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About RCAS

RCAS is a non-profit research organization focusing on the maritime issues and regional integration in the Indo-Pacific region. It is a newly-established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng, in Haikou, China. We, at the moment, have an international research team with resident/non-resident researchers from China and other Asian states.

RCAS seizes the opportunity that China is building Hainan Free-Trade Port in which the Hainan Island will become an important window for China's opening up to the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean to become a leading research institute and think tank on maritime affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. So far, RCAS focuses on the maritime disputes and maritime cooperation in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, and various regional cooperation mechanisms such as BRI, LMC, RCEP and so on. It is committed to promoting the maritime cooperation, regional integration and academic exchanges in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has received a number of research funding from universities and foundations, and conducted research programs of the South China Sea(SCS) dispute, China-South/Southeast Asian relations, BRI in South/Southeast Asia, terrorism/anti-terrorism in Afghanistan, and so on. RCAS researchers have won various awards from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and the Hainan government.

RCAS has published nearly 10 books in Chinese and English, and more than 20 papers on SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *The Uncertain Future of Afghanistan: Terrorism, Reconstruction, and Great-power Rivalry*(Springer Nature, forthcoming); *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *International Pressures, Strategic Preference and Myanmar's China Policy since 1988*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2020); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches*(2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988*(2021); *The Budding Indo-Myanmar Relations: Rising But Limited Challenges for China*(2019).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles and been interviewed in various local and international media outlets such as Asia Centre in France, *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum(EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Lian He Zao Bao* and *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post(SCMP)* and *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN* and *Global Times* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the US, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places. Welcome to visit our website: <http://www.rcas.top>.

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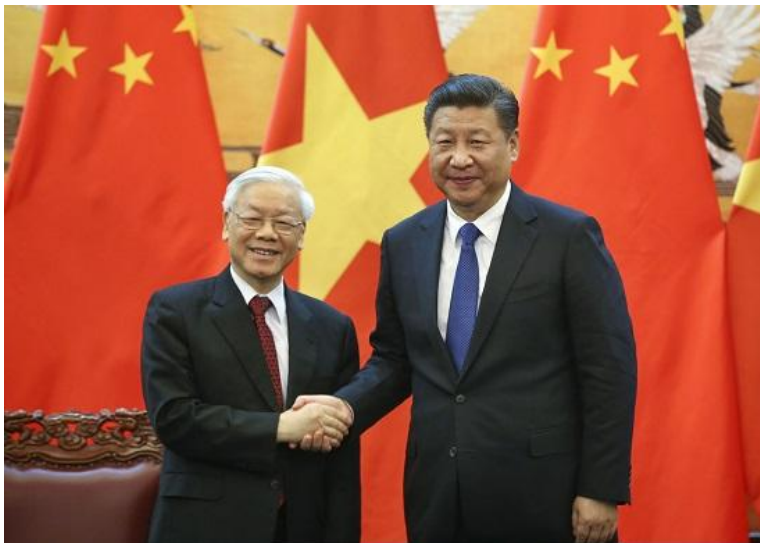
RCAS Commentary

Nguyen Phu Trong's Trip Highlights Special Relationship

between China and Vietnam

Nian Peng

At the invitation of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee General Secretary and Chinese President Xi Jinping, Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) Central Committee General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong will pay an official visit to China from October 30 to November 2. It is not only a prominent demonstration of the special relationship between the CCP and the VCP, but also a positive signal about the steady progression of Sino-Vietnamese relations.



▲Xi Jinping met with Nguyen Phu Trong

Xi and Trong have not met face-to-face since the APEC Summit in Da Nang, Vietnam in 2017. This is due to a combination of factors, including Trong's poor health after the APEC summit, but also VCP's focus on its top priority, the 13th Party Congress held in January 2021. Coupled with the travel restrictions on foreign visits after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Trong has not had a chance to take a China tour-until now.

More recently Trong attended a series of official meetings in Vietnam, which is a clear sign of his improved health sent by the Vietnamese government. As a result, a short-distance foreign visit has become feasible. Moreover, the VCP's 13th Congress was successfully held last year, and Trong was re-elected as the general secretary. That indicates that he has consolidated power in both the party and the government. With that achieved, Trong's China visit was put on the agenda.

There are at least two major signals being sent by Trong's visit to China at this time. First, Trong is the first foreign leader to visit China after the CCP's 20th Party Congress, edging out Pakistani President Shehbaz Sharif, who will travel to China on November 1. As the top leader of the VCP, Trong wants to convey a clear message that the party has continued to maintain a special relationship with the CCP, the two biggest communist parties in the world.

