

Education in Vietnam

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Education in Vietnam

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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<i>About the Contributors</i>	xi
1. Education in Vietnam: Historical Roots, Recent Trends <i>Jonathan D. London</i>	1
2. Historical Welfare Regimes and Education in Vietnam <i>Jonathan D. London</i>	57
3. Education, Education Finance, and the Economy <i>Jim Cobbe</i>	104
4. Market-oriented Education: Private (People-Founded) Upper-Secondary Schools in Hanoi <i>Trần Thị Bích Liễu</i>	132
5. School Dropout Trends in Vietnam from 1998 to 2006 <i>Bùi Thái Quyên</i>	152
6. “They Think We Don’t Value Schooling”: Paradoxes of Education in the Multi-Ethnic Central Highlands of Vietnam <i>Trương Huyền Chi</i>	171

7. Higher Education in Vietnam: Boundaries of Autonomy <i>Elizabeth St. George</i>	212
8. Challenges to Higher Education Reform: A University Management Perspective <i>Nguyễn Minh Hồng</i>	237
9. Market-led Globalization and Higher Education: The Case of Đà Nẵng University <i>Hồ Vũ Khuê Ngọc</i>	259
10. Research Institutions, Industry, and Sustainable Development <i>Marea Fatseas</i>	277
11. WTO Accession, Socioeconomic Transformation, and Skills Development Strategies in Vietnam <i>Alexandre Dormeier Freire</i>	299
<i>Index</i>	327

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

their assistance on research and copy-editing respectively, and Bui Thai Quyen for her assistance with research and data collection in Hanoi. The academics whom he asked to read and comment on some of the chapters include Vu Quang Viet, Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Jonathan Pincus, David Marr, Ben Kerkvliet, and Philip Taylor. Jonathan wishes also to thank the contributors for their receptiveness to undertaking multiple revisions.

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