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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### TRADE AND TOURISM OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION ZONES BETWEEN VIETNAM AND CHINA: CASE OF MONG CAI (VIETNAM)-DONGXING (CHINA)

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#### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on trade and tourism along the Sino-Vietnamese borderlands in the Mong Cai-Dongxing region. The trading cities of Mong Cai (Quang Ninh Province, Vietnam) and Dongxing (Guangxi, China) both constitute a cross-border economic cooperation zone, a key strategic element of regional economic development and transnational integration in the Greater Mekong Subregion. In addition, the Mong Cai-Dongxing border cooperation zone not only has a strategic position in bilateral cooperation between Vietnam and China but also is one of the gateways connecting China and Southeast Asia. This is a typical area for the cross-border cooperation model between the two countries, especially in the field of cross-border trade and tourism.

## INTRODUCTION

The northern part of Vietnam borders the southern part of China. The Vietnam-China border regions are surrounded by mountains and precipitous landforms. Various ethnic minorities have lived in these border regions, and these residents of border areas have transported goods freely between the neighboring countries as a part of their living area. In 1999, China and Vietnam officially demarcated the current position of the land border with a length of 1,306 km. In 1999, China and Vietnam officially demarcated the current position of the land border with a length of 1,306 km. The China-Vietnam border areas are home to many people who transport a variety of merchandise, and they are coming and going with a full cargo on a bicycle or a two-wheeled cart loaded with seafood, agricultural products, household appliances, fertilizer, and other items. The border does not separate the nations or limit the range of living areas or living activities of the border residents, and they can also reap the economic benefits of frontier trade. Against this backdrop, the China-Vietnam border regions have changed from battlefields to marketplaces, and what was previously the front line of defense has now become a frontier for economic exchange. (Ryo Ikebe, 2013: 250-251). The area of the China-Vietnam land border comprises the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (hereinafter referred to as *Guangxi*) and Yunnan Province in China, and the six Vietnamese provinces of Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Quang Ninh. In 1992, China decided to open the land border regions of the major areas, and in May 1994, China promulgated the "Foreign

Trade Law" in an attempt to establish the implementation of foreign trade, including various incentives for border trade. Next, in January 1996, China issued the "Notification of Border Trade," with the intention of further promoting frontier trade in the border areas. In addition, it specifically set forth preferential tax rates for border trade. As a result of introducing these border trade systems, China has promoted economic development in the border areas, established friendly relations with neighboring countries, and tried to maintain and improve the levels of stability in the border areas. (Ryo Ikebe, 2013: 251). The land border between Vietnam and China is contiguous with the 7 provinces of Dien Bien, Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Quang Ninh of Vietnam and Yunnan Province and Guangxi of China. Vietnam and China signed an agreement on the management of the two countries' land borders in 1999. This is an important basis for the two sides to promote border cooperation, including trade and tourism. In 2011, the two countries signed the Protocol amending the Agreement and the Protocol on the Implementation of the Road Transport Agreement. In 2010, Vietnam and China signed a "Tourism Cooperation Agreement between Vietnam and China for the period 2010-2013." Moreover, on June 29, 2010, China issued a document: "Some opinions of the State Council of the Central Committee of the CCP on deepening the implementation of the Western Exploitation Strategy." In which it is explicitly stated that the construction of the Dongxing Key Opening and Exploration Experimental Zone, which has been officially upgraded to a state-level key development strategy, has become the leading pilot zone in the opening up of China's Guangxi border

development. (*Nánguó zǎobào*, 2015) In April 2015, China also announced the Guangxi Border Development Opening and Opening Plan (2015-2020), which clarifies the “One Ring and Three Belts” plan, in which the three belts include: the Economic Cooperation Belt Nanning-Fangcheng-Dongxing (China)-Mong Cai and coastal areas (Vietnam) aimed at ASEAN; the Economic Cooperation Belt in coastal areas from Nanning-Chongzuo-Pingxiang (China)-Dong Dang (Vietnam); and the Periphery Nanning-Jingxi (China)-Tra Linh (Vietnam). And one ring is the Guangxi Border Gate Economic Cooperation Ring. (*Fàngchénggǎng shì rénmin zhèngfǔ*, 2017; *Nánguó zǎobào*, 2015) In addition, Vietnam and China signed a “tourism cooperation plan between Vietnam and China from 2017 to 2019,” a “plan for cultural and tourism cooperation between Vietnam and China for the period 2019-2021,” and a “memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the field of cultural industry between Vietnam and China” in 2019. (*Baochinhphu*, 2010). Mong Cai and Dongxing are not only the only border cities, including both land and sea, between Vietnam and China, but also the most favorable gateways for the south and southwest of China to trade with Vietnam and ASEAN countries, which has an important position in the development of trade and tourism. Mong Cai is a border gate city located in the interconnected gate of the Tonkin Gulf and the economic corridor of Nanning-Singapore, acting as an important bridge of economic cooperation between ASEAN and China and holding a position of strategic importance to the economy, defense, security, and diplomacy of Quang Ninh province and the whole country. (Le Van Anh, 2022) Besides, the development of border trade and tourism between Vietnam and China makes an important contribution to promoting economic development, promoting changes in social life, and creating jobs for workers in the local border areas of the two countries. In addition, border tourism and trade activities also help improve the cultural and spiritual lives of ethnic minorities in border, mountainous, remote, and isolated areas, thereby contributing to strengthening national defense and security, social order, and safety in the Vietnam-China border area. The Mong Cai -Dongxing cross-border cooperation zone has become an important transit and distribution station for goods, capital, and people between Vietnam and China. The two governments’ issuance of a Joint Statement on strengthening comprehensive strategic cooperation between Vietnam and China in the new period and the signing of the “Memorandum of Understanding on building a cross-border cooperation zone” are significant in promoting trade and tourism cooperation between Mong Cai of Vietnam and Dongxing of China.

**The role of the Mong Cai-Dongxing Cross-Border Cooperation Zone in China and Vietnam’s Strategies:** Over the past years, the northern province of Quang Ninh (Vietnam) has been working to gradually establish itself as a “gateway” for cross-border trade between Vietnam and China, thus contributing to bilateral economic ties. Quang Ninh, which shares more than 118 km of land border and 191 km of sea border with China, is located at the start of the countries’ “Two Corridors, One Belt” economic cooperation zone, in the Nanning-Singapore Economic Corridor, and the expanded Gulf of Tonkin inter-regional cooperation area under the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area. (VNA, 2021b). As an area with an important position in Vietnam’s maritime strategy as well as in the key economic axis of Hanoi—Hai Phong—Quang Ninh, Mong Cai has now become one of the two major economic centers of Quang Ninh province. Mong Cai border gate is identified as the most important land border gate of Vietnam and an important gateway in the process of international economic integration between countries in the region, especially in the economic cooperation relationship between Vietnam and China. Mong Cai has a particularly important position as an intersection point and a “springboard” for economic development, especially given Vietnam’s strategy of “Two Corridors, One Belt.” The city of Mong Cai is nearly 200 kilometers northeast of Ha Long. The city has a favorable geographic position and plays a crucial strategic role in terms of politics, economics, defense and security, and external relations because it has international border gates both on the road and in the sea, connecting Vietnam with China and other countries in the world. Therefore, Mong Cai was first formed as an experimental economic zone in Vietnam, starting in 1996.

