

# Some Impacts of France and Us Education on the Higher Education System in South Vietnam (1956-1975)

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**Abstract:** In 1954, America supported Ngo Dinh Diem to establish in South Vietnam the US henchman government with the name of the Republic of Vietnam. The US had made efforts to aid the government of the Republic of Vietnam to strengthen its military, economic and political strength as well as invest in educational development, including higher education to solve the problem of human resource training to serve the “regime” and conduct research on practical issues of social life in South Vietnam to serve American goals. One of the salient features of higher education in South Vietnam is the influence of two trends, French and American education. In the years of 1956-1964, higher education in South Vietnam was heavily influenced by French higher education in terms of system structure, content, training programs and methodologies. Since 1965, the practical values and pragmatism of American higher education have been shaped and become obvious in the higher education model of the Republic of Vietnam. From clarifying the factors affecting the formation of higher education in South Vietnam, the article focuses on explaining some influences of French and American education in geoeducation in South Vietnam on the aspect of system structure. At the same time, the article also gives comments and evaluations on this issue.

**Keywords:** Influence, Highe Eduction, France, America, Republic of Vietnam

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## 1. Introduction

After 1954, the “establishment of the provisional National Assembly for Vietnam” officially established in South Vietnam “a separate nation”. The government of the Republic of Vietnam began the process of educational development, including higher education, in order to solve the problem of training human resources to serve “the nation”. With the aid of the US, since 1956, the government of the Republic of Vietnam had taken basic steps to shape the viewpoints and policies of education construction in South Vietnam. The education system of the government of the Republic of Vietnam was divided into three levels: primary, secondary and higher education. In which, the higher education lasts from 5 to 7 years, and was managed directly by the Undergraduated Division under the Ministry of National Education [1]. The model of higher education in South Vietnam in the period 1956-1975 included a system of public colleges, community colleges, private colleges and several institutions of higher education and training, spreading throughout major cities and a number of provinces such as

Sai Gon, Can Tho, Tien Giang, Khanh Hoa, Da Lat, Hue, etc. Before 1964, the influence of French higher education model in the higher education system of the Republic of Vietnam still prevailed with bold imprints on the system, organizational structure and operation. From 1965 onward, this model of higher education gradually moved towards the organizational form of American-style-colleges to replace the Faculté, which is a characteristic of the French style.

## 2. References and Research Method

Researching on higher education in South Vietnam, many articles delved into the operation process, model, current situation, educational philosophy, etc., such as: Phong Hien (1978), Some ideological tools for America's neo-colonialism in South Vietnam; Doan Viet Hoat (1971), The development of modern higher Education in Vietnam: a focus on cultural and social-political forces; Do Ba Khe (1972), Community Univertities; Luu Van Quyet & Nguyen Thi Mai Huong (2020), Higher Education in South Vietnam in 1965-1975: An Approach from The Impacts of The Us Education Aid;

Ngo Minh Oanh (2019), Secondary education in South Vietnam (1954-1975); Luro, Gustave Dumoutier (1887), The beginning of French education in the North, etc. These articles more or less mentioned aspects such as: advocacy trends, training goals, structure, system, operation process of colleges, achievements and limitations of higher education in South Vietnam in the period 1955-1975. However, up to now, there has not been any research that fully and comprehensively studies the influence of French and American higher education on the higher education system in South Vietnam. On the basis of using specialized research methods, combined with interdisciplinary research methods such as statistics, analysis, synthesis, comparison, contrast, inheritance of the results of previous works, the article mainly exploited original materials (archives) including Directives, Ordinances, Reports, Official Dispatches, etc. of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam related to higher education currently being saved at the National Archives Center II to clarify the transformation of the South Vietnamese higher education model in the period 1956-1975 in terms of system structure.

### 3. Research Outputs

#### 3.1. Foundation to Establish Higher Education System at South Vietnam

At the end of the nineteenth century, the French rulers tried every way to establish an education model in the colonies to serve political purposes as finalizing the invasion progress of Indochina [2]. By the first decade of the twentieth century, France started the implementation to establish a model of colonial education throughout Indochina after conducting initial investigations [3]. Consequently, the Indochina University was established in Hanoi on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1906. This was the first university, applying modern Western educational model, founded by the French in Vietnam during the colonial period with the mission of “disseminating in the Far East European knowledge and methods, mainly through French” [4]. In 1955, there were nearly 1 million people migrated from the North to the South of Vietnam partly by the requirement of Geneva Agreement. During the exodus, educational institutions as well as many lecturers, students of Indochina University in Hanoi moved to South Vietnam. The Indochina University then was transferred to the Vietnamese government after the withdrawing of France on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1955 and renamed as Vietnam National University [5]. By the year of 1956, Vietnam National University together with educational system in the South of Vietnam were put under the management, organization and control of the government of the Republic of Vietnam by the establishing announcement of educational system made by the new regime in the South of Vietnam.

