

# The United States and Sino-Vietnamese Relations

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In 1944 President Franklin Roosevelt dispatched vice president Henry A. Wallace to meet with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and offer him the “return” of Indochina to China. Chiang wisely declined the offer. [1]



**Henry Wallace in China**

Although the idea was as far from the history and realities of East Asia as a comet passing overhead, it was not without its reason. The idea stemmed from Roosevelt’s general anti-colonial views and his awareness that the Second World War would provide an opportunity to transform world political geography. Moreover, relations between China and Vietnam had never been so close as in the previous half century. Oppression by Western imperialism had for the first time in their long

intertwined history given China and Vietnam a common threat. Vietnam provided the base for most of Sun Yat-sen’s numerous unsuccessful uprisings in 1907-8 against the Qing Dynasty, and similarly Guangzhou was an important base for early Vietnamese revolutionaries. Later, the Guomindang (GMD) worked with its sister party the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD), and the Communist Party of China, and occasionally the GMD, were in intimate contact with Ho Chi Minh and the Indochinese Communist Party. From the distant office of a busy and powerful leader trying to shape a post-war world, the idea seemed attractive.

Roosevelt was not the last American leader to misunderstand the Sino-Vietnamese relationship. From 1950 to 1971 United States policymakers, assuming that the alliance between China and Vietnam was permanent, made containing the spread of “world communism” in Vietnam the major justification for American military involvement. Similarly, from 1979 to 1990 they assumed that Sino-Vietnamese hostility was permanent. Since 2000 the analysis of the relationship has become somewhat more complex.

Understanding American perspectives on Sino-Vietnamese relations requires a familiarity with their evolution and with current American perceptions of the relationship. But in order to grasp their fundamental dynamic, it is important to analyze how America’s situation as a distant global power affects its judgments. Distance makes Americans impatient with complex and conditional interpretations of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship. The relationship is seen as important insofar as it affects American global interests and its regional

presence in East Asia. At present, the emergence of China as a regional power and its increasing global presence increases the salience of the “China connection” in American policy toward China’s neighbors. However, America’s distance from Asia and the asymmetry of its relationships with both China and Vietnam continue to distort its understanding of their mutual relationship.

### Evolution of the American perspective

As Roosevelt’s idea suggests, before the victory of the Communist Party of China the United States assumed the existence of a benign relationship between China (the Republic of China) and Vietnam. At the Potsdam Conference (July 1945) China was designated as the occupying force of Vietnam above the 16th parallel, while Britain was in charge to the south. From the Vietnamese point of view, the Chinese presence was problematic. Although the Guomindang had always preached an anti-colonial policy, it agreed in 1946 to the return of French troops to northern Vietnam in exchange for France’s renunciation of its claims to extraterritoriality in China. [2] American support in 1946-1949 for the French effort to reestablish its colony had little to do with the Sino-Vietnamese relationship; it was the result of efforts to influence domestic French politics. Since the French Communist Party was anti-colonial, the United States was interested in the success of French colonial policies.

By May 1949, China again became central to American policy in Vietnam, but it was a different China. [3] World communism had now reached the Vietnam border, and it was the same world communism that the US was fighting in China and would soon engage in Korea. The stubborn resistance of the Viet Minh to French pacification and the victories of the People’s Liberation Army led the United States to imagine a “domino effect” of cascading regimes falling to communism and

therefore to fully commit American military support to the French. By the time of the fall of Dien Bien Phu, which occurred in the middle of the Geneva Conference of 1954, the United States was resolved to support any anti-communist government in Vietnam in order to contain the spread of communism.



**Captured French soldiers following defeat at Dien Bien Phu**

It should be noted that US leaders did not think that China was responsible for the success of the Viet Minh against the French. Instead, they held the French responsible for creating a political vacuum in which the nationalism of the Viet Minh could flourish. Therefore, the United States thought that by supporting an independent, anti-communist government in the South they could hold the line against the further spread of Communism. But the assumption of a close relationship between the Chinese communists and the Vietnamese communists, as well as among other not-yet-successful communist parties in the region, was essential for raising the importance of Vietnam to global levels.

