
The Process of Establishing Universities in South Vietnam in 1955-1957

Luu Phuong Truc

International School Ho Chi Minh City, American Academy (ISHCMC-AA), Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Email address:

kinferider@gmail.com

To cite this article:

Luu Phuong Truc. The Process of Establishing Universities in South Vietnam in 1955-1957. *History Research*.

Vol. 10, No. 2, 2022, pp. 113-118. doi: 10.11648/j.history.20221002.17

Received: September 25, 2022; **Accepted:** October 17, 2022; **Published:** October 27, 2022

Abstract: After the signing of the Genève Accords (1954), the higher education system established by the French in Indochina (mainly based in Hanoi) from the beginning of the 20th century was gradually moved to Saigon. After taking over the system from the French, in order to meet the demand for human resources to serve the regime and under the auspices of the United States, the government of the Republic of Vietnam had made lots of efforts to build a new higher education system in South Vietnam. In 1955-1957, this system (consisting of universities and post-secondary schools) was gradually formed in South Vietnam on the basis of reconstructing and restructuring most French higher education institutions established earlier. In the context of the transition to a new, more pragmatic higher education system following American model, the results were not much and the transition proceeded relatively slowly despite the aid and political manipulation from the US. Until before 1960, French influence to the higher education system of Republic of Vietnam still prevailed, leaving clear marks on the structure, organization and operation of universities in South Vietnam.

Keywords: Republic of Vietnam, Higher Education, Process of Establishing, 1955-1957

1. Introduction

In 1954, Vietnam was temporarily divided into two regions and supposed to be reunited after a nation-wide election for in 1956. However, before the election being held in the Southern region of Vietnam, the US had gradually dismissed the French before directly intervening and maintaining the division of Vietnam in long term. In 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem has been backed by the US for establishing the Government of the Republic of Vietnam in the South of Vietnam. The government of the Republic of Vietnam, which heavily relied on the comprehensive support and aid of the US, faced the need developing higher educational model and training human resources for the purpose of socio-economic and cultural development as well as for service in the US invasion of South Vietnam. In fact, shortly after its establishment, the Republic of Vietnam government issued many policies related to higher education. On the basis of inheriting educational institutions left by the French, the Republic of Vietnam government restructured Vietnam National University, established new universities and other higher education institutions in South Vietnam. However, the

higher educational system was mainly relied on foundations inherited from the French model without any long-term planning for development. Moreover, the political dependence on the US of the ROV government led higher education in South Vietnam in this period failed to leave its own mark; instead, it was mainly influenced by French higher education.

2. Literature Review and Research Methodology

Research works on higher education in the South Vietnam after signing the Genève Accord (1954) are mainly based on sources of documents including: Archived documents - Directives, Decisions, Guidelines, Policies and directions of the Republic of Vietnam government for education system; memoirs and narratives of lecturers and students who participated in the teaching, learning and management at universities and schools of that period. These documents are being preserved at Vietnam National Archives Centers. Representative studies related to this field include: Do Trong

Hue (1965). *Problems in education: French program or Vietnamese program*; Nguyen Dinh Hoa (1961), *Road to build the national higher education*; Nguyen Van Trang (1972). *Education issues*; Do Ba Khe 1972. *Community Colleges*; Dao Nhat Tan (1970); Doan Viet Hoat (1972). *University fever in the South*; Long Dien (1977). *The organization and activities of USAID in the new colonial education in South Vietnam*; Nguyen Thi Mai Huong, Luu Van Quyet (2022). *Higher Education Development Policy in South Vietnam in 1955-1963*; Tran Ngoc Dinh (1975). *New American colonial higher education in South Vietnam before the liberation*; Nguyen Thi Hong Cuc (2014). *Higher education management in South Vietnam (1954-1975)*; Ngo Minh Oanh (2011). *General education in the South in 1954-1975*; 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, etc.* These works cover many aspects of the establishment, organizational structure, objectives and contents of training; as well as the achievements and limitations of higher education in South Vietnam in the 1956-1975 period. In fact, there are not many in-depth research works on the formation of higher education system in South Vietnam after the signing of the Genève Accords in 1954. These are the academic "gaps" that we want to fill in with the content of this article.

