

Higher Education in Vietnam

Flexibility, Mobility and Practicality in the
Global Knowledge Economy

Lý Thị Trần,
Simon Marginson,
Hoàng Minh Đỗ,
Quyên Thị Ngọc Đỗ,
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Thạch Ngọc Phạm,
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with

Tiên Thị Hạnh Hồ



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Palgrave Studies in Global Higher Education

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HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

Flexibility, Mobility and Practicality in the Global Knowledge Economy

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Higher Education in Vietnam

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2014 978-1-137-43647-4

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First published 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978-1-349-49346-3 ISBN 978-1-137-43648-1 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137436481

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book had its genesis in a Vietnam Reading Group set up in early 2010 at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, Australia. At the time a number of doctoral students from Vietnam, mostly from Hanoi-based universities, were working at the University of Melbourne. The Group consisted of these students, Lý Thị Trần, who had previously completed a doctorate in Melbourne, and Melbourne academic staff with an interest in Vietnam. Subsequently more doctoral students came from Vietnam to the Centre for the Study of Higher Education and joined the Group, as did another doctoral student from Victoria University.

After two years of fruitful, enjoyable and constructive discussions of readings from the literature, it was decided at the end of 2011 to attempt the production of a full-length research-based original book focused directly on issues and problems of higher education in Vietnam. The Group was and is strongly motivated by a desire to contribute to the lifting of higher education and research in Vietnam. Education and research were and are seen as integral to national development and defence and to the forward influence of Vietnam in the world.

In much of East Asia, higher education is improving fast, as was studied by the Group in its pre-book discussions. In most countries participation is growing, institutions are lifting in quality, research papers in science and technology are multiplying and world-class universities are rising. These changes are blending East Asian traditions in education, state and society, with newer themes of modernization, openness and closer global engagement, and with internationalization programmes that are opening national education systems to transformation, while at the same time maintaining and developing national identity. However, education and research in Vietnam are not progressing in the mode of rapid development that characterizes Korea, China, Taiwan and Singapore, or Japan at an earlier time. 'Why is this so?' we asked. In the preparation of this book, we sought to identify the barriers that have been holding back Vietnamese higher education, and the steps needed to lift its contribution to the nation.

Part of the problem is too much dependence on educational traditions inherited from the past and part of it lies in dead-weight political

habits that have emerged more recently. But governance and tradition also provide essential resources, provided that they are used creatively and flexibly, and are continually developed in terms of national needs. We believe that higher education in Vietnam should embody the best traditions of Vietnam, while at the same time it should be modernizing, incorporating the best ideas about education from around the world, in the cosmopolitan manner that was practised by President Hồ Chí Minh. Using this creative hybrid approach, national tradition is continually modernized, and the best of the past continues into the future, while at the same time national development takes a Vietnamese character.

The approach is summarized in the book's central themes: flexibility, practicality and mobility. These themes are seen as integral to the history of the Vietnamese nation with its striving always for independence and freedom. At the same time, the principles of flexibility, practicality and mobility provide us with continuing guidance today as we respond to the challenges of national evolution; the expansion, reform and advance of the educational system; and global integration.

It was decided to adopt an approach to existing practice that was both critical and constructive. We saw ourselves as supporting national effort, and understanding the conditions and limitations facing government and the education system, while hoping for the best. We also set out to be open and fearless in identifying problems and areas that needed improvement.

It was also decided that our method of preparing the book should be consistent with the collective approach that is part of national tradition, so as to maximize the contributions of every member of the Group. We planned the book in outline together, identifying chapters and authors. The small author groups responsible for each chapter prepared detailed plans and first drafts and brought the texts back to the whole group for ongoing discussion. The first draft of the opening chapter began in May 2012 and that chapter was not finalized until early 2013 after a number of full-length discussions of its contents, in which many new ideas emerged. Chapter drafting took more than 15 months, with chapters 9–11 the last to be discussed by the Group.