With its advantage of having a long borderline near Guangxi, China, the city’s economy has strongly developed with the establishment of a series of trade centers and a system of restaurants and hotels ranging from common to luxurious, so it is no exaggeration to say that Mong Cai is the “shopping heaven” of the northeastern region of Vietnam. The Guangxi province borders Vietnam and has several ports in the Beibu (Tonkin) Gulf. It is one of the two provinces in China that has both land and maritime borders with China’s neighboring countries. (Mingjiang Li, 2019) Dongxing Port is a state-level first-class port for economic and trade exchanges between China and Vietnam. Dongxing City is a border trade city adjacent to Vietnam’s Mong Jie Special Economic Zone and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. In 2017, China and Vietnam established the Dongxing–Mangjie Cross-border Economic Cooperation Zone to create a new growth pole for China’s border economic development. Dongxing is the cross-border highway transportation hub of the new land-sea corridor in southwest China and plays an important role in the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) and the RCEP. In the future development of Dongxing, in addition to the influencing factors of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the influence of economic and trade exchanges between Chongqing, Shanxi, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Vietnam should also be considered. (Wu, B., et al., 2022).

With the deepening of the construction of the “Belt and Road Initiative,” Dongxing city, as a window that opens up (southern) China to the outside world, has a strong momentum of development. The number of cargoes and tourists passing through Dongxing Port keeps increasing. In the future, to promote the port, the relationship between urban development and port development should be achieved by developing a broader market, promoting the development of entrepot trade and import and export processing industries, conforming to the transit travel sustained growth trend, integrating Dongxing city and the surrounding tourism resources, and creating enticing travel brochures. (Wu, B., et al., 2022). The mainland Southeast Asian region or the Mekong Subregion bordered by China’s Guangxi and Yunnan provinces—China’s relatively underdeveloped region in the Southwest. However, this region has an extremely important position in China’s regional strategy, including the “*Xibu Da Kaifa Zhanlüe*” that would be “the Great Western Development (GWD) policy” and the opening-up in the southwest region of China, which is also the door to go down to Southeast Asia by road and go into the Indian Ocean via Myanmar. In addition, the region is mainly composed of countries with close trade relations with China, especially now that many countries in this region are increasingly tightening their relations with China. Therefore, for China, this area can be seen as Beijing’s “backyard,” so promoting a new, more efficient cooperation mechanism will be of great importance to the overall strategy of China in Southeast Asia. (Duong Van Huy, 2020: 14101-14111).

Begun in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become one of the key international cooperation platforms, focusing mainly on infrastructure development and connectivity. Through BRI, China’s economic presence and influence in Southeast Asia will continue to rise. The concept of the Belt and Road was derived from many sources with political and economic motivations. Its conceptualization has been at the crux of the larger debate about the transformation of China’s foreign policy thinking. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi insisted that the BRI is “a product of inclusive cooperation, not a geopolitical tool,” (*Fmprc.gov.cn*, 2015) stressing Beijing’s commitment to the spirit of “peaceful rise” and the newly coined “community of shared future.” On the one hand, it is linked to China’s new regional and global position following decades of economic growth. This has clearly provided China with the economic clout to finance investments abroad and to pursue strategic goals beyond its immediate neighborhood in East Asia. The initiative involves building advanced rail infrastructure along several routes across Central Asia, and expanding infrastructure for shipping routes in Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea. (Erik Baark, 2019) The overall geopolitical and strategic aspects of the BRI have been extensively analyzed by Western and Chinese scholars, albeit often from very different perspectives. (Erik Baark, 2019;

Maximilian Mayer (ed.), 2018; Marlene Laruelle (ed.), 2018; Li Yuan and Markus Taube, 2018; Cheng Yu, Song Lilei and Huang Lihe (eds.), 2018) At an early stage of implementation, the geostrategic basis for China's BRI was interpreted as rooted in domestic regional politics and Chinese "peripheral diplomacy," that is, the need to further develop western regions in China, such as Xinjiang, and to cultivate political and economic relationships with the nearest neighboring countries. (Cai, 2017). In 2012, China launched the Dongxing National Key Development Opening Pilot Area in Guangxi. Accordingly, China also proposed early to build the Dongxing border-gate economic zone (Guangxi, China) and Mong Cai (Quang Ninh, Vietnam) to become a "Two Nations, One City" (lưỡng quốc nhất thành) cooperation zone, or "two countries and one zone" (hai nước một khu). The Chinese side has accelerated the construction of infrastructure as well as building models and mechanisms of cross-border cooperation with Vietnam. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese side is still confused about how to cooperate with China in building a model of a cross-border cooperation zone. Besides, Quang Ninh Province is considered one of the key areas for the border economic development of Vietnam. The Vietnam-China border area in Quang Ninh province currently has three border gate economic zones: Mong Cai border gate economic zone, Bac Phong Sinh border gate economic zone, and Hoanh Mo-Dong Van border gate economic zone, which serve as a springboard for socioeconomic development in the province. Mong Cai and Dongxing constitute a cross-border economic cooperation district officially named the Dongxing-Mong Cai Free Trade Zone. This is considered a hub for development and integration for the Greater Mekong Subregion.

#### Formation of the Mong Cai-Dongxing Cross-Border Cooperation Zone

From the Vietnam side, Quang Ninh focused on researching and proposing to the government a number of specific mechanisms and policies to be applied in border areas as early as the 1990s, after the two countries, Vietnam and China, normalized relations. In addition, the Government of Vietnam also issued Decision No. 675/TTg on "pilot application of a number of policies at Mong Cai border gate area"; Decision 103/1998/QĐ-TTg and Decision 53/2001/QĐ-TTg allow Mong Cai to apply a number of investment policies, including tax, finance, land, and resource use policies; policies on import and export, etc. The government issued Decision No. 34/2009/QĐ-TTg on March 2, 2009, approving the master plan to develop the coastal economic belt in the Gulf of Tonkin until 2020, including oriented content on cooperation with China to build the Mong Cai Free Trade Zone; develop economic and trade cooperation activities between the two countries; and open up and integrate strongly with ASEAN countries. More specifically, in Decision No. 99/2009/QĐ-TTg dated July 29, 2009 approving the Prime Minister's Project on developing Mong Cai as an international border gate city until 2020, the leaders of Mong Cai City were allowed to discuss with the leaders of Dongxing City (China) the implementation of the pilot construction of a border economic cooperation zone in the direction of having common regulations in a number of fields.

