

Chapter 13

Higher Education in Vietnam

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“Whether the Vietnamese mountains and rivers will attain glory and whether the Vietnamese land will gloriously stand on an equal footing with the powers in the five continents, this depends to a great extent on your studies.”

Special letter written to Vietnamese pupils by President Ho Chi Minh on September 3, 1945, the day after the declaration of Independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam

(Phạm 1998: 13)

“We should grow trees for ten years interests, and grow man for one hundred years interests.”

Ho Chi Minh (Cited in Phạm Minh Hạc 1998: viii)

“To cross a river, you should build a bridge; to have your children well-versed in letters, you should love the teacher.”

Vietnamese proverb (Cited in Phạm Minh Hạc 1998: viii)

“With science and technology, education in general and higher education in particular, is considered as the first national priority policy, as the driving force and the basic condition in ensuring the realization of the socio-economic objectives, and of building and defending the Fatherland.”

7th Party Congress, 1991 (Sloper and Lê 1995: 67)

13.1 Basic Background on the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

One of the most famous images of the US War in Vietnam is a naked young Vietnamese girl, Kim Phuc, running from a village, her body inflamed with napalm. That photograph, taken by Nick Ut, displayed to the whole world the horrors of the US war in Vietnam. Kim Phuc, now a Canadian citizen living in Ottawa with her two children, runs a foundation to help child victims of war. Kim’s success and inspiring story is reflective of the resilience of the Vietnamese both at home and abroad in the face of the dramatic tragedy of war, death, and violence.

Especially during the early period of communist rule (1975–1985) that followed US withdrawal from Vietnam and the end of the Vietnam War, many refugees (often as boat people) left Vietnam for the USA. Currently there are 1,418,234 Vietnamese-Americans (representing 0.5% of the US population). They are the

second largest Southeast Asia-American group in the USA. Much attention has focused on the military conflict in Vietnam and the US war there. However, Vietnam is not just a war, but a country. Already in 2008, many books have been published about Vietnam. Nearly all are still about the tragic war. Vietnam has a long and rich history as a literate culture strongly influenced by China. On many occasions, the Chinese tried to dominate and defeat Vietnam, but always failed.

Vietnam is one of the five remaining communist countries in the world. It is a one-party state with the Communist party dominating politics and policies. Opposition to the one party state is not tolerated, though within the country's National Assembly there are often intense policy debates and differences.

With the unification of Vietnam in 1975 and the introduction of *Dôì Mới* in 1986, Vietnam has made impressive economic gains and is a rising phoenix on the world economic scene. Vietnam has greatly reduced the number of state-owned businesses and opened its economy to trade with much of the world. Vietnam normalized relations with the USA in 1995, became a member of ASEAN in 1997, a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) in 1998, and became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on January 11, 2007. Since 1996, the year after relations with Vietnam were normalized, trade between the USA and Vietnam has expanded roughly by 900%. Between 2005 and 2007, Vietnam was the fastest growing economy in the ASEAN region and one of the hottest economies in the Asia-Pacific region. Among nations of the Asia-Pacific region it has one of the lowest levels of inequality. Thus, Vietnam is striving to achieve growth with equity and pro-poor growth (see Banschap and Klump 2007; Klump 2007). The role of higher education in achieving that goal is a major focus of this chapter (Tables 13.1 and 13.2).

13.2 Historical and Political Context

In the analysis of contemporary political economy and educational issues, important historical and political context is often ignored. Such historical myopia and amnesia can lead to tragedy, as was the case of the US War in Vietnam (McNamara 1999). Nguyen Khac Vien (1993) has provided an excellent overview of Vietnamese history from a Vietnamese perspective (Trần and Hà 2000). In terms of the historical and political context of Vietnam, five themes are important to mention. The first is the continual Vietnamese struggle to free themselves from foreign domination, starting with roughly 1,000 years of Chinese rule, threats from the Mongols, and then external domination by the French, Japanese, and the USA. In all these instances, the Vietnamese displayed courage, creativity, and determination in winning their eventual freedom and independence. The second theme is the struggle against natural disasters such as floods and typhoons. Reflective of this struggle are the huge dykes protecting the capital, Hanoi, from possible flooding by the Red River. A third theme is *nam tiến* (expansion to the South), the need for

Table 13.1 Key basic statistical indicators for the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (CIA World Factbook 2006; ASEAN-Japan Statistical Pocketbook 2006; Earth Trends database on global conditions and trends, World Resources Institute)

Statistical indicator	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Population (million)	85.3
Land area (km ² , '000)	332
Number of provinces/states/divisions	59
Human Development Index	0.733
	World rank, 105 out of 177 countries
Percent of population that is majority (Kinh)	90
Percent of population that is other ethnic nationalities (54 in total), Chinese (3%); Muslim (1%), other groups such as the Hmong, Khmer, Tay, Muong, and Dao (6%)	10
GDP (PPP) (\$US)b	235.2
GDP/capita (PPP) (\$US)	2,800
GDP real growth rate (%)	8.5
Exports (\$US)b	32.23
Imports (\$US)b	36.88
X + M/GDP	1.58
Foreign Exchange Reserves (\$US)b	8.863
% of trade with ASEAN countries	16.6
Unemployment rate	2.4
% of population below the poverty line	19.5
Gini index of inequality	.344
Literacy rate	90.3
Total fertility rate	1.89
Statistical Indicator	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Population growth rate (%)	1.004
Life expectancy	70.85
Infant mortality rate	25.14
Human Happiness Index	61.2
Total number of medals won in 2006 Asian Games (Asian Olympics)	21
Total number of medals won in 2007 Scientific Olympiads (chemistry, biology, and physics)	9
Rank among 95 countries competing in 2007 International Mathematics Olympiad	3rd
Energy consumption per capita	.38
Member of APEC	Yes
Member of WTO	Yes
Member of G77	Yes

