogeneous Hypothesis*, the *Fragmentation Hypothesis* raises the point of internal differentiation within the middle class, arguing that this cleavage between managers and professionals might offer explanation to the empirical inconsistency. Due to different types of assets they are holding, managerial middle class and professional middle class shall depict different political attitude in general and political efficacy in particular. But how does it relate to our discussion about China and Vietnam's transition? We shall proceed on to this issue in the next section.

Transition in China and Vietnam and the rise of middle class

In recent three decades, both China and Vietnam has undertaken a profound reform, abolishing the mandatory planning economy and adopting a market institution. The two nations catch our attention because they stand out for some particular features

compared to other transitional economies: Communist party sustains as the ruling power and leads the transition from the very beginning; political structure largely remains intact; large scale of rapid privatization does not occur, with majority of assets and resources still in the state's possession; both countries are predominantly agrarian, but achieve much higher growth rates than many other transitional economies (Chan, Kerkvliet & Unger 1999; McCormick 1998; Walder 2003:901; Walder & Nguyen 2008: 253-254). These commonalities undoubtedly make China and Vietnam ideally comparable. However, this section intends to focus on differences in their transitional path, which brings about divergent social consequences behind the apparent similarities. What is to our interest here is the middle class' political efficacy.

Some researchers argue that the transition in several Asian economies from state socialism to capitalism follows a bottom-up trajectory: private property rights emerge while the public ownership still dominates; market distribution co-exists with tight state regulation; traditional authoritarianism survives and rational bureaucratic authority arises. This so-called Asian model diverges sharply from east-European "top-down" transition and central-European's "borrowed capitalism" (Eyal, Szelenyi, & Townsley 1989). It precisely catches the main characteristics of China and Vietnam's economic transition: public ownership be the mainstay and multiple forms of ownership develop side by side; the private ownership once ideologically condemned now re-defined as an effective form public ownership; market functions as the new mechanism of resource distribution, along with the sustaining central planning; a large group of private entrepreneurs come into being; profound economic reforms pave way for the vigorous growth, followed by administrative reform, but political reform is much more moderate (Le Dang Doahn 2009; Kubota 1996/1997; Ye Fuchun 2008). We witness that, state imperatives change dramatically in both China and Vietnam, from rigid political leadership towards a developmental state prioritizing modernization (Black 1966/1988: 89). Apparently, Chinese and Vietnamese governments have both embraced market institutions and led the transition with great determination in the severe scarcity (Li Wen 2003: 49-51).

Nevertheless, if we examine more closely, we shall see that Vietnamese transition sharply differs from the Chinese path in some aspects: whether the state has adjusted its role during the transition. China has gone from decentralization to a "regulatory state" in the mid-90s², while Vietnam, since Renovation (*Doi Moi* in Vietnamese) in 1986, is still decentralizing its power³. Now let us elaborate on this point in further details.

² Naughton (2009) writes an excellent review of the change in China's state role and power structure during the reform.

Some studies mention that, in 1980s, China's reform is based on the reflection of traditional totalitarian governance, thus to prioritize "decentralization of power"; while in 1990s, these reflections are again taken over by prevalent call for a "strong government", since the once-embraced "small is beautiful" model runs into obstacles (Yan Jirong 2009)

Additionally, those focusing on china's fiscal reform and central-local relations interpret the "Tax-sharing Reform" in mid-1990s as the signal of a changing state role. They believe that this reform marks a cleavage between decentralization and re-centralization (Wong 2000; Wu, Jinglian 2003).

³ For the analysis of Vietnam's economic and political reform, you may refer to Lý Vĩnh Long & Cổ Trảng Vĩnh (N/A) & Le Dang Doahn (2009).