What's more, U.S. President Joe Biden is expected to visit Vietnam during the multilateral meetings taking place in Southeast Asia in November-including the G-20 Summit, East Asia Summit, and APEC Summit. Trong needs to visit China before Biden's Vietnam trip, so as to convince China that the Sino-Vietnamese relationship is still the priority of Hanoi's diplomacy.

On the eve of his China trip, Trong sent a congratulatory message to Xi praising the successful convening of the 20th Party Congress. "I look forward to see you again at an early date to have an in-depth exchanges of views on major strategic issues, so as to further enhance the political trust between the two sides and point out the direction for the future development of the bilateral ties," Trong wrote.

As Vietnam is now in the vortex of the intensified China-U.S. competition, if not confrontation, it has to cautiously manage its relations with the two great powers. On the one hand, maintaining close relations with China has always been a top priority of Vietnam's diplomacy; on the other hand, Vietnam has attempted to further develop relations with the United States. But Hanoi needs to allay China's rising concerns about the fast-growing U.S.-Vietnam relationship in recent years, particularly the defense cooperation between Vietnam and the United States in the South China Sea.

In fact, Vietnam had long held to the "four noes" policy: Vietnam does not join any military alliance, does not ally with any country targeting another country, does not allow foreign

countries to set up military bases in Vietnam or use Vietnamese territory against other countries, and does not use force or threaten the use of force in international relations. In order to enhance the mutual trust and lay a firm foundation of trust for the development of Sino-Vietnamese ties, Trong is likely to re-affirm this stance and try to reassure China that U.S.-Vietnam relations would not harm China's relationship with Vietnam.

Both China and Vietnam see themselves as facing increasing ideological infiltration from the United States; the CCP and VCP alike feel threatened by the core values of the West, such as democratic elections and freedom of speech. Therefore, both sides have strengthened exchanges between the two parties and pursued useful ways to safeguard both their socialist systems and the governing power of their respective communist parties.

Last but not least, Vietnam expects to learn from China's experiences on economic development and social stability and absorb more Chinese investment and technology to sustain its economic growth and social cohesion. For its part, China will try to promote friendly Sino-Vietnamese relations and maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea, so as to achieve the goals of modernization and national rejuvenation, the main task of Xi's third term.

The article was first published at The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/10/nguyen-phu-trongs-trip-highlights-special-relationship-between-china-and-vietnam/>.

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Nian Peng is the Director at Research Centre for Asian Studies(RCAS), Haikou, China. He holds a Ph.D. in Government and International Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University. His main research interests are in the areas of China-Southeast/South Asia relations, Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) and maritime security of the Indo-Pacific. He authored/edited six books-*The Uncertain Future of Afghanistan: Terrorism, Reconstruction, and Great-power Rivalry*(Springer Nature, forthcoming), *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives*(Springer Nature, 2022), *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry*(Springer Nature, 2021), *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the Covid-19 Pandemic*(Springer Nature, 2021), *International Pressures, Strategic Preference, and Myanmar's China Policy since 1988* (Springer Nature, 2020) and *Leng Zhan Hou Yin Mian Guan Xi Yan Jiu [A Study on Indo-Myanmar Relations after the Cold-War]*(Shi Shi Chu Ban She [Current Affairs Press], 2017). His refereed articles have been notably published in *Ocean Development and International Law*, *Pacific Focus*, *Asian Affairs*, *Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu [Southeast Asian Studies]*, *Nan Ya Yan Jiu [South Asian Studies]* and *Nan Ya Yan Jiu Ji Kan [South Asian Studies Quarterly]*. He also contributes his perspectives to many think tanks and various local and international media outlets such as Asia Centre in France, *East Asian Forum* in Australia, *The Diplomat* in the USA, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Lian He Zao Bao* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post* and *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *Global Times* and *CGTN* in China.

RCAS Talk

When China and the United States Meet in the “Asian Moment”

Can ASEAN Maintain Its Independence?

Nian Peng

From November 8 to 19, Southeast Asia entered the “highlight moment”. During these 12 days, Southeast Asian countries will host three large-scale regional and international summits, and leaders from all over the world will gather together to discuss the “world’s affairs”. As Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, global governance has entered the “Asian moment”.



▲Xi Jinping met with Joe Biden

Southeast Asia begins its official “summit season” this week. The first of its kind was a series of meetings of East Asian cooperation leaders held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, from November 8 to

13; the G20 Summit will be held in Bali, Indonesia, from 15th to 16th. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Informal Meeting was held in Bangkok, Thailand from 18th to 19th.