Data are the most recent, normally for 2006 or 2005

additional land and territory, given the high population density of Vietnam. A fourth theme relates to Chinese cultural and intellectual influences, particularly in the cities. One thousand years of Chinese domination left an indelible influence

Table 13.2 Basic Indicators on education and human resource development in Vietnam (UNDP 2008; ESCAP 2007; UNESCO, Institute for Statistics; Thang & Quang 2007; di Gropello 2007)

Educational and human resource development indicator	Value
Primary school completion rate	93.5%
Primary age kids out of school	13%
Population under the age of 30	65%
Age group in tertiary education	16%
Age group (females) in tertiary education	13%
Age group (males) in tertiary education	19%
Education as a percent of state budget expenditures	17.1%
Researchers per 1,000,000 population	115
Expenditures on R&D as a percent of GDP	0.2%
Internet users (per 100)	17.2
Personal computers (per 100)	1.3
Rate of growth in IT (information technology) market	3rd fastest in Asia-Pacific region
Telephones, cellular subscribers (per 100)	18.3
Total number of college students	1,404,000
Percent of tertiary students enrolled in science, engineering, manufacturing, and construction	20%
Percent of tertiary enrollment that is postgraduate	4%
Ratio of students to teachers at the university/college level	29:1 (at some public universities it is as high as 100:1)
Percent of those in the labor force with degrees in higher education	5.1%

on Vietnam, its culture, customs, and language. This influence has direct relevance to education. Unlike its Southeast Asian neighbors such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos, Vietnam is part of the Confucian world (Tu 1993, 1996; Le 1994) as is Japan, Korea, and Singapore. Part of this cultural heritage is great importance attached to learning and special respect for teachers, scholars, and mentors. A fifth theme is the importance of village life as the heart of Vietnamese culture and related wet rice cooperative culture. It is impossible to understand Vietnam without understanding its villages and their rich cultural traditions (Phan Huy Lé 1993; Luong 1992).

It is also important to note that Vietnam has a long tradition of higher education. It has the oldest recorded institution of higher education in Southeast Asia. In 1076 the Royal College (Văn Miếu Quốc Tử Giám) was built in the Temple of Literature during the Ly Dynasty to provide moral education and training to the sons of dignitaries (Sloper and Lê 1995: 43). Later in 1253 the National Institute of Learning was also established at the Temple of Literature. The Royal College significantly predates both the colleges at Angkor Wat and the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines.

It is also significant to note that Vietnam has had an advanced writing system which dates back several thousand years. Because of earlier Chinese rule, Vietnam used Chinese characters for 17 centuries. Later, however, it developed its own

unique system of Vietnamese characters called *Nôm*. Then in the seventeenth century with the assistance of Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and French scholars, particularly Alexandre de Rhodes – a French missionary and scholar – the Vietnamese developed a romanized *Viêt* script known as *Quốc Ngữ* (Phạm 1998: ix). Starting in 1919, *Quốc Ngữ* became widely used, particularly in primary schools. After 1945, *Quốc Ngữ* was used at all levels of education. Also 11 of Vietnam's 54 ethnic nationalities have their own writing scripts (Đỗ 1998).

During the French colonial period in the late nineteenth century several colleges were set up to offer fields of study such as pharmacy, pedagogy, agriculture, and engineering. Later in Hanoi, a University of Indo-chine was established which also served students from the Lao and Khmers part of the French colony, Indo-chine.

Also in the period 1945–1954, three colleges (i.e., medicine, pharmacy, and pedagogy) were formed in the revolutionary area in the north.

From 1945–1975 when Vietnam was divided into the North and South there were two separate systems of higher education. The system in the North was built with assistance from the former USSR and reflected Soviet influences. In the South, the system was based on the earlier French colonial model, with later strong influence of the US model. During the intense bombing of the North, college physics, for example, was being taught in caves.

After liberation and independence in 1975, Vietnam's system of higher education was unified. At that time there were 51 universities and 56,000 students in the North and 18 universities with 116,500 students in the South. An example of universities in the South was the University of Dalat in the Central Highlands. In 1977–1978, after peace and reunification, there were a total of 50 universities and 20 colleges, all public.

13.3 Demographic Background

With a population of 85.3 million in July 2007, Vietnam is one of the most densely populated countries in Asia. Its population is approximately one third of that of the USA, but its land area is only 3.5% of that of the USA. Seventy-five percent of the land is mountainous and, thus, not available for settlement or cultivation; 39.7% of Vietnam is forests. This special demographic niche gives Vietnam both special advantages and disadvantages (Khong 2002). From the positive side it provides for important and valuable economies of scale related to both the development of physical and human infrastructure (Simon 1990). It also forces the Vietnamese to be highly innovative and efficient in the use of scarce space. The development of intensive agriculture, making Vietnam the world's largest rice exporter, is indeed impressive. The major negative dimension is the tremendous pressure this puts on the Vietnamese economy to provide meaningful employment and educational opportunities for its citizens, especially its young people. With respect to this special demographic niche, Vietnam mirrors Japan to an important degree in addition to the common Confucian influences mentioned earlier.

13.4 The Legacy of Ho Chi Minh as a Protean Educator/Learner

Father Ho (Uncle Ho) is the dominant figure in modern Vietnamese history, the father of the nation and its independence from foreign domination. In addition to his significant political role, Ho also represents an important role model for Vietnam's students. He was a continual learner who mastered an amazing number of languages, both European and Asian. As a younger person he traveled to diverse parts of the world becoming familiar with a wide range of ideas and perspectives (Nghiem 2003). He displayed many qualities of the Protean individual (Lifton 1993). His emphasis on a modest personal style is also exemplary in an age of increasing materialism (see Fromm 1979). Vietnam's National Political Academy for training leaders is understandably named in honor of Ho. The historian, Professor William J. Duiker (2000) has written the definitive Western biography of Ho which carefully documents Ho's lifestyle and diverse learning pursuits around the world.

