

PHILOSOPHY OF COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM–AUSTRALIA RELATIONS: FROM HISTORICAL PERCEPTION TO STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP FORMATION

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Abstract: Over the past fifty years (1973–2023), Vietnam–Australia relations have evolved from an era of ideological confrontation into a comprehensive strategic partnership, reflecting profound transformations in both countries’ philosophical and ethical approaches to international cooperation. This paper examines the relationship from the philosophical perspective of cooperation and development, exploring the cognitive, moral, and humanistic foundations that have shaped the Vietnam–Australia trajectory.

Grounded in Ho Chi Minh’s thought on peace and friendship and Australia’s philosophy of pragmatism in politics, the study argues that Vietnam–Australia cooperation is not merely a product of strategic interests but an expression of national moral consciousness—one that prioritizes humanity, autonomy, and sustainable peace.

The analysis identifies three philosophical foundations underpinning the “philosophy of cooperative development” between Vietnam and Australia:

- 1.A **dialectical mindset** transforming conflict into cooperation;
- 2.A **humanistic worldview** grounded in respect for national sovereignty; and
- 3.**Pragmatism for humanity**, a distinctive feature of modern cultural–political dialogue.

The paper concludes that Vietnam–Australia relations represent a model of East–West philosophical convergence in the 21st century and provide a theoretical foundation for the expansion of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between 2025 and 2035.

Keywords: Philosophy of cooperation, strategic partnership, Vietnam–Australia relations, Ho Chi Minh thought, political pragmatism, international humanism.

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Introduction

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations on February 26, 1973, Vietnam and Australia have experienced a half-century journey marked by significant turning points. During the period 1973–1991, their relations were shaped by wartime prejudices and ideological differences. However, after the Cold War, both nations gradually adopted the mindset of “dialogue instead of confrontation.” In 2009, Vietnam and Australia entered a Comprehensive Partnership, and by 2018, the relationship was elevated to a Strategic Partnership, marking the emergence of a philosophical foundation of cooperation built upon mutual trust and shared interests.

From an ideological perspective, this relationship reflects the intersection between Eastern political philosophy—rooted in harmony, benevolence, and community—and modern Western philosophy, which emphasizes pragmatism, fairness, and cooperation. Ho Chi Minh’s thought considers “dialogue, cooperation, and peace” as universal human values, while the Australian political tradition underscores pragmatic humanism—practical action for the benefit of humanity. This intellectual encounter forms a durable philosophical basis for the bilateral relationship.

Rationale of the study: Most previous works have analyzed Vietnam–Australia relations through political, economic, trade, educational, or defense perspectives (e.g., Nguyen Chung Thuy, 2024; Nguyen Ha Phuong, 2023; Lam, 2023), yet few have approached it from a philosophical–humanistic standpoint—where moral, ontological, and cognitive values are placed at the center. In the context of U.S.–China competition, global crises, and emerging non-traditional challenges (pandemics, climate change, human security), Vietnam and Australia are compelled to redefine the philosophical meaning of cooperation: not merely “cooperation for development,” but “cooperation for ethical coexistence.”

Objectives and research questions: This paper pursues two main objectives:

1.To elucidate the philosophical and ideological foundations of Vietnam–Australia cooperation, from historical cognition to the establishment of a strategic partnership.

2.To analyze the intersection between Ho Chi Minh’s thought on cooperation and peace and Australia’s pragmatic political philosophy, thereby identifying the ontology of cooperation in contemporary diplomacy.

The central research question is: *What philosophical foundations explain the evolution of Vietnam–Australia relations over the past half-century?* And what ethical and humanistic values are shaping the nature of their comprehensive strategic partnership?

