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## Reconsidering the Vietnamese development vision of "industrialisation and modernisation by 2020"

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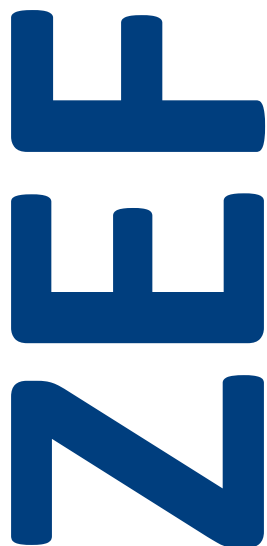
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Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung  
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## Working Paper 102

SIWEI TAN

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# Reconsidering the Vietnamese development vision of “industrialisation and modernisation by 2020”<sup>1</sup>

Siwei Tan

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## Abstract

The role of ideas in the policy-making process has been taken up by institutional analysts who found the structured approaches of institutionalism wanting in predicting political changes. But this ideational turn has been plagued by definitional ambiguity with repercussions for the research methods: specifying and elaborating the core concept of "idea" is often skipped over, in favour of synonymical terms, without exploring the relationship between the concepts. Likewise, what policy-making entails and which aspect or element of it is under study is also often unspecified. Instead, the focus is on ideational power and the causal mechanisms, but the ontological side-steps raise interesting questions about operationalisability. This paper seeks to apply the ideational perspective to a socialist centralised planning context, specifically the Vietnamese socio-economic development plans and planning apparatus. The phrase "industrialisation and modernisation by 2020" can be seen in many Vietnamese circles: whether it be the communist party, policy-makers, consultants, scholars, or government officials, the phrase is used mostly as an opener, a suffix, and appearing as value-neutral. This paper suggests that "industrialisation and modernisation by 2020" is more than a slogan, and as an idea, exercises influence over socio-economic development policy-making through the institutional set-up of Vietnamese development planning that reproduces and propagates the mantra of industrialisation. This prioritisation of the economic and industrial is further reinforced by the fluidity of the boundary between policy and law in Vietnam, to the detriment of other aspects of socio-economic development that are not related to "industrialisation and modernisation". This analysis of Vietnamese socio-economic development planning demonstrates the essentially inductive process through which "ideas" are identified, defined and attributed, and raises questions about operationalising analyses of ideational power.

Keywords: Vietnam, industrialisation, development planning, discourse, policy and law, ideational power, ideas

## **Abbreviations**

CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
DPI	Department of Planning and Investment
GDP	Gross domestic product
I&M	“Industrialisation and modernisation by 2020”
SEDS	Socio-Economic Development Strategy
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plan
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NA	National Assembly

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## Introduction

“The 9<sup>th</sup> Party Congress is to ... decide upon the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—Strategy for *accelerated industrialisation and modernisation* along the socialist line, laying the foundations for ours to become by 2020 *basically an industrialised country*... The overall goals of the 2001-2010 ten-year Strategy are: to bring our country out of underdevelopment; ... and lay the foundations for making ours basically a *modern-oriented industrialised country* by 2020... *Industrialisation and modernisation* represent an undertaking of the entire people, of all economic sectors among which the State economic sector plays the leading role.” (Central Committee CPV 2001:1)

Industrialisation and modernisation presents itself as a *leitmotif* in the Vietnamese socio-economic development strategy. Although the phrase “industrialisation and modernisation by 2020” has a slight slogan-like ring to it, it is not to be preliminarily dismissed as such, for it has organising force within the Vietnamese socio-economic development planning apparatus.

Several seemingly disparate empirical observations made during a field research in the Mekong Delta between June 2011 and February 2012 have inspired this paper. First, in interviews with provincial agencies investigating industry and industrial wastewater management, references were often made to many different types of planning documents varying in terms of their detail, time span or geographical span: orientation plans, master plans, plans with a vision to 2015 and orientation to 2020, annual plans, regional plans, provincial plans, *etc.*. The Vietnamese terms *quy hoach* and *ke hoach* best exemplify this. While both terms are translated as plans in English, some translations have resorted to “planning” for the former and “plan” for the latter, if only to show the difference in strategic vision and details. The second peculiarity was the reference to industrialisation, particularly its emphasis by provincial Departments of Planning and Investment, and their eagerness to point to the statistical evidence that industry’s contribution to economic growth is increasing annually. The incongruence of such a reference is obvious when one juxtaposes it with the largely agrarian provinces of the Mekong Delta. The third and last observation is specific to this author’s research topic of wastewater management in industrial zones in the research area. Interviewees involved in wastewater management drew constant references to the laws and regulations, even when they did not manage to follow the regulations, e.g., the prescribed frequency of inspections. When this fact and a critique of the rigidity and reactivity of the legal framework were presented as preliminary findings at a seminar, a Vietnamese scholar pointed out that there was a new law that had been recently promulgated which resolved the loopholes this author had presented. What do these three disparate observations about a large array of planning documents, references to industrialisation in a rural region, and an apparent fixation with laws in solving the problem of pollution have in common? The prevalence of “industrialisation and modernisation” in the Vietnamese planning apparatus could proffer some insights.

This paper explores how the centralised hierarchical socio-economic development planning apparatus and the instrumentalisation of law for policy implementation in Vietnam could explain the ideational power and ability of the phrase “industrialisation and modernisation by 2020” to organise and influence the actions taken at the level of the province. Despite the trend towards decentralisation, agenda-setting remains centralised (Pham Cong Huu 2011; G. Waibel et al. 2012:173,188). Thus, the planning documents in different sectors and at different government levels reiterate and reinforce “industrialisation and modernisation” as a goal through action plans or targets, such that it could be said to take on dimensions of a *raison-d’être*. Moreover, as the Vietnamese state sees the law as a tool for implementing their policy, so policy lapses into and becomes law (Bui Thi Bich Vien 2005:114; Gillespie 2005). But even the lack of an explicitly relevant



law does not prevent policy from influencing and shaping actions, as government officials are expected to implement both policy and law. Thus, understanding what the policy is – specifically, the substance of socio-economic development plans – is fundamental to understanding why local officials act the way they do, or why they do not act the way they ought to.

These cognitive and ideational effects of policies can be interpreted with reference to the body of work on the role of ideas in policy-making. Scholars working under the rubric of international relations and international political economy found the “traditional” institutionalisms unable to explain political change with their structural approaches (Campbell 1998; Lieberman 2002). They posit that “ideas” – which encompasses a range of ideational objects such as paradigms, world views, causal beliefs, etc. – have causal effects on policy-making, and have explicated how some causal mechanisms work by highlighting the role of epistemic communities (Haas 2001) and ideational institutions (Yee 1996). These mechanisms help illuminate the example of “industrialisation and modernisation” as an ideational object propagated via the socio-economic development planning apparatus and institutional set-up in Vietnam. Yet, despite its novelty and insight, this body of work suffers from definitional ambiguity, as exemplified by the terminological array which appears to be employed to avoid the slipperiness of using the term “idea”. “Policy-making” too is a complex process with different aspects and phases, and different scholars pick up and work on different aspects; indeed, policy practice could also encompass global policy discourse as well as everyday politics (Reis 2012). This paper seeks to demonstrate the organising force that the idea of “industrialisation and modernisation by 2020” has within the Vietnamese socio-economic development policy apparatus. In this operationalisation of the concept of ideational power, the paper also shows the inherent difficulties posed by the definitional ambiguity of its two core concepts “idea” and “policy-making”.

Thus, in Section 1, the role of ideas in policy-making is discussed. Then, the fundamentals of the Vietnamese socio-economic development planning apparatus are laid down in Section 2. The institutional set-up and hierarchy of development plans are presented: who makes which development plans, which are these planning documents, and how do they stand in relation to each other? Having established these, Section 3 goes on to perform a content analysis of the Vietnamese socio-economic development policy documents, so as to identify the dominant “idea” and glean insights into the Vietnamese conception of development. Section 4 deals with the question of how “industrialisation and modernisation” has ideational power within the institutional set-up. Legal scholars have observed the lack of a policy-law dichotomy in the one-party socialist state (Gillespie 2005:47f), where law is instrumental to policy implementation. That policy lapses into law indicates that law is a means of propagation for policy ideas, and also that policy goals could explain the state of legal regulation. Having introduced this plausible causal mechanism, the Section draws on the challenges faced in operationalising ideational power for this paper, to demonstrate some weaknesses of the research on the role of ideas in policy-making, but also, that ideational power, despite its weaknesses, could shed an alternative light on and for policy research. Areas of research that could improve our understanding of Vietnamese policy-making and implementation are further identified.

# 1 The role of ideas in policy-making

The role of ideas in policy-making has been a topic of study within the scholarly traditions of international political economy and international relations. This turn to ideational power in explaining policy-making has been seen by several authors as marking a turn in the rationalist and institutionalist approaches to international political economy (Blyth 1997; Jacobsen 1995; Laffey and Weldes 1997; Lieberman 2002; Yee 1996), which suffered from reductionist explanations due to its emphasis on structure, organisation, and behavioural regularities as guiding political behaviour (Lieberman 2002:698). Historical institutionalism, for instance, was unable to explain why policy-makers choose the issues they choose to address, the particular content of the policy proposals, and the construction of imperatives (Béland 2009:702). The introduction of “ideas” recognised that political actors’ perception of interest could change with the ideological settings, and human agency might defy structural constraints (Lieberman 2002:698 citing Smith 1992), thus reintroducing complexity and multidimensionality. Empirically, it has drawn mainly from economic and foreign policies: Goldstein and Keohane (1993b) studied the effect of causal beliefs, principled beliefs, and world views on American foreign policy during the Cold War; Sikkink (1991) compared developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina and attributed the differences to the economic ideas and beliefs in circulation.

