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Promoting the “Soft Power” of Vietnam and the Russian Federation in the framework of Cooperation in Culture, Education, Tourism, and Language Learning amid Geopolitical Changes

Abstract. In the context of global geopolitics with complex structural shifts, strengthening multilateral cooperation and effectively promoting soft power has become a strategic direction for many countries. The paper is based on the original definition of soft power and the foundation of relations between Vietnam and the Russian Federation to analyze the possibility of promoting the soft power of the two countries through cultural, educational, tourism and language dissemination cooperation in the current geopolitical context. Updating secondary documents in Russian, Vietnamese, English, especially documents from 2022—2025, based on the practice of cooperation between the two countries, with a systematic and interdisciplinary approach, the article synthesizes and focuses on explaining the obstacles to cooperation in each field (culture, education, tourism), identifies the causes of those obstacles, and points out that language barriers are the key to cooperation fields along with many other obstacles. The article proposes a number of new groups of solutions to promote the soft power of the two countries through culture, education, tourism and language dissemination. The bases for proposing solutions are based on the results of an overview of research, on Vietnam’s latest development viewpoint and leadership guidelines. The article concludes that in the context of fierce international competition, Vietnam and Russia need to quickly innovate their thinking, elevate cooperation in the direction of interdisciplinary — creative — digital — linked to development strategy, the two countries can firmly consolidate their comprehensive strategic partnership.

Keywords: Vietnam—Russia, cultural and educational cooperation, tourism cooperation, language dissemination, soft power.

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**Продвижение "мягкой силы" Вьетнама и Российской Федерации
в рамках сотрудничества в области культуры, образования, туризма
и изучения языка в условиях геополитических изменений**

Аннотация. В условиях сложных структурных сдвигов в глобальной геополитике укрепление многостороннего сотрудничества и эффективное продвижение «мягкой силы» стало стратегическим выбором многих стран. В статье детерминированы первоначальное определение «мягкой силы» и основы отношений между Вьетнамом и Российской Федерацией. Исходя из этого, проведен анализ возможностей продвижения «мягкой силы» двух стран посредством сотрудничества в области культуры, образования, туризма и распространения языков в современном геополитическом контексте. Опираясь на вторичные документы на русском, вьетнамском и английском языках, особенно за период 2022—2025 годы, с учетом практики сотрудничества двух стран, применяя системный и междисциплинарный подходы, автор синтезирует их и фокусируется на объяснении препятствий для сотрудничества в каждой области (культура, образование, туризм), выявляет причины этих препятствий и указывает, что языковые барьеры являются ключевым фактором сотрудничества наряду со многими другими препятствиями. Предложены новые решения для продвижения «мягкой силы» двух стран посредством культуры, образования, туризма и распространения языков. Сделан вывод о том, что в условиях жесткой международной конкуренции Вьетнаму и России необходимо быстро внедрять инновации, развивать сотрудничество в междисциплинарном, творческом, цифровом направлении, согласовывая его со своей стратегией развития, чтобы обе страны могли прочно укрепить свое всеобъемлющее стратегическое партнерство.

Ключевые слова: Вьетнам — Россия, культурное и образовательное сотрудничество, сотрудничество в сфере туризма, распространение языка, мягкая сила.

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I. Literature review

The topic of “promoting the soft power of Vietnam and the Russian Federation through cultural, educational, tourism and language dissemination cooperation in the current geopolitical context” has received attention in recent studies in Vietnam, and more attention in Russia and internationally. The general results from Vietnamese, Russian and English studies from 2022 to 2025 all mention the foundation and role of traditional cooperation and basic achievements in cooperation in each field.

Vietnam and Russia have a long-standing tradition of cooperation, based on the comprehensive strategic partnership established in 2011 and raised to a higher level in

2012. Multi-field cooperation from economy, culture, education to tourism has developed dynamically, affirming the deep political trust between the two countries [Viet Hang: 15.01.2025]. This is a favorable condition to promote soft power through bilateral activities [Vietnam Government Newspaper: 18.06.2024].

