

An Investigation into the Resolution of the Sino-Vietnamese Land Border Issue

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Abstract

The modern Sino-Vietnamese land border dispute began after the signing of the Sino-French New Treaty, in which the Sino-Vietnamese land border was explicitly defined, but because of natural or man-made factors, the boundary markers were displaced. The land boundary dispute between the two countries was the result of the different claims made by the two countries. The two countries negotiated the land border in 1955, when they resolved to set aside the dispute; in 1976, the reunification of Vietnam opened a second border negotiation, but both sides still insisted on their own views, and the negotiation broke down, the impact of this time was to lead to the war between the two countries in 1979; in 1991, the normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations, the two countries opened a third border negotiation, and the two countries and the two countries signed the Agreement on the Boundary between the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1999. In 1991, China and Vietnam normalized their relations, and the two countries started the third border negotiation, and in 1999, the two countries signed the Land Boundary Treaty between the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, to peacefully solve the border disputes, and in 2008, they completed the demarcation of the border as well as the establishment of boundary monuments to define the land border between China and Vietnam.

Keywords

Sino-Vietnamese Border; Sino-Vietnamese Relations; Sino-French New Treaty.

1. Introduction

After the Sino-French War, China and France concluded the Sino-French New Treaty, the Sino-French New Treaty and the subsequent implementation of Article 3 of the Treaty, the Sino-French Boundary and Commerce Article and the Annex to the Sino-French Boundary and Commerce Article became an important basis for the future of the border between China and Vietnam in the 20th century as well as for the demarcation of the border between the two countries, which was the first time that the two countries had a clear depiction of the border in modern times. Although the border line was clearly described after the Sino-French War, there were still border problems in 1979. From the conclusion of the Sino-French New Treaty in 1885 to the resumption of hostilities in 1979, there were still some problems on the border between China and Vietnam, which led to disputes between the two countries in the future.

For example, in the Sino-French New Treaty concluded after the war as well as in the special articles and by-laws derived from the boundary affairs thereafter, the way of defining the boundary was mainly shaped by boundary markers, descriptions of articles and accompanying maps, and the technology at that time did not accurately define the boundary in terms of latitude and longitude, and the regular patrols were carried out only by describing the boundary in words together with the boundary markers and hand-drawn accompanying maps, and it was obvious that such a way of describing the boundary was imprecise, as mentioned by Liu Bokui in his "History of Sino-French Negotiations on Vietnam" Liu Bokui, in his History of

Sino-French Negotiations with Vietnam, refers to “the place where the character B is found on the map. From B to C, also from the west to the east. Sino-Vietnamese border road through two rivers, the two rivers and into a river into the river betting curse, also known as the Black River; from the word C to the southeast about fifteen miles, to the word D to the north of the place of Nandan, all belong to China.” A small section of the boundary is roughly described, but one can see the problems involved and the real conflict that ensued.

In addition, the detailed location of the boundary markers will change with time, due to weathering, or border patrol personnel due to the vast area of responsibility, or due to negligence of duty, failed to find out in time is the type of situation in a timely manner to return timely processing, resulting in problems surfaced on the stage often to show the irreversible disputes; in 1912, the occurrence of the dispute over Boundary Marker No. 124 is a case in point, the Sino-Vietnamese border between the Boundary Marker No. 124 and Boundary Marker No. 125 In 1912, the dispute over Boundary Marker No. 124 and Boundary Marker No. 125 on the Sino-Vietnamese border was a case in point; between Boundary Marker No. 124 and Boundary Marker No. 125 on the Sino-Vietnamese border, the two countries chose to carve the inscriptions on the wall of the mountain because of the scarcity of people, ruggedness of the mountain paths and the transportation inconvenience. In 1909, the first year of the Qing dynasty's Xuantong reign, a dispute arose when a Vietnamese tax collector went to a Chinese village on the border to collect taxes, causing a dispute between the two countries (Huang Zheng, 1993)

2. Perspectives of China and Vietnam on the Border Issue

In 1958, Zhou Enlai and Le Duan reached an agreement to respect the Sino-French New Treaty, using it as the basis for the border. At the time, due to the good relationship between China and Vietnam, the border remained relatively peaceful. During this period, China was the primary supporter of Vietnam, providing assistance for the Vietnamese revolution, infrastructure, supplies, and social stability. As a result, for a long time, Vietnam was reluctant to raise or address any border disputes. After the Sino-Soviet split, the Soviet Union increased its aid to Vietnam in order to counterbalance China, which gave Vietnam the opportunity to change its position. Truong Nhu Tang, who was then the Minister of Justice of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam, mentioned in his book: "I knew that the Party had long decided to ally with the Soviet Union. The shift in this direction began as early as 1969, and the death of Ho Chi Minh paved the way for this decision to be formalized. However, no public declaration was made, as Vietnam still needed Chinese aid." Therefore, although Vietnam's attitude toward China had shifted, it never raised any border issues with China nor severed ties with it.

