

Review Article

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Status of the Study of “Vietnam-China Relations” in Vietnamese Documents¹

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Abstract

The topic of “Vietnam-China relations” has once again become of interest to Vietnamese academics as a consequence of the formal normalization of relations between the two countries in 1991. Since then, research on many dimensions of Vietnam-China relations been conducted. The topic has been studied broadly and in-depth, both inside and outside of Vietnam. This article examines the background and present status of studies on Vietnam-China relations in Vietnamese articles, books and documents. The purpose is to view the latest subjects and the contexts/conditions of interest to Vietnamese academics/researchers. The study found three main points of interest: 1) overall Vietnam-China relations (politics, foreign affairs-diplomacy, economy, society); 2) economics, trade and investment; and 3) the dispute over the Paracel and Spratly Islands. In this article, the discussion of each point will include examples of issues along with the names of authors who have done exceptional work on that particular issue. The contexts/conditions that have an impact on the study of those issues will also be discussed.

Keywords: Vietnam-China relations, status, study, Vietnamese documents

บทคัดย่อ

หัวข้อเกี่ยวกับ “ความสัมพันธ์เวียดนาม-จีน” ได้รับความสนใจศึกษาในแวดวงวิชาการเวียดนามอีกรั้งอันเป็นผลมาจากการสถาปนาความสัมพันธ์ขั้นปกติระหว่างเวียดนามและจีนซึ่งเกิดขึ้นอย่างเป็นทางการในปี ค.ศ.1991 นับจากทศวรรษ 1990 เป็นต้นมา กระแสของงานเขียนและการศึกษาเกี่ยวกับเวียดนามและจีนได้ถูกกล่าวถึงในหลายมิติ รวมถึงได้รับการศึกษาอย่างกว้างขวางและในเชิงลึกทั้งในประเทศและนอกประเทศเวียดนาม

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บทความนี้จึงมุ่งนำเสนอให้เห็นถึงการศึกษาเรื่อง “ความสัมพันธ์เวียดนาม-จีน” ในเอกสาร เวียดนามจากสถานภาพปัจจุบันและมองย้อนไปในอดีต เพื่อชี้ให้เห็นประเด็นการศึกษา ล่าสุดและกำลังอยู่ในกระแสความสนใจของนักวิชาการและนักวิจัยชาวเวียดนาม พวกเขางาน ใจศึกษา “ความสัมพันธ์เวียดนาม-จีน” ในประวัติศาสตร์ และอยู่ภายใต้บิบิทหรือเงื่อนไข ใด ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การศึกษาในเรื่องดังกล่าวสามารถจัดแบ่งความสนใจออกเป็น 3 ประเด็นใหญ่ ได้แก่ ประเด็นแรก ศึกษาความสัมพันธ์เวียดนาม-จีน ในภาพรวม ประเด็น ที่สอง ศึกษาเกี่ยวกับเศรษฐกิจ การค้า การลงทุน และประเด็นที่สาม ศึกษาข้อพิพาท ระหว่างเวียดนาม-จีน โดยมุ่งเน้นประเด็นหมู่เกาะพาราเซลและหมู่เกาะสปรัตเลีย์ ทั้งนี้ ในแต่ละประเด็นของการนำเสนอผู้เขียนจะยกตัวอย่างผลงานชิ้นสำคัญ ซึ่งอาจมีการระบุ ถึงผู้เขียนที่มีผลงานโดดเด่นในแต่ละประเด็นปัญหา ตลอดจนวิเคราะห์ให้เห็นถึงบิบิท หรือเงื่อนไขที่ส่งผลต่อการศึกษาในประเด็นเหล่านั้น

คำสำคัญ: เวียดนาม-จีน สถานภาพ การศึกษา เอกสารเวียดนาม

Introduction

Vietnam or the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is located in the Mekong region of Southeast Asia. Its area covers an S-shaped swathe totaling 31,033 square kilometers in size along the western edge of the South China Sea. Vietnam is bordered by China to the north, the Gulf of Thailand to the south and southeast, the South China Sea to the east and the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Cambodia to the west. With a current total population 90 million, Vietnam is the world's fifth-largest rice-exporting country.