13.5 Overview of Higher Education in Vietnam

Since 1986 a profound socioeconomic policy change has taken place in Vietnam: the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy (Boothroyd and Pham 2000). Thus, Vietnam has become one of the many economies now classified as a transitional economy. Examples of other such economies are the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Mongolia, and of course, neighboring Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).

In response to the change of the socioeconomic policy, since 1987 the higher education system has adopted some important reform policies. The training provided by higher education is aimed at serving not only the state and the collective economic sector but also all other important economic sectors such as tourism. This chapter provides an overview of the private higher education sector in Vietnam, an integral part of higher education reform in Vietnam. It draws upon an extensive recent literature on higher education in Vietnam. Among key scholars writing about higher education in Vietnam have been Mashiro Chikada (2004, 2005, 2006); Dang Ba Lam (1997); Emanuela di Gropello (2007); Martin Hayden and Lam Quang Thiep (2006); Lê Thac Can (1991, 1995); Ngo Doan Dai (2006); Pham Lan Huong and Gerald Fry (2002, 2004); Paul P. Sauvageau (1996); David Sloper (1995), and Vu V. T. (1991).

13.6 Genres of Universities and Colleges in Vietnam: The Diversification of Higher Education in Vietnam

There are basically seven types of universities and colleges in Vietnam:

1. Specialized universities, which focus on a single area of study such as forestry, fine arts, economics, or law. They are often run by line ministries. Examples are: Ho Chi

Minh City University of Economics, Vietnam Forestry University, University of Fisheries, and the Hanoi College of Pharmacy. These specialized universities are a legacy of the Soviet influenced higher education system. Approximately 13 different ministries have responsibilities for individual universities.

2. Multidisciplinary universities, which offer a wide range of academic programs up through the doctorate. Major examples are: Vietnam National University, Hanoi; Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City; Hue University; The University of Da Nang; Dalat University, and Thai Nguyen University.
3. Open universities, which are of three types: Hanoi Open University, Ho Chi Minh City Open University, and Ton Duc Thang University. They are considered semi-public universities since they are owned by the state and managed by a public authority. However, student tuitions provide an important source of their revenue.
4. Private universities, which do not receive state funding. Among major private universities are Van Lang University, Hong Bong University, Duy Tan University, and Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology. These universities tend to focus on popular fields of study which are relatively low cost (unlike the natural sciences which require expensive laboratories) such as information technology, management, and tourism. Some may be profit-oriented with investors expecting a return from their investment in the institution.
5. Public junior colleges, which offer 2–3-year practical curricula in fields such as teacher training, agriculture, health, fine arts, banking, and policy studies (Thang & Quang 2007).
6. Private junior colleges.
7. International universities such as the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) International University.

13.7 Statistical Overview of Higher Education in Vietnam

Table 13.3 provides statistical data on these different genres of higher education institutions.

In recent years there has been a dramatic expansion in Vietnamese higher education, reflecting both the rapid economic development in the 1990s and related growth in social demand for higher education to prepare young people for jobs in the modern sector. Between 1995 and 1996, the number of students in higher education increased 16.4% and between 1996 and 1997 that number accelerated to 38.3%. Back in 1991, only 2% of the relevant age group studied at the university level. By 1999, this increased significantly to 11%. Now it is 16%, eight times higher than back in 1991. In 2000, the number of higher education students per 10,000 of population was 118. By 2005, in only 5 years that number had increased 43% to 169 (Thang and Quang 2007). With the increased access made possible by private higher education, Vietnam now has more than one million college students.

In terms of gender equality, it is interesting to note from Table 13.4 that an impressively high 36.2% of the professoriate in Vietnam are women.

Table 13.3 Types of institutions of higher education in Vietnam (Adapted from Ngo Doan Dai 2006)

Type of institution	Number in Vietnam	Number of students served, 2005/06
Public universities	85	689,679
Open universities	2	52,583
Public junior colleges	99	205,639
Private universities	24	111,654
International universities	Influx	NA
Private junior colleges	19	25,468
Total	255	1,404,000

Universities (*troung dai hoc*) have a curriculum of 4–6 years, while junior colleges (*troung cao dong*) offer a 2–3 year curriculum. These data exclude military schools, security schools, and the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy. The aggregate data are for 2005/06. The data for each genre of institution are for 2003/04.

Table 13.4 Statistical profile of the professoriate in Vietnamese higher education (Dai 2006: 246)

Statistical indicator	Profile
Total number of academic employees	39,985
Number of teaching staff	32,205 (80.5%)
Percent of faculty who are women	36.2%
Percent of faculty who are full or associate professors	5.1%
Percent of faculty with doctorates	17.8%
Percent of faculty with master's degrees	41.6%
Percent of faculty with bachelor's degrees	40.6%

13.8 Major Elements of the Reform of Higher Education in Vietnam

In 1986, Vietnam introduced *Dôi Mới*, a fundamental reform and renovation of its economic system to allow for the use of free market forces and mechanisms and a reduced role of the state and centralized planning of the economy. To facilitate such major economic reforms, it was imperative that Vietnam also reform its educational system, particularly higher education to accommodate the new system. Unlike Thailand, which enacted a major integrated educational reform in 1999 with its new National Education Act, Vietnam's reforms have occurred gradually over time. The following are the key elements of the Vietnamese reform of higher education (see Paitoon 1997; Thanayathip 1998):

- Diversification of higher education, to allow for non-state provision of tertiary education. The goal is to have the private sector represent 30% of the higher education sector by 2010 and 40% by 2020 (Dai 2006; Hayden and Thiep 2007).