The first named author for each chapter contributed the majority of the writing of the first draft of the chapter with the other named authors contributing lesser amounts. However, responsibility for authorship does not stop there. All chapters aside from Chapter 10 were thoroughly discussed in Group meetings and were changed as a result of those discussions. Almost every individual member of the Group contributed materially to each chapter during the processes of discussion

of drafts, followed by redrafting and further discussions. The book is a genuinely collective product, grounded in consensual agreement. All the named authors on the front of the book take responsibility for the contents of the chapters.

The authors' names on the front of the book have been placed in the order they appear in the chapters. The order of names does not represent a hierarchy of importance or reflect inequalities in contributions to the book. All are essentially equal as authors, though publishing and citation conventions require that the names be used in one order on a consistent basis.

In the exceptional case of Chapter 10, Tiên Thị Hạnh Hồ did not take part in the Group discussions during production of the book and has no responsibility for chapters other than her own work on Vocational Education and Training (VET). Therefore she is not named as one of the book's authors. We are very grateful to Tiên for contributing a chapter on VET that complements the rest of the book. While the book is predominantly focused on universities and other higher education institutions, we recognize that the topics of some chapters, such as those on internationalization, governance and the student self, are equally relevant in vocational training. We did not have a comprehensive set of data on vocational training to match our material on higher education, but Tiên's chapter goes part of the way in redressing the lack. Chapter 10 was reviewed by the whole group, and all authors are happy to endorse it.

We are grateful to Oanh Dương, Alan Williams, Cate Gribble and Melissa Barnes who contributed to meetings of the Vietnam Reading Group before and in the early stages of the production of the book. We thank Hiệp Hùng Phạm who provided the first critical review of the book manuscript. Hiệp's tremendous knowledge of higher education and government in Vietnam resulted in a number of significant improvements to the text. We also thank the anonymous reviewer of the manuscript, our constructive Palgrave publisher Andrew James, the coordinators of the Palgrave book series Roger King, Rajani Naidoo and Jenny Lee, our skillful production manager Arvinth Kumar.

We also thank Richard James and Sophie Arkoudis, who were directors of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) at the University of Melbourne during 2010–2013. The CSHE provided administrative support and hosted Group meetings over the four-year period, besides housing the doctoral studies of the majority of the book's authors. At one point Richard joked that the CSHE was becoming the 'Centre for the Study of Vietnamese Higher Education'! We also thank Leo Goedegebuure who directs the LH Martin Institute for Higher Education

Leadership and Management that is located alongside CSHE. Meetings of the Vietnam Reading Group were held in the LH Martin Board Room.

We also thank our families for their great support during the book project, and in all our work, and for the happiness that our children bring. One of us (Thảo Thị Phương Vũ) gave birth to a daughter just after completing the consolidated reference list at the end of the book – and revised the references only three weeks after the birth. Our children make us more optimistic about the future and explain why we do work such as this. People do not exist to fulfil the needs of structures. Structures exist to fulfil the needs of people. Our growing children remind us how important it is that higher education in Vietnam be as good as humanly possible.

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Introduction

1

Education for Flexibility, Practicality and Mobility

Lý Thị Trần and Simon Marginson

Introduction

Vietnam is a country of over 90 million people, the third largest nation in Southeast Asia after Indonesia and the Philippines, and with more people than any European country except Russia. Though parts of the country are very fertile, it includes challenging mountainous terrain, and some agricultural land is still recovering from military despoliation. The people include 54 ethnic groups. The largest group, the Kinh, is dominant in the principal cities of Hà Nội and Hồ Chí Minh. Vietnam also includes more than four million citizens living, working and studying abroad, an important resource with a continuing connection to the country.