China, located in East Asia, is bordered by 15 countries, including Vietnam. It is also bordered by the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea and the South China Sea to the east and the south. In terms of size, China has the third largest area in the world, with a total of 9.6 million square kilometers, while its population of 1.350 billion is the largest in the world. A socialist democracy, it has experienced a quantum leap in economic development and now plays an important role in the international politics.

Despite the many differences between the two countries, Vietnam and China share a common history because of their geographical proximity. They can access each other by land along their shared border and by sea along the Gulf of Tonkin in the South China Sea. In addition, the two countries are both located in the Mekong region. In the past Vietnam referred to China as “the invader from the north” as a consequence of China’s invasion and occupation of Vietnam for a thousand years. Through this occupation, Vietnam absorbed many aspects of Chinese civilization, including religions (Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism), culture and language. Faced with aggression and threats from France and the United States until a struggle for national liberation arose in Vietnam, China and Vietnam became allies. Vietnam’s national reunification was achieved in 1975 with the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. However, political volatility made “friends become enemies,” resulting in battles between the Chinese and Vietnamese armies which eventually escalated into a border war in 1979. The issue of Cambodia was also a source of tension. These situations led to the ultimate breakup of relations between the two countries. However, “enemies became friends” when the cold war ended, and in 1991, relations between Vietnam and China officially resumed.

This review article focuses on the topic by examining Vietnamese documents, including those from the Communist Party and the government of Vietnam, as well as theses and the research of students from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (from both the North and the South of Vietnam), books, and academic research articles in the Journal of Chinese Research (Nghien cuu Trung Quoc), which were published primarily from the 1990s to 2014. Based on the review, it was found that the studies on Vietnam-China relations published in Vietnamese language during 1990-2014 have three main points of interest, namely 1) overall Vietnam-China relations including politics, foreign affairs-diplomacy, economy and society; 2) economics, trade and investment; and 3) the dispute over the Paracel and Spratly Islands.

Overall Vietnam-China relations (politics, foreign affairs-diplomacy, economy, and society)

Vietnam and China are neighbors with a long shared history. Their relationship has been one of “dear friends”, as well as one of “mortal enemies,” depending on the time and context. Consequently, Vietnam studies have been conducted in China, and China studies have also been conducted in Vietnamese academic circles (Nguyen Huu Tam, 2006: 53). The two countries have a high degree of understanding of each other, or at least a great number of academic works on the subject of “Vietnam-China relations” have been produced by both Chinese and Vietnamese scholars. This academic activity began when China started to implement national reform open-door policies in 1978, and again after Vietnam implemented the Doi Moi policy of economic reforms aimed at creating a socialist-oriented market economy in 1986. After the two countries announced the development of their relations in 1991, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of historical studies (Nguyen Huu Tam, 2006: 53). In Vietnamese academic circles, numerous universities and research centers, such as the Institute of History Education, the Institute of Chinese Research (under the supervision of the Institute of Vietnam Social Sciences), the Department of History at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Vietnam National University, Hanoi and National University, Ho Chi Minh City) and the University of Teacher Education were encouraged to conduct research on Chinese history (Nguyen Huu Tam, 2006: 54), and other dimensions related to China or Vietnam-China. In addition, other related organizations and various publishers in Vietnam decided to support and publish issues related to Vietnam and China.