Reform in China set off in late-1970s. Transforming a centralized command economy to a decentralized market system has tremendously motivated the direct producers (Wu Jinglian 2003). The ownership of the means of production, once entirely monopolized by the state, is now partially privatized. The property rights for human capital, once incomplete, can evade administrative manipulation and seek economic returns in an emerging labor market (Liu Xin 2010). However, this decentralization process somehow does not persist in the three-decade reform. Mid-1990s marks the cleavage of China's economic reform: top leadership in Beijing strategically re-defines the role of the state and re-directs the reform. Initially the central government intended to reclaim its authority over their local subordinates in order to collect taxes. Gradually the means turns out to be the ends. Thus we could roughly conclude that, the first 15 years of the reform is to decentralize the state power and to nurture a larger social and private sector (*Guo Tui Min Jin* in Chinese), while the latter half witness that a "regulatory state" again takes over (Naughton 2009). The central government starts to lay a heavy hand over the social arena and private sector. Non-state sector is shrinking under an ever-growing powerful central regime. We may see that China's transition goes from a highly centralized system to an actively decentralization, then back to re-centralization.

Vietnam shares many similarities with its Chinese counterpart during the take-off period: it is trapped in severe poverty and shortage and has to set off to change (Boudarel & Nguyen 2002; Liao Jianxia 2007); a powerful state plays a role as functional substitute for market (Li Wen 2003: 56). However, when Vietnam proposed Doi Moi in 1986, it not only introduced the market mechanism but also re-assessed the Socialist line (*Lu Xian* 路线) in an all-round way, which differs from China. One of the major components raised in the 6th Plenary Meeting of Vietnamese Communist Party Conference (*Yue Gong Liu Da* 越共六大) stresses that, the Communist Party is not the only, but among several others, leading force in Vietnam (Funston 2002/2007). The state leadership has also substantially re-structured: the government and the parliament (equivalent to the People's Congress in China) are endowed more power and the party retrieves to a great extent in many spheres (Kubota 1996/1997). The Central Committee of the Communist Party is still in charge of some sub-committees, but they are largely research entities working out development strategies and guiding principles (Funston 2002/2007: 359-365). The party proposes general guidelines and leaves policy-planning and implementation in the hands of the government and parliament (Kubota 1996/1997: 98-100). For the last two decades, separation of powers continues in Vietnam, departing from a regulatory state and towards a decentralized type of regime (Ye Fuchun 2008: 140-141).

In both countries, domestic and international capital has rapidly accumulated during the transition. With the expansion of education sector, two societies have created economic and social contexts for a rise of middle class, just as the western societies in 19th and 20th century. Thus we witness that, in both countries, a "middle group" emerges. Their life chances lie somewhere between the elite and the working class,

thus called “middle class”, and their socio-political attitude is profoundly affected by the state role.

In the previous section, we have presented many studies on the stable relationship between types of state regime, political participation and political attitude. Research has shown that, the frequency and intensity of political participation shall cast positive effect on people’s political efficacy, meaning that the more decentralized the state is, more often people are provided with opportunity to political participation, the stronger belief of casting an influence on political institution people will have, resulting in a stronger feeling of political efficacy. To the contrary, if the state regime is more centralized, it usually less empowers the ordinary citizens and sets more restrictions on political participation, then people shall have weaker belief in casting effective influence and lower political efficacy. Based on this simple line of reasoning, we shall propose a set of hypotheses on the political efficacy of middle class in China and Vietnam:

Hypotheses 1a: The middle class in Vietnam has stronger political efficacy than the Chinese middle class.

Hypothesis 1b: There is no significant difference between China and Vietnam in terms of middle class’ political efficacy.

Is the middle class fragmented?

Now we shall explore the second question, if the middle class is fragmented between managerial and professional middle class.

We have argued that, when the state decentralizes its power, the middle class naturally gains more opportunity in political participation, which consequentially raises their political efficacy. And when the state regime reclaims its role as a mighty regulator, it would overall affect the middle class. This argument, nevertheless, sees middle class as a homogeneous social entity. If we plan to gain better understanding of different sub-groups within the middle class, we shall refer to the *fragmentation hypotheses*. As it suggests, the middle class is internally differentiated between managers and professionals in terms of political attitude in general and political efficacy in particular due to their possession of different types of assets. But how is this argument relevant to the transitional states? Whether the reform has cast different impact on those two groups? To identify the mechanism, we here propose two factors which may significantly influence the political efficacy of managers and professionals.