By accessing primary sources such as original documents (archives) including Directives, Mandatories, Reports, Official Letters, etc. related to higher educational management of the Republic of Vietnam, which are now being stored at Vietnam National Archives Centers, as well as the secondary resources such as academic works of various scholars, we use interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary research methods to clarify the historical context, factors with impact and higher education development policies of the Republic of Vietnam government in Vietnam; and analyze the process of establishing higher education institutions in South Vietnam in the early period of the Republic of Vietnam government. On that basis, we present our comments on these issues.

3. Research Findings

3.1. Background and Higher Education Policy of the Republic of Vietnam Government in South Vietnam After 1954

After the accomplishment of invading Indochina by the end of the 19th century, with the notion that "schools are the most effective and surest tools in the hands of the conquerors" [1], the French established an education system in the colonial lands to justify their aggression. After a process of research and preparation, in the early 20th century, the colonial education system was established throughout Indochina, embracing the territory of Vietnam [2]. In that context, the University of Indochina was established in 1906 in Hanoi. This was the first modern Western-style university in Vietnam founded by the French during the colonial era,

tasked with "popularizing European knowledge and methods in the Far East, mainly through French language" [3]. University of Indochina consists of the following members: School of Law and Administration; School of Science; School of Medicine; School of Construction and Faculty of Literature. In 1946, after reconquering Indochina, the French established the Vietnam-France Mixed University on the basis of merging Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy, Law and Science of University of Indochina and opened branches of these schools in Saigon [4].

In order to ensure legal rights in the field of education, in March 1949, the then-Prime Minister of France, Vicent Auriol signed with Bao Dai (represented for the State of Vietnam- a government in the Indochina Federation of the French Union) the Élysée Treaty with many contents, including a provision stating that the French acknowledges the independence of the Bao Dai-established State of Vietnam government, in consideration of recognition that France is allowed to maintain the name of French Union for its universities in Vietnam [5]. Next, in December 1949, the French government and Bao Dai signed a "Cultural Treaty" and an Annex for "transition clauses" in January 1951, stating the transfer of this educational institution toward the management by the State of Vietnam 's government [1].

After being defeated in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu, French was forced to sign the Genève Accords ending the war on the ground of respecting the territorial integrity, unity, sovereignty and independence of countries in Indochinese Peninsula. The Accords made a decision that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was temporarily divided into the Northern and Southern regions. The 17th parallel (Ben Hai River, Quang Binh Province of Vietnam today) was chosen as interim military division for the two regions which were supposed to be reunited after a nation-wide election for in 1956. However, in South Vietnam, the US further increased its intervention, seeking all the ways to undermine the Genève Accords and plotting for Vietnam to stay divided. In 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem has been backed by the US for establishing the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (ROV) and self-claiming as Prime Minister in the South of Vietnam [6]. The Republic of Vietnam government existed in South Vietnam from 1955 to 1975, completely depended on the aid from the US and served the new American colonial policy in South Vietnam.

The goal of building Republic of Vietnam government in South Vietnam was affirmed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the memorandum sent to Department of Defense on August 4, 1954: "It is absolutely essential that there is a strong, stable, civil government in power..." [7]. To do this, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided advice to the Republic of Vietnam on economy, administration, culture-society, security, etc. to build the government. In terms of education, from the viewpoint of American education policy makers, in order to build a "new nation" that belongs to the "free world", higher education plays an important role in training civil service staff to serve the regime. In order to study and understand the customs and

psychology of South Vietnam people, thus to propose cultural and educational solutions in line with the goals of the new colonial policy, international development agencies of the US in Vietnam set up a separate office to help the Republic of Vietnam government reform its education apparatus, eliminate the influence of French education and build American-style pragmatic education in South Vietnam [8]. Through the aid and activities of education think tanks, the US intervened in the planning and implementation of the Republic of Vietnam government's education development policy. According to a statistic, US education aid to the Republic of Vietnam government ranged from \$1 million to more than \$2 million per year [9].

