

Vietnam–Russia Relations through the Lenses of History, Memory, and Community

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Abstract

This paper examines Vietnam–Russia relations in the post-Cold War era from the perspectives of historical legacy, collective memory, and societal linkages, seeking to move beyond conventional approaches that emphasize geopolitics and military cooperation. The study argues that the durability of bilateral relations is not grounded solely in contemporary strategic interests but is shaped by a multi-layered structure in which the Soviet–Vietnam legacy, memory politics, and transnational social networks play foundational roles. Based on a review of academic literature published between 2015 and 2025, combined with an analysis of political discourse and public diplomacy practices, the paper identifies three main findings. First, the institutional, legal, and human resource legacies of the Soviet period continue to influence political structures, levels of trust, and the framework of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries. Second, the memory of “traditional friendship” is reproduced in political discourse, education, and media as a symbolic resource that reinforces legitimacy and the distinctive character of bilateral ties amid intensifying major-power competition. Third, cooperation in education, culture, language, and two-way migration forms a “soft infrastructure” that sustains interaction beyond the state level. The paper concludes that integrating historical and societal dimensions into the analysis of Vietnam–Russia relations provides a more comprehensive explanation of their continuity and adaptability within a transforming international order.

Keywords: collective memory, diaspora networks, Soviet legacy, strategic partnership, Vietnam–Russia relations.

1. Introduction

Vietnam–Russia relations in the post-Cold War era are commonly approached through the lenses of geopolitics, military cooperation, or comprehensive strategic partnership (Britov, 2022; Mazyrin, 2021; Zaręba, 2023). The upgrading of bilateral ties to the level of a “comprehensive strategic partnership” has often been interpreted as the outcome of a restructuring of mutual interests amid shifting global power configurations (Le & Le, 2012; Rumer & Sokolsky, 2014). However, existing analyses predominantly emphasize the strategic-state dimension, while historical legacies, collective memory, and societal linkages remain insufficiently integrated into a

comprehensive analytical framework. The foundations of Vietnam–Russia relations were not established solely after 1991 but are deeply rooted in the Soviet–Vietnam legacy. This legacy is reflected in institutional, legal, and governance influences that the Soviet Union left on the political and legal structures of contemporary Vietnam (Le, 2023; Nghia & Ha, 2018). At the societal level, memories of the socialist past continue to be reproduced and reinterpreted within Vietnam’s public sphere and political discourse (Grossheim, 2020, 2021), forming what may be described as a “memory infrastructure” that contributes to continuity in bilateral relations.

Beyond historical factors, humanitarian cooperation—including education, culture, science, and language—has increasingly been recognized as a soft pillar of the strategic partnership (Dang, 2025; Ponka et al., 2021). The presence of the Vietnamese community in Russia and labor migration flows further function as important social bridges (Ryazantsev & Piskunov, 2023; Ryazantsev et al., 2022; Toan et al., 2019). At the same time, two-way migration dynamics, including the movement of Russian citizens to Vietnam, reflect the diversification of social linkages between the two countries (Pismennaya & Nioradze, 2022).

In the context of evolving geopolitical dynamics and intensifying major-power competition (Luzyanin, 2022; Tran, 2025), approaching Vietnam–Russia relations through the lenses of history, memory, and community enables a broader understanding of their resilience beyond the logic of purely strategic interests. This paper therefore seeks to analyze how historical and societal factors contribute to the long-term foundations of Vietnam–Russia relations in the post-Cold War era.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

Theoretical Framework

This paper approaches Vietnam–Russia relations through the combination of three theoretical perspectives: (i) strategic partnership in international relations, (ii) institutional legacy and memory politics, and (iii) soft power and societal linkages.

First, the concept of a *comprehensive strategic partnership* provides the foundation for understanding the political–state structure of bilateral relations. Recent studies argue that this framework both reflects achievements already attained and represents an ongoing objective to be consolidated amid geopolitical volatility (Britov, 2022; Mazyrin, 2021). At a broader level, Vietnam–Russia relations must be situated within the context of power competition in the Asia–Pacific region and the Russia–Vietnam–China triangle, where strategic balancing and diversification play significant roles (Luzyanin, 2022; Tran, 2025). However, as Rumer and Sokolsky (2014) have observed, the durability of bilateral ties depends not only on current strategic interests but also on accumulated trust and historical foundations.