- 1) How powerful or influential s/he is in the workplace authority structure? As we have mentioned, the work-related power counts as the non-political source of political efficacy (Ikeda 2005; Perruci et al 1980). The more hierarchical power s/he is endowed with, the stronger that s/he shall feel of making changes, and the higher sense of political efficacy s/he has; in contrast, the less say in the daily

work, the weaker feeling of being effectively involved, and the lower political efficacy s/he has (Almond & Verba 1972/2008; Rodgers 1974).

- 2) How large is the gap between expectation towards political participation and actual opportunity s/he is granted? High expectation with fewer actual participation results in huge gap and lowers the political efficacy; while if the actual participation is compatible with the expectation, people will assess their participation in a more positive way, thus endowing higher political efficacy (Rodgers 1974).

Let's take a look at the first factor – the position within the work-related authority structure. Managerial middle class usually enjoys certain manipulative power, for instance over personnel, financial issues, project implementation etc. Exercising the manipulation shall endow the managers a feeling of casting effective influence, or even domination, and further arises a sense of doing “simulative” political decision-making and implementation. Compliance and consent from colleagues and subordinates shall bring about feeling of efficacy. Though it is not political efficacy in strict terms, but as we mention earlier, this type of efficacy counts as the “non-political source of political efficacy”. Additionally, this work-related feeling of efficacy also diverts the managers’ aspiration for “real” political participation, and off-sets the disappointment if not given enough chances.

Furthermore, if we take the sector into consideration, public sector actually accounts for a large percent of managerial middle class. Working in the public sector, let's say various government agencies, they are usually close to the political authority and their daily job involves policy-making and implementation. They enjoy a great deal institutionalized channels to cast real political and social influence. In transitional states like China and Vietnam where the fundamental political system remain intact, we can see a huge group of administrators and officials. Due to the lack of competitive democratic system, these are no doubt the “political man”, who deal with politics, make political decisions and put them into practice. Thus they shall naturally have stronger political efficacy.

Now let's turn to illustrate the second factor, the gap between expected and actual political participation.

A shift from traditional “indulgency model” (Gouldner 1964) of governance to a rational strict bureaucracy makes the society increasingly dependent on specialized knowledge and skills. Accordingly, those who possess knowledge (the cultural capital) would have more bargain power in different arena, and then have stronger appeal to political power (Eyal, Szélenyi, & Townsley, 1989; Savage et al 1992). However, a stronger will to participate in politics does not necessarily lead to higher political efficacy. We shall also take into consideration that to which extent those expectations are fulfilled. The argument raised by Savage and his colleagues is partially correct in

pointing out the political aspiration (Savage et al 1992), but they forget the other side of the story – the actual political participation. Whether people regard their political participation as effective depends not only on their objective position in the social structure, but also on their subjective perception of who they are and what they should have. If granted more effective participation to meet strong political aspiration, people would not sense a large gap between expectation and reality, leading to higher level of political efficacy; if the actual participation is less frequent and effective, a gap would occur, which leads to lower level of political efficacy.

In China, the professionals keep well hold of knowledge assets, which applies to the needs of modernization. They expect to have a stronger saying in the political process, but are impeded by an ever-growing state regime. The managerial group has organizational assets in their possession. These assets are bound to their organization-related position. The fear of losing the position shall reduce their aspiration for more political rights (Savage et al 1992). And the desire of political participation does not increase tremendously, since most of them are already exercising political influence, virtual or real.

Therefore, the professionals are more fragile to the changing role of state in the transition in the sense of being empowered psychologically while dis-empowered politically. When the Chinese state abruptly suspends decentralization, re-claims centralizing power, and squeezes non-state sectors in regulating society and distributing resources, it shall cast more profound impact on the professionals by expanding the gap between their political aspiration and actual political participation. On the contrary, managerial middle class have much better chances to exercising power in both work-related authority structure and outside. Thus they do not share the tension with professionals.