Specifically about achievements in cultural cooperation and language dissemination, VOV (20.07.2025; 25.08.2025), Mazyrin and Burova (2022) wrote that, programs such as “Vietnam-Russia Cultural Day”, Pushkin Russian Language Center in Hanoi are developed according to intergovernmental agreements, organizing diverse cultural events to promote the image and enhance understanding and people-people exchange.

Regarding cooperation in education and human resource training, Dontsov, A. (2025) showed that Lomonosov scholarships, student exchanges, and joint scientific research are the main focuses, with more than 1,200 Vietnamese students receiving annual scholarships to study and exchange in Russia.

Regarding tourism and trade promotion, vietnamplus (5.08.2025), and Nguyen Ba Hai, Kazushige Kobayashi (2024) showed that, tourism between the two countries is developing positively, with Russian tourists to Vietnam increasing by about 15 % in the period 2021—2023 thanks to visa policies, tourism promotion, and special events.

About limitations, research by Luong & Pham (2023) suggests that most of the research is descriptive, lacking a system of quantitative indicators to measure the actual effectiveness of cultural, educational, and tourism programs in changing the perceptions and behaviors of audiences, students, and tourists. Novikova E.S., Nguyen Huu Phu, Le Hoang Anh (2023) commented that the role of digital media platforms (livestream, social networks, virtual reality) has not been studied in depth, lacking a model of adapting to digital transformation in promoting culture and language.

More fundamentally, the study of V.M. Mazyrin and E.S. Burova (2022) concluded that there is strategic fragmentation and coordination gaps between Vietnam and the Russian Federation, specifically, the absence of a unified soft power strategy that integrates cultural, educational, tourism and linguistic efforts into a unified whole. Russian and Vietnamese initiatives often operate in parallel rather than in coordination, leading to duplication of efforts and suboptimal allocation of resources. The two countries do not have a consensus on the definition and measurement of “soft power” in the bilateral context. Russian scholars note that, without unified indicators or evaluation frameworks, it is impossible to assess the effectiveness of cultural festivals, scholarship programs, or language centers; this ambiguity undermines both research and policy design.

II. Basic concept of the “soft power” and each country’s soft power

According to the definition of Joseph Nye Jr. (2004), soft power is “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion” by cultural values, political ideals and foreign policies.

We all know, soft power is not the only or the most important source of power, because its impact tends to be slow and indirect. However, history shows that the

survival and sustainable development of a country are inseparable from the “sublimation” of soft power. Unlike “hard power” which is imposing and forcing, soft power is to arouse, attract, and voluntarily follow. Soft power and hard power reinforce, complement and strengthen each other, and when combined effectively, they will create a comprehensive national power.

To maintain bilateral relations, this article would like to further emphasize that in the Information Age, trust and credibility are of utmost importance.

1. Vietnam's soft power

Vietnam, with thousands of years of history, has accumulated a rich and unique treasure of soft power.

In terms of culture, Vietnam's soft power is reflected in *tolerance and adaptability, diverse culture and profound identity, ability to integrate and transform*.

Regarding education, Vietnam's soft power is demonstrated through *the tradition of loving learning and valuing talents, increasingly high international academic achievements*.

In terms of tourism, Vietnam's soft power is reflected in *rich natural resources and heritage, human factors and hospitality*.

In terms of the Vietnamese language, with its unique tone system and characteristic grammatical structure, it is not only a means of communication but also closely associated with national identity and history.

2. Russia's Soft Power

Conceptually, the Russian Federation has developed a distinct approach to soft power that differs significantly from Nye's definition. Rather than focusing solely on cultural and political appeal, Russia's understanding includes non-Nye elements such as economic instruments, which Nye considers a form of hard power [Borschevskaya 2021]. Laruelle, M. (2021) argues that Russia's strategy can be understood as “niche soft power”, designed to target specific audiences rather than aiming for global appeal. This strategy focuses on groups whose ties to Russia are based on four factors: history and culture, Soviet heritage, political identity.

The viewpoint of this article is that the appeal of Russian tourism, culture, history, fundamental sciences, and people is undeniable. And it makes sense to incorporate economic factors into cultural, tourism, educational and language dissemination activities because economic measures make it easier to evaluate results and ensuring economic benefits ensures resources to sustain activities.

In terms of culture, Russia's soft power is clearly demonstrated through *classical literary and artistic heritage, unique and impressive architecture, long history and ideology*.