Chinese government officials began their first post-pandemic trip to Southeast Asia this week. Chinese President Xi Jinping personally attended the G20 Summit and APEC Summit. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited Cambodia from November 8 to 13 and attended the China-ASEAN (10+1) Leaders' Meeting, the ASEAN-China-Japan-South Korea (10+3) Summit and the East Asia Summit.

On the eve of the meeting, Wang Yi said in a phone call with Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian that China hopes that ASEAN countries will take the recent series of summits as an opportunity to make the "Asian moment" provide more certainty and stability to the world and play an "Asian role" in coping with world chaos and changes.

What is the "Asian role"? **Nian Peng, Director of Research Centre for Asian Studies(RCAS)**, China, analyzed in an interview with *Hong Kong China News Agency* on November 9th that the current global situation is turbulent, and the risk of geopolitical competition and even nuclear war has increased significantly, which also brings security risks to the Asian region. Under such circumstances, on the one hand, only by self-unity, maintaining regional stability and easing global tensions can countries in the region create an external environment for sustained prosperity and lay a solid foundation for the development of all countries. On the other hand, in response to the risks faced by the all countries, Europe and the United States have not come up with a good solution. Asian countries in the face of the pressure of the United States "choose sides", still maintain a relatively moderate situation. There are some positive practices, if can be systematically refined and promoted globally, it is also of great significance to the world.

The relationship between China and ASEAN is very close. In November 2021, China and ASEAN officially announced the establishment of China-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. ASEAN is China's largest trading partner, and China is also ASEAN's largest trading partner. Chinese leaders have attended the China-ASEAN Summit and the ASEAN-China-Japan-South Korea Summit for 24 consecutive years, and the East Asia Summit for 16 consecutive years. There is a view that China's current diplomatic strategic focus has been firmly focused on Asia.

Nian Peng pointed out that economically, there is no doubt that China and ASEAN cooperate closely in trade and investment, especially after the epidemic, the two sides have more room for economic cooperation. Under the rising pressure of the United States' "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework" and its efforts of promoting the "decoupling" of the global supply chain from China, China has strong motivation to build a highly stable industrial chain with ASEAN state, which will be of great significance to its future foreign trade and economic development, as well as to promote the implementation of its dual circulation between domestic and international market.

Regarding the reason why China's current diplomatic strategy focuses on Asia is, Nian Peng added that first of all, because China's diplomatic tradition attaches importance to peripheral diplomacy, especially Southeast Asia and South Asia, which are not only important regions for China's economic and trade cooperation, but also the preferred region for China's border stability. In addition, the United States has recently invested more and more geostrategic resources around China, constantly destabilized the South China Sea and criticized the BRI, trying to drive a wedge between China and its neighboring countries. If China's relations with ASEAN countries deteriorate, the United States will have a good chance to intervene in the territorial dispute in the SCS, and even military intervention.

Since taking office, U.S. President Joe Biden has repeatedly expressed his importance to Southeast Asia and revealed his intention to "return to Southeast Asia". U.S. officials in charge of Indo-Pacific affairs have said that in the past, they only contacted ASEAN countries occasionally, but now they do so once a month. According to the White House, Biden will also travel to Southeast Asia and will participate in the U.S.-ASEAN Leaders' Summit and the East Asia Summit, as well as the G20 summit. US media reports described Biden's trip as to expand US influence and "counterbalance China."

In this regard, Nian Peng said that the United States has high expectations for ASEAN countries in this meeting, hopes to develop positive relations with the United States, and there will certainly be more aspects to target China, including openly and covertly playing up the "China threat" card, hyping up the "debt trap", and encouraging ASEAN countries to "contend with China". The United States has its own purpose in this trip, not really for the sake of Southeast Asian countries.

The ASEAN countries are becoming main centers for Sino-US strategic competition, can they adhere to the independent “ASEAN Way”?

Nian Peng believes that ASEAN’s principle of not “taking sides” is consistent and must be adhered to. First, ASEAN is geographically closest to China and cannot afford to take sides; Second, ASEAN is highly depended on Chinese economy, and the loss of the Chinese market will cause immeasurable losses to the future economic recovery of the ASEAN countries. Finally, ASEAN does not want the region to become the next battleground between the great powers. “ASEAN has a clear understanding that it can develop relations with the United States to a limited extent, but it will not target China. The influence of the United States is limited.”

This article is translated from the Chinese edition which was first published at Hong Kong China News Agency, <http://www.hkcna.hk/docDetail.jsp?id=100209333&channel=2813>.