Novel contributions: Beyond tracing fifty years of Vietnam–Australia cooperation, this study:

Proposes the concept of a “Philosophy of Cooperative Development” as a new epistemological axis in international relations research;

Demonstrates the compatibility between Ho Chi Minh’s humanism and Australia’s pragmatic humanism;

Provides a theoretical foundation for shaping a humanistic and empirical foreign policy, oriented toward a stable and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

1. Philosophical Framework of International Cooperation

The cooperative relations among nations are not merely the outcome of material interests but, more profoundly, an expression of a philosophical consciousness of humanity’s shared existence. In modern political philosophy, several foundational schools of thought are essential for analyzing Vietnam–Australia cooperation:

Dialectical Materialism (Marx–Engels–Lenin) views international cooperation as a manifestation of the law of social development, in which contradictions between opposing forces are resolved through transformation, creating a new state of equilibrium. The historical transition from conflict (during the Vietnam War) to cooperation (after 1973) exemplifies this dialectical process.

Ho Chi Minh’s Humanistic Philosophy emphasizes “*dialogue, peace, and cooperation*” as universal human values, grounded in the principles of respect for independence, sovereignty, equality, and mutual benefit. For Ho Chi Minh, international cooperation is not merely a political instrument but an ethical mode of interaction among nations, oriented toward the ideal of a “*great harmonious world*” (Collected Works of Ho Chi Minh, Vol. 10, p. 153).

Australian Pragmatism, rooted in the thought of John Dewey and embodied in the country’s pragmatic and humanistic foreign policy, considers political action as a process of solving concrete problems based on practical experience and communal benefit. As Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant (1991) observed, it is precisely this “*pragmatism and multiculturalism*” that has enabled Australia to remain flexible in political reform, sustain human rights dialogue with Vietnam, and promote educational and developmental cooperation.

From a philosophical perspective, therefore, Vietnam–Australia cooperation represents a transformation of historical cognition into political ethics, where national interests and the collective interests of humanity are dialectically unified.

2. Foundations for the Formation of the “Philosophy of Cooperative Development” Between Vietnam and Australia

Building upon the foregoing theoretical bases, the concept of a “Philosophy of Cooperative Development” can be established—a conceptual framework that embodies how the two nations understand and practice international relations on moral, humanistic, and pragmatic foundations.

(1). Historical–Dialectical Foundation: Vietnam–Australia relations are the outcome of a historical transformation from confrontation to collaboration, in which “*history becomes the bridge to the future*.” Both countries have transcended the legacies of war to pursue shared benefits—an emblematic expression of historical dialectical thinking.

(2). Ethical–Humanistic Foundation: Australia’s foreign policy under Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (2022–2023) promotes the philosophy of becoming “*a good global citizen*,” reflecting an ethical conception of international responsibility and a sense of global community. This ideal aligns with Ho Chi Minh’s teaching that “*international cooperation must serve peace, independence,*

and the happiness of the people” (Collected Works of Ho Chi Minh, Vol. 12, p. 275).

(3). Practical–Political Foundation: Pragmatism has enabled Australia to recalibrate its foreign policy in the “Asian Century,” emphasizing multilateral diplomacy and regional balance. Conversely, since Đổi Mới (1986), Vietnam has adopted the philosophy of “diversification and multilateralization,” upholding strategic autonomy and equitable cooperation. These two orientations converge in the notion of “sustainable development based on trust and human dignity.”

This convergence has produced a parallel philosophical model of cooperation:

Vietnam contributes the humanistic depth and communitarian consciousness, while Australia adds pragmatic governance capacity and democratic norms. When combined, these elements create what may be termed “developmental ethics”—viewing development not only as material growth but also as the expansion of human capability and dignity (Sen, 1999).

Philosophy of Action and Dialogue in the New Context: In an era characterized by U.S.–China strategic competition and non-traditional crises, the Vietnam–Australia philosophy of cooperation is reinforced across three dimensions:

Dialogue instead of confrontation, reflecting Habermas’s theory of communicative action, where language, culture, and respect for difference serve as tools for building trust;

Cooperation for humanity, grounded in Ho Chi Minh’s humanistic philosophy and Australia’s concept of human-centered diplomacy;

Autonomy and interdependence, combining Marxist–Leninist principles of self-reliance with Canberra’s regional interdependence approach.

Hence, the Philosophy of Cooperation and Development between Vietnam and Australia crystallizes three interwoven currents of thought: dialectical, humanistic, and pragmatic.

