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Globalization and the governance of education in Viet Nam

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In a globalizing world, local and global governance arrangements are increasingly interdependent, which produces harmonization in some instances and new tensions and contradictions in others. Analysis shows that successive waves of globalization have affected the governance of education in Viet Nam differently. It shows that the globalization of Viet Nam's social and political economy has not diminished the centrality of Viet Nam's state in the governance of education, but that the character of the state's governance roles has changed significantly. Even in the context of the current global turbulence, it seems clear that Viet Nam's economy will continue to grow. But it is equally clear that what transpires in the field of the governance of education will profoundly influence the sustainability of that growth, its distribution, and its qualitative impacts on social life in Viet Nam.

Keywords: Vietnam; Viet Nam; education; globalization; governance

“Globalization” refers to the intensification of social, political, economic, and cultural ties across borders. Today there is indeed an increased sense (and reality) of political, economic, and cultural interconnectedness (see Held & McGrew, 2002). Globalization is not new, but its velocity and scope have increased alongside recent advances in transport, communications, and information processing capacities, and there are many aspects of contemporary globalization that are truly unprecedented. That globalization is most commonly associated with economic processes is both understandable but misleading. It is understandable because globalization has indeed gathered pace alongside the worldwide expansion of capitalism. This is misleading, however, in that globalization is a multi-faceted phenomenon whose social, political, economic and cultural aspects are inextricably linked (Therborn, 2000).

“Governance” refers to the coordination and ordering of social activities (Mayntz, 1993). The presence of governance of any kind implies a more or less stable set of supporting institutions. As North (1991) observed, institutions may be formal (as in the case of laws, policies, and codes) or informal (as in the case of customs, informal norms, and unofficial rules); all (except chaotic) social forms are governed by some combination of formal and informal institutions. But theorists have identified three distinctive modes of governance. Williamson (1985) famously distinguished how governance occurs under markets and hierarchies. In hierarchies, co-ordination occurs through the imposition

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of integrative rules, whereas under markets co-ordination occurs through property-bound contracts over property rights, mediated by the price mechanisms. In hierarchies, conflicts are resolved through the application of authority, whereas in markets conflicts are resolved through bargaining or through mediation in rules-based legal institutions. Thompson (Thompson, Frances, Levacic, & Mitchell, 1991), Ouchi (1980), Streek and Schmitter (1985), and others have identified a third distinctive mode of governance, referred to variously as “network” or “community” governance, in which co-ordination is achieved through voluntary alliances among actors with coincident interest (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998). Today the term governance is widely used in normative terms; the presumption being that some forms of governance produce more desirable social outcomes. One influential notion of “good governance” suggest that governments can improve their efficiency by expanding their reliance on markets; whereas critics of this perspective charge that privatizing state operations can produce adverse social outcomes.

“Education” can be understood as activities that impart knowledge, skills, or morality. Education takes place in innumerable guises and settings, though current understandings define education (narrowly) as formal schooling. The term “education system” has a somewhat broader connotation, and typically refers not only to schooling, but also occupational training, research, and the activities of various agencies implicated in the organization and operation of educational activities. In most (perhaps all) contemporary settings, states play particularly important roles in the governance of education, though the way in which they do so varies across time and place. This article examines the governance of education in contemporary Viet Nam. It is particularly concerned with the changing governance activities of the Vietnamese state.

Viet Nam is a particularly interesting context for an analysis of globalization and the governance of education. Viet Nam is a formerly state-socialist country in which a ruling communist party has survived the collapse of central planning by combining market-based strategies of economic accumulation with Leninist principles of political organization. Prior to its economic transition, Viet Nam’s state sought to industrialize on the basis of state-socialist-economic institutions and during this period the state attempted to assume total responsibilities for the governance of education, including the provision and finance of all education. Today, the Vietnamese state’s role in the governance of education has changed significantly and in this article I seek to clarify the nature and significance of these changes. I do so in three steps. In the first section I examine education and the globalization of the governance of education in Viet Nam in historical perspective. I contend that Viet Nam has in fact experienced four distinctive waves of globalization and that each of these have affected modes of education governance in distinctive ways. In the second section I examine how the erosion of state-socialism and Viet Nam’s subsequent market transition affected the governance of education and education outcomes. In the final section, I examine key current issues related to globalization and the governance of education in Viet Nam. These include educational impacts economic turbulence, vocational and tertiary education reform, and the political dynamics of education governance.

Governance structures are ever-changing but they go through periods of relative stasis and change. Governance structures shape and constrain behaviour but are always subject to the influence of powerful actors and processes.¹ Forces bearing on local modes of governance may be of endogenous or exogenous origins. Invariably, however, changes in governance structures reflect shifting alignments of power and interest.

In a globalizing world, local and global governance arrangements are increasingly interdependent, which produces harmonization in some instances and new tensions and contradictions in others. This analysis shows how successive waves of globalization have

affected the governance of education in Viet Nam. It shows that the globalization of Viet Nam's social and political economy has not diminished the centrality of Viet Nam's state in the governance of education, but that the character of the state's governance roles has changed significantly. In Viet Nam, hierarchies, communities and networks, and markets all play important and often overlapping roles in the governance of education, even as the byzantine hierarchies of Viet Nam's party-state remain the most powerful governing force.

Globalization and the governance of education in Viet Nam in historical perspective

Globalization is not new to Viet Nam. Depending on ones accounting procedures, Viet Nam is currently experiencing its third or fourth distinctive wave of globalization, each of which has affected the governance of education in distinctive and path-dependent ways. Certainly, globalization is a continuous process. But there have at junctures in Viet Nam's history been distinctive changes in the character of globalization. The Chinese wave of proto-globalization that consumed (what is today) northern Viet Nam between the 1st and 10th centuries had transformative and lasting effects on local institutions and heavily influenced the development and governance of education. After nearly a millennium of independence, French colonization of Viet Nam marked a second and wave of globalization. The adoption of Soviet-inspired state-socialist institutions represented a third wave of globalization, though the wars Viet Nam experienced in its transition to state-socialism were unquestionably globalizing in their own right. Since the erosion of state-socialism in the late 1980s, Viet Nam has experienced its latest wave of globalization. In each of these historical waves of globalization, Viet Nam's intensifying cross-border relations have had a transformative effect on local institutions and on the governance of education in particular. At the same time, in each wave of globalization autochthonous institutions and actors have mediated localized effects of globalizing processes. In what follows, proto-globalization, colonial globalization, and state-socialist globalization are examined in turn. Analysis of globalization associated with Viet Nam's market transition is left to the second and third sections.