Geopolitical conditions, history and the close relations between Vietnam and China as well as the improvement in the political context between the two countries have all contributed to the increase in the number of studies on “Vietnam and China,” especially on issues concerning relations between the two countries. More importantly, research on these issues continues to be conducted. It can also be seen

from the past to the present that there are numerous studies on this issue. This is evident from a recent work, Vietnam-China Relations: An Inconsistent Period of History (1975-2001) (Quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc: Nhung thang tram lich su) by Nguyen Thi Mai Hoa (n.d.)² which focuses on the conflicts between Vietnam and China during the years 1975-1979. Of particular importance was the 1979 border war initiated by China, which resulted in what many consider the worst period of relations between the two countries in their entire history. However, in the period 1979-1991, Vietnam attempted to restore relations with China even though China did not reciprocate. Nevertheless, relations between the two countries were reestablished in November 1991 and over the next 10 years developed rapidly in several dimensions, including politics, trade, culture, education and tourism. Nguyen Thi Mai Hoa writes of this trend in her doctoral dissertation, “The policy of the Communist Party of Vietnam regarding relations with China from 1975 to 2001” (Chu truong cua DCS Viet Nam trong quan he voi Trung Quoc tu nam 1975-2001) (2007) at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi. This work followed her 2004 MA thesis, “The Party directs the process of building and developing Vietnam-China relations from 1986 to 2001” (Dang lanh dao qua trinh binh thuong hoa va phat trien quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc thoi ky 1986-2001). Her latest work presumably grew out of these two earlier studies. Another doctoral dissertation in history, “Vietnam-China Relations from 1986 to 2006” (Quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc tu 1986 den 2006), is that of Pham Phuc Vinh (2010) at Ho Chi Minh City Pedagogical University. It focuses on the last two decades of Doi Moi on such topics as political-diplomatic relations, security, economics, and cultural and educational issues. The author considered these relations in terms of the advantages for Vietnam and found that Vietnam-China relations fluctuated in terms of cooperation and competition for national interest. The results are presented according to periods based on important events in Vietnam’s

² The author has obtained the draft of this book from a historian who teaches at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi. Dr. Nguyen Thi Mai Hoa, an expert in the relations between Vietnam and China, gave the draft, which is to be published as a book, to that historian.

political history, as follows: an overview of relations between Vietnam and China from 1945 to 1986, the normalization and the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries from 1986 to 1991, and relations in the periods 1991-2000 and 2001-2006 by focusing on solving the disputes in the East Sea and other areas with the cooperation of China. The final chapter assesses overall relations and the history of Vietnam in having relations with China which would be beneficial for Vietnam.

The final example of academic studies of Vietnam-China relations is a master's thesis by Nguyen Van Thanh (2000) called "A study of Vietnam-China historical relations from 1975 to the present (1999)" (Tien trinh lich su cua moi quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc tu 1975 den nay). This study begins with relations between the royal court of Vietnam and the royal court of China, and moves on to the French colonial era, to the liberation of the South (1975), to mid-1975 to 1991, and finally from 1991 to 1999. The main emphasis is historical.³

In addition to studies conducted by leading universities, research on various dimensions of the relations between Vietnam and China has been conducted by research institutes, government organizations, and individuals. An example is *A chronology of Vietnam-China relations 1961-1970* (Quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc nhung su kien 1961-1970) (2006), edited by Nguyen Dinh Liem of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, China Research Center. The Institute also published a similar work, *A chronology of Vietnam-China relations from 1991 to 2000* (Quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc nhung su kien 1991-2000) (2002), edited by Tran Van Do. These two books were parts of the project, "Vietnam-China relations: a Chronology, 1950-2000," which was prepared on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities (1953-2003) and the 10th anniversary of the founding of the China Research Center (1993-2003).