After a long period of warfare, in which the land was invaded and partly occupied by Japan, France, the principal colonial power, and the United States, Vietnam finally achieved national unification and found its unchallengeable place in the world with the defeat of the American army in 1975, the first military reverse ever inflicted on the leading global power. This repeated the earlier success of the Đại Việt 1000 years before, in achieving independence after a long invasion by the greatest power of the time, China. As the founder of the modern nation, President Hồ Chí Minh stated: 'Không có gì quý hơn độc lập tự do' [Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom]. In winning the American war, Vietnamese people, men, women and children demonstrated great bravery, determination, flexibility, practicality and the deep ability to work together for a common goal.

The newly unified Vietnam stabilized its southwestern border with Cambodia in 1978, beat back a land invasion from China in the north in 1979 and began the long process of national reconstruction, the

modernization of the nation and the creation of a better and more fulfilling life for its families. Today Vietnam has an expanding and increasingly open economy and the nation has a growing role in East Asia and the world. The task now is for Vietnam to make the best use of its independence and freedom: to work with the determination of the war years to make up for the time lost during the wars; to use, develop and change Vietnam's national traditions to best effect; and especially to augment its individual and collective human resources which are the ultimate source of economic value, and of technological and social development. To catch up with other nations in the region and in the world. To make a better future for all. And in the global knowledge economy in which all nations now find themselves, higher education and research are especially important in building the emerging nation.

Education and Vietnam

Not all great leaders survive the test of time, but President Hồ Chí Minh remains a source of both inspiration and ideas for national development, more than 40 years after his death. Hồ Chí Minh was known as 'the teacher' [Người Thầy]. He was well aware that education is the key to a better future, for individuals, for their communities and for the nation as a whole. Vietnam has a long tradition of commitment to learning, which is part of the Confucian cultural heritage that Hồ Chí Minh valued, although he was also aware of its limitations. Teachers are held in high esteem by Vietnamese parents and children, which is both part of the Confucian tradition and one of the keys to the future. In a globalizing world, education and research are the keys to the continuous process of adapting to technology that is a continuous part of modern economies, and education and research also facilitate adaptation and reform in government. When society becomes more educated and at a higher level, government becomes more open, transparent and accountable. Hồ Chí Minh's love for learning is increasingly right for Vietnam. The future quality of education, training and research will decide the knowledge and skills of the people and shape the life of every person, and the place of the nation in a globalizing world. In a sense, everything depends on modernizing and improving education. It cannot substitute for good government, smarter industry and productive work, but it helps make them possible.

This book will centre on the reform of Vietnam's tertiary education, focusing largely on universities and other higher education institutions, and their research activities, with some discussion also of technical and vocational education. In this chapter and this book, we argue for a

system of higher education and tertiary training that enables the development of *flexible, practical* and *mobile* citizens, one that is also founded in a flexible, practical and mobile view of knowledge so as to best equip Vietnam for the challenges of an ever-changing world.

In this book we argue that the reform of the higher education system in Vietnam needs to both modernize and change where change is needed, *while also* drawing on the nation's traditional strengths. Both national tradition and modern challenges emphasize the need for flexibility, practicality and mobility as core national virtues. The sections that follow discuss how Vietnamese history of thousands of years has been the cradle for the nurturing of 'flexibility' and 'practicality' as national characteristics, and how 'mobility' has emerged as an increasingly important dimension of Vietnam's way of life in the period of modernization. With this as background, we go on to critically ask the crucial question of the chapter: 'Does the higher education system address the demands of the nation and people within the global age?' The later chapters in the book will further develop and discuss answers to this crucial question.

Flexibility and practicality as principles of life

The notions of flexibility and practicality have evolved naturally in Vietnam, and the development and flourishing of flexible people and social organization are rooted in Vietnamese survival and culture. This section explores how the concepts of flexibility and practicality are interrelated with basic principles underpinning Vietnamese culture, including the strands of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism in that culture, and have also been shaped by Vietnam's history against foreign invasion. Likewise, flexibility and practicality have been integral to government-led responses to social and economic changes since the unification of the whole country in 1975 and the opening up of the economy in 1986.