2.1. Vietnamese Perspective

Although the two countries had a good relationship, it does not mean that China and Vietnam had a unified view on territorial issues. For Vietnam, as a French colony during the Sino-French border negotiations, it had no authority to participate in talks regarding its own borders; France took the lead. Regarding the disputed territories that France ceded to China for reasons such as trade and border stability, Vietnam had no right to question or intervene, leading to significant dissatisfaction among the Vietnamese people and severely hurting national sentiment. Consequently, Vietnam has repeatedly stated that the demarcation of the Sino-Vietnamese land border in the Sino-French negotiations was an imperialist imposition on the Vietnamese people, resulting in the loss of large portions of Vietnamese territory. In a memorandum on the Sino-Vietnamese border issue published by the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 15, 1979, it was stated that the Qing Dynasty had exerted pressure on France to cede some areas of Vietnam to China, causing losses to the Vietnamese people. Vietnam believed that this view

reflected the will of the Qing Dynasty and France, and the division of Vietnamese territory was done without the consent of the Vietnamese people. Since no Vietnamese representatives were involved in the negotiations, the border demarcation was considered invalid. Vietnam also argued that, apart from the negotiations between Zhou Enlai and Le Duan in 1957 on the border issue, there had been no further talks between the two parties or governments regarding the border. However, the absence of negotiations did not mean there were no problems at the border, nor did it imply that there were no disputes. Vietnam believed that the 1957 agreement merely postponed the issue without conducting a new border survey. Vietnam could not accept the results of the 19th-century Sino-French demarcation, which it considered an imperialist imposition that deprived Vietnam of vast territories.

1974 marked the beginning of the Sino-Vietnamese land border conflict and brought the issue to the forefront. The nearly 797-mile land border between the two countries was established during the French colonial period, and although the disputed areas were small, other factors such as Sino-Vietnamese relations, the Chinese diaspora in Vietnam, and Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia escalated the situation into the decade-long Sino-Vietnamese War. The border issue seemed to be the tip of the iceberg in the broader Sino-Vietnamese conflict. Additionally, according to a memorandum published by the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1986 titled "Regarding China's Anti-Vietnamese Hostile Policies," the situation intensified after China's occupation of the Paracel Islands in 1974. In that year alone, there were 174 border military provocations by China; this number increased to 294 in 1975, 812 in 1976, 873 in 1977, and surged to 2,175 in 1978. Although the data from both sides differed significantly, these numbers illustrate that the land border conflict between the two countries escalated rapidly from 1974 onward, peaking in 1978 and leading to the outbreak of war in 1979.

It is understandable that Vietnam's stance on the Sino-Vietnamese land border issue is to conduct a new survey and demarcation, discarding the border defined by its colonial ruler, France. Given the international situation and the traditional ties between the two countries and their respective parties, Vietnam had to initially set aside its insistence and claims, waiting for the right moment to express its position appropriately. By reviewing history, we can see that in 1975, after the Vietnam War ended and Vietnam achieved unification, its dependence on and concerns about China diminished. Coupled with increased Soviet aid and cooperation, Vietnam's reliance on the Soviet Union grew, and the existing tensions between China and Vietnam deepened, ultimately accelerating the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations. In the same year that the Zhenbao Island incident occurred due to Sino-Soviet tensions, a border war between China and Vietnam also erupted.

2.2. Chinese Perspective

From China's perspective, it adheres to the border line demarcated by the Sino-French New Treaty. China believes that the border between the two countries, as defined in the Sino-French New Treaty, was determined by representatives from both sides after surveying. At the time, the actors involved were the Qing Dynasty government in China and the French government acting on behalf of Vietnam. According to an article titled "Eight Principles Proposed by Ambassador Han Nianlong in the Second Vice-Ministerial Negotiations Between China and Vietnam on Handling Sino-Vietnamese Relations" published in the People's Daily on April 26, 1979, China's position was: "On the basis of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence, both sides should restore good neighborly relations. Disputes and issues in bilateral relations should be resolved through peaceful negotiations to seek reasonable solutions"; "Both sides should respect the Sino-French demarcation of the Sino-Vietnamese border and use it as the basis for negotiations to resolve territorial disputes. Before the border issue is resolved, both sides should strictly maintain the status quo of the border as

it was during the 1957 and 1958 correspondence between the Chinese and Vietnamese Central Committees and not unilaterally alter the actual administrative control of the border under any pretext or in any manner."

