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THE VIETNAM CROSS DAYS BETWEEN MGIMO UNIVERSITY AND ST PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

N.V. Kolotova¹, N.S. Kuklin², V.V. Vershinina³

Abstract: The article surveys a scientific conference and a scientific-practical student seminar held in Moscow and in St Petersburg in the frameworks of the “Vietnam Cross Days” that were organized by MGIMO Vietnamese Students Association, the ASEAN Centre in cooperation with the Ho Chi Minh Institute of the Saint-Petersburg State University. Russian and Vietnamese speakers discussed a wide range of issues, including bilateral relations, growth and development of Vietnam, as well as the history, culture and language of this country.

Keywords: Vietnam Cross Days, student science, Vietnam, Russia, comprehensive strategic partnership, Russian-Vietnamese relations, Southeastern Asia, Vietnam’s economy, Vietnam’s foreign policy, Vietnam’s domestic policy, Vietnam’s culture and literature.

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The traditional “7th Vietnam Day at MGIMO”, a flagship initiative of the Vietnamese community and the ASEAN Center, was held in April 2022. Its site annually unites Vietnamese students learning in Russia, Vietnamists of leading Russian schools of oriental studies, and those whose professional concerns are directly connected with the study of Vietnam and the development of Russian-Vietnamese relations. The novelty this year has been the organization of external activities, i.e., “the Vietnam Cross Days”, for the first time held at St Petersburg State University with support of the Ho Chi Minh Institute. In the course of mutual visits of student delegations to Moscow

¹ Kolotova Nadezhda V., graduate student, Faculty of Oriental Studies, St. Petersburg State University. E-mail: nadyakolotova@gmail.com

² Kuklin Nikita S., Ph.D. (History), Assistant, Department of Theory and History of International Relations, Faculty of Humanitarian and Social Sciences, RUDN University; Expert of the ASEAN Centre, MGIMO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0002-5715-847X. E-mail: kuklin-ns@rudn.ru

³ Vershinina Valeria V., Ph.D. (Political Science), Expert of the ASEAN Centre, MGIMO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0001-7848-8497. E-mail: vv.vershinina@inno.mgimo.ru

and St Petersburg there was held a number of scientific, as well as cultural and educational events, dedicated to Vietnamese studies in Russia and to the analysis of the role of Vietnam in the world.

On April 25, a scientific-practical student seminar was held at the Ho Chi Minh Institute at St Petersburg State University. Students-Vietnamists of St Petersburg State University, MGIMO University, the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow State Linguistic University, National Research University Higher School of Economics, and RUDN University took part in it. Students read fifteen papers which discussed issues of Vietnam history, literature, culture, economics and politics from antiquity to the present day.

Moscow delegation headed by Svetlana Glazunova, a senior teacher of the Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai and Lao Chair at MGIMO University, consisted of thirteen students from Moscow leading institutes. Also, the participants were Valeria Vershinina, Ksenia Tabunova, MGIMO ASEAN Center experts, and Vu Thi Tra My, a graduate of MGIMO University, a member of the Association of Lawyers of Russia.

Prior to the seminar, in keeping with the tradition of the Ho Chi Minh Institute at St Petersburg State University guests jointly with teachers and university students laid flowers at the monument of President Ho Chi Minh (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Laying flowers at the monument of President Ho Chi Minh at St Petersburg State University.

Photo: The Faculty of Oriental Studies at St Petersburg State University

Piotr Moskalyov, Assistant Professor at St Petersburg State University, opened the scientific-practical seminar in the frameworks of “the Vietnam Cross Days” between MGIMO University and St Petersburg State University. He mentioned the importance of exchanging the results of studying one of the key partners of Russia in APAC to strengthen the relations between the countries.

The first author was E. Moiseyev, a third-year student of National Research University Higher School of Economics. He provided the analysis of Le Thanh Tong’s “ideal” state. Following the chronology, E. Petelina, a second-year student of the Faculty of Oriental Studies of St Petersburg University, spoke on the role of Buddhism and Confucianism in the socio-political system of medieval Vietnam in the 14th and 15th centuries.

Yu. Dokshina, a student of the Institute of Asian and African Countries at Lomonosov State University, rose the question of the Mac dynasty in Vietnamese and foreign historiography in her paper on “The History of the Mac Dynasty: The Socio-Political Aspect”. Her colleague A. Alexandrova transferred the discussion to the New Time having provided the research with the theme: “The Dai Nam Empire Infrastructure Creation in the Years of 1802–1862” (Fig. 2).