In the 1960s it became clear that the United States and its Saigon ally were even less successful than the French had been in repressing the forces of independence and revolution. From 1955 American military assistance crept past the limits imposed at the Geneva Accords, to direct involvement in the

early sixties under President Kennedy and the full-fledged Americanization of the war under President Johnson. However, containing world communism remained a global priority, and so more and more destructive effort was applied to Vietnam.



**Zhou Enlai (left), Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh, official portrait**

Moreover, since the increasing instability could no longer be attributed to the mistakes of France, trouble in the South was attributed to the interference of the North, and in turn the strength of the North was attributed to Soviet and especially to Chinese support. [4] The immediate result of this analysis was the bombing of the North and attempts to interdict supply lines. More generally, containment became “collective defense against armed aggression,” although the United States was concerned to limit to Indochina the “hot war” implications of this formulation, that is, to avoid direct US-Soviet or US-China armed confrontation. [5]



**Zhou Enlai and Ho Chi Minh, May 1960**

The turning point in US-China relations, the visits by Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon in 1971-2 and the signing of the Shanghai Communique, was premised on the linkage between China and Vietnam. Although the American attempt to induce China to cut its assistance to Vietnam was unsuccessful, the transformation of the US-China relationship moved American thinking beyond the domino theory and containment.

The American perception that China had ceased to be a global threat reduced US fears concerning China’s relations with its neighbors. Without the specter of unified world communism, Vietnam and indeed the whole region of Southeast Asia seemed less important to Washington. In the 1970s American diplomatic attention was diverted to specifically anti-Soviet Cold War conflicts in Angola, the Horn of Africa, and Afghanistan, and to resource issues in the Middle East. Contrary to some interpretations, the United States did not shift to the Chinese side as Sino-Vietnamese hostility grew in the second half of the decade. Rather, the United States saw no reason to shift from its post-war posture of resentful but passive hostility toward Vietnam at a time when its relationship with China was improving. I attribute the failure of the 1978 US-Vietnamese normalization negotiations to American hostile inertia and relative indifference regarding

Vietnam rather than to an American preference for the China side in the growing tensions between China and Vietnam. [6] From 1979 American passive hostility toward Vietnam was increased by Vietnam's alliance with the Soviet Union [7], its treatment of the "boat people," and its invasion and occupation of Cambodia.

In the 1980s the United States rather complacently perceived Sino-Vietnamese hostility as a permanent return to age-old hatreds. [8]



**Historic boundary marker between China and Vietnam**

The United States became a passive partner in the entente against Vietnam led by China and ASEAN. The Reagan administration devoted its diplomatic attention to Europe-centered Cold War issues, and the succeeding Bush administration was preoccupied with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Europe's transition to post-communism. The United

States was sluggish in adjusting to resolution of the Cambodia problem. When it finally recognized the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in July 1995 it was at the end of the diplomatic receiving line. [9] Indeed, it was Vietnam's impending entry into ASEAN that same month that provided the incentive for the US to act, and lingering resentment of Vietnam continued to influence the relationship even after normalization.

The normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1991 was little noted in the United States and did not affect American attitudes toward either country. The prior hostility between the two had laid to rest any concerns that rapprochement might lead to alliance, and in any case both China and Vietnam had established friendly relations with their neighbors. As a global actor with pressing military and security preoccupations elsewhere, the United States was happy to leave a peaceful neighborhood alone.