- Changing the funding of higher education to reduce dependence on state subsidies through, for example, the charging of tuition and universities having the chance to generate funds through contracts, grants, and external sales. Tuition fees were first introduced in 1993.
- Reduction of the percentage of students receiving state grants and scholarships under the old quota system.
- Establishment of open universities.
- Restructuring through an amalgamation of specialized universities into multidisciplinary national and regional universities (such as Vietnam National University, Hanoi and Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City).
- Development of new curricula in fields such as management and tourism.
- Introduction of general basic education during the first 2 years of college.
- Move toward a credit system, to improve comparability across campuses and with international institutions.
- Increased use of distance education to provide access to those in remote mountainous areas. Eight universities are now offering distance education.
- Decentralization of the management and administration of universities and colleges. As part of a Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) approved in 2005, was a stipulation to give universities greater institutional autonomy (Hayden and Quang 2007).
- Opening up opportunities for internationalization and for universities from other countries to open campuses in Vietnam (e.g., RMIT).
- Major expansion of the higher education system to be three to four times larger in 2020 and to be better managed and of higher quality (Hayden and Thiep 2006).

13.8.1 The Emergence of Private Higher Education in Vietnam

Given that allowing for a private sector role in higher education is an integral part of Vietnam's higher education reform, the emergence of higher education in Vietnam will now be described in detail drawing heavily upon the work of Pham and Fry (2002).

13.8.1.1 Rationale for the Introduction of Private Higher Education in Vietnam

The demands related to the development of a market economy have important implications for the development and expansion of higher education. Since the introduction of the open policy, the Vietnamese economy has quickly developed (Boothroyd and Pham 2000). The demand for educated knowledge workers has risen; especially the demand for human resources with high technical capability and new management skills (related to new private market conditions). Higher education

in Vietnam, thus, faces many new and complex challenges. It critically needs to develop not only the quantity but also the quality of its human resources to facilitate successful economic integration with the region and the world. As the Princeton economist Paul Krugman (1996) has pointed out compellingly, the key to a nation's economic success is its ability to raise the productivity of its citizens. Central to that goal is the quality of a nation's training and educational systems.

Since national funds for education and training are limited, it is not enough simply to develop public universities and, thus, fail to meet the needs of increasing new institutions, particularly in the private sector. The government has, thus, established a flexible policy of education to mobilize diverse sources of investment for education. Such a policy is both responsive to socialist ideals (related to equity and social justice) and *Dôì Mói* (and its emphasis on efficiency and incentive systems). Without a mixed system of public and private institutions of higher education, many needs would go unmet, adversely affecting both equity and efficiency.

Many educators aspire to have an opportunity to promote and develop innovative higher education. There are investors eager to become involved in the expansion of higher education. Integration into the international economy (e.g., AFTA, WTO) requires and demands openness in terms of privatization.

13.8.1.2 The Historical Evolution of Private Education in Vietnam

1. The First Phase, 1988

In 1988, under the open policy of the Vietnamese Government, a group of Hanoi intellectuals was established and led by Dr. Hoang Xuan Sinh, who was concerned about the backward level of higher education in Vietnam, which was lagging behind. She aspired to create a new style of higher education in Vietnam as an experiment. She hoped to provide quality education in accord with international standards. The Thang Long University was established (Hoang and Sloper 1995). Initially, the University had 150 students with two branches: mathematics and information. The founder of the University, Dr. Hoang Xuan Sinh is a famous professor of mathematics, who graduated from Paris. Tuition was set at about US\$100 per academic year. The university was supported by Overseas Vietnamese in France, nongovernment organizations such as Comoro Catholic Contre la Faim et Pour le Development and German-Vietnamese Association. The University was encouraged by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and located physically at the Puskin Institute. The quality of enrolled students initially was low (at that time, in the North, people did not like to send their children to study in the private universities), but after 4 years, the graduating had attained a good level of learning. However, with such a small number of students (204) and low tuition fee, Thang Long University could not invest in new expenditures and could not adequately equip the institution's facilities. Thang Long University tried strengthening its quality by utilizing excellent visiting professors (both Vietnamese and international). Also, they opened a software center aiming to export this product so that it could bring in

financial support for the institution. With current economic conditions in Vietnam, the development of Thang Long University has been extremely difficult. Thang Long University is a test of a new style of education which can be developed in Vietnam.

2. The Second Phase – the Establishment of Private Education Institutions in Vietnam

After Thang Long University was established, a number of other private universities and colleges were also established. Among such institutions were Dongdo University, established by a science group of the Vietnamese Science Institute; Phuong Dong University established by some retired professors of Vietnam National University, Hanoi; Management and Business University, established by former Vice Prime Minister Tran Phuong. In the Ho Chi Minh City area, Van Lang University was established by an intellectual group from Saigon. Its first president was Dr. Phạm Khắc Chi, the former director of the Dalat Atomic National Institute. Hung Vuong University's president was Dr. Ngo Gia Hy, a famous physician in Ho Chi Minh City. University of Technology was set up by technical lecturers; Hong Bang University; the University of Foreign Language and Information. Some private universities and colleges were also established in some provinces such as: Lac Hong, Binh Duong, and Duy Tan (in Da Nang).