Proto-globalization and the governance of education in "classical" Viet Nam

"Proto-globalization" refers to the efforts of world empires at global expansion in the absence of global awareness. China is a classic example. Though punctuated by periods of insularity, China's extensive regional and extra-regional ties transformed much of East Asia. China's 1000-year occupation of (what is today) northern Viet Nam gave Viet Nam what Alexander Woodside has described as "a comprehensive initiation into the scholarship, political theories, familial organization patterns, bureaucratic practices, and even the religious orientations of Chinese culture" (Woodside, 1971, p. 7). Consequently, as in China, the development of formal education in Viet Nam was deeply implicated with the expansion of bureaucracies and the exercise of state power. The Viet Nam historian Bùi Xuân Đính was not alone when he identified the use of written Chinese, the development of an intellectual (or Confucian) scholar "class" (*thành lớp nho sĩ*), and the incorporation of villages into the pre-modern (or "feudal") state as critical steps in the development of Viet Nam's village culture, customs, and codes (Bùi, 1985).

Chinese proto-globalization occasioned considerable change in Viet Nam's institution, which were at the same time subject to considerable local influence. For the nearly 1000 years that separated Chinese and French occupation, Viet Nam developed educational traditions both informed by and in opposition to Chinese influences.

As Alexander Woodside (2006) has shown, as in Tang Dynasty China, political leaders of the *Lý* (1010), *Trần* (1225–1440), *Le* (1428–1788) and *Nguyễn* (1802–1945) used competitive examination systems to recruit staff, develop their dynastic states' bureaucratic capacities and, perhaps most important, achieve (degrees of) insulation from hereditary and other “feudal” claims on state office. For these dynastic states, the governance of education was seen as a means to reduce risk, as it enabled the development of large bureaucracies that were necessary to maintain and expand territorial dominance. Dynastic states sought to govern education through hierarchical means, though their abilities to do so were limited by Viet Nam's decentralized social organization.

At local levels, formal education in classical Viet Nam was an activity reserved for a very small minority and was centred on the organized study of the classics in preparation for imperial examinations. Local literati, village elders, and other community elements determined who would study, who would receive support, and who would sit for examinations. Women were almost always excluded. Networks, social capital, and community mattered more than markets or hierarchies. Training usually occurred in the home of the teacher and education certainly did not have a mass character. Although the number and scale of village schools grew continuously, not more than 10% of Viet Nam's population was ever literate in the traditional Chinese characters or the later-devised *nôm* script. The wide use of the Latinized *quốc ngữ* 'alphabet that is in use in Viet Nam today did not occur until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Such a brief sketch of educational governance in classical Viet Nam cannot offer serious historical analysis. But it is suggestive of the rich history of educational governance in Viet Nam and its complex (proto)global and local dynamics. It shows how education was subordinated to the hierarchies of the imperial court but governed, at the local level, by networks of interest constitutive of village life.

The governance of education in colonial and anti-colonial Viet Nam

The second major wave of globalization that Viet Nam has experienced was that associated with European expansion and, eventually, French colonialism. By the mid-nineteenth century, the *Nguyễn* dynasty, which the French along with the Thais had helped to power in 1802, came under severe French pressure. But colonization took time. The bombardment of Đà Nẵng Harbor in 1858 was the opening salvo and by the late nineteenth century France had achieved control over the entire territory. The French declared *Cochin China* (present-day southern Viet Nam) as a colony, and declared *An Nam* (central Viet Nam) and *Tonkin* (northern Viet Nam) “protectorates”.

Under French governance, education was largely subordinated to colonial imperatives. Vietnamese clerks and translators were needed to make exploitation and oppression more efficient, both in Viet Nam and other parts of Indochina. Under French authority, schooling was elitist and exclusive (Marr, 1981), while village schools were generally discouraged. The French colonial model of educational governance was hierarchical indeed. At local levels, Viet Nam's traditional literati – large portions of whom became subservient to French interests – rapidly lost their social prestige and instead became symbols of disgrace and targets of ridicule (Tai, 1982). Educational opportunities for Vietnamese remained severely limited.

But globalization is never a one-way top-down processes. Local actors and institutions respond to globalization according to their own experiences, interests, and capacities. This could be seen in colonial Viet Nam, where the governance of education became the subject of increasingly intense political debate. That French political ideals were not to be

extended to French colonial subjects was testimony to the moral bankruptcy of French power. Anti-colonial activists' increasing demands for greater rights included calls for expanded access to education. Debates concerning education were very closely linked to questions of freedom, nationhood, and self-determination.

Viet Nam's most famous anti-colonial activists – *Phan Chu Chinh*, *Phan Boi Châu*, and *Nguyễn Ái Quốc (Hồ Chí Minh)* – all pursued studies overseas and all promoted the idea that Vietnamese communities should promote education and literacy in the national interests. By the early twentieth century, Vietnamese anti-colonialists increasingly took matters into their own hands, organizing literacy courses and informal schools, and integrating these activities into the development of a growing anti-colonial movement. Unlike other contestants for power, the CPV was the only force to effectively use educational activities (in particular literacy training) and educational rhetoric into organizational weapons. The French had no illusions about hierarchical control, while in subaltern world of Vietnamese anti-colonialism, the governance of education was again a community project, organized under community forms of governance. Anti-colonialists long-term vision was that of an independent Vietnamese state, accountable to the needs of Vietnamese.