Compared to localities along the Vietnam-China border, Mong Cai City (Quang Ninh, Vietnam) and Dongxing City (Guangxi, China) have more advantages in both trade and tourism development based on the advantages of geographical location, infrastructure, economic complementarity, and future cooperation prospects. Not only that, but these are the two municipalities that the governments of the two countries anticipate and prioritize with numerous preferential mechanisms and policies. Including the efforts of the two sides when determining the first step to building a model of the Mong Cai-Dongxing border economic cooperation zone. Mong Cai is one of the most important international border crossings on Vietnam's northern border for exchanging goods with China and other countries in the region. This economic zone is being constructed to be a big, modern, and versatile city and is defined as the gateway for the PRC's approach to the Southeast Asian market. With the advantage of having a 4,600-kilometer-long border with China, Laos, and Cambodia, in 1996 Vietnam began to build the Mong Cai border gate

economic zone. After over 10 years of operation, this border gate economic zone has made great contributions to the external economic development strategy, gradually improving the people's lives and bringing a new image to the border area, which was once an underdeveloped area. Being the first zone to enjoy the preferential policy applied to the border gate economic zone since 1996, Mong Cai has had a gigantic socio-economic development and has become one of the largest trade centers in Quang Ninh Province. The Mong Cai Border Gate has become Viet Nam's most important land border gate, as well as an important gateway to the economic corridors of Lao Cai - Ha Noi - Hai Phong - Quang Ninh - Kunming (China) and Ha Noi - Hai Phong - Quang Ninh - Lang Son - Guangxi (China), as well as the economic belt surrounding the Tonkin Gulf that the Vietnamese and Chinese governments intend to construct. According to the Government's Decision dated July 29, 2009, approving the Project on Developing Mong Cai Border Gate City by 2020, Mong Cai international border-gate city will reach Grade II urban center standards, and the zone will be developed into a dynamic economic zone of this border province by 2020. (QNP, 2017).

With its advantages in terms of geographic position, natural landscape, and economic potential, Mong Cai was planned by the government to develop into the Mong Cai Border Gate Economic Zone by 2050. Under the plan, the economic zone will have a total area of 121,197 hectares, including a total land area of 66,197 hectares and a water area of 55,000 hectares. It is expected to become a dynamic economic growth pole of the Red River delta, a developed economic center on the coastal economic belt of the Tonkin Gulf, and an important gate for trade and international cooperation between Vietnam and China and other ASEAN members. On April 10, 2012, the Prime Minister of Vietnam promulgated Decision No. 19/2012/QĐ-TTg regarding the establishment of a border gate economic zone in Mong Cai, Quang Ninh Province. The Mong Cai Border Gate Economic Zone includes all of Mong Cai City and the surrounding communes. Mong Cai Border Gate Economic Zone (EZ), established in 2012, consists of the entire Mong Cai city along with nine communal-level localities in Hai Ha district. It has a total area of 121,197 hectares, including 66,197 hectares of land and 55,000 hectares of sea. Mong Cai is among nine border gate EZs nationwide that were prioritised for investment during 2016–2020 with a view to driving dynamic and sustainable economic development in the province and the northern key economic zone as a whole. Quang Ninh also considers Mong Cai one of the two economic hubs of the province. (VNA, 2019). Mong Cai is a border gate city located in the interconnected gate of the Tonkin Gulf and the economic corridor of Nanning-Singapore, acting as an important bridge of economic cooperation between ASEAN and China and holding a position of strategic importance to the economy, defense, security, and diplomacy of Quang Ninh province and the whole country. According to the Resolution of the 15th Provincial Party Congress of Quang Ninh for the 2020-2025 tenure, "Mong Cai will be developed into a key service, trade, tourism, and seaport center of Quang Ninh province." (Le Van Anh, 2021).

The Mong Cai Border Gate Economic Zone in the northeastern province of Quang Ninh is set to become a key border gate economic zone of Vietnam under a recently amended overall planning scheme for its development until 2040. According to the planning scheme, with revisions approved by the Prime Minister on March 16, the zone covers 17 communes and wards of Mong Cai city and Quang Ha town, along with Quang Minh, Quang Thanh, Cai Chien, and Quang Phong communes of Hai Ha district. It will be built into a national key border gate economic zone as well as an important economic development center of the northern region, the northern coastal economic belt, and the Kunming (China)—Hanoi—Hai Phong—Mong Cai—Fangcheng (China) economic corridor. The plan looks to turn this zone into a center of cross-border trade, industry, seaport, logistics, and general services for Quang Ninh province and the northern key economic region; a national tourism site; a modern and sustainable coastal city; and a zone holding special importance in terms of national defense and security. By 2030, the Mong Cai Border Gate Economic Zone is expected to have a population of about

310,000–320,000 and attract 5–6 million tourist arrivals annually. The respective figures are set to reach 460,000–470,000 and 8–9 million by 2040. (VNA, 2021a). Mong Cai international border gate, Quang Ninh province: Mong Cai international border gate and Bac Luan bridge were built and put into use on April 17, 1994, and upgraded in the second phase in 2008 and the first quarter of 2009. The total area of the Bac Luan border gate is 15,871 m<sup>2</sup>. At the end of October 2015, the Quang Ninh Provincial People's Committee issued Decision 3391/QĐ-UBND approving the project of expanding and upgrading the Mong Cai international border gate. Furthermore, the Bac Luan 2 bridge projects are being built to reduce people and goods traffic. Ka Long border gate was rebuilt in 2002 with a total area of 11,872 m<sup>2</sup> and has been in operation since 2004. At the Ka Long border gate, there is a cargo loading and unloading area of about 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> and nine export goods inspection points. located on the banks of the Ka Long River.

At Mong Cai international border gate and Ka Long border gate, there are agencies and departments performing state administrative management, including the Management Board of Mong Cai international border gate, Mong Cai City Customs Branch, Border Guard Station Mong Cai international border gate, animal quarantine, plant quarantine, and medical quarantine. Based on their functions, tasks, and powers, these agencies are responsible for the state management of import and export activities. From the China side, China is a vast country with a land border of 22,800 kilometers, the longest in the world. China is also one of the countries with the most neighbors. Most of those land border areas are located in mountainous and desert areas, far from the economic, political, and cultural centers of China. As a result of suffering from wars throughout history, those border areas tend to exhibit characteristics of low economic construction and development. Since the opening-up policy was implemented in 1978, the Chinese government has included the economic development of border areas into the national development strategy, among which one of the most important policies is opening up border trade. From the perspective of China, border trade includes three forms: trade among border residents, small-scale border trade, and foreign economic and technological cooperation in border areas. (Yanyu Miao, 2020).

