

ADVANCING EDUCATION IN THE WAR CONTEXT: THE COOPERATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM AND THE ASIA FOUNDATION IN THE YEARS 1956-1975

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Abstract. The prolonged conflicts from the liberation movements to the resistance wars in Vietnam in the twentieth century, primarily against the French and American imperialists, shaped contemporary interests in the military struggle rather than cultural, educational, and other social issues. This subsequently affected research tendencies in Vietnamese and foreign scholars' post-war works, which mainly focused on hostilities. However, Vietnamese society's dynamics and mobilization could not be explained and understood without comprehensive knowledge of other aspects beyond the military. Among all the aspects developed in South Vietnam during the war, the Republic of Vietnam's education made an impression through its unique achievements. By pointing out the premises for building an educational cooperative relationship between the Asia Foundation and the Republic of Vietnam in the years 1956-1975; analyzing critical cooperative activities of the Asia Foundation in South Vietnam in the field of education, which included budget and programs, university personnel, and educational materials; and drawing out the features of educational collaboration in South Vietnam during the war, this study aims to gain insight into the development of the Republic of Vietnam's education, to understand the mutual effects of politics, society, military and education; the distinct essence of education that grew in the war context; and the lingering legacies from the educational collaboration between the Asia Foundation and the Republic of Vietnam education.

Keywords: The Asia Foundation, Republic of Vietnam, South Vietnam, education, international cooperation.

1. Introduction

Situated in a special geographical location in Southeast Asia, Vietnam attracted the attention of most powers in the twentieth century, from England, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union to China. She was a 'hotspot' in the influence competition of great powers in the context of the Cold War. It is assumed that Vietnam was one of the critical elements in understanding and explaining the dynamics and evolution of international relations during this period. The war in Vietnam was one of the US longest wars of the twentieth century [1], and the dynamics of this war were also so unique that it is impossible to gain insight into it just by casualty figures, the volume of weapons, and the war expenses, but also other countless tangible and intangible impacts, one of which is the development and movement of non-military issues in the context of war.

The global context and the Vietnam War in the mid-twentieth century profoundly affected the progression and trajectory of cultural and social issues in South Vietnam, authorized by the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) government. In the flow of conflicts, which prioritized military solutions, the education sector of the RVN found the path to enhance and promote itself, which took advantage of the allied bonds, transforming the allies into educational partners by collaborating on educational projects with international organizations, groups, and individuals. Seeing the field of education as one of the inseparable parts of getting to know South Vietnam during the war decades in the last century, several studies related to RVN's education were conducted and published recently; for instance, *Higher Education under the Republic of Vietnam (1956-1975)* written by Hong Thi Hong Nga (Dissertation, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi, 2016), *General Education in South Vietnam (1954-1975)* written by Ngo Minh Oanh (Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House, 2018), *Private University in South Vietnam from 1957 to 1975* written by Pham Ngoc Bao Liem (Dissertation, University of Hue, 2020), and *The American Influences on the Higher Education of the Second Republic of Vietnam: The Case of the National Universities* written by Truong Thuy Dung (Dissertation, University of Hamburg, 2020). These studies elucidate various aspects of RVN's education and contribute vitally to perceiving the RVN's education.

Based mainly on archival materials and the support of published works to analyze RVN's educational cooperation with the Asia Foundation in the years 1956-1975, this research argues that exploring the path of RVN education, primarily through the interaction of RVN education with outside entities, is an irresistible part of understanding the historical trajectory of South Vietnam in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The development of RVN education in the last century did not exist isolatedly but responded to mutual elements of politics, economy, and military, and in turn, it also affected those elements. This study aims to provide evidence to examine the above argument and create an opportunity to gain insight into RVN education, a modern education that existed in Vietnam for approximately three decades and has enduring, valuable legacies in Vietnam's present education system.