Abundant studies on China's modern history have revealed that, in China, the life chances of professionals are very sensitive to the state-society relationship. Before the reform, the communist party and the government are deep suspicious of this group. The suspicion brings trouble and humiliation to the intellectuals, and intentionally marginalizes their political participation (Lieberthal 1995/2010: 306-307). Until 1978, when then-chairman Deng Xiaoping announced in the 1st National Science Conference that the intellectuals are part of the working class, mass suspicion towards the knowledge group starts to fade away (Townsend & Womack 1986/2010: 224). This announcement denotes the official recognition of knowledge class' important role in China's modernization. Thereafter, the state has endeavored to development education and research, to encourage academic exchange and cooperation with other countries. However, just as Townsend and Womack (1986/2010: 232) notices, in three-decade social management, Chinese state fluctuates between centralization and de-centralization. After loosening the control over the intellectuals for a while, the state re-claims its power over the knowledge group, i.e. implementing control over educational institutions, closely supervising the topics and results of academic

research projects, recruits more professionals to be communist party member etc. These characteristics shall have influence on the professionals' opportunity of effective political participation and thus on their political efficacy.

Therefore, we could further deduce a hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2a: China's middle class shall diverge in their political efficacy: professionals are significantly weaker than their managerial counterparts.

Hypothesis 2b: In Vietnam, the professional middle class and the managerial middle class do not diverge in their political efficacy.

In the next section, we shall proceed to testify these hypotheses.

Data, model and descriptive statistics

This study uses two waves of survey data, respectively on 2003 and 2006, in China and Vietnam, from the AsiaBarometer survey dataset⁴. AsiaBarometer survey is organized by the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies and Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia in Tokyo University. In each survey country, the organizer collaborates with local Academy of Social Sciences or commercial survey company to conduct the survey. In China, survey center of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences conducted the 2003 and 2006 wave survey; while in Vietnam, the survey conductor is TNS (Taylor Nelson Sofres Vietnam) commercial survey company.

The survey adopts multi-stage stratified random sampling. In China, the 2003 wave surveys 100 respondents from 8 cities respectively, amounting to 800 cases in total, all between 20 to 59 years old. The 8 cities are Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chongqing, Xi'an, Nanjing, Dalian and Qingdao, roughly covering China's different regions. 2006 wave divides China into 5 regions according to demographic characteristics and selects 100 cities (or counties). It surveys 2000 respondents between 20-69 years old. Correspondingly, in Vietnam, 2003 wave surveys the largest city in four regions, namely northern, middle, southern and Mekong River region, and randomly selects 807 samples between 20-59 years old. 2006 wave adopts PPS⁵ sampling procedure and surveys 1000 respondents between 20-69 years old⁶.

2003 and 2006 waves have provided target variables, while other waves do not contain complete political efficacy scale in the questionnaire. 2003 wave contains 800

⁴ AsiaBarometer has so far been taken 5 waves, respectively on 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007 and 2008, totally including more than 30 countries, which counts as the largest comparative survey ever since. The structured questionnaire integrates content such as family life, consumption preference, socio-political attitude and action, life satisfaction etc. Samples for each country are randomly selected. For more detailed information on this project, you may refer to its official website: <https://www.asiabarometer.org/en/index>

⁵ PPS sampling is the abbreviation for probability proportionate to size sampling method, which, as the name denotes, ensures that each unit in the sampling frame has the equal opportunity of being chosen. It is a widely-used sampling procedure in survey practice.

⁶ You may refer to the AsiaBarometer website for more details on sampling procedure and the distribution of sample cases: <https://www.asiabarometer.org/en/surveys>

and 807 cases for China and Vietnam respectively, and 2006 wave 2000 and 1000. Since this study focus on the sub-groups within the middle class, the sample size would be too small if we use only one year survey data. To increase sample size of analysis, we merge cases of two waves and get 1807 and 2800 cases respectively for Vietnam and China.

We use OLS regression to analyze the data. Dependent variable is the political efficacy⁷. The measurement is a Likert scale, containing three statements. The respondents are required to score each statement from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). The three statements are:

q.192. Generally speaking, people like me don't have the power to influence government policy or actions.

q.193. Politics and governments are so complicated that sometimes I don't understand what's happening.

q.194. Since so many people vote in elections, it really doesn't matter whether I vote or not.