State-socialist globalization: education in the struggle for independence and socialist revolution

By the twentieth century, state leaders increasingly recognized that education (and the governance of education) could be used to meet state imperatives. Indeed, states' recognition of education's multi-functionality gave them impetus to transform education from a loose set of activities that primarily took place in the home, community, and work places, into a more vast and organized set of processes to be conducted through formal schooling on a mass scale, and under bureaucratic administration. While the timing of developments varied across countries, the development of mass education in the twentieth century is indeed one of history's most impressive examples of global institutional convergence. Still, the precise content of mass education policies showed considerable diversity and reflected state's differing interests and capacities, which were themselves determined through contestations for state power.

It was the principles of the international socialist movement inspired the foundation of the Communist Party of Viet Nam (initially the Indochina Communist Party). The implementation of state-socialist policies in Viet Nam (in the north after 1954 and in the south after 1975) represented a third distinctive wave of globalization that impinged heavily on the governance of education in Viet Nam. To be sure, the catastrophic wars Viet Nam experienced between the 1940s and the 1980s had important globalizing aspects and certainly affected the governance of education. On the other hand, it was the principles and institutions of Soviet-inspired state-socialism that governed education in Viet Nam during this period.

Whether capitalist or socialist in their orientation, states recognized that the governance of education concerns not only education, but also the dissemination of dominant values, the development of particular quantities and qualities of human resources and, the promotion of certain patterns of social and occupational stratification. Arrangements regarding the provision and payment for education vary in accordance to alignments of power and interest in different settings. In states with market economies, the governance of education tends to be manifold, with different educational activities falling under different modes of governance. By contrast, socialist-states (particularly communist states) tended to possess singular and more or less shared vision education governance;

namely, that education should be governed by the state in the interest of socialist aims. The ascent of the Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPV) in the 1930s and the 1940s was accompanied by the ascent of precisely this thinking, even as socialist revolution would require national liberation. Education was thus subordinated to the twin struggles of national independence and socialist revolution.

The CPV's defeat of the French in the north of Viet Nam in 1954 led to the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam and new arrangements for the government of education. In the south of Viet Nam, the short-lived Republic of Viet Nam made their own arrangements. In the north, the state's role in the governance of education had two pillars: to impart nationalist zeal in the struggle for self determination and the defeat of imperialism, and to lay the foundations for socialist industrialization, the development of a new (Vietnamese) socialist "man", and to achieve revolutions in the productive sphere. After 1954 in the north and 1975 in the south, the CPV pursued the development of a national education system designed to eventually ensure all Vietnamese access to a publicly financed K-12 education as a right of citizenship. Nationally, education would be financed by state-socialist economic institutions and subordinated to relevant administrative authorities of Viet Nam's integrated state. In urban and certain rural areas (connected to state organizations and enterprises) education would be funded largely through the unified state budget, while in rural areas, local agricultural collectives would be responsible for financing education in combination with supplemental funds from the state budget. Nationally and locally, hierarchical governance was preponderant, not only in education, but all spheres of social life.

Remarkably, Viet Nam's education system expanded rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s, even as the country was at war. Enrolments expanded in the north in the 1960s, even as education was provided in the context of great economic scarcity. (Arguably, the south of Viet Nam was experiencing different global influences. In the 1960s, the south of Viet Nam also saw considerable increases in enrolments. For example, between 1960 and 1970, the proportion of children that completed primary education in the south of Viet Nam doubled, from 30-60%, and by 1973 there were over 100,000 students enrolled in community colleges and universities [T.L. Nguyễn, 2006, p. 6].) Patterns of higher education in the 1960s and 1970s tended to mirror geopolitical division in Viet Nam, with tens of thousands of students from northern Viet Nam undertaking studies Eastern Europe while a significant (though smaller) number of students from the south pursued studies in the US and Europe.

Over the long term, however, the development of state-socialism did not go according to plan. A combination of economic scarcity, war, and other factors put this goal well out of reach. The limits of education stemmed largely from the limits of Vietnamese state-socialism, an economic system that was built in context of wars, was largely cut off from world trade, and was riddled with perverse incentives that had the unintended effect of limiting economic resources available for education. During the late 1980s, the institutional arrangements responsible for financing education in Viet Nam gradually disintegrated as the planned economy came apart. Between 1980 and 1990, Viet Nam registered only a minor increase in its gross enrolment, even though the country gained millions more school-age children. By the end of the decade, dropout rates soared, particularly at the secondary level of education. Under state-socialism, the CPV-led state realized many important gains in education and did so in the face of overwhelming challenges. But by 1989, Viet Nam's 35-year experiment with state-socialism came to an unexpected conclusion. The withering of state-socialist economic institutions necessitated

a reworking of the financial and fiscal basis of formal schooling and, by implication, a reworking of educational governance.

Globalization, marketization and the governance of education

1989 and the years that immediately followed it were pivotal in global terms. Eastern Europe entered a period of rapid and fundamental political and economic realignment. In Viet Nam and China, by contrast, communist parties managed to harness their political power to more market-based economic strategies. In Viet Nam, the erosion and subsequent dismantlement of state-socialist economic institutions was followed by a proliferation and gradual deepening of the country's ties to the regional and world economies. Foreign investment and aid – the latter often tied to governance reform – began to trickle and then flow in. The transition from state-socialism to markets entailed a transformation in state-society relations, as the implicit state-socialist social contract was effectively rescinded (London, 2003, 2004).

In Viet Nam, market transition and globalization were driven by political as well as economic necessity and would effect fundamental changes in principles and institutions governing the provision and payment for education. The effects of marketization and globalization on the governance education in Viet Nam can be summarized as follows: Market transition fuelled rapid though uneven economic growth which, in turn, permitted continuous increases in total (i.e., public and private spending on education) as well as impressive increases in the scale of the education system, as measured by enrolments; economic growth occurred along side changes in state policies, frequently informed by international development agencies' insistence on governance reform; new education policies did not amount to the withdrawal of the state from education but did promote the commodification of education by shifting an increasing share of the institutional responsibility for education payments from the state onto households; the state has responded to emerging market-based education inequalities through various means-tested and targeted "safety nets" programmes, which have been only partially effective, however.