2. Content

2.1. Premises for the collaboration of the Asia Foundation in South Vietnam

2.1.1. The change of Vietnam's position in the American foreign policies

Vietnam attracted the United States' attention in the 1940s, appearing in the US foreign policies through the scenario of granting autonomous rights to colonized countries. The American idea confronted fierce opposition from their allies, predominantly from Britain, due to the endangerment of this policy towards British interests in their colonial system [2]. In 1945, after the sudden death of President Roosevelt, the White House welcomed a new leader, the 33rd President of the United States, Harry Truman. Under the Truman administration, the "autonomous policy" that emerged in the predecessor's administration became less appealing [3]. As a staunch anti-communist, President Truman advocated the return of former colonial countries to stem the dynamic rise of a communist wave, especially in Asia. Subsequently, in Vietnam and, to a greater extent, in Indochina, the US became a reliable ally, willing to endorse France, with both financial and material resources, to wage the Indochina War (1945-1954).

Until the 1950s, when realizing that France was incapable of withstanding the Indochina War, the United States, on one hand, still increased its financial and weapon aid to the French; on the other hand, began to consider a new solution for the circumstance with no French presence in Indochina. The United States conceded the potentiality of a future leader for South Vietnam in a former Mandarin under the Nguyen Dynasty - Ngo Dinh Diem. Ngo Dinh Diem's rigid attitude towards France and the communists made him a promising candidate in the eyes of the

Americans to build a new polity, replacing the State of Vietnam governed by the former Emperor – Bao Dai [4].

In 1953, under pressure from the United States, Chief of State - Bao Dai invited Ngo Dinh Diem to return to Saigon for the establishment of a new cabinet. On July 6, 1954, the Cabinet led by Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem was officially founded with 16 members, mainly pro-American politicians such as Tran Van Chuong (Secretary of State), Tran Van Do (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Tran Van Cua (Minister of Finance and Economics), and Phan Khac Suu (Minister of Agriculture) [5]. The birth of this Cabinet marked a milestone in the US foreign policies toward French and Vietnamese affairs. A month after the founding of Ngo Dinh Diem's Cabinet, in a meeting of the US National Security Council, chaired by President Eisenhower, the United States decided to replace the French role and position in Vietnam.

Despite various debates among American politicians, the Ngo Dinh Diem solution was still convincing until the early 1960s. The negative feedback and laments about the authorities of the First Republic, especially about the model of 'nepotism' in South Vietnam, led the White House to re-consider the Ngo Dinh Diem solution and think of a new figure to replace him sailing South Vietnam's politics.

After the coup, which caused the death of Diem and Nhu, and subverted their regime in 1963, South Vietnam's politics fell into chaos during the years 1963-1967 [3]. Looking for a political leader who could stabilize South Vietnam's politics was an urgent task for the United States 'mentors'. The road to finding the president for the Independence Palace was again held with the race of many candidates. Ultimately, Major General Nguyen Van Thieu won the final round after receiving strong support from chief figures of the White House. He officially assumed the presidency of the Independence Palace in 1967 and began the Second Republic in South Vietnam. During the existence of the Second Republic administration, President Nguyen Van Thieu was not solely in the highest position on the political stage as President Ngo Dinh Diem was in the First Republic, he was also the person who received the most lasting endorsement from the United States compared to other leaders of the Second Republic.

Despite experiencing the vicissitudes with many 'ups and downs' of the South Vietnamese politicians, American support for the republic institution in South Vietnam remained unchanged from its first days of establishment until at least 1973, when the Paris Agreement on ending the war and restoring peace in South Vietnam was signed. That helped the Republic of Vietnam to receive tremendous aid from the United States, not only in military and economic terms but also a generous budget to develop RVN education. Along with the military advisory delegations, other American advisors in the fields of culture and education also arrived in South Vietnam shortly after the Republic of Vietnam regime was inaugurated. Among the pioneering agencies, organizations, and American universities that participated in the mission of spreading American culture, there were several prominent names, such as United States Operations Mission, Michigan State University Group, American Friends of Vietnam, Association of Vietnamese Americans, Ohio University, and The Asia Foundation.

