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TITLE: THE ROLE OF STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS IN VIETNAM'S PATHWAY TO NEOLIBERALISM

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Abstract:

In this paper, I trace Vietnam's pathway to neoliberalism from the 13th century to modern day. Drawing on the writings of Vietnamese and foreign historians and anthropologists, I discuss the rise of the commodity economy in the 13th century when the farmer-settlers came to the Mekong Delta; followed by the Nguyen Dynasty's anchor of South Vietnam as the region's commercial centre in the 18th century. The latter was the first period when merchants became a form of social class in Vietnam. I argue that the subsequent French colonialization and the US occupation enhanced, rather than created, the capitalistic dispositions and class divisions in the Vietnamese society. I then discuss Vietnam's economic reform in the 1990s as policy shift from centrally-planned to market-based economy. Attention is drawn to the role of the Socialist State in driving competing agendas of economic reform and political ideologies through marketization practices to maintain its political legitimacy. Vietnam's society thrives on the economic pragmatism under the unique conditions of *authoritarian Socialist neoliberalism*. I argue that neoliberalism takes shape differently in different parts of the world. It is worthwhile to analyse the role of State-society relations in the trajectory of neoliberalism, with historical, anthropological and sociological sensitivities.