Under the US auspices, Republic of Vietnam government had taken concrete steps to build a new education system. The policy on higher and professional education development was outlined by the National Council of the Republic of Vietnam in the "Petition for Education Reform and Organization" with a few short lines: establishing an Economics Department teaching in Vietnamese, opening more technical schools to attract young people to pursue studies, etc. This not only helps them make a living but also benefits the nation [10]. These are the measures to build higher and professional education system in line with a new administration that has just taken control with a high demand for civil service staff and technicians for socioeconomic activities. From 1956, the Republic of Vietnam government had more fundamental policies to shape the views and policies of building education system in South Vietnam, which focused on two main contents: (1) receiving higher education institutions from the French; (2) "promoting" higher education in order to train civil service staff for the regime. With that in mind, Republic of Vietnam government implemented measures aiming at: "Recovering educational sovereignty in full; implementing an education system that is humane, national and liberal; reforming the education management system in terms of administration to manage works quickly and reasonably; promoting higher and technical education to train specialists that are needed for the construction of the country" [11].

On February 21, 1956, the Republic of Vietnam government issued Decree No. 98-GD/ND to establish Ministry of National Education, as well as education levels from elementary to tertiary and professional schools [12]. In the 1956 Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam, Article 26 defines: "The nation strives for every citizen to have basic, compulsory and free education. Every citizen has the right to pursue education. Those who have the ability but without their own means will be supported in this pursuit. The nation recognizes that parents have the right to choose a school for their children. Private institutions open schools according to law. Private universities and professional colleges that meet statutory requirements can be recognized by the nation. Diplomas issued by those schools may be nationally recognized" [13].

In the "First National Education Conference" of the Republic of Vietnam (held in 1958), three basic principles of Republic of Vietnam education were identified: Education of

Humanity - National Education - Liberal Education. Accordingly, (1) Education of Humanity means education must uphold the value of a person, which is seen as a lifeline rather than a tool that serves the goal of any individual, party or organization. (2) National Education means education must respect the good traditions of the nation, the curriculum must make student "conscious of the existence of the nation, raise pride and patriotism in the young generation". (3) Liberal Education: This principle requires the curriculum to be extensive in order to receive advanced scientific ideas and knowledge from everywhere, thus create rich, advanced and modern understanding. Based on these principles, the Republic of Vietnam government set the goal, content and method of education to "training young people in all three aspects: physical education, virtue and knowledge; the higher they go, the more they value their education". Accordingly, the education system in the early period of Republic of Vietnam government is divided into 3 levels: elementary; secondary and tertiary (consisting of undergraduate, post-secondary and vocational education) In which, the training duration of undergraduate level is from 5 to 7 years and of post-secondary and vocational levels is from 2 to 3 years, which are under the management of Higher Education Department under Ministry of National Education [14].

The Republic of Vietnam Government has put efforts on forming a higher educational system for the development of socio-economics and culture as well as for the war service in the South of Vietnam. However, the system was initially inherited from the French model without any long-term renovation and development plan, tight budgets and the close dependence on the US. The higher educational system in the South of Vietnam was mainly influenced by French higher educational model instead of education policies of the ROV government.

3.2. Higher Education Institutions Established in South Vietnam After 1954

After the signing of the Genève Accords in 1954, nearly one million people migrated from the North to the South of Vietnam. In the context of migration, a great amount of lecturers, students and higher education institutions of the University of Indochina in Hanoi also moved and relocated to the Southern region. On May 11, 1955, before withdrawing from Vietnam, the University of Indochina was handed over to the State of Vietnam's government and renamed as Vietnam National University [15]. By 1956, followed by the official inauguration in South Vietnam of the Republic of Vietnam government, the Vietnam National University was officially managed, organized by the administration of ROV. On the basis of French higher education system, the first universities in South Vietnam were restructured, established and expanded in scale.