In terms of education, Russia demonstrates its soft power through *outstanding tradition of fundamental sciences and engineering* [The Times Higher Education 2024].

In terms of tourism, Russia's tourism industry has potential based on its rich cultural and historical heritage, as well as diverse resources [Bunakov et al. 2018], although it has been severely affected by recent sanctions and geopolitical conflicts. Russia has *Majestic and diverse natural landscapes* from ancient historical cities such as Moscow, Saint Petersburg to the wild lands of Siberia and Lake Baikal, Russia offers diverse travel experiences with many cultural and natural heritages are recognized by UNESCO.

On the language, Russia has made efforts to strengthen the position of Russian as a public diplomacy tool, especially in post-Soviet countries [Cassandra Brown 2025].

Although its use is declining significantly [Cassandra Brown 2025], surely Russian remains an important language of scientific research [Dương Tâm: 20.06.2024].

3. Current geopolitical context

In recent years, the international context has changed profoundly, forming many important characteristics that directly affect the ability of Vietnam and the Russian Federation to promote soft power through cultural, educational, tourism and language dissemination cooperation:

Vietnam believes that the world is entering a period of “multipolarity, multicenter, multilevel”, in which strategic competition is increasingly fierce, hotspots and traditional and non-traditional challenges become more complex [MOFA 2025]. Thus, in the context of a “multi-center” international environment, countries such as Vietnam and Russia are motivated to enhance “soft power” to ensure their position, prestige and international influence.

Vietnam considers culture — cultural diplomacy as a pillar in its new foreign policy. Cultural diplomacy “must be placed on par with politics and economic diplomacy” to meet national requirements in the new situation [MOFA 2025]. Vietnam promotes Cultural Diplomacy — shifting the approach from the State to digitalization, creativity, broad participation of businesses & people, while encouraging innovation, creativity and application of digital technology in cultural exchange activities [Hong Nhung, Ngoc Ly 2024]. This is an important premise to promote soft power through new forms, such as online education, digital content, creative cultural experiences.

Russia “pivots” to Asia — promoting relations with Southeast Asia in the context of isolation from the West. Russia’s desire to build deeper relations with countries like Vietnam creates a favorable environment for cultural, educational, and linguistic cooperation to be placed in overall strategic packages — not just a single activity [Đặng Cường/VOV: 28.01.2025].

The context of geopolitical tensions and sanctions affects international exchanges, services, tourism and payments. International sanctions against Russia make it difficult for international financial transactions, payments, imports and exports, and also affect tourism, academic cooperation, and student exchanges [Guarascio, Nguyen 2025]. This factor increases the costs and risks for soft power cooperation activities if they depend heavily on international financial flows and direct international exchanges.

Tourism growth recovers after COVID-19 and interest in energy-technology cooperation. Reports show that tourism between the two countries has recovered strongly after COVID-19. The number of Russian tourists to Vietnam increased by 84.9 % in 2024; at the same time, technological and nuclear cooperation activities have been expanded [VietnamNews: 13.01.2025]. This creates a good opportunity for culture, language, and education to be integrated into economic-energy-technology cooperation activities, helping soft power become more applicable.

The above characteristics show that the current geopolitical context has both opened up great opportunities for promoting soft power through the fields of education, culture, tourism, and language between Vietnam and Russia, and at the same time created pressure and requirements for innovation in approach: it must be more strategic, more technological, and more connected to strategic cooperation areas.

III. Premises for promoting soft power cooperation between Vietnam and the Russian Federation in education, tourism, culture and language dissemination

In the new context, the cooperative relationship between Vietnam and the Russian Federation is facing many favorable opportunities thanks to strategic premises and strong internal development from Vietnam. First of all, Vietnam's national development policy in the “era of rising up” is aiming to restructure the growth model, shifting to high value-added areas such as knowledge economy, innovation, high-quality education and sustainable culture and tourism. Vietnam attaches importance to diversifying partners and maximizing external resources, in which cooperation in education, science, tourism and cultural exchange with the Russian Federation is one of the directions with great potential [Nguyen Hong Quan 2025].

At the same time, the Vietnamese Government's push to mobilize new growth drivers, especially in the fields of education and training, green economy and creative culture, is creating favorable conditions to expand cooperation with countries with strengths in these fields.