Second, the paper draws on historical institutionalism to explain the long-term impact of Soviet–Vietnam relations on contemporary structures. Analyses of the “Soviet legacy” demonstrate the imprint of the Soviet Union on Vietnam’s legal system, governance models, and policy thinking (Le, 2023; Nghia & Ha, 2018). At the same time, memories of the socialist past continue to be reproduced in the public sphere,

shaping identity and contemporary political discourse (Grossheim, 2020, 2021). The mobilization of the memory of “traditional friendship” is also manifested in public diplomacy practices and commemorative activities (Tran, 2025).

Third, the analytical framework of soft power and humanitarian cooperation helps explain the societal dimension of bilateral relations. Cooperation in education, science, culture, and language functions as a mechanism for strengthening trust and strategic coordination (Abramova, 2019; Dang, 2025; Ponka et al., 2021). Migration flows and the Vietnamese community in Russia create transnational networks beyond the state, contributing to the promotion of bilateral relations at the societal level (Ryazantsev & Piskunov, 2023; Ryazantsev et al., 2022; Toan et al., 2019). Conversely, the migration of Russian citizens to Vietnam reflects the diversification of social ties between the two countries (Pismennaya & Nioradze, 2022).

Research Methodology

This study employed a thematic literature review combined with discourse analysis to examine the role of collective memory and societal linkages in Vietnam–Russia relations during the post-Cold War period. First, the literature review method was applied to systematize existing academic works on Vietnam–Russia relations, the Soviet–Vietnam legacy, humanitarian cooperation, and international migration. Studies on strategic partnership and regional geopolitical contexts provide the analytical basis for identifying the strategic-state layer of bilateral relations (Britov, 2022; Luzyanin, 2022; Mazyrin, 2021). At the same time, research on institutional legacies and socialist memory in Vietnam helps explain the historical continuity embedded in political structures and policy thinking (Grossheim, 2020, 2021; Le, 2023; Nghia & Ha, 2018).

In addition, discourse analysis was employed to examine how memories of Soviet–Vietnam relations are reproduced in official statements, public diplomacy activities, and policy-oriented scholarship (Dang, 2025; Tran, 2025). This approach allowed for the identification of how historical symbols and narratives of friendship are mobilized as political resources in the context of intensifying geopolitical competition. Furthermore, studies on the Vietnamese community in Russia and two-way migration flows were used to analyze the societal layer of bilateral relations (Pismennaya & Nioradze, 2022; Ryazantsev & Piskunov, 2023; Ryazantsev et al., 2022). By combining literature review and discourse analysis, the study approached Vietnam–Russia relations as a multi-layered structure in which historical, memory-based, and societal factors interact closely with contemporary strategic interests.

3. Findings

Historical Legacy: From Soviet–Vietnam Relations to a Strategic Partnership

The historical legacy of Soviet–Vietnam relations constitutes a foundational element in the contemporary structure of Vietnam–Russia ties. Prior to 1991, cooperation between Vietnam and the Soviet Union was not limited to strategic–military collaboration but also encompassed cadre training, technical assistance, technology transfer, and institution-building. Studies on the “Soviet legacy” demonstrate the profound influence of the Soviet Union on Vietnam’s legal system, state governance,

and policy thinking (Le, 2023; Nghia & Ha, 2018). According to Nghia and Ha (2018), Vietnam's post-war legal framework and state organizational model bore a distinct imprint of the Soviet socialist model, particularly in the fields of economic-industrial management and human resource development. Le (2024) further argued that even in the course of post-Đổi Mới legal reforms, traces of Soviet legal structures remain identifiable, revealing a pattern of institutional path dependence in Vietnam's development trajectory.