3.2.1. Conversion of Vietnam National University into Saigon University and Establishment of Hue University

On March 1, 1957, the ROV government issued Decree

No. 45-GD, changing the name of Vietnam National University to Saigon University. After being restructured, Saigon University consists of the following member schools (faculties): School of Literature; School of Science (Saigon Science School); School of Law; School of Medicine (School of Medicine - Pharmacy - Dentistry); Saigon School of Education; College of Architecture.



Figure 1. Organizational structure of Saigon University in 1957 [15].

School of Literature was established in 1950 in Hanoi according to Decree No. 1 - ND/GD dated January 4, 1950 of Ministry of National Education, Government of the State of Vietnam (directly under the management of Ministry of National Education). In November 1954, the school was moved to and reestablished in Saigon. On December 6, 1955, in order to unify the management of universities in South Vietnam, School of Literature was merged into Vietnam National University (Saigon University).

School of Science (Saigon Science School), formerly known as College of Science under University of Indochina was established on July 26, 1941 in Hanoi according to a decree of the Government of Indochina. In 1947, the school opened its second campus in Saigon. On November 12, 1953, the school was reformed into Science School according to an agreement between the French and Vietnamese governments. In November 1954, the campuses in Hanoi and Saigon were merged with each other to form School of Science (Saigon Science School) under Vietnam National University.

School of Law was established on February 15, 1933 on the basis of École Supérieure de Droit (Law School). In 1941, it was renamed School of Law of Indochina (Faculté de Droit de l'Indochine). On May 11, 1955, School of Law was merged into and became a member of Vietnam National University.

School of Medicine (School of Medicine - Pharmacy - Dentistry), formerly known as Hanoi School of Medicine (École de Médecine de Hanoi) was established on January 18, 1902 according to a Decree of the French government in Indochina. On October 25, 1904, Hanoi School of Medicine was restructured and renamed School of Medicine of Indochina (École de Médecine de l'Indochine). In 1914, its second campus was established in Saigon. In 1941, the school changed its name to School of Medicine and Pharmacy. In November 1954, the Hanoi campus of School of Medicine and Pharmacy was moved to Saigon to establish Faculty of Medicine and became a member of Vietnam National University.

Saigon School of Education was established on August 21, 1958 under Decree No. 426-GD of the Republic of Vietnam

government on the basis of College of Education established in 1950 in Hanoi.

College of Architecture: In 1926, Department of Architecture was established in Hanoi, then upgraded to School of Architecture under the Indochina College of Fine Arts. Due to the war, it was moved to Da Lat and organized as a local school. On February 1, 1947, the school was renamed Da Lat School of Architecture. In 1948, the school was placed under University of Indochina and upgraded to College of Architecture. According to the agreement dated December 30, 1949 between France and Vietnam, Da Lat College of Architecture under Hanoi University was later moved to Saigon and renamed Saigon College of Architecture. In 1957, the school became a member of Saigon University [15].

Also with the restructuring of Vietnam National University into Saigon University, under Decree No. 45-GD (March 1, 1957), the ROV government established a new university called Hue University. It is the second largest university established in South Vietnam after 1954. In its early days, Hue University consisted of several member schools, such as: College of Fine Arts, National Institute of Midwifery, School of Medical and Nursing Personnel. Hue University is a higher education institution with the function of "promoting Vietnamese culture and at the same time synthesizing national culture with international sources of thought, to help in the training of citizens capable of serving the nation"[15].

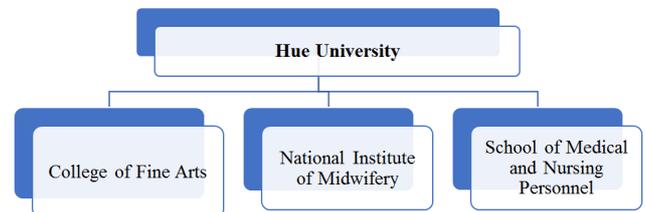


Figure 2. Hue University in 1957 [16].