The present stormy era of American diplomacy has been defined by the "war on terror," the occupation and continuing wars involving Afghanistan and Iraq, and general tensions with the Islamic world. Neither China nor Vietnam is central to these acute problems, but in the background of these urgent concerns the rise of China has raised long-range strategic issues. The question of whether the United States should engage with China has undergone a subtle change from the aftermath of June 4, 1989 to the present. In 1989 the American choice was whether to engage China or to punish it with isolation. Now the choice is whether to engage China or to contain it. The American diplomatic answer in both cases is "both/and" rather than "either/or." However, China has now become a global presence and a multifaceted mainstay of the US economy. Even for a distant global actor like the United States this has increased the significance of China's relationships with its neighbors.

**American Prospects in East Asia and the**

## Sino-Vietnamese Relationship

In itself, the Sino-Vietnamese relationship is not a concern for the United States. In contrast to the 1950s, there is no expectation of communist dominos spreading to Southeast Asia and beyond, and the illusion that communist countries are natural collaborators was shattered by the struggle over Cambodia. [10] Neither country has been confrontational over major American concerns such as terrorism, Afghanistan, and Iraq. As Bronson Percival has observed, “With improved US-Chinese bilateral ties, Beijing has taken few discernible steps since 2002 that can be portrayed to have had a direct impact on US interests in Southeast Asia.” [11] Since both countries are governed by communist parties the United States is exceptionally sensitive to human rights issues, but the sensitivity is not due to the relationship, but rather stems from American perceptions of the nature of the regimes. The United States is sensitive about human rights in Cuba and DPRK as well.

Moreover, American policy with regard to both China and Vietnam is governed primarily by bilateral or global interests and concerns rather than by triangulation, that is, a matter to be resolved among China, Taiwan and the US. This applies to US-China trade and balance of payment frictions and to the question of Taiwan. Similarly for US-Vietnam relations, issues such as the continuing search for American soldiers missing in action (MIA) [12] and improved trade and transportation relations have little to do with China. As summarized in the Joint Statement Between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the United States of November 2006, the US-Vietnam relationship “encompasses significant and growing trade and economic ties, an emerging military-to-military relationship, successful cooperation on health and development issues, growing cultural and educational links, a commitment to resolving remaining issues stemming from the war, a shared interest in

ensuring peace, stability, and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region, and frank and candid discussion of differences.” [13] There is nothing in the main threads of the relationship that requires or implies a reference to China.

Nevertheless, the rise of China has influenced fundamentally the American perception of China as a global power, and more recently its perception of the global ramifications of China as a regional power. American attitudes towards China’s rise can be divided into three categories: “China threat,” “China challenge,” and “China opportunity.” The “China threat” perspective anticipates inevitable conflict between the United States and China and therefore views any progress by China as a relative loss for the United States. The “China challenge” perspective sees the rise of China affecting indirectly the global political, economic, and military situation of the US. China’s gain does not necessarily presume an American loss, but it changes the existing proportions of power. The “China opportunity” perspective sees the growth of China as creating new opportunities for the United States, primarily in economics but also in politics and even security. Although the three attitudes are distinct, individual Americans may combine two or even all three attitudes when confronting different aspects of China’s rise. Within the American government all three attitudes are visible. It is tempting to say that the military tends toward “China threat,” presidential diplomacy toward “China challenge,” business interests toward “China opportunity,” and that Congress exhibits a mix of all three, but in fact elements of all three attitudes run throughout the American government and broader public opinion. The phenomenon of China’s rise, viewed from the perspective of the current superpower, is a complex event that necessarily evokes mixed responses.

The various American attitudes toward the rise of China have definitely affected attitudes

toward Vietnam. Despite the normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1991, many American analysts and politicians continue to assume that Vietnam is innately hostile to China and would willingly join with the United States in containing China. [14] Such arguments were made, for example, by Senator John McCain, a leading proponent of normalization of relations with Vietnam in the 1990s. More recently, however, the increase in China's "soft power" in Southeast Asia has attracted attention and increased American interest in the region. As New York Times reporter Jane Perlez put it in 2003, "More than 50 years of American dominance in Asia is subtly but unmistakably eroding as Asian countries look toward China as the increasingly vital regional power." [15] Many observers, including Ms. Perlez, blame the erosion of American influence in the region as much on the unpopular policies of the United States government since 9-11 as on actions by the Chinese government. [16] In any case, however, along with the rise of China, the importance of the region for the United States has also risen in the context of the "war on terror".

