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**Foreign Aid Via Civil Society
Support Program in Vietnam:
Regulation and Re-
configuration under the
Party-State**

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Introduction

- Marked increased in foreign aid to Vietnam's civil society
- Foreign funding comes from government aid agencies, multilateral donors and international NGOs.
- Foreign funding targets target generally the quasi-autonomous organizations and social organizations
- Conventional understanding about Vietnam's party-state: anathema to civil society
- Legal framework about civil society space and foreign funding on this sector: restrictive

Intro.

- A puzzle: how does foreign funding thrive?
- A need to offer a better account of the dynamics of interaction and intersubjectivity that shapes the convergence of preferences and attitudes among actors
- Main argument: approach to implementing civil society support program is adapted and reworked in practice.
- Practical reconfiguration of regulatory responses in implementation is reflected in the discourse that forms the communicative actions among actors.

Overview of civil society support programs in Vietnam

- Foreign aid to support civil society in Vietnam: two channels: direct grant schemes by foreign governments/international donors to Vietnamese NGOs or project-based disbursement by International NGOs.
- More than 2 billion USD have been distributed as ODA to the sector Government & Civil Society-general since 2000.
- government aid agencies: SIDA, CIDA, NORAD, USAID, AusAID, multilateral donors like the WB, ADB, and UNDP.

Examples of CSF

- The UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF) sponsored a VNGO's project between 2012-2014 .
- The European Union (EU) funded a project on "Promoting efficient interaction between the National Assembly and civil society in Vietnam".
- The World Bank has established a 'civil society fund' in Viet Nam
- A Civil Society Fund by Irish Government for the period 2011-2015 with a budget of 11 euros per annum

Approach to civil society by international donors

- “A key ingredient in promoting good governance” (Howell and Pearce 2001).
- Vietnamese NGOs as “the best way of carving out space for civil society activity in authoritarian system” (Thayer 2009).
- A persistent attempt to create a Vietnamese civil society, narrowly defined as development NGOs (Gray 1999, Saleminck 2006).

Legal regulation of civil society funding

- Regulatory framework is generally characterized by constraints, restrictions, inconsistency, gap between regulation and implementation.
- **Decree 93/ND-CP** on the Regulations on the Management and Use of Foreign Non-Governmental Aid in October 2009, followed by **Circular 07/2010/TT-BKH** providing implementation guidelines in March 2010.
- Government's Decree 12/2012/ND-CP dated March 1, 2012 on Registration and Operation Management of INGOs in Vietnam ("**Decree 12**").
- "an insecure and unpredictable operating environment"

Towards a more nuanced understanding of foreign aid for civil society in Vietnam

- A puzzle about the increasing aid and restrictive legal framework for receiving aid.
- A need for account of the dynamics of interaction and intersubjectivity that shapes the convergence of preferences and attitudes among actors.
- State actors: practical reconfiguration of regulatory responses in implementation

Reconfiguration by actors

- Official attitude: opinion piece on *Nhan Dan daily* – mouthpiece of the Party:
“The realities in recent years have indicated that a number of INGOs are keenly interested in political-social organizations in our country and have attempted to infiltrate, influence, and transform those organizations toward political activity in the absence of oppositional groups. By means of such activities as implementing projects, supporting, financing, and holding workshops and conferences with VNGOs, a number of foreign organizations have tried to grasp the internal understanding and viewpoint trend of VNGOs on the party’s leadership over popular organizations, provoke their separatism from the leadership by the party and state, and advocate the freedom to association in the Western standard.”
(Duong Van Cu 2012)

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- In practice: ambivalent attitude
 - A dual strategy of both cooperation and struggle in dealing to win more advantages while fencing off threats to the security of the political regime.
 - International donors/INGOs: an reconfiguration of requirements/re-alignment of interests and priorities for the party-state.
 - A strategic alliance of foreign capital and the party-state: the resilience of the party-state.

- Vietnam Partnership for Development (VPD): the highest level of dialogues between the party-state and international donors:
“The Government and international donors appreciate the role of political, political-social, and social organizations, VNGOs and INGOs, and the private sector for the social and economic development of Vietnam. The Government is committed to creating a favourable environment for and supporting the participation by these entities in the development process as the beneficiaries, participants and watchdogs of implementation at all levels.”

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- Vietnamese NGOs: 'negotiated symbiosis' in receiving and implementing foreign funding.
 - Subordinating to the political will of the party-state
 - Responding to donors' agenda and conditions
 - Manipulating the invited space to bring about social activism

Conclusion

- Approach to implementing civil society support program is adapted and reworked in practice
- Practical reconfiguration of regulatory responses in implementation is reflected in the discourse that forms the communicative actions among the regulatory actors, international donors and implementers
- Foreign funding for civil society support program strengthens strategic alignment of interests among the party-state, international donors and domestic NGOs.



Thank you!

Questions and Comments.

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