(Uneven) economic growth and (uneven) gains in education

Viet Nam's market transition has enabled a sustained period of rapid economic growth as well as significant if uneven improvements in living standards. Economic growth has also enabled continuous increases in total (i.e., public and private) education and spending. Contrary to much thinking on marketization and globalization – these processes can actually strengthen the capacities of the state, which is just what occurred in Viet Nam. Perhaps most basically, state investments in education in Viet Nam have increased. Today, not one of over 10,000 communes and precincts in Viet Nam lacks a primary school, enrolments at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels have all increased markedly, and the state appears set to maintain public spending on education at 20% of the state budget for the foreseeable future.

After slow growth in the early 1990s, public spending on education has grown significantly in both absolute terms and as a proportion of Viet Nam's GDP. Between 1990 and 2010, public budgetary spending on education in Viet Nam increased from 1% to 4.8% of an increasingly large GDP (Ministry of Finance, 2010). Today, education represents nearly 20% of the state budget and is expected to remain at or above this level for the foreseeable future (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2006). A large proportion of public spending goes to teachers' wages, but Viet Nam's state has also used its increasing fiscal resources to expand the geographical coverage of the educational system. While the

“socialist” credentials the CPV are frequently subject to doubt, there is no question that the redistributive fiscal policies the state has employed have ensured a more egalitarian distribution of public education than would have otherwise been the case.

Equally impressive, if not more striking than increases in public spending on education, has been the explosion of non-state (seldom called “private”) education spending. This includes households’ out of pocket education spending. As recently as the late 1980s, all education in Viet Nam was – in principle – state financed. Today, by most estimates, households’ education expenditures account for at least 50% of total education spending. Increased household earnings have no doubt permitted these increases: per capita GDP has increased from less than US\$200 in the early 1990s to roughly US\$1000 by 2010. On the other hand, shifts in the principles guiding education policies have made out-of-pocket spending a practical necessity.

Marketization has played an important role in the expansion of the education system and it is reasonable to assert that market forces plays a more significant role in the governance of education in Viet Nam than at any time under the CPV. It was in 1989 that CPV leaders began to permit the collection of fees for schooling as well as the limited private provision of education. Today, “non-state” or “self-financed” schools (“private” remains a taboo term) play major roles in the provision of education, particularly at the preschool, upper secondary and tertiary levels.

Uneven development poses well-known difficulties in the governance of education. It is true that spatial and temporal unevenness is an attribute of economic growth under any kind of economic system. But it is also true that certain kinds of economic activities and certain kinds of state policies can help determine the extent of unevenness, particularly in education. In Viet Nam, economic growth has occurred most rapidly in the Southeast (in and around Ho Chi Minh City), the Red River Delta (particularly in Ha Noi and surrounding areas), the Mekong Delta, and the south-central coastal area. The northwest mountainous areas, the Central Highlands, and the Northeast are economic laggards in growth terms.

Viet Nam’s fiscal system is broadly redistributive and this has helped mitigate the unevenness of public expenditure on education across provinces. Even so, the depth of poverty in the laggard regions is considerable and owes significantly to spatial, topographical, and environmental factors that require great investments of resources to overcome. The Mekong Delta is a good example in this regard. Although it is wealthier than other regions in terms of per capita income, the costs of getting children to school in a vast delta area has been one among many factors contributing to low enrolments in that area. While transfers of resources though the budget are occurring, the amount of resources for education in Viet Nam’s poorest regions remains inadequate. Marketization has thus increased the total volume of public resources to education, but unevenly. An equally salient feature of marketization has been that which has occurred *within* the education sector, owing in large part to state policies and their intended and unintended outcomes, as we will now see.

Cost-shifting and commodification: the marketization of education governance

Viet Nam’s transition from central planning to a market economy has seen the emergence diverse, overlapping, and hybridized forms of governance. In the sphere of education, market forces play a more important role in coordinating and ordering educational activities, even though this often occurs within or on the bounds of state administered schools. The state has attempted to promote community governance through policies

labelled “socialization” (see below). But the overall effect of governance reforms in education has been to commodify education and assign households greater responsibility for financing education.

These trends are not due to the “natural” development of markets (markets are in one way or another *always* shaped by state authority), but instead are the outcome of various state policies. In important respects, globalization contributed to the adoption of these policies. Political and economic necessity led Viet Nam’s state to seek new governance arrangements. The state’s intensifying engagement with and dependence on international institutions, its increasing exposure to internationally-dominant ideas (such as neo-liberalism economics and “new public management” theory), and pressures to allow state-workers to cash in on economic growth have all occasioned a process of institutional convergence, whereby Viet Nam has moved its education policies toward a more market-based form of governance. Notably, in education as in other spheres of social life, market governance in Viet Nam appears in both formal and informal guises. Indeed, state, market, and community forms of governance are often interpenetrated.

It was in 1986 that Viet Nam’s CPV leaders publicly committed themselves to systemic economic reforms. It was in 1989 that CPV leaders began to permit the collection of fees for schooling as well as the limited private provision of education. In 1994, the World Bank in Viet Nam published its first analysis of education in Viet Nam, which emphasized the need for increased cost-recovery as various cost-saving measures, such as large class sizes. Globally, the World Bank has been an enthusiastic supporter of state retrenchment and “market governance”. Bank policies on education in developing countries frequently encourage states to introduce fees and other “cost-recovery” schemes for education, decentralize and privatize education, and (until recently) to neglect higher education (CITE).

In addition to embracing the types of marketizing policies listed above, the 1990s in Viet Nam saw the advent of an additional mechanism for social coordination: “socialization” (*xã hội hóa*). “Socialization” appears in quotation because in Viet Nam the term has a meaning diametrically opposite that in the rest of the world. Outside Viet Nam, socialization refers to the state assuming costs or ownership over a given social activity. In Viet Nam, socialization refers to “all segments of society contributing” to some sphere of social life.

