



# A Study on Vietnamese Scholars' Cognition about Sino-Vietnamese Relations from the Journal "International Studies"

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**Abstract:** Economic globalization has a great impact on the diplomatic relations of countries in the world, and the "track II diplomacy" is playing an increasingly important role. Based on the important influence of Vietnamese scholars on the decision-making of the Vietnamese government, this paper uses the China-related papers included in the journal "International Studies" sponsored by Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam in 2013-2018 as research samples, and analyzes the Vietnamese scholars' cognition about Sino-Vietnamese relations from the perspectives of politics, economy, national defense, and strategy etc., thereby revealing the true mentality of Vietnam towards the development of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

**Keywords:** Vietnamese scholars; Sino-Vietnamese relations; Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam

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The scholars and retired officials who are the main participants of "track II" diplomacy often has a government background and they provide policy advice and intellectual support for the "track I" official cooperation between governments<sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore, the "track II" diplomacy is a supplement to the "track I" diplomacy and has a great influence on the government's decision-making. Research

conducted from the perspective of "track I" diplomacy often involves "public statements", while the perspective of "track II" diplomacy often involves "hidden views". Vietnamese scholars' understanding of China reflects the true attitude of Vietnam's "track II" diplomacy, and it also affects the decision-making and judgment behind the "track I" diplomacy of the Vietnamese government. Therefore, studying Vietnamese scholars' cognition about Sino-Vietnamese relations is helpful to understand how Vietnamese academic circles view China and the true thinking behind the official public statements of the Vietnamese government. It is conducive to providing a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of Sino-Vietnamese relations which is of important significance and practical value.

## 1 Research trends of Vietnamese scholars' cognition about Sino-Vietnamese relations

Most of the existing studies on Sino-Vietnamese relations are analyzed from the perspective of "track I" diplomacy between governments. They mainly study the diplomatic relations between China and Vietnam through analysis of leaders' public statements, government white papers, and high-level visits. Such a research perspective has its advantages, but it cannot fully and accurately reflect Sino-Vietnamese relations.

Currently, the related results of study on Vietnamese scholars' cognition about Sino-Vietnamese relations

from the perspective of “track II” diplomacy mainly include some academic papers and doctoral dissertations by Vietnamese scholars. Chinese scholars have not studied Vietnamese scholars’ cognition about Sino-Vietnamese relations from the perspective of “track II” diplomacy. Nguyen Hoai Thu's doctoral dissertation "Looking at the Great Power from the Edge: The Understanding of Sino-Vietnamese Relations in the Vietnamese Journal of China Studies" took research papers on Sino-Vietnamese relations published in 1995-2004 on the journal "Chinese Studies" sponsored by the Vietnam Institute of Chinese Studies of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences as research samples, and interviews with Vietnamese scholars engaged in Chinese studies were conducted to analyze Vietnamese scholars' understanding of Sino-Vietnam relations. The research objects of this dissertation were mainly focused on the views of Vietnamese scholars engaged in Chinese studies, and their attitudes towards China may be biased. Therefore, this dissertation cannot reflect the general views of Vietnamese scholars in the selection of research objects. In addition, Vietnamese scholar Hoang Tung Lan's academic paper "A Review of Research on China's Diplomacy in Vietnam: Focusing on the Research Results from 1993 to 2013" introduced Vietnam's research institutions and teams engaged in Chinese diplomacy research, and quantitatively analyzed the research results of academic journal papers, master and doctoral thesis, academic monographs and compilations on Chinese diplomacy and other related topics, and finally briefly explored the problems existing in the study of China's diplomacy in Vietnam. This paper is only part of the analysis on Vietnamese scholars' understanding of Sino-Vietnamese relations, and the analysis is not thorough enough.