We first test the Pearson correlation among each two statements and finds positively high correlation between .30 and .50⁸. It shows that these three statements are measuring on the same direction. Three scores are added for each case and amount to an aggregate score measuring political efficacy. Political efficacy scores between 3 and 15, the higher the score, the more strongly the respondent disagrees with the statement, and the stronger political efficacy s/he has.

Independent variables are country and sub-groups within middle class. Country is a binary variable: China and Vietnam. Sub-groups also contain two categories: managerial middle class and professional middle class.

How to identify managerial and professional middle class according to their occupation is somewhat arbitrary in this case, since the survey does not provide detail job information. We are unable to identify those groups using a strictly-defined class schema. However, we can exploit the multiple-choice question of "Occupation (q291)" to differentiate between managers/administrators and professionals. Managerial middle class includes "Business owner or manager of an organization with over 30 employees"⁹, "senior manager" and "clerical worker"; professional middle class includes "self-employed professional" and "employed professional or specialist".

⁷ This concept has two dimensions, internal political efficacy and external political efficacy. We only focus on the internal political efficacy. Though the questionnaire provides some scales on external efficacy, but only to China. Missing data in Vietnam causes difficulty in making complete measurement of political efficacy, but internal efficacy can at least give a "snapshot" of the political attitude in both countries.

⁸ A Pearson's correlation coefficient among these three statement scores are .47 between q192 and q193, .36 between q192 and q194, and .36 between q193 and q194.

⁹ This item puts business owner together with manager, which is truly problematic, since owners are large proprietors rather than salariat. But referring to recent year's survey in urban China, the chance of getting in touch with bourgeoisie is very small. This grouping only causes theoretical ambiguity, but would not much affect the outcome. Actually, even in advanced society, large proprietors share a fairly small percentage in general social survey's sampling frame (Erikson & Goldthorpe 1992).

The occupation items do not contain the group of “government officials or civil servant”. But we speculate that, given the choices in the questionnaire, bureaucrats would choose managers of an organization or senior manager rather than fall into other categories. Thus this group shall largely overlap with the managerial middle class.

The control variables include gender, age, years of schooling and income level. Gender, age and education level might also influence the political efficacy, thus in order to reveal the net effect of the occupation, we shall control the effect of those variables. Gender is a binary variable. Age effect is usually not linear, thus we further add age square. Education level is originally in categorical variable, and we try to recode it into continuous variable, years of schooling, in order to reduce degree of freedom¹⁰.

Here we need to elaborate a bit more on income level. Classical political sociology argues that people’s political behavior and attitude is largely determined by people’s class position, and class exerts influence through class interest. Empirically, we see occupation influences people’s economic status, thus causing political attitude to vary. In this study, we are not particularly interested on this mechanism; instead, we try to unveil the net effect of occupation, to see if different occupation groups vary in their political efficacy due to the types of assets they are holding rather than the income status they are endowed with. Therefore we need to control the income effect to see whether the variation pertains. We calculate the average disposable income per household for China and Vietnam respectively on 2003 and 2006. Based on that number, we further recode the original categorical data into a new variable, with “low”, “medium” and “high” categories. The indicators used in calculation are shown in table 1:

Table 1: Calculation of average disposable income per household in China and Vietnam, 2003 and 2006.

	China (urban & rural)		Vietnam (urban & rural)	
	2003	2006	2003	2006
Average family size (<i>persons</i>)	3.38	3.17	4.31	4.21
Average disposable income per capita	5,547 rmb	7,673 rmb	5,428,074 vnd	7,814,430 vnd
Average disposable income per household	18,749 rmb	24,324 rmb	23,395,000 vnd	32,898,750 vnd

Data source: *China Statistics Yearbook 2004, 2006*; Euromonitor, (2010). *Consumer lifestyle--Vietnam*; Nguyen, T. B. (2011). *The trend of Vietnamese household size in recent years*. Paper for 2011 International Conference on Humanities, Society and Culture.