Dialectics explains the transformation of history;

Humanism provides the moral foundation and spirit of community;

Pragmatism ensures political effectiveness and sustainable growth.

Together, these strands constitute a distinct “Vietnam–Australia Philosophy of Cooperative Development,” in which cooperation becomes an intrinsic moral value, reflecting the evolving ethical and cognitive maturity of both nations in the twenty-first century.

3. Implementation in Practice (1973–2025)

3.1. Research Approach

This study adopts an interdisciplinary research approach, combining political philosophy, international relations, and diplomatic history, in order to reconstruct and analyze the underlying philosophical dimensions within the evolution of Vietnam–Australia cooperation. Specifically, three principal methodological groups are employed:

(1) Historical–Dialectical Method: This approach is applied to trace the developmental laws governing Vietnam–Australia relations, from the period of ideological confrontation (1973–1991) to the phase of strategic partnership (2018–2025). It helps clarify the historical inevitability of a “philosophical transformation” in both nations’ perception of international cooperation.

(2) Analytical–Synthetic Method of Thought: Used to identify and compare the philosophical values embedded in Ho Chi Minh’s thought and Australia’s pragmatic political philosophy. Data sources include *The Complete Works of Ho Chi Minh* (Volumes 10–12), *Australia’s Foreign Relations* (Evans & Grant, 1991), and reports by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT, 2021).

(3) Content Analysis Method: Applied to over 50 papers and studies published in the proceedings “50 Years of Vietnam–Australia Relations: Looking Back and Moving Forward,” together with international works such as Lam (2023), Huong (2022), and Hang (2019). This method enables the extraction and modeling of the philosophical framework of cooperation as reflected in real-world policy practices.

3.2. Analytical Model of Vietnam–Australia Cooperative Practice

To elucidate the “Philosophy of Cooperative Development,” this study employs a triangular analytical model consisting of three interrelated pillars:

Table 1. Philosophical Dimensions of the Vietnam–Australia “Philosophy of Cooperative Development”

Pillar	Philosophical Interpretation	Empirical Illustration
Historical Consciousness	Rooted in historical dialectics—transition from confrontation to reconciliation	from 1973 Agreement on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations; Australia’s <i>Look East</i> policy in the 1990s
Moral Values	Grounded in Ho Chi Minh’s humanism and the philosophy of pragmatic humanism	Human rights programs, educational assistance, and people-to-people exchanges
Pragmatic Development	Integration of socio-economic interests with a pragmatic political philosophy	<i>Australia–Vietnam Enhanced Economic Engagement Strategy (EEES, 2021)</i>

This model demonstrates that the philosophy of cooperation between Vietnam and Australia cannot be separated from political and economic realities. Rather, it represents the philosophical consciousness of modern diplomatic action, where ideas are embodied in policy and practice, transforming moral and pragmatic values into the operational logic of bilateral relations.

3.3. Practical Implementation (1973–2025)

Phase 1973–1991: This was the period of “cognitive transformation,” when the two countries established diplomatic relations in a post-war context. Research on this stage—primarily based on historical and dialectical analysis—indicates that both Vietnam and Australia gradually shifted from “ideological opposition” to “humanistic dialogue” (Trinh Thi Dinh, 2005).

Phase 1991–2018: This era marked integration and multidimensional cooperation. Vietnam embarked on its *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) reforms, while Australia advanced its “Asia Engagement” strategy. Studies by Hang (2019) and Huong (2021) reveal that the bilateral philosophy of cooperation evolved from one focused on *economy and education* toward a broader paradigm of *sustainable development and knowledge-based human resources*.

Phase 2018–2025: This is the period of strategic partnership for peace, stability, and development. The present study goes beyond descriptive analysis to decode the philosophical depth of diplomatic action, viewing Vietnam–Australia cooperation as an expression of an emerging “global moral consciousness” in the Asia–Pacific region.