The area of the China–Vietnam land border comprises the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Yunnan province in China and the six Vietnamese provinces of Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Quang Ninh. In 1992, China decided to open the land border regions of the major areas, and in May 1994, China promulgated the “Foreign Trade Law” in an attempt to establish the implementation of foreign trade, including various incentives for border trade. Next, in January 1996, China issued the “Notification of Border Trade,” with the intention of further promoting frontier trade in the border areas. In addition, it specifically set forth preferential tax rates for border trade. As a result of introducing these border trade systems, China has promoted economic development in the border areas, established friendly relations with neighboring countries, and tried to maintain and improve the levels of stability in the border areas. Dongxing is the third-largest land border gate in China. More than 40 years after China established its first special economic zone as a pilot for economic reform and opening-up in the coastal city of Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Fangchenggang, a western border city, is moving to set up an experimental zone to explore new methods of developing the border economy. China issued opinions on the western development strategy in June 2010, advising the region to create three border experimental zones for development and opening up, including Dongxing in Fangchenggang city. China intends to build the Dongxing Experimental Zone to be the border special zone in western Shenzhen. The zone is intended to be a pioneer zone connected with strategic cooperation between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The number of people crossing the Dongxing border ranks third in China after Shenzhen and Zhuhai, which are both in Guangdong province. The Dongxing mutual trade zone, the biggest in China, has been functioning since 2011.

Dongxing border economic cooperation zone is an important component of the international foreign trade economic zone and is a breakthrough zone in Guangxi's reform and opening up process. The regional infrastructure has been relatively complete; the project management and construction agency have been established and put into operation. The fields of trade, transportation, exchange of goods, and tourism between the two sides in the cooperation zone have been quite developed. China built the Guangxi Dongxing National Key Opening and Opening Development Pilot Zone to become “a pioneer zone in Guangxi's reform.” Dongxing of Guangxi and Mong Cai of Quang Ninh are two border gate cities with the closest distance to the border on the Vietnam-China border and unique and complementary resources. According to the common perception of the two governments and the signed document of the local governments of the two countries defining the Dongxing-Mong Cai cross-border economic cooperation zone, the emphasis is on implementing cooperation in areas such as infrastructure construction, trade, tourism, and investment cooperation, production cooperation, financial cooperation, socio-cultural cooperation, environmental protection cooperation, mutual assistance cooperation, justice, and other areas of cooperation of mutual interest. (*DXYZF.gov.cn*, 2013).

The pilot zones of China, including the Dongxing Key Pilot Zone for Opening Up and Development, will act as an important frontier for open cooperation between China and ASEAN countries. Building the pilot zone is an important measure to jointly advance the Belt and Road Initiative, accelerate border development and opening up, and create a new pattern of opening up on all fronts. The pilot zone will further boost China's cooperation with ASEAN in political, economic, cultural, and technological areas. The pilot zone will uphold the new development concept in its construction. In accordance with the requirements of high-quality development, the unique advantages of the pilot zone will be brought into full play in achieving cooperation with ASEAN members, especially Vietnam. Steps will be taken to innovate systems and mechanisms, increase infrastructure connectivity, promote deep industrial opening up and cooperation, and build a high-quality open frontier economy. (HKTDC, 2020) To accelerate the pace of border region opening, key border regions must play an important supporting role in promoting Belt and Road construction and establishing a new pattern of all-around opening. Objectively, the opening-up of border regions still lags behind that of coastal regions. With the continuous deepening of China's opening to the outside world, the degree of opening-up of western regions has continuously expanded, and the level of opening-up has continuously improved, since China implemented border region opening-up and established 14 border economic cooperation zones in 1992. However, restricted by multiple factors, the level of opening-up of the western regions falls behind that of the eastern regions, and the level of opening-up of the border regions falls behind that of the coastal regions. With the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative and the gradual formation of an all-around pattern of opening up to the outside world, border regions are moving forward from the tail end of the opening up process. Accelerating the development and opening-up of border regions is not only a requirement for all-round opening-up to the outside world but also has a special significance for protecting security, deepening sub-regional cooperation, and promoting national unity and stability in border regions.

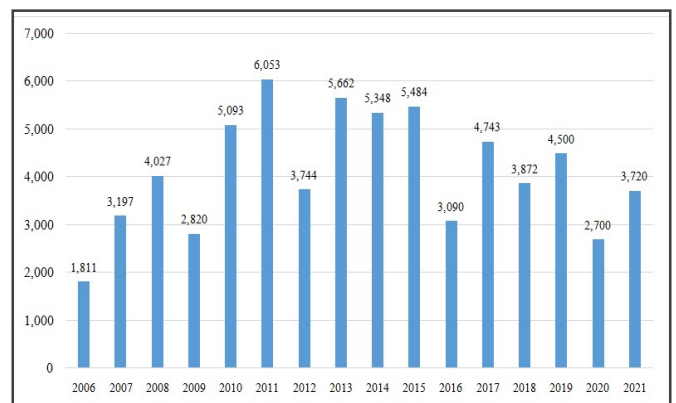
**How the two countries promote cross-border trade and tourism development in the Mongcai-Dongxing area: Achievements and challenges:** The two sides collaborated within the framework of the “Two Corridors, One Belt” program, which was proposed in May 2004, including the economic corridors Kunming (China) - Lao Cai - Hanoi - Hai Phong (Vietnam), Nanning - Lang Son - Hanoi - Hai Phong (Vietnam), and the Economic Belt: Lao Cai- Hanoi- Hai Phong- Quang Ninh (Vietnam). In 2016, China and Vietnam issued a joint statement that emphasized strengthening the development of the strategic connection between the two countries, promoting the connection of the BRI of China with the “Two Corridors, One Belt” of Vietnam. To accelerate BRI connectivity with the “Two Corridors,