Russia, with its traditional science and technology foundation and strong research university system, is considered a suitable partner to promote in-depth educational and scientific cooperation models [Nguyen Minh Tuan 2024]. Notably, training programs for engineers and experts in the fields of energy, artificial intelligence, and high technology between Vietnamese and Russian universities are being encouraged to expand [VNU — MGIMO Agreement 2025].

Established a Russian Language Center in Vietnam, Russia positioned as a regional training facility, further affirms the depth of bilateral cultural and educational cooperation [Voice of Vietnam: 28.01.2025]. In particular, the Russian community in Vietnam — concentrated in tourist centers such as Nha Trang, Mui Ne (Phan Thiet), Phu Quoc — is not only a tourist but also a group of long-term temporary residents, participating in services, cuisine, tourism and education [Le Duc Dung 2025].

In short, the resonance between Vietnam's internal needs in the period of accelerated development and the proactive and active multilateral foreign policy has created solid premises for promoting cooperation with the Russian Federation in the fields of education, tourism, culture and language dissemination in the new context.

1. Cultural Cooperation issue

In addition to the solid foundation for bilateral cooperation, it is necessary to review the current difficulties to overcome them. Only then will the two sides have a basis to propose solutions to move forward — more sustainable cooperation.

One of the major challenges is the decline in the influence of Russian culture among the young generation of Vietnam, especially in the context of strong competition from popular cultures such as Korea, the US, and China [Trinh Thi Hanh 2024]. The lack of updating and innovation in the way of communicating and introducing Russian culture makes it difficult for soft power to spread effectively in the modern digital cultural environment.

Cultural exchange programs, translation, exhibitions, and Russian language education in Vietnam are still small-scale, unsystematic, and heavily dependent on the

budget for each period. Meanwhile, Russia is also affected by international economic sanctions, leading to a reduction in foreign investment for foreign cultural activities [Ivanov 2025]. The lack of a long-term funding mechanism or a clear legal framework for expanding Russian cultural centers in Vietnam has caused many programs to be interrupted.

Language barriers and lack of bridge personnel. The dissemination of culture is always closely linked to language. However, Russian is no longer a popular foreign language in Vietnam, and human resources who know Russian and have a deep understanding of Russian culture are increasingly scarce. According to a report by the Ministry of Education and Training [MOET 2023], the number of students studying Russian has decreased by more than 60 % compared to 2005. This is a profound obstacle to cultural communication.

Finally, it is impossible not to mention the impact of the international geopolitical context. Although Vietnam maintains an independent and balanced foreign policy, the multilateral cooperation environment with Russia in the fields of culture and academia is also affected to a certain extent. This may cause difficulties in connecting multinational exchange programs, organizing seminars, and exhibitions with third-country elements [Ivanov 2025].

Causes of difficulties

Limitations in expanding cultural cooperation between Vietnam and the Russian Federation stem from deep-rooted causes in both policy structures, resources, and adaptation to global cultural changes.

First of all, the lack of strategic investment in cultural communication and training of bridge human resources is a direct cause of reduced cooperation effectiveness. Both sides do not have a long-term strategy to nurture human resources with a deep understanding of each other's culture, especially the young generation — the key target of soft power. Russian is no longer popular in Vietnam, while Vietnamese is not widely taught in Russia, hindering in-depth exchanges [MOET 2023].

Second, the thinking of cultural management is still bureaucratic, inflexible and has not made good use of digital platforms. Most exchange activities are still ceremonial and formal, have not reached the depths of public emotions, and do not interact strongly through social networking platforms — which are the main communication channels today [Petrova 2025]. Another reason is the influence of the international geopolitical environment, which has narrowed the international space of Russia's cultural diplomacy, leading to limited funding, causing many cooperation programs to lack stability and be interrupted [Ivanov 2025].

2. Educational cooperation issue

Let count the main difficulties in implementing the promotion of soft power through educational cooperation between Vietnam and the Russian Federation.

In the same direction, there is declining academic attractiveness of Russia to Vietnamese students while Vietnamese students tend to prioritize destinations such as Japan, Korea, Germany and English-speaking countries due to language barriers, less innovative learning environments and the impact of geopolitical conflicts [Bui Thi Hong 2025].