There are many ambiguities concerning the meaning of "soft power" and its application to the relative positions of the United States and China in Southeast Asia and more specifically with regard to Vietnam. The discussion of American soft power often ranges from the spread of Barbie Dolls and Kentucky Fried Chicken to ideals of democracy and human rights. Bronson Percival points out that soft power has a quite different meaning in Southeast Asia, and that the general improvement of attitudes toward China is based on China's careful and sympathetic interaction with the region. [17] There is a growing confidence in the region that China will pursue mutual interests rather than insist on its own advantage. There is considerably more substance to the improvement of China's profile in the region than the often-used term

"charm offensive" might suggest. [18] China has been generous and non-intrusive with its aid to Laos and Cambodia, it has negotiated its land border disputes and joined efforts at peacefully managing island disputes, and the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area is ahead of expectations in developing regional trade. Nevertheless, many Americans view the general improvement of China's image as a deliberate and strategic move to displace American influence. As a New York Times headline puts it, "China moves to eclipse US appeal in Southeast Asia." [19] A more subtle version holds that China is inhibited by its current relative weakness from expressing its anti-Americanism. [20] Moreover, China's relationships in the region are often portrayed in the American media as cynical and sinister support for corrupt governments that frustrate more high-minded American efforts to further democracy and human rights. The most obvious example is the American perspective on Myanmar. At a minimum, the rise of China's influence is viewed as a reduction in the relative influence of the United States.

In the context of China's increasing soft power, Vietnam is seen by some as a key point in reducing the further erosion of American influence and encouraging a critical distance between China and Southeast Asia. Moreover, improvement in US-Vietnam relations can be justified from any of the three American attitudes toward China. If China is seen as a threat, then Vietnam could help block China's influence and contain China. If China is a challenge, then part of the American response is to improve its own soft power in countries like Vietnam. If China is an opportunity, then Vietnam is a similar opportunity, though smaller. Hence it can be predicted confidently that the rise of China will continue to be a positive influence on US-Vietnamese relations, regardless of the direction taken by US-China relations in the future. However, if US-China relations take a fundamental turn for the worse, then American interest in containing

China could present Vietnam—and its neighbors—with a painful choice. [21]

In sum, the rise of China as a global actor has increased American interest in China's regional activities, and this has raised the profile of Southeast Asia in American foreign policy circles. Despite regime similarity between China and Vietnam and the evident intensity of their relationship, Vietnam is not considered a conduit of Chinese regional influence or unusually close to China. Quite the contrary. Some analysts believe that Vietnam's traditional hostility to China and its sensitivity to Chinese encroachment make Vietnam the country most resistant to Chinese influence, and thus the most promising target for an American counter-offensive in soft power competition.



**Nguyen Minh Triet, George Bush and Hu Jintao (right)**

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Vietnam and Southeast Asia remain rather low on the American agenda of foreign policy priorities. Symptoms of low status include Condoleezza Rice's absence from the 2005 ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference, and Congressional approval of PNTR status for Vietnam as the final item of business in the last meeting of the 109th Congress in December 2006. The United States pays much more attention to its bilateral relationship with China

and to China's influence on global concerns such as the North Korean nuclear issue or Iran, and much less to derivative concerns about China's regional influence.

### **Explaining American perspectives**

From Roosevelt to the present, while American perspectives on Sino-Vietnamese relations have been shaped by the personalities of leaders and by the broader contours of American global diplomacy, it is worthwhile to analyze the structure of American relations with China and Vietnam. Although structure does not determine outcomes, it provides the architecture within which history is played out.