One Belt” Plan, China and Vietnam are actively promoting the establishment of the Dongxing-Mong Cai Transboundary Economic Cooperation Zone to lead the development in the border area of the two countries and improve the level of connectivity between the two countries. On the other hand, the two sides have also strengthened cooperation through the Pan-Tonkin Gulf Economic Cooperation Forum. This forum is part of the “One Axis, Two Wings” initiative proposed by China in 2006. It is also an important factor in promoting comprehensive cooperation between Vietnam and China in general, including cross-border tourism cooperation. In addition, the construction of border-gate economic zones in the two countries also creates an important premise to promote cross-border trade and tourism. Since 1996, the Government of Vietnam has been piloting the construction of the Mong Cai economic zone through the approval of a number of preferential mechanisms for this economic zone. Mong Cai border gate on the Vietnam-China border is the first area to apply some policies of the border gate economic zone. After that, Vietnam continued to allow the pilot application of several mechanisms and policies at several border gates in Lang Son province (in 1997), Lao Cai province (in 1998), and Cao Bang province (in 1999). In 2001, Vietnam issued Decision No. 53/2001/QĐ-TTg on policies for border-gate economic zones, which apply to all border-gate economic zones, and in 2008, it issued a decision to officially establish a border-gate economic zone. Dong Dang—Lang Son border gate economic zone is the first, followed by Thanh Thuy border gate economic zone, Ha Giang province (in 2009), Mong Cai border gate economic zone, Quang Ninh province (in 2012), and Cao Bang province border gate economic zone (in 2014). Up to now, Vietnam has had 12 border-gate economic zones, or areas where the policy of border-gate economic zones has been applied along the Vietnam-China land border.

The Chinese side is also promoting the construction of the border economic belt by promoting the establishment of seven pilot zones for key national development in border areas. A key opening point for national development is that there are two areas located in the border area adjacent to Vietnam: the Pingxiang and Dongxing areas of Guangxi. This has important implications for promoting economic development and tourism between the two countries, including cross-border tourism. In addition, Quang Ninh province and Guangxi signed a memorandum of understanding on enhancing comprehensive cooperation in trade and tourism between Quang Ninh and Guangxi. In which it is emphasized that the two sides agree to strengthen cooperation in tourism management and supervision, jointly ensure the order of the tourism market, ensure tourist safety, and create a healthy tourism environment, as well as efforts to build Mong Cai-Dongxing border trade and tourism to become a bright spot in Vietnam-China border trade and tourism cooperation.

In terms of cross-border trade, since 2016, Vietnam has remained China’s biggest trade partner in ASEAN, and China has been Vietnam’s biggest trade partner for 18 consecutive years. (Vietnam Law, 2022) In particular, cross-border trade between the two countries plays an important role in promoting trade relations between the two countries. In recent years, cross-border trade in the Mong Cai—Dongxing cross-border cooperation zone has developed strongly. According to Vietnam, border trade (tieu ngach) is (i) trading activities among border residents; (ii) trading activities at border markets, crossing-point markets, and markets inside border economic zones; and (iii) the trade that is recorded in bilateral trade agreements but not following international rules. Quang Ninh has signed 26 provincial-level agreements with Chinese localities. Via these cooperative ties, the province has gradually established itself as “a gateway, a bridge” in the Vietnam-ASEAN-China cooperation, helping to achieve major outcomes in almost all areas, especially cross-border economic and trade partnerships, road transport, border gate opening and upgrade, border management, and the fight against cross-border crimes. On July 16, 2021, authorities in Quang Ninh and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China officially launched customs clearance through the Bắc Luân (C: Bei Lun) No. 2 Bridge, which links the Mong Cai International Border Gate of Vietnam with the Dongxing Border Gate of China. (VNA, 2021b)

Implement Resolution No. 24/2005/NQ-HDND dated July 25, 2005 of the Provincial People’s Council on the commercial development planning of Quang Ninh until 2010, with development orientation to 2020; Decision No. 898/QĐ-UBND dated March 22, 2007 of the People’s Committee of Quang Ninh province approving the planning on the development of the market system up to 2010, with orientation to 2020; and Decision No. 22/2008/QĐ-BCT dated July 31, 2008 of the Ministry of Industry and Trade promulgating the Regulation on border markets, border-gate markets, and markets in border-gate economic zones Quang Ninh has flexibly applied preferential policies for markets to exploit the five strengths of each locality bordering China and mobilize the resources of all economic sectors to invest in developing infrastructure to facilitate the development of trade, services, and tourism in the area, significantly contributing to the state budget and stabilizing the revenue collection annual policy, creating jobs for many workers, and improving the material life of a part of the population. Import and export through Mong Cai border gate: in the 1996–2006 period, the average growth rate was 24.5 percent per year; in the 2006–2011 period, the average growth rate was 26.25 percent per year; total turnover accounted for 95.7 percent of total import-export turnover through Vietnam–China land border gates in Quang Ninh province and accounted for over 40 percent of the total import and export turnover through the border gates of the northern border provinces of Vietnam. Import-export tax collection accounted for 85.3 percent of total revenue through border gates in Quang Ninh province and accounted for 28.5% of total import-export revenue through border gates in northern border provinces. The value of imports and exports through the Mong Cai border gate in 2011 increased more than 20 times compared to 1996. From 2011 to 2018, the total value of import and export goods through the Mong Cai border gate has reached 14,160 million USD, an average increase of 7.2 percent per year. In the period 2011–2013, import and export tax collection reached 1,792.6 billion VND. Total goods circulation in the period 2006–2011 increased on average 23.55 percent per year; the 2011–2014 period reached 26,493 billion VND, an average increase of 4.4 percent per year; Currently, the area has four trade centers, 14 markets with over 4,725 business points; the total investment capital is nearly 1,000 billion VND. (*ThanhtraVietnam*, 2018)



Source: The figures are based on the authors’ statistics.

**Figure 1. Mong Cai-Dongxing import and export situation from 2006 to 2021**

The total import-export turnover through the Mong Cai International Border Gate in the 2006–2008 period reached over 2 billion USD per year. (QNP, 2017) In 2012, the Mong Cai Economic Zone was officially established, becoming the largest-scale economic zone in the country. In the 5-year period (2010–2015), the total value of goods passing through the Mong Cai international border gate has reached over 23 billion USD, an increase of 1.8 times compared to the previous 5-year period (1996–2010); this has contributed nearly 6,000 billion VND to the budget. At the time of its evaluation in 2015, the Mong Cai SEZ was deemed the most successful of the country’s 28 SEZs. The total import-export turnover through the Mong Cai SEZ will exceed 30 billion USD in the five years from 2015 to 2020; budget revenue from import-export activities reached 4,647 billion VND.