The language barrier persists and there is no synchronous solution. The shortage of Russian learners in Vietnam and vice versa, along with the lack of young lecturers, has severely limited access to Russian education, thereby hindering the spread of cultural-linguistic influence [Tran Duy Hung 2025].

The joint training program system is still formal and slow to adapt. Many current educational cooperation programs are not linked to the labor market. Sher, M. L. & Andrusova, N. V. (2025) pointed out the difficulties in higher education cooperation between Vietnam and Russia such as: disagreements on training programs; differences in educational quality assessment standards; lack of flexibility in credit transfer and degree recognition.

Support and investment policies are not synchronized, lacking long-term vision. Educational cooperation is not considered by the two countries as a strategic pillar (like energy or defense), leading to lack of financial investment, lack of incentive mechanisms for university partners, and no proactive education promotion strategy [Ivanov 2025]. Educational cooperation often depends on high-level agreements and government initiatives; if there is a lack of monitoring and evaluation, or if one side changes priorities, implementation may be neglected.

Lack of strategic communication and image of Russian education in the eyes of the Vietnamese public. Russia is not strong in “exporting” education to the Vietnamese market; awareness/interest from Vietnamese students about Russian schools is less than Western schools; difficulties in promotion, lack of clear information [Kokushkina, Makukhin & Le 2024].

3. Tourism cooperation issue

As noted, the flow of tourists from Russia to Vietnam increased by about 84.9 % compared to 2023 [Vietnam Pictorial: 11.01.2025]. Vietnam applies a visa exemption policy for Russian citizens. Both countries are actively promoting tourism [VOV: 25.08.2025]. However in order to promote soft power through tourism cooperation between the two countries, the following difficulties still exist:

Although many direct and transit flights have resumed, the number of direct flights from many major cities in Russia to many destinations in Vietnam is still limited, especially during peak seasons. International airfares — especially direct flights — are often high cost, increasing the total cost of travel for visitors [VOV: 20.07.2025]. Visa procedures for Vietnamese tourists to Russia are still cumbersome [Nhandanonline 2025].

In term of service quality, Vietnam still lacks specific tourism products for the Russian tourists; many tours have not been renewed, experiences have not been personalized to attract customers looking for a difference [VietnamPlus: 5.08.2025].

External factors such as exchange rate fluctuations (ruble, Russian currency) and fuel costs affect the Russian tourists' ability to pay [VOV: 20.07.2025]. International political factors, diplomatic relations, sanctions affect air transport, international payments, and affect tourists' psychology. In addition, Vietnam also has difficulties in promoting and accessing the remote Russian market, focusing mainly on Moscow and St. Petersburg. With Russia being the largest country in the world, Vietnam's tourism promotion is still too narrow.

4. Language dissemination

From the above, it can be seen that the language barrier is a barrier throughout all fields of cooperation. Promoting soft power through language dissemination cooperation between Vietnam and the Russian Federation currently has 5 obvious difficulties such as:

The language dissemination force is aging, lacking the next generation. Many Russian language lecturers and experts in Vietnam and Vietnamese language teachers in Russia all come from the Soviet era and are now old. Meanwhile, the young successor team is very thin, lacking the motivation to pursue a career in teaching or researching the other language [Hanoi university: 22.11.2024]. This is a major barrier that makes the process of language dissemination no longer continuous — a vital factor of soft power. The reason is the lack of policies to attract young people to pursue a career in languages, causing the generation gap to widen.

Decline in Russian language learners in Vietnam and Vietnamese language learners in Russia [Tran Duy Hung 2025]. This makes it difficult to spread soft influence to the wider community.

Language is not linked to the real job market. One of the reasons why young people do not learn Russian or Vietnamese is the lack of a clear link between learning and career opportunities. After finishing Russian, many Vietnamese students do not know what to do next; on the contrary, in Russia, Vietnamese learners lack the opportunity to use the language practically in the work environment [Du ho?c Nga: 05.08.2021]. If language is not considered a tool for career development, it will not be strong enough to become an effective channel for transmitting soft power. The reason lies in the disconnect between language education and bilateral economic and trade development policies.