On the basis of receiving the educational institutions left by France, with the aid of the US through the Education Division of the Media Communication Division, the United States Agency for International Development, together with

the mobilization of private aid or multilateral aid through organizations such as the Asian Culture Agency, School of Science (including the departments of Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology), School of Medicine, School of Civil Engineering and (Asia Foundation), Asia Society, American Catholic aid agency, etc., [6] the government of the Republic of Vietnam took fundamental steps to shape the viewpoints and policies to build higher education in Southern Vietnam in order to train qualified personnel to serve the construction of the “nation”. During the years 1956-1964, although under the influence of the US in terms of politics, aid, advice, and the government of the Republic of Vietnam gradually chose American model for universities in South Vietnam with initial experiments and desire to erase the influence of French education. However, due to the constraints on the Treaty of Culture and Education that the Bao Dai government signed with the French before [7], along with the foundations left behind by French education, which could not be changed easily, higher education in South Vietnam before 1965 was still heavily influenced by French higher education. Since 1965, when the US directly sent troops into South Vietnam, the US advocated to develop capitalist relations in South Vietnam with economic aid policies. In order to have human resources to serve the development of capitalism in the South and to serve the war, the US determined the goal was to help the government of the Republic of Vietnam train a diverse contingent of scientific and technical intellectuals. In that context, higher education in South Vietnam was clearly changed to the US influence in many ways.

#### 3.2. Structural System of Higher Education in South Vietnam (1956-1975) by the Influence of Education of France and the America

##### 3.2.1. The Influence of French Education (1956-1964)

In order to build a “new nation”, higher education played an important role in training civil servants to serve the regime, the government of the Republic of Vietnam had taken concrete steps to build a new education system. On February 21, 1956, the government of the Republic of Vietnam issued Decree No. 98-GD/ND establishing the Ministry of National Education [21], establishing all levels of education from primary to higher and professional schools in South Vietnam [8]. In the period 1956-1964, the higher education development policy of the Republic of Vietnam government focused on two main contents: (1) receiving higher education institutions from the French [9]; (2) “amplifying” higher education in order to train hard workers for the regime. With that policy, the government of the Republic of Vietnam implemented measures towards: “Totally recover the sovereignty of education; carry out a humane, national and liberal education; promote university and technical disciplines in order to train professionals necessary for nation-building” [6]. In the 1956 Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam, Article 26 defined: “The nation strives to provide all citizens with a free and compulsory basic education. Every citizen has the right to pursue education. Those who have the ability but do not have their

own means will be supported to pursue education. The State recognizes that parents have the right to choose a school for their children. Private organizations open schools under laws. It is nationally accredited private colleges, universities, and professional colleges that meet statutory requirements. Diplomas issued by such institutions may be nationally recognized" [7]. With this view, the government of the Republic of Vietnam has issued many policies to develop higher education in South Vietnam. Before 1965, the higher education system in South Vietnam consisted of state-owned universities and a system of private colleges [21].

*State-owned university system:* On March 1, 1957, the government of the Republic of Vietnam issued Decree No. 45-GD renaming the Vietnam National University to the Saigon University [22], which was considered the first higher education institution and also the image of Western university model for the formation of higher education model in South Vietnam [21]. By the early 60s of the twentieth century, the Saigon University consisted of the following schools: Literature, Law, Medicine, University of Science (Saigon University of Science), and Junior College of Architecture; Also according to Decree No. 45-GD, the government of the Republic of Vietnam established Hue University with the function of "promoting Vietnamese culture and at the same time synthesizing national culture with international sources of thought, helping to train citizens capable of serving the nation" [10]. Hue University included schools: Literature, Law, Science, Pedagogy, and Medicine. Both Saigon University and Hue University were formed on the basis of the model of the previous French Indochina University, which were multidisciplinary university (in the Institute there were many schools, also known as faculties) [11].