The analysis demonstrates that bilateral cooperation has been consistently guided by a dialectical–humanistic–pragmatic mindset, aligning with the theoretical structure of the *Philosophy of Cooperative Development*. Historical and empirical data confirm that the fifty-year trajectory of Vietnam–Australia relations embodies the philosophy of human-centered action, manifested

through collaboration in *education, security, and sustainable development*.

Since 2002—the year both sides intensified political dialogue mechanisms and educational cooperation—Vietnam–Australia relations have not only advanced substantively but also reflected the philosophical depth of modern diplomatic behavior:

- From political dialogue based on trust;
- To economic cooperation centered on sustainable development;
- To cultural and educational exchanges as channels for transforming international community consciousness.

This evolution vividly illustrates the “Philosophy of Cooperative Development,” in which human beings and humanistic values constitute the ultimate goal of bilateral cooperation.

Pillar 1 – Politics and Security: The Philosophy of Trust and Ethical Dialogue:

Vietnam–Australia political relations during 2002–2025 exemplify the philosophy of “ethical trust”—a form of trust grounded not only in material interests but also in mutual respect, consensus, and international responsibility.

From a philosophical standpoint, Ho Chi Minh’s thought considers diplomacy to be the embodiment of “the great moral virtue of the nation in global action.” Meanwhile, Australia’s doctrine of “responsible middle power diplomacy” (Evans & Grant, 1991) articulates the ethical responsibilities of a middle power in maintaining peace and order.

When these two ideas converge, they form the “ethics of dialogue”—the philosophical foundation of Vietnam–Australia political cooperation.

Table 2. Political–Security Milestones in Vietnam–Australia Relations and Their Philosophical Significance

Period	Political–Security Event	Philosophical Significance
2009	Signing of the <i>Comprehensive Partnership</i>	Represents the transformation from bilateral dialogue to institutionalized cooperation.
2018	Elevation to a <i>Strategic Partnership</i>	Political trust becomes a shared moral value, oriented toward regional peace and stability.
2023	Proposal for an <i>Upgraded Comprehensive Strategic Partnership</i>	Embodies a philosophy of human-centered action and regional responsibility (Bui Hai Dang & Nguyen Do Minh Tri, 2023).

Source: Compiled by the authors based on official diplomatic documents and scholarly analyses.

Pillar 2 – Economy and Development: The Philosophy of Pragmatic Humanism:

If politics embodies the philosophy of ethical dialogue, then Vietnam–Australia economic cooperation reflects the philosophy of pragmatic humanism—development for humanity and for sustainable mutual benefit.

Philosophically, Australia’s tradition of democratic pragmatism emphasizes action guided by efficiency and social responsibility, where political rationality serves human welfare.

Conversely, Vietnam views economic development as the central task and international cooperation as a condition for ensuring peaceful growth (*Documents of the 13th National Party Congress*, 2021).

These two perspectives converge within a humanistic philosophy of sustainable development, integrating economic growth with social equity, and reaffirming that the essence of cooperation lies not in profit alone but in the shared advancement of human dignity and wellbeing.

Table 3. Economic Milestones in Vietnam–Australia Relations and Their Underlying Philosophical Reflections