This section will thus begin by reviewing the body of work on the role of ideas in policy-making, specifically, the causal mechanisms through which ideas affect policy-making processes. But to talk about the effect of ideas on policy-making begs the questions of what an idea is, and what policy-making might entail. This definitional ambiguity will be discussed subsequently. Finally, this section closes with a critical discussion of major weaknesses of this body of work, and what this paper proposes to do in operationalising “ideational power” in the Vietnamese socio-economic development planning apparatus.

## 1.1 The causal role of ideas

While the authors generally agree and claim that ideas exercise influence in policy-making through their cognitive or normative effects on policy-makers (Blyth 1997; Jacobsen 1995; Lieberman 2002; Yee 1996), the precise mechanism and explanations proffered varies. Generally, the literature reflects two views: ideas cause policies (Blyth 2003; Goldstein and Keohane 1993a; Parsons 2002), or there is a causal – and indirect – link between idea and policy-making (Blyth 2003). These differences in theoretical approaches are significant for they necessitate different empirical methods (Yee 1996:70). Scholars seeking to show causation rely on statistical associations; this was supplemented by the qualitative approaches introduced by George (1979 cited in Yee 1996:76). These were the congruence procedure – which sought to show consistency between the content of the “ideas” and the content of the policy decision – and the process-tracing procedure that tried to link the “idea” to the policies via the intervening steps. But they failed to prove the hypothesis of causation, merely demonstrating an explanatory link, which justifies the turn in focus towards the causal mechanism. (Yee 1996:82).

The causal mechanisms through which “ideas” affect policy-making have been variously elaborated. Hall (1993) utilises the “policy paradigm”, an interpretive framework of ideas and standards through which policy-makers customarily work within, to explain how policy-makers are ‘constrained’ by pre-specified policy goals and the kind of instruments that may be used to attain them. This has been applied and reinterpreted by others (Béland 2005; Bleich 2002). Ideas can also exert influence when they are congruent with the political discourse of the country, gain salience as such, and become embedded in institutions, whereby the institutions provide organisation support

and a means of expression (Sikkink 1991), or reflect the dominant set of ideas translated through legal mechanisms into formal government organisations (Yee 1996:88 citing Goldstein 1988:181), although Drezner (2000) suggested, based on his observation of bureaucratic politics, that idea-infused institutions face a trade-off between survival and influence. "Institutional ideation" (Yee 1996:86) also occurs through epistemic communities, where its members – experts – diffuse ideas or exert direct policy-making influence by acquiring bureaucratic power (Haas 2001). Yet, while these causal mechanisms show that "ideas" have effects on policy-making, they do not explain how and why. Discourse plays a role in this: it can shape, influence, guide and constrain the policy preferences of decision-makers; Schmidt's work on discursive institutionalism (2008, 2010) starts from the baseline of ideas as inter-subjective objects, and as such, explores discourse as the interactive process of conveying ideas, as well as the substantive content of ideas, which can be cognitive or normative.

Others are sceptical of the causal power that is attributed to ideas. Jacobsen (1995), in his review of the work on ideational power, sees interests and ideas as interpenetrated, and argues that ideas do not have a force of their own independent of the interests which vest them with material power. Campbell (2002:34) agrees that the pitfalls of the idealist versus materialist debate of the nature of public policy making can be avoided by paying attention to how ideas and interests interact. Indeed, ideational processes affect policy by affecting the way actors perceive their interests and the environment they find themselves in (Béland 2009): ideas or ideational processes "construct" problems and issues that enter the policy agenda, they shape the assumptions underlying its content, and they could also become discursive weapons that participate in the construction of reform imperatives.

## 1.2 Definitional ambiguity of "idea" and "policy-making"

However, many works on the impact of ideas on policy-making fail to offer a definition for the core concept of "idea" (Drezner 2000; Goldstein 1989; Hart 2001; Skogstad 1998). Ideas have been used interchangeably with theory, ideologies, beliefs, models, perceptions (Laffey and Weldes 1997:197), world views, culture, societal script, norms, models, causal beliefs, frames (Bleich 2002), paradigms (Hall 1993), ideational processes (Béland 2009), analogies (Khong 1992) and so on. Some authors seem to be aware of this oversight and challenge, and resort to a carefully qualified use of the word within inverted commas/quotation marks (Goldstein 1989:33). Mostly though, authors deal with the concept of ideas in a summary one-line manner<sup>2</sup> (McNamara 1999:457) such as: "claims about descriptions of the world, causal relationships, or the normative legitimacy of certain actions" (Béland 2009:702 citing Parsons 2002:48), and "mental constructions that encapsulate common beliefs and valued norms, for example about the economy and polity and the role of the individual within them" (Skogstad 1998:464). These seemingly simplified definitions have their merits when one considers the few authors who, in their attempt to show the range of ideational objects, provided multiple overlapping and diffusive definitions. Odell is a fine example with his references to "innovation in economic and political science, the spread of ideologies, the circulation of schools of thought..., and changes in the perceptions of specific situations, ...the intellectual idiosyncrasies of individual leaders" (Laffey and Weldes 1997:197 citing Odell 1982:363).

Only very few works have turned their attention rightfully to the question of what exactly the "idea" in ideational power analyses really is (Blyth 1997; Jacobsen 1995). Laffey and Weldes (1997:197) rightly point out that the equation of ideas with various different terms and concepts

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<sup>2</sup> Despite repeated use of the word "idea", the only line which comes close to a definition is: "Ideas...do not float freely however, they arise from actors' experiences with their environment and interactions with other actors, and they survive implementation into policy only if they are politically salient."

essentially posits that anything ideational is an idea, and more damningly fails to specify the relationship between the various concepts. Yee (1996:69f) suggests that the definitional ambiguity can be overcome by differentiating ideas according to levels of generality and their possession by different relevant social entities. Attempts at typologies by Goldstein and Keohane (1993a) and Campbell (1998) have risen in part to this challenge.

Goldstein and Keohane (1993a:7ff), who defined ideas as particular beliefs shared by large numbers of people which have implications for human action, introduced a three-tiered typology. World-views or conceptions of possibility are shared beliefs that define the universe of possibilities for action; examples include religions, conceptions of sovereignty, secular scientific premises. Then there are principled beliefs and normative ideas, which specify criteria for distinguishing right from wrong and unjust, and mediate between world views and policy conclusions by translating fundamental doctrines into guidance for human action (1993:9). Finally, causal beliefs or shared causal beliefs, beliefs about cause-effect relationships which derive authority from the shared consensus of recognised elites. Campbell's typology (1998) differs in that he differentiates between the positioning of the idea in the policy debate and whether it operates in a normative or cognitive level. He speaks of four types of ideas: programmes, frames, paradigms and public sentiments. Programmes and paradigms operate cognitively; the former are elite policy prescriptions that help policy-makers chart clear and specific courses of action, while the latter operate in the background of the debate as elite assumptions that constrain the cognitive range of useful solutions. Frames and public sentiments operate normatively; frames work in the foreground, as symbols and concepts that help policy-makers legitimise policy solutions to the public, while public sentiments lurk in the background as public assumptions that constrain the normative range of legitimate solutions available to the policy-makers (Campbell 1998:385).

What the typologies achieve is that they illustrate the one-line definitions by showing the range of conceptual objects that can be studied as ideas, as well as their cognitive or normative levels of operation. Simultaneously though, these typologies also point to the essentially inductive and attributive exercise that ideational analyses are. The typologies serve the purpose of understanding how ideas affect policy-making processes, and thus assume that ideas have causal effects. This implicit conceptualisation as objects, separation from interests as explanatory variables, and the definition as individual possessions, beliefs or shared beliefs can be seen as supporting the argument that "ideas" are not the alternative to the dominant rationalist perspective (Laffey and Weldes 1997: 194).

Given the ambiguity of the term idea, it is unsurprising that some authors skip over the problematic "idea" and refer to "ideational factors" which are "widely-shared inter-subjective beliefs that are not reducible to individuals, and these inter-subjective beliefs construct interests and identities of actors" (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001:393 citing Adler 1997, Ruggie 1998, and Wendt 1999). Others argue that it is more useful to conceptualise all the phenomena labelled as "ideas" as symbolic technologies (Laffey and Weldes 1997:184 citing Greenblatt 1991:12). Still, the open question will not rest, especially as ideas are used to explicate other concepts. For instance, Wendt (1998) saw identity as being constituted by external and internal ideas. In this sense, the typologies attempted by Goldstein and Keohane (1997) and Campbell (1998) have been helpful in showing how to operationalise ideational analyses.

