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Вьетнамовед Евгений Кобелев: биография и публикации последних лет

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Аннотация. В статье представлены биографические материалы о жизни и работе Евгения Васильевича Кобелева (02.05.1938–05.05.2025) – одного из крупнейших вьетнамоведов России. Он оставил заметный след в развитии российского востоковедения благодаря своим публикациям в книгах и журналах, а также активной общественной деятельности в сфере продвижения российско-вьетнамских отношений. Его научное наследие экспертам ещё предстоит изучить, однако уже сегодня можно отметить высокий профессионализм учёного. Он исследовал современный Вьетнам через призму истории этой страны, которую очень хорошо знал, поскольку был непосредственным участником многих ключевых событий – в частности, как журналист ТАСС. Указаны основные работы Е.В. Кобелева, в том числе и в российском журнале «Восточная Азия: факты и аналитика», с которым он тесно сотрудничал.

Ключевые слова: АСЕАН, Вьетнам, Евгений Кобелев, вьетнамоведение, наука, публикации, журналы.

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The Vietnamese scholar Evgeny Kobelev: biography and publications of recent years

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Abstract. The article presents biographical materials about the life and work of Evgeny Vasil'yevich Kobelev (May 2, 1938 – May 5, 2025), one of the leading Vietnamese experts in Russia. He left a noticeable mark on the development of the Oriental studies in the form of publications in books and journals, as well as

through public activities in the field of promoting Russian-Vietnamese relations. His scientific legacy has yet to be studied by experts, but today we can already note the high professionalism of the scientist. He studied modern Vietnam through the prism of the history of this country, which he knew very well, being a direct participant of many key events, in particular, as a TASS journalist. The article indicates the main works of Dr. Kobelev, including those in the Russian journal “East Asia: Facts and Analytics”, with which he cooperated closely.

Keywords: ASEAN, Vietnam, Evgeny Kobelev, Vietnamese studies, science, publications, journals.

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Introduction

On May 5, 2025 (at the age of 87), one of the main Russian Vietnamists, the Leading Research Fellow of the Center for Vietnam and ASEAN Studies of the Institute of China and Contemporary Asia of the Russian Academy of Sciences (the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences until 2022), the First Deputy Chairman of the Russian-Vietnamese Friendship Society, Evgeny Vasil'yevich Kobelev (PhD in History), passed away¹. On June 17, 2025, the events, dedicated to the scientist's memory, were held in Moscow and Hanoi, being also broadly reflected in the Vietnamese press. Thus, in the interview to the Vietnamese correspondent, the scientist's daughter Dr. T.E. Gorchakova noted: “The main legacy of my father is the spirit of selfless work and the conviction that if you do something, do it 100 %”, and Evgeny Vasil'yevich always lived and worked with this motto^{2,3}. The publications of E.V. Kobelev, which in Russia formed the basis of modern Vietnamese and ASEAN studies, require further research, but some features can already be identified today.

From the biography of the scientist

Evgeny Vasil'yevich Kobelev was born on May 2, 1938 in Ulyanovsk. In 1956, he graduated from high school in Simferopol with a gold medal and immediately entered the newly opened Institute of Oriental Languages of the Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov. In 1958, he was among the first group of Soviet students to continue his studies at the Hanoi State University for two years. In 1962, Evgeny Vasil'yevich graduated with honors from the Institute of Oriental Languages. His diploma thesis was dedicated to the work of the outstanding Vietnamese

¹ In memory of E.V. Kobelev. *The Russian-Vietnamese Friendship Society*, May 5, 2025. URL: <https://orvd.ru/pamyati-ev-kobeleva/> (accessed: Jul 5, 2025). (In Russian).

² In memory of the Russian scientist who dedicated his life to Vietnam. *VietnamPlus*, Jun 17, 2025. URL: <https://ru.vietnamplus.vn/pamjati-rossiiskogo-uchenogo-posvjativshego-zhizn-v-etnamu-post80788.vnp> (accessed: Jul 5, 2025). (In Russian).