Three basic factors shape American perceptions vis-à-vis China and Vietnam: First, the remoteness of the United States; second, its position as a global power; and third, asymmetries of power between the United States and both China and Vietnam, as well as between China and Vietnam.

Remoteness, the first factor, affects the American perspective in a number of important ways. Most importantly, if a third party is distant from the other two, then the relationship between the other two tends to become less salient than the third party's bilateral relations with each. The relationship between two neighboring states is inherently important to a third neighbor. Examples would be the relationship between Vietnam and the Soviet Union in the 1970s for China, or the relationship between China and Cambodia in the 1970s for Vietnam. One reason that multilateral regional institutions like ASEAN are important is that they buffer the vulnerability of member states to the relationships of their neighbors with other countries. The inattentiveness of the United States to the major watershed in Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1991 would be an example of an effect of remoteness.

Similarly, remoteness lessens the inherent significance of even the bilateral relationships of the remote state with the two neighboring states. Even in a globalized world, the question, “what does this matter to me?” has a different answer in a neighboring state than in a distant one. Indeed, if a remote state becomes interested, its understanding of the distant situation is likely to be shaped and distorted by the reasons for its attention. Greater attention does not automatically produce greater understanding. Similarly, American interest in questions such as human rights or freedom of religion produces information, but it neglects contextual reality. Question-directed attention wants clear answers to its questions, and is impatient with complexity.

Lastly, remoteness reduces the urgency of learning from mistakes. After its war in Vietnam, the United States did not adjust its policies in Southeast Asia for twenty years. Similarly, the US hardened its anti-China policy after the Korean War stalemate. It could afford to become indifferent in part because of its power, but also because of its distance.

The second basic factor underlying the American perspective is its status as a global power. To a certain extent being a global power has a contrary influence from remoteness. A global power mixes its national interests with global interests. It feels a special responsibility and authority for such issues as freedom of sea lanes and non-proliferation. At a certain level, conflict in any region attracts its attention, and it is sensitive to developments in remote areas. For example, the “war on terror” has brought American military to the most inaccessible parts of the Philippines.

However, a global interest is a peculiar sort of interest. It is focused on issues important to the global power, and therefore its involvement in regional affairs is derivative from their global dimension. For instance, Vietnam was very important to the United States during the

1950s and 1960s, but only as a venue of the Cold War. Similarly, normalization with China in 1971-79 was important because of the advantageous “strategic triangle” that normalization created. The initial disinterest of the Clinton administration in US-China relations was due in part to the fact that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the “China card” was no longer necessary. As China rises to global prominence for the United States, so do its relationships with other countries, but only insofar as they affect American global interests. Hence the American interest in China’s soft power in Southeast Asia, but primarily as it affects American interests. Global attention is also attracted by crises, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004 or the demonstrations in Myanmar in September 2007.

A global power tends to assume that all of its interests are global, and that they are shared by the rest of the world. It also assumes that global interests automatically have a higher priority than purely local interests. Thus it is often frustrated and impatient with regional cooperation, because states in a region usually have more complex interests and concerns with their neighbors. The problem of American single-issue focus in tension with the more complex interests of neighbors is particularly evident in the Korean nuclear discussions since 2002.

One effect of the mixing of global and national interests is that the global power often projects narrow national interests as global concerns, or requires that other states share its particular interpretation of global concerns. Conversely, issues that appear of global significance to other states may be downplayed by the global power. A recent example is global warming.

While the United States is interested in the global aspects of regional and even domestic actions, it is not particularly interested in the local effects of global policies. During the Asian



financial crisis of 1997 there was the relative indifference of the “Washington Consensus” to the dislocation and sufferings of the affected countries. The entire history of the American war in Vietnam was characterized by the prioritization of global objectives and the neglect of the local effects on Vietnam. In contrast to the greed of France, whose profits derived principally rice exports, more globally-minded American involvement turned South Vietnam into a rice importer by 1969.