2.1.2. US aids, cultural and educational projects, and contracts

After the 1954 Geneva Agreement on Indochina, France compulsorily continued signing other agreements, which handed over the headship of national affairs to the Vietnamese government, including an agreement signed on May 11, 1955, to return the management of higher education to Vietnamese authorities [6]. The United States played the role of a foremost ally when offering its aid to the Republic of Vietnam to build a strong government in South Vietnam. Since the fiscal year 1955, the first year of the First Republic, President Ngo Dinh Diem received aid amounting to US\$ 322 million from the United States [7]. Aid grew dramatically during decades of American involvement in South Vietnam. Since the mid-1960s, US aid to South Vietnam

surged to more than 1 billion US dollars per year. In 1973, US aid to the Republic of Vietnam peaked at US\$ 3,880,600,000 [8].

Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), America's cultural and educational aid activities in developing countries became more systematic and amplified. The educational development activities of USAID in South Vietnam varied across three periods. During the years 1954-1965, USAID focused on small-scale selective education programs, with an emphasis on improving the quality of teacher training at all levels. From 1965, with the escalation of the war, education became more closely connected with pacification activities, especially primary education. Hence, the expansion of educational opportunities became a determining political task. During this period, educational programs focused on building and equipping facilities for schools and classrooms. By the early 1970s, the scope of USAID-coordinated educational programs in South Vietnam was narrowed, focusing mainly on the higher education sector [9].

Similar to other American institutions, universities, and agencies having educational cooperation projects with the Republic of Vietnam, the Asia Foundation did not directly sign contracts with the Republic of Vietnam government; instead, all contracts were conducted through USAID coordination. This situation benefited the Americans in controlling their goals set in educational cooperation while avoiding the duplication in the cooperation activities from different American partners. For example, Michigan State University took charge of administrative and judicial educational contracts, Ohio University had a crucial role in building an experimental high school system in South Vietnam, the University of Florida cooperated in the development of Agricultural Education, and the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point had a significant role in perfecting and renovating the higher education system of the Republic of Vietnam [10-13].

Compared with the above educational institutions, the differences between the Asia Foundation's educational contracts and cooperation projects with South Vietnam from 1956-1975 was noticeable. The Asia Foundation did not concentrate on training; instead, the Asia Foundation's programs focused on activities that subsidized the operation of the RVN education, such as finance, educational materials, methods, facilities, and human resources. This assistance and collaboration helped not only to supplement but also offer comprehensive programs of American organizations, universities, and agencies toward the Republic of Vietnam government.

In the 1970s, the United States adjusted the criteria in its cooperation policies with undeveloped countries, emphasizing: "US development cooperation can be through the private sectors, including organizations that have close relationships with undeveloped countries such as educational institutions, cooperatives, credit institutions, voluntary organizations to maximize cooperation possibilities" [14]. This policy created more favorable legal conditions for private organizations, such as the Asia Foundation, to promote cooperation activities and support cultural and educational development in member countries. The Asia Foundation realized its advantages as a private organization operating in South Vietnam and Asia. The Foundation's Assistant Representative in Saigon, Peter S. Glick stated: "Asian people are less reserved and prejudiced against us; they are more willing to seek our help than that from larger and less private ones" [15].

2.1.3. Transition of educational models in Vietnam from the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century

Vietnamese education was still molded in the feudal model during the nineteenth century [16]. After the French colonialists completed the pacification process and established the colonial system in Indochina, the French education model was gradually formed in Vietnam. Until 1917, France had established a unified education system for all three parts, South, Central, and North Vietnam. The system was divided into primary, secondary, and university levels [17]. The curriculum in Vietnamese schools were built based on the French curriculum, and French became the principal teaching language at schools in Vietnam.

After over half a century (from the late nineteenth century to 1954), Vietnam's education changed markedly in all aspects, from the training model to the number of schools and students. Feudal education ended its mission in Vietnam with the last metropolitan and palace exams (*thi Hội* and *thi Đình*) in 1919 [18]. From this point onward, the task of training human resources was assigned to the French education model. The development of Vietnam's education following the French model nurtured and cultivated a generation of modern Vietnamese intellectuals who were less prejudiced toward new educational ideas that differed from Confucian education, which existed for centuries in Vietnam [19].

