

LOOKING BACK ON THE AUSTRALIA - VIETNAM RELATIONSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF ASIAN CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Vietnam and Australia are both middle powers actively contributing to the strategy of adapting to China's rise in Southeast Asia. In particular, Australia has continuously taken advantage of and created opportunities, including the first aid packages right after the end of the Vietnam War—initiatives to contribute to solving the Cambodian problem in Vietnam-ASEAN relations. After the prosperity in economic ties between Australia and Vietnam after the Cold War, the historical method and the systematic method are the popular international relations research methods used in previous studies in Vietnam and Australia; the article shows that the convergence of values, needs and interests between Australia and Vietnam in the 21st Century is the driving force to promote bilateral cooperation based on equality, mutual respect, and mutual benefits. Finally, the paper may become a valuable source of interpretation for the nature of the similarity in strategy to adapt to China's rise.

Keywords: *Asian Century, Asia Pacific, Australia-Vietnam Relationship, Middle Powers*

INTRODUCTION

Previously, most research on Australia-Vietnam relations only applied the historical approach, stopping at the first decade of the 21st Century. There were almost no independent articles studying the relationship. Between Australia and Vietnam from the perspective of international relations, especially after the release of the white paper "Australia in the Asian Century." The rapid development of Australia-Vietnam relations is often explained only in terms of liberalism when, in reality, Vietnam's foreign policy and international relations depend more on realism. The theory of middle power is the only similarity point that can become the driving force behind the strategic partnership between the two countries. Therefore, it is necessary to consider Australia and Vietnam as middle powers pursuing multilateralism to explain the nature of bilateral cooperation in the Asian Century.

A nation that is marginally more powerful than a superpower, maintains a diplomatic style that is neither overly assertive nor defensive, values multilateral agreements, actively engages in global problem-solving, and forges a distinct identity can be considered a middle power. From 2012 up to now, Vietnam's economy has become more and more stable and developed, one of the fastest growing economies in

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Asia. The investment and business environment in Vietnam has improved markedly. Being among the 20 strongest militaries in the world, possessing dynamism, liberal spirit, and characteristic construction at the multilateral diplomatic level, Vietnam also builds a network of interwoven relations of multi-dimensional interests. At the bilateral level, there are about 200 countries and territories. Vietnam has also made great efforts to develop a positive but cautious and skilful approach and choice, persistently valuing the values of standard behaviour, being ready to protect its legitimate interests, and entirely satisfying the criteria compatible with the characteristics of a mid-range country (Le Dinh Tinh, 2018, pp. 22-53). Pursuing and promoting multilateralism and settling international disputes in the spirit of respecting international law, Australia and Vietnam have constantly been proactive in building initiatives and developing agendas of international organisations to strengthen trust, increase voice, and attract support from countries for the role and responsibility of "exemplary international citizens" of the two countries. After five decades of establishment, the relationship between Vietnam and Australia has rapidly made significant progress. From the first humanitarian aid packages in 1973-1979, going through the "frost" period in 1979-1989, economy-trade was the first flourishing field in Vietnam-Australia relations. Entering the 21st Century, the relationship between Vietnam and Australia has new achievements. In addition to the economic-investment field, which is a bright spot in the relationship between the two countries, the science-technology-education relationship holds a central position in the context that the superpowers are still the subject of international politics can change the structural system of the world order, the relations between major countries have changed rapidly, the process of strategic competition among countries in the region has continuously developed, security-defence cooperation is also considered a pillar in Vietnam-Australia relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previously, most references related to Australia's foreign policy towards Vietnam could only be extracted from political news articles regularly published on the website "The World and Vietnam," Communist magazine, Vietnam's online "Government" newspaper, and The Diplomat. Those are not studies of political theory and international relations.

There have been many research and expansion dissertations regarding the relationship between Vietnam and Australia. First, Do Thi Hanh's doctoral thesis is about Australia's relations with Southeast Asia from the Second World War to the mid-1990s. The thesis focuses on analysing basic developments in critical fields. In Australia's relations with Southeast Asia from after the Second World War to the mid-1990s. In particular, Do Thi Hanh (1999) devoted a part of the content to portraying the Australia-Vietnam relationship in the year 1990 based on discussing Australia's Southeast Asia policy to realise the national interests of Australia, a middle power in the Asia-Pacific region. However, Vietnam - Australia relations since the 1990s have been within the framework of Australia's Southeast Asia policy and the framework of Australia's foreign policy in the Asian Century and the Indo-Pacific initiative. At the same time, Australia's national interests have also continuously changed since the 1990s. Also referring to Australia's international relations in the 1990s, the book "Australia's Foreign Relations in the world in the 1990s" by Gareth Evans and Grant (1999) also provides the basis for Australia's awareness and understanding of Vietnam in the last decade of the 20th Century. Since the 1990s, entering the Asian Century,

Australia's perception of Vietnam's position has also changed a lot, not only because of the factors mentioned by Gareth Evans and Grant (1999) but also because of emerging factors such as radical Islamic terrorism, the rise of China, the formation of the ASEAN Community, and the emergence and substantial rise of populism and trade protectionism under Trump. Following, it is impossible not to mention the thesis "Australia - Vietnam relations in the period 1991-2013" by Huynh Tam Sang, "Outstanding achievements in Vietnam - Australia relations from 2000 up to now"- Master thesis majoring in Asian Studies by Tran Thuy Trang, "Australia's policy towards ASEAN from 1996 to the present" by MSc Hoang Huu Tham, these are works of great significance, contributing a lot to this vital resource.