IV. Some solutions and conclusion

Using the results from the overview of studies, including Professor Mazyrin's comments on the lack of common concept of “soft power” in bilateral relations, combined with the lack of indicators to evaluate cooperation effectiveness, lack of utilization of digital diplomacy and overseas Vietnamese community, geopolitical barriers; with the analysis presented above on the difficulties in implementing cooperation in each field, the article would like to propose a number of groups of solutions that are systematic and suitable to the objective and subjective contexts of the two countries, including:

1. Establish a common conceptual framework on Vietnam — Russia soft power

- Solution: The two countries need to establish an Intergovernmental Working Group on Bilateral Soft Power Strategy, with the participation of scholars, policy makers, and cultural experts.

- Objective: Agree on the definition, pillars and tools of “soft power” suitable for the Asia-Eurasia regional context, support the viewpoint of integrating the economy into the set of indicators to evaluate the results of cooperation areas.

- Impact: Create a solid ideological foundation for education, culture, tourism and language programs to be designed synchronously, linked to long-term strategies, creating a basis for building indicators to evaluate cooperation commitments.

2. Develop a digital ecosystem to promote soft power

- Solution: Build a bilingual digital platform (VN-RU) integrating services: foreign language learning, cultural research, digital tourism, open education library, podcast exchange series.

- Objective: Build a Synchronous Inter-Ministry Strategy, connecting people of the two countries directly without depending entirely on traditional events.

- Impact: Increase the coverage and spread of soft power, especially among young people and the middle class, enhance understanding of the two countries, people and related issues.

3. Linking education with strategic sectors — reshaping language training

- Solution: Integrating Russian and Vietnamese into training programs for petroleum engineers, defense technicians, medicine, artificial intelligence, logistics, etc.

- Goal: Building a Synchronous Inter-Ministry Strategy, turning language into a career development tool, not just a “legacy” of a historical period.

- Impact: Increase the demand for language learning, create practical motivation and restore the spread value of Russian and Vietnamese.

4. Transforming the form of cultural cooperation — from ritual to creative experience

- Solution: Co-production of films, virtual exhibitions, YouTube series “Vietnam — Russia: Daily life”, cultural game shows on TikTok or YouTube.

- Objective: Build a Synchronous Inter-Ministry Strategy, create attractive, youthful, accessible content, not just stop at formal ceremonies and festivals.

- Impact: Change the way the world looks at “Russian culture in Vietnam” and “Vietnam in the eyes of Russians”, increase mutual sympathy and understanding, Expand the network of soft ambassadors.

5. Develop study of tourism — language tourism — creative tourism

- Solution: Design short-term language learning tours in localities with many Russian tourists (Nha Trang, Phu Quoc); tours to explore Vietnamese culture and language in Kazan, Irkutsk, Vladivostok...

- Objective: Design multi-dimensional KPIs, online surveys and social media analysis, Expand the network of soft ambassadors, Integrate language and cultural experiences into real travel itineraries.

- Impact: Turn tourism into a strong channel to promote soft power directly to the public.

6. Re-establish the language dissemination force through the young generation, promote the overseas Vietnamese community

- Solution: Link Vietnamese high schools and universities with Russian schools on dual degree programs and short-term student/learner exchanges, establish dual degree joint programs or first-year student exchanges, or interactive summer courses with Russian universities, to help Vietnamese students get in touch with the Russian language and Russian environment earlier; at the same time, recruit Russian students to study Vietnamese language and culture; Establish a scholarship fund and career support for

students majoring in Russian and Vietnamese studies; grant special visas to young language teachers.

- Objective: Expand the network of soft ambassadors, address the aging of the dissemination force, and create new momentum for the language training industry.

Impact: Ensure the inheritance and sustainability of language cooperation — the core of soft power.

Overall, in the context of fierce international competition for soft power, if Vietnam and Russia do not innovate their thinking and elevate cooperation in the direction of interdisciplinary — creative — digital — linked to development strategy, soft power will continue to be an untapped potential. Based on the solid foundation of historical relations, complementary strengths, by proactively overcoming challenges and fully exploiting potential, the two countries can firmly consolidate their comprehensive strategic partnership, contributing to regional and global peace and prosperity.

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