However, the limits of the French educational model were later exposed. Vietnamese intellectuals and educators realized that the French educational model was novel to Vietnamese, however, did not aim at the masses. The pyramid shape could be used to describe the situation of Vietnam's education system in the first half of the twentieth century - the higher the level of education, the fewer schools there were. At the primary level, there were two to four schools per district. The secondary schools were not distributed to all provinces but just a few; for example, in North Vietnam, students could study in Hanoi, Hai Phong, Nam Dinh, Lang Son; in Central Vietnam, students entered schools in Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Hue, Quy Nhon; and in South Vietnam, there were schools in Saigon, My Tho, Can Tho. Vietnamese students had only three choices to upgrade to the high school level, i.e., Hanoi, Hue, and Saigon [16]. By 1955, the Indochinese University was the only university in all three countries, including Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

In the context of the dynamic development of countries after World War II, Vietnam was looking for a new educational model that was more suitable to its development requirements. After the 1954 Geneva Agreement on Indochinese affairs, while in North Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam chose the Soviet educational model to develop their system, in South Vietnam, under the authority of the Republic of Vietnam, the American educational model was integrated and replaced the previous French education. A generation of Western-educated intellectuals born in the first half of the twentieth century became a critical human resource, a bridge for the Republic of Vietnam to access the American educational model in the 1955-1975 period.

In its role as one of the representatives to spread the influence of the American educational model in South Vietnam, the Asia Foundation also found favorable conditions to carry out its mission based on the educational accomplishments that Vietnam had achieved before 1956, prior to the time the Asia Foundation began its operation in South Vietnam.

2.2. Educational collaboration activities of the Asia Foundation in South Vietnam (1956-1975)

2.2.1. Budget and programs

The Asia Foundation was, and still is, a non-profit, non-political organization founded in 1951 with headquarters in San Francisco. The organization maintained representative offices located in 18 countries across Asia. Through these offices, the Asia Foundation cooperates and supports Asian countries in various fields, including cultural development, education, and other civic programs [20].

The Asia Foundation's cooperation programs on education are diverse and flexible and can involve different levels and training types, for example, higher education, teacher training, adult education, and vocational training. Several specific programs that the Asia Foundation conducted in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s consisted of organizing seminars and scientific workshops for teachers, publishing support to arouse interest and passion for science; implementing programs for rural development and agricultural expansion; assisting Asian countries to carry out economic and social research by providing both human resources, i.e., providing experts and researchers in

specific fields as well as providing material resources, such as facilities and research materials. In addition, this organization also provided funds to facilitate Asian researchers to participate in international conferences as well as participate in programs and projects related to education, culture, arts, science and technology, social welfare, rural development, women's and youth's activism, journalism, and several other professional fields [21].

From 1954 to 1968, the Asia Foundation spent approximately 4 million US dollars per year on activities in Asian countries [21]. In particular, the Asia Foundation dedicated about US\$ 250,000 to 300,000 /year to activities in South Vietnam, which implies that the investment for Vietnam during that time was higher than the average expenditure for all Foundation's member countries. This also underscores the attention and priorities of the Asia Foundation for educational cooperation and support activities for the Republic of Vietnam.

Funding from the Asia Foundation helped facilitate the smooth operation of educational institutions and programs in South Vietnam during the years 1956-1975. For instance, during crucial moments of the campaigning period in the early years after South Vietnam's universities were established and in the tense war situations when educational institutions were severely damaged. Specifically, after the 1968 Tet Offensive, timely financial aid from the Asia Foundation was granted to the Republic of Vietnam's educational institutions to maintain their activities and help avoid the interruption of the learning process of South Vietnamese students.