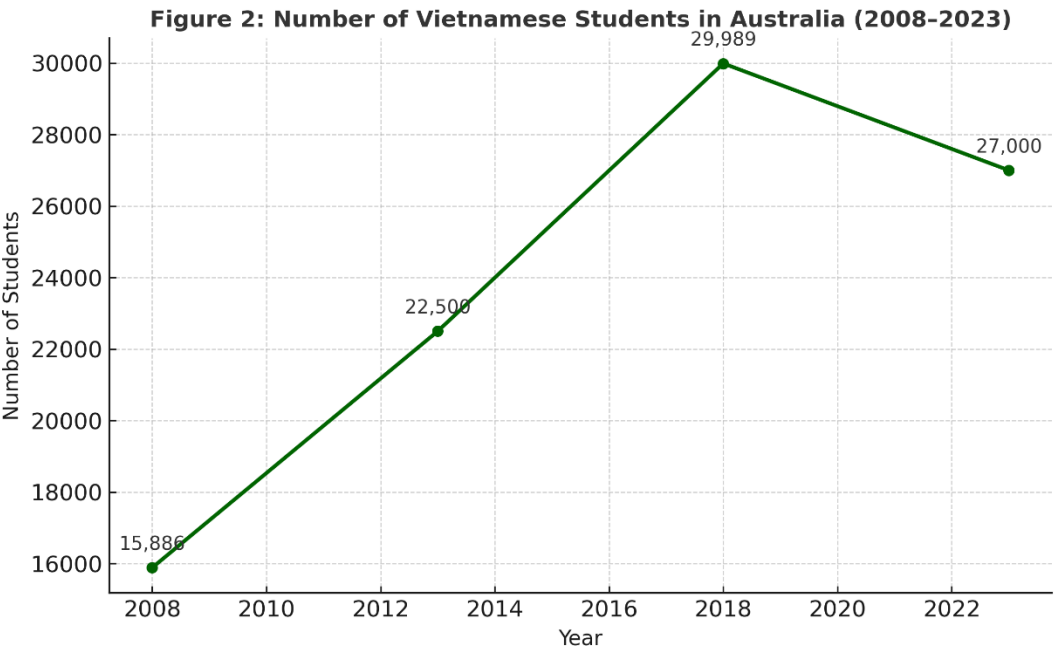
Year	Economic Cooperation Event	Philosophical Reflection
2002	Signing of the <i>Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIA)</i>	Investment viewed as a foundation for “value-sharing cooperation,” not merely profit generation.
2015	Accession to the <i>Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)</i>	Demonstrates the practice of a philosophy of interdependent development, linking national interests to shared regional prosperity.
2021	Adoption of the <i>Australia–Vietnam Enhanced Economic Engagement Strategy (EEES)</i>	Integrates green economy, renewable energy, and innovation, embodying the principles of modern developmental ethics.

Source: Compiled by the authors from DFAT (2021), Vietnam Ministry of Planning and Investment (2022), and related bilateral reports.

Figure 1. Growth of Two-Way Trade Between Vietnam and Australia (2002–2023)

Value of bilateral trade (billion USD).

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT, 2023); Agribank (2023).



Source: Ministry of Education and Training (Vietnam); Australian Embassy (2023)

→ Philosophical Analysis: Economic growth is not merely a material indicator but a “manifestation of humanity’s cooperative capacity,” consistent with Amartya Sen’s concept of *Development as Freedom* (1999).

Pillar 3 – Culture and Education: The Philosophy of Humanism and Intellectual Liberation

Culture and education constitute the most vivid expression of humanistic philosophy within Vietnam–Australia relations.

Between 2008 and 2023, the number of Vietnamese students studying in Australia increased from 15,886 to 27,000,

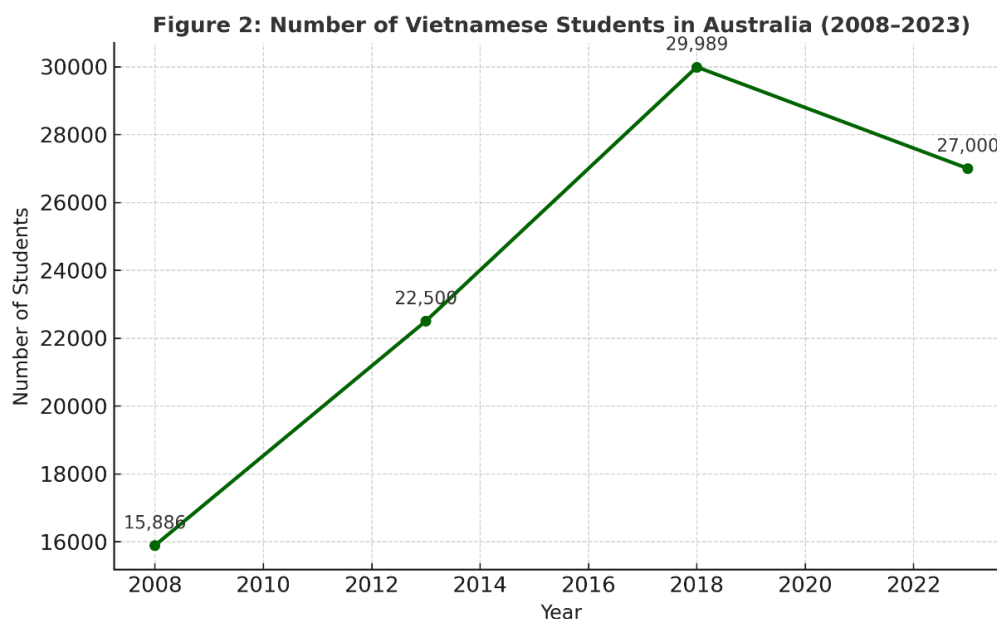
accompanied by more than 45 joint academic programs and over 200 inter-university cooperation agreements.