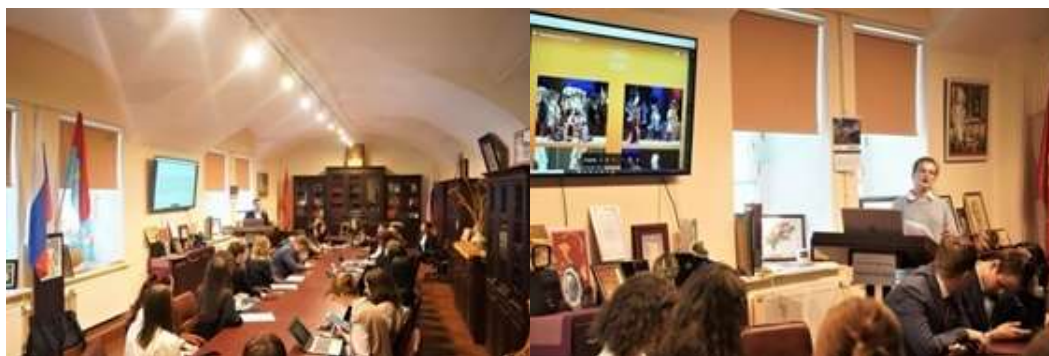


Fig. 2. “The Vietnam Cross Days” between MGIMO University and St Petersburg State University at the Ho Chi Minh Institute. *Photo: TTXVN*

Though the country has rich centuries-old history, young Vietnamists are more often attracted with problems of modern history of Vietnam. I. Trukhin examined the process of French occupation of Vietnam and its military and political consequences for the region. Pursuing the theme of the Vietnamese history in the 20th century, M. Stepanishchev compared Ngo Dinh Diem’s and Nguyen Van Thieu’s regimes in the Republic of Vietnam. P. Solovyova shared with her colleagues the results of comparative analysis of the SRV and ASEAN policy in Indochina at the end of the 1970s and 1980s. The research results of D. Ryabtseva, a second-year student of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at St Petersburg State University, with the theme: “The Renovation Policy in Vietnam as an Objective Consequence of External and Internal Political Processes” logically followed the conclusions made by her MGIMO colleagues.

Students showed their interest in issues of international cooperation. M. Levchenko, a RUDN student, presented her paper on the participation of Indochina countries in the Chinese Belt and Road initiative. Also, master students took part in the discussion on results and perspectives of Russia-Vietnam cooperation in various fields. N. Kolotova, a master student of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at St Petersburg State University presented the analysis of the current two countries’ cooperation in the digital realm. In his turn, A. Kryukov, a MGIMO master student, spoke on the RF and SRV cooperation in the sphere of agriculture. This cluster of papers provoked a lively debate touching legal, logistical and transactional issues including the one of blockchain technologies use when doing business in SEA region.

Also, young Vietnamists are interested in problems of spiritual and cultural life of the region. P. Naumkina, a second-year student of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at St Petersburg State University, spoke on the theme of ancestors’ cult and its role in beliefs of Vietnam prior to the 17th century. A. Bobylkina, a master student of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at St Petersburg State University, analyzed features of images of women at war as being shown in “Mother”, a story by Le Minh Khue. A. Kovalyova, a student of Moscow State Linguistic University, delivered a paper with the theme: “Theater in Vietnam and its Popularization in Modern Conditions”.



Fig. 3. *Left: Doctor of History, Prof. V.N. Kolotov, Director of the Ho Chi Minh Institute at St Petersburg State University. Photo: The Faculty of Oriental Studies at St Petersburg State University*

Concluding the conference Professor Vladimir Kolotov, Head of the Department of History of the Far-East Countries at St Petersburg State University, Director of the Ho Chi Minh Institute (Fig. 3) spoke on the development of Oriental studies, particularly on Vietnamese studies at St Petersburg State University. Also, he presented the activity of the Ho Chi Minh Institute at St Petersburg State University. Professor Kolotov emphasized the key role of complex study of the region for the development of efficient cooperation and cited Sun Tzu's quote: "Know yourself – know the other". In the conclusion he mentioned a high quality of student papers and paid attention to the importance to hold student seminars which unite young researchers of the centers of Vietnamese studies in Russia.

The Moscow series of events started with the research conference "Vietnam Facing the 21st Century Challenges: A New Understanding of Russia-Vietnam Relations" on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Russia and Vietnam. The conference discussions covered three sessions on Russian-Vietnamese economic relations; social, political and economic changes in Vietnam; and historic and cultural studies of Vietnam.

The Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, H.E. Mr. Gennady Bezdetko delivered opening remarks via a pre-recorded video message for the launch of the conference. In his speech he emphasized the timeliness and the importance of the meeting with the view of complex geopolitical situation in the world, he also touched upon the need for searching for new ways to foster Russia-Vietnam relations. Dr. Andrey Baykov, MGIMO Vice-Rector for Science and Research, in his welcoming remarks noted that a wide range of proposed topics to discuss and a broad representation of Russian and Vietnamese research centers at the conference reflect the diversity of Russia-Vietnam comprehensive strategic partnership (Fig. 4).

Dr. Natalia Stapran, Director of the Department for Multilateral Economic Cooperation and Special Projects of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation and Mr. Vyacheslav Harinov, Trade Representative of the Russian Federation to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, introduced an up-to-date overview of trade and economic Russia-Vietnam relations. They noted the positive dynamics and the growth of trade turnover, as well as outlined perspective areas for cooperation considering the latest changes in Vietnamese consumer market. Dr. Valdimir Mazyrin, Head of the Center for Vietnam and ASEAN Studies at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies RAS and Dr. Vladimir Kolotov, Director of the Ho Chi Minh Institute, in their welcoming remarks raised the issue of Vietnamese specialists training in Russia, and touched upon the Russia-Vietnam research cooperation.



Fig. 4. Vice-rector MGIMO Andrey Baykov welcomes the conference participants. *Photo: MGIMO*

The first session was devoted to the analysis of trade and economic aspects of Russia-Vietnam comprehensive strategic partnership (Fig. 5). The session was moderated by Dr. Valeria Vershinina, Expert of the ASEAN Centre. Mr. Alexander Butko, Senior Fellow of the Center for Scientific and Analytical Information of the Institute of Oriental Studies RAS opened the discussion. In his presentation he identified new perspective areas for Russia and Vietnam cooperation in the field of nuclear energy. Taking into account the growing demand for electricity, Vietnam may reconsider its intentions regarding nuclear energy. In this regard, Russian unique technologies such as floating nuclear power plants and small nuclear power plants could be of potential interest to Vietnamese partners. Dr. Marina Hramova, Associate Professor of the Department of Demographic and Migration Policy, MGIMO University, Deputy Director of the Institute for Demographic Research FCTAS RAS analyzed migration flows of Russian citizens to Vietnam and its impact on Vietnam's economy. She pointed out that the large Russian-speaking diaspora in Vietnam plays an important role in its economy, especially in the sphere of tourism in the southern provinces. Yet, there are still several issues and obstacles in the visa asymmetric regime that may contain the future development of bilateral relations. Mr. Trinh Quoc Ving, a master student of the School of International Relations of the Far Eastern Federal University, focused on the significant potential for cooperation between Russia's Far East and Vietnam provinces. He believes that Russian and Vietnamese regions have great potential for cooperation in the spheres of trade, construction, tourism, education and others. Though one of the key obstacles, in his view, is complex logistics and the absence of direct flights between the regions.

A RUDN bachelor student of the Department of theory and history of International Relations Ms. Maria Levchenko and MGIMO bachelor students of the School of International Economic Relations and the International Law School Mr. Nguyen Tung Son and Mr. Ha Le Thanh Trung shared their view on the Russia-Vietnam cooperation in energy sector – the foundation of bilateral relations. Ms. Maria Levchenko gave a historic overview of oil and gas exploration on the continental shelf of Vietnam by soviet specialists. The discovery of oil and gas deposits and the development of infrastructure within joint ventures such as "Vietsovpetro" had a significant impact on the industrial development and economy of Vietnam. At the same time, despite declining oil production, the joint venture "Vietsovpetro" expands its services to external organizations and partners in order to remain

profitable. Mr. Nguyen Tung Son and Mr. Ha Le Thanh Trung described potential projects in the liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry. According to them, Russian companies such as “Zarubezneft” and “Novatek” have plans to construct the Ca Na LNG Power Plant and Vinh Phong offshore wind farm.