Vietnamese culture and religions

Notions of flexibility and practicality, and also forms of communism, were always at the heart of Vietnamese traditional ways of living and engaging with the surrounding world. In this sense, Vietnam is an agriculture-based society (Trần, 1999, 2009). Farmers' life and well-being are largely dependent on nature. It has always been essential for Vietnamese farmers conditioned by the paddy rice civilization to draw on the collective strength and solidarity of the whole community in

order to protect crops from natural disasters such as flood, storm and drought. Vietnamese farmers' ways of cultivating and living need to be flexible, practical and communally oriented in response to the constant and uncertain changes of nature for effective agricultural cultivation. In addition, the communal virtue also shapes the individual's unwavering commitment to maintain harmony with oneself. The 'flexible' life philosophy of 'ở bầu thì tròn, ở ống thì dài' [Live in a gourd, you grow round. Live in a tube, you grow long] and 'khéo ăn thì no, khéo co thì ấm' [Those who know how to eat will have their fill, those who know how to use a blanket will be warm], which refers to efforts to flexibly adapt to a particular circumstance, has been cultivated and developed throughout the agriculture-based culture. This logic of thinking and behaving has contributed to a tendency to be adaptable, which is now an essential resource in the transition to a more industrial and urban society.

Buddhism is the most common religion in Vietnam, and flexibility is one of the fundamental principles underpinning Buddhist ideology. Flexibility is embraced in the Buddhist idea of 'Tùy duyên bất biến' – acting flexibly depending on particular situations without losing one's identity and core values [Thuận theo hoàn cảnh mà xử sự, nhưng không đánh mất bản tính của mình]. The aspiration cherished in this primary principle of Buddhism 'tùy duyên bất biến' can itself be regarded as a very Vietnamese concept. It embraces flexibility, fluidity, adaptability and practicality in response to new demands and changes in life and society instead of being rigid and static. This principle has drawn on opposite integration to guide people on how to engage with the community and the world around. In the light of this opposite integration, people are advised to nurture flexible attitudes and adaptive ways of life [tùy duyên] but at the same time retain their own identity, core values and self-determination [bất biến]. Emphatically, this principle does not encourage either sole flexibility or rigid adherence to basic beliefs. This Buddhist idea integrates opposites that can exist in an integrated whole: flexibility while embracing identity, aspiration and self-determination.

The way that Vietnamese people are oriented to flexibility, and thus the way they engage with the world, is also influenced by Taoism. The essence of Taoist belief is the harmonization between human beings and nature. Taoism has found its place in Vietnamese culture because it matches with characteristics of Vietnamese agricultural life and the tendency to maintain harmonization in ways of life of the Vietnamese. Flexibility and practicality as primary features of Vietnamese agricultural

life are intimately related to the *yin-yang* principle (Tran, 1999, p. 59), which focuses on the flexible relationship and balance between different factors containing *yin* and *yang* in life. The *yin-yang* principle is bound to both the ‘dynamic whole’ and the ‘harmony of opposites’ (Soo, 1981, cited in Luk-Fong, 2005).

In essence, flexibility, practicality and harmony – modern principles on which an education system can be built – fit with Vietnamese ways of seeing and making sense of the world. Vietnamese people learn to value these principles all their lives.

Vietnamese people have also been flexible in adapting Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism and Taoism, and religions such as Buddhism, to ensure that these principles can be made suitable to the way of living and spiritual life of the Vietnamese. These systems of thought have been Vietnamized so as to leave out or adapt those elements that are rigid, involve essentialist beliefs, or do not match well with nature, Vietnamese cultural heritage, Vietnamese tradition or Vietnamese core values. For example, Confucianism is the product of Chinese feudalism and as such it encourages patriarchal behaviour and absolute loyalty to the ruler [*Trung*]. This appears to be opposed to the idea of freedom for the grass roots, and the idea of national liberation from imperial control. So the Confucian idea has been adapted and changed in Vietnam. In Vietnam, ‘loyalty to a monarch was conditional upon his success in defending national territory’ (Vietnam-political culture, 2012). Furthermore, ‘trung, hiếu’ has been Vietnamized to be in line with the nation’s political agenda, ‘trung với nước hiếu với dân’ [loyal to the Nation, pious to the People].