Asymmetry, the third factor, is necessarily implied by American status as a global power, but its effects can be distinguished. It is a particular complication of the American perspective on the Sino-Vietnamese relationship because the United States is stronger in economic and military terms than either, but in addition China has an asymmetric relationship with Vietnam.

Asymmetry has a profound effect on the perspective of participants. [22] Because of the difference in capacities, the weaker side is more exposed to the relationship than the stronger. The stronger side by definition has proportionately less to gain or lose, and thus is less engaged in the relationship. If the stronger side must involve itself in a problem, it will tend to bully the smaller side, trying to push it into line with its preferences. The ultimate in bullying is what the stronger side views as a “small war,” that is, armed conflict with an opponent who cannot retaliate in a similar manner. However, what appears to be a small war to the stronger is a mortal threat to the weaker, and while it cannot destroy the stronger, it can prolong its resistance until it frustrates the war aims of the stronger.

At the extreme of war, the best example of asymmetric differences is the American war in Vietnam. The United States continued to “escalate in a quagmire” because it could not accept failure and it thought it could achieve a threshold of force at which the opponent would

surrender. There are many less extreme situations affected by asymmetry as well. The very slow response of the United States to Vietnamese normalization overtures can best be explained by the fact that the relationship simply was not important enough to the United States to merit the diplomatic re-thinking and political reorientation that normalization would require. It took Vietnam’s impending entry into ASEAN to place a deadline on normalization.

Despite the imbalance of capacities, asymmetric relationships can be stable. [23] Prudence is one argument for stability: both sides may know from experience that victory in a small war is difficult, and that resistance, even if successful, is costly. But each side has different requirements for asymmetric normalcy. The weaker side is vulnerable. Therefore it needs credible acknowledgment of its autonomy from the larger side. The stronger side needs deference from the weaker. It needs to know that the weaker accepts the existing imbalance of capacities. A normal asymmetric relationship is not one of domination and submission. Quite the opposite. The normalization of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship in 1991 was founded on the failure to achieve unilateral goals through force in the previous twelve years of hostility. Within the general framework of acknowledgment and deference both sides can negotiate their interests.

A triangular asymmetric situation such as Washington-Beijing-Hanoi (WBH) adds new levels of complexity. There is a natural temptation for the strongest and the weakest state to ally against the middle, since the middle is the greater potential threat to the strongest and the weakest can hide behind the strongest. However, such an alliance puts the weakest in a precarious position. The strongest does not need its additional strength, and it is refusing deference to the middle, thereby justifying hostility from a power stronger than itself. Moreover, in the WBH case the strongest

is operating in a global environment quite different from that of the weakest, and therefore the terms of the alliance could change unexpectedly and for reasons unrelated to the actions of the weakest. The most relevant example of such a shift would be Gorbachev's new Pacific policy in 1986 and its effect on the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance.

## Conclusion

The American perspective on the Sino-Vietnamese relationship may be more "objective" than those of the participants, but it has its own characteristics and limitations. Indeed, as the example of Roosevelt's initiative indicates, it is possible for the United States to be more wrong about the relationship than either of the parties directly involved. The American perspective is not one-sided, but it is remote, global, and asymmetric. Because it is remote, American interest will tend to be issue-driven; because it is a global power, the focus will be on global issues, and because of asymmetry, the United States will tend to push for solutions to problems rather than to engage in sustained multilateral management of issues.

In the current situation of a normal Sino-Vietnamese relationship within a broader context of normal East Asian relationships, it is to American global interests to be supportive. In contrast to the relationship in the 1950s and 60s, the current Sino-Vietnamese relationship is neither exclusive nor unique. Therefore the issues that arise between the United States and China and Vietnam are likely to be bilateral or possibly regional, and they are not likely to focus on the Sino-Vietnamese relationship *per se*.