In terms of organization and management, both Saigon University and Hue University follows the model of multidisciplinary universities as similar as the University of Indochina consisting of different schools/colleges or faculties. The model of multidisciplinary universities was actually founded by the French earlier during the colonial period. The universities was under the management of a Governing Board headed by Chancellor and the aide of Vice-chancellor(s). There were some other administrative units assisting the functional managing of the Chancellor including Departments of Administration, Finance and Culture. Beside the Governing Board, where the Chancellor acts as President, the university also embraced members including General Secretary, Deans, Vice-Deans and Professors from various schools/colleges or faculties [12]. The Dean of each faculty (equivalent to a school/college today) played the highest responsible role for operating and managing the Faculty. Faculties operated almost independently from each other and might be geographical located differently. Ministry of

Education would be on behalf of the government to allocate national budget for financing universities. The universities would be autonomous in terms of personnel, programs and curriculums based on the approval of Minister of Education [17].

3.2.2. Establishment of Post-Secondary and Vocational Schools

Since 1955, in order to train engineers, industrial workers and agricultural personnel, the Republic of Vietnam government established several post-secondary schools, such as: National Academy of Public Administration; Phu Tho Technical Center; National School of Agriculture, Forestry and Livestock Farming; and some vocational schools (also called intermediate schools) including: National Music and Drama School, College of Fine Arts, Language Center, National Posts School, National Midwifery School, etc.

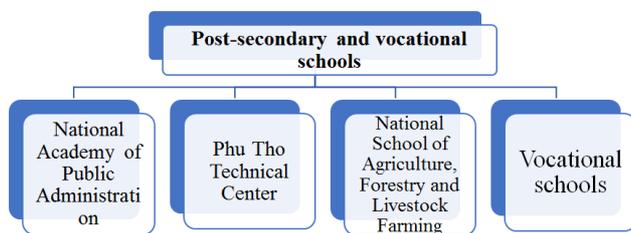


Figure 3. Diagram of post-secondary and vocational schools in South Vietnam in 1956 [18].

National Academy of Public Administration (under the Presidential Palace) was established on April 7, 1952. It was originally Hanoi Law School, a department of which was moved to Da Lat. On August 9, 1955, the Republic of Vietnam government moved the branch of school from Da Lat to Saigon and named it National Academy of Public Administration.

Phu Tho National Technical Center (also known as Phu Tho Technical School) (under Ministry of National Education) was established on June 29, 1957 by a Decree of President of the Republic of Vietnam, consisting of 4 member schools (College of Public Works; College of Electrical Engineering; National Technology Engineer School; Vietnam Maritime School), and run by a Director and a Deputy Director. Each member school is managed by a Director in charge.

National School of Agriculture, Forestry and Livestock Farming was established in 1955 (under the management of Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Vietnam). The school is run by a Rector (appointed by Ministry of Agriculture) with the support of staff. According to the decree of its establishment, the school provides training at post-secondary and intermediate levels, as well as seasonal training courses that are not divided into semesters and have no fixed date of completion [18].

In addition to three major centers of post-secondary training, in the higher education system of South Vietnam in this period, there were also vocational school (a.k.a. Intermediate schools), such as: National Music and Drama

School, College of Fine Arts, Language Center, National Posts School, National Midwifery School, etc. These are small-scale vocational schools.

In terms of management and organization, each post-secondary school is under the administration of a Director with the help of the governing board and office. The Governing Board of a post-secondary school consists of the Director (President) and members being professors. The Office of a post-secondary school is run by the General Secretary [6].

4. Conclusion

After its establishment in South Vietnam, with the US aid, the Republic of Vietnam government took fundamental steps to shape the views and policies of building higher education system in South Vietnam, with the aim of training qualified personnel to serve the construction of the "nation". In 1955-1957, the higher education system (consisting of universities and post-secondary schools) in South Vietnam was gradually formed on the basis reconstructing and restructuring most French higher education institutions that had just been moved from the North to the South. As being influenced by the US through politics, consultation and aid, the Republic of Vietnam's government had trials of establishing university model in South Vietnam following the higher education model of America aimly eliminating the past-French influence. However, the structural system of educational institutions in South Vietnam during this period was yet fundamentally and significantly changed; instead, they still operated according to the model and manner of French universities which had been shaped earlier in the 20th century. The system of educational institutions consisted multidisciplinary model universities (embracing many schools/colleges), vocational schools and post-secondary schools. In this system, the engineering disciplines were mostly placed at vocational or post-secondary level. The disciplines of engineering was not trained at university level and there was certainly not establishment of an school/college of engineering during this period.