Trần Đình Hượu (2009) concludes that the Vietnamese traditional approach towards national, community and personal development is *to ‘du nhập và linh hoạt ứng dụng’*, meaning importing and flexibly adapting foreign values. It is imperative for Vietnam to capitalize on these traditional strengths and continue to adapt and marry foreign ideas relevant to the national context, blending them with the distinctive features of Vietnamese culture. This is how an evolving Vietnamese identity can be created for modern times.

Many well-regarded scholars of Vietnamese culture and history have emphasized that flexibility is central to Vietnamese cultural identity (for example, Trần Quốc Vượng and Trần Đình Hượu). The saying ‘Biết nhu biết cương biết công biết thủ’ (Trần, 2000) [knowing when to be gentle and tough, when to attack and defend] reflects the flexibility and adaptability of the Vietnamese people and the Vietnamese way of living and national culture. According to Trần Đình Hượu (2009), the three

essential features of Vietnamese culture include practicality, flexibility and harmony. The author contended that the aspiration for remarkable creativity may not be visible in Vietnamese culture. What is central to Vietnamese culture is sensitivity, flexibility and adaptability to deal with challenges in life and to maintain harmony.

Flexibility and practicality as featured in history against foreign invasion

Resilience, solidarity, self-determination, flexibility and practicality are interwoven with the national history of more than 4000 years. This history has consisted of numerous campaigns against foreign invasion and domination. Resilience and human solidarity have enabled the whole nation to sustain long-lasting fights for peace, independence and unification and to rebuild the country again and again after devastating wars. Coupled with the Vietnamese nationalist spirit, the Vietnamese people's commitment to self-determination, agency and flexible response has been demonstrated not only in war time but also in the current modernization of the country.

The so-called art and science of war – the strategy of flexible response [tác chiến linh hoạt] (Đào, 2012) – is important in military conflict. It has been even more fundamental for Vietnam's army throughout the country's national history, due to its unique military circumstances. Being a small nation in the Southeast Asian region, Vietnam experienced Chinese incursion for over 1000 years, French colonization for almost a century and American occupation for nearly 30 years. The Vietnamese had to tactically live with and fight against much stronger opponents in order to protect territorial integrity and achieve independence. According to the military analyst and colonel Đào Văn Đệ (2012), the capability to foresee opportunities and respond flexibly and practically to the emergent opportunities – by developing suitable and timely strategies that place the enemy in a situation that they find unexpected, confusing and complicating to cope with – is the key to Vietnam's victory during the war with America. On the occasion of the 37th celebration of the reunification of the country on 30 April 2012, *The People's Army*, the leading magazine of the Vietnamese army, had a special issue devoted to reflecting and analysing the factors underpinning victory in the war with America. Amongst these factors, the military art of acting flexibly, practically and correctly to changing circumstances during the war was identified as primary (Quân Đội Nhân Dân, *The People's Army*, 2012).

This conversation between the American Colonel Summers and Vietnamese Colonel Tu on 25 April 1975 in Hanoi, five days before the

reunification of the country, implicitly conveys the enormous significance of 'flexibility' and 'practicality' in deciding victory in the war:

'You know you never defeated us on the battlefield,' said the American colonel.

The Vietnamese colonel pondered this remark a moment. 'That may be so,' he replied, 'but it is so irrelevant.'