From 1956, in order to train engineers, agricultural and industrial workers, the government [21] of the Republic of Vietnam had also established a number of Colleges and Professional schools in the public education system such as: Phu Tho National Technical Center; Hue Technical High School; Saigon Technical High School; National School of Commerce; Phu Tho School of Science and Technology; Saigon Experimental School; Nha Trang Experimental School; Practical Fine Arts School; Gia Dinh College of Fine Arts, Hue College of Fine Arts, Saigon National School of Music and Drama, Gia Dinh School of Fine Arts Decoration, etc. School year 1954-1955, technical and fine art schools trained 2,761 students, by the 1960-1961 school year, the number of trained trainees was 6,252 students [12].

*Private university system:* On October 23, 1956, just 3 days after promulgating the Constitution, the government of the Republic of Vietnam issued Decree 57/4 allowing all kinds of private schools to be opened within the legal framework, under the supervision and control of local authority and the Ministry of National Education. From 1957 to 1964, in South Vietnam, the first two private universities were established under the management of the government of the Republic of Vietnam, established by two major religions, Catholicism and Buddhism, the Da Lat University (1957) and Van Hanh University (1964) [21]. Da Lat University was

established under Decree No. 67/BNV/NA/P5 dated August 8, 1957, with the former base of École d'Enfants de Troupe de DaLat, which was administered by the Vietnamese Bishops' Conference and was the first private university in Vietnam. Da Lat University officially operated from the academic year 1958-1959 with 3 faculties (schools): Pedagogy, Science, and Literature. On August 13, 1964, another faculty was opened, Economics and Enterprise Administration. Van Hanh University was established in 1964, according to Decree No. 1805-ND/PG/ND of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Vietnam on the basis of the College of Buddhist Studies. In the first academic year 1964-1965, the university opened two faculties: Faculty of Buddhism and Faculty of Literature and Humanities. Later, it expanded other faculties [13].

During this period Public university model arrangement in the South of Vietnam continued to be organized as multidisciplinary universities as Indochina University established by France earlier [22]. State-established universities and the Ministry of Education acted as general coordinators to unify the staff management activities, educational philosophy, and financial arrangement. The Minister of Education would recommend the position Rector of the University. The Rector then would be appointed by Executive Order of the President after approving by the Senate. The Rector ran the Institute with the assistant of the Deputy Rectors and the Departments such as Administrative, Financial and Cultural Department for handling the affairs of the Institute. In addition, the Rector also chaired the University Council. The members of the Council included the Secretary General of the University, Deans, Vice Deans, and Professors of each faculty [14]. Dean would be head of Faculty and be responsible for running the Faculty's activities (equivalent to the Rector of current school in Vietnam). Faculties acted almost independently from each other in terms of governance and were located in separate locations. National Assembly would approve the national budget including fiscal budget of state-owned universities. The personnel, programs and teaching contents of universities enjoyed such a level autonomy base on the approval of the Ministry of Education [15]. The Rector and Election at the College Council would propose the position of Director of each junior college affiliated to a public university [16].

The basic features of the higher education model in South Vietnam from 1955 to 1964 were still strongly influenced by the French educational model that was shaped in Vietnam since the early twentieth century. There were two types of educational institutions, including state-owned schools and private schools with universities and a system of colleges and professional schools [22]. In which, engineering majors were mainly trained at college and professional level. No specialized technical universities were established during this period. Compared with the previous French higher education model, the new point in the higher education model of the Republic of Vietnam at this time was the birth of private university system (Da Lat University and Van Hanh University) [21].