³ A wide range of studies exist on all aspects of Vietnam-China history, including the movement of President Ho Chi Minh and others during the 1920s and 1930s toward China. These issues have received a great deal of attention both in Vietnam and in China. Details about these topics can be seen in the work of a group of prominent historical academics, especially, for Vietnam, the studies of Nguyen Huu Tam (2006)

As for studies on political-diplomatic relations, the works of Luu Van Loi, an official in the Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are most often cited. Many of his studies concern Vietnam-China relations from ancient times to the present. *The diplomacy of Dai Viet* (Ngoai giao Dai Viet) (2000), for example, examines the diplomacy of Vietnam from the time it began to have relations with China until it had relations with Chenla. Two other important works of his are *Fifty years of the diplomacy of Vietnam, 1945-1995* (Nam muoi nam ngoai giao Viet Nam 1945-1995) (1996) and *The diplomacy of Vietnam, 1975-1995* (Ngoai giao Viet Nam 1975-1995). These two books illustrate contemporary relations between Vietnam and China. Another interesting study of the Vietnam-China relationship in the past is a book by Ta Ngoc Lien (1995), a researcher associated with the Institute of History. *Relations between Vietnam and China from the 15th to the early 16th century* (Quan he giua Viet Nam-Trung Quoc the ky XV-dau the ky XVI) examines nearly 100 years of Vietnam-China relations, from 1428 to 1526. Focusing on politics and diplomacy, the study is based on an examination of ancient documents from Vietnam and China. It is one of the first pieces of Vietnamese research on the history of Vietnam-China relations. Its publication was also supported by the Institute of History, Hanoi.

Another interesting work published by the government of Vietnam that is frequently cited is the “white paper” of the Foreign Ministry, entitled “Facts about Vietnam-China relations 30 years ago” (Su that ve quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc trong 30 nam qua) (1979). This work discusses the relationship between Vietnam and China from 1950 to 1980. Although this book is not in the scope of the present study, it reflects the conflicts as well as the negative attitudes of the party and the government of Vietnam towards China during the cold war. It has been used as a reference by researchers both inside and outside of Vietnam for studying relevant issues before 1980.

Topics related to Vietnam-China relations appear not only in master's theses, doctoral dissertations, and books; they are also found in papers presented at national and international seminars which have

been published. One example is *Vietnam-China: raising the level of cooperation for development and the direction of the future*, (Viet Nam-Trung Quoc tang cuong hop tac cung nhau phat trien-huong toi tuong lai), prepared by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities (Vien khoa hoc xa hoi Viet Nam) and the China Research Center, and published by Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi. It consists of articles presented at a seminar on mutual problems, political-foreign affairs, economic relations and academic-cultural relations. A second example is the 2003 book, *Broad foreign policy of Vietnam and Vietnam-China relations* (Chinh sach doi ngoai rong mo cua Viet Nam va Quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc), edited by Do Tien Sam and Furu Motoo. Based on a seminar, the book's publication was supported by the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities in collaboration with the China Research Center and the University of Tokyo.

The third example is a series of books entitled *Vietnam-China relations during the past 10 years*, (Quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc nhin lai 10 nam va trien vong), prepared by the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities and the People's Committee of Lang Son Province and published by the Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi in 2002. It is a collection of studies conducted by scholars from various institutions in Vietnam who participated in a seminar on Vietnam-China relations over a decade. Issues include politics-foreign affairs, economics and trade, cultural relations, academic and educational topics and tourism.

Economics, trade, and investment

Studies on economics, trade, and investment between Vietnam and China have increased since 1991, possibly because senior party and government leaders from both countries have had opportunities to meet each other more frequently. As a result, several agreements have been signed, including those on economic cooperation. The 16 *chu* or “Sixteen Letters” principle was declared by the two countries to develop relations according to the slogan: “Friendly neighbors, cooperating in all

dimensions for stability and long-standing partnerships towards the future” (Lang gieng huu nghi, hop tac toan dien, on dinh lau dai, huong toi tuong lai). This principle seems to be the foundation for developing not only political, but also economic relations. Consequently, articles by Vietnamese scholars on issues of economics, trade and investment began to appear (see Do Tien Sam, 2002). They include *Vietnam-China Trade* (Thuong mai Viet Nam-Trung Quoc) (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2008); a master’s thesis by Nguyen Van Hung (2001), entitled “The economic relationship between Vietnam and China from 1991 to 2000” (Quan he Kinh te Viet-Trung 1991-2000); and a study by Vu Hoai Thuy (2001) under the Ministry of Commerce, entitled “The desire for trade relations between Vietnam and China” (Nghien cuu trien vong quan he thuong mai Viet Nam-Trung Quoc).