Conversation in Hanoi, April 1975

(cited in Summers, 1984, p. 1)

The American colonel still maintained the ideology of conventional warfare, where logistics and weaponry were decisive on the battlefield. This principle was irrelevant to the context of the anti-America war, which was a people's war or guerrilla war. The guerrilla war tactic was the flexible, practical and relevant response to an enemy that was much stronger in terms of logistics and weaponry. Most Vietnamese civilians were mobilized in active participation in the course of warfare on different fronts, including the political, cultural, economic and agricultural, not just on the battlefield. The reunification of the country was the triumph of the persistent struggles of the Vietnamese people, together with a flexible and practical military strategy, cultivated in nationalism and Vietnamese patriotic tradition. This was successful against the most advanced modern weaponry. It again illustrates how flexibility and practicality have been nurtured and developed in Vietnam's history and way of life.

Mobility as a dimension of Vietnamese tradition

Mobility is multi-dimensional. It involves not only physical mobility, but also regional mobility, virtual mobility and cross-border intellectual mobility including the mobility of ideas. Physical mobility is the more traditional idea, and often links to a sense of locality, while intellectual and virtual mobility appears to be more fluid and open-ended. The mobility of knowledge is remarkable. Many learned skills can be applied in a flexible way in different jobs; and knowledge itself is exceptionally mobile, flowing across national borders and between different fields of human activity. Ideas and information that emerge in one domain are often used in others. Skill mobility, and especially intellectual and virtual mobility, has emerged more strongly in response to the current stage of modernization and globalization. But all forms of mobility are becoming more important in an ever-changing world.

The virtue of mobility has been nurtured in Vietnamese life and is particularly embraced in our aspiration to enrich knowledge and develop a well-rounded human being. Physical mobility and intellectual mobility are interconnected, as reflected in well-known Vietnamese sayings: ‘Đi cho biết đó biết đây. Ở nhà với mẹ biết ngày nào khôn’ and ‘Đi một ngày đàng, học một sàng khôn’ [travelling forms a young man]. Criticism of those who are immobile and do not attempt to enhance their learning is shown in the Vietnamese proverbs ‘Ếch ngồi đáy giếng’ [the frog at the bottom of the well] and ‘An phận thủ thường’ [feeling smug about one’s present circumstance/rest on one’s laurels]. Therefore, in Vietnamese tradition, along with flexibility and practicability, the notion of mobility has been nurtured in relation to the desire to continue learning from the broader world, and the desire to perfect oneself.

Yet mobility as a Vietnamese traditional virtue has also been gender-biased and male-oriented. Traditionally, the man was expected to travel beyond the ‘village bamboo’ to increase his understanding of the world outside and thus become a ‘real man’. This belief is demonstrated in the following folklore, which are also common lullabies:

Làm trai cho đáng nên trai
 Xuống đông đông tĩnh, lên Đoài Đoài yên
 [As a man, be worth a man
 Pacifying east and west, wherever you go]
 Làm trai cho đáng nên trai,
 Phú Xuân đã trải, Đồng Nai cũng từng
 [As a man, be worth a man
 Phu Xuan, Dong Nai, you surely have gone]

Such male-oriented mobility is consistent with not only traditional Vietnamese male-dominated society but also the history of resistance wars, where it was most often males who were mobilized to join the army. The lifestyle embedded in male-oriented mobility reflects ‘chí làm trai thời chinh chiến’, that is, the determination and responsibility of men to engage in mobility and sacrifice their lives for their homeland’s peace and justice. However, in the current time, women and men engage in mobility more equally, given that priority for travelling is more linked to opportunities rather than responsibilities and given that families are smaller than in the past, because of which some families may have only daughters.

Mobility has been an effective tactic, in connection with flexibility, in our history of wars against foreign domination. Mobility features as a necessary dimension in certain well-known strategies and campaigns of the anti-American war: Chiến thuật đánh nhanh rút gọn [quick attack, prompt withdrawal], vườn không nhà trống [vacant garden, empty house], đường mòn Hồ Chí Minh [Hồ Chí Minh Trail] including đường mòn Trường Sơn [Trường Sơn Trail] and đường mòn Trường Sơn trên biển [Trường Sơn sea route], bếp Hoàng Cầm [Hoàng Cầm mobile kitchen], chiến dịch hành quân liên tục and đánh du kích [continual operations and guerrilla attacks]. Mobility was the core principle in building mobile temporary military bases, organizing mobile military forces and sustaining a mobile supply line for the war against the American army.