A brief summary of the academic discussion on the definition of an "idea" is that the definitional ambiguities stem from the diversity of terms and concepts in use, and except typologies, the relationship between the concepts is unclear. Attempts to reduce the definitional ambiguity have seen the introduction of typologies. On a deeper level, when the "idea" is conceptualised as an object, a causal effect, which is distinct and separate from that of other explanatory variables, is presumed. This assumption has repercussions for research methods and analysis, and will be discussed below.

The other definitional ambiguity pertains to "policy-making". Authors have not always busied themselves with the theoretical definition or delineation of the aspect or phase of policy-making they are interested in; the works tend to refer broadly to "policy" even if one specific policy outcome was the subject of study, be it European agricultural policy (Goldstein 1989; Skogstad 1998), social policy (Béland 2005), foreign policy (Drezner 2000), or economic policy (McNamara 1999). As one of the exceptions, Hall (1993:278) considers policy-making as a process consisting of three variables: the overarching goals which guide policy, the techniques used to attain the goals, and the precise setting of instruments. Yee thus pointed out that the imprecise specification was encumbering further research (1996:69); he suggested that policy resultants can be differentiated according to the stages in the policy-making process: preference, choice, enactment, and implementation. Reis (2012) delved deeper and questioned the very conceptualisation of policy-making: ought policy-making be viewed as problem-solving or policy practice? She also questions the concept of the state that is so central to most policy analysis work, which has been conducted in the occidental democratic context. The conceptualisation of "policy-making" is more than just a theoretical issue; it is vital to the operationalisation of the research. The term in itself appears to exclude policy outcomes, and policy evaluation, yet in the data used for studying the effect of ideas, the authors have drawn heavily from policy outcomes. This is probably necessarily so since analyses of ideational power are *ex ante*. In fact, Hall's definition makes more sense than Yee's pragmatic approach, for the non-linearity of policy-making certainly poses a challenge to the clear-cut differentiation between "phases". Unsurprisingly then, in his study of American antitrust policy, Hart (2001) considered the entire gamut: policy debates, institutions involved in agenda-setting and decision-making, policy decisions themselves, and speculative impacts of the decisions on technological developments.

### **1.3 Operationalising research on ideational power**

The core theme of analyses is often not the idea itself, but ideational power. In their bid to understand political changes by analysing the effects of ideas, the scholars actually deal rather summarily with the concept of ideas. They provide working definitions, but the concept of "idea" remains slippery, since its definition is a net that can be loosened or tightened depending on the author's theoretical preferences. One author's "idea" is not necessarily another's. Blyth (1997) opines that the turn to ideas is "theoretically degenerate" since ideas are catch-all concepts that explain variance, rather than subjects in their own right. Further, most authors do not demonstrate how they had identified the very ideas whose effects they purported to be studying. Who looked where to find and define the "idea", re- or paraphrases it into an ideational object? The analyses are inductive; it often appears that the authors have pre-identified or predefined ideas and possible influenced policy outcomes, and find these in the policy-making processes in order to demonstrate and elaborate the concept of ideational power or causal linkages. How do imposed categories affect analytical utility? This paper submits that the academic debate over causation and causal linkages has remarkably neglected to observe that the inductive method precludes proving causation via falsification, because one will find what one found. In this sense, the body of literature is ontologically weak. Ideas in themselves are uninteresting; it is political change that warrants an investigation into potential candidate ideas. While typologies exist, they serve the purpose of understanding the effects or potential power of ideas, rather than what ideas are.

Thus, this paper proposes to shift the attention from causal mechanisms to ideas instead in its operationalisation of "ideational power" in analysing the Vietnamese socio-economic development policies and planning apparatus. This requires firstly, the "idea" to be located and identified, and secondly, the "policy-making" process and the elements to be studied, to be defined and justified. Working definitions are thus indispensable, and a precursor to the conceptualisation of how ideas affect the policy-making process. Goldstein and Keohane's one-line definition could be said to be

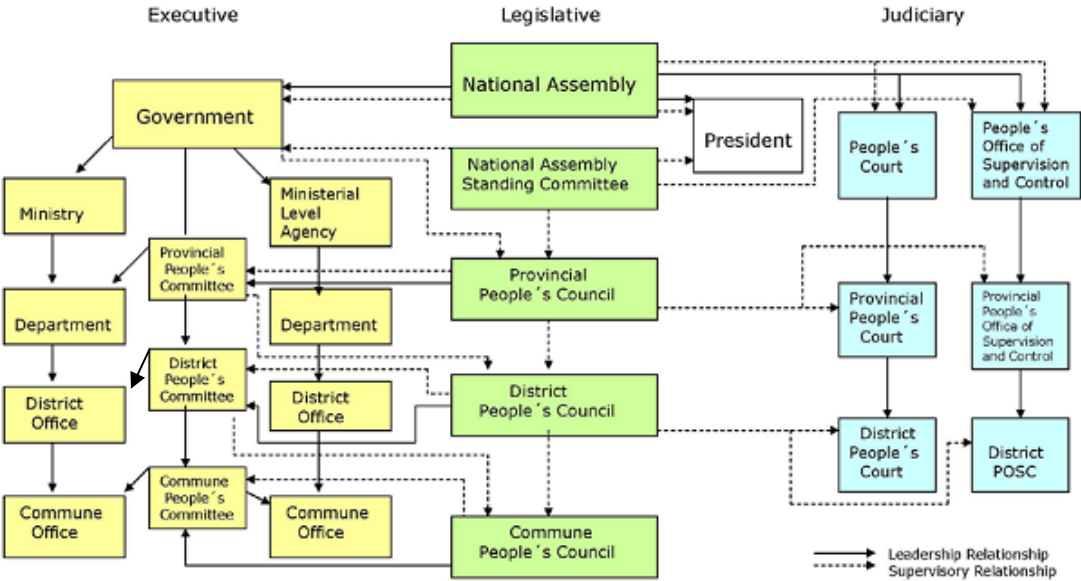
based on the common denominator of various definitions: "particular beliefs shared by large numbers of people" (1993:7). Perhaps it is so that an "idea" that has not been differentiated based on its nature, its effect and its plane of operation also loses its analytical utility, but this paper does not propose to already typify the idea that will be identified. Instead, this is a first and exploratory application of "ideational power" to a social planning system and its socio-economic development plans; the value of a typology is acknowledged in that it could explain or provide alternative explanations of implementation-related issues in Vietnamese socio-economic development planning (See Section 4). The "idea" will be traced through a content analysis of the socio-economic development policy documents between 2006 and 2010, which are outcomes of the policy-making process, because they are the culmination of the clash of ideas that have been debated during that process. The idea in the policy document is the dominant idea that has won out, the one with more impact. Also, the institutional set up of policy-making in Vietnam – the institutions involved in agenda-setting and decision-making – is an important element of this analysis, because the "idea" circulated, thrived and survived through and in this context. The content analysis of the Vietnamese socio-economic development plans confirms the hunch that "industrialisation and modernisation by 2020" is a core "idea", and the summary institutional analysis shows that ideas can be embedded through the institutions.

## 2 The Vietnamese development planning apparatus

The Vietnamese have two words for the word “plan”: *quy hoạch* and *kế hoạch*. English translations can be confounding, as the former could be translated as “planning” (Nguyen Luong Ngoc et al. 2010b) while the latter is translated as “plan” or “detailed plan” even when details are lacking. Generally, the *quy hoạch* appears to reference a longer-term perspective and contains lesser details than the *kế hoạch*<sup>3</sup>. Thus seen, the *quy hoạch* could be considered the predecessor of the *kế hoạch*. Unfortunately, the terminological array does not end there: *chiến lược* meaning strategy (Nguyen Luong Ngoc et al. 2010a), *phương hướng*, meaning orientation, are also common parlance. This differentiated understanding of the word “plan” is emblematic of the policy-making apparatus in Vietnam, where planning has been a tool for the central government to regulate and steer the socio-economic development in the past four decades (Forsberg 2007). This Section aims to provide an overview of the institutional set-up, as a basis for the next section which performs a content analysis of the planning documents resulting from this set-up.

### 2.1 The Vietnamese state set-up

Figure 1: Set-up of the Vietnamese political system based on its constitutional document



Source: (G. Waibel 2010:12)

Vietnam is a one-party and tricameral state, and the Communist Party of Vietnam (“CPV”), as the ideological leadership, provides the policy impulses alongside the National Assembly. The CPV, or rather, its Central Committee, convenes once in five years at the Congress to decide on the development vision of the nation, and set out policy goals and principles. The legislative branch comprises of the National Assembly (“NA”) and its Standing Committee. The NA also makes policy, by approving plans and budgets, and supervising its implementation. Representatives and members of the NA are brought together biannually for legislative duties. The executive branch consists of the Government, its Ministries and Ministerial line agencies, while the People’s Court and the People’s Office of Supervision and control make up the judicial branch in Vietnam. This tricameral

<sup>3</sup> However, five-year socio-economic development plans are also referred to as *ke hoạch* as annual plans are, despite the former’s longer time-span.

arrangement is mirrored through the administrative levels of province, district, and commune<sup>4</sup>. Figure 1 provides a graphical representation, in which the horizontal and vertical linkages of each organisation unit are obvious. For instance, a Department at the provincial level reports to both the Ministry above it, and the Provincial People’s Committee. Additionally, though not part of the formally described state apparatus, the Fatherland Front, an umbrella organisation of mass organisations, has close links to the Party. These mass organisations work on behalf of the government and mobilise their members to disseminate information and implement national and local programmes (G. Waibel 2010:11-13).