To sum up, there are not many relevant studies on Vietnamese scholars’ understanding of Sino-Vietnamese relations. Some of the papers on this issue are just a macroscopic review of Vietnamese scholars’ research results on Sino-Vietnamese relations, and are not accurate and thorough in revealing Vietnamese scholars' understanding of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

## **2 Overview of the Journal of International Studies**

The think tank is an important platform which gath-

ering scholars and their opinions, and academic papers are the largest carriers that directly and comprehensively reflect the systematic views of the scholars. Therefore, this paper is dedicated to selecting a periodical published by a representative Vietnamese think tank to systematically analyze Vietnamese scholars' understanding of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

Think tanks are non-profit organizations that aim to study strategic issues and public policies, and provide advice on government policy formulation and social-economic development. In Vietnam, the concept of think tank is still very novel. Think tanks in Vietnam are divided into national research institutes and research institutes affiliated to various universities and research institutions in Vietnam. According to the data of the "2018 Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports" compiled by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) of the University of Pennsylvania in the United States, there are 11 think tanks in Vietnam. In the 2017 global think tank rankings, no Vietnamese think tank was on the list of the top 100 think tanks in the world. However, in the ranking of think tanks in Southeast Asia and the Pacific in 2017, five think tanks in Vietnam ranked in the top 100 in the region. Among them, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam is the only specialized foreign policy and international affairs think tank, and it is also the most authoritative think tank in the field of diplomacy and international relations in Vietnam.

Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam is located in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, directly under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is the only diplomatic education institution in Vietnam and the only training base for Vietnamese diplomatic and foreign affairs officials. The editorial board and consultants of the journal "International Studies" sponsored by the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam include officials from the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and officials and researchers from various universities and research institutes. The editorial board of the journal includes Dang Dinh Quy, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, Nguyen Vu Tung, the Dean of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, and Le Van Cuong, the former Dean of the Institute of Strategy and Science of the Ministry of Public Security of Vietnam. It also included the former Prime Minister of Vietnam Vu Khoan, and Dean of the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics

Nguyen Xuan Thang, and former deputy minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam Nguyen Tam Chien as consultants. Judging from the members of the editorial board and consultants of the journal, the journal "International Studies" is both official and social. The journal "International Studies" is the most authoritative core journal in the field of international relations and foreign policy in Vietnam. The choice of themes and content of the papers are relatively diverse and free. It reflects the mainstream views of Vietnamese academic circles and can reflect Vietnamese scholars' cognition about Sino-Vietnam relations more truly and comprehensively. Therefore, I chose the China-related papers included in the journal "International Studies" sponsored by the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam between 2013 and 2018 as the research samples, which is both authoritative and representative.

### **3 Viewing Vietnamese Scholars' Understanding of Sino-Vietnamese Relations from China-related Papers in the Journal "International Studies"**

A comprehensive analysis on China-related papers included in the journal of "International Studies" from 2013 to 2018 reveals that Vietnamese scholars' research on Sino-Vietnamese relations mainly focuses on politics, economy, national defense, and strategy. In terms of politics and economy, Vietnam needs to rely on China's support. In terms of national defense and security, it hopes that the United States will intervene to keep China in check. Therefore, strategically, Vietnam chooses to maintain a strategic balance between China and the United States, and always maintains the harmonious and stable development of Sino-Vietnamese relations for the benefits of Vietnam.

#### **3.1 The similar political systems of China and Vietnam promote the stability and long-term development of Sino-Vietnam relations**

Vietnam is a socialist country governed by the Communist Party. The state adopts the dictatorship of the proletariat, and it is a socialist republic. It implements the principle of "the Party's leadership, the State's management and the people's mastery". It can be seen that China and Vietnam share great similarities in their political systems. This similar political system also makes it easy for the

leaders of China and Vietnam to reach a political consensus, thus promoting the stability and long-term development of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

Due to the similarities in the political systems of China and Vietnam, China's ruling experience is of great reference to Vietnam. Just as the views of Dinh Cong Tuan, a scholar of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, and Nguyen Thi Que, a scholar of the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, China's new ideas and new measures to improve the Chinese Communist Party's governance and state management are valuable lessons for Vietnam, and they have provided inspirations to the formulation of Vietnamese national policies<sup>[2]</sup>. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, after a period of development and achievements in various socialist countries, they began to experience a similar "typical" crisis. Therefore, various socialist countries have set off a trend of reforms. According to their own characteristics and conditions, they have successively carried out "reorganization", "reform" and "renovation". Although the names of reforms are different, the essence is the same. After China made important achievements in reform and opening in 1978, Vietnam also implemented renovation policy in 1986, which freed Vietnam from isolation and closedness, improved Vietnam's international image, and promoted the development of Vietnam's economy. Facts have proved that China's governance and development experience is an important reference for Vietnam to explore a path suitable for its own development.