Next, in the book "Australia's Policy Towards ASEAN (1991 to Present): Situation and Prospects" by Vu Tuyet Loan, the author described Australia's relationship with ASEAN, including Vietnam. This is a book that examines Australia's entire relationship with ASEAN, in addition to offering perspectives on this relationship. This article will also inherit the basis of assessment of Australia-ASEAN's movement and development trend under the influence of relations with regional and international factors generalised by Vu Tuyet Loan (2005) over 1991-2004. In the seminar "Australia-The Path to Asian Integration," Tran Nam Tien (2012) provided the research paper "Asia in Australia's Foreign Policy" provides a complete view of Australia's choices on the way to assert itself with Asia, the achievements and limitations of the process of implementing Australia's "Asia Policy" through the stages. Tran Nam Tien (2012) systematised the history of Australia's presence in Asia in association with the change in Australia's perception of the importance of Asia in Australia's foreign policy. This shift in foreign thinking can also be seen as a dominant factor in Australia-Vietnam relations in the overall picture of Australia-Southeast Asia relations.

In addition, there are many research articles on the Asian factor in Australia's "Asia-oriented policy," the most notable of which can be "Options for Australia in Promoting Security in the South China Sea" by Huynh Tam Sang, "Australia Looks to Southeast Asia" by Nguyen Tan Duc, "Australia's goal of becoming an Asia-Pacific nation—viewed from the perspective of history and Australia-Asia relations" by Do Thi Hanh. However, there has not been any work that has deepened the research and analysis of the Vietnamese factor in Australia's "Asia Policy" but there is only a brief, general nature, not specific enough. However, it is undeniable that these works are precious references. There is a tendency to pursue and promote multilateralism, resolving international disputes in the spirit of respect for international law, in the context that superpowers are still the subjects that determine international political destiny, with the power to influence that can change the world order structure, Vietnam can only choose the hedging policy that is considered the most effective to both maintain economic growth and ensure the maximum reduction of strategic security risks that may cause by the superpowers, thereby maximising its responsible role with the community of nations in the region and the world in traditional and non-traditional security issues. The history of Vietnam's international relations has shown the failure of using the balancing and bandwagoning strategies as a countermeasure against China in the 1980s. To focus on promoting multilateralism, attracting Gathering forces from like-minded countries, turning initiatives, plans, and agendas to create a security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, Vietnam has enhanced security and defence cooperation with a series of other large countries such as Australia. This shows that security and defence are crucial areas of collaboration that play an active role in

effectively realising Vietnam's hedging strategy to control China's increasingly assertive rise, ensure the maintenance of the US presence in the region, and protect national interests.

METHODOLOGY

The methods used include the comparative, analytic-synthetic, and interdisciplinary approaches. The comparative method examines the foundations of Vietnam-Australia relations and the development process through two main periods: before and since the Asian Century. The multidisciplinary approach helps study the impact of all aspects of Australia-Vietnam relations in the economic, political and social fields. Finally, the analytic-synthetic method is applied to gain a deeper understanding, thereby giving a comprehensive view of Australia-Vietnam relations' prospects, motivations and future scenarios.

In particular, the historical method was used by Trinh Thi Dinh (1995) to reproduce the development of Australia-Vietnam relations in chronological order. Do Thi Hanh (1999) also uses the historical method to reconstruct the historical process of Australia's specific relationship with Southeast Asia through events, milestones and periods. The historical method is also used by Huynh Tam Sang (2018) to examine the entire development of the relationship between Australia and Vietnam, the transformation of Australia's foreign thinking towards Vietnam, and the flow of relations between Australia and Vietnam, events of different historical periods of the two countries. Thanks to the historical method, Huynh Tam Sang (2018) has found the characteristics that explain the correlation of values, interests and needs of the two countries in developing bilateral relations.

The logical method is used by Trinh Thi Dinh (1995) to analyse and evaluate historical policies and issues, as well as the causes and consequences of those policies and historical matters. The logical method is again considered by Do Thi Hanh (1999) as a mandatory element to generalise the content of references, thereby capturing the essence of the relationship between Australia and Southeast Asia. Then, find out the movement and development trend of the relationship between Australia and Southeast Asia. The logical method is also used by Huynh Tam Sang (2018) to examine and study the nature and dynamics of promoting the bilateral cooperative partnership from the overall foreign policy of the two countries and the dynamics of the relationship between the two countries. Thanks to this logical method, Huynh Tam Sang (2018) discovered the movement trend in the Australia-Vietnam relationship in various fields. Therefore, the conclusions and evaluations are highly persuasive.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Regional and International Context in the Asian Century

The Liberal-National Coalition in power released a foreign policy White Paper called "In the National Interest," which identifies "national interest" as Australia's foreign policy objective (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1997). Australia's foreign trade and trade policy is to advance the interests of Australia and the Australian people. The government views "national interest" as the pursuit of interests

that lie at the heart of foreign trade and trade policy: the security of the Australian nation, jobs and the standard of living of Australians. Australia faces specific challenges and opportunities in balancing its nations in a constantly changing Asia-Pacific region. The Asia-Pacific is a dynamic region that offers many opportunities for Australia to enhance its security and prosperity and play a leadership role in building the regional and international system. Australia's security relationships in the Asia-Pacific region have improved significantly as several past "rivals" have become Australia's trade and security partners (O'Neil, 2013, pp. 275–277). During the first decade of the twenty-first Century, Australia's trade growth with Asia increased by 15.5% annually (Australian Department of Defense, 2013).

Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans once affirmed Australia's engagement with Asia in a speech in Parramatta on February 7, 1996: "Our international relations are in good shape at the world level, especially in the places that matter most, in our region... We have deliberated that if we want Australians to think differently about Asia, we must take the lead and establish a dialogue. And open the door to practical cooperation" (Parra Trade, 1996).

The economic boom of Asia with the end of the Cold War was one of the crucial developments of the Australian era. The developments in the region during this time represent a profound shift in the balance of economic power in the world from Europe to Asia, from North to South. And it's an economic transformation that, in the long run, will also have profound implications for strategic power. Facing this change and making the most of it was Australia's most critical challenge in the 1990s. The consequences of these developments will shape Australia in the 21st Century. Prime Minister Keating also regularly emphasised the importance of Australian identity and values in the 21st century, precisely Asia's vision and strategies for an Asian Australia. Australia has made many efforts to contribute to security, stability, and development cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, typically by solving the Cambodia issue, establishing APEC, and participating in the ARF. Prime Minister Paul Keating and Foreign Minister Gareth Evans emphasised the creation of Australia's Asian identity. In the speech "Australia, Asia and the New Regionalism" by Prime Minister Paul Keating at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, on January 17, 1996, he did not forget to affirm: "I have said it more than once—if Australia doesn't succeed in Asia, it won't succeed anywhere" (Paul Keating, 1996). Paul Keating asserted that the form and success of Australia's engagement with Asia is described as emerging, at least in part, from the projection of a new national identity. Australia finds itself at home in Asia and finds its future prosperity and security there. In affirming Australia's determination to turn to Asia in 1997, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer emphasised that "no important issue is more important than Australia's foreign policy than its commitment to Asia. Australia's future lies in Asia...we must make our commitment to Asia a top priority in our foreign policy. Australia's close ties to Asia are long-lasting. Australia contributes to its security and prosperity... Australia continues to engage with Asia because of the profound benefits derived from close relationships with countries in the region and common interests." (Alexander Downer, 1997).

In 2007, Labor Party leader Kevin Rudd replaced John Howard as Australia's 26th Prime Minister, increasingly pushing efforts to enhance Australia's role as a creative middle power. Kevin Rudd has restructured foreign policy into the "Three Pillars": a partnership with the United Nations, a collaboration with Asia, and an ally with the United States (Huynh Tam Sang, 2019). In Australia's Asia-Pacific foreign policy, Vietnam is a top priority and a key partner in the Indo-Pacific. It is expected to

be upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (Thanh Thanh 2020). Australia also plays a vital role in helping Vietnam expand its relationships in the Asia Pacific. At the same time, in Vietnam's foreign policy, Australia is America's leading important ally in the Asia-Pacific, having a particular geo-strategic position in the Asia-Pacific space. Australia's position in close association with the US is an essential basis for linking Vietnam-Australia relations and promoting Vietnam-US relations to balance dynamically with the rise of an assertive China in the South China Sea. To ensure the integrity of national interests, Australia's correct perception of the relationship between Australia and Southeast Asian countries is essential. Australia's active participation in security cooperation issues and substantial maritime security consolidation not only creates a solid foundation for promoting and concretising Australia's "Asia-oriented" foreign thinking but also contributes to affirming the view of a middle power. It is the theoretical and practical basis for flexible diplomatic activities in each period of Australia's history (Nguyen Dinh Chien, 2016, pp. 22–24). The practice of international relations has proven that countries often associate national security issues with the security of neighbouring areas. That is the reason for Australia's presence in almost all security issues of Southeast Asia in particular and the South Pacific region in general, such as terrorism, immigration, environment, piracy, smuggling, etc., drug trafficking, search and rescue. That presence has laid the first bricks for Australia to contribute to regional security (Stewart Firth, 2005, p. 8).

Primary Results in the Process of Developing Political-Diplomatic Cooperation

The friendship and cooperation between Vietnam and Australia have been continuously consolidated and developed with the visits of high-ranking leaders of the two countries.

Year	The Vietnamese side visiting Australia	The Australian side's visit to Vietnam
1993-1994	Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet (May 1993)	Prime Minister Paul Keating (April 1994)
1995	Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Manh Cam (February 1995)	Governor-General Bill Hayden (April 1995)
1996	General Secretary Do Muoi (July 1995)	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Tom Fisher (August 1996) Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Alexander Downer (July 1996)
1997	Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Manh Cam (February 1997)	Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Alexander Downer (July 1997)
1998	National Assembly Chairman Nong Duc Manh (March 1998)	Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Alexander Downer (April 1998)
2000	Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Manh Cam (September 2000)	Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Alexander Downer (May 2000)

2001		Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Alexander Downer (July 2001)
2003		Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Alexander Downer (July 2003)
2005	Prime Minister Phan Van Khai (May 2005)	
2006	Vice President Truong My Hoa (October 2006)	Prime Minister John Howard (November 2006)
2007	President Nguyen Minh Triet and Mr Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem (October 2007)	
2008	Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Thien Nhan (February 2008)	Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith (July 2008)
	National Assembly Chairman Nguyen Phu Trong (March 2008)	
	Deputy Prime Minister Truong Vinh Trong (May 2008)	
	Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung (October 2008)	
2009	General Secretary Nong Duc Manh (September 2009)	Speaker of the House Henri Jenkins (January 2009)
	Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem (September 7, 2009)	Immigration and Naturalization Secretary Chris Evans (January 2009)
2010		Prime Minister Julia Gillard (October 2010)
2011		Secretary of State Kelvin Rudd (April 2011)
2012		Governor-General Quentin Bryce, Secretary of State Bob Carr (March 2012)
		Secretary of Defense Stephen Smith (August 2012)
2013		Speaker of the House AnnaBurke (May 2013)
2015	State President Nguyen Minh Triet, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung (March 2015)	
2018	Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc (March 2018)	Governor-General Peter Cosgrove (May 2018)
	Vice President Dang Thi Ngoc Think (April 2018)	Secretary of State Julie Bishop (May 2018)
	Defense Minister Ngo Xuan Lich (November 2018)	Speaker of the House Tony Smith (July 2018)