³ Tưởng nhớ nhà khoa học Nga gắn bó suốt đời với Việt Nam [Remembering the Russian scientist who devoted his life to Vietnam]. *TuoiTre Online*, Jun 17, 2025. URL: <https://tuoitre.vn/tuong-nho-nha-khoa-hoc-nga-gan-bo-suot-doi-voi-viet-nam-20250617163525054.htm> (accessed: Jul 5, 2025). (In Vietnamese).

poetess Ho Xuan Huong. In 1961, being a student, Evgeny Vasil'yevich was invited to work as a simultaneous interpreter of the Vietnamese language at official events, which included congresses of the CPSU, the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, and the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions. At the 22nd Congress of the CPSU he was entrusted with the simultaneous translation of the welcoming speech of Ho Chi Minh, who headed the Vietnamese delegation and highly praised the work of the Soviet student. In addition to the Russian and Vietnamese languages, E.V. Kobelev was fluent in French, English and Ukrainian.

Besides, Dr. Kobelev was a very versatile, educated, and well-read person. He was a professional chess player, participated in chess competitions throughout his life, and was the champion of Crimea. He also had an opera voice, perfect pitch and sang in five languages. His repertoire included both arias from operas and pop songs.

In 1964–1967, Dr. Kobelev worked in Vietnam as a TASS correspondent, and was then appointed the Head of the Pravda Newspaper Bureau for Indochina. By the decision of the USSR government, for this dedicated work he was awarded the Order of the Badge of Honor. In 1968, E.V. Kobelev, as a highly qualified expert on Vietnam, was invited as a referent to the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, where he oversaw the relations with the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) and afterwards with the People's Republic of Kampuchea. The extensive experience in organizational work allowed him to take the position of the Deputy Head of the Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia sector of the CPSU Central Committee Department for the Relations with Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries in 1987–1989, and the Head of the Indochina group of countries of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1989–1991 (ill. 1).

The central figure in the creative and scientific biography of Dr. Kobelev was Ho Chi Minh. In 1978, the editors of the famous series “The Lives of Remarkable People” asked him to write a book about Ho Chi Minh. In 1979, the publishing house “Molodaya Gvardiya” issued E.V. Kobelev’s monograph “Ho Chi Minh” [Kobelev 1979] (ill. 2) in a print run of 100,000 copies. This popular science book, among other things, clearly demonstrated the author’s excellent Russian. Many readers noted the high quality of the material presented in the Russian language.

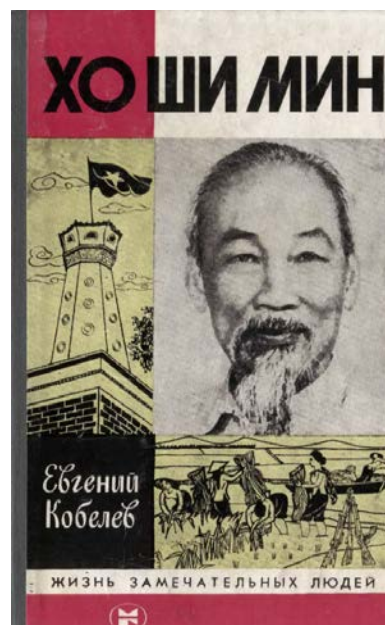
The book enjoyed great success among Soviet readers, so in 1983 it was reissued in a print run of 100,000 copies. Later, this book was published three times in Vietnamese (in 1985, 1990 in Moscow and in 2010 in Hanoi) and twice in English (in 1990 in Moscow and in 1995 in Hanoi). In addition, it was also published in Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Laos.

In 1981, E.V. Kobelev defended his PhD thesis in History at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences (after 1991, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences). The topic of his thesis was “The Political Biography of Ho Chi Minh”, where a number of unknown or little-known facts from the life and work of Ho Chi Minh were introduced into scientific circulation for the first time, especially regarding Ho Chi Minh’s stay in Soviet Russia from 1923 to 1938. And later the scholar has repeatedly addressed the topic related to the historical role of Ho Chi Minh (see, for example, [Gorchakova, Kobelev 2020]).

Since 1991, a new stage in the life of E.V. Kobelev began, which marked a direct involvement in science. He became a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, where he published the first monographic study in Russia devoted to the post-Soviet period of the Vietnamese history – “Modern Vietnam: Reforms, Renewal, Modernization (1986–1997)” [Kobelev 1999].