China believes that along the 1,347-kilometer land border between the two countries, the actual control lines of both China and Vietnam are largely consistent with the border defined by the Sino-French Treaty, with only about 120 kilometers of discrepancy, accounting for 8.9% of the total border length. Of these discrepancies, there are 12 areas where Vietnam has crossed the boundary, covering 16 square kilometers; 13 areas where China has crossed, covering about 14 square kilometers; 19 areas where both sides have differing interpretations due to unclear treaty boundaries, covering about 28 square kilometers; and 13 areas where Vietnam has made territorial claims beyond the boundary, covering about 5 square kilometers (Liu Hongxuan, 2001). China has consistently emphasized the results of the Sino-French border demarcation, and during negotiations on the Sino-Vietnamese land border, it has upheld this boundary line. This includes the principles proposed by Zhou Enlai during the 1954 discussions, the vice-ministerial-level border negotiations held in Beijing in 1977, and the same position upheld during the vice-ministerial negotiations in 1979. All of these negotiations were based on the border line defined by the Sino-French demarcation, a position that sharply contrasts with Vietnam's stance. This difference is the largest point of contention between the two countries at the negotiation table.

After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the unification of Vietnam in 1976, Vietnam's dependence on and concerns about China significantly decreased, which accelerated the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations. This also made the land border dispute a flashpoint for the breakdown in relations between the two countries. Vietnam initiated over 100 border provocations in 1974; 439 in 1975; 986 in 1976; 752 in 1977; and more than 1,100 in 1978. In total, from 1974 to 1978, Vietnam engaged in over 3,500 armed provocations along the border (Dou Hui, 1989). These figures differ from those provided by the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but both sets of data agree that relations between the two countries began to sharply deteriorate toward the end of the Vietnam War in 1974.

From China's perspective, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, disputes over the land border between China and Vietnam were relatively minor and seemed resolvable. Even before coming to power, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) maintained a close relationship, which Mao Zedong described as "comrades plus brothers," and this relationship remained friendly for more than 20 years. However, after 1974, and particularly after 1979, Sino-Vietnamese relations quickly soured, leading to a decade-long confrontation. Given the abnormal state of relations between the two countries, neither China nor Vietnam could calmly discuss their territorial and border issues, and thus the land border dispute remained unresolved.

Regarding the disputes between the two countries, China and Vietnam held multiple rounds of vice-ministerial-level negotiations between 1977 and 1979, meeting in both Beijing and Hanoi to discuss various issues, including the land border dispute. However, due to fundamental differences in their areas of concern, the two sides could not reach an agreement. Both rounds of negotiations ended in failure, paving the way for a decade of Sino-Vietnamese war. The underlying reasons for the breakdown in negotiations were not only the overseas Chinese issue, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, and the influence of international relations involving the Soviet Union and the United States (Spencer C. Tucker, 1999), but also the differing perspectives of the two countries on their land border.

3. The Sino-Vietnamese Border Negotiation Process

The process of border negotiations between China and Vietnam can be divided into two phases, with the improvement of diplomatic relations between the two countries serving as the dividing line. These phases are before the improvement of relations and after the improvement of relations.

3.1. Before the Improvement of Sino-Vietnamese Relations

In the late 1960s, as Sino-Soviet tensions escalated, cracks began to appear in Sino-Vietnamese relations. The territorial disputes between the two countries mainly concerned the South China Sea islands, the Beibu Gulf (Tonkin Gulf), and the land border. The Beibu Gulf issue is related to the land border demarcation, as the crux of the problem also stems from the Sino-French Treaty of 1887. The Beibu Gulf, located at the northern end of Vietnam and adjacent to China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Guangdong Province, and Hainan Province, is a key sea route with significant economic and strategic value. However, China and Vietnam had never delineated their shared waters, and the 1887 Sino-French Treaty only divided some small islands, leaving the maritime boundary undefined.