In 2021, the total import-export turnover will reach 3.95 billion USD, and budget revenue from import-export activities will reach 1,296 billion VND. (Thanh Nguyễn, Quang Hùng, 2022) In the first nine months of 2022, the total import-export turnover of road border goods with China through Mong Cai city reached over 2.5 billion USD, of which export turnover reached more than 1.1 billion USD, import turnover reached more than 1.4 billion USD, and state budget revenue reached more than 1,200 billion VND (up 60 percent over the same period in 2021). (Mongcai, 2022). The situation of buying and selling goods by border residents at border-gate markets, border markets, and markets in the border-gate economic zones of Mong Cai (Vietnam) and Dongxing (China): In the 1990s, China began allowing border residents to conduct small-scale cross-border businesses, attracting Vietnamese residents to Dongxing, which is just across the border from Mong Cai. In 2012, the Dongxing government allowed Vietnamese residents to open stores in the city, fueling another surge in the number of workers crossing the border. According to government data, by 2017, there were 1,886 Vietnamese stores operating in China, with a registered capital of more than 28 million yuan (about 4.3 million USD). (People, 2017) Several Vietnamese vendors from the Vietnamese city of Mong Cai, just across the China-Vietnam border, sell goods in Dongxing, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Vietnamese vendors have been shipping Vietnamese specialties to Chinese buyers. Besides commuters, an increasing number of Vietnamese workers have been stationed in factories in Guangxi's border cities, such as Pingxiang and Dongxing. Dongxing began implementing a pilot scheme in 2015, allowing eight local factories to hire about 1,000 Vietnamese employees for a single stay of up to six months. Now, more than 4,000 Vietnamese workers are being hired by nearly 20 factories in the city as the scheme expands. Pingxiang began its pilot scheme in early 2017. According to Jiang Liansheng, head of Guangxi's commerce department, Vietnamese employees help relieve the shortage of blue-collar workers in border areas. (People, 2017). Regarding import and export activities through border gates in Quang Ninh province: In recent years, import and export activities through border gates and openings in Quang Ninh province have been stable, and the proportion of annual exports has increased. Specifically, in 2017, the export of goods across the border area increased by 22 percent compared to 2016, and in the first quarter of 2018 it increased by 3.6 percent over the same period. According to the trade agreements signed by Vietnam and China, small-scale border trade is gradually transitioning into general trade. In 2017, exports to the Chinese market through the border gate of Quang Ninh province reached 564.7 million USD, an increase of 20.83 percent compared to 2016, and in the first quarter of 2018, they reached 138.1 million USD, an increase of 21.32 percent over the same period. At present, this activity is carried out in accordance with the provisions of relevant legal documents and has not posed any problems. (Le Thanh Tuan, 2019) In 2020, the value of goods traded through Quang Ninh's border gates will approximate 2.79 billion USD, including over 1.11 billion USD in exports, 980 million USD in imports, and 695 million USD worth of items temporarily imported for re-export or stored in bonded warehouses. Of the total figure, Mong Cai city of the province, posted over 1.09 billion USD in exports, nearly 1.04 billion USD in imports, and 694 million USD of goods temporarily imported for re-export or stored in bonded warehouses. Hai Ha district recorded 3.5 million USD in exports and 4.5 million USD in imports, and Binh Lieu district had 16.6 million USD in exports and 65.9 million USD in imports. (VNA, 2021b).

Activities of temporary import for re-export of goods and bonded warehouses: this activity in recent years has tended to decrease. Specifically, in 2017, this activity decreased by 35% compared to 2016, and the first quarter of 2018 decreased by 32.6% over the same period. Many businesses have switched to temporary imports for re-exports of goods to neighboring provinces such as Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Lao Cai. (Le Thanh Tuan, 2019). Issues of stability and security constantly emerge from the narratives of Chinese traders either established in Móng Cái or conducting cross-border trade in the area. *Bu wending* [unstable] and *bu anquan* [insecure] are words they use to express their feelings towards the

local environment they must cope with in order to organize their business activities. The perplexities and worries they depict indicate three levels of insecurity. (Caroline Grillot, 2016: 170) Firstly, the impact of the dispute between Vietnam and China in the South China Sea on trade and tourism in the border area. Although the venues of these disputes are a long way from Móng Cái and Dongxing, the border area and the traders themselves are affected by the states' regular emphasis on unresolved historical issues. Frictions at the diplomatic level, spread throughout media and propaganda materials, regularly arouse suspicion and paranoia among people who have difficulty maintaining a critical distance from the manner in which geopolitical matters are explained and represented. In the borderlands, patriotism and nationalism always find a niche in which they can flourish among those eager to believe that the enemy is next door, precisely when frustrating everyday practices tend to provoke each other's distrust. State propaganda maintains tension and provokes debates among locals, who see any sudden strict implementation of regional policies and border trade rules as the direct consequence of another diplomatic crisis. The instability of the geopolitical environment goes hand in hand with business precariousness.

The anxiety created by the increasing instability of the diplomatic relationship and the consequent variations in border management is also palpable in the local markets. (Caroline Grillot, 2016: 170). In Vietnam, the Chinese people are aware that they attract little sympathy because of their dominating economic power. However, local authorities have harassed small traders at the border in their commercial activities. Importing Chinese goods to Vietnam through official gates or smuggling channels exposes us to the payment of various shipping costs, including those paid to customs. But even after the goods arrive at the market, we must handle lots of other fees. In this market, we pay different taxes: land tax, state tax, shop façade tax, and management tax, and we also have various fees, such as shop and storage rental, electricity, security, insurance (which we are forced to buy for fear of seeing our shops destroyed by fire), and other occasional fees, such as for repairs (which are very high in terms of what they are paying for). (Caroline Grillot, 2016: 173). Chinese traders generally live on the Chinese side of the border, for convenience and for safety reasons, as they see Vietnamese border cities as relatively insecure and backward in many senses. Besides the environmental insecurity that underlies their expression of a feeling of distrust, various aspects of trade-related activities act to sustain suspicion in the minds of Chinese traders. (Caroline Grillot, 2016: 173).

Most Chinese traders who arrive in Mong Cai and Dongxing have the ambition to engage in cross-border trade and raise money as quickly as possible. In the realm of small-scale trade, generally no contract is signed between a supplier and a customer. Each party simply maintains a record of orders in a well-kept notebook. Hence, word of mouth and trust constitute the sole basis of business deals: trust in the Chinese wholesalers' ability to supply the goods on time, with the expected quality, at the agreed price, and according to a regular logistical procedure; and trust that the Vietnamese customers will collect their orders, pay according to the agreed-upon schedule, and refrain from changing their minds or returning unsold goods. Payment is, of course, the most important link in this logistics chain, because each link in the commodity chain between a factory in China and a retailer in Vietnam necessitates some form of investment and imposes obligations on wholesalers and their shipping partners. At any time, there exists the potential that one of these links will fail to respect a contract and put at risk the business deals of many intermediaries. Money transactions are administered according to well-established rules that assume an accurate evaluation of risk on the part of those who use informal banking systems.

