

Summary of the Dissertation

From the mid-1950s, accompanied by massive assistance of the United States to the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), especially in the area of education, South Vietnamese educators experienced a more fertile environment to develop higher education. Through the coordination of USAID, American educational institutions and universities operated effectively to assist South Vietnam's system of higher education. The initial engagements of the Americans in the RVN higher education system can be traced back to the 1950s, however, the most extensive US engagements took place in the period of the Second Republic of Vietnam government (1967–1975). The priorities of the US in advancing education in Vietnam changed during distinctive periods. In the initial years in mid-1950s, the Americans were engaged more in non-academic fields, such as the police services and refugee resettlement. In late 1950s, accompanying the non-academic activities, educational programs started. Since the early 1960s, the academic fields enjoyed more attention, consequently, the involvement of US American institutions in advancing RVN education increased, shown by the participation of several famous institutions like Michigan State University, Ohio University, and the Asia Foundation. Nonetheless it lasted until the late 1960s, when the development of higher education in South Vietnam was placed as a high priority on the agenda of the US. The number of the participating institutions grew rapidly, and included many distinguished and well-known US universities such as Washington State University, Harvard University, Southern Illinois University, Wisconsin State University, University of Missouri-Rolla, University of Florida, Cornell University, and University of Hawaii.

Among the numerous examples to illustrate the influences of the United States on RVN higher education (1967–1975), the three state universities, namely the University of Saigon, the University of Huế, and the University of Cần Thơ can be regarded as best and convincing examples for the American influences on this area. While the University of Saigon played a pioneering role in the academic activities in South Vietnam, the University of Huế was founded to serve as a cultural bulwark against North Vietnam, and the establishment of the University of Cần Thơ responded perfectly to the requirements of the Mekong Delta especially with regard to the development of the agricultural economy. Based on examining three primary aspects of these universities, which are the areas of administrative, academic, and international cooperation, this thesis sheds light to investigate the following questions: whether or not the American educational model surpassed the French influence to become a leading system in

South Vietnam's higher education? Are there proofs for the penetration of American influences in the RVN national universities? To what extent did the U.S exert influence on these three national universities? And, how did South Vietnamese educators deal with the situation of overwhelming external influences in the Republic of Vietnam from 1967 until 1975?

US American influence varied in intensity and quality depending on specific affairs of the three RVN public universities. The Americans influenced both levels – the macro and micro levels of administrative and international cooperation of RVN public universities. In comparison, concerning the academic affairs, their influence remained extensive only at the micro level. American experts, advisors, and educators played a decisive role in assisting the Vietnamese in the formulation and enactment of legislative statutes to advance higher education, as well as in framing the policies of overseas studies and international cooperation of the RVN education system. In the academic affairs, the American influences were diversified in many aspects, for example, regarding the curriculum, the teaching methods, and publications. Nonetheless, these engagements tended to be on projects at the micro level instead of at the macro-level as the two above-mentioned topics. Moreover, their influences caused different results according to the specific RVN universities in distinctive periods of time. For instance, the University of Huế was given more attention in the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, while the American assistance for the University of Saigon was less intensive in the same time period. Among the three public universities, the Americans seem to have had more influence on the later created institutions, including the University of Huế and the University of Cần Thơ, compared to the University of Saigon.

Education was a key drive and had the task to form “future citizens” and construct both the image and the reality of the Republic of Vietnam as a modern, successfully developing nation. The unprejudiced minds of RVN teachers and professors in adapting successful educational models was considered to be appropriate to their needs, and it was critical to the success of RVN authorities. Despite their sincere intentions and best efforts, the ideal RVN educational infrastructure envisioned in the 1960s and 1970s had no chance to be realized. The regime's final collapse was a reality which could not be avoided and it illustrates the flaws of the Republic of Vietnam in its administrative processes. Nevertheless, their overall lack of final success as they were overwhelmed by greater historical events should not be a pretext to deny the RVN's many attempts and successes in the course of its twenty-years existence.

Enduring influences and educational effects from the system of RVN higher education are de facto legacies. These could be visible, such as in the infrastructure of RVN universities, in the human resources, who were educated in that system, and in relationships of Vietnamese with foreign educators and educational institutions. They could be invisible as well, for instance the aspirations towards a progressive higher education and educational initiatives, which were practiced in the RVN education system. Visible or invisible, the system of RVN higher education was incorporated into system of higher education of today's Vietnam and continued, to a certain extent, its mission of modernization.