In August to November 1974, China and Vietnam held their first vice-ministerial-level border negotiations, focusing on the division of the Beibu Gulf. In October 1977, the two sides held their second border meeting in Beijing. Due to prior agreements, both sides temporarily set aside the issue of sovereignty in the South China Sea and focused only on the land border and Beibu Gulf. They first discussed the land border. According to a People's Daily report on May 13, 1979, Vietnam believed that the documents exchanged between China and Vietnam in 1957 and 1958 regarding the land border recognized the "status quo of the border" as the "historical boundary" of both sides, so they argued that no further demarcation or adjustment was necessary. However, China put forward five principles, the main points of which were: both sides should use the Sino-French Treaty of 1887 as the basis to verify the entire boundary line and resolve territorial disputes; any area under one party's jurisdiction that extends beyond the border should be unconditionally returned to the other party; if the two sides have different understandings of certain boundary segments, these should be resolved through friendly negotiations; a new Sino-Vietnamese boundary treaty should replace the Sino-French treaty, and boundary markers should be re-established. During these negotiations, China hoped to base the boundary on the "historical boundary" defined in the 1887 Sino-French Treaty, and that areas under inappropriate or illegal Vietnamese administration should be re-determined based on international law. This formed the basis of China's insistence on redrawing the boundary and signing a new treaty.

It is clear from this that the two sides had fundamentally different interpretations of the "historical boundary." Although China later considered some of Vietnam's views and proposed nine principles on top of the original five, China remained firm on the main issues (People's Daily, 1979). In the international context at the time, it was almost impossible to re-demarcate the border and change the status quo, making the negotiations futile. This ultimately led to the armed conflict of 1979.

3.2. After the Improvement of Sino-Vietnamese Relations

As international circumstances shifted and domestic conditions in both countries changed, Sino-Vietnamese relations began to ease. In 1990, the leaders of China and Vietnam held the "Chengdu Talks," marking an important turning point in which both sides sought to "end the past and open up the future." This further promoted the normalization of relations between China and Vietnam. In November 1991, China and Vietnam held high-level meetings, leading to the normalization of relations between both countries and parties. After this, formal land border negotiations between China and Vietnam began. To reasonably and properly resolve the

land border dispute, the two countries held two rounds of expert-level talks, six rounds of government-level border negotiations, 16 rounds of joint working group meetings on land borders, and three rounds of meetings to draft the land border treaty. This greatly advanced the negotiation process.

At the same time, China and Vietnam also promoted trust and cooperation through multiple channels, including government diplomacy, party diplomacy, civil diplomacy, and parliamentary diplomacy, which further facilitated the development of land border negotiations. Finally, on December 30, 1999, the "Sino-Vietnamese Land Border Treaty" was signed in Hanoi. Through peaceful means, China and Vietnam successfully, reasonably, and properly resolved the long-standing land border issue that had troubled both governments and peoples.

Table: Timeline of Sino-Vietnamese Land Border Negotiations

Date	Location	Summary
1991.11.05	Beijing	Signed the "Provisional Agreement on Handling Border Affairs between China and Vietnam".
1992.10.12—17	Beijing	First round of border negotiations by Sino-Vietnamese expert groups.
1992.10.26—28	Hanoi	The Sino-Vietnamese border affairs delegation exchanged views on implementing the provisional agreement and signed a "Meeting Summary".
1993.02.14—18	Hanoi	Second round of border negotiations by Sino-Vietnamese expert groups.
1993.08.24—29	Beijing	First round of vice-ministerial negotiations and signing of the meeting summary.
1993.10.18—21	Hanoi	Signed the "Basic Principles Agreement on Resolving Border and Territorial Issues between China and Vietnam".
1994.01.11—15	Beijing	Expert delegations from China and Vietnam discussed the implementation of the provisional agreement.
1994.02, 06, 10	Beijing, Hanoi	Three rounds of land border joint working group negotiations.
1994.08.14—18	Hanoi	Second round of government-level border negotiations led by vice ministers.
1995.07.11	Beijing	Third round of government-level border negotiations.
1995.01, 05, 10	Beijing, Hanoi	Fourth, fifth, and sixth rounds of land border joint working group negotiations.
1996.09.17	Hanoi	Fourth round of government-level border negotiations and regular vice-ministerial consultations.
1996.01, 05, 10	Beijing, Hanoi	Seventh, eighth, and ninth rounds of land border joint working group negotiations.
1997.05.06—10	Beijing	Tenth round of land border joint working group negotiations.
1997.08.13—15	Beijing	Fifth round of government-level border negotiations and regular vice-ministerial consultations.
1998.01.12—22	Hanoi	Eleventh round of land border joint working group negotiations.
1998.05.26—06.05	Beijing	Twelfth round of land border joint working group negotiations.
1998.09.25—28	Hanoi	Sixth round of government-level border negotiations and regular vice-ministerial consultations.