In addition, articles about economic dimensions of Vietnam-China relations have appeared in journals in Vietnam, including one in the *Journal of Chinese Research* (Nghien cuu Trung Quoc), entitled “Enhancement of economic relations between Vietnam and China,” (Nang quan he kinh te doi ngoai Viet Nam-Trung Quoc len tang cao thoi dai) which mentioned the trade deficit problem (fewer exports from Vietnam to China than from China to Vietnam), which seems to increase every year. Other studies were two by Le Tuan Thanh in 2004, “Trade along the Vietnam-China border and remarks on conditions for the development of formal trade” (Buon ban qua bien gioi Viet Nam-Trung Quoc va mot so nhan xet ve nhung dieu kien de phat trien buon ban qua bien gioi giua hai nuoc) and “Trade relations between Vietnam and China, reconsidered after one year” (Quan he thuong mai Viet Nam-Trung Quoc mot nam nhin lai).

In addition, the *Journal of Chinese Research* has published academic works on economic and other issues, as have other research journals, including the *Journal of South East Asian Studies* (Nghien cuu Dong Nam A), the *Journal of International Research* (Nghien cuu Quoc te), the *Journal of Social Science* (Khoa hoc xa hoi), the *Journal of History* (Nghien cuu lich su) and the *Journal of the People’s Army* (Quan doi Nhan dan).

Disputes: the Paracel and Spratly Islands (Hoang Sa and Truong Sa)

Although relations between Vietnam and China are generally good at this time, one issue which is notable in the studies of both academics and the government of Vietnam is the dispute over the Paracel and Spratly Islands, two groups of small islands and reefs in the South China Sea or the East Sea (in the Vietnamese language). The islands are largely uninhabited but are thought to be rich in natural resources, especially oil. The roots of this conflict, according to Dr. Nguyen Nha, a Vietnamese scholar and expert on the islands, began in 1909 when the Quang Dong government claimed that the Paracel Islands did not belong to anyone. Later, in 1956, China occupied Phu Lam Island, the largest island of the Paracel group (Hoang Sa Islands), and subsequently claimed sovereignty over all the islands in the South China Sea. In 1974 China occupied the entire area of the Paracel Islands, leading to the Battle of the Paracel Islands. The following year the Saigon government issued a white paper protesting China's occupation, and four years later, in 1979, a battle took place between China and Vietnam in the area of the Paracel Islands. Subsequently, on July 30, 1979, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a white paper announcing that Vietnam had accepted the jurisdiction of Chinese sovereignty over the islands. Later, China made a new statement that these islands were on the shores of Vietnam and were not "Tai Sa" (Paracel) and "Nam Sa" (Spratly) of China (For more information, see Thananan Boonwanna, 2014).

In early 1988 a memorable event occurred "the Sea War" (Hai chien Truong sa 1988) when China's military occupied several of the "Truong Sa Islands" (Spratly Islands) and engaged in battle with Vietnam. This resulted in the death of Vietnamese soldiers. China subsequently announced that Hainan Province included the "Hoang Sa Islands" (Paracel Islands) and "Truong Sa Islands" (Spratly Islands). However, battles between Vietnam and China over the two islands continued and the situation became tense in mid 2012. Therefore, Dr. Mai Hong, who had owned a Chinese map known as "Hoang trieu truc tinh dia du toan do" (in Vietnamese) for 35 years, decided to donate it

to the National Museum of Vietnamese History. It was evidence supporting the argument that until 1904, in Chinese maps the southern territory of China ended at Hainan Island. He was honored by the government of Vietnam as a hero and his picture appeared on the front page of almost every newspaper since this map obviously supported the discourse of Vietnam that China was not entitled to ownership of the disputed islands (see Thananan Boonwanna, 2014).