At the political-diplomatic level, Soviet-Vietnam relations were grounded in shared ideological orientations and geostrategic interests. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia's policy shift toward the West in the 1990s led to a significant decline in economic cooperation and strategic presence in Southeast Asia. However, as Kanaev et al. (2020) contended, the "restart" of Russia-Vietnam relations in the early 2000s was not an entirely new beginning but rather a restoration based on historical capital and accumulated political trust. The authors emphasized that memories of Soviet-Vietnam cooperation helped reduce political transaction costs and facilitated the re-establishment of high-level dialogue mechanisms.

The elevation of bilateral ties to the level of a "comprehensive strategic partnership" can thus be understood as the institutionalization of this historical legacy. Le and Le (2012) argued that the upgrading of relations reflects not only new strategic needs but also the continuation of a long-standing tradition of cooperation. Britov (2022) questioned whether the comprehensive strategic partnership represents an accomplished achievement or an ongoing objective; nevertheless, he underscored the importance of historical foundations in sustaining political trust between the two sides. Similarly, Mazyrin (2021) maintained that the high frequency of political contacts between Russia and Vietnam is the outcome of a long-term process of accumulation rather than a mere situational response to international fluctuations. Complementing these perspectives, Hung (2020) highlighted that post-Cold War Russia-Vietnam cooperation has not only been maintained at the political level but has also been restructured around new economic and legal interests. According to Hung, the distinctive character of bilateral relations lies in the combination of historical legacy and adaptability to a changing international economic environment. This suggests that the Soviet-Vietnam legacy is not a static inheritance but has been transformed into a strategic resource under conditions of integration and global competition (Hung, 2020).

The historical legacy extends beyond institutions and politics to encompass discourse and social memory. Grossheim (2020) analyzed how Vietnam constructs and reproduces a "memory machine" that celebrates the socialist past. The emphasis on Soviet-Vietnam friendship in commemorative events and historical education contributes to reinforcing the legitimacy of contemporary relations. Grossheim (2021) further demonstrated that memories of the socialist period are not immutable but are continuously adjusted and reinterpreted to align with contemporary political needs. In this context, the memory of the Soviet Union becomes a symbolic resource mobilized in diplomatic practice.

From the Russian perspective, relations with Vietnam are also perceived as part of a broader strategy to maintain influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Rumer and Sokolsky (2014) have observed that although Russia no longer holds superpower status as it did in the Soviet era, its historical relationship with Vietnam provides Moscow with a unique foothold in Southeast Asia. Luzyanin (2022) expanded this analysis within the framework of the Russia-Vietnam-China triangle, arguing that Vietnam plays a significant role in Russia's regional balancing strategy. Nonetheless, contemporary geopolitical calculations continue to rest upon the foundations of trust and cooperative memory established in earlier decades.

Another significant dimension of the Soviet-Vietnam legacy lies in human resource training. Tens of thousands of Vietnamese students and officials studied in the Soviet Union and later in Russia, forming influential alumni networks within Vietnam's political and economic systems. Abramova (2019) emphasized the role of the Russian language and Russian cultural space as components of socio-cultural reality, contributing to the maintenance of long-term connections between the two nations. Dang (2025) further argued that promoting soft power through education and language represents a continuation of historical logic, whereby humanitarian cooperation occupies a central place within the strategic partnership.

Beyond the state and symbolic dimensions, migration flows and community networks also reflect historical continuity. Ryazantsev and Piskunov (2023) demonstrated that Vietnamese labor migration to Russia originated during the Soviet period and has continued to evolve under new conditions. Ryazantsev et al. (2022) emphasized the role of the Vietnamese community as a bridge promoting bilateral relations. Conversely, Pismennaya and Nioradze (2022) analyzed the growing trend of Russian migration to Vietnam, highlighting the increasingly two-way nature of social interaction. Toan et al. (2019) conceptualized diaspora as a form of social linkage that shapes the Russia-Asia dialogue.

Taken together, these analyses indicate that the historical legacy of Soviet-Vietnam relations persists not merely as a memory of the past but as an active structuring force in contemporary Vietnam-Russia relations. From institutional and legal frameworks to political discourse, social networks, and educational exchange, these elements collectively provide a durable foundation for the comprehensive strategic partnership. In other words, Vietnam-Russia relations after the Cold War do not represent a rupture with the past but rather the reconfiguration of a relationship formed and accumulated over decades of shared history.