2019	Deputy Prime Minister Trinh Dinh Dung (November 2019)	Speaker of the Senate Scott Ryan (January 2019) Secretary of State Marise Payne (July 2019)
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Source: Australian Embassy Vietnam (2020)

Statistics on the time and number of visits of state-level leaders between Vietnam and Australia in the period 1995-2020, most notably the number of visits by the Vietnamese Foreign Ministers and the Australian Foreign Ministers (accounting for 15/31 of the total number of trips and visits of state leaders between Vietnam and Australia in the period 1995-2020). In particular, the presence of two reciprocal visits by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam (in July 1995 and September 2009) and the Governor-General of Australia (in April 1995 and March 2012), which were two figures with a voice, unofficial indirect power, although not the heads of the two countries, they are two essential pillars. The two men have the task of deciding the spiritual aspect and leading the political system of the two countries. Both visits are associated with two milestones: 1995 (resuming the normalisation of bilateral relations between Vietnam and Australia after Cambodia) and 2009 (upgrading bilateral relations to a comprehensive partnership). Those two unique visits opened two explosive periods of development in Vietnam-Australia relations with a series of bilateral cooperation agreements signed continuously in 1996-1998 and 2010-2012. In particular, it was not until the administration of Barack Obama that there was the first visit to the US by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the first visit of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam to Australia took place. Since 1995, right when the two countries resumed diplomatic relations after the "freeze" period because of the Cambodia issue. That shows Australia's respect for Vietnam's differences in political regimes quite early, a significant manifestation in changing the perception of both countries in international relations from 1973 until now.

Primary Results in the Development of Defense-Security Cooperation

In 1998, the two countries initiated the Regional Security Dialogue with the participation of both civilian and defence officials. This is an essential foundation for developing security and defence cooperation between the two countries. In February 1999, the Australasian Military Attaché Room at the Australian Embassy in Hanoi was opened. In September 2000, the Vietnam Military Attaché Room was opened at the Vietnamese Embassy in Canberra. With discussions and implementation of cooperation and training initiatives increasingly facilitated thanks to the communication between the two Military Attaché Offices of the two countries, the deeper connection between the two countries is also strengthened (Thayer 2021). Based on two visits by the Joint Services Staff College delegation in 1996 and 1998 to discuss cooperation in malaria prevention and control, the Australian Defense Force and the Vietnam People's Army Military Medical Academy signed The Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in malaria prevention research lasts five years, creating favourable conditions for cooperation in malaria prevention research, becoming a highlight to help the military medical collaboration between the two countries be closer (Huynh Tam Sang, 2018, p. 79).

Besides, many other agreements, memorandums and bilateral agreements were also signed, including the Agreement on Transfer of Prisoners (October 2008), Cooperation in the Exchange of Entry and Exit Information (January 2009), Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Public Security of Vietnam and the Australian Federal Police in the field of combating transnational crime and promoting police cooperation (August 2009); Memorandum of Understanding between the Supreme People's Court of Vietnam and the Federal Court of Australia (September 2009); Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation (October 2010). To promote the fight against transnational crime in the fields of corruption, fraud and bribery of foreign officials, RMIT International University (Vietnam), the Australian Federal Police, the General Department of Police, and the Ministry of Public Security of Vietnam cooperated to coordinate the 39th Asia Region Law Endorsement Management Program (ARLEMP) for senior police officers. And law enforcement officers in the Asia-Pacific region (Tran Thuy Trang, 2015, p. 44).

In the past, Australia mainly trained the Vietnamese Army at the Australian National Martial Arts School regarding technique and language training. Since 2010, military training has been a developed content that works more and more closely. Content such as exercises with Vietnam and training for members of the Vietnamese Army were actively proposed by the Australian side. This is the first time the term “strategic dialogue” is mentioned in a document between Australia and Vietnam (Huynh Tam Sang, 2018, p. 113). By 2013, the Australian Defense Force had sponsored more than 2,000 study slots for Vietnamese People's Army officers in Australia and Vietnam. In March 2015, during his visit to Australia, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and Prime Minister Tony Abbott agreed to strengthen security-defence cooperation, including sharing information and experiences, training in English, and coordinating between special forces. Accordingly, 120 Vietnamese soldiers are expected to be trained in Australia (Tran Thuy Trang, 2015, p. 82). Training courses, including English language courses, military specialisation courses and full scholarships for Masters's training at Australian universities are organised. Australia also strengthens ties with Vietnam by providing expenses for Vietnamese cadres to attend the course and sponsoring the construction of a second English language classroom at the Hanoi Military Technical Academy (Huynh Tam Sang, 2018, p. 118). The Australian Army has trained more than 1,500 Vietnamese soldiers in the country and in Australia (Lam Giang, November 10, 2018).