Is socialization a new form of network or community governance? Or is it hierarchical governance in sheep’s clothes? Some of its proponents insist it is not a top-down directive but in fact a bottom-up movement of mutual support – though this perspective seems often to confuse “Party line” with “bottom-up”. However it may be interpreted, and without denying some benefits, socialization has above else amounted to a shifting of the costs of public services from the state onto households. As one commentator notes in a local newspaper:

Beyond the spirit of supporting children in their studies, and promoting a close relation between the school, family, and society . . . the real meaning of [socialization] that everyone knows is to contribute [*đóng*] money to the school: contribute the fee, contribute to the supplemental funds like the construction fund, sanitation, water, parking, electricity (through the parents’ school committee), . . . for text books and materials, various kinds of extra study . . . All these contributions have the signature of the parents next to the word “voluntary”! The concept socialization also refers to some people investing funds to open a school (usually under the heading ‘people founded’ school) for students unable to qualify for public schools. In recent times efforts to promote foreign investment in education also is understood as socialization. (Người Hà Nội, quoted in T.L. Nguyễn, 2006)

How did economic conditions and state policies (including those that sought to promote “socialization”) contribute to the marketization of education governance in Viet Nam. There are at least three major explanations. The first concerns the particular path of Viet Nam’s market transition. At the outset of the transition, Viet Nam was in deep poverty and its state was so fiscally strapped it barely functioned. Systemic inefficiencies, perverse incentives, and expanding markets had the effect of draining already scarce resources for education. In many rural areas, teachers went months without compensation while the agricultural collectives that were supposed to support teachers disbanded. Many teachers left the profession while others who stayed had to find other way to make ends meet. The fiscal operations of Viet Nam’s state did not recover until the mid-1990s and significant increases in teachers’ wages would not occur for another decade. Gradual increases in spending on education would occur, though not enough to sustain the livelihoods of the country’s nearly 1 million teachers. Hence, while both the numbers of schools and enrolments increased, Viet Nam’s schools remained chronically underfunded, and much of the teaching staff would have to rely on other forms of remuneration outside of their formal teaching jobs.

“Socialization” policies in the education sector were designed with the intent of reducing demands on the state education budget. The most important means to this end included the collection of fees and other charges, the promotion of non-state provision of education (through self-financed “people’s founded” schools), and the creation of a tiered education system in which different classes of students within the public school system would be subject to different payment schemes. These policies were effective in that they did reduce demands on scarce budgetary resources. But they also contributed to the commodification of education by making access to schooling increasingly contingent on the payment of fees.

The expansion of non-state provision of education has gathered pace, particularly at the preschool, upper secondary school and tertiary levels. By 2006, large proportions of preschool and upper-secondary students were attending non-state schools or were registered as “semi-public” students paying semi-public fees. But even in nominally public schools, the amounts of fees and charges remain substantial. Students have to pay various “voluntary” contributions, including construction contributions, health insurance for students, water charges, and so forth. There are, in addition, expenses for school books, uniforms, and lunches. In many localities, parents have a “choice” of sending their children to half or full-day sessions. Preschool enrolment remains low among poorer segments of the population and the continued commodification of preschool education will likely prolong poverty in Viet Nam.

A final aspect of marketization in Viet Nam has been the proliferation of “extra-study” (*học thêm*), consisting of the private provision of school lessons outside of school hours by “public” school teachers. The phenomenon of extra study is by no means unique to Viet Nam. But the evolution of this practice in Viet Nam was, in the first instance, driven by low wages for teachers. Extra study turns out to be critical to academic success. It is also costly and promotes inequality by making academic success more contingent on income. Preschool and secondary school (particularly upper secondary school) are the most expensive stages of the education system with respect to extra study. Monthly fees for extra study for secondary school students can exceed US\$100, an unattainable sum for poor households. Other aspects of marketization in Viet Nam’s education governance that cannot be addressed at length here include the commercialization of education (such as the permission of advertising in schools), the sale and purchase of degrees, and various forms of gift giving.

Equity challenges in the governance of education

The stratification outcomes of the marketization of education governance are just as salient as the marketization itself. The commodification of education and the marketization of education governance have exacerbated educational inequalities in Viet Nam. Remarkably, gender inequalities are negligible, at least so far as enrolments of Kinh (i.e., Viet) children go at the primary and secondary levels of education. There are, by contrasts, severe inequalities with respect to ethnic minorities. Figure 1 shows estimated annual per capita expenditure on education per student in Viet Nam for the period 2002 to 2008, across five different expenditure quintiles of the population.

Figure 1 captures an important aspect of Viet Nam's education system: the quite dramatic variations in the amount of resources households are able to commit to education across different regions and segments of the population. Household expenditure on education across regions reflects not only variance in school fees across regions but the varying sums that households in different regions pay for so-called "extra-study". By 2008, it was not uncommon for households in Ho Chi Minh City or Ha Noi to pay US\$100 per month, an unimaginable sum for poor households in any region. Recent household data suggests the share of household expenditure on education going to such extra study has declined from 20% to 15%. Nonetheless, payments for extra-study remain a significant expenditure item. Other equity challenges in the governance of education in Viet Nam can be seen through regional comparisons presented in Table 1.

Generally, enrolments have increased across all regions of Viet Nam, particularly at the primary and lower secondary levels. But, as Table 1 shows, the pace of improvement has been uneven across regions, even though Viet Nam's poorest regions – the northwest mountainous region and central highlands – have registered considerable gains. An examination of enrolment rates across regions provides some indication of the effects of uneven development and income on disparities on education.