Fig. 5. At the first session of the conference at MGIMO. *Photo: Nhan Dan*

The second session was focused on Vietnam’s achievements in the social-political and economic spheres and on the threats and challenges that it faces today. The first speakers of the session, Ms. Nadezhda Kolotova, a master student of the Saint-Petersburg State University, and Mr. Ivan Hludov, MGIMO master student of the School of International Relations, paid their attention to Vietnamese foreign policy. Ms. Nadezhda Kolotova analyzed the concept of “soft power” by the case of the state committee for overseas Vietnamese under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam. In her view, the term “soft power” is relatively new for Vietnamese academic discourse, yet the committee’s broad activities and its initiatives allow to generate a positive image of the country in the international arena as well as to remain connections of overseas Vietnamese between generations and to their country of origin. Mr. Ivan Hludov reviewed France’s approach to ‘Indo-Pacific Region’, the evolution of its strategy and the role of Vietnam in it. He believes that France views itself as an Indo-Pacific power and in this regard France-Vietnam relations are becoming even more relevant than ever with France’s attempt to expand relations with ASEAN. The France-Vietnam cooperation develops most rapidly in the defense area. Both sides also achieved progress in trade and humanitarian areas. Yet, in comparison with France relations with other ASEAN member states especially with Singapore, the level of France-Vietnam relations is far below. In conclusion, the speaker stressed that with a of view growing strategic value o f Vietnam, in the near future France will enhance its cooperation and make efforts to intensify mutual dialogue.

Among the other topics discussed during the session were the most dynamically developing sectors of Vietnam’s economy, namely, auto and game industries. A bachelor student of the Far Eastern Federal University Mr. Maxim Ohotnikov started his presentation with a division of the Vietnamese auto industry into two areas. The first area is the car assembly in Vietnam of such world car brands as «Mazda», «Hyundai», «Kia» and «Toyota». The second is the Vietnam’s car industry which is presented by such companies as “Vinaxuki”, “THACO” and “Vinfast”. The Vietnamese car manufactures produce not only vans, trucks and buses but also passenger cars, electric cars and electric buses. Vietnamese car brands have great plans to enter the world auto market and to construct car factories overseas. In conclusion, he underlined that despite the country’s limited domestic market

the Vietnamese car industry is developing rapidly and has a great potential for future growth. A MGIMO master student of the School of International Relations Ms. Alexandra Urueva examined the Vietnam's state regulation of the game industry. She presented a short overview of the Vietnam game market which is characterized with predominance of Chinese and Korean PC and mobile video games. The Vietnam game market is import-oriented with the largest company "VinaGame" that produces only 5% of its own video games while others 95% are foreign-owned games that were localized for local players. Ms. Alexandra Urueva believes that the key issue for Vietnamese government today is the China's dominance in the domestic game market. On the other hand an enhanced biopolitical state monitoring is ongoing in Vietnam which aims to advance local law, and to tighten the video game licensing process and the video game censorship.

During the discussion, the participants also touched upon the environmental agenda in Vietnam. Ms. Anna Dolinina, Senior Specialist-Expert of the Department for Multilateral Economic Cooperation and Special Projects of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, IAAS MSU postgraduate student has demonstrated in her presentation, in what manner the Vietnamese agriculture and changes in the food consumption structure has affected the environment. She noted that the increase in animal protein consumption, as well as the development of rice and coffee exports, are the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, the growth of eating out, taking into account the underdeveloped infrastructure for the collection and processing of garbage, negatively impacted the ecology of Vietnam. Nevertheless, as Ms. Anna Dolinina underlined, the country is actively developing and implementing new technologies for growing rice and meat production, by resorting to the support of foreign partners. It is also important that infrastructure for the waste collection and processing is under construction, which may further reduce environmental risks in Vietnam. Subsequently, Mr. Vadim Kuznetsov, a bachelor's student at the School of Governance and Politics at MGIMO, in-depth analyzed Vietnam's state carbon neutrality programs in his presentation. In his view, Vietnam ranks second in the world in terms of reserves of rare earth metals, which are necessary for the green energy development. Today's Vietnam has a great opportunity of becoming the world's largest exporter of this metal type after China. The country actively participates in the international climate forum's activity and has committed itself to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and plans to implement a significant number of renewable energy generation projects.

The final part of the discussion was devoted to the presentation by Mr. Nikita Kuznetsov, a research assistant at the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ISPR FCTAS RAS). He presented the results of a sociological study on the factors influencing the choice of education abroad among Vietnamese youth. A survey showed that an average Vietnamese applicant has high requirements not only for the education level, but for the accompanying factors of studying abroad, including the life quality or the quality of care. The subsequent education programs also play an important role for education abroad development, it is also influenced by the employment after graduation and simplification of the visa regime for students studying abroad. The findings, by Mr. Nikita Kuznetsov, indicate the need for additional elaboration of the Russian strategy for exporting education to foreign markets, especially in relation to Vietnam, where interest in Russian education remains high.