Cooperation in military training and officer and cadre training with Australia gives Vietnam many advantages because the Australian army is equipped with modern equipment and is the best in the region. It exchanges experiences with the US military. The development of security and defence cooperation between Australia and Vietnam helps modernise the Vietnamese army but also helps to link defence cooperation between the US and Vietnam (Huynh Tam Sang, 2018, p. 114). Along with the Memorandum of Understanding on defence cooperation, the two sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the Australia-Vietnam Action Program 2020-2023 to deepen security and defence cooperation. Promoting security cooperation between the two countries through the FONOP exercises is also an opportunity for Australia and Vietnam to affirm their support for promoting efforts to find ways to protect sovereignty, freedom of navigation and overflight rights in the South China Sea by Southeast Asian countries in the face of China's increasing illegal claims (Hong Phuc, June 7, 2021).

To promote security for the two countries and the whole region, defence cooperation is conducted more often; Australia has sponsored Vietnamese defence personnel to attend many seminars and courses to improve professional capacity, for example, the National Defense Management Seminar, seminars of “RAN Seapower Center”; seminars on the Military Revolution; regional conference on defence; seminar on Law and Maritime Security; emergency management seminar (Huynh Tam Sang, 2018, p.110). On December 4, 2018, in Hanoi, an international conference on "Promoting maritime security cooperation in the East Sea" was jointly organised by the Diplomatic Academy (DAV), the British Embassy, and the Australian Embassy has focused on experience in maritime delimitation and dispute settlement at sea; legal aspects of law enforcement operations and cooperation at sea; and cooperation between law enforcement forces in the South China Sea (Duy Quang, December 4, 2018).

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the two countries still maintain the Vietnam-Australia Defense Policy Dialogue and the Vietnam-Australia Diplomatic Defense Strategic Dialogue at the ministerial level, similar to the strategic dialogue mechanism between Australia and its traditional allies Indonesia, the US, and Japan (VNA, October 30, 2019). That shows the growing position of Vietnam in Australia's perception and for the regional security order (Viet Trung, Khong Minh Khanh, June 12, 2019).

Australia's trend from 2007 to 2011 was to strengthen Australia's position as a middle power and the strategic significance of the South China Sea for Australia's security (Wesley, 2011), tighten ties with Vietnam, Indonesia, and India was to help Australia become more independent from the strategic competition of the US (Australia's traditional security ally)-China (Australia's most significant economic partner) in the region. This is despite the fact that ASEAN has not yet reached a consensus due to differences in interests, political-economic relations with China, and the level of national security interest in the South China Sea (Storey, 2013). Despite adjusting strategic awareness closer to Vietnam's position, defence cooperation between Vietnam and Australia has not made much tangible progress because Australia is still more dependent on China's economy and cannot provide means to support Vietnam to enhance maritime security, but only at the political commitments between the two countries (Baterman, 2013). 2017 marks the first time that Australia has sent six warships to the South China Sea to participate in exercises, and it is part of a two-month exercise program - Australia's most extensive warship deployment plan since the Vietnam War (VNA, April 19, 2018).

Promoting security-defense cooperation brings long-term benefits to the two countries in the context of increasingly complicated regional security tensions. Australia is an active participation in the Near North security environment and a greater contribution to regional security; meanwhile, developing more substantive relations helps Vietnam strengthen its connectivity with Australia and mitigate the negative effects of the power imbalance with China (Goh, 2/2016). Article 3.25, Australia's 2017 Defense White Paper affirms: "Australia has a solid foundation of longstanding bilateral and multilateral partnerships with Southeast Asian countries interested in maritime security in the region, including Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam" (Australian Department of Defense, 2017, p. 75). Australia's 2017 Foreign and Trade White Paper also further asserts: "The future balance of power in the Indo-Pacific will largely depend on the actions of the United States, China, and major powers such as Japan and India. The response of major Southeast Asian states, such as Indonesia and Vietnam, will also be important (Australian Government, 2017, p. 25). Australia places a high priority on bilateral

relations in Southeast Asia and supports ASEAN. The government is strengthening its engagement with the region to support an increasingly prosperous, outward-looking, stable, resilient Southeast Asia. Australia has agreed to a new Strategic Partnership with Vietnam. Australia will elevate development, trade and investment cooperation with Vietnam and continue to build deep links in politics, defence, education and people-to-people exchanges (Australian Government, 2017, p. 44). In 2018, the security and defence cooperation relationship between Australia and Vietnam continued to be strengthened by the Joint Vision Statement on Defense Cooperation (Prime Minister of Australia, 2019). The defence-security cooperation between the two countries has become a pillar of the Australia-Vietnam Strategic Partnership, a priority area in the Action Plan for the War Partnership period 2020-2023 (Thu Trang, 2018).

Main Results in the Development of Economic Cooperation

The foundation for relations in the field of trade is marked by the Agreement on the Promotion and Protection of Mutual Investments between Vietnam and Australia, signed in March 1991 (Huynh Tam Sang, 2018, p. 64). Agreements between the two countries were signed in turn, such as the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation (June 1990), Agreement on the Promotion and Protection of Investment (March 1991), Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Tax Dodging on Taxes on Income (April 1992), Agreement on Air Services (July 1995). The agreements open wide development opportunities for both countries. Since the Trade Cooperation Agreement, Vietnam's economy has made remarkable changes, with a faster and more sustainable development pace (Huynh Tam Sang, 2018, p. 65). As of August 2011, Australia has 243 projects in Vietnam with a total investment of 1.23 billion USD, ranking 20th out of 92 countries and territories investing in Vietnam. In particular, Australia's investment mainly focuses on post and telecommunications, heavy industry, food industry, education, finance, and healthcare. In the 2011-2012 financial year, Australia gave Vietnam AUD 137.9 million. Some other significant projects funded by Australia include the project to build My Thuan Bridge (AUD 68 million), a water supply project for five towns of Bac Ninh-Bac Giang-Ha Tinh-Vinh Long-Long An (AUD 25 million). The development of clean water supply and health care projects and the protection of water resources and the environment remain the focus areas of the Vietnam-Australia development cooperation program (Le Ba Khoi, 2012, pp. 26-27).