## 2.2 The plethora of development planning documents

Socio-economic development policy documents vary in their temporal and geographical reach. Table 1 provides a list of all these policy documents in a chronology that largely reflects their hierarchy.

Table 1: Types of socio-economic development planning documents in the period 2006-2010

Planning document	Characteristics	Approving body	Drafting body	Example
Ten-Year Socio-economic development strategy	National, 10-year. States political vision for long-term development. Sets priorities for national, sectoral and regional development.	Communist Party of Vietnam	Development Strategy Institute of the Ministry of Planning and Investment	Socio-economic development strategy 2001-2010
Five-year socio-economic development plan	National, 5-year. Concretises the development strategy and sectoral master plans	National Assembly	Ministry of Planning and Investment	Socio-economic development plan 2001-2005, 2006-2010
Sectoral socio-economic development strategy	Sectoral, long-term. Sets target programs for regions.	Prime Minister	Sectoral Department of the Ministry of Planning and Investment working together with relevant sectoral ministry	Strategy on development of Vietnam’s service sector through 2020; Strategy on environmental protection till 2010 with orientation towards 2020
Regional socio-economic development plan, “master plans”	Regional or sectoral, long-term. Sets target programs for regions.	Prime Minister	Planned and coordinated by MPI working together with relevant Ministries	Master plan of socio-economic development in the Mekong Delta until 2010, Socio-economic development plan in the Mekong Delta in the 2001-2005 period
Annual socio-economic development plan	National, annual.	National Assembly	Ministry of Planning and Investment	Socio-economic development plan 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010
Provincial socio-economic development plan, also “master plan”	Provincial, 10-year. Sets target programs for provinces	Prime Minister	Department of Local and Regional Economy of the Ministry of Planning and Investment	Master plan on socio-economic development of Can Tho City in the 2006-2020 period, Master plan on socio-economic development of An Giang province up to 2020

Design by author. Source: (Central Committee CPV 2001; Forsberg 2007:99-105; Government of Vietnam 2006; National Assembly 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2009; Prime Minister 1998, 2001, 2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2011)

<sup>4</sup> In urban districts, the administrative unit below the district is the ward.

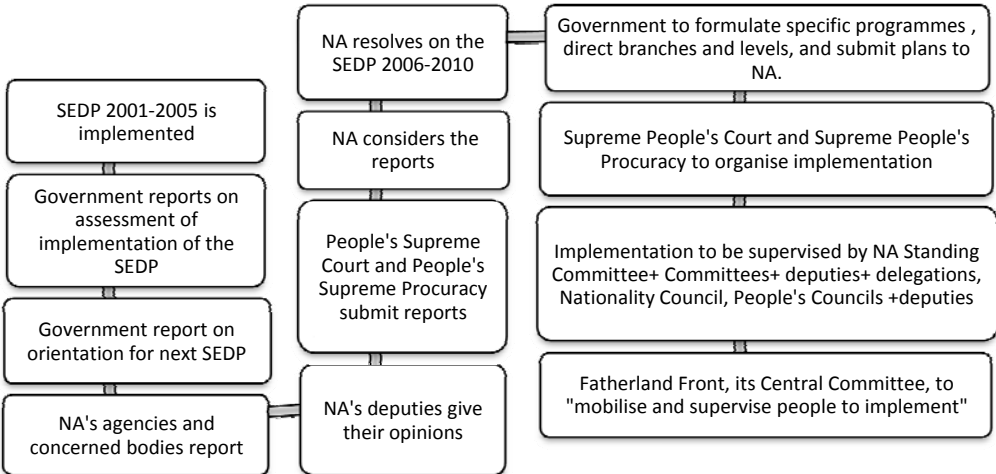


The plan that could be considered to be the blueprint is the socio-economic development strategy (SEDS), a ten-year plan which lays down in broad strokes the direction for the Vietnamese nation. This SEDS originates from the ideological leadership, the Communist Party of Vietnam, whose Central Committee convenes once in five years at the National Congress. Thus, at every alternate congress, the Communist Party votes upon and passes the SEDS. This strategy paper is seen as the embodiment of the party's political vision. The second-level plans come from the government: the Standing Committee of the National Assembly that convenes biannually fleshes out the SEDS in a five-year socio-economic development plan (SEDP); this same agency also elaborates the annual socio-economic development plans, which they vote upon at the end of each year. Regional development plans tune the objectives of the SEDS and SEDP to the conditions of the regions in Vietnam, while sectoral development plans set down sector-specific objectives to be implemented by the sectoral ministries. Finally, at the sub-national level, line ministries have sectoral development plans, and provincial People's Committees – the highest executive body in the local government system – draw up long-term and annual plans for socio-economic development.

### 2.3 Development planning and the planners

The life cycle of a socio-economic development plan can be considered as comprising the stages of implementation, supervision, assessment, preparation, resolution and organisation. This classification is based on the process-descriptive lines in the socio-development plans, as presented schematically in Figure 2. In the case of the five-year SEDP, the National Assembly is presented as the body-in-charge. Its Standing Committee considers reports on the implementation of the previous SEDP and the new draft SEDP before approving it<sup>5</sup>. Then, it delegates the organisation of implementation to the government while retaining supervisory functions over the implementation process itself, although it is the government that is in charge of the monitoring process. This is the official picture, as outlined in the SEDP 2006-2010.

Figure 2: Socio-economic policy elaboration in Vietnam on the example of the Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010

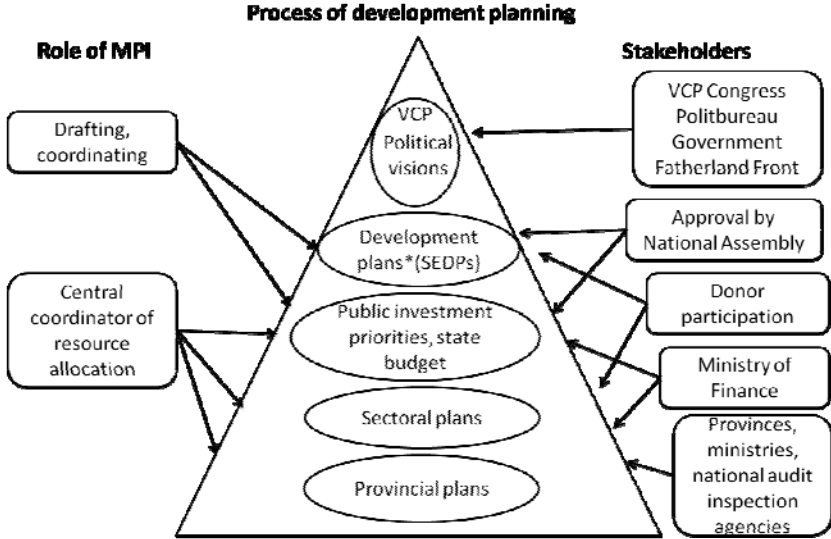


Source: SEDP 2006-2010, preamble and last paragraph; design by author

<sup>5</sup> This process is listed in the preamble of Resolution 36/2009/QH12 of the National Assembly dated 06-Nov-2009 on the 2010 Socioeconomic Development Plan.

But a description of policy-making per distinct temporal stages and per monolithic entities oversimplifies the structure and operations of the Vietnamese government (Shanks et al. 2004), and also obscures the role of third party entities that the government consults and receives help from. Firstly, the government is not organised in a top-down hierarchy. Each body has vertical and horizontal reporting obligations (Shanks et al. 2004) that cannot be adequately presented in charts or diagrams, which tend towards a vertical portrayal of mechanisms. Nonetheless, this paper wagers another attempt at a schematic representation in Figure 3, used by Forsberg in her work on the institutional determinants of development planning in Vietnam. Vertical top-down relations pertain mainly to the planning documents, while the organisational actors (labelled “stakeholders” in Figure 3) have their hands in different pots simultaneously. Additionally, Figure 3 also shows the central role played by the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) (to the left of the diagram). The MPI is the master planner and it is also the entity that drafts all the planning documents. In Table 1 on page 12, the MPI’s leading role in agenda-setting through drafting is obvious. Forsberg, the only scholar who has closely examined the Vietnamese socio-economic development planning processes so far, observed and recorded that, where the provincial and sectoral plans are concerned, the responsible departments in the MPI can even push their will through despite and against that of the sectoral ministries, unfortunately to the detriment of sectors such as health, education, elderly care and environment which receive little attention at these high levels of policy-making (Forsberg 2007:104).

Figure 3: The overall structure of the development planning process



Source: Forsberg 2007:103

Thirdly, the agenda-setting process is influenced by third parties who are active and close dialogue partners of the Vietnamese policy-makers particularly in the themes they have identified for funding. Forsberg (2007) considered the SEDP 2006-2010 as reflecting donors' influence on domestic politics. Other scholars are more sceptical about the role of official development aid (Edgren 2001; McCarty 2005). Still, at least officially the third parties appear to be very active. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) financed a series of studies to support the Government of Vietnam in its preparations for the formulation of the SEDS 2011-2020 (Coxhead et al. 2010b; Coxhead et al. 2010a; Kirkpatrick et al. 2010), and the Asian Development Bank also provided technical assistance<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This technical assistance project (TA-7725 VIE: Support for the preparation and implementation of the results-based socioeconomic development plan 2011-2015) was worth USD 1.3 million and was premised on the

for the preparation and implementation of the results-based socio-economic development plan 2011-2015 (ADB 2010a). Civil society organisations do not appear to exercise influence in the Vietnamese socio-economic development planning process (Kerkvliet et al. 2008:28ff).