Collective Memory and Political Discourse

If historical legacy provides the institutional foundation for Vietnam-Russia relations, collective memory and political discourse function as mechanisms through which that foundation is reproduced and legitimized in the present context. Bilateral ties are sustained not only by strategic interests but also by the continuous reinterpretation of the past and its linkage to contemporary policy objectives.

Studies on socialist memory in Vietnam demonstrate that the past is not preserved neutrally but is organized, selected, and reconstructed through an institutionalized “memory machine” (Grossheim, 2020). Within this process, memories of Soviet–Vietnam relations are emphasized as symbols of friendship, wartime support, and assistance in national reconstruction. Grossheim (2021) further argued that memories of the post-1975 period and the socialist era serve not merely to reflect history but to promote social integration and reinforce political legitimacy. This dynamic is particularly relevant in contemporary Vietnam–Russia relations, where official statements frequently invoke “traditional friendship” as a foundational element.

At the diplomatic level, historical memory is mobilized as a political resource within public diplomacy practices. Tran (2025) showed that throughout 75 years of relations between Vietnam and the Soviet Union/Russian Federation, public diplomacy activities—ranging from commemorative events to cultural exchanges—have played a key role in maintaining continuity in bilateral ties. By rearticulating historical milestones and highlighting Soviet support in the past, both Vietnam and Russia reinforce a discourse of mutual trust, thereby creating a basis for strategic initiatives in the present. This approach aligns with Dang’s (2025) argument that soft power and cultural–educational cooperation have become significant instruments amid shifting geopolitical conditions.

Collective memory is also directly connected to the construction of national identity and international positioning. Nghia and Ha (2018) indicated that the Soviet legal and institutional legacy not only shaped Vietnam’s state structure but also influenced how Vietnam conceptualizes international order and its role within it. Le (2024) added that despite market-oriented reforms, elements of the Soviet model remain embedded in administrative thinking and policymaking practices. This suggests that institutional memory is not merely symbolic but has tangible implications for political behavior.

Within Russian strategic discourse, Vietnam is often portrayed as a traditional and reliable partner in Southeast Asia. Rumer and Sokolsky (2014) argued that the historical relationship with Vietnam provides Russia with a distinctive foothold in the region, enabling it to maintain influence despite limited resources. Luzyanin (2022), in his analysis of the Russia–Vietnam–China triangle, contended that Vietnam occupies a significant position in Russia’s Asia strategy and that historical factors contribute to reinforcing bilateral political trust. Such interpretations demonstrate how historical memory is integrated into the structuring of strategic interests.

From the Vietnamese perspective, political discourse on relations with Russia also reflects a balancing approach. While affirming the comprehensive strategic partnership, Vietnam simultaneously pursues diversification and multilateralization of foreign relations (Britov, 2022; Mazyrin, 2021). Nevertheless, official statements and academic analyses frequently highlight Soviet support as evidence of the distinctive character of Vietnam–Russia relations (Le & Le, 2012). This reflects the strategic mobilization of memory to differentiate Russia from other partners, even as Vietnam maintains a flexible and pragmatic foreign policy.

Memory discourse is further manifested through language and education. Abramova (2019) demonstrated that the Russian language is not merely a medium of communication but also a socio-cultural space closely linked to historical memory. The continued teaching of Russian and the maintenance of academic exchange programs serve as mechanisms for reproducing shared memory at the societal level. Dang (2025) argued that in the context of soft-power competition, promoting cultural and linguistic cooperation strengthens each country's image and presence in public perception.

In addition, community networks and migration contribute to sustaining collective memory. Ryazantsev and Piskunov (2023) showed that the Vietnamese community in Russia not only plays an economic role but also functions as a socio-cultural actor. Ryazantsev et al. (2022) emphasized that the Vietnamese diaspora actively participate in cultural and commemorative activities, thereby reproducing Soviet-Vietnam memory within the Russian context. Conversely, Pismennaya and Nioradze (2022) observed a growing presence of Russian citizens in Vietnam, reflecting two-way social interaction built upon historical familiarity and positive perceptions of the past.