The internal and transnational mobility and mobilization of nationalist spirit is reflected in the protests of the Vietnamese both within the country and from over 30 cities around the world against China's illegal deployment of the Haiyang Shiyou 981 oil rig inside Vietnam's exclusive economic zone near Vietnam's Paracel Islands. Vietnam mobilizes the patriotism of the Vietnamese from all walks of life including Vietnamese overseas students and expatriates as well as the support of international communities and peace-lovers against China's incursion into its maritime zones and China's nine-dash line claim to almost the entire South China Sea (Taylor, 2014; Thayer, 2011, 2014). These are examples of how Vietnamese people drew on physical, intellectual and patriotic mobility in order to mobilize manpower, materials and patriotism against foreign invasion.

Mobility in the life of Hồ Chí Minh

Hồ Chí Minh is perhaps the most influential leader throughout the history of Vietnam and is regarded as the symbol of crystallization of Vietnamese traditional values. His life exhibits both Vietnamese patriotism and globally mobile, flexible and cosmopolitan being. Though Hồ Chí Minh was brought up in a family with a strong Confucian tradition, he was able to identify not only the positive aspects of the tradition, but also aspects that were outdated or were not compatible with the patriotic pathway to the independence of Vietnam. He was determined to go abroad so as to enhance his understanding of the world and better develop a suitable agenda to protect the nation against colonialism and foreign domination. That agenda drew flexibly on both nationalism and socialism. Hồ Chí Minh revealed 'tự do cho đồng bào tôi, độc lập cho tổ quốc tôi' [freedom for my people, independence for my country]

(Nguyễn, 2011) as the ultimate aspiration underpinning his need to be globally mobile and to learn in a flexible manner about the world, its values and its knowledge.

In particular, Hồ Chí Minh believed that in order to work out the right strategy to lead the Vietnamese to freedom, it was imperative to understand the country that was imposing colonization upon his motherland. While his decision for transnational mobility was based on his commitment to national patriotism, his method was to a certain degree cosmopolitanism-oriented. His transnational mobility enabled him to learn about new values, outside the Confucian tradition he learned in his youth, such as freedom, social justice, humanity, democracy and socialism. These values greatly shaped the so-called Hồ Chí Minh ideology.

Hồ Chí Minh was able to flexibly draw on and harmonize different principles including communism and socialism embraced in Marxism–Leninism, the values underpinning the French revolution ‘Tự do, bình đẳng, bác ái’ [freedom, equality, humanity/charity], the American ideology of freedom especially the spirit of the American Declaration of Independence and Oriental ideologies including Confucianism, Taoism and Vietnamese traditional values. All played a role in developing his guideline for national liberation. His determination to engage in transnational mobility and undertake overseas travels, to learn how to liberate the country, was a very advanced approach compared to that of most other leaders in the early twentieth century.

In sum, his mobility was grounded in an ethno-relative cosmopolitan outlook, an openness to ideas from abroad and the capacity to creatively combine those new ideas with traditional values. These were distinctive virtues of Hồ Chí Minh’s quest for practical knowledge. Vietnamese higher education can build on this approach now. In fact, in a more global age, Hồ Chí Minh’s cosmopolitan and mobile approach is even more necessary than it was in his time.

Dimensions of mobility in modern Vietnam

Mobility has been nurtured in Vietnamese tradition for years, but this principle has become more important in the era of modernization and globalization. There are different dimensions of mobility with implications for the higher education system: regional, social, transnational, cross-sectoral and virtual mobility. The chapters in this book highlight the critical need for Vietnam’s tertiary education, knowledge and skills to respond to current economic and social developments, for example,

issues of skill shortages that are intimately linked to these dimensions of mobility. In particular, the book emphasizes the role of education in facilitating social mobility, overcoming regional and gender disadvantages and inequalities and developing Vietnam in the global context, in which change and mobility are both continuous. It also discusses the way knowledge itself has become much more mobile in the global environment. The nation needs universities in Vietnam that can confidently develop new knowledge of a flexible and practical kind, to meet the needs of economy, society and government, able to be applied in mobile ways across the country. Vietnam also needs many graduates prepared in the skills of research who can make practical use of mobile knowledge flowing into Vietnam from other parts of the world.