In these initial phases, most of these private higher education institutions offered such programs as business administration, foreign language, and accounting, which did not require laboratories or special facilities. Programs in information technology (IT) were particularly "fashionable." Given the growing market demand for graduates with IT skills, every university and college opened this popular field of study. Văn Lang University is the largest among the new private institutions. In its very first year, there were an impressive number of 4,700 students enrolled. After that the MOET decided to allow only 800–1,500 students per year for every private university, even though the number of people wanting to matriculate quickly reached 20,000 at Văn Lang University (2000/01). In contrast, at Lac Hong University, the number of students seeking to matriculate is smaller than the number of students who are needed (2000). Such discrepancies exactly reflect the competition of market mechanisms, mandated by the *Dôi Mới* policy. Teachers are invited from public universities, scientific research institutes, and private companies to lecture in the new private universities. Campuses are often rented from public institutions. Curricula follow the program guidelines of the MOET. Some universities and colleges were provided land or their campus by local authorities.

3. Initial Achievements of Private Higher Education in Vietnam

The establishment of private universities and colleges has helped solve financial problems confronting education and reduced pressures on the national budget. Ten years ago the government prioritized investment in developing education. The total cost for education has increased from VND7.100 billion (10.08% of national budget) in 1996 to VND14.180 billion (15% of national budget) in 2000 of which 80–85% went for personnel (including salaries, allowances, scholarship) and only 15.20% was used for educational facilities and infrastructure. However, this amount is still inadequate for all the public universities. Thus, the social policy of the gov-

ernment to diversify higher education was most timely. The opening of private universities has helped the government provide access to more than 104,255 students of a total 918,228 students nationwide. The number of private students is 11.4% of the total and it is over 20% of the total in the southern region of Vietnam. Funds for all the activities of private universities are from nongovernmental resources. This is a remarkable achievement that demonstrates the timely and judicious policy of the Vietnamese government.

13.8.1.3 The Internationalization of Vietnamese Higher Education

Internationalization has been another important aspect of Vietnamese higher education reform. Decree No. 06/2000/ND-CP, initiated in 2000, opened the door for international universities to offer education in Vietnam and to provide incentives to encourage such international investments (Dai 2006).

In the fall of 2001, the RMIT from Australia opened an international campus in Saigon, Vietnam. In 2004, it opened a second campus in Hanoi. It has a third new campus in Saigon South which cost \$20 million. One of the university's newest and most popular programs is a Bachelor of Applied Science (Information Technology). RMIT offers both undergraduate and graduate programs in education, business, computer science, information technology, multimedia, and engineering (Dai 2006).

There are also many joint ventures between Vietnamese and overseas universities, some involving "sandwich programs." Among such institutions are the University of Hawaii's MBA program, Troy State University, Washington State University MBA program, University of Houston, University of Greifswald (Germany), University of Technology in Sydney, Toulon University, France, and Liege University in Belgium (Dai 2006). Harvard University has also offered a certificate program in Hanoi, the Fulbright Economics Teaching Program, which is one of the most popular curricula in the country. Many of its alumni have played a major role in the Vietnamese economy. One of its alumni was the first Vietnamese vice president of Citibank (Overland 2006).

In 2005, the Vietnamese government announced a 5-year strategic plan for higher education aimed at the current capacity problem facing the system, i.e., its inability to meet the rapidly growing social demand for higher education and the need for highly skilled personnel in the dynamic modern sector of the economy. The plan includes opening up an additional 100 institutions of higher education through private and international initiatives. For example, in January 2005, US-based Roger Williams University opened a campus in Hanoi. Similarly universities from France and South Korea plan to open campuses in Vietnam. The Dutch government recently granted US\$6.6 million for the launch of a new e-learning portal to help improve the quality of Vietnam's higher education system (*The Observatory* 2005).

In 2005, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which has pioneered open course ware, in collaboration with a consortium of Vietnamese universities launched Vietnam Open Course Ware. Currently this program is in a 2-year

experimental phase (2006–2008) and has the potential to revolutionize Vietnam's higher education.

Also in 2005, Vietnam signed an agreement with the Singapore-based Informatics Group to enable Vietnamese students to study on-line with various overseas universities. The Hanoi University of Business and Management will coordinate the program and recruit students. Informatics' PurpleTrain.com was Asia's first e-Learning provider back in 1999.

In July 2006, Rice University in Texas signed an agreement with Vietnam's MOET to launch a program called Connexions in Vietnam. The connection between Rice and Vietnam was facilitated by the Vietnam Education Foundation in Washington. Connexions is based on the open-source software concept. The MOET will coordinate and promote the use of Connexions at universities and institutions of higher learning throughout Vietnam. This will give Vietnamese universities and their students access to cutting-edge research and educational materials. Connexions software fully supports the Vietnamese language. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has awarded \$2.25 million to this innovative program, which definitely involves what has been called *leapfrogging*.

13.8.1.4 Other Initiatives to Enhance Capacity

In Chapter 1, there is an emphasis on capacity development. Vietnam has initiated several programs to enhance capacity development. The Vietnamese government has recently launched two human resource development programs to enhance the skills of its university graduates. The first program involves a total investment of US\$20.7 million in the training of gifted students between 2004 and 2011. These are for top graduates, aged 22–30, studying in fields such as economics, business management, law, and technology. They can receive support, for example, for postgraduate programs in management. A second program provides US\$11–45 million in the form of state-funded and internationally provided scholarships (Thang and Quang 2007; Gross and Weintraub 2005).

Vietnam has also had two major World Bank higher education projects to enhance the capacity of higher education. The first project, approved on August 27, 1998, provided US\$103.7 million for the period 1998–2007 to: (1) increase coherence, flexibility, and responsiveness of higher education to the changing demands of society and the market economy, (2) improve efficiency and resource utilization in higher education, and (3) improve the quality of curriculum, teaching, learning, and research in higher education (World Bank 1998).