In sum, collective memory in Vietnam-Russia relations is not merely a remnant of history but a dynamic element continuously reconstructed within political discourse and diplomatic practice. It reinforces the legitimacy of the comprehensive strategic partnership while generating a layer of societal connection that transcends purely interest-based logic. In an era of intensifying geopolitical competition and global uncertainty, the mobilization of historical memory becomes a crucial mechanism for preserving the stability and distinctiveness of Vietnam-Russia relations.

Community, Education, and Societal Linkages

Beyond the strategic-state layer and the memory-discursive layer, Vietnam-Russia relations are sustained and reproduced through a dense network of societal linkages, including migrant communities, educational cooperation, language exchange, and humanitarian activities. If history provides the foundation and memory generates symbolic meaning, it is these concrete social connections that constitute the "soft infrastructure" ensuring the continuity and resilience of bilateral relations.

First and foremost, the Vietnamese community in Russia represents one of the most significant social actors in bilateral ties. Ryazantsev and Piskunov (2023) demonstrated that Vietnamese labor migration to Russia originated during the Soviet period and has continued to evolve in the post-Soviet era, with changes in occupational structures and legal status. Migration is therefore not merely an economic phenomenon but a process of building transnational social networks. In their study, Ryazantsev et al. (2022) emphasized that the Vietnamese community in Russia plays an active role in promoting bilateral relations through cultural activities, business engagement, and support for public diplomacy initiatives. This community simultaneously preserves Vietnamese cultural identity and integrates into Russian society, thereby creating a two-way space of social interaction.

Toan et al. (2019) approached the Vietnamese diaspora in Moscow as a component of Russia–Asia dialogue, arguing that coordination between state authorities and the private sector in managing migrant communities contributes to enhanced socio-economic cooperation. This suggests that community linkages are not purely spontaneous but are increasingly institutionalized through policy mechanisms and bilateral cooperation. Conversely, Pismennaya and Nioradze (2022) documented the growing trend of Russian migration to Vietnam, particularly among retirees and professionals, reflecting the diversification of social interactions between the two countries. This two-way presence reinforces the transnational character of Vietnam–Russia relations, moving beyond a traditional one-directional model.

In addition to migration, educational cooperation constitutes another crucial societal pillar. Since the Soviet era, tens of thousands of Vietnamese students and officials have been trained in Soviet and Russian educational institutions, forming influential alumni networks within Vietnam’s political and economic systems. Although the number of Vietnamese students in Russia has fluctuated over time, education continues to function as a long-term channel of connection. Ponka et al. (2021), in their analysis of humanitarian cooperation from 1991 to 2019, argued that education, science, and cultural exchange play central roles in consolidating the framework of the comprehensive strategic partnership. They highlighted that in an era of globalization, humanitarian factors have become increasingly significant in shaping the behavior of states seeking to maintain meaningful roles in the international system.

Dang (2025) further contended that promoting soft power through cultural, educational, tourism, and language cooperation is a strategic means of strengthening each country’s image and presence in the partner society’s perception. In the context of intensifying soft-power competition, maintaining Russian language programs in Vietnam and expanding educational cooperation carry not only technical but also symbolic value. Abramova (2019) conceptualized the Russian language as part of socio-cultural reality, where memory and identity are reproduced through education and communication. This perspective underscores that language functions not merely as a vehicle for knowledge transmission but also as a medium for sustaining historical memory and relational continuity.

Educational and humanitarian cooperation is closely linked to the broader framework of strategic partnership. Britov (2022) and Mazyrin (2021) both emphasized that despite limitations in economic cooperation, political and humanitarian fields maintain high levels of interaction. Le and Le (2012) argued that the elevation of relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership provided an institutional framework for expanding educational exchanges and cultural cooperation. Meanwhile, Tran (2025) demonstrated that public diplomacy—including commemorative events, people-to-people exchanges, and media engagement—serves as a mechanism for sustaining positive perceptions of bilateral relations.