Finally, however, the combination of some of these points here can only lead to more questions. If every department has horizontal and vertical reporting obligations and policy-making is not top-down, how is the predominance of the MPI to be understood? Provincial authorities have to convince the MPI that their projects are worthy for financing (Nguyen Mai 2006), and the positioning of the MPI at the centre of the “ask and give” system means that there is a passive dependence on MPI, but the lack of transparency and the existence of informal rules renders an exact delineation of the processes difficult (Forsberg 2007:113). This might seem an irrelevant quest for those who have argued that the planning mechanism in Vietnam is a structural relic from the command economy days (Coulthart et al. 2008). Also, as this paper later argues, the ideas and concepts contained in the higher-level policy documents can be reinforced through these processual mechanisms unique to the Vietnamese policy-planning apparatus, to shape the cognitive frameworks of those implementing the policies.

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assumption that clear and realistic indicators and measurements, in other words a “sound monitoring and evaluation system”, are necessary to successfully implement the SEDP (see page 14).

### 3 Tracing the “idea” in the Vietnamese vision of development

The purpose of this content analysis is to distil how the Vietnamese government envisages socio-economic development, notably, the underlying “idea”, as captured in the final drafts of the policy-making process. National policy documents from the period 2006 to 2010 will be used. While policy debate documents would be a richer supplement, they appear to be accessible only to those privy or internal to policy-making circles, and are only available in Vietnamese. This content analysis is thus textual and less “interpretational”.

#### 3.1 Socio-economic development strategy 2001-2010

The ten-year socio-economic development strategy (SEDS), issued by the CPV isn't a “government” document in the sense that it defies the tripartite categories of legislative, executive and administrative. But, it clearly functions as a boundary marker since it provides guidelines for all related government planning documents. The SEDS has eight sections. It begins with a recitation of the “situation of the country and international context” before going on to discuss the “strategic goals and the development approach”. This is followed by the “sectoral and regional economic development orientations”. Thematic issues are addressed subsequently: synchronised formation of institutions of the socialist-oriented market economy, development of education and training and science and technology, cultural and social development, and the acceleration of administrative reform as well as building of a clean and strong state apparatus. The strategy ends with a section on the organisation of strategy implementation.

“Industrialisation and modernisation by 2020” is the *leitmotif* of the SEDS 2001-2010<sup>7</sup>. The first of thirteen references is to be found already in its preamble: a clear statement that its purpose is to define the strategy for “accelerated industrialisation and modernisation along the socialist line, laying the foundations for ours to become by 2020 basically an industrialised country.” Reviewing the achievements of the past decade, the Communist Party concluded that “most of the main targets set by the 1991-2000 SEDS have been fulfilled ... and more conditions have been created for *accelerated industrialisation and modernisation*,...however, the recorded achievements and progress are not enough for us to rise above the status of a poor and underdeveloped country...the economic restructuring geared at industrialisation, modernisation and production-market linkage has been slow” (Central Committee CPV 2001:3). Thus, looking ahead, the Communist Party aimed, with the SEDS 2001-2010, “to bring our country out of underdevelopment...[and] lay the foundations for making ours basically a modern-oriented industrialised country by 2020”. These statements highlight and bring to the fore, firstly, a focus on the need to industrialise fast, as an antidote to what is perceived as a lowly international status presumed to result from their poverty and underdevelopment, and secondly, the perception of economic restructuring, or “industrialisation” as panacea. These appear to be the assumptions underlying the revolution of the entire SEDS around the goal of “industrialisation and modernisation” (“I&M”).

The repetition of the statement of purpose of I&M could be interpreted in two ways: either it is the guiding principle on which objectives are based, or it could be serving a purpose other than goal definition. Consider the sectoral development orientation stated in the SEDS: “to speed up *agricultural and rural industrialisation and modernisation* geared towards forming large-scale commodity agriculture relevant to market demands and ecological conditions of individual regions, to transform the occupational and labour structures, and generate labour-intensive employment in

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<sup>7</sup> The Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2001-2010 was issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam at the 9th National Congress in April 2001, where the implementation of the SEDS 1991-2000 was reviewed and endorsed as well.

the countryside.” Paragraphs later, under regional development orientation, industrialisation is left to the urban regions “to promote the role of administrative, economic and cultural centres in each region and locality, move rapidly in the I&M process, strongly develop industry and services, and pioneering in developing a knowledge-based economy.” In both listed examples, I&M is the only part in the sentence that does not actually communicate what the drafting body envisages as necessary actions, while clearly communicating that the ultimate goal for Vietnam is to be industrialised and modern. Thus seen, it is the red herring in the SEDS, which appears to be a mammoth document full of directions but hardly any specific measures to be taken. Recognising that “industrialisation” is both theory and goal is one way of reconciling these two perspectives.

This ambiguity of “industrialisation” as theory and goal is always present in the SEDS. As a theory, it is full of truisms which rationalise and justify industrial policy: undertaking to boost scientific and technological research would foster hi-tech industries and bring about modernisation. In the SEDS, the Communist Party elaborated on what they considered as “build[ing] the economic potentials and material-technical bases responsive to the I&M requirements”: socio-economic infrastructures, industries, including major production means industries, hi-tech industries, defence industries, a large-scale cash agriculture, basic services, scientific and technological potentials. The stated “means” here is unclearly differentiated from the “ends” sought, that of industrialisation. This tautology illustrates how industrialisation, as used in the SEDS, is simultaneously theory and goal. While the two are not mutually exclusive, the conflation of its two natures necessarily leads the Communist Party to conceive of an overwhelming role for industrial policy and a strong interventionist state. This has been confirmed empirically by other scholars (Wiemann et al. 2006).

It is the economic that takes actual precedence over the social in the “socio-economic” development strategy. The Communist Party’s prioritisation of economic goals over social goals can be seen in every section of the strategy document. In its statement of specific developmental goals, doubling the GDP is the first thing mentioned (Central Committee CPV 2001:6), followed by other economy-related objectives. The subsequent mention of the human development index fore-bodes what seems to be a penchant for percentile goals even with “social” goals<sup>8</sup>; whether the listing of percentages or indicators really aids monitoring, and evaluation purposes is unclear (ADB 2010b).

Similarly, the “development approaches” identified by the SEDS are: “to ensure rapid, efficient and sustainable development, economic growth is to go along with social progress and equity, and environmental protection”, and “to consider economic development the central task, and the synchronised laying of foundations for an industrialised country an urgent requirement”<sup>9</sup>. Over three pages, only two paragraphs address human-oriented development and the environment. This observation illustrates the fundamental tension between sustainability and rapidity of development: one of the two has to give. In the case of this SEDS, the choice appears to have been speed rather than sustainability. Could it be that there is an assumption that economic transformation will have positive social spill-over effects? Of the four thematic issues addressed in this SEDS, cultural and social development<sup>10</sup> is also, formally seen, an issue of last priority in a 32-page long document.

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<sup>8</sup> The SEDS 2001-2010 states on page 6: “Population rate to have dropped to 1.1-1.2% by 2010...to reduce urban unemployment rate to below 5%...increase utilised worktime in rural areas to about 80-85%...raise trained labour ratio to around 40%...reduce under-five child malnutrition to around 20%...increase average life expectancy to 71 years.” These numerical targets are repeated in the annual SEDPs.

<sup>9</sup> The other three subsequent sub-headings are: “to step up the renewal process, generate a driving force for releasing and promoting all resources”; “to closely link building of an independent and autonomous economy with proactive international economic integration”; and “to closely combine socio-economic development with defence and security” (Page 8 and following)

<sup>10</sup> In the SEDS, issues that were listed under the section on cultural and social development (pp 27, 29) include: population and employment; hunger eradication and poverty alleviation; development of healthcare and protection for people; and the fight against social vices and AIDS.

Finally, the prioritisation of the economic over the social can also be observed even in non-economic objectives. Consider this: “to increase rapidly endogenous capacities in science and technology, to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training to meet the requirements of industrialisation and modernisation” (Central Committee CPV 2001:7). This formulation allows the inference that education is perceived as serving the economy and the goals of I&M. In form and in substance, socio-economic development as conceived by the ideological leaders of Vietnam<sup>11</sup> is mostly equated with economic development.

## 3.2 Socio-economic development plan 2006-2010

The five-year SEDP is, to begin with, only a fifth the length of the SEDS, and consists of three main sections. The “overall objectives” are listed in one paragraph, and followed by numerical targets for the economy, the social and the environment. This is followed by the “tasks and major solutions” which makes up the bulk of the document that ends with the “organisation of implementation”.