### 3.2.2. *The Influence of the American Education (1965-1975)*

From 1965, the war that the US waged in Vietnam had entered an increasingly drastic phase, the US had sent tens of thousands of expeditionary troops and troops of allied countries into South Vietnam to pacify it. In the field of culture and education, with the goal of "finding out the psychological, emotional, customs, and tastes characteristics of Vietnamese people so that they could spread American culture appropriately" [17], the US stepped up its aid to the Republic of Vietnam government in order to win the "hearts and minds" of the South Vietnamese people. The US had provided many scholarships to Vietnamese students and organized for lecturers and managers in universities in South Vietnam to come to the US for short and long-term study. In addition, the US also sent US university advisory missions to Vietnam to study, work and propose projects to support the reform of higher education institutions in South Vietnam. A report in 1964 said that about 127 Vietnamese students had been trained by the US and awarded Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Sciences degrees [22], 45 students were awarded Master and 35 students were awarded Doctor of Philosophy in the US [18]. By 1968, the number of Southern students and cadres studying abroad in the US was 4,809 people. In 1969, the scholarship program that the US granted to Vietnam was worth about 2,385,000 USD [20]. In addition, the US also sent managers and lecturers from universities in Vietnam to visit short-term training and practice models in the US and other countries. Student study abroad programs, visiting and researching tours for educational administrators in the US were all aimed at the goal of training many university professors in South Vietnam to know how to manage education according to American model [16]. According to many researchers, through the US aid and training programs that the US organized for students, lecturers and educational managers of the South Vietnam government, from 1965 onwards, the US had somewhat defeated the influence of French education on Vietnamese higher education [21]. In that context, higher education in Vietnam had shifted from the influence of French higher education to the American higher education. In addition to the previously established state-owned and private systems, since 1971 there has also been a community university system.

*State-owned university system:* Since 1965, the previous state-owned universities in the South of Vietnam (Saigon University and Hue University) had been rearranged in terms of organization. Moreover, there were a number of new educational institutions with American features had been established such as Can Tho University was established in 1966 with Faculties of Science, Law - Social Sciences; Pedagogy, and Literature [17]. The purpose of establishing the Can Tho University was established is to bridge higher education with the practical local development needs, demonstrate the dynamism and shift towards higher education associated with the realities of life following the trend of American universities [22]. On the other hand, the

Thu Duc Polytechnic University was established on March 29, 1973 accordingly to the US Polytechnic State University (California Polytechnic State University), multidisciplinary, focusing on practical industries, necessary for the economy in Saigon and neighboring provinces [8]. The birth of Thu Duc Polytechnic University marked a turning point in technical and professional education with the restructuring of colleges and professional schools in higher education in South Vietnam [21]. This was the first time a university established in South Vietnam not following the pattern of faculties of the previous Saigon University [18].

Along with universities, since 1965, the system of previous established colleges and professional schools had now been reformed in terms of disciplines. Some of them had been renamed and some new schools had been established [22]. The Intermediate Polytechnic School, National Commerce University and Professional Personnel Committees of the National Academy of Technology were merged into the Intermediate Professional University, established on April 19, 1974 by Decree No. 069- SL/GD of the Republic of Vietnam government. The university had departments: Department of Public Works and Land Administration, Department of Technology, Department of Electrics and Electronics, Department of Chemistry, Department of Commerce. All departments of the university were oriented towards the purpose of training professionals with the qualifications and expertise to serve in the public and private manufacturing industries [18].

*Community college system:* Since the 1970s, in order to meet the needs of economic, cultural and social development in the localities, the higher education system of Vietnam had many multi-disciplinary community colleges [20] established with the local participating, contributing, constructing and administration [8]. From 1971 to 1974, in South Vietnam, community colleges were established, including: Tien Giang Community College and Coastal Community College in Khanh Hoa established in 1971, Quang Da Community College was established in 1974 and Regina Pacis University only for female students was established by the Catholic Church in Saigon in 1973 following the model of a community university [19].

These schools focused on practical local training professions [22] and effectively trained many specialists in various fields for the local development [20]. The higher education policy makers of the Republic of Vietnam at that time conceived: "Community university is the synthesis of a classical university and junior colleges, where future professors and manual labors will study at the same school, practice democratic life at school to build a just society in the future" [21]. Later, many other localities in South Vietnam also planned to establish a community university but could not implement before the Republic of Vietnam collapsed (1975) [21].

*Private university system:* After 1965, in the fact that the needs of students were increasing, while the burden did not change to keep up with the social needs of the public university system, along with a shortage of facility system

and staffs at public universities, private universities continued to be established in the South of Vietnam, such as: Minh Duc University; Cao Dai University; Hoa Hao University; Southern University; Cuu Long University; Tri Hanh University, etc., [19]. Before the establishment of more and more private universities, in order to increase contributions, close cooperation and eliminate the concept of public and private distinctions, in 1973, the Council of Private Universities in South Vietnam was established. The establishment of the Council of Private Universities in South Vietnam marked a new stage in the development of higher education in the South of Vietnam [22]. At this time, public and private universities cooperated closely and equally with each other. With the advantage of being autonomous, not bound by administrative procedures such as the public university system, and rapidly innovation according to the actual situation, private universities played an increasingly important role in the development process of higher education system in South Vietnam. Not only demonstrating the ability to train pragmatic professionals that public universities had not shown, the private higher education system also promoted cooperation, guidance and advice on development plans for leaders.