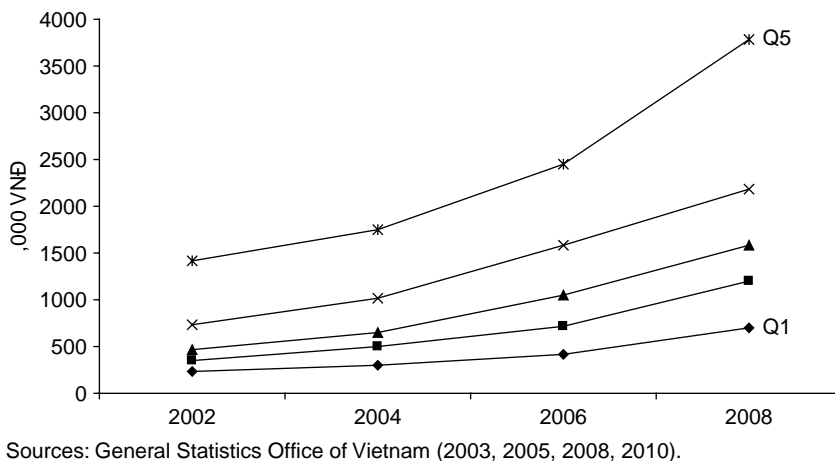


Figure 1. Average expenditure on education per student in the past 12 months (2002–2008).

Table 1. Net enrolment by region (2006).

Region	Net enrolment by level of schooling (%)		
	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
Red River Delta	90.4	86.9	68.3
Northeast	89.2	83.3	55.3
Northwest	82.9	61.0	34.7
North Central	91.8	84.2	59.8
South Central	89.6	81.6	58.1
Central Highlands	87.5	69.9	43.8
Southeast	89.1	78.2	55.2
Mekong Delta	88.4	69.3	38.4

Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2008).

Equity-enhancing schemes²

A widely known effect of marketized education is the emergence of educational inequalities. Although Viet Nam has registered major gains with respect to education, children in Viet Nam continue to confront major obstacles to schooling, frequently due to the expenses they must bear. Although these problems are especially severe for children in poor and remote areas, education is a concern for children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Vietnamese state's National Target Programs and Program 135 have sought to promote education with assistance for the construction of schools and the provision of certain forms of financial assistance, including the exemption of school fees and other contributions to officially income-poor and ethnic minority children only. The general intent of these forms of assistance is to decommodify education. A recent government edict (Decision 112) established monthly payments of VND70,000 to certified income-poor households for the preschool attendance of their children, of VND140,000 for households with children attending semi-boarding schools.

Recent data indicate that around 20% of children in surveyed households do not attend school at the grade appropriate for their age. (One can only suspect that the actual figure is higher, given that migrant households are not accounted for in either survey.) Alternatively, one of the encouraging trends appears to be remarkable equality among boys and girls, in terms of enrolment, however this is not the case among ethnic minority groups, where girls continue to trail severely behind. Major weaknesses in the education system include the inadequacy of arrangements for preschool, the financial obstacles education presents families, and the difficulties children in ethnic minority groups encounter with respect to education. The challenges of starting education in time are especially acute for children living in remote rural areas, for ethnic minority children (especially girls), children affected by HIV/AIDS, migrant children, and children with disabilities.

Despite fees reductions and exemptions schemes, the cost of education remains a major obstacle to schooling. In some localities, local officials continue to succumb to "achievement syndrome" (*thành tích*), reporting statistics that are obviously exaggerated but which allow local authorities to report "success". Although reforms in the test evaluation system were designed to improve the quality of students, they sow hopelessness among many students, contributing to the drop out problem. In one poor province (Sóc Trăng), between 2005 and 2008 the dropout rate hovered between 10% and 15% per year

in the 7th and 8th grade, after which it levelled off. Numerous studies suggest that ethnic minority households and children from ethnic minority groups continued to face difficulties owing to language problems and various forms of discrimination.

In short, the state's safety nets policies are having a significant impact, but they are frequently overwhelmed by other factors that conspire to deprive children of educational opportunities. There are also financial problems the education providers face. Resources allocated for pre-primary education are frequently much less than is needed, and in some instances local officials have to turn parents and children away. The cost of schooling, geographic barriers, and (intended and unintended) discrimination continues to undermine the educational prospects of Viet Nam's children, particularly those in ethnic minority and other socio-economically vulnerable groups.

Current issues in globalization and the governance of education in Viet Nam

The governance of education in Viet Nam occurs in an increasingly globalized context. The significance of this to education policy and its outcomes can be seen through an analysis of issue areas: global economic turbulence, vocational and higher education reform, and the politics governance.

Global economic turbulence and the governance of education in Viet Nam

In 2008, Viet Nam experienced its worst economic turbulence since the late 1980s. Dependent on its exports, Viet Nam was by 2009 facing a global economic of uncertain duration. By May of 2008, inflation in Viet Nam had reached 25% (the highest since 1993) while food prices increased by some 70% early in 2008 and have declined only moderately since. Prices for other essential goods such as fuel, housing, electricity, and other products and services increased have fluctuated. Housing prices (particularly in urban areas) has declined, but housing remains very expensive and in short supply. The global economic down turn has slowed economic growth (and investment). The turbulence (and more specifically the inflation and lower growth forecasts) had both endogenous and exogenous causes, but in key respects illustrate the heightened risk exposure that comes with globalization.³

Specifically, these economic shocks have placed strains on households' education expenditure and that increased food and housing prices are crowding out expenditures on education. When households can no longer afford education, children withdrawal from their studies. Anecdotal evidence from research in three provinces suggested dropouts were on the rise, particularly among the poor in non-food self-sufficient areas. This is significant. For although Viet Nam has registered impressive gains in the field of education and poverty reduction, large segments of Viet Nam's population remain poor or near poor. As Viet Nam urbanizes, more of its children will come from non-food self-sufficient households. In short, governance of education under market arrangements – even in opaque informal markets – exposes households' ability to finance the cost of education. The fact of Viet Nam's greater exposure to global economic turbulence gives reason to reconsider the wisdom of a highly commodified education system.