At a broader level, these societal linkages help mitigate risks in an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment. Luzyanin (2022) noted that within the Russia–Vietnam–

China triangle, Vietnam must carefully adjust its policies to maintain strategic balance. In such a context, social and humanitarian connections preserve channels of dialogue and cooperation even when the political–security environment shifts. Zaręba (2023), although focusing primarily on military cooperation, acknowledged that Vietnam–Russia relations are not confined to defense but are reinforced by multiple channels of interaction.

Taken together, community networks, education, and societal linkages constitute a durable layer of connection between Vietnam and Russia. While the strategic layer depends on security interests and geopolitical calculations, the societal layer operates according to a different logic—the logic of networks, memory, and everyday interaction. The interweaving of migration networks, educational programs, and cultural and linguistic cooperation has created a shared social space in which bilateral relations are sustained not only by states but also by diverse social actors.

Therefore, analyzing Vietnam–Russia relations solely through a strategic lens would overlook a crucial component of their long-term resilience. Community and education are not merely supplementary fields but central mechanisms that translate historical legacy into contemporary practice. In the context of a continuously evolving international order, this societal layer may function as a “shock absorber”, contributing to the stability and distinctiveness of Vietnam–Russia relations.

4. Discussion

The findings presented in Section 3 suggest that Vietnam–Russia relations can be understood as a multi-layered structure in which historical legacy, collective memory, and societal linkages do not exist in isolation but interact closely with the strategic–state framework. This discussion highlights three key points: (i) the continuity and restructuring of the Soviet–Vietnam legacy; (ii) the role of memory as a political resource; and (iii) the stabilizing function of social networks in a volatile geopolitical context.

First, analyses of historical legacy indicate that post-Cold War Vietnam–Russia relations do not represent an entirely new beginning but rather the restructuring of a pre-existing foundation (Kanaev et al., 2020). The institutional and legal imprints of the Soviet Union within Vietnam’s system (Le, 2023; Nghia & Ha, 2018) reflect a mechanism of path dependence, whereby structures established in the past continue to shape present behavior. This helps explain why, despite the decline in economic cooperation during the 1990s, political relations were maintained and subsequently elevated to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership (Britov, 2022; Le & Le, 2012).

However, continuity does not imply immutability. Mazyrin (2021) and Rumer and Sokolsky (2014) emphasized that contemporary Vietnam–Russia relations are adjusted to a new distribution of power, in which Russia seeks to preserve influence in Asia while Vietnam pursues diversification and multilateralization of its foreign policy. Luzyanin (2022) demonstrated that within the Russia–Vietnam–China triangle,

strategic calculations have become increasingly complex. Thus, historical legacy does not replace current interests but functions as a catalyst that reduces political transaction costs in the process of policy adaptation.

Second, collective memory emerges as an important political resource. Grossheim (2020, 2021) demonstrated that socialist memory in Vietnam is selectively organized and reproduced to reinforce political legitimacy and social integration. In the context of Vietnam–Russia relations, the memory of “traditional friendship” becomes a symbolic element in political discourse and public diplomacy (Tran, 2025). This indicates that memory is not merely a residue of the past but a tool for defining national identity and international positioning.

The mobilization of memory is also closely linked to soft-power strategies. Dang (2025) and Ponka et al. (2021) argued that humanitarian cooperation—encompassing education, culture, and language—contributes to strengthening each country’s positive image in the partner’s perception. Abramova (2019) highlighted the role of the Russian language as a socio-cultural space in which historical memory is maintained and transmitted across generations. In this sense, memory exists not only at the state level but is continually reproduced in social life.

Third, societal and community linkages function as stabilizing mechanisms in a changing geopolitical environment. Research on the Vietnamese diaspora in Russia (Ryazantsev & Piskunov, 2023; Ryazantsev et al., 2022; Toan et al., 2019) shows that the community serves not only as an economic actor but also as a cultural and social bridge. Conversely, Russian migration to Vietnam (Pismennaya & Nioradze, 2022) reflects the increasingly reciprocal nature of social interaction. These networks create channels of engagement beyond the state, helping sustain connections even when the political–security environment shifts.