Ministry of Education was the governmental institution administratively managing and operating all universities. Moreover, the Ministry would also be responsible for approving many important decisions of the universities such as recruitment, procurement of building materials, building costs, etc. The curriculum and teaching methods of universities in South Vietnam still simulated French higher education model, i.e. strong in theoretical knowledge and weak in science and technology, with giving lectures as the main and classical teaching method. The reason is that the higher education system in South Vietnam is the successor to the University of Indochina. Also, in its early day, the Republic of Vietnam government was unable to build an education system that bears its own colors. However, the establishment of universities as well as other higher education institutions in South Vietnam during this period laid a solid foundation for the formation of the higher education system under the Republic of Vietnam later on.

References

- [1] Luro, Gustave Dumoutier (1887). The beginning of French education in the North, Hanoi, Imprimerie Schneider, p. 4.
- [2] Nguyen Thuy Phuong (2020). Education in Vietnam under the colonial era - red and black legend. Hanoi Publisher, p. 9.
- [3] Governor of Cochinchina (1906). Decree establishing Indochina University Institute. No. 48.042-GGI/NĐ, May 16, 1906.
- [4] Nguyen Thi Mai Huong, Luu Van Quyet (2021). "Higher Education Policy in Southern Vietnam (1955 - 1963)". *Thu Dau Mot University Journal of Science*, No. 3 (52). <http://doi.org/10.37550/tdmu.VJS/2021.03.189>.
- [5] Nghiem The To (1954). Vietnam: Blood and Fire. Sai Gon: Mai Linh Publishing House, p. 89.
- [6] 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". *Review of International Geographical Education (RIGEO)*, 10 (4), pp. 804-814. Doi: 10.33403/rigeo.791622.
- [7] Le Mau Han (1999). General history of Vietnam. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
- [8] Nguyen Tan Phat (2014). Education of the South Vietnamese revolution in the period 1954-1975 - Historical experiences and lessons. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
- [9] USAID (United States Agency for International Development) (1967). Participant Training: Objectives and Returns, Saigon: October, 231. National Archives Center II, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
- [10] National Council of the Republic of Vietnam (1954). Recommendations on education reform and reform. No. HDQG/TT, December 21, 1954. National Archives Center II, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
- [11] Ministry of National Education Republic of Vietnam (1961). Report on the activities of the Ministry of National Education from 7/7/1954 to 7/7/1961 sent to the Prime Minister's office. No. 176-GD/TT/BC, July 28, 1961. National Archives Center II, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
- [12] Ministry of National Education Republic of Vietnam (1965). "Report of the Ministry of National Affairs of the Republic of Vietnam on the 5-year plan educational development". No. 3214-GD / TT, January 3, 1965. National Archives Center II, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
- [13] Ngo Minh Oanh (2019). General in the South (1954-1975). Ho Chi Minh City: General Publishing House.
- [14] Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Vietnam (1958). "Document of the first national educational conference". File 112-GD, December 1958. National Archives Center II, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
- [15] Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam (1957). Decree on the establishment of Saigon University and Hue University Institute. No. 45-GD, March 1, 1957. National Archives Center II, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
- [16] Le Cung 2012. Hue University-55 years of construction and development (1957 - 2012). Hue: University Publishing House.
- [17] Ministry of National Education Republic of Vietnam (1960). "Dispatch from the Ministry of National Education to the Prime Minister's Office on the establishment of educational institutions from 1956 to 1960". No. 1145GD/TT/CV dated October 21, 1960. National Archives Center II, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
- [18] Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Vietnam (1958). "Report on the situation of Colleges-Professionals in the national territory". No. 221 / GQG-TT, October 13, 1958. National Archives Center II, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.