Nevertheless, the rise of China changes the global structure of power, and a major part of the change is the increase in China's influence in its three regions of Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia. While China's improved relations have not been targeted at

the United States, they do affect the relative strength of American influence. To the extent that China's global presence is founded on its regional presence, the global importance of China's regional relationships has increased, and with it American interest.

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## Notes

[1] According to Wallace, "He [FDR] told me [Wallace] to inform Chiang that he proposed to see that both Hong Kong and Indo-China would be returned to China, and that he wanted to see a strong, truly democratic government in China, willing and anxious to live at peace with its neighbors." Henry Wallace, *Toward World Peace* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1948), p. 97. Bernard Fall confirmed the story (and Chiang's declining of the offer) with Wallace. See Bernard Fall, *The Two Vietnams* (New York: Praeger, 1964), pp. 54; 453n.

[2] King Chen, *Vietnam and China, 1948-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969). The major French retrocession was Fort Bayard, now Zhanjiang, Guangdong.

[3] *History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954* (Washington: Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, originally

prepared February 1955, 2nd ed. 1971, declassified edition 1981).

[4] US Department of State White Paper, Aggression from the North, the Record of North Viet-Nam's Campaign to Conquer South Viet-Nam (Washington: Government Publications Office, 1965)

[5] "Viet-Nam Action Called 'Collective Defense Against Armed Aggression,'" [Department Statement read to news correspondents on March 4, 1965 by Robert J. McCloskey, Director, Office of News], Department of State Bulletin, March 22, 1965, p. 403.

[6] The classic account of these negotiations is Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy* (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

[7] Vietnam joined the Soviet led Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in June 1978, and signed a treaty of friendship in November.

[8] See for instance Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder: Westview, 1987)

[9] More than 160 countries had recognized Vietnam by that time. See Bui Thanh Son, "Vietnam-US Relations and Vietnam's Foreign Policy in the 1990s," in Carl Thayer, ed., *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 202-214.

[10] An even more spectacular transformation occurred in US attitudes toward China and Northeast Asia. China went from being the implacable, inhuman enemy in the Korean War to the respected regional convener of the Six Party Talks.

[11] Bronson Percival, *The Dragon Looks South: China and Southeast Asia in the New Century* (Westport: Praeger, 2007), p. 10.

[12] According to the US State Department, "The United States considers achieving the fullest possible accounting of Americans missing and unaccounted for in Indochina to be one of its highest priorities with Vietnam." [Summary of US-Vietnam relations](#) .

[13] White House, Office of the Press Secretary, November 17, 2006. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/11/20061117-4.html>

[14] Henry Kenny, *Shadow of the Dragon: Vietnam's Continuing Struggle with China and the Implications for US Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brassey's, 2002).

[15] Jane Perlez, "Asian Leaders Find China a More Cordial Neighbor," *New York Times*, October 17, 2003.

[16] See for example Joseph Nye, *Soft Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004). For a critique of Nye's notion of soft power, see Brantly Womack, "[Dancing Alone: A Hard Look at Soft Power](#)," *Japan Focus* (November 2005).

[17] Percival, *The Dragon Looks South*, chapter 7.

[18] Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). The term "charm offensive" was first used in 1986 to refer to Mikhail Gorbachev's diplomacy toward the West.

[19] Perlez, *New York Times*, November 18, 2004.

[20] Robert Sutter, "China's Regional Strategy and Why it might not be Good for America," in David Shambaugh, ed., *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 289-306.

[21] Brantly Womack, "China and Southeast

Asia: Asymmetry, Leadership and Normalcy," Pacific Affairs 76:3 (Winter 2003-4), pp. 529-548.

[22] Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and Systemic Misperception: The Cases of China,

Vietnam and Cambodia during the 1970s." Journal of Strategic Studies 26:2 (June, 2003), pp. 91-118.

[23] Brantly Womack, China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).