The interaction between the strategic layer and the societal layer helps explain the relative resilience of Vietnam–Russia relations amid intensifying major-power competition and international sanctions. While military cooperation remains a central pillar (Zaręba, 2023), and the comprehensive strategic partnership provides an institutional framework (Britov, 2022; Mazyrin, 2021), it is historical legacy, collective memory, and community networks that supply depth and long-term stability.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that existing scholarship tends to analyze these dimensions separately. Most studies focus either on strategic partnership and geopolitics (Britov, 2022; Luzyanin, 2022), humanitarian cooperation (Ponka et al., 2021), or migration and diaspora (Ryazantsev & Piskunov, 2023), without fully integrating the three layers in a unified theoretical framework. The multi-layered approach proposed in this paper contributes to filling this gap by conceptualizing Vietnam–Russia relations as an intertwined structure of state, memory, and society.

Fourth, the findings of this study also carry important implications for contemporary diplomacy and for the study of soft power in international relations. In the context of

intensifying competition for influence among major powers, intangible resources such as historical memory, political symbols, and transnational social networks may function as a form of “strategic capital” that helps sustain long-term bilateral relations. According to Nye (2004), soft power derives not only from culture and values but also from the ability to generate attraction and trust in the perceptions of partners. The case of Vietnam–Russia relations demonstrates that memories of Soviet–Vietnam cooperation have been mobilized as a soft resource that reinforces political trust and reduces transaction costs in bilateral cooperation. At the same time, as Miskimmon et al. (2013) argued, states can employ “strategic narratives” to connect the past with present policy objectives, thereby shaping perceptions in the international environment. From the perspective of memory politics, Olick (2007) emphasized that the institutionalization of memory can become a mechanism for legitimizing policy and positioning strategy. For policymakers, this suggests that the strategic use of historical and social resources can enhance the effectiveness of long-term diplomatic engagement. For scholars, the multi-layered approach that integrates history, memory, and society also opens a new avenue for examining how soft power operates in bilateral relations grounded in deep historical experience.

In sum, the discussion demonstrates that the resilience of Vietnam–Russia relations cannot be explained solely by strategic interests or geopolitical calculations. Rather, this durability results from the intersection of historical legacy, collective memory, and social networks. Recognizing these interconnected layers broadens our understanding of bilateral relations and provides a theoretical foundation for future research on the relationship between history, memory, and foreign policy in a transforming international order.

5. Conclusion

This paper has approached Vietnam–Russia relations from a perspective that differs from traditional analyses centered primarily on geopolitics or military–economic cooperation. By integrating three analytical layers—historical legacy, collective memory, and societal linkages—the study demonstrates that post-Cold War bilateral relations are not merely a strategic “restart” but rather a process of restructuring a foundation accumulated over several decades.

First, the Soviet–Vietnam legacy continues to shape contemporary relations through institutional and legal imprints, as well as through networks of human capital trained prior to 1991. Research on the “Soviet legacy” and the comprehensive strategic partnership indicates that this continuity is not merely symbolic but has tangible effects on political structures and the level of mutual trust between the two sides. Second, collective memory and political discourse function as legitimizing resources in a fluctuating international environment. The recurrent invocation of “traditional friendship” not only reinforces national identity and political legitimacy but also provides a soft foundation for present policy decisions. Third, societal linkages—particularly migrant communities, educational cooperation, cultural exchange, and language programs—constitute a form of “soft infrastructure” that sustains bilateral interaction beyond state-centric logic. These social networks contribute to stabilizing relations during periods of geopolitical uncertainty.

Taken together, the analysis affirms that the durability of Vietnam–Russia relations cannot be adequately explained solely through strategic interests or power-balancing considerations. Instead, it requires the integration of historical, memory-based, and societal dimensions into the framework of international relations analysis. Such an approach not only broadens the understanding of Vietnam–Russia ties but also suggests a conceptual model applicable to other bilateral relationships grounded in deep historical experience within a transforming international order.

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