Date	Location	Summary
1999.12.30	Hanoi	Signing of the "Sino-Vietnamese Land Border Treaty".
2000.02.21—22	Beijing	Seventh round of government-level border negotiations and regular vice-ministerial consultations.
2000.07.06	Beijing	Representatives exchanged ratifications of the "Sino-Vietnamese Land Border Treaty," officially bringing the treaty into effect and beginning the boundary demarcation process.
2000.11.19—12.01	Beijing	First meeting of the Joint Boundary Demarcation Committee.
2001.02.15—03.02	Hanoi	Second meeting of the Joint Boundary Demarcation Committee.
2001.05.22—06.07	Beijing	Third meeting of the Joint Boundary Demarcation Committee.
2001.11.15	Hanoi	Eighth round of government-level border negotiations.
2001.11.16—12.06	Hanoi	First Chief Representatives' meeting of the Joint Boundary Demarcation Committee.
2001.12.27	Guangxi Province, Fangchenggang, Mong Cai, Vietnam	Boundary marker unveiling ceremony at the China-Vietnam land border.
2002.08.22—23	Kunming, Yunnan Province	Ninth round of government-level border negotiations.
2004.01.11	Hanoi	Tenth round of government-level border negotiations.
2004.12.28	Beijing	Eleventh round of government-level border negotiations.
2005.12.10	Hanoi	Twelfth round of government-level border negotiations. Both sides agreed to accelerate the demarcation and boundary marker installation process, with the goal of completing it by 2008. Four chief representatives' meetings of the demarcation team were held during this time.

Sources: Compiled from the Policy Research Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, China's Diplomacy 1991 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1992), pp. 49-51; China's Diplomacy 1992 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1993), pp. 49-51; China's Diplomacy 1993 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1994), pp. 50-53; China's Diplomacy 1994 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1995), pp. 45-50; China's Diplomacy 1995 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1996), pp. 43-47; China's Diplomacy 1996 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1997), pp. 38-43; China's Diplomacy 1997 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1998), pp. 49-55; China's Diplomacy 1998 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1999), pp. 58-63; China's Diplomacy 1999 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2000), pp. 54-58; China's Diplomacy 2000 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2001), pp. 54-58; China's Diplomacy 2001 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2002), pp. 61-66; China's Diplomacy 2002 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2003), pp. 58-65; China's Diplomacy 2003 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2004), pp. 50-57; China's Diplomacy 2004 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2005), pp. 319-320; China's Diplomacy 2005 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2006), pp. 266-267; China's Diplomacy 2006 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2007), pp. 264-265; China's Diplomacy 2007 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2007), pp. 259-260; China's Diplomacy 2008 Edition (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2009), pp. 255-256.

A comparison of the two rounds of negotiations between China and Vietnam reveals that there were other factors affecting the land border negotiations. Before the normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations, and even before the Sino-Vietnamese War, both sides remained firm in their stances during the land border negotiations. China consistently insisted that negotiations must be based on the boundaries delineated in the Sino-French Treaty, while Vietnam insisted on negotiating based on the current status of the border. This persistent disagreement between the two sides was the main reason that no consensus was reached in multiple rounds of negotiations.

When comparing the Sino-Vietnamese border negotiations of 1958, 1977, and 1991, we can observe that although the actual status of the land border remained unchanged, the methods and outcomes were vastly different, which warrants further investigation. In 1958, shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China, relations between China and North Vietnam were good, and although they could not resolve the border issues, both sides agreed to shelve the disputes and maintain the status quo. In the land border negotiations starting in 1977, the border status remained unchanged, but the breakdown of talks led to the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979. However, in the 1991 negotiations, there were no such conflicts, and China no longer insisted on the boundaries set by the Sino-French Treaty. Instead, China was willing to negotiate and demarcate based on the current situation. This eventually led to the signing of the "Treaty on the Land Border Between the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" in 1999, followed by successful boundary demarcations and the peaceful resolution of the border dispute.

4. The Impact of Resolving the Land Border Dispute on China

The resolution of the Sino-Vietnamese land border dispute is not merely a settlement of the border issue itself. Behind this resolution lies the resolution of political, economic, and social issues. Vietnam, as China's southern neighbor, brings far-reaching implications not only in terms of the border issue but also in diplomacy, economic development, and social progress.