Within the framework of Session 3 "History, Culture and Literature of Vietnam", the speakers discussed a wide range of topics, from the ancient history of Vietnam to the current development stages of its domestic and foreign policy. Attention was also paid to the development of the religious

tradition in Vietnam, as well as to the problems of the Vietnamese language and linguistics evolution. The session was moderated by the ASEAN Centre expert Dr. Nikita Kuklin.

The first part of the session was devoted to a remarkable academic discussion on the influence of Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism and Legalism on the formation of the Dai Viet statehood. In particular, the presentation by the 2nd year bachelor student at the Faculty of Asian and African Studies, St. Petersburg State University Ms. Elizaveta Petelina touched upon such a subject as the role of Buddhism and Confucianism in the social and political system of medieval Vietnam in the 14th–15th centuries. As a result, the session participants expressed different positions on the issue of how influential the Buddhist elites really were in the period and how much they could resist the Confucian court elites in the struggle for power in society and in the political system of the time.

This discussion was continued by the research of Mr. Evgeniy Moiseev, 3rd year bachelor student at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, Institute for Oriental and Classical Studies, on the topic “Ideal” state of Le Thanh Tong. Mr. Evgeniy Moiseev conducted a detailed study of the internal policy of emperor Le Thanh Tong and drew attention to the fact that in his decrees and reasoning of state power, the monarch equally refers to the Legalists and Confucians heritage, which determines his sympathy, including for strict approaches to government. The speaker noted that Le Thanh Tong deliberately adapted the Legalist and Confucianist ideas to create a new system of meritocratic government, instead of the outdated systems of noble birth appointments to the state posts. It was also noted that the emperor pursued a policy of religious groups influence limiting and also banned the new temples construction for Buddhists and Taoists.

The next presentation of the session by Ms. Diana Ryabtseva, 2nd year bachelor student at the Faculty of Asian and African Studies, St. Petersburg State University, was devoted to the topic “Renovation Policy in Vietnam as an objective consequence of foreign and domestic political processes”. She noted that since the official announcement at the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in December 1986 of the Doi Moi renovation policy, Vietnam entered a qualitatively new stage in its development, which was determined by the transition from a system of centralized and bureaucratic management to a system of regulated market relations. The purposeful combination of economic development with the maintenance of political stability has resulted in Vietnam’s growing competitiveness and openness to world economic processes.

Further, valuable research “Reflection of politeness, hierarchy and commonality of the face in the Vietnamese linguistic culture” was presented by MSLU postgraduate student Ms. Nguyen Thi Minh Nguyet, which carried out a detailed linguistic study on comparing the norms of communication behavior and the use of certain words and expressions in the Vietnamese, aimed at “saving face” concept, which has of particular importance to Vietnamese culture today. Through a survey of 90 people, she identified the most frequent expressions and their understanding from the native speaker’s point of view. It was determined that the face saving in Western and Vietnamese cultures differs in that the Vietnamese seek to strengthen the “common face” of the conversation participants, based on compromises, while, for example, the Australians try to minimize the loss of the individual face of a speaker.

The final presentation of the session by Ms. Anastasia Bobylkina, a 4th-year bachelor student at the Faculty of Asian and African Studies, St. Petersburg State University was the focus of “Images of women features in the war in the works of the Vietnamese writer Le Minh Khue”. The speaker noted that Le Minh Khue is an important figure of the Vietnamese military journalism and literature. It was also highlighted that her works are devoted to the artistic depiction of complex moral situations that arise in the conditions of war hostilities among ordinary people who find themselves in difficult

psychological cases. As part of the presentation Ms. Anastasia Bobylkina came to the conclusion that the central image of the story "Mother" - a military doctor Hien, differs from other characters by her fate, and, as a result, habits or manners, character demonstrates to the reader. She is portrayed as a "caring mother", while the rest of the characters, like female doctors or wounded soldiers serve to reveal the fullness of the heroine image, her moral choice and humanistic values.

At the end of the session, the speakers and a number of eminent experts on Vietnam, such as Dr. Maxim Syunnerberg, Associate Professor at the Department of the History of the Far East and Southeast Asia studies of the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Lomonosov Moscow State University and Associate Professor of the MSLU Department of Oriental Languages Dr. Elena Zubtsova took an active part in the academic discussion and reflected on all the presented researches and ideas.