III. 1. Kobelev Evgeny Vasil'yevich



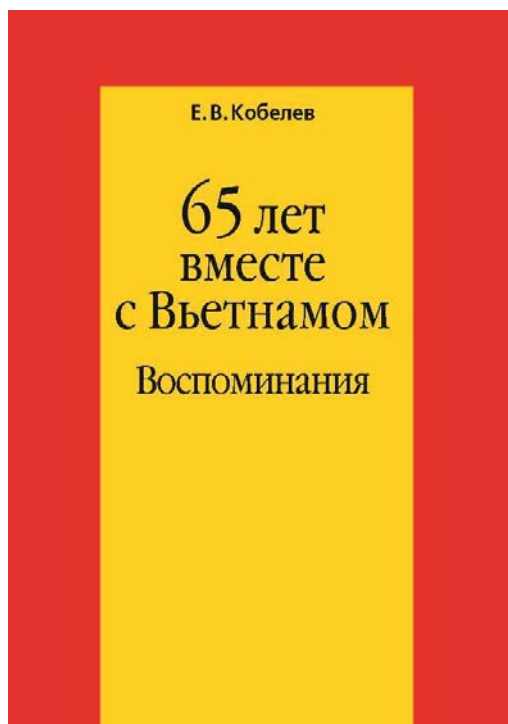
III. 2. Cover of the book “Ho Chi Minh”

Since 2005, Dr. Kobelev has been a Leading Research Fellow at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IFES RAS). And in 2008 Dr. Kobelev created the Center for Vietnam and ASEAN Studies in the Institute. It was the first specialized “headquarters” for the research of the Southeast Asian issues in Russia, which he headed for six years. This small scientific unit achieved serious results and recognition both in the domestic and foreign scientific community. The Center held international conferences with the participation of leading Vietnamese experts from different countries, annually published 2–3 monographs or collections of articles, regularly submitted analytical reports with specific proposals for government bodies of the Russian Federation, and actively cooperated with leading scientific institutions of the ASEAN countries. Thus, the Center had close ties with foreign scientific and educational institutions: the institutes of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, the Ho Chi Minh State Political Academy, the Hanoi National University, the Vietnam Diplomatic Academy, Chiang Mai University (Thailand), the Royal Academy of Cambodia, the Institute for Strategic and International Studies of the Ministry of Malaysia etc.

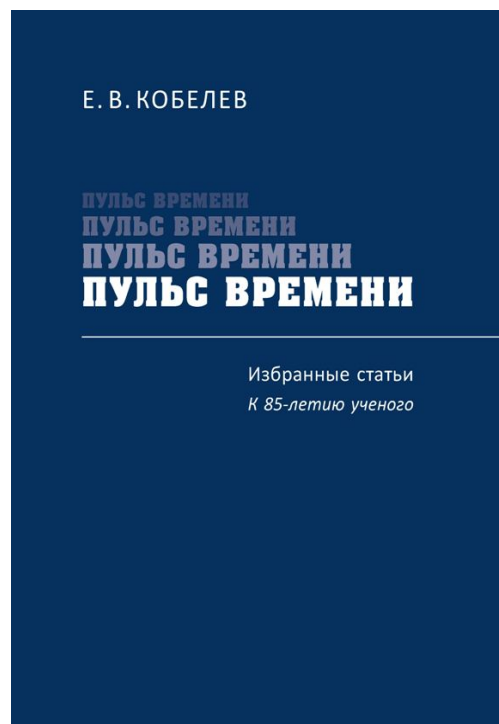
Later, in 2023, the Institute of China and Contemporary Asia of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ICCA RAS) published the book by Dr. Kobelev “65 years together with Vietnam. Memories” [Kobelev 2022a; Tsvetov 2022] (ill. 3). The Foundation for assistance to the development of the Russian-Vietnamese cooperation “Traditions and Friendship”⁴ plans to translate this work into Vietnamese.

The latest important monograph by E.V. Kobelev was “The pulse of time (selected articles for the 85th anniversary of the scientist)” [Kobelev 2023a] (ill. 4). This work contains several sections that show the breadth of the problems that the author dealt with, including the economy, foreign and domestic policy of Vietnam, and such topics as the Communist Party of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, and the Russian-Vietnamese relations.

⁴ The Foundation “Traditions and Friendship” is a non-profit organization registered on August 17, 2020 with the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, registration number 1207700294020. URL: <https://fonddruzhba.ru/> (accessed: Jul 5, 2025).