In March 2018, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, his wife, and a high-ranking Vietnamese delegation officially visited Australia. In the context of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), of which Vietnam and Australia are two members, this visit marked three critical milestones in the relationship. The relationship between the two countries was elevated to a strategic partnership, and nearly 30 documents and cooperation agreements were signed. Within the framework of the visit, the leaders of the two countries agreed to strengthen and further promote people-to-people exchanges, to establish contact mechanisms at the levels of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defense and Ministers in charge of the economy; strengthen cooperation in dealing with security challenges including counter-terrorism, transnational crime, human trafficking and illegal migration. The two sides also agreed to create conditions for comprehensive and extensive development in the bilateral economic cooperation relationship based on promoting the unique strengths of both countries to complement each other. Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull affirmed the deepening relationship between the two countries through cooperation in education, cultural exchange and

tourism development. This is the solid foundation of the current and future Strategic Partnership (Duc Tuan, 2018).

The official visit to Vietnam by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison from August 22-24, 2019, is an essential event for the two countries' relations. Firstly, the most critical point in the two countries continues to be the rise of the level of relations based on trust, attachment, and mutual benefit. It can be said that the two countries still have a lot of potential to jointly promote strong economic cooperation, tighten security ties and develop innovation and creativity partnerships. Second, the two sides will create an Enhanced Economic Engagement Strategy to strive to become one of each other's top 10 trading partners. Economic cooperation has become the mainstay of the Vietnam-Australia strategic partnership. With a total two-way trade turnover in 2018 reaching nearly 7 billion USD, in the first six months of 2019 alone, it reached more than 3.2 billion USD, up 8% over the same period in 2017, Australia is the 19th largest foreign investor of Vietnam with a capital of more than 1.9 billion USD.¹⁴ Especially, after the CPTPP of which Vietnam and Australia are members went into effect in early 2019. However, the relationship between the two countries still has some differences, including opening the market for agricultural and aquatic products. In 2011-2015, ACIAR (Australian Center of International Agricultural Research - Australian Center for International Agricultural Research) supported the study of many similar aquaculture species between Vietnam and Australia, such as grouper, lobster, sea cucumber, and abalone. These are livestock with high economic value. As a result, Vietnam's seafood industry has taken advantage of the scientific and technological achievements transferred by Australia (The World & Vietnam, 22/08/2019).

Aiming to double their two-way investment and become one of each other's top 10 trading partners by 2025, Hanoi and Canberra launched the Strategy to Enhance Economic Cooperation in December 2021. This roadmap is the first specific plan that Vietnam has signed with another country to open up opportunities for cooperation and solve "economic challenges and coercive activities." Australian Prime Minister Morrison said the above strategy will "lead the two countries towards new, equitable and sustainable development and prosperity" (Huynh Tam Sang, 2022).

Main results in the development of technology-sciences and education cooperation

As one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam right after the Paris Agreement was signed in 1973, Australia is also a pioneer in supporting Vietnam with human resources for national reconstruction. In 2000, the first cable-stayed bridge connecting the two banks of the Tien River was received by the people of the Mekong Delta in particular and the people of Vietnam in general as a gift of close friendship from the Australian people.

Australia is one of the first countries to cooperate with Vietnam in telecommunications. The international agency of telecommunications company Australia Telecom—OTC Company is the leading supplier of telecommunications units to Vietnam. In particular, in the complicated political situation in the region, with the US embargo on Vietnam in many aspects, thanks to Australia's cooperation policy, Vietnam has the opportunity to develop one of the fields of particular significance. The presence of OTC has helped the telecommunications network in Vietnam to grow and expand internationally, thereby contributing to the development of the economy's modernisation (Vu Tuyet Loan, 2004).

Between 1994 and 1995, AUD 20 million was reserved for Australian-sponsored training scholarships. In 1995 alone, 500 Vietnamese students studied abroad in 48 Australia under ASTAS. In the health sector, the project on HIV/AIDS prevention in Vietnam is also of interest and cooperation from both sides (Vu Tuyet Loan, 2004, p. 126).

During 1995-2000, AUD 127.8 million was invested in five projects; in 2000-2005, the number of projects increased to 9 with a total value of AUD 144.15 million. The Australian Government also works with the World Food Organization (FAO) to assist Vietnam in curbing insect infestation through AusAID's regional programs (Vu Tuyet Loan, 2004, pp. 211-212).

Since 2009, Australia has committed to sponsoring 30 scholarships for Vietnam each year at the Royal Melbourne Academy-the first foreign university-level training institution in Vietnam. Many Vietnamese universities also have joint training programs at undergraduate and postgraduate levels with Australian universities. Since 2010, the total number of scholarships Australia has committed to sponsoring Vietnam each year has increased to 398, of which 225 are for postgraduate study programs. In 2011 alone, to create future grassroots human resources in Vietnam, Australia granted 247 scholarships for postgraduate study programs for the 2012-2013 academic year (Le Ba Khoi, 2013, pp. 26-27).