In terms of cross-border tourism, this border city boasts its Mong Cai International Border Gate, which is the busiest trade gateway in the northeast, connecting the city of Mong Cai with Dongxing (China) and helping the city develop tourism. Tourists can easily complete procedures for traveling to China's coastal provinces from this border gate. The Ka Long River, which forms a natural border line of 60 km between Mong Cai, Quang Ninh Province, and Dongxing, Guangxi,

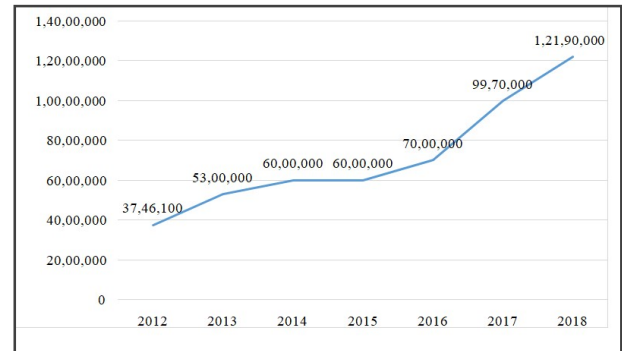


China, it is the busiest and most important river border gate for Vietnam-China trade. Quang Ninh province (Vietnam) is considered an area with key cross-border tourism activities on the entire Vietnam-China border. The Mong Cai area of Quang Ninh province, which has both land and sea borders with China, has become the area with the most favorable conditions for tourism development cooperation with the Guangxi (China) market. The two sides are interested in promoting their cooperation in tourism development, especially in the period from 2009 to the present. Meanwhile, Dongxing is the third largest land border gate in China. Since 2013, China has started allowing foreigners to do visa procedures at the Dongxing border gate, which creates favorable conditions for Vietnamese tourists to travel to China. The two sides have always maintained a good relationship of cooperation and development of border tourism with Dongxing city and Fangcheng area, and the two sides had a tourism cooperation framework agreement with Jiangshan tourist resort located on the peninsula of Fangchenggang city. (Baoquangninh, 2019b). At the same time, the two sides regularly hold talks, develop and implement cooperation mechanisms, and manage border tourism activities.

Every year, the two sides coordinate to alternately organize the Vietnam-China Trade and Tourism Fair in Mong Cai City and Dongxing City; effectively implement the model of welcoming Chinese tourists using travel documents to visit Mong Cai City; and effectively maintain the self-driving tourist car model traveling across the border between the two countries. In particular, the operation of the “2 countries, 4 destinations” tourist route (Ha Long—Mong Cai—Dongxing—Guilin) achieved many positive results. In November 2018, the two countries marked the milestone of welcoming 10 million tourists to enter and exit through the Mong Cai and Dongxing international border gates. So far, about 70% of Chinese visitors to Quang Ninh Province in Vietnam arrive by road, through the Mong Cai International Border Gate. (Baoquangninh, 2019b). Besides, the two sides have also organized many activities to strengthen cross-border tourism routes, such as the Dongxing-Mong Cai one-day tour, the Dongxing-Mong Cai-Tra Co two-day tour, and the Dongxing-Tra Co-Ha Long Bay three-day tour. On May 17, 2015, at Dongxing border gate, Fangchenggang City, Guangxi (China), the launching ceremony of the route “Red tourism: following in Uncle Ho's footsteps” and the Vietnam-China border people's festival took place, a place bearing the historical imprint of Vietnam-China relations and the starting point of the ships to support the resistance war against the US to save the country of the Vietnamese people. (Bienphong, 2015) Since 2016, the two countries have piloted the operation of self-driving tourist cars between the two cities of Mong Cai and Dongxing through the Mong Cai international border gate. By 2018, this service had been extended and expanded to include Ha Long City; however, the first bus between the two countries circulated in June 2018. As a result, Vietnamese cars with 5-7 seats are permitted to travel 600 kilometers to Guilin, Guangxi, China. Similarly, cars from China can travel 180 kilometers to reach Ha Long City in Quang Ninh Province. On August 24, 2019, Vietnam agreed to extend the pilot period of operation for Chinese self-driving tourist cars through the Mong Cai International Border Gate into Ha Long City until the end of June 2020. (Thanhnie, 2019) During the pilot period of self-driving tourist cars through the Mong Cai border gate, there were 530 vehicles, with over 1,580 passengers entering and exiting. In which nearly 500 vehicle turns and nearly 1,500 passenger turns entered Vietnam and 35 vehicle turns and 106 passenger turns exited vehicles. (Vovgiaothong, 2019).

With favorable mechanisms and policies on entry and exit, tourism activities have begun to develop strongly since 2000. In the period 2001-2005, the number of visitors entering and exiting through the Mong Cai international border gate reached 10,276,003 total people, and total revenue reached 1,447 billion dong, an average increase of 22% per year; In the period 2006–2011, total revenue reached 1,893.74 billion VND, an average increase of 12.95% per year; in the period 2011–2014, it reached 2.16 million people, an average increase of 16.9% per year, and an average increase of 22% per year in total revenue. Up to now, the city has 194 accommodation establishments, maintaining the operation of 62 focal points for international travel

business units; there is an 18-hole golf course to meet the needs of visitors... (ThanhtraVietnam, 2018). Total tourists to Mong Cai in 2018 reached 2.7 million, reaching 108% of the plan, up 22% over the same period; payment to the state budget for tourism services reached 125 billion VND, up 13% over the same period. (Baoquangninh, 2019a)The Dongxing-Mong Cai border gate area in 2018 cleared more than 30,000 people a day; at its peak, it reached 46,000 people a day. In the summer of 2019, the number of people passing through the Dongxing-Mong Cai border gate reached over 30,000 times per day (see Figure 2 below).