4.1. Diplomacy

For China, maintaining good relations with neighboring countries is a necessary condition for national development. Vietnam, being a socialist country, holds unique significance. According to Vice Minister Li Chengren of the International Department of the Communist Party of China (Li Chengren, 2010), after the reform and opening-up period, China's foreign policy in the new era focused on creating a favorable international environment for its modernization. Strengthening relationships with neighboring countries became a priority in China's foreign affairs. Li emphasized that socialist countries like Vietnam, North Korea, and Laos were particularly important partners for China.

This relationship goes beyond traditional diplomacy with neighbors; it involves an ideological connection. According to Li, maintaining good relations with neighboring countries is crucial for national development. The shared socialist ideology between China and countries like Vietnam makes them key targets for strengthening ties.

Addressing Vietnam's importance, Lin Minghua highlighted not only the ideological, economic, and social factors but also Vietnam's role as a catalyst for the development of southwestern China (Lin Minghua, 2001). The process of resolving the Sino-Vietnamese land border dispute and the Gulf of Tonkin issue can serve as a reference for resolving future disputes in the South China Sea. The South China Sea is a complicated issue involving multiple nations, but it is also a crucial passage for China's oil imports. If China can maintain good relations with Vietnam, both parties can continue to negotiate peacefully and seek a long-term solution that benefits all stakeholders. By preventing the issue from becoming complicated, expanding, publicized, or

internationalized, both countries can ensure that their differences do not hinder normal relations and maintain regional peace and stability.

4.2. Economics

Vietnam's importance to China goes beyond shared socialist ideology, extending into economic factors. A report from the Yunnan Provincial Department of Commerce in 2008 indicated that, after relations between China and Vietnam improved, trade between Yunnan and Vietnam increased significantly. The benefits were reinvested into border development, which helped stabilize ethnic minorities and promote the development of China's southwestern region. In 2003, the trade volume between Yunnan and Vietnam was \$220 million, which grew to \$795 million by 2008. As border trade flourished, investments in the southwest frontier naturally increased, improving living standards in the region.

From the above data, it is evident that opening border trade led to direct economic growth for China. The key prerequisite for this growth was maintaining good relations with neighboring countries. Stable bilateral relations allowed for the possibility of border trade.

4.3. Social Development

Yunnan, which shares a border with Vietnam, is home to several ethnic minority groups. Resolving disputes with Vietnam allowed for the development of border trade, which not only addressed the economic stagnation in the southwestern frontier but also contributed significantly to stabilizing ethnic minorities and promoting social development. From the perspective of ethnic minority stability and border economic development, Vietnam's importance to China lies in enhancing prosperity, national strength, and neighborly relations. The development of the southwestern frontier had been an underdeveloped area in China, but the improvement in Sino-Vietnamese relations created a peaceful international environment, leading to positive domestic developments.

In conclusion, Vietnam's importance to China is undeniable. Resolving the Sino-Vietnamese land border dispute was essential for China's reform and opening-up policies after the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee. In the context of creating a favorable international environment for economic development, China's national strategy shifted, with the aim of peaceful development. After the reform and opening-up, pursuing development opportunities became a recurring theme in China's white papers, evolving into the "harmonious world" policy of the early 21st century. This shift had a profound impact on how China approached the resolution of the Sino-Vietnamese land border dispute. Every year, China emphasizes dialogue and cooperation with neighboring countries, striving for a peaceful external environment conducive to national development.

As relations between China and Vietnam improved during this period, progress on the land border issue was smooth. The land border was merely a visible manifestation of the broader issues between the two nations. After resolving the more important matters, the land border became less contentious. This resulted in high-level meetings between the two countries, leading to actual boundary demarcations and the erection of boundary markers. In 2008, the final boundary marker was successfully installed. This process reflects China's changing national strategy, creating development opportunities and pursuing national growth as part of a new round of strategic goals. Diplomatic behavior changed as a result, making the peaceful resolution of border disputes between the two nations possible.

5. Conclusion

A boundary defines the limits of a nation's territorial sovereignty, delineating the space where a country exercises its authority. Boundaries are generally classified into traditional customary boundaries and treaty boundaries. Traditional customary boundaries are established based on

historical administrative control between neighboring countries. These boundaries are often implicitly recognized by the nations involved. However, because they are not formally delineated, differing interpretations of the location and direction of these boundaries can lead to disputes, conflicts, or even wars. The Sino-Vietnamese border conflict arose from such circumstances. Therefore, how to manage and peacefully resolve border issues between the two countries, particularly in relation to the South China Sea, is a topic that warrants deeper investigation in the future.

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