The newest one, approved on June 20, 2007, is titled the Second Higher Education Project (HEP2) and “aims to increase the quality of teaching and research in universities in ways that improve the employability of graduates and the relevance of research in Vietnam” (World Bank 2007). The total project cost is US\$70.5 million for the period, 2007–2012. The major thrust of the project is to increase the capacity and capability of Vietnam's higher education sector.

13.9 Key Stakeholders and Actors in Vietnamese Higher Education

13.9.1 The Government of Vietnam

As a new member of WTO (as of January 2007) and as part of APEC and ASEAN, Vietnam aspires to be a new “Asia Tiger.” Michael Porter (1980, 1990) at Harvard emphasizes competitiveness and Paul Krugman (1996) at Princeton emphasizes the importance of improving individual productivity. Between 1960 and 1990, Japan increased individual productivity dramatically at rates unprecedented in world history. Clearly, the government of Vietnam wants the country to advance economically and to become a strong Asia-Pacific economy. Thus, the quality of higher education is extremely important to the government of Vietnam to ensure that the nation has the trained people power to be successful in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Also, the government must respond to rising social demand for higher education. This is one reason why the government opened the door for private institutions to play an important role in higher education, as a means to increase capacity to meet the growing social demand for higher education.

Though with *Dôì Mới*, the number of state-owned enterprises has steadily decreased, those that do remain need high quality well-trained staff.

Universities can also contribute to important applied research and development to facilitate economic development and international competitiveness.

13.9.2 Vietnam’s Rapidly Growing Private Sector

With *Dôì Mới*, Vietnam’s private sector has grown rapidly and contributed significantly to Vietnam’s high economic growth profile during the past decade. This sector has the need for well-trained and highly qualified individuals. As one concrete example, Vietnamese tourism has grown rapidly. Vietnam now attracts about 3.5 million tourists a year. A number of universities have academic programs to prepare Vietnamese young people to work in the rapidly growing tourist sector. To work in this sector, international language skills are important. The beach resort of Phan Thiet, approximately 4 hours north of Ho Chi Minh City, has grown dramatically in the past 10 years; the largest number of tourists are from Russia and Germany.

13.9.3 Private Universities

During the past 10 years there has been a rapid growth in private universities. There are now 43 private universities and colleges serving over 100,000 students. These institutions compete for quality students to enhance both their stature and

financial success. Vietnam's large population of college-age individuals and its success in increasing secondary school completion augurs well for the future of this important stakeholder. The major challenge facing this stakeholder is that of providing adequate quality in these universities.

13.9.4 International Agencies and Donors

Many international agencies and donors such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Ford Foundation are active in Vietnam. The ADB is placing greater emphasis on the development of higher education. In general, these agencies see Vietnam as a nation with good absorptive capacity for using international aid and technical assistance effectively. These agencies want to have good returns on their investments and they view Vietnam in a generally positive light.

13.9.5 The Government and Transnational Corporations of Japan

With Japan's economy having a high wage cost structure, it is imperative that Japan seeks offshore production sites. Among such important sites are China, Thailand, and Vietnam. During the boom of the 1980s, a new Japanese factory was coming on line once every 3 days in Thailand. These overseas factories and businesses need skilled personnel. Thus, it is in Japan's interest that Vietnam produce high quality college graduates who can work for Japanese employers. Interestingly in Thailand, the Japanese have opened a new private joint venture university with the Thais, Thai Nichi Institute of Technology, to help ensure that Thailand is producing skilled engineers needed by Japanese businesses operating in Thailand. Something similar might likely happen in Vietnam. It is dangerous for Japan to be too dependent on any one country. Thus, it is needs to diversify its offshore production possibilities.

13.9.6 Universities in Other Countries Such as the United States and Australia

With dramatically increasing academic mobility and educational services now covered under the WTO/GATT, there is increasing competition for top talent globally. Thus, universities around the globe are interested in attracting some of Vietnam's best students. Teekens (2002) describes the situation of an outstanding student from Vietnam doing doctoral work in mathematics in the Netherlands. The US university currently attracting the largest number of Vietnamese students is the University of Oklahoma. International programs of neighboring Singaporean, Malaysian, and Thai universities are eager to attract bright Vietnamese students.

13.9.7 Families

After *Dôi Mới*, Vietnamese families have had to bear increasingly more of the costs of education. Given Vietnam's strong Confucian tradition, many families aspire to have their children have the opportunity to go on to college and university education. Thus, they have a strong interest in ensuring that there are adequate seats for their children and that costs are affordable.

13.9.8 Individuals

Many young Vietnamese, especially those in urban areas, aspire to go on to higher education. Thus, they too have an important interest in having access to affordable quality higher education. Vietnamese women without adequate human capital development are vulnerable to temptations from a growing and highly profitable commercial sex industry (Luong 2003).

13.9.9 Conclusion: Interaction Among These Key Actors

As indicated in Fig. 3.1 in Chapter 3, there is important interaction among these actors. As an example, a bright individual from a remote area of Vietnam might receive a Ford Foundation Fellowship to attend Dalat University. Through this process, that individual's human capital and capacity is enhanced. That also enhances the diversity and quality of Dalat's student body. That individual might eventually end up doing graduate work at RMIT in Ho Chi Minh City benefiting an Australian international university. Then the individual with this enhanced capacity could join a transnational Japanese company exporting to Japan, benefiting both Vietnam (increased hard currency from exports) and Japan, low cost overseas production site.