China's state governance is also an issue of great concern to Vietnamese scholars. "Governing the country according to law and building a socialist rule of law country" is the basic principle of China's governance of the country, which has also become a useful reference for Vietnam to build a socialist rule of law country. As Pham Van Duc, the Vice President of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences and the Chairman of the Communist Party Central Theoretical Committee Professor said: "In the process of building a socialist rule of law country, Vietnam should study and learn from other countries' progressive ideas and experiences on building a socialist rule of law country, and adapted it for Vietnam's national conditions."<sup>[3]</sup> The Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam held in April 2001 also proposed to "build a socialist rule of law country

under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam" and included it in the 2001 Vietnam Constitution Amendment. This shows that Vietnam is very concerned and good at absorbing China's useful experience in state governance and applying it to Vietnam's national governance practices.

In short, due to the similarity of the political systems between China and Vietnam, the two countries have similar and interlinked ideologies in many aspects of governance, and this similarity of political ideology is a driving factor for the stability and long-term development of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

### **3.2 Worries of economic dependence on China threatening Vietnam's national defense security**

Economic construction is the prerequisite for the prosperity of the country and the people, and it is also the material basis for ensuring the national defense security of any country. From an internal point of view, the economy is the support and basis for building a country's national defense, and provides material guarantees for the realization of national defense and military modernization. From an external point of view, the economy is of great significance for ensuring a country's national defense security and long-term stability. According to the view of Vietnamese scholars, from an internal point of view, the economic cooperation between China and Vietnam is beneficial to the development of Vietnam's domestic defense and army building, but from an external point of view, it is worried that economic dependence on China will be detrimental to Vietnam's national defense security.

Vietnamese scholars affirmed that since the normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1991, the cooperation between the two countries in trade, investment, tourism and other fields has achieved outstanding results and brought tangible benefits to the country and people of the two countries. However, Vietnamese scholars also believe that there are also many problems in the economic relations between China and Vietnam. These problems not only limit the development of the economic relations between the two countries, but also have a negative impact on Vietnam's national defense. They believe that the most prominent problem in the economic relations between China and Vietnam is Vietnam's perennial trade deficit and economic dependence on China,

this economic dependence is mainly manifested in the dependence on China's import and export market. First of all, in trading, Vietnam's import and export of agricultural products, textiles, leather, rubber and other major industries rely heavily on the Chinese market; secondly, in investment, Vietnam relies heavily on China in construction progress and technology for Vietnam-based projects where the general contractors are Chinese. Some Vietnamese scholars said that 80% of Vietnam's total economic output relies on China. According to international economic theory, if a country has 30% of its total economic output dependent on another country, it is economic dependent<sup>[4]</sup>.

It is precisely due to the severe economic dependence on China that Vietnamese scholars worry that such dependence will have an adverse effect on Vietnam's national defense security. Therefore, Vietnamese scholars proposed that Vietnam should take various measures to reduce its trade deficit as early as possible. First, Vietnam should expand trade cooperation with other neighboring countries; secondly, Vietnam should strengthen import management and tighten imports, especially small sum imports; thirdly, prohibit and limit the smuggling of goods between China and Vietnam to the greatest extent possible; and finally, strengthen the promotion of trade and investment, and develop information channels about the Chinese market and partners<sup>[5]</sup>. In addition, Vietnamese scholars generally believe that if Vietnam actively creates a good international environment and maintains Vietnam's domestic economic, political, and social stability, economic measures imposed by China on them can be avoided, thereby ensuring Vietnam's national defense security. It can be seen that under the extremely asymmetric economic and military aspects of China and Vietnam, Vietnam is worried about its national defense and security, worrying that it will be in a passive position on issues involving Vietnam's national interests because of its economic dependence on China.

### **3.3 U.S. intervention will not affect the general direction of development in Sino-Vietnamese relations**

After the Cold War, the United States withdrew its military bases in many areas, and only retains some military bases in Northeast Asia so far. Therefore, Vietnamese scholars believe that since the US military is almost absent in Southeast Asia, China

will have more opportunities to "call the shots" in the region. In this context, Southeast Asia has become an important area for competition between China and the United States.