The commodification of education in Viet Nam is less worrisome provided that economic growth remains rapid and reasonably broad in its spatial and demographic distribution. However, when growth slows, or when basic items become prohibitively expensive for poor and even middle households, commodified education becomes costly for both households and Viet Nam. As we have observed, efforts to shield Vietnamese households from the pernicious shocks of global markets are at present inadequate. In the absence of significant policy

adjustments, Viet Nam will see a generation of its less well-off children effectively priced out of education. Although it is projected that Viet Nam's economy and per capita incomes will continue to grow, there is concern that the pace of growth may slow considerably, particularly if continuous inflation reduces the attractiveness of Viet Nam for prospective investors. There is also concern that economic turbulence may persist and that periodic stress on households' education expenditure will become a pathological defect in Viet Nam's development.

Globalization, Viet Nam's skills gap, and bureaucratic politics in the governance of higher education

The Vietnamese state operates in a fundamentally changed domestic and international context. Late-developing countries like Viet Nam must compete on an uneven playing field, and states like Viet Nam's must nurture and create comparative advantage with a constant eye toward sustainability and changing market conditions. Although enrolments in upper secondary and tertiary education have increased, the majority of Vietnamese children are not competing upper-secondary education and receive little or no occupational education. Currently, roughly one in four Vietnamese is a child below aged 15 and a million new Vietnamese enter labour markets every year. Going forward, an insufficient pool of skilled workers and underdeveloped research capacities in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities will limit the sustainability and global competitiveness of Viet Nam's economy and may hamper or distort future achievements in the social, political, and cultural spheres. There are efforts to reform the governance of education, but they are just beginning. In the mean time, the decentralization of higher education – which may produce improvements in some spheres – also brings the risk of commercializing higher education at the expense of quality improvements.

Beginning with skills, firms in Viet Nam face intense competition in a global economy characterized by rapid technical change. Employers in Viet Nam have a need for skilled workers but cannot find enough, and the price of skilled workers in Viet Nam is increasing more rapidly than average wage costs. Viet Nam's leaders have given consistent rhetorical attention to skills, in fact even prior to 1989. But as recently as 2006, only 15–20% of Viet Nam's labour force had received formal training (Dormeier Freire & Vu, 2007). The relevance of Vietnam's state-supervised curricula has been the subject of profound doubt, both by students and employers is in profound doubt. In some manufacturing industries that draw on vocationally trained students, employers typically must still train workers anywhere from six months to two years for the latter to adequately perform their jobs. A recent collaborative effort between six Vietnamese universities and the Dutch Government is helping universities develop new curricula, based on surveys of employers needs (M.H. Nguyễn, 2007). The matter of skills development shows the new global challenges Viet Nam faces as well as the opportunities globalization presents Vietnamese universities in responding to the needs.

Comprehensive higher education reform is seen as one of the most important and challenging tasks confronting Viet Nam's leaders. After decades of neglect, Viet Nam's political leaders are now giving higher education their urgent attention. Higher education reform is viewed as essential not only for ensuring the long term sustainability and international competitiveness of Viet Nam's economy, but also for less instrumental but not less important reasons, such as improving national capacities in basic science and developing a more intellectually vibrant and even substantively democratic society. Higher education is viewed as especially important in light of globalization, as many state

leaders within and outside the education sector realize that higher education is key to Viet Nam's global and international positioning.

Viet Nam's government has ambitious (and according to some, highly unrealistic) plans for the higher education sector, including adding 10,000 PhDs and achieving a top 200 university by 2020. To many observers, it seems clear that effective higher education reform will need to start with governance reforms, even as the meaning of governance in Viet Nam (as elsewhere) is poorly understood. As it stands, however, higher education in Viet Nam is substandard and compares poorly to most other countries in East (including Southeast) Asia, with the exception of some educational basket-cases (Myanmar comes to mind). Notably, Viet Nam lacks a single university of international standing, though there are current efforts to address this gap. Second, previous efforts to reform higher education have failed and political obstacles to fundamental reforms of higher education remain. Third, and most ominously, as Viet Nam's economy continues to grow, the underdeveloped state of higher education threatens to disable the country over the longer term.

There is wide agreement that problems in higher education stem from the Ministry of Education and Training's outmoded, over-centralized, and conservative management approach, referred to locally as "controlism" (*chủ quản*). Controlism is a rigid management disposition driven by entrenched interests and fear of change that scorns initiative and prevents educators from responding to local needs. Controlism is now seen as an important obstacle to improving higher education, as those within and outside the education sector believe individual colleges and universities are better able to respond to local and global labour market demands. Indeed, the term "autonomy" has gained great currency in Viet Nam's higher education system, but is less often realized in practice. (Though the translation of "governance" into Vietnamese has produced twisted and inaccurate results, whereby governance is understood as "state management" or regulation.) State leaders in Viet Nam remain mystified by the idea that co-ordination and order in higher education might be achieved without state or party control.

Nonetheless, there seems a move under-foot to some new mode of governance in higher education. The most important single document on higher education reform is undoubtedly Decree 14 (2 November 2005), on the "Fundamental and comprehensive renovation of university education in the period 2006–2020."⁴ The Decree identifies general and specific aims for higher education in Viet Nam. These can be restated concisely as six different task clusters, including:

- working out the structure, system, and network of university education;
- overhauling curriculum and quality assurance;
- expanding the scale of education through diversification of funding sources;
- expanding research activities and financially exploit their practical application;
- accelerating professional development of teachers and education managers; and
- increasing the autonomy and responsiveness/responsibility of universities, state management, and supervisory role of "society".

While globalization and international integration are not stated as major aims of Decree 14, it is clear from other segments of the document (as well as other policy statements) that international cooperation is viewed as a means (*phương tiện*) of achieving the above aims. That is, promoting higher education reform will require the increased development of foreign ties, increased partnership with foreign partners, and the increased though selective adoption of foreign ideas and practices.