13.10 Major Contemporary Problems in Vietnamese Higher Education

13.10.1 The Issue of Quality and Inadequate Numbers of Qualified Professors

Vietnam has been highly successful in quantitatively expanding the size of its higher education system, particularly during the last decade. Improving quality, however, represents a continuing and daunting challenge. As seen in Table 13.4, relatively few faculty (17.8%) have a doctorate. The most common academic background of

a university professor is holding only a master's or bachelor's degree (roughly equal numbers of both, see Table 13.4). Its professoriate is also aging and many were trained in the former Soviet Union or other Eastern block countries (Wasley 2007). As many as 80% of full professors and 30% of associate professors are over the age of 60. Many scholars in the West unfortunately mistakenly write off and belittle the training of Vietnamese professors in the former Soviet Union or Eastern block. While it is true that training in fields such as the social sciences (dominated by Marxist-Leninist ideology) was weak, education in areas such as mathematics, science, and linguistics was quite strong (Christy 1986). Interestingly many were trained in the Russian language. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and significant decline in study opportunities in Russia and Eastern block countries, the Russian language became largely irrelevant and such professors had to be retrained for other more relevant fields such as English language teaching (Overland 2006a). Now with Russian tourism increasing in Vietnam, Russian may again develop some contemporary relevance.

Low salaries of academics in Vietnam is another serious problem which results in frequent moonlighting and the related neglect of research.

In June 2007, Vietnam's president, Nguyen Minh Triet, and Vietnam's Minister of Education and Training, Nguyen Thien Nhan, visited the USA to meet with President Bush and to seek US assistance in improving the quality of higher education in Vietnam. Currently, Vietnam produces only 500 new Ph.D. graduates per year. The nation's goal is to have 20,000 doctorates by 2020, half of whom would be trained outside Vietnam. The Minister indicated his hope that 2,500 of these new Ph.D. graduates would be educated in the USA (Wasley 2007).

Currently, fellowships for overseas study are limited. The following governments offer fellowships to Vietnamese, with the statistic in parentheses indicating the number of fellowships available: Canada (10), UK (70), France (200), Australia (150), USA (75, Fulbright and Vietnam Education Foundation), and Thailand (80).

13.10.2 Access to Higher Education in Vietnam

13.10.2.1 Access Under the Traditional Socialist Quota System

Traditionally in socialist countries such as Vietnam and Lao PDR, there was a special quota system for access to higher education. Several decades ago extremely few had access to higher education. Those who did gain access did not have to pay any tuition at all and received a modest monthly stipend to cover their day to day living expenses. Access was based on a quota system that allocated available seats on the basis of a number of factors such as ethnic nationality, social class, an individual's life history and loyalty to the party, gender, geographic area of residence, and other similar factors. This is different from a modern meritocratic system based, for example, on objective examinations (Zeng 1999).

Actually in a meritocratic system, those from higher socioeconomic classes in urban areas with access to the best secondary schools are definitely advantaged.

Actually the former quota system was probably much more equitable than the contemporary system, though hard data on the allocation of university seats in those days are not available.

Currently, Vietnam actually ranks well on common measures of equity. Overall it has a relatively low Gini coefficient of 0.344. In terms of the share of poorest 20% of the population in national income, the figure for Vietnam is 9%. In the entire Asia-Pacific region on this indicator only two countries show a greater level of equity than Vietnam (Japan, 10.6% and Pakistan, 9.3% (ESCAP 2007). This is likely a legacy of the socialist ideology reflected in the quota system described above.

13.10.2.2 Current Access Issues

The current demand for higher education greatly exceeds the number of university seats available. With Vietnam's great success in expanding secondary education, there are now almost three million upper secondary students. This means that more than one million Vietnamese students sit each year for the university entrance examinations. In 2005, over 1.5 million students sat for the national university entrance examination, but all higher education institutions could admit only about 230,500 students (Dai 2006). Those in the richer southern zone of the country have much greater access to private universities. There is, for example, only one private university in the poorer central zone. Thus, in remote mountainous areas, particularly ethnic nationalities, having much less access to secondary education and quality secondary education are seriously disadvantaged in terms of opportunities for higher education. For example, the net enrollment ratio at the lower secondary level for the Hmong is only 4.5% and it is only 8.9% for the Ba-Na people in the Central Highlands (Baulch et al. 2002; Đỗ 1998; VNA 2005; Taylor 2007). Di Gropello (2007) has provided concrete recent data on access to higher education related to economic status. About 40% of Vietnam's college students are from the richest 20%. The lowest 20% economically account for only 12% of those in college. While these data show clear departure from the equality standard (a Gini of 0), they show greater equality than for many other developing countries around the world.

In 1997, the Vietnamese government introduced a subsidized student loan program (with interest rates at 50% of the market rate) administered by the Incombank. About 10% of students in higher education draw upon this loan fund (Dai 2006). The Israeli economist Adrian Ziderman, a specialist on student loan schemes has analyzed the Vietnamese system (Ziderman 2004).

To enhance equity of access, the Ford Foundation has established an innovative program in Vietnam titled *Pathways to Higher Education*. This mirrors Ford's global fellowship, International Fellowship Program, which aims to increase higher education opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is the largest initiative in the history of the Foundation. The Vietnam Pathways to Higher Education provides special scholarships to 10 selected universities, mostly in the regions, to enable them to enroll more students who are from other ethnic nationalities, orphans, low-income students, and those from remote areas. Among participating

universities are Can Tho University in the Mekong Delta, Da Lat University in the Central Highlands, Vinh Teachers Training University, and the University of Da Nang in central Vietnam (Ford Foundation 2007).

Another strategy for enhancing access has been an expansion in distance education at the university level. On July 4, 2005, the government approved a policy for the period 2005–2010 that aims to offer distance education and training services to at least 20% of the country's enrolled tertiary level students. In 1995–2005, 54,000 individuals graduated from distance education and training courses. In 2005, 122,000 students were enrolled in distance learning classes. Of these students 30% were from remote mountainous areas. The others are those fully employed who want to enhance their skills and training (Vietnam Net Bridge 2005). Seven universities now offer distance education, namely: Hanoi Open University, Ho Chi Minh City Open University, the University of Da Nang, Hue University, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong University, and Da Lat University.