The *leitmotif* of I&M has been retained, as has been its tautological usage. Despite a much lower frequency of use, the substance of the SEDP is heavily oriented towards economic restructuring and “modernising”. Explicitly human-oriented development tasks – such as poverty reduction, healthcare, women’s rights – are only mentioned after a recitation of nine other economy-oriented tasks. But the explicit uses of I&M offer some insight. A prime example is that of one of the overall objectives of the SEDP 2006-2010, which is “to speed up industrialisation and modernisation and develop a knowledge-based economy, laying foundations for making our country a fundamentally industrial country along the direction of modernisation by 2020.” Firstly, it is worth mooting why the ultimate goal is not more people- or society-oriented. This is most probably due to the fact that the five-year SEDP is a concrete action plan based on the SEDS, and that it is the MPI – albeit different departments – which drafts both the SEDS and the SEDP<sup>12</sup>. Secondly, tautology aside, when the goal is being a fundamentally industrialised and modern country, the utility or sense of any planned measure that seeks to facilitate or “speed up industrialisation” and the focus on the economy instead of its human components unquestionable is rendered almost un-challengeable<sup>13</sup>. Perhaps then, the tautological use of I&M serves as insulation for the measures planned and executed in its name in the SEDP 2006-2010 from critical scrutiny.

The focus of the SEDP is on fast and faster economic growth. Of the fifteen tasks described, seven are explicitly about the economy, and these are listed first. Even where the identified development task explicitly addresses a social issue, it is brought back to the aim of industrialising. For instance, the eighth major task points to the need to “prioritise the development of education and job training and ensure a rational human resource structure”, but this is to “[meet] the requirement of serving the national industrialisation and modernisation”. The stylisation of this five-year SEDP lays open if human-oriented objectives – such as the narrowing of development gaps between the urban and rural areas and the need for improvements in environmental protection – are development goals in themselves, or merely seen as the accrued negative externalities of prior

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<sup>11</sup> While the SEDS technically originates from the Central Committee of the Vietnam Communist Party, Table 1 on page 12 shows that the Development Strategy Institute of the Ministry of Planning and Investment is actually the body in charge of drafting.

<sup>12</sup> See Section 2, Table 1.

<sup>13</sup> To give an example, this appears to be the case for industrial zones, where too many have been planned and are not actually succeeding at attracting investment or generating the promised employment. And yet, the Vietnamese government persists in giving its approval for even more industrial zones. This statement is based on preliminary findings from a field research stay in the Mekong Delta looking at wastewater management in industrial zones, conducted between May 2011 and March 2012.

economic growth which need to be addressed. The priority certainly appears low: although the rights of women and children are explicitly addressed in this SEDP, nothing is mentioned of these goals or tasks in the subsequent annual SEDPs which are supposed to be based on the 5-year plan. In comparison, every annual SEDP steadily defines as major tasks the following: accelerating the growth rate, improving the business environment, reforming financial and monetary policies, improving defence and security, *etc.* While these criticisms might be seen as unsubstantiated by evidence of positive human development in terms of infant mortality or poverty reduction; this paper's conclusion that "the social" does not have precedence in the Vietnamese government's socio-economic development vision limits itself to the articulation of goals in policy documents.

There is thus a potential contradiction between the pursuit of economic growth with the commitment to sustainable development. The SEDP states that one of its overall objectives is to "raise the efficiency and sustainability of development," and to that extent there are numerical targets to achieve with regard to the environment: increasing forest coverage, clean water supply, rate of production enterprises that apply clean technologies or pollution-reducing and waste treatment equipment, the rate of enterprises that reach environmental standard, *etc.* After this initial mention of the environment, it is not until much later that there is a five-line tribute<sup>14</sup>, and nowhere again are the environment and the integration of environmental concerns with socio-economic development – the core of sustainable development – mentioned. After this mention here, the Agenda 21 is also never referred to in any of the subsequent annual SEDPs. This neglect of environmental concerns is not unique to Vietnam, and is rather generally characteristic of the development pathways of industrialised nations. What differs is the stage at which the concept of sustainable development appeared in the Vietnamese industrialisation process. The Vietnamese government has now come up with a list of norms and indicators within the framework of the new Sustainable Development Strategy, which was unveiled this year (Huong Giang 2012). Reis (2012) has confirmed that global policy ideas shape policy practices in Vietnam, albeit only formally, because her study of rural water supply and sanitation practices shows that what policy does is influenced by monetary resources in the policy arena, rather than external ideas. Thus, the Vietnamese government has a certain level of sophistry or even "openness" in adoption of current development concepts.

Finally, certain expressions invite speculation about the nature and efficacy of planning. The curious adverb "rationally" appears at various points: "to rationally increase the powers of district-level courts", "to rationally distribute population among regions"<sup>15</sup>, and "to rationally develop and step up socialisation, standardisation and modernisation in order to raise quality of education"<sup>16</sup>. It is unclear if this is a critique of the organisation of implementation of the annual SEDPs or the actual implementing policies and measures of the various Ministries. The instructions from the Prime Minister on the drafting of the SEDP contained no references to irrational allocation and uses of resources (Prime Minister 2004).

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<sup>14</sup> Point 9 of 15 points states: "To harmonize socio-economic development with a rational and efficient use of natural resources, environmental protection and improvement; to concentrate on redressing environmental pollution in industrial parks, residential areas, craft villages, and large cities; to raise effectiveness of state administration of environmental protection. To realise the sustainable develop strategy in Vietnam. To organise the implementation of Agenda 21 on sustainable development at all levels and in all branches." The SEDS 2001-2010 also referred to Agenda 21, a non-binding resolution passed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where the participant states pledged to take action for sustainable development.

<sup>15</sup> Point 10 in SEDP 2006-2010

<sup>16</sup> Point 8 in SEDP 2006-2010

### 3.3 Annual socio-economic development plans from 2007-2010

The annual socio-economic development plans share a common structure, and even the contents are similar but for the reshuffling of different texts and the adjustment of numerical targets. In the statement of overall objectives in the four SEDPs, acceleration of economic growth rates, international economic integration (in preparation for and post-accession to the World Trade Organisation), defence and security, and administrative reforms form the crux of the matter. The first half of the “major tasks and solutions” identified in the SEDPs also listed economic reforms or reforms linked to the achievement of a “market economy with socialist orientation”. When and where the focus seemed to shift to the environment or the social, the economy would be brought back in some way. This high degree of consistency in the contents of the annual SEDPs is unsurprising since they are based on the same blueprint documents: Thus, most of the observations previously made apply to the annual SEDPs as well. Still, the numerical targets are note-worthy.

The numerical targets common to all annual SEDPs are grouped as major economic targets, major environmental targets and major social targets. These appear at a fixed spot in the SEDPs, with slight variations in their magnitude from year to year. In a sense, this is the only policy tool discernible from these SEDPs, which, despite their limited temporal validity, do not elaborate the development goals or policy objectives with more concrete policy tools. Throughout the texts of the SEDPs, sentences begin with “to...” and never mention “by”. The step of elaboration falls within the implementation phase, which leaves the local authorities to devise plans for disbursing public investment towards achieving the given goals (Forsberg and Kokko 2007). While measurement and indicators enable progress-tracking and evaluation, they could also take on a life of their own, in that implementing agencies might be more concerned with meeting the targets<sup>17</sup> (UNIDO 2000). But the utility of numerical targets as a tool for measurement of progress is tied up with its purpose as goal-setter.

The fluctuation in the numerical targets leaves it open as to whether the targets are based on assessment of achievement or attempts to meet pre-set values. Nguyen Mai, former deputy chairman of Vietnam’s State Committee for Cooperation and Investment, pointedly suggested (2006:5) that the targets are not “firmly based on scientific and practical grounds”, and rhetorically asked if they were “merely subjective opinion and desire, or “necessity”, set before each Party Congress?”. This view does find support in this interpretation of the SEDP. Table 2 shows the environmental targets set out in the socio-economic developments plans between 2006 and 2010. Several things are worth noting. Firstly, even though the 5-year SEDP is the “higher-level” document that should be implemented through the annual SEDPs, some targets were not taken up in annual plans. These are “new establishments with pollution-reducing and waste treatment equipment”, “urban centres with waste treatment systems”, and “production and business enterprises meeting environmental standards”. This inconsistency might be hinting that targets are set because it seems they should be set. Such an interpretation finds support in the fact that environmental monitoring in Vietnam is nascent, and that the numerical targets fluctuate. Not only does the environment find its expression in numerical targets, its inherent value seems to depreciate when the economy is shaken up. Between 2008 and 2009, the target for increasing forest coverage dropped, but as the economy rebounded, this target went back up. The same goes for the collection and treatment of medical wastes as well as the installation of wastewater treatment plants in industrial zones and export

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<sup>17</sup> This has been noted by Edmund Malesky who designed the Provincial Competitiveness Index, who critically reflected on the power indices have as assessment tools of provincial governance, and how this changed the balance of bargaining power between provincial authorities and investors and business. See Edmund J. Malesky and Nina Merchant-Vega, 'A Peek under the Engine Hood: The Methodology of Subnational Economic Governance Indices', *Occasional Paper No. 5* (The Asia Foundation, 2011). Also, the UNIDO (2000: 54) observes in its report on rural industrial development that, “Planning consists of setting detailed production targets for different economic sectors but the particular measures or policies to be applied to achieve these targets are rarely specified. Success is measured in terms of how these production targets have been achieved.”



processing zones. Additionally, “hazardous waste collection and treatment” becomes an issue in 2008, but by 2010 it is no longer an environmental target. It seems implausible that the figures are based on assessments of progress, since they fluctuate, and newspaper reports also frequently paint a more drastic picture. Hence, the numerical targets are best considered sceptically.