III. 3. Cover of the book
“65 years with Vietnam. Memories”, 2022



III. 4. Cover of the book
“The pulse of time...”, 2023

Along with his scientific and expert work, E.V. Kobelev gave a lot of time to popularizing the Russian-Vietnamese relations through numerous comments and interviews in the media, as well as public activities as the First Deputy Chairman of the Russian-Vietnamese Friendship Society, which has branches in two dozen regions of Russia and carries out extensive work to develop and strengthen bilateral humanitarian ties.

Dr. Kobelev is widely known in Vietnam as one of the leading Russian experts on the country's history, literature and culture, as well as the Vietnamese language. The Vietnamese government highly appreciated the multifaceted activities of Evgeny Vasil'yevich in strengthening the friendly relations between our countries. He was awarded the Vietnamese Order of Friendship, the commemorative Badge of the Academy of Social Sciences of Vietnam “For achievements and contribution to the development of social sciences”, and the commemorative Badge of the Union of Friendship Societies of Vietnam “For peace and friendship between peoples”.

Journal publications of recent years

In addition to published monographs, E.V. Kobelev actively cooperated with the scientific journals of the IFES/ICCA RAS: “Far Eastern Studies” (ISSN 0131-2812), “The Russian Journal of Vietnamese Studies” (ISSN 2618-9453) and “East Asia: Facts and Analytics” (ISSN 2686-7702).

In 2019, the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences started issuing the electronic scientific journal “East Asia: Facts and Analytics” (EAFA), with Dr. T.E. Gorchakova as the Editor-in-Chief. The first issue of EAFA was published on October 4, 2019. From the very beginning, E.V. Kobelev was actively involved in the work of the journal, acting as a reviewer and as an author of scientific publications. His publications were, as a rule,

historical and sometimes autobiographical. The author often used unique photographs from his personal archive.

Dr. Kobelev's first article in the journal "East Asia: Facts and Analytics" was "The Vietnamese studies in the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences" (2021), dedicated to the 55th anniversary of the IFES RAS. In this article the author described how the Institute, created mainly to study China, gradually turned into a multifaceted scientific institution for the study of Japan, the Korean Peninsula, the problems of the Asia-Pacific region and the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). And in 2008, the Director of the IFES RAS, Academician M.L. Titarenko signed an order to include in the scope of activities of the Institute the study of Vietnam, which is an integral part of the ancient Chinese area both geographically, historically, and even spiritually, and along with it the problems of ASEAN, where this country has played an increasingly important role since 1995 [Kobelev 2021a]. The Head of this center was Dr. E.V. Kobelev.

In the historical essay "Phan Boi Chau – the Vietnamese revolutionary democrat, predecessor of Ho Chi Minh" (2021), the author talks about the life and work of one of the leaders of the national liberation movement in Vietnam, the predecessor of Ho Chi Minh – Phan Boi Chau. Coming from the class of Vietnamese Confucians, he could have made a brilliant career as an official, but chose the path of fighting for the liberation of his homeland [Kobelev 2021b].

In the article "The lessons of Vietnam and the Ukrainian crisis" (2022), E.V. Kobelev was one of the first in the Russian science to draw attention to the experience of Hanoi's leadership of the national liberation struggle in Southern Vietnam in the 1960s–1970s, and then the liberation of Cambodia from the criminal Pol Pot regime in the context of the absence of a "second front" during the implementation of Russia's special operation in Ukraine in 2022 [Kobelev 2022b].

The historical essay "Paris talks. How it was... (On the 50th Anniversary of signing the Paris Agreement on ending the war and restoring peace in Vietnam)" (2023) is dedicated to the 50th anniversary of signing the Paris Agreement (January 27, 1973). The author analyzes the main Vietnamese publications of this period, which show the process of the US and DRV leadership realizing the need for a political settlement of the long-term military conflict and creating the prerequisites for this. The materials also describe the most important features of the Paris negotiations and their completion on the terms that meet the interests of the Vietnamese people [Kobelev 2023b].

The article "Ho Chi Minh and Russia (On the 100th anniversary of Ho Chi Minh's first arrival to our country on June 30, 1923)" (2023) tells about a significant event in the Russian-Vietnamese relations – the opening of the bronze monument to the leader of the Vietnamese people Ho Chi Minh on June 30, 2023 in St. Petersburg on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his first arrival to Russia. According to the author, it was Ho Chi Minh who laid the "foundation of fraternal friendship" between the peoples of our countries and until the end of his days did everything possible to ensure that it developed and strengthened [Kobelev 2023c].