An outstanding achievement of the RVN education, rooted in American organizations' educational assistance and cooperation activities in South Vietnam, was the striking increase in the number of students at all levels. As clarified in a 1973 USAID report on the educational situation of the Republic of Vietnam, 'the development and expansion of education in South Vietnam in the context of the war became a phenomenon' [9]. Among 19 Asian countries surveyed by UNESCO in 1972, the Republic of Vietnam had the highest enrollment rate among students aged 5-14. At the primary school level alone, enrollments increased from 400,000 in 1954 to 3,000,000 in 1972 [9]. From 1957 to 1971, the total number of university students in South Vietnam increased tenfold, from 4,985 to 49,007 students. Contributing to that achievement were the efforts of many educational agencies and organizations, including contributions from the Asia Foundation's activities in South Vietnam.

The Foundation had a long association with the educational development of the Republic of Vietnam, from the First Republic (1955-1963) to the Second Republic (1967-1975). Although the programs' focus in each period may vary, the goal is to develop a mass education and to provide educational opportunities for all South Vietnamese people was kept consistently during the years 1956-1975. The Asia Foundation's success in projects to support adult education and education for ethnic minority students could be taken as a piece of evidence for achieving that goal.

Since 1956, the Asia Foundation has supported adult education courses in various cities by providing finance and educational facilities. The course curriculum was designed distinctively toward the general education curriculum. These courses imparted social and professional science knowledge that was not taught in regular schools. Vietnamese people held these courses in high demand. However, a thousand applications were rejected due to the scarcity of facilities and instructors [22].

In 1969, the Foundation also invested in opening an adult education program in Saigon, part of the adult education program being implemented in South Vietnam. The Asia Foundation invested VND 5,000,000 to develop the program. The great need for opening adult education classes in Saigon was recognized. The government of the Republic of Vietnam estimated the funds to be able to organize 200 anti-illiteracy classes, 150 supplementary classes, and 50 short-term training classes in Saigon with a budget of about VND 16,158,000. To acquire such a budget to launch the adult education program in Saigon, the Asia Foundation cooperated with RVN's

educational institutions, such as the Popular Culture School and the Popular Polytechnic School among others, in mobilizing funds [22].

In another aspect, the Asia Foundation provided funding to the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Vietnam to prepare for radio and television education as well as for research and seminars related to educational innovation and program modification. Moreover, the Foundation also granted a budget for the Directorate of Montagnard Affairs which helped award 161 scholarships to ethnic minority students [23].

2.2.2. University personnel

For a newly-formed education system like that of the Republic of Vietnam, the shortage of personnel, especially lecturers, was arduous. To solve this problem, the Asia Foundation assisted South Vietnam's universities in various ways, including financial support for foreign professors, who taught in Vietnam, as well as subsidizing university leaders and educators to conduct overseas trips to encourage Vietnamese intellectuals returning home.

From 1957, the Asia Foundation combined with the International Rescue Committee to fund travel, salaries, and other expenses for Polish visiting professors to teach Political Science at the University of Hue. From March 1958, the Asia Foundation paid a salary to Professor Herbert Izzo, who was in charge of teaching Literature and English at the University of Hue. Professor Izzo was the first American professor to join the faculty staff of this university. Under the contract signed with the Asia Foundation, Professor Izzo taught at the University of Hue from March 1958 until the end of the 1958-1959 academic year [24]. In addition, the Asia Foundation also paid travel expenses once a month for an American Professor of Botany to fly to Saigon and Hue, enabling him to teach on both campuses. This solution temporarily solved the shortage of lecturers at South Vietnam's universities [25]. From the 1959-1960 academic year onward, the Asia Foundation financed a professorship of English Linguistics and American Literature at the University of Hue [26].