In October 2010, Vietnam and Australia officially signed the Vietnam – Australia Action Plan (between 2010-2013). This event indicates that Vietnam paid much attention to Australian investments in education for Vietnam, and this country was looking forward to intensive cooperation to make a rational change in its private education. So far in 2011, the establishment of the Vietnam-Australia Joint Working Group on Education and Training in Canberra 2011 noted a great stride in this relationship. Both countries defined vocational education, higher education, kindergarten education, educational policies, and standardised diplomas as crucial fields of educational cooperation (Vietnam-Australia Joint Working Group on Education and Training, 2011). The generosity of Australia offered Vietnam a comprehensive education, primarily in incidental fields such as higher education and vocational training.

In 2013, the New South Wales State Department of Community Education, Ho Chi Minh City Department of Education and Training and EMG Education Company signed a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in college and professional training for students, teachers, and administrative officials (Chu Mien, 2013). In 2018, Vietnam-Australia was thriving and gaining a “Strategic partnership.” According to James E. Henderson, in a strategic partnership, the partners remain independent, share the benefits from risks and control over joint actions, and make ongoing contributions in strategic areas (James E. Henderson, 2014). In this case study, the approach of Australia is prone to Vietnam’s market and defence in an alliance to deter the power of China’s soft power in Southeast Asia. On this opportunity, Vietnam would like to benefit from Australia's involvement in regional issues to make a close connection with educational cooperation and training.

Besides, Australia promised to share its experiences and keep in contact with public and private universities and colleges in Vietnam to get access to education technology, policy, and governance (The Government of Australia, 2018, p. 2). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia actively encouraged distance learning and online training courses for Vietnamese students. In 2020, Vietnam and Australia

held a broad discussion about online education September 2020 to assist potential Vietnamese students soon approaching Australian education in light of global disruption to the education sector (RMIT University, 2021).

The rapid growth of Vietnam's economy stimulated this country to seek educational opportunities to train a generation of high-quality human resources. Meanwhile, Australia is expected to depend on the advantages of education diplomacy to promote its power and position in international relations. Specifically, the Australian government supposed that "Our commitment to education, training and research exchanges will remain central to Australia's soft power. These exchanges build influence and strengthen people-to-people links and mutual understanding. Australia will continue to welcome hundreds of thousands of international students to our shores (Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017, p. 111). Vietnam has profoundly integrated into regions and intends to take a big push in all diplomatic relations. It is indicated that both countries have a joint vision statement of multiple spheres, yet educational cooperation is the most prominent field in the future.

Some Remarks on Cooperation between Australia and Vietnam in the First Two Decades of the Asian Century

Firstly, the Australia-Vietnam relationship is a typical example reflecting the trend of dialogue and cooperation for peace, stability and development of the Asia Pacific region in general and Southeast Asia in particular.

Second, the Australia-Vietnam relationship is a successful strategic partnership, typically between two different models of socio-political regimes, aiming to promote mutual strategic interests. Vietnam has a geopolitical position of strategic significance when it is located right next to the world's leading large economy, China, and also located on a balcony overlooking the South China Sea, rich in mineral resources, so Australia is always interested in orientation in foreign policy making, especially in establishing and improving relations with neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia—a region containing Australia's core interests. In contrast, Australia is an essential link in the traditional US strategic alliance structure in the Asia Pacific, a security architecture that Vietnam can rely on to promote a balance of power with the Chinese economy. Therefore, promoting strategic cooperation between Vietnam and Australia is a favourable condition to enhance each country's strategic interests.

Third, the Australia-Vietnam economic relationship is the field of cooperation that has achieved the most significant achievements in the Australia-Vietnam relationship. However, the political relationship between the two countries is the area where Vietnam has gained the most advantages over other Southeast Asian countries in its cooperation with Australia. Therefore, it can be said that the economic relations between Vietnam and Australia still have significant room for development commensurate with Vietnam's strategic geopolitical position towards Australia. Regarding the bilateral trade turnover between Australia and China, China is Australia's largest trading partner. The need to import minerals and fuels from China is an essential factor that helped Australia become one of the rare developed economies to maintain positive growth through the 2008 world economic recession. Therefore, Australia will be in a dilemma when it has to protect its economic interests in relations with China and take strategic political and security measures to control China's rise. Suppose Australia realises that the benefits from cooperation with China are too great to be

sacrificed. In that case, Australia will have to adjust its strategy, and then Vietnam-Australia relations may be negatively affected.

Fourth, the Australia-Vietnam relationship is a special one that has undergone many different ups and downs. During the post-Cold War period, the political outlook of generations of Australian rulers has continuously changed from dialogue to active dialogue, from cooperation to comprehensive cooperation, and most recently, they have reached a new level of strategic cooperation. That rapid change was greatly influenced by major powers (UK, US, and China) and Australia's shift in strategic perception towards Southeast Asia in particular and Asia Pacific in general. It is a strategic change process reflecting the world's constant movement. International relations are always associated with the system of power centres that are national actors in the international arena, are always dominated and decided by big countries with ambitions for global hegemony and hold fundamental economic-political interests in the international arena. There are still differences between the two countries regarding democracy and human rights. However, it seems this is not a big problem when Australia does not emphasise this issue too much in its bilateral relations with Vietnam. On the other hand, the pressure of the Vietnamese community on the Australian government regarding democracy and human rights is not as great as in the US. Therefore, while the two sides maintain dialogues on human rights to resolve differences and improve mutual understanding and trust, Australia will not let this issue overshadow the long-term prospects of the bilateral strategic relationship. In short, in the long term, the strategic relationship between Vietnam and Australia has many opportunities for further development.