These conflicts led to an increase in studies on the conflict over these islands by academics from various disciplines as well as by government organizations and publishers. Numerous studies began to be written in early 2010. These issues have always been in the interest of the Vietnamese as pointed out in the book, *Paracel and Spratly are the flesh and blood of Vietnam* (Hoang Sa, Truong Sa La mau thit Viet Nam) (2013) edited by Mai Hong and Le Truong, which contains studies by researchers from various disciplines such as history, cartography, geography and journalism. All of the articles insist that the two island groups belong to Vietnam. The book focuses on the issues that were no Paracel and Spratly Islands on the Chinese map of the year 1904 and on the assessment of the map known as “Hoang trieu truc tinh dia du toan do,” mentioned above. This was interestingly analyzed by the historian Phan Duy Kha. Another topic is “The Paracel and Spratly Islands are the flesh and blood of Vietnam which cannot be separated forever.” Other evidence includes academic, historical and legal aspects, especially ancient maps, documents and papers of the West, which proved that there was no evidence supporting China’s claim of ownership. Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs also published a book, entitled *Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands* (Chu quyen cua Viet Nam doi voi hai quan dao Hoang Sa va Troung Sa) in 2012.

Still another book, *Historical evidence and laws proving that Paracel and Spratly belong to Vietnam* (Bang chung lich su va co so phap ly Hoang Sa, Troung Sa la cua Viet Nam) (2011), was published by Tre Publishing House. This book is a collection of writings on the issues of the two island groups from experienced Vietnamese researchers,

including Nguyen Nha, Nguyen Dinh De, Pham Han, Pham Hoang Quan, Hoang Viet and Luu Van Loi. On the whole, this book is like a representative of the government of Vietnam, which argues that the Paracel and Spratly Islands belong to Vietnam and had never belonged to China. Like others, this study examined Chinese documents and the ancient map of China. Another issue discussed is the demarcation line known as the “cow’s tongue” or “nine dash lines” claimed by China as the transport route used by the Chinese in the past. This route covered nearly all of the South China Sea. However, Vietnam argued that this claim was unreasonable. The actions of China did not help build peace and stability to the region. On the contrary, they were a threat, and they were especially destructive to Vietnam-China relations. A further study was that of Vuong Quoc Khanh (2009), entitled *The dispute over the Spratly Islands of Vietnam and all parties involved* (Tranh chap quan dao Truong Sa giua Viet Nam va cac lien quan tu nam 1909 den nay).

More than ten years ago, in early 2000, several systematic studies, theses, and doctoral dissertations on the issue of the islands began to appear. One was “The establishment of the sovereignty of the Paracel and Spratly Islands of Vietnam” (Qua trinh xac lap chu quyen cua Viet Nam tai quan dao Hoang Sa va Truong Sa) by Dr. Nguyen Nha (2001), a specialist on this issue. He became seriously interested in it in 1974 when China occupied the Paracel Islands on January 19 and since then he has been trying to discover the historical facts about the two island groups. After visiting libraries in other countries he realized that there are very few Vietnamese records on the Paracel Islands compared to Chinese records (Nguyen Nha, 2014). His work was the first to systematically study the two island groups and it argues that they have belonged to Vietnam since the past. Moreover, he recommended that the Vietnamese government develop a long-term strategy to regain and protect sovereignty over the two islands. To accomplish this, he recommends adding historical information on the establishment of sovereignty and the approaches in defending the sovereignty of Vietnam over the islands to secondary school and university curricula. In addition, he suggests that roads and schools should be named “Hoang

Sa” and “Truong Sa” as well as the names of those who sacrificed their lives to defend Vietnam’s sovereignty over these islands. He also advocates broadly disseminating information about Vietnam’s sovereignty over the islands on various websites (Nguyen Nha, 2001). Nowadays, Dr. Nguyen Nha regularly attends seminars on the Paracel and Spratly Islands, both at home and abroad. Thus, his studies are likely to contribute an awareness of the issues and an interest in studying them by the government and other agencies.