From a philosophical perspective, education is not merely a channel for knowledge transmission, but a pathway of cooperative cognition—echoing John Dewey’s principle that “*learning by doing means understanding through cooperation.*” In Ho Chi Minh’s philosophy, education serves as “*a means of human liberation and the development of communal personality.*”

→ This synthesis gives rise to the philosophy of “liberating education,” in which cultural and academic cooperation becomes an embodiment of freedom and mutual understanding between nations.

Figure 2. Vietnam–Australia Educational Cooperation (2008–2023)

Source: Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training; Australian Embassy in Hanoi (2023).



Source: Ministry of Education and Training (Vietnam); Australian Embassy (2023)

Source: Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam; Australian Embassy (2023).

→ Philosophical Interpretation: Transnational education is not merely a form of developmental cooperation but rather a cultural dialogue within the space of globalization—where the philosophy of respecting difference becomes a fundamental condition for humanity’s coexistence.

Conclusion

From 2002 to 2025, the three pillars of Vietnam–Australia cooperation reflect three levels of philosophical evolution:

Politics: from “*dialogue*” to “*co-creation of regional moral values*”;

Economy: from “*pragmatism*” to “*human-centered development*”;

Culture: from “*exchange*” to “*co-construction of global knowledge*.”

The Vietnam–Australia philosophy of cooperation has thus evolved into a multi-layered ideological paradigm, harmonizing Marxist–Ho Chi Minh dialectics with Australian pragmatic humanism, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive strategic partnership oriented toward *global ethical development* in the coming decade.

The period 2025–2030 marks a new stage in the fifty-year journey of bilateral cooperation—from a strategic partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership with philosophical depth; from cooperation for mutual benefit to cooperation for humanity; from pragmatic policy to ethical global action.

The proposed “Phased Integration Roadmap” illustrates how Vietnam and Australia transform international cooperation into philosophical practice within development policy, thereby

contributing to the creation of a humane, interdependent, and sustainable regional order.

Over more than half a century (1973–2025), Vietnam–Australia relations have evolved from limited post-war cooperation to a comprehensive strategic partnership—reflecting a philosophical transformation in the perception of international cooperation. This evolution is not merely a political or economic process but a philosophical phenomenon of ethics and humanism in national action.

The study reaches three overarching conclusions:

1. Vietnam–Australia cooperation is a product of historical dialectics, in which past conflicts have been transformed into the foundations of present dialogue. This process embodies the law of “unity through opposition” in Marxist–Leninist philosophy while also reflecting Ho Chi Minh’s humanistic principle of reconciliation.

2. The philosophy of Vietnam–Australia cooperation is shaped by the interaction of two ideological systems: The Marxist–Ho Chi Minh humanism, which considers peace and cooperation as universal human values; The Australian pragmatic humanism, which views cooperation as an instrument for achieving effectiveness and fairness.

Their synthesis gives rise to a new philosophical model — the “Philosophy of Cooperative Development” — harmonizing ethics and practicality.

3. From 2002 to 2025, Vietnam–Australia cooperation has transcended bilateral boundaries to become a regional intellectual space, where humanistic values, global responsibility, and sustainable development are co-created. This represents clear evidence of the realization of philosophy in international politics — that is, “*ethical action in an interdependent world*.”

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