Hedging is a strategy in which one country simultaneously pursues many different, sometimes contradictory, policies with another country to avoid choosing a strategy in only one direction. The hedging strategy is selected due to uncertainty about the future when one does not know how the other country will behave. For example, a hedging strategy can simultaneously include elements such as competition and cooperation, compromise and prevention to both take advantage of the benefits of cooperation and prevent future strategic risks from the partner country. A hedging strategy is “the behaviour of a state seeking to offset risks by simultaneously pursuing multiple policies that create mutually deterrent effects in an uncertain and multi-threat context” (C. Kuik, 2008, p. 168). Specifically, to pursue the hedging strategy, a country often strengthens engagement, cooperation and integration activities and focuses on balancing operations according to Realist theory. This characteristic is consistent with Australia's activities and foreign policies, as shown by Prime Minister John Howard (1996). It can be easily seen that Australia's hedging policy is based on the following main pillars: i) pragmatic cooperation in economics, politics, and security-defence, attracting China's participation in multilateral mechanisms in the region; ii) modernise domestic security and defence forces; iii) strengthen the alliance with the US and cooperate on security and defence with countries in the region.

The choice of a hedging policy only occurs when three conditions are present: (1) no direct threat forces a country to ally with a significant power to protect itself, (2) there are no ideologically broken boundaries between countries, and (3) there is no external excellent power rivalry that forces small countries to choose (Cai Dexian, 2013, p. 6). Hedging policy is also a strategy in which a country simultaneously pursues many different, sometimes contradictory, policies with another country to avoid choosing a plan in only one direction. The hedging strategy is used to both take

advantage of the benefits of a cooperative relationship and guard against future strategic risks from the partner country (Luong Lan Anh, 2013).

In Southeast Asia, implementing a hedging strategy is especially useful for small countries in their relations with large countries to ensure benefits for both sides. Bilahari Kausikan, former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, currently Ambassador-at-Large and Policy Advisor of Singapore, once said: "Small countries in Southeast Asia have lived amid great power competition for centuries. Always and simultaneously using balancing, hedging, and bandwagoning is deeply ingrained in our foreign policy DNA" (Le Hong Hiep, 2016).

In the future, Vietnam and Australia can continue to promote extensive cooperation in security and freedom of navigation issues based on compliance with international law and establish closer cooperation mechanisms. Thereby improving the defence capacity of the two countries, implementing the hedging strategy most effectively while actively turning China into a truly responsible power, ensuring regional economic stability and security while ensuring maintaining the US presence to control China's rise in the region, minimising strategic risks that may arise from China (Le Dinh Tinh and Hoang Long, April 31, 2019). Because:

Firstly, security-defence is not only a determining factor that is a top priority in Australia's foreign policy but also one of the three priority areas in the Action Plan for the Strategic Partnership. Vietnam-Australia for 2020-2023 (World & Vietnam, August 23, 2019).

Second, the Indo-Pacific is the most critical security area for Australia. The South China Sea circulates about half of the country's goods to other markets in Eurasia and North America.

The third factor promoting the security-defence cooperation between Vietnam and Australia is the Chinese factor, which Australia welcomes (in economic terms) and fears (in terms of security and defence).

The Joint Statement on the Establishment of the Strategic Partnership between Australia and Vietnam also stated: "We affirm the growing strategic relationship and share regional interests, and reaffirmed the commits to closer cooperation in defence, law and justice, intelligence and security, and contributes to regional peace, stability and development. We reaffirmed our commitment to participate in the annual Defense Ministers Meeting to facilitate high-level dialogue on defence issues underpinned by the Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation signed in 2010. These exchanges will be an opportunity to deepen defence cooperation, including education and training, maritime and aviation security, peacekeeping support, counter-terrorism, war legacy issues and other fields" (The World & Vietnam, March 15, 2018). In addition, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam and Australia are both facing a health crisis and an economic recession, so cooperation in military medicine to respond to and adapt to the pandemic will be an area of focus. Playing an increasingly important role alongside maritime security cooperation, maritime security is the most critical area of collaboration in the context of an intensifying arms race in Southeast Asia in response to China's rise to increasingly assertive, defying international law. Aid to support military medical and equipment training in the context of the crisis caused by the pandemic will demonstrate Australia's efforts to affirm Australia's strategic security commitments and strengthen trust between the two countries (Vinh An, 2021).

It can be said that the strategy of strengthening relations with middle powers in the region, such as Australia as well as Japan, India or South Korea, is a possible and wise choice for Vietnam in the context of dealing with China's rise, especially in the South China Sea region.

CONCLUSION

Vietnam - Australia relations have been increasingly tightened and raised to a higher level than ever before. Besides the objective factors that have a dominant influence on the relationship between the two countries (world socio-economic situation, factors of significant countries, geo-strategic position and geopolitical movement of the two countries), subjective factors such as political vision and foreign policy adjustment of the ruling leaders of the two countries also play a significant role. The meeting between Vietnam's comprehensive multilateral foreign policy and Australia's ideology toward Asia in the Asian Century has further strengthened the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

From all angles, Vietnam has no interest in conflicting with Australia on its own. Vietnam's development does not challenge Australia's interests in the region. Therefore, it can be seen that cooperation with Vietnam and Australia is more beneficial than conflict. In addition, the Vietnamese community in Australia can become a catalyst for economic cooperation. Australia also needs to promote relations with Vietnam for Australia's benefit. Stemming from the above-mentioned practical benefits, Vietnam and Australia can ultimately expand collaboration for the benefit of each party. Consolidating and developing the partnership, equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit between Vietnam and Australia will positively contribute to peace and development in the region.

Disclosure statement

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