In the 1990s, Vietnamese academics began to study these island groups by examining Chinese documents. Nguyen Quang Ngoc pointed out that before 1907, “Hoang Sa” (Paracel Islands) had never appeared on a map of China. Other studies were “The attitudes of China towards Hoang Sa and Truong Sa” by Hoang Ngoc Bao and “The attitudes of Taiwan towards Hoang Sa and Truong Sa” by Nguyen Huy Quy (see Nguyen Nha, 2001). From these studies, it can be seen that the awareness of Vietnamese academics on the issue of the Paracel and Spratly Islands in using Chinese documents has not just recently gained attention, but it has been going on for some time and has led to a new discovery supporting the Vietnamese side. Finally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam (1984) published the book entitled *Hoang Sa Islands and Troung Sa Islands: the territory of Vietnam* (Quan dao Hoang Sa va quan dao Truong Sa: Lanh tho cua Viet Nam). This appeared to be the first piece of writing in which the Vietnamese government clearly claimed that the Paracel and Spratly Islands were in the territory of Vietnam. In conclusion, it can be seen that overall studies about these island groups aim to oppose China and verify Vietnam’s ownership of the islands.

Concluding remarks

Studies of “Vietnam-China” in Vietnamese academic circles coincide with the establishment of relations between Vietnam and China in 1991 after nearly two decades of confrontation. Since the 1990s numerous studies of these issues have been conducted, especially the conflicts

over the Paracel and Spratly Islands. After thorough review of literatures, the author grouped the studies into three major themes, namely 1) overall Vietnam-China relations; 2) economics, trade and investment; and 3) disputes concerning the Paracel and Spratly Islands.

From the studies above, the following conclusions can be made. First, studies of Vietnam-China relations have often been done by historians, whose findings are generally presented by using the major political events as the basis of the division. The periods of some topics sometimes overlap. Moreover, some are the products of different institutions and the focus is different. In addition, historical studies are usually based on an analysis of documents. The research also found that, apart from the leading universities in Vietnam, other organizations have produced research on Vietnam-China relations, including the Chinese Research Center (founded after Vietnam and China had established official relations), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government agencies situated in provinces along the Vietnam-China border.

Second, studies of economics, trade, and investment have been conducted since the political tensions between the two countries were resolved. The leaders of the two countries have often visited each other and signed several agreements. Therefore, studies in the form of research, research articles, academic seminars and other forums were found.

Third, the conflicts concerning the Paracel and Spratly Islands are of great interest to Vietnamese academics and the Vietnamese public sector. These issues have been studied continuously as a direct result of the battles over these two islands between Vietnam and China. Especially in Vietnam, the trend of writing about this issue may have emerged out of the interest of academics and might be supported by the party and the government of Vietnam in order to create a discourse about the ownership of the islands. However, there are more studies of these issues than can be thoroughly categorized in this article.

The study of these topical trends makes us aware of the dominant discourse or the official history of the two island groups as well as the work of outstanding Vietnamese scholars. It is also noteworthy that the

issue of Vietnam-China relations seems to be the main focus of Vietnamese academics. Nevertheless, such topics are rarely found in the main titles. However, the classification of the study of Vietnam-China relations in this research was categorized according to general viewpoints. This was done in order to understand the academic progress of Vietnam and to answer basic questions about current trends in research. The author also recognizes that there may be other dimensions which have not been presented, including society, culture, tourism, religion and beliefs, which it is hoped will be studied in the future.

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