Source: The figure is based on the authors' statistics

**Figure 2. People passing through the border gate crossed the Mong Cai-Dongxing border (from 2012 to 2018)**

(Chinanews, 2019). Mong Cai, around 170 kilometers north of UNESCO heritage site Ha Long Bay, is home to 15 tourist attractions and nearly 200 accommodation establishments. In 2019, Ha Long welcomed 2.9 million international visitors, 60% of whom were from China. China used to be Vietnam's biggest tourism market until the pandemic intervened, with nearly 5.8 million Chinese visiting in 2019. In the absence of Chinese tourists, Vietnam only received 2.95 million foreign visitors in the first 11 months of 2022. (Thanh Tan, 2022). Dongxing is the third largest land port in China. China has allowed foreigners to apply for visas in Dongxing since 2013, which has increased the number of tourists from around the world using the city to enter Southeast Asia, according to Dongxing's tourism bureau. Since 2016, private-rented cars have been allowed to cross between Dongxing and Mong Cai, thus further boosting local tourism. The customs of Dongxing, in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, recorded about 4.66 million people crossing the border in the first half of 2017, up 41.84 percent year-on-year. (Le Tian, 2017). China's “zero-COVID” policies are putting Chinese cities on lockdown and grounding air travel. They are also disrupting trade routes across its land borders that are lifelines for the region's farmers and merchants. In Vietnam, thousands of trucks laden with dragon fruit, jackfruit, watermelons, and other produce have been backed up at the border awaiting passage for weeks. Their trips were disrupted after Chinese authorities, toward the end of 2021, suspended operations at a number of gates or slowed traffic, citing a need to contain COVID-19. For Vietnam's farmers and traders, not being able to reach Chinese consumers is crippling. Take dragon fruit, for instance. China's growing appetite helped drive Vietnam's exports of the red-skinned fruit to \$1 billion in 2021—nearly 20 times the \$57 million in 2010, according to data from Vietnam's trade and agriculture ministries. Around 80% of those exports go to China. Vietnam went from producing less than 25,000 metric tons of the fruit annually two decades ago to an average of about 1.4 million tons in recent years, with many farmers switching over from traditional rice cultivation. Australia and Europe have also emerged as destinations for Vietnam-grown dragon fruit, but demand from those places pales in comparison. In late December 2021, Vietnam's trade ministry characterized China's measures—such as suspending border-gate activities and stopping fruit imports—as overkill. Local Chinese authorities have said the restrictions were prompted by COVID-19 infections on their side of the border or concerns about the virus hitching a ride into China via Vietnamese cargo. (Niharika Mandhana, 2022).

Vietnam's overland trade with China fell sharply as that country tightened COVID-19 safety measures and its borders became congested. China's "zero-COVID" strategy and tightened control of cross-border movement have had the biggest effect on trade. Lack of transport, logistic, and cross-border trade infrastructure worsened the situation. The Vietnam Ministry of Industry and Trade has asked China's Guangxi authorities to take urgent measures to ease congestion at border crossings after China stepped up its border controls with neighbors to follow zero COVID-19 policies. Vietnam's trade ministry stated that "anti-virus prevention measures that Guangxi is applying under the 'zero-COVID' policies, including closing border gates or stopping fruit imports, are overly necessary, disrupting supply chains, negatively affecting the development of bilateral trade, and causing great losses to businesses and people on both sides." (Đức Duy, 2022) Previously, on December 29, 2021, Vietnam's Minister of Industry and Trade, Nguyen Hong Dien, sent 4 letters to the Minister of Commerce of China, the Director General of the General Department of Customs of China, the Secretary of the Guangxi Provincial Party Committee, and the Secretary of the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee on the issue of goods congestion at the border gate between the two countries. In the letter, Minister Nguyen Hong Dien suggested that China use common sense about maintaining the flow of goods and maintaining supply chain connectivity, as mentioned in bilateral phone calls between the two countries' senior leaders and in the joint statements of the April 2020 ASEAN+3 Special Summit and the November 2021 ASEAN-China Special Summit.

The Minister also suggested that the Chinese side and border localities together discuss and agree on the safe clearance process for epidemic prevention but still ensure the smooth circulation of goods at the border gate. (Đức Duy, 2022). Challenges for cross-border trade and tourism cooperation in the Mong Cai-Dongxing cross-border cooperation zone: Any research conducted in the Sino-Vietnamese borderlands must take into account the centuries-long connections between China and Vietnam that still resonate in the everyday lives of local people. The extensive existing literature on this turbulent relationship describes the complex negotiations that frame political and economic interactions in recent history; some of the literature emphasizes how these tensions are interpreted and absorbed by local actors, whether policymakers or average citizens. (Evans, Grant, Christopher Hutton, and Kuah Khun Eng (eds.), 2000) Keeping in mind the historical background and the political context in which personal alliances occur today is essential. These include the thousand-year integration of Vietnam into the Chinese empire, the common ground of the two countries' languages and cultures, the 1979 border war, the current economic dominance of Chinese trade, and the ongoing dispute over the Spratly and Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, to name but a few. These sensitive aspects of the current relationship between China and Vietnam frame the empirical experiences of local people. (Womack, 2000) To this day, these neighboring countries are still affected by a prevalent feeling of caution and distrust; this is true both at the diplomatic level and at the level of the general population, despite the extent of economic cooperation that links both sides of the China-Vietnam frontier. It is against this particular backdrop that cross-border marriages have become more visible in the last two decades. (Caroline Grillot, 2015) After the latest military conflict between China and Vietnam in 1979, the Sino-Vietnamese border reopened in 1991, allowing once again the flow of reunifying kin, traders, and audacious migrants. Following the recent economic development of this region into a nexus of international commercial exchange where border trade is actively promoted, border control has consequently been simplified through various formalities that allow local residents (i.e., native people) to come and go easily over the border and non-locals (i.e., established migrants) to cross the border without going through the tiresome usual procedure required for tourists crossing an international border. (Caroline Grillot, 2015: 33). Therefore, thousands of people transit through the numerous mountain tracks, local checkpoints, and international border gates along the frontier each day, with or without proper documentation. In this context of intense human interactions,

Vietnamese women also come and go, trading, guiding, translating, carrying, seeking fortune, and, in the case of some, selling themselves. (Caroline Grillot, 2015: 33).

## CONCLUSION

Vietnam and China are two neighboring countries with a long historical relationship. The development of relationships, especially cross-border trade and tourism cooperation, has a great impact on the economic development of each country. In fact, in recent years, cross-border trade and tourism relations between the two countries have achieved many positive achievements, but there are also many limitations that need to be overcome and strengthened. Moreover, the results of recent cross-border trade and tourism relations have not met the requirements and potentials of each country. To solve this problem, it is necessary to promote cooperation and the development of cross-border trade and tourism in border cooperation zones, as in the case of Mong Cai and Dongxing. The Mong Cai-Dong Hung cross-border cooperation zone is not only a gateway for cooperation between Vietnam and China but also a gateway for China to promote cooperation with Southeast Asia. However, the construction of cross-border cooperation zones between the two countries in Mong Cai and Dong Hung has not made great progress, especially in the Mong Cai border gate economic zone of Vietnam. Meanwhile, China's Dongxing border gate economic zone has been strongly promoted. The development of trade and tourism in the Mong Cai-Dongxing border gate cooperation area has been strongly promoted by both sides in recent years. Vietnamese and Chinese tourists travel by road mainly through the Mong Cai-Dongxing area. However, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to the present, especially China's strict "zero-COVID" policy, it has strongly affected trade and tourism activities in the Mong Cai-Dongxing cross-border cooperation zone. However, both Vietnam and China are promoting the construction of the Mong Cai-Dong Hung cross-border cooperation zone to become an important economic and connection hub for the two countries in the coming time, in which trade and tourism cooperation remain key factors.

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