About Author



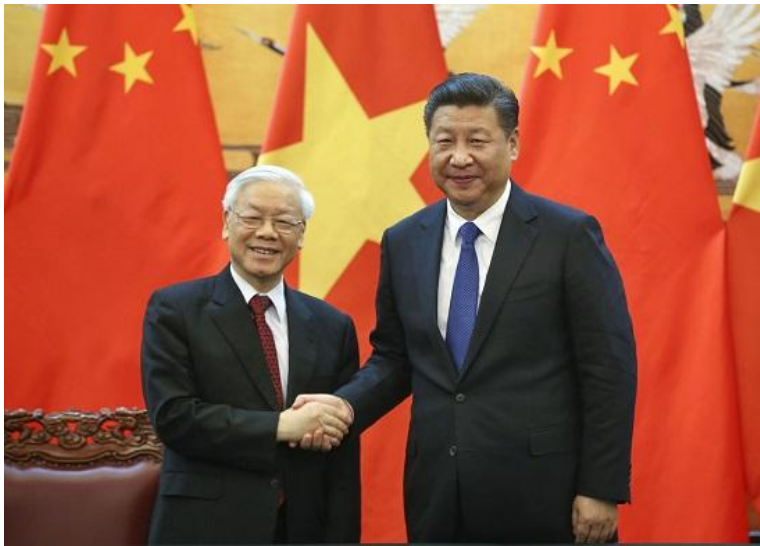
Nian Peng is the Director at Research Centre for Asian Studies(RCAS), Haikou, China. He holds a Ph.D. in Government and International Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University. His main research interests are in the areas of China-Southeast/South Asia relations, Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) and maritime security of the Indo-Pacific. He authored/edited six books-*The Uncertain Future of Afghanistan: Terrorism, Reconstruction, and Great-power Rivalry*(Springer Nature, forthcoming), *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives*(Springer Nature, 2022), *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry*(Springer Nature, 2021), *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the Covid-19 Pandemic*(Springer Nature, 2021), *International Pressures, Strategic Preference, and Myanmar's China Policy since 1988* (Springer Nature, 2020) and *Leng Zhan Hou Yin Mian Guan Xi Yan Jiu [A Study on Indo-Myanmar Relations after the Cold-War]*(Shi Shi Chu Ban She [Current Affairs Press], 2017). His refereed articles have been notably published in *Ocean Development and International Law*, *Pacific Focus*, *Asian Affairs*, *Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu [Southeast Asian Studies]*, *Nan Ya Yan Jiu [South Asian Studies]* and *Nan Ya Yan Jiu Ji Kan [South Asian Studies Quarterly]*. He also contributes his perspectives to many think tanks and various local and international media outlets such as Asia Centre in France, *East Asian Forum* in Australia, *The Diplomat* in the USA, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Lian He Zao Bao* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post* and *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *Global Times* and *CGTN* in China.

RCAS Talk

China's Open Embrace and Vietnam's 'Bamboo Diplomacy'

Sutirtho Patranobis

It's a Communist cliché but Xi had rolled out the red carpet for Trong, 76, with whom he shares parallels in career.



▲ Xi Jinping met with Nguyen Phu Trong

Credit must be given to China's general-secretary Xi Jinping.

Xi has hit the ground of global diplomacy running within days of being freshly minted as the Communist Party of China (CPC) chief for a norm-breaking third time.

The top leaders from Vietnam, Pakistan, Tanzania and Germany landed-made a beeline, perhaps-in Beijing between October 30 and November 4 to meet Xi and the outgoing members of the CPC politburo standing committee (SC) including Premier Li Keqiang.

Only top comrade Nguyen Phu Trong, chief of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and de facto head of government, however, was accorded royal treatment: Trong had dinner, hosted by Xi, with all the seven new members of the SC lined up for him at the Great Hall of the People: Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang and Li Xi, the "group of 7" under Xi who will rule China for the next five years.

Trong actually edged out “iron brother” Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to become the first foreign leader to meet Xi after the 20th CPC national congress, dutifully noted by Chinese official media as a sign of strong ties between China and Vietnam.

Xi and Trong, mask-less and smiling, shook hands and embraced at the Great Hall, which, according to Reuters, was an unusual display of close contact between Xi and a foreign leader, given China’s strict Covid-control rules and general diplomatic protocol.

The two leaders went on to sign 13 different bilateral cooperation agreements; Xi also awarded Trong China’s “Order of Friendship” medal for his contribution to, among other things, Sino-Vietnamese ties. (Xi’s good friend Russian President Vladimir Putin received the first Friendship Order medal in 2018.)

Both are the heads of their respective ruling parties and are currently in their unprecedented third tenure as party chief; Xi is considered the most powerful Chinese leader since modern China’s founder, Mao Zedong, and so is Trong in Vietnam’s post-Ho Chi Minh-era; both made anti-corruption drives their signature campaigns, and, yes, neither of them likes dissent.