After eliminating the missing data, the valid sample of analysis is 996, including 685 Chinese cases and 311 Vietnamese cases. The descriptive statistical report is depicted

¹⁰ For reasons why such recoding is better than using categorical data, you may refer to Xie & Hannum (1996). Here we recode education into continuous variables according to different categories: for China 2003 wave, no formal education=0, elementary/junior high/middle=7, high school=12, vocational-technical school=12, professional/technical=15, university/graduate=16; for China2006 wave, primary or below=6, junior high/middle=9, high/vocational=12, college=15, university=16, graduate=19; for Vietnam 2003 and 2006, no formal edu=0, grades 1-5=3, grades 6-9=7.5, grades 10-12=11, studying in college=13.5, graduated college=15, studying in univ=14, graduated univ=16, post-univ=19.

in table 2:

Table 2. Descriptive statistical report: China Vs. Vietnam

Variables	China	Vietnam	Statistical Sig. Testing
Male (<i>Yes=1</i>)	.53	.51	$\chi^2 = 0.1052$
Age	35.42	34.63	t = 1.2142
Age square	1348.96	1284.42	t = 1.2892
Education	14.27	14.35	t = -.4405
Income			$\chi^2 = 20.20^{***}$
Low (<i>Yes=1</i>)	.20	.30	
Medium (<i>Yes=1</i>)	.19	.25	
High (<i>Yes=1</i>)	.61	.45	
Middle class groups			$\chi^2 = 25.13^{***}$
Managerial Middle Class (<i>Yes=1</i>)	.63	.46	
Professional Middle Class (<i>Yes=1</i>)	.37	.54	
Internal Political Efficacy	9.91	8.55	t = -12.86 ^{***}
Number of observations	685	311	

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001 (One-tale Sig. Test)

From table 1, we see that the basic demographic characteristics of two middle class samples are largely similar: a bit more than 50% are male, average age is about 35 years old, average years of schooling is around 14, meaning having college education. But for income level, Chinese middle class are significantly higher than the Vietnamese middle class. Since we recode the income level according to average disposable income per household (including urban and rural area), it might denote that income discrepancy in China is larger than in Vietnam. Also, in our samples, China has significantly larger part of a managerial middle class while Vietnam has a larger component of professionals.

Results and discussion

Table 3 displays results from models predicting the political efficacy for China and Vietnam. We use three models to illustrate.

Now let us first present Model 1, the aggregate model. In Model 1, we merge two samples in one model in order to determine whether, once we control for a variety of background factors, the difference between Chinese middle class and Vietnamese middle class still pertains. Table 3 presents that Vietnamese middle class has significantly stronger political efficacy than their Chinese comrades, about twice as high as the Chinese middle class if we take the number arbitrarily. Hypothesis 1a is empirically supported and hypothesis 1b is not grounded as far as we can see from the data.

Another finding is that the high income level group, compared with the low income

level group, more strongly disagrees with the statement, showing higher political efficacy. This finding lends support to the class-politics argument in classical political sociology that the economically advantageous group usually has more say in the current institutions (Franklin & Mughan 1978; Weakliem & Heath 1994; Waal, Achterberg & Houtman 2007). Therefore more participation brings about higher political efficacy.

Strangely, none of the control variables has any explanatory power towards the middle class' political efficacy in these two transitional economies. This type of political attitude and orientation seems not vary with age, gender or education level in our sample.

Now let us turn to explore whether the middle class is internally differentiated, which Model 2 and Model 3 present. These two models show different patterns of middle class' political efficacy between two countries. In China, the professional middle class significantly more strongly oppose the statements, thus depicting much weaker political efficacy compared to the managerial middle class, which supports hypothesis 2a.

In contrast, we could not find any internal differentiation within the Vietnamese middle class, meaning that professionals and managers/administrators have similar level of political efficacy. Hypothesis 2b is also supported.

