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HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

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HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

CHANGE AND RESPONSE

EDITED BY

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for Higher and Vocational Education*



Indochina Unit
INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

Cover Photograph

*The bronze statue of Ho Chi Minh as teacher
that stands in front of the French colonial city hall
in Ho Chi Minh City symbolizes
Vietnam's commitment to education*

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*This book is dedicated to
increased international understanding
through higher education
as exemplified by the growth in
Vietnamese-Australian relationships
during the past decade
and to Alison Sloper
and Tran Tuyet Nhung, our wives,
who as frequent research
and conference widows,
have contributed much to this ideal*

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FOREWORD

This study of Vietnam's higher education structure and system is both *unique* and *necessary*. It provides detailed data and critical analysis not previously available to readers outside Vietnam and it is *unique* by virtue of the quality of the writing being ideologically objective. It is a *necessary* report in the sense that Vietnam is today embarking on a new era of educational, scientific, and commercial co-operation with many countries and, accordingly, it is especially important to understand both her present situation and future aspirations for higher education.

The book contains material pertinent to a basic understanding of the historical and polyglot background to the development of Vietnam's higher education system and its more recent metamorphosis. It contains professional analysis and objective expositions of key problems currently impacting on the installation of a modern and effective system of higher education so necessary to propel Vietnam into a position where it can eventually stand intellectually and economically as an equal with its neighbours. It is especially rewarding that a publication of this genre has been compiled by key Vietnamese personnel, located in the highest echelons of both "party and pedagogy". Such a book accordingly has the imprimatur of authenticity and presents the latest, best, and most accurate of sensitive data, much of which would be available only in Vietnamese, perhaps if at all. *Ipsa facto*, it indubitably contains what might be otherwise described as "privileged information" not easily or freely accessible within Vietnam and cer-

tainly not normally available to an international readership. The book is particularly pertinent in that it covers a range of current issues, discusses a variety of persistent structural problems, and shares with readers some of the aspirations of the government for the future of higher education in Vietnam. The compositions, as readers will find for themselves, are elegantly written with flair and sophistication. In addition, the book should be seen as an important intellectual signpost representing a major step in the difficult progression of higher education for a society that has suffered political trauma and social incoherence for much of the past half century. The patina of ideology is generally absent in the writing and refreshingly so in today's age where openness should not be a rationed commodity in intellectual or scientific circles to which universities of international standards surely aspire.

This book comes at a particular time when Vietnam is at a crucial crossroads in terms of both its economic and political orientation. Since 1986 when the government's policy of *doi moi*, "renovation", was first proclaimed, Vietnam has struggled to accept the realities of changing global practicalities and take advantage of the more open climate and accommodation at last engendered towards it by other nations. Accordingly, in comparative-international terms the state will have to face challenging issues in higher education, namely, massive structural reorganization at the same time as its struggles to equitably allocate its modest resources for a rapidly growing and demanding population. The universalization of primary, and eventually secondary education, is a necessary goal that needs to be set more carefully in place, thus ensuring an effective future linkage with both further and higher education. While pragmatism and improvisation may have been keys to the maintenance of a constricted system of higher education during the past two decades, since reunification in 1975, they cannot be used as excuses for the coming decades. This situation is now clearly recognized by the government and Vietnam has greatly benefited by the more recent attention and contribution of a range of international agencies providing both intellectual expertise and concrete material support.

The particular style of objective, detailed, and critical inputs provided by all those who have contributed the various chapters in this book is perhaps the most tangible reflection of the open attitudes that

are now prevailing within those circles entrusted in giving intellectual leadership currently to the renovation and expansion of higher education taking place in Vietnam. From a personal as well as professional perspective, it is proper that regional countries such as Australia, amongst others, are now taking a prominent place in participating co-operatively in the strengthening or upgrading of Vietnamese higher education. This is increasingly manifest in the number of contacts, exchanges, and programmes inaugurated in recent years between Australian and Vietnamese academics, scientists, and the various universities and research institutions that they represent. The co-operative process is a mutual one involving the sharing of a range of scientific expertise and practical experience whose territorial boundaries are not immutable. *Higher Education in Vietnam: Change and Response*, a joint research effort by Australian and Vietnamese academics published by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, is a practical expression of this style of concord. It should auger well for the next edition of this work when the process of *doi moi* is more fully extended and its results thoroughly evaluated. Hopefully this will be well before the commencement of the next millennium.

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The contribution of the authors, numbers of whom are ministers and senior officials of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), is greatly appreciated for all of them lead busy professional lives. While the exposition of higher education in Vietnam and its continuing development are properly their responsibility, we recognize the vital stimulus these endeavours received through the Education Sector Review and Human Resources Analysis Project. This project, strongly supported by Professor Tran Hong Quan and actively led by Professor Pham Minh Hac with expert assistance from Mr Baudouin

Duvieusart of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as Task Manager and Dr Doran Bernard as Chief Technical Adviser, has created a framework for the modernization of education and training in Vietnam.

Finally, we acknowledge the support given David Sloper through a 1993 joint programme award of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and the National Centre for Social Sciences of Vietnam. This award and the access to research facilities provided by the NRIHVE, its Director, Professor Dang Ba Lam, and his colleagues enabled this book to be written.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIT	Asian Institute of Technology
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AY	Academic year
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
COM	Council of Ministers
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
FAO	United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
ESR	Education Sector Review and Human Resources Analysis Project, 1991–92
GDP	Gross domestic product
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GNP	Gross national product
MIS	Management Information System
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOSTE	Ministry of Science, Technology, and the Environment
NA	National Assembly
NCAE	National Centre for Atomic Energy
NCSS	National Centre for the Social Sciences of Vietnam
NGO	Non-governmental organization

NIES	National Institute for Educational Sciences
NRIHVE	National Research Institute for Higher and Vocational Education
NWG	National Working Group
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
R & D	Research and Development
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SCST	State Committee for Science and Technology
SPC	State Planning Committee
SRI	State research institute
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNE	University of New England, Armidale, NSW, Australia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNESCO/PROAP	UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Map of Vietnam
Provincial Boundaries and Principal Cities, 1990