Given that Vietnam and China are among the last five communist-ruled countries in the world, along with Cuba, Laos and North Korea, bilateral ties are bound to be-or at least meant to be-special.

It’s complicated though.

There are hard disputes between the two countries: Competing claims of sovereignty over islands in the South China Sea and a history of swaying allegiance and mistrust including wars.

In recent history, the two neighbours fought on land in 1979 and on the choppy seas when China is said to have seized what Vietnam calls Gạc Ma Reef (also known as Johnson South Reef or Chigua Reef) in 1988.

“In 1979, China invaded Vietnam’s northern border area, then after a month unilaterally withdrew. This was the opening blow of a decade-long effort to punish Vietnam for a series of moves unacceptable to Beijing,” John W Garver, a leading expert on China’s foreign relations, wrote in his book “China’s Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China”.

Maritime disputes between the two countries continue to be a source of tension.

“Vietnam and China are involved in several disputes in the South China Sea (SCS). The first dispute and also the least serious one is the maritime boundary dispute in the mouth of the Gulf of Tonkin. The second dispute concerns sovereignty over the Paracel Islands, which China took over by force from South Vietnam in 1974,” Vu Hai Dang, an expert on international law and the SCS, said at a webinar organised earlier this year by the Singapore-based ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Multilateral maritime disputes involving the two countries include the one over the Spratly Islands, which also involves Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, and Malaysia.

The two ruling Communist parties have, however, remained in an awkward embrace with trade-what else-playing the eager cupid.

Bilateral trade has grown substantially over the years.

Vietnam and China’s bilateral trade jumped to \$230.2 billion in 2021-crossing \$200 billion for the first time-and China is Vietnam’s largest trade partner and the second-largest export destination.

Despite recent disruptions in the supply chain because of China’s stubborn “zero-Covid” policy and dragging disputes, business and diplomatic ties have been good enough to make space for high-level exchanges and even better optics.

“It (Trong’s visit) is a clear sign to the world that China and Vietnam, the two biggest socialist countries in the world, have maintained a special relationship between both the communist parties and the socialist regimes. For China, Vietnam is not only a major partner in China-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) cooperation, but also a main claimant state in the SCS,” **Peng Nian, Director of the Haikou-based Research Centre for Asian Studies (RCAS)**, said.

That’s part of the geopolitical picture.

For Vietnam, negotiating between the US and China will be tricky and will put to test what party chief Trong said in 2021 was his country’s unique type of diplomacy: “bamboo diplomacy”.

“Like bamboo with strong roots, solid stems and flexible branches, Vietnamese diplomacy is soft and clever but still persistent and resolute; flexible, creative but consistent, valiant and resilient...,” he said at a national conference on foreign policy in December last year.

The policy essentially refers to Vietnam’s experience of balancing conflicting geopolitical interests-say between China, the US, Russia and India-over the last three decades.

Vietnam’s “bamboo diplomacy” has to be read together with what the country’s 2019 white paper on defence described as the “four Nos”: no military alliances, no taking sides, saying no to Vietnam being used as a military base by foreign powers, and no use of force in international relations.

For Vietnam, Trong’s visit was important to reduce China’s concerns over the fast-growing Vietnam-US relations by indicating that Vietnam treasures its ties with China, a neighbour.

Trong’s China visit will likely intensify the geopolitics in the region though, mainly in the context of the Sino-US strategic competition, if not confrontation, in Asia.

“On one hand, China will try its best to prevent Vietnam from swinging to the US, especially the close cooperation between Vietnam and the US in the Indo-Pacific strategy (including Indo-Pacific Economic Framework) and the troubled waters in the SCS,” Peng said.

“On the other hand, the US has attempted to assist Vietnam, economically and militarily, in resisting Chinese economic influence and its assertiveness in the SCS and thus to contain China’s rise,” Peng added.

Where does India stand in Vietnam’s foreign policy priorities, given the chill in ties between New Delhi and Beijing?

“As Vietnam has adopted a flexible balance strategy in its foreign relations, which is also known as ‘bamboo-style diplomacy’, it will promote Vietnam-India relations. This will not raise too much China’s concerns unless the two countries conduct oil and gas exploration activities or military exercises in the disputed waters of the SCS,” Peng added.

Now that he has had Trong in a mask-less embrace, he can wait and watch to note which side the bamboo might sway.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/hutong-cat-china-s-open-embrace-and-vietnam-s-bamboo-diplomacy-101667823459109.html>.