Table 2: Environmental targets set out in SEDPs from 2006 to 2010

	SEDP 2006-10	SEDP 2007	SEDP 2008	SEDP 2009	SEDP 2010
Forest coverage	42-43%	39%	40%	39.8%	40%
Rural population with clean water	75%	67.2%	75%	79%	83%
Urban population with clean water	95%	80%	85%	85%	84%
New establishments with pollution-reducing and waste treatment equipment	100%	-	-	-	-
Production and business enterprises meeting environmental standards	>50%	-	-	-	-
Urban centres with wastewater treatment systems	100%	-	-	-	-
Clean up of establishments causing serious pollution	-	50%	60%	65%	70%
Industrial parks and zones with wastewater treatment systems	50%	-	60%	65%	45%
Solid waste collected and treated	80-90%	-	80%	82%	85%
Hazardous waste collected and treated	-	-	64%	65%	-
Medical waste collected and treated	100%	-	86%	75%	80%

Source: (Government of Vietnam 2006; National Assembly 2006a, 2007, 2008, 2009)  
“-” connotes that no numerical targets were given in the corresponding document.

### 3.4 Observations on the Vietnamese vision of development

First of all, it is important to note that the critical comments in Section 3.1 to 3.3 pertain to the discourse as represented in these socio-economic development planning documents. The discussions have generalised to present the gist of the development plans, but drew on specific examples to substantiate critiques; while the latter was necessary to hedge against unsupported statements, the former was needed as introduction. Moreover, this discussion focuses on rhetoric and semantic rather than actions. It is not to be excluded that implementing agencies or bodies have meaningfully fleshed out indicators in action plans. Nonetheless, the discourse presented in the planning documents allows several general observations to be made.

The Vietnamese vision of socio-economic development between 2006 and 2010 can be said to be characterised by an overwhelming focus on the economic and a corresponding neglect of the social and the environment. The development plans see such an effusive use of economic terms, that references to the environment or societal goals can be considered as “nods”: they need to be acknowledged but are not that urgent to command attention or a priority placement in the list of major development tasks. The social development tasks mentioned in the higher-level SEDP 2006-2010 were also no longer mentioned in the annual SEDPs. Thus, critically seen, the references to sustainable development could be considered lip service.

Thirdly, the socio-economic development plans are unmistakably technocratic. This is due to the centrality of the planning mechanism to the Vietnamese system and the equation of development with I&M. Where industrialisation is the light, the only lit path is that of economic reforms and

increase in industrial production or productivity. The technocratic tendency further manifests itself through the numerical targets, in both their prevalence and their ambiguity. However, the juxtaposition of planning and technocracy should not lead to the conclusion that the Vietnamese planning apparatus has been a careful engineer of the success hitherto. In this regard, Fforde has also noted that Vietnam's economic success cannot be attributed to policy rationalities (2009:91).

Finally, I&M – clearly a "particular belief shared by large numbers of people" (Goldstein and Keohane 1993:7) – takes on multiple roles in the Vietnamese vision of development. It has ideational power but also suffers from ambiguity. It was clearly the *leitmotif* of the SEDS, which might be considered a *quy hoach*, a plan with longer term view and less detail. But in the SEDP 2006-2010, which is a *ke hoach* (a detailed plan), it was no longer the 'star'. This difference could be that the call to I&M did not provide enough implementable detail, or more fundamentally, that none of the documents had ever attempted to define what industrialisation or a 'basically industrialised country' (Central Committee CPV 2001) might be. This ambiguity might be essential to insulating certain policy measures from scrutiny as long as its rationale is that of achieving industrialisation; this is certainly worthy of further research. Also, this author has previously suggested that its tautological use – industrial policy leads to industrialisation, and to industrialise necessitates industrial policy – shows that industrialisation is both a development goal and a theory of development in Vietnamese usage. Thus, as the title of this working paper suggests, the Vietnamese vision of development is embodied by the phrase I&M and is not to be dismissed as a slogan.

## 4 Ideas in the Vietnamese policy apparatus: implications for operationalisation

### 4.1 The instrumentality of law for policy-makers as causal mechanism

What escapes comprehension though are the mechanisms through which the ideational power of the concepts and goals in the SEDS and SEDPs are translated into policy actions. The quotation below features sentences uttered by an interviewee working in a provincial department of justice, and they reflect simultaneously the gist of each part of this paper: the top-down development policy-making mechanism, the heavy slant towards the economic in planning document contents and its reflection in implementation reality, and the instrumentality of law in the lack of distinction between policy and law.

"Industrial development is very important and that is why the Vietnamese government has promulgated a system on agricultural and industrial development. Modernisation and industrialisation is the responsibility of the government. We must attract investment capital, and to do so, the Vietnamese government directs provinces to develop industrial zones and industrial parks. An Giang is one province in the Mekong Delta with a large natural area, and has more than two million people and 11 districts. To have a stable development, we must plan industrial zones and industrial parks. (...) To guarantee orientation, the government must promulgate a system of legal regulations." (*Opening sentences of an interviewee at a Department of Justice from the Mekong Delta, An Giang, 07 December 2011*)

Industrialisation is the crux of this quotation, but the more illuminating question is how the slogan-ideal-goal influences the local decision-making processes, particularly since it is not an interest as such but an idea.

"Students are taught that the most important functions of law is to manage the economy (*quan ly nha nuoc ve kinh te*). State economic management is regarded as part of a class revolution during the transition period to protect the working class from exploitative capitalism. To fulfil this task, the State employs 'plans' (*ke hoach*)..." (Bui Thi Bich Vien 2005:141).

"The underlying notion of law is not so much that of an immutable order to which all should bow, but rather that of an important element of the way in which the Party line is implemented" (Fforde 1986:62 cited in Nicholson 2005:174).

The development vision articulated and repeated in every SEDP is not merely a 'castle in the air', and this is due to the instrumentality of law in Vietnam. The policy objectives and approaches in the SEDPs do not function as guidelines, but are executed using the law by the Vietnamese state. At this point, it would do well to ask what "law" is. In her assessment of the proposed Vietnamese judicial reform, Nicholson argues that "in socialist states, law is traditionally seen instrumentally – it is the force that gives effect to party policy, whether that be through a legal instrument or policy" (2005:167). Policy is as significant as law and this relationship between law and policy causes tension because law is used interchangeably with policy (Nicholson 2005: 174) such that party officials are expected to implement both (Bui Thi Bich Vien 2005). This lack of a division between law and policy is evinced by the fact that policy documents are passed as resolutions, decisions, directions and are considered part of the system of legal documents (National Assembly 1996). The fluidity between policy and law is so institutionalised that Bui Thi Bich Vien (2005: 144) observes in her study of the Vietnamese legal education system that "for both law teachers and students, law is an integral part

of politics and the study of state and law is incomplete without referring to the Party's resolutions". Thus, returning to the two quotations above, that Vietnamese law students are told that the function of law is state economic management concurs with the earlier observation Section 2 that policy is overwhelmingly focused on the economic than the "social", because the law is used to implement the party line.

Given the fluid boundary between law and policy, the predominant focus on economic issues in the SEDPs could have also led to the marginalisation of non-economic topics in daily state management duties articulated by legal documents. Thematic reports by consultants point to the lack of integrated planning: the integration of environmental objectives is constrained by development priorities, such that the main documents on environmental protection do not authoritatively address the nexus between the environment and the economy and are not mainstreamed (Bass et al. 2010). The abundance of legislative action and secondary regulations intended to implement the laws on environmental protection has ironically thwarted the purpose, due to the contradictions and overlaps in the legislation (Nguyen Thi Phuong Loan 2010). Doberstein's work on environmental impact assessments demonstrates that the institutional context of development planning affects the efficacy of laws (2004). In the case of integrated water resources management, bureaucratic fragmentation and separatism, 'top-downism' negating multi-stakeholder participation, and the goal of rapid industrialisation and economic growth have led to the marginalization of environmental concerns in policies (Sajor and Nguyen Minh Thu 2009). Bach Tan Sinh (2004) notes that the decentralisation of decision-making to the local levels – under the rationale that local authorities know better about the eco-social needs of the locality – have actually led to counterproductive results, but he remains optimistic that sustainable development as a concept will gain more momentum. Moreover, not all economic issues received equal attention. While the private sector surged due to the implementation of the new Enterprise Law in 2000, reform of inefficient *state-owned* enterprises is still an issue, as is administrative reform (Vo Tri Thanh and Pham Hoang Ha 2004). All in all, the political will to achieve, or a lack thereof, as expressed by and in the policy documents, have their practical implications.