13.10.2.3 Economics of Higher Education Issues in Vietnam

A key issue in this arena relates to how much should students pay for their higher education. The private higher education sector operates on a complete cost recovery model and students pay the tuition needed to cover costs. This results often in very large classes in private universities, which is cost-effective but certainly adversely affects quality. In the public sector, the critical issue is how much students should pay to cover costs. Since there are both high social and private returns to higher education in Vietnam, strong arguments can be made for both cost recovery and subsidizing public higher education (Glewwe, et al. 1998; Moock, et al. 1998, Glewwe and Patrinos 1999). There is also the issue of how much the government of Vietnam should invest in developing quality higher education. Fourteen universities have been designated as *key institutions* to develop and Vietnam aspires by 2020 to have one of its universities in the world's top 100 (Wasley 2007; Hayden and Thiep 2006). One key policy dilemma relates to investing in higher education versus investing in high quality vocational/technical training related to Vietnam's status as a newly industrializing nation (World Bank 2006). The social demand is clearly for more higher education, given its greater social status, but given the current level of unemployment, or underemployment, of college graduates, should the government's policies be totally driven by social demand? (Sakellarios and Patrinos 2000). The government's aim should be to "provide graduates with the skills necessary to perform effectively in a shifting and developing labour market" (Thang and Quang 2007).

13.10.2.4 Need for a Higher Education Law

Current reforms are reflected in a diverse set of decrees approved in recent years. There is a critical need to codify into one law these various decrees and to establish a vision for the future of higher education in Vietnam reflective of current progressive policies and

ideas. In 2005, the MOET developed a HERA, a blueprint for reform of the system by 2020. This could be the basis for the new Higher Education Law.

13.10.2.5 The Role of Higher Education Research and Development

Currently, the research function of Vietnamese universities is quite weak. There are inadequate incentives to carry on research. In fact, given low salaries, there are strong incentives to increase teaching loads and to do moonlight teaching. Vietnamese professors, for example, have earned very few patents. Clearly it is important for Vietnamese professors to engage in more knowledge production, both to make them more effective teachers and to create usable knowledge (Lindblom 1979). In documents concerning the future of Vietnamese higher education, there is discussion of the need to carry out fundamental research. Given Japan's experience during the period, 1960–1990, when it increased its productivity dramatically, it would seem reasonable for Vietnam to follow the Japanese model at that time, which emphasized technology development, that is, the *application* of expensive basic and fundamental research developed elsewhere.

13.10.2.6 Corruption in Higher Education

Corruption has emerged as a serious issue in Vietnamese higher education (McCormac 2007; Overland 2006c). In 2006, in a shocking development, a local court sentenced a professor to a 3-year prison term for taking bribes from her students. The extremely low salaries of academics in Vietnam opens the door for potential corruption that may take diverse forms. Based on informal surveys and in-depth interviews, McCormac found that cheating was common. He also found corruption related to examinations and admissions. An important part of the current education reform initiative is to eliminate corrupt practices. The court case mentioned suggests that the government is taking this issue seriously.

13.11 Conclusion

There have been dramatic reforms and changes in Vietnamese higher education since the introduction of *Đổi Mới* in 1986. These reforms have been driven by both politics and economics. With Vietnam's notable success in increasing enrollment rates in secondary education (see L.C.L. Viet, Chapter 12), rapid urbanization, solid economic growth, and a large and youthful population, the social demand for higher education has increased dramatically. It has been politically important for Vietnam to respond effectively to that demand.

With Vietnam's joining ASEAN in 1997 and becoming part of AFTA (ASEAN Free Trade Area), becoming a member of the WTO in 2007, and its aspiration to

become a dynamic Asia-Pacific economic tiger, it has been imperative to improve its higher education sector to provide the human resources to make Vietnam competitive in an increasingly globalized economy.

The major element of Vietnam's reform of higher education has been *diversification*, both in terms of funding for higher education and types of higher education offered to the Vietnamese people. Prior to *Đổi Mới*, higher education was entirely financed and provided by the government. Currently many additional interrelated stakeholders are involved in providing higher education including private individuals and their families (tuition payments), private universities (both nonprofit and for profit), international universities, and international development agencies. As the result of diversification, the Vietnamese higher education system has expanded dramatically and Vietnamese students have many more choices (Sen 1999).

Vietnam has declared the goal of becoming a knowledge-based society by the year 2020 (Ngo 2001). The key challenge to Vietnam's higher education system is to improve its quality in the years ahead. Vietnam has the opportunity to leapfrog in its aspiration to become a knowledge-based society. Its recent agreements with MIT, Rice University, and the government of the Netherlands in the software and IT areas suggest it is indeed poised to leapfrog.

Another important dimension of Vietnam's success is its commitment to *growth with equity* (Banschab and Klump 2007; Klump 2007). While inequalities have certainly increased in recent years, the level of Vietnam's inequality both as a nation as a whole and in the higher education sector is low compared to many other developing nations.

Thomas Rohlen, an anthropologist who studies Japan, states that this nation is distinctive in its "devotion to the idea that self-cultivation through the disciplined pursuit of knowledge is the path to human perfection." The same mindset exists among many Vietnamese with their high motivation to learn and to study, reflected in the quotation of Ho Chi Minh at the beginning of this chapter. Vietnam is indeed an ascending dragon (Kamm 1996). Its commitment to higher education expansion and reform and realization of quality improvements is crucial to its becoming an integral part of what has been termed an "Asian Renaissance," a region of dynamism and creativity (Gill, et al. 2007).

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