Table 3. OLS Regression of political efficacy (China, Vietnam and Aggregate Model)

	Model 1: Aggregate (y_1)		Model 2: China (y_2)		Model 3: Vietnam (y_3)	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
Gender ^a	.0724	.1431	.0111	.1675	.1623	.2750
Age	.0582	.0553	-.0025	.0612	.2896*	.1244
Age square	-.0008	.0007	-7.49e ⁻⁶	.0008	-.0040	.0017
Education	-.0307	.0301	-.0584	.0363	.0326	.0542
Income level ^b						
Medium	-.1413	.2145	-.3781	.2635	.2996	.3722
High	.4242*	.1802	.4016 ⁺	.2185	4.2771 ⁺	2.3131
Occupation ^c	-.3202*	.1499	-.3937*	.1754	-.1591	.2828
Country ^d	2.1047***	.1570				
Constant	7.2620***	1.0516	8.8341***	1.1773	4.2771	2.3131
N	996		685		311	
<i>F</i>	23.34		3.12		1.45	
df	987		677		303	
Adj R ²	.15		.03		.01	

⁺ 0.1 < p < 0.05; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001 (one-tail Sig. test)

^a. Male as the reference group ^b. Low income as the reference group

^c. Managerial middle class as the reference group ^d. China as the reference group

Based on the major findings, we may summarize several arguments.

Chinese middle class is not a highly homogeneous group. Instead, it is fragmented in terms of political attitude. This cleavage occurs between professional middle class and managerial middle class. These two groups have different relations with state regime, which results in divergent political attitude.

Managerial middle class has more opportunity of “simulative political participation”, which allows them to practice domination and manipulation in their work situation. They are closer to the powerful person or decision-making body, thus enjoy a higher level of autonomy and monitoring. These practices would grant them a feeling of “efficacy”—effectively casting influence on others. On the other hand, they possess organizational asset, which is bound to external position. The fear of losing the position and associated power would hamper their active participation in politics. Low expectation and high efficacy together lead to higher level of internal political efficacy.

Professional middle class, to the contrary, is farther away from the administrative power, and sometimes marginalized in the power hierarchy. They have much fewer opportunity of practicing politics and “simulative politics”. At the same time, they have knowledge asset at hand, and they naturally appeal to more political rights and participation. High expectation and fewer chances of real participation result in lower level of internal political efficacy.

Nevertheless, in Vietnam, no clear differentiation has occurred so far according to our data. We could not rush to any definite assertion now. Rather, we need more concrete evidence from various sources to make further argument. The measurement for political efficacy and the definition of middle class from the items given in this questionnaire might be contested, since it lack detailed occupational information and misses the important part of external political efficacy. Apart from that, no difference within the middle class might also be attributed to other issues, for instance, the duration of the ongoing reform. Until we can eliminate the period-of-reform-effect, otherwise we could not falsify the argument that if Vietnam continues the reform, it shall depict similar pattern with China in a later stage.

We also find supportive evidence that the socio-political attitude of middle class is tremendously affected by the role of the state. For the transitional country, the state has played a significant role in cultivating and deepening the market institutions. During the expansion of modern bureaucracy, a middle class emerges and grows. This group benefits from the retrieval of an omnipotent party and dominating command economy. Given enough opportunity to decision-making, they would enjoy the autonomy and have a say in the politics. The Vietnamese middle class has experienced an ever-shrinking party-state regime, thus overall shows a higher level of

internal political efficacy; while the Chinese middle class does not confront a consistent power decentralization, the state reclaiming its domination over society and economy in the latter half of the reform, it deteriorates the middle class' internal political efficacy. Unfortunately, due to the lack of data, we can only conjecture the mechanism. If later survey can have more detail information on the informal networks of the respondents and their power in work-related authority structure, we may reach a more concrete conclusion on the “non-political sources of political efficacy”.

The *Fragmentation Hypothesis* proposed by Savage and his colleagues (1992) is illuminating to our understanding of the transitional contexts, though this theory is based on the western empiricals. Regime power and state role affect the middle class, and differently onto the sub-groups, mainly through different assets in their possession. But to explore deep into the mechanism of how it takes effect and what effect it brings, and how it interacts with different political institutions, these questions are all substantial and needs further empirical studies and theoretical imagination.

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