The article "The clash of war correspondents in Hanoi" (2024) is dedicated to the events of the Vietnam War (1955–1975), where the author participated as the TASS war correspondent. From the perspective of an eyewitness, he describes the realities of a journalist's work in Hanoi, from where correspondents from different countries sent information reports on military operations to their news agencies [Kobelev 2024a].

The article “The features of the Vietnamese-Cambodian relations in the historical retrospect” (2024) examined two mutually exclusive positions on the origin and development of the Cambodian People’s Revolutionary Party (CPRP). The first is the position of the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary group: the revolutionary movement in Cambodia developed and won independently. The second is the position of the healthy forces of the CPRP: the Cambodian revolution is a part of the revolutions in Vietnam and Laos [Kobelev 2024b].

The latest scientific article by E.V. Kobelev was also published in the journal “East Asia: Facts and Analytics”. It is called “The lessons of the historical experience of the Communist Party of Vietnam. On the 95th anniversary of its establishment” and is devoted to the main reasons for the phenomenon of the successful activity of the CPV over a historically long period. According to the author, they are contained in the consistent struggle against factionalism in the ranks of the party and the ability to stand behind one or another political force, leading it, but “without pushing oneself forward” [Kobelev 2025].

Among the latest publications, one can also note the article “Tourism industry in Vietnam: importance for the economy and development challenges” [Kobelev 2024c]. The author notes that international tourism is becoming increasingly important in the development of the ASEAN countries, which are experiencing rapid economic growth, as it makes a significant contribution to their economy. He points out the existing difficulties in the tourism industry of Vietnam and calls for more active attraction of guests from Russia, which in the current political situation considers Vietnam a friendly country.

Conclusion

The colleagues highly valued the unique experience and professionalism of E.V. Kobelev, the leading specialist on Vietnam and the ASEAN countries. With his passing, no equivalent replacement in the Institute of China and Contemporary Asia of the Russian Academy of Sciences will be possible. However, Evgeny Vasil’yevich left behind scientific publications that allow us not only to assess the high level of the scientist in historical perspective, but also to outline the main directions of further work in order to study the ASEAN countries and solve modern regional and global problems. In particular, we will pay attention to the following points:

1. E.V. Kobelev has many times underlined the importance of ASEAN for the consolidation of the Asia-Pacific countries. It became especially evident in 2025 against the backdrop of the aggressive policy of the US President D. Trump towards the Asian countries in the context of the slogan “America First”. Thus, on the one hand, in July 2025, ASEAN demonstrated its growing global influence at its annual Regional Forum (ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)), and on the other hand, it revealed many more contradictions due to numerous unresolved internal problems⁵.

2. Professional knowledge of the history of Vietnam provides a basis for analyzing current processes, as drawing historical parallels allows us to assess today's geopolitical situation. For example, the experience of the Vietnam War can also be applied to the Ukrainian conflict [Kobelev 2022b]. In this regard, the professionalism of the researcher comes to the fore, offering expert solutions based not only on theoretical reasoning, but above all on personal experience.

⁵ ASEAN asserts global role as internal rifts cloud regional unity. *Nikkei Asia*, Jul 14, 2025. URL: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/ASEAN-asserts-global-role-as-internal-rifts-cloud-regional-unity> (accessed: Jul 15, 2025).

3. The relevance of developing bilateral relations between Russia and Vietnam has been repeatedly emphasized in the publications of E.V. Kobelev. At present, specific measures are needed from Russia to improve relations with Vietnam, which has chosen the path of multilateral cooperation with various countries, including the United States. Although Vietnam is a historical ally of Russia, modern realities require active actions to develop specific areas of cooperation, given the high level of political and economic competition on the global stage.

4. Interaction in the humanitarian sphere, including scientific cooperation and public activities, which need to be developed in the Russian-Vietnamese relations and in the ASEAN-Russia format, is acquiring an important role in relations between the countries. People's diplomacy and mutual tourism occupy a special place here. The topic of humanitarian relations was developed at the international scientific conference "Humanitarian cooperation of the Asia-Pacific countries", which took place at the ICCA RAS on April 23, 2025 [Gorchakova 2025a; Gorchakova 2025b].

5. It is relevant to bring Russia closer to the ASEAN countries, using, for example, close ties with Vietnam in order to gain authority and build mutually beneficial relations in all areas, including security issues.

However, a more detailed analysis of Dr. E.V. Kobelev's works still awaits its researchers.

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