It can be said that, since 1965, higher education of the Republic of Vietnam in South Vietnam had become more and more oriented towards the pragmatism of American education. University autonomy is increasingly emphasized and enshrined in the Constitution [19]. The "Regulations on the national higher education system" of the President of the Republic of Vietnam in March 1970 defined the organizational structure of higher education system in South Vietnam. Accordingly, the National Council for the Development of Higher Education directly manage the higher education system [22]. The National council had various positions including Prime Minister as chair-person, Minister of Education as Secretary General and 9 members: Minister of Finance, Minister of National Planning and Development, Chairman of the Culture and Education Committee, National Assembly Youth, representative of the Culture and Education Council, representative of Socio-economic Council, one rector represented the public universities and one rector represented the private universities [22]. The mandate of this council was to formulate policy for the development of higher education and to determine the annual funding of universities [20].

During this period, the model of higher education in South Vietnam still existed two public and private systems according to the university structure as in the previous period. However, within each system there had been changes. The university was organized into many schools (faculties), headed by the dean. Schools (faculties) operated independently and autonomously in many aspects such as academics, curriculum, teaching content, organizational structure and internal personnel. The other aspects such as finance, key personnel, administrative staff at all levels, teaching staff of all ranks, etc. were managed by the General Secretariat of Public Affairs.

The characteristics of the higher education model in South Vietnam in the period 1965-1975 were influenced by the American higher education model. It was the emergence of new universities, with the upgrading of a number of colleges and professional schools, the birth of a series of community universities and Can Tho University, Thu Duc Polytechnic Institute. Along with that, the training program had shifted towards practice - shifting from the characteristics of French general theory-heavy education to the popular trend, focusing activities on practical disciplines for the purpose of serving the masses, especially in the economic under specialization direction of the United States. From 1971, schools (including public, private, and community) had tended to follow the credit system (Crédit) (Can Tho University was the first university in the South of Vietnam to apply the credit system) [5] similar to the US higher education. In addition to the lecture method, for the fields of study associated with practice, there were new, interesting and practical teaching and learning methods. University autonomy is increasingly emphasized. These were the manifestations of the increasing influence of American features on the higher education model of the Republic of Vietnam in South Vietnam [22].

## 4. Conclusion

In the years of 1956 -1975, the basic features of higher educational system in South Vietnam had been formed accordingly to the historical context in South Vietnam. From 1956 to 1964, higher education in South Vietnam was heavily influenced by the French model shaped in Vietnam since the early twentieth century [21]. Educational institutions in the South during this period included schools (within the institute) and a system of colleges and professional schools. In which, technical majors were mainly trained at college and professional level, no specialized technical university had been established in this period. In the management structure, universities must be placed under the management of the Ministry of Education. Important decisions such as recruitment or promotion of professors, procurement of materials or construction costs must be submitted to and approved by the Ministry of Education [22]. The reason for this was because the constraints on the Treaty of Culture and Education signed with France along with the foundations left by French education had not been easily changed, besides, despite the help of the US, but the government of the Republic of Vietnam in the early stage was not able to build a university system with its own identity.

From 1965, under the influence of many factors, the practical values and pragmatism of American higher education in the higher education model of the Republic of Vietnam had been shaped and clearly reflected in the system structure, content, programs and methods of training. The birth of new types of higher education such as Polytechnic University, American Community College associated with local development; the transformation of the institution to the credit system, promoting the initiative and flexibility of students in the learning process; university autonomy was

increasingly emphasized, enshrined in the constitution and had its own position. All of these had partly overcome the academic weaknesses of higher education in the French style. According to the comments of educators at that time, "the opening of an American-oriented university, mainly by those who received training at American universities, responded to the needs and development time of the new intellectual age in the period of American influence". The higher education model in the South of Vietnam, besides its incomplete aspects, still had many useful lessons that today need to fully study in order to selectively inherit and continue. In which, there is the absorption of influence of the French and American educational models.

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