In Viet Nam, a certain bureaucratic politics has emerged in the process of marketization whereby the provision of essential services is increasing being transformed into a field of business enterprises. Part of this owes to an ongoing process of administrative and financial decentralization – a policy actively promoted by international organizations such as the World Bank – aiming (again) to reduce burdens on the state budget. Of particular importance are two government decrees – Nos. 10 and 43 – which encourage public service units (including some kinds of schools) to promote non-budgetary sources of revenue through the expansion, reorganization, and introduction of new services. In principle, public service delivery units (such as schools) must retain their core functions and mission and certain categories of schools (such as primary and lower secondary schools) are forbidden from engaging in such activities. However, as units are entitled to use proceeds from these activities for increasing staff remuneration, there are powerful incentives at work. Possible hazards of the decentralization craze in Viet Nam's higher education sector include the further stratification of the education system. Across Viet Nam, education service providers are increasingly promoting new business ventures, sometimes in ways that are not clearly linked to their ostensible higher education mission. For example, the rapid expansion of enrolments in degree and non-degree programmes is used as a strategy for boosting revenue, with little regard for the quality of education services provided or the relevance of the curriculum to labour market demand.

Fortunately, it seems the globalization of higher education in Viet Nam is generating some promising efforts to address Viet Nam's increasingly acute human resource needs. To promote the development of higher education, Viet Nam's government has enlisted the support of a diversity of partners, ranging from World Bank, bilateral donors, foreign universities, and prominent individuals (such as presidents of elite universities). There is already in Viet Nam a significant outflow of tertiary students (especially from wealthy households) for studies overseas.

Globalization and the politics of education governance

Viet Nam's state is promoting some aspects of globalization and clearly guarding against others. Several issues in the governance of education touched upon in the foregoing analyses have political aspects that are of concern to different elements of the ruling party. Based on my own observations of Viet Nam's education system, three concerns stand above others. The first concerns the issue of equity or perceived inequities arising from the commodification of education and related concerns about Viet Nam's ability to "catch up" or surpass other regional economies. A second concern relates to prospective international competition in the education sector, particularly as it relates to the provision of tertiary education, especially in light of Viet Nam's WTO commitments. A final political issue concerns the intellectual threats posed by the development of higher education system.

Throughout its existence, the CPV has been impressive (if not entirely effective) in its attempts to address inequalities in the sphere of education. As Viet Nam has grown, certain educational inequalities have declined, but certain others have increased. Cost and quality inequalities are not inherently bad and may even be desirable (e.g., in higher education). There is, however, concern among many that educationally-based social inequalities (regional and otherwise) will intensify and that "normal" Vietnamese may be priced out of the emerging "education market" including that for higher education. The nature of equity challenges in the education system is likely to change over time. As enrolments increase, so do expectations of future learning. Based on the CPV's own rhetoric, opportunities for

higher education should be available in a country that traditionally accords higher education and social justice.

Viet Nam's accession to the WTO means that, in the future, an increasing number of foreign private providers of education will enter Viet Nam. Not only will Vietnamese youngsters of sufficient means go for education overseas, for reasons of quality and status, many may prefer enrolling in foreign schools that choose to locate in Viet Nam. Free competition in the field of higher education in Viet Nam is a concern if Vietnamese providers of higher education become seen as second-rate. A more likely scenario is that Vietnamese institutions will seek to partner with and derive economic benefits from overseas institutions.

Numerous authors have noted that education governance is seen not only as a basis for international economic competition but also as key site of cultural promotion. In Viet Nam, state authorities place great emphasis on the cultural role of education and, in particular, the use of education as a means of inculcating certain values, including a love for the CPV. Current debates on higher education reform hinge, as we have seen, largely on the issue of autonomy while tension in debates concerning the non-state provision of higher education frequently stem from issues of curriculum design and pedagogy. Currently in Viet Nam, all providers of education – state or non-state and at all levels – remain thoroughly penetrated by Party organs. While many of the Party's perspectives on many issues are admirable, it is clear that the Party does not desire a higher education system in which free debate takes place or one in which challenges to the Party's wisdom and correctness can be called into question.

Conclusion

Some understandings of globalization emphasize a global convergence around certain principles and institutions. Others emphasize local diversity and the resilience of local institutions. In either case, local actors and institutions always mediate the localized outcomes of globalizing processes. The historical and present dynamics of the governance of education in Viet Nam are testimony to this point. Across the classical, colonial, state-socialist, and contemporary eras, state authorities have played leading roles in the governance of education. In each era, globalizing forces resulted in important periods of institutional realignment. Viet Nam is presently experiencing historic changes in the governance of education. But the overwhelming interest in the state of leading the governance of education remains.

This article has summarized major developments in the governance of education in Viet Nam, particularly in light of globalization. From a very early period in Viet Nam's history to the present, the governance of education has been viewed as profoundly political. Education has and continues to be seen as inseparable from key state imperatives, including the maintenance of social order, the promotion of economic accumulation and social welfare, and the strengthening of the state's capacities and legitimacy. Today in Viet Nam, the state remains the most important provider of education, some provision of education takes place through "non-state" (though politically subordinated) institutions. In the mean time, much of the institutional responsibility for education finance – even in nominally "public" schools – has been shifted onto households.

Even in the context of the current global turbulence, it seems clear that Viet Nam's economy will continue to grow. But it is equally clear that what transpires in the field of the governance of education will profoundly influence the sustainability of that growth, its distribution, and its qualitative impacts on social life in Viet Nam.

Notes

1. In this sense, a governance system is similar to Krasner's conception of "regime", which refers to "a set of rules, institutions, and structured interests that constrain individuals through compliance procedures" (Krasner, 1983, cited in Gough, 2004, p. 22).
2. This passage draws on research conducted for UNICEF by the author in 2008 (London & van Ulford, 2008).
3. Domestically, generalized inflation was an outgrowth of the state's market-based industrialization strategy and, in particular, state banks' proclivity to issue soft loans to state enterprises, rampant property speculation and soaring property prices, and rising cost of skilled labour. An adverse weather event (severe cold in the north of Viet Nam) and a pig blight contributed to rising food prices. But it was the combination of these factors with the global food crisis that emerged in early 2008 and coincident surges in energy prices that drove up inflation. This has raised important short-term and long-term issues related to the governance of education.
4. Nghị Định 14, in *Công Báo* and quoted in Renovating University Education in Vietnam (*Đổi Mới Giáo Dục Đại Học Việt Nam*, July 2005).

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