Regional and social mobility

Regional mobility is related to the mobility of learners from rural to urban areas and vice versa. Vietnamese learners tend to concentrate in more densely populated urban areas of Vietnam, which has contributed to the inequitable distribution of human resources and economic development in the rural and urban areas of Vietnam. Hà Nội and Hồ Chí Minh City account for about half the total higher education population of the nation. For many students originally from rural and remote communities, a university qualification is associated with the opportunity for themselves and their families to migrate to urban areas and ensure more stable living conditions. In those instances, regional mobility is also social mobility. Many learners from regional universities have relocated and attempted to obtain employment in major cities such as Hà Nội, Hồ Chí Minh and Đà Nẵng.

While the migration of learners from rural to urban areas is very common in Vietnam, from 2011 learners have been granted with incentives to work in the countryside and in mountainous and remote areas as part of the Vietnamese government's agenda to poverty alleviation and sustainable development for Vietnam's countryside. The government issued Decree No. 30 regarding poverty reduction and sustainable development for 62 poor districts. A new initiative of this Decree is the recruitment of 600 young learners to be the Vice Chairs of commune people's committees in 62 regional and remote areas. This initiative was realized through Decision No. 170/QĐ-TTg issued on 26 January 2011 (Nguyen, 2012). The government is according great emphasis on both bringing graduates into regions and getting regional people to bring their skills and knowledge back to the region. The results of this initiative have not yet been confirmed.

Transnational knowledge and skills mobility

In the increasingly globalized world we now live in, Vietnam embraces the opportunity to integrate into the world but faces challenges in gaining recognition throughout the world for Vietnamese skills and knowledge. There are over 60,000 Vietnamese students undertaking overseas study (Runckel, 2009). Further, recent years have witnessed labour migration from Vietnam to foreign countries under the labour despatch programme. According to Mr Pham Viet Huong (2012), Head of Planning and Finance Division, Department of Overseas Labour, Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Vietnam has 500,000 migrant workers abroad. The main labour markets for Vietnam are Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia and Laos. Of the total, 53 per cent work in the services sector and 42 per cent in industries, agriculture and aquaculture (VietNews, 2011).

While unqualified Vietnamese workers working abroad are often appreciated in receiving countries, it is ironic that graduates with a Vietnamese qualification are not valued in the Asian region and around the world. While Vietnamese low-skilled labour is recognized internationally, high-skilled labour is not. Many Vietnamese graduates would like the opportunity to work beyond national borders in the Asian region or around the world but find it very hard to obtain employment outside Vietnam. Many also find it difficult to be recognized as well qualified to work for joint venture and foreign enterprises in Vietnam. Vietnamese enterprises and organizations are often more interested in employing foreigners and foreign-trained Vietnamese graduates. Currently the Vietnamese higher education system and the vocational training system are not producing a well-qualified, flexible and practical workforce that can meet regional and international demands.

Cross-sectoral knowledge and skills mobility

Because of the market economy and Vietnam's changing social and employment structures, many graduates have moved from public-sector to non-public-sector jobs, and many graduates work in areas different from their major discipline. In total, 50 per cent of Vietnamese graduates do not work or have been unable to secure employment in their area of specialization (Hương Giang, 2012).

While this may indicate that Vietnamese higher education is largely isolated from the actual demands of the labour market, and that the mission of Vietnamese higher education needs to be reconsidered, it also has significant implications for flexible capacity building and human resource development in the current context of Vietnam. Higher