## **4.2 Challenges in operationalising ideational power in this study**

The first issue pertains to the empirical method. Why and how does it matter if it were deduction or induction through which the "idea" or "ideational object" was identified? What this paper shows is that an inductive process affects the strength of the argument of causality. The content analysis was a deductive practice, which looked at policy outcomes and not policy debates, on the basis that the policy outcomes present the dominant idea that had won out against competing ideas. But this content analysis was preceded by a hunch about the importance of I&M within the Vietnamese socio-economic development planning apparatus. Indeed, a hunch would certainly serve as a starting point for most studies on ideational power, even if it is not explicitly stated; although it could also be possible that some might have been true positivist and deductive exercises that determined an area of policy-making, identified the ideational debates and set out about falsification of hypotheses. But this question of whether it was induction or deduction matters because there is the danger that one finds what one wants to find. It also has implications for the arguments about causation and causal mechanisms: these are stronger when the failure of a competing paradigm can be shown.

The second issue relates to the non-linearity of policy-making, and its challenge for demonstrating causality. Section 3.1 began with a representation from the Vietnamese government of the life cycle of a policy document: "implementation, supervision, assessment, preparation, resolution and organisation". Policy-making is rarely a linear process, whether temporally or hierarchically. Even if it were as presented above, the question is where policy-making begins and ends. Implementation and supervision affect assessment, which in turn influences the preparation of

the next policy document. Perhaps ideational power would be easier to operationalise if the policy were not cyclical and recurring, but a one-off, path-breaking policy change; in the case of the Vietnamese socio-economic development policy, the problem of antecedent ideas poses a challenge to showing ideational power, and the analysis, in order to be convincing would have to go back to the start and cover all the policy cycles.

Moreover, the institutional analysis of the policy-making apparatus shows that exogenous elements can also exert ideational influences. So far, the literature has not considered the role of exogenous agents of ideational change. Third parties, such as donor agencies with the financial resources to support implementation measures, can also introduce ideas and through their implementation programmes 'fix' the ideas in the local political-ideational landscape. This can be observed in the case of industrial zones: Asian investors introduced and financed the first industrial zones, and now industrial zones as a means to speed up industrialisation have become a fixed and unquestioned part of the Vietnamese industrial policy (M. Waibel 2003). Similarly, the environmental impact assessment as introduced by donor and international agencies has been ideationally accepted, as exemplified by its incorporation into the law (Doberstein 2004). However, the reality of its implementation arguably shows the limitations of ideational analysis, particularly when implementation is not considered as part of "policy-making" for theoretical and operational clarity. In the case of international or donor agencies, an analysis of ideational power would also necessarily call into question and begin a debate about the influence of donors.

This leads to the fifth issue in operationalising ideational power, which is that of the interplay of power and interests (Béland 2009; Blyth 2003; Moe 2005). The complexity such an analysis introduces would also provide a more nuanced and improved understanding of the causal mechanisms through which ideational power functions, although it would also bring about a reconsideration of the centrality of the causal mechanism in this field of research. Certainly though, the degree of interpretation involved will be a difficulty.

### **4.3 The promise of ideational power analyses**

Despite these weaknesses in operationalising ideational power, this paper argues that ideational power can contribute to traditional perspectives on governance issues. For instance, capacity issues are often seen as a reason for weak implementation in Vietnam (AusAID 2001; Bass et al. 2010; World Bank 2010). Campbell (1998) has suggested that the influence of ideas depends on whether they are normative or cognitive, and whether they stand in the foreground or background of the debate; Table 3 summarises the four types of ideas. This typology could give insights into implementation issues. For instance, "programs" might better explain the insistence on continuing with the original or old action plan, while "paradigms" explain why changing the implementation strategy does not appear to be a possibility for the policy-makers. Frames could also have been utilised by the policy-makers to justify their inaction.

Also, the institutional analysis of the development planning apparatus in Vietnam provides some insights and directions for further research, which calls for a revised and widened understanding of ideational agency. Despite the pioneering work done by Forsberg (2007) which pointed to the MPI's dominance in the planning process, its role in designing and reinforcing the agenda needs further research. Its involvement in various stages would qualify it as an "epistemic community" (Haas 2001), and it could also be seen as an ideational agent. However, further research might fare better by avoiding such a literal understanding of ideational agency. In the reality of policy implementation, budget allocation and inflows of monetary resources could be stronger enabling or constraining factor (Reis 2012). The role of the Ministry of Finance, as the entity with the final say over budget allocations, is as interesting for research on ideational power. How does the state itself direct or influence implementation through the direction and injection of funds or other financial

instruments? For instance, tax breaks are provided for companies in provinces and districts with extremely difficult socio-economic conditions; this could certainly be seen as a tool of I&M. The relation between ideational power and the utilisation or allocation of resources to influence policy implementation could be explored.

Table 3: Types of ideas and their effects on policy-making

	Concepts and theories in the foreground of the policy debate	Underlying assumptions in the background of the policy debate
Cognitive level	PROGRAMS  Ideas as elite policy prescriptions that help policy makers to chart a clear and specific course of policy action	PARADIGMS  Ideas as elite assumptions that constrain the cognitive range of useful solutions available to policy makers
Normative level	FRAMES  Ideas as symbols and concepts that help policy makers to legitimise policy solutions to the public	PUBLIC SENTIMENTS  Ideas as public assumptions that constrain the normative range of legitimate solutions available to the policy makers

Source: (Campbell 1998:385)

Certainly this work gives a lot of agency to the governmental institutions, and ideas can be introduced or perpetuated by third parties. Wells-Dang (2011) has pointed out that civil society is active but its activity is not picked up by those external to the Vietnamese scene. Also, policy is fleshed out for actual implementation at the level of the local government, but the mechanisms of this process is still not well-understood. During her field research, this author observed that provincial implementation of industrial zone establishment went past that of what was centrally-approved. Industrial zones are a cornerstone of the I&M agenda, and some of the provincial governments accorded symbolic value to the establishment and existence of these zones. In the decentralisation drive in Vietnam, the provinces are given a certain amount of flexibility in “translating” and implementing national regulations, but why do some provinces subscribe more to the notion and mechanisms of planning, or the *motif* of I&M than others?

Last but not least, this paper has sought to apply ideational power analysis in the context of a socialist state. With the *Doi Moi*, the state sought to create a society ruled by law and proceeded to codify laws and regulations in earnest; but law in the Vietnamese context is not a higher authority than the state (Beresford 2006). In this respect, any further research applying ideational power to a socialist set-up or where the rule by law is really the “rule of law”, would do well to also consider the law in its institutional analysis. The law could be used as an ideational agent, by concretising ideas in words and giving it the appearance of legal, legitimate force.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has stemmed from an ongoing doctoral research project on wastewater management in the industrial zones of the Mekong Delta, where the centrality of planning and the ambiguity in implementation came to the fore. The turn to ideational power has brought attention to new aspects of Vietnamese development planning and implementation, and identified areas worthy of further research. But hitherto, the question of reconsidering the Vietnamese vision of socio-economic development as communicated by “industrialisation and modernisation” has remained unaddressed. The exposition on the contents of the socio-economic development plans in Section 3 cast an unflattering light, attributing to it the mixed characteristics of a tautology, theory plagued by truisms, and an ambiguity that could be insulating measures taken in its name from scrutiny. But this paper has also argued that it also functions as an ideational object.

The institutional set-up of Vietnamese socio-economic development planning shows that contradictory perceptions of hierarchical “top-downism” (G. Waibel et al. 2012:185) and dynamism (Shanks et al. 2004) co-exist. What is definite is that the planning process and hierarchy of documents mean that higher-tier planning documents such as the SEDS and SEDP pre-define contents of “implementing” documents. Socio-economic development is conceptualised and encapsulated in “industrialisation and modernisation”, a phrase which is transplanted, reproduced and transmitted through this institutional set-up, from the SEDS to an annual SEDP. It could be said that “industrialisation and modernisation” achieves a certain degree of ideational power in that it is always lingering somewhere as a rationale or context in one of the planning documents. The fluidity between law and policy in Vietnam might be viewed as another means of propagation. Scholars have previously pointed out that economic growth is the leading paradigm in Vietnam (Beresford 2006; Fforde 2009); this research takes this observation one step further with the attribution of cognitive power to what appears to be a nationalistic slogan. This postulates that it could be acting either as a guidance for policy-making prioritising industrialisation, or as a constraint in policy innovation and change. Thus, this paper concludes that “industrialisation and modernisation by 2020” is the slogan-like, simplistic yet also fitting expression of the Vietnamese vision of development, and it achieves a certain amount of ideational power through the set-up of the development planning apparatus as well as the lapse of policy into law.

The questions that follow are how it affected and affects policy-making. Does it function as a constraint in hindering the identification of other appropriate measures, or does it aid policy-makers in structuring action plans? Does it work as a symbol that helps policy-makers legitimise the undertaken policy measures, or is it a publicly-accepted and asserted norm that makes it difficult for policy-makers to consider other solutions (Campbell 1998:358)? Moreover, other concepts appear to have caught on in the Vietnamese policy-making circles. Development agencies promote “industrial clusters”, “export diversification”, “supporting industries”, “the knowledge economy”<sup>18</sup>, and in line with the commitment to sustainable development, the concepts of “clean production”, “green growth”, or “public-private partnerships”. Whether these ideas and concepts will be adsorbed or absorbed might be a question that could be illuminated by an historical or organisation institutional analysis of the role of the idea of “industrialisation and modernisation” in Vietnamese policy-making.

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<sup>18</sup> Vietnamese media frequently reports of new conferences and workshops where international organisations offer expert opinions on these issues.

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