Education in Vietnam
The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) was established as an autonomous organization in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute’s research programmes are the Regional Economic Studies (RES, including ASEAN and APEC), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS).

ISEAS Publishing, an established academic press, has issued more than 2,000 books and journals. It is the largest scholarly publisher of research about Southeast Asia from within the region. ISEAS Publishing works with many other academic and trade publishers and distributors to disseminate important research and analyses from and about Southeast Asia to the rest of the world.

The Vietnam Update is a series of annual conferences that focus on recent economic, political and social conditions in Vietnam and provide in-depth analysis on a theme of particular relevance to Vietnam’s socio-economic development. The first Vietnam Update was held at the Australian National University in 1990. In recent years, the series has been organized in conjunction with ISEAS.

The Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS) is Australia’s pre-eminent centre for research and postgraduate training on the Asia-Pacific region. Priority areas of the School are Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific. There are nine major disciplines represented in the School: Anthropology, Archaeology, Economics, History, Human Geography, International Relations, Linguistics, Political Science and Strategic & Defence Studies. One of the four original research schools that formed The Australian National University when it was established in 1946, RSPAS has maintained a strong record of research excellence.
Education in Vietnam

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FOREWORD

Few concerns are of greater importance in Vietnam than education. It could be characterized as the unifying preoccupation of that country. Today, more personal and public resources are devoted to education than to almost any other comparable form of social activity; nearly every citizen has experienced schooling at some level. Education has been integral to Vietnam’s history and remains central to its people’s identity and aspirations for the future. For years, fierce debates have raged over the quality, accessibility, direction and management of education. The debates reveal dissatisfactions that are expressed more openly than perhaps in any other sector of society. However, all protagonists in Vietnam’s perennial education debates are united by the passionate belief that education is critical to individual advancement and to the wellbeing of the nation.

The pressure on education to serve as a vehicle of individual and collective advancement is more acute than ever as the society becomes more complex and globally integrated. Major changes have occurred in the funding of education, and a host of reforms undertaken in curriculum design, examination procedures, teacher training, and educational administration. Private and foreign schools have entered the educational marketplace and the number of Vietnamese seeking education overseas continues to soar. Today Vietnamese people face unprecedented educational choices, but also substantial risks and costs. Do parents and students feel this is money well spent? Are their opinions being heard at policy levels? Is education meeting the needs of its diverse population and satisfying the expectations of its employers, civil service and social organizations?
Can it be said that educational achievement is fostering social mobility in Vietnam?

The 2007 Vietnam Update was organized to respond to these questions. Held at the Australian National University, it was titled: “Education in Vietnam: Changes and Challenges”. The majority of the proposals submitted in response to the call for papers were from Vietnamese academics, reflecting the keen debate on education that is presently underway in Vietnam. Six of the invited speakers were from Vietnam. The remainder were specialists on education in Vietnam from other countries. The Update consisted of sessions on educational financing, the political economy of education reform, skills training, school case studies, and higher education. The audience members included development specialists, public servants, diplomats, journalists, academics, university students and NGO workers.

This book is the product of that workshop and it is fitting to acknowledge the many organizations and individuals who provided the financial and logistical support that made it possible. Funding for speakers from Vietnam and for the bulk of the workshop expenses was provided by the Australian overseas aid agency, AusAID. The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, covered the travel costs of the remaining speakers. Additional support for organization of the workshop was provided by the four units of the College of Asia and the Pacific, ANU, that co-operated to host the 2007 Update.

Particular thanks must go to Thai Duy Bao who acted as the convener of the Update. David Marr drafted the call for papers, provided detailed comments on individual papers, and chaired the wrap-up discussion. Ben Kerkvliet secured and oversaw the Update funding. The academic organizing committee also included Li Tana, Ashley Carruthers, and Philip Taylor of the Australian National University, and David Koh and Russell Heng of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. The real work of organizing, however, was done by the capable team of Oanh Collins, Lyn Ning, Pham Thu Thuy, and Lynne Payne, who handled the many logistical arrangements with great professionalism.

Jonathan London’s offer to edit the Update volume was enthusiastically welcomed by the organizing committee. This book is the end result of years of his dedicated and patient efforts. Jonathan wishes to thank Ngo Tuyet Lan and Jennifer Eagleton, at City University of Hong Kong, for
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