Vietnamese scholars believe that the competition between China and the United States in Southeast Asia will continue. Through the Belt and Road Initiative and the building of sub-regional cooperation, China's influence in Southeast Asia continues to increase, which poses a threat to the United States' influence. The United States will take measures to actively respond and maintain its status as a world power<sup>[6]</sup>. In fact, to a certain extent, the intervention of the United States has indeed brought benefits to Vietnam. Most Vietnamese scholars believe that China and the United States need to win support from other countries in order to increase their influence in Southeast Asia. Therefore, they encourage ASEAN to play a central role in maintaining regional peace and stability. Neither the United States nor China hinders ASEAN and its member states from developing multilateral and diversified diplomatic relations. This has brought two benefits to Vietnam: On the one hand, it prevents small countries from being controlled by superpowers and reduces the possibility of China and the United States making the rights of small countries as part of a "deal"; on the other hand, this allows Vietnam to independently formulate policies, increase strategic value, and maintain a balanced relationship with the two major powers of China and the US.

In fact, Vietnam has cleverly used the conflicts between China and the United States to maintain a strategic balance between them to maximize its own interests. First of all, the competition between China and the United States has contributed to ASEAN's dominance in regional affairs, giving Vietnam a greater voice in diplomacy and greater autonomy in policy. Secondly, Vietnam hopes to keep China in check through the intervention of the United States. On certain issues, it believes that the US factor is a bargaining chip for realizing Vietnam's interests. Under the guidance of the superpowers balance strategy, Vietnam is good at finding a balance between China and the United States, avoiding "offending" either party that put Vietnam into a passive situation, and is good at using Japan, Russia, India and other countries to form a multi-party containment against China, thereby protect Vietnam's interests from being

harmed.

However, while the US intervention has brought benefits to Vietnam, it has also brought many crises to it. Vietnamese scholars believe that if the United States continues to escalate its strategic competition with China, the two countries are likely to drag Vietnam into it. The United States will put pressure on Vietnam to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms with the United States in the field of defense and security. At the same time, China may use the similarity of the political system to create pressure within Vietnam and prevent Vietnam from deepening its defense cooperation with the United States. In addition, Vietnam is also worried that excessive involvement of external forces will affect Vietnam's political system and social stability, and will try to prevent hostile forces from infiltrating Vietnam through political, cultural, economic, religious, ethnic, and national defense channels. "Peaceful evolution" is one of the "four major crises" referred to by the Communist Party of Vietnam. Therefore, China, which is also ruled by the Communist Party, can help Vietnam politically, and Vietnam still needs to rely on China's support politically.

All in all, Vietnamese scholars believe that although US intervention will more or less affect Sino-Vietnamese relations, it will not affect the general direction of the development of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

#### **4 Conclusion**

Vietnam has always advocated a diversified and all-round foreign policy, and the development of good relations with China, a neighboring power, has always been a priority. Both China and Vietnam are socialist countries under the leadership of the Communist Party. They have traditional revolutionary friendships and support each other on the path of socialist development. The leaders of the two parties and countries can easily reach a strategic consensus. Although there are occasional frictions between China and Vietnam, the general trend of friendly cooperation remains unchanged. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Vietnam 70 years ago, although the traditional friendly relations between China and Vietnam have fluctuated, historical practice has proved that friendship and cooperation have always been the

mainstream of the relations between the two parties and the two countries. Therefore, despite the friction between China and Vietnam and that differences are inevitable, the leaders of the two parties and countries of China and Vietnam have the wisdom and ability to properly manage the differences and promote the continuous development of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

Vietnamese scholars are the intellectual support of the Vietnamese government, their views have an important influence on government decision-making, and their universal value orientation is consistent with the government. Whether it is for political, economic, or strategic considerations, Vietnamese scholars agree that good diplomatic relations should be developed with China. The similarity of the political system creates natural advantages for the harmonious and stable development of Sino-Vietnamese relations. The two parties and the two countries have frequent interactions and actively exchange experiences in socialist construction and state governance. Economically, Vietnam relies on China's support while worrying about its excessive "dependence" on China, which will adversely affect its national defense security. The balance of great powers is an important diplomatic strategy pursued by Vietnam. On the one hand, Vietnam hopes that the United States will intervene as a bargaining chip to contain China. On the other hand, Vietnam is also worried that the excessive intervention of the United States will threaten its political stability and national

security. Strategically, Vietnam chose to maintain a strategic balance between China and the United States to protect Vietnam's interests to the greatest extent. In short, Vietnamese scholars believe that the sound development of relations with China is in the interests of the Vietnamese country and people, and the general direction of developing friendly relations between Vietnam and China will not change.

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