In 1959, the Asia Foundation provided financial support to a group of professors in Hue, including Prof. Le Van, Dean of the University of Education; Prof. Le Tuyen, Academic Director of the Faculty of Literature and Linguistics, School of Education; and Father Thanh Lang, Prof. of Vietnamese Literature, School of Literature, to make a two-month trip to Europe, in July and August 1959, with the task of persuading Vietnamese intellectuals to return to teach at the University of Hue [27]. The trip yielded positive results as several Vietnamese professors, who were teaching at French universities, were willing to return to teach in the 1959-1960 academic year. These professors are experts in a number of fields, such as Bui Tuong Huan - Economy; Nguyen Huu Tri - Physics; Bui Nam - Chemical Engineering; Tran Van Tan - Mathematics; Vo Khac Long - Chemical Engineering; Tran Nhat Tan - Mathematics; Nguyen Hoa Nha - Geography and History; Le Huy Chuoc - Medicine; Pham Doan De - Medicine. In addition, the professors also contacted doctoral candidates studying in Europe, such as Truong Than Tuyet Anh, majoring in English; Tran Van Toan, majoring in Philosophy; Lam Ngoc Huynh, majoring in Philosophy; Nguyen Tien Duc, majoring in Geological Engineer; Ta Huu Hiep, majoring in Far Eastern Studies; Nguyen Van Hong, majoring in Internal Medicine; Ton That Hung, majoring in Surgeon.

Not only did it contribute to increasing the number of domestic students, additionally, the support of the Asia Foundation contributed to the growth of South Vietnamese overseas students at foreign institutions. In this respect, the distinctions in the aided subjects and the focus of training levels can be observed. Stemming from the purpose of helping educational institutions, especially universities in South Vietnam, to solve the problem of shortage of personnel, particularly highly qualified lecturers, the Asia Foundation bestowed funds for staff and lecturers of the University of Hue and Van Hanh University to participate in graduate courses in advanced education

countries, such as the United States, West Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Switzerland [21].

In the first decade (1956-1965), the Asia Foundation devoted much time and effort to public higher education institutions in South Vietnam, for example, the University of Hue and the University of Saigon. During the Second Republic (1967-1975), educational cooperation and support programs were extended to private universities, such as Dalat University and Van Hanh University. The budget of US\$ 63,000 (equivalent to VND 2,242,000) was endowed to Van Hanh University, of which the budget for teacher training was US\$ 49,500. The amount was employed to sponsor three scholarships for graduate studies in the United States valued at approximately US\$ 5,500/person/year [28].

In its establishment, Van Hanh University also encountered difficulties with staff scarcity, especially the shortage of highly qualified lecturers. To help Van Hanh University solve this problem, the Asia Foundation accepted a proposal from the Rector of Van Hanh University to provide funding for a faculty development program. Van Hanh University selected monks and laypeople to be sent for postgraduate training in the United States. The selection criteria were based on candidates' achievements and Van Hanh University's needs for training. The Asia Foundation covered both living expenses and study fees for selected candidates. In addition, the Foundation agency advised candidates on fields of study and application procedures [21].

The case of Dalat University demonstrates another aspect of cooperation and support. With the assistance of the Asia Foundation, the 'Summer Employment' program was organized for students of the School of Management and Business Administration of Dalat University. Through this program, the students gained work experience, applying the theories they have learned in the university program. Later, they were introduced to many jobs opportunities, such as those in banks, corporate accountants, large enterprises, industrial companies, and government offices [21].

2.2.3. Educational materials

Another important activity of the Asia Foundation was providing educational materials to institutions, groups, and individuals in South Vietnam. As one of the main contents of the Asia Foundation's program, the *Books for Asian Students* program was implemented throughout the years the Foundation operated in South Vietnam. Thanks to the continuous updating of South Vietnamese scholars' and educators' demands and close contact with the suppliers, numerous books, newspapers, and research journals were sent to serve South Vietnamese people's teaching and learning needs. This supply solved one of the primary challenges of an established education as the RVN, i.e., the lack of learning and research materials. Most books, newspapers, and magazines published in foreign countries are regarded as elaborate and prestigious research works. These sources helped South Vietnamese students and lecturers access advanced research, rational perspectives, and the latest research methods of international scholars. It must be admitted that not all South Vietnamese students can access and exploit these resources [29-30]; nonetheless, it can not reduce the research and human values that the *Book for Asian Students* program procured.

The response to South Vietnam's educational institutions and schools' demands for documents took place together with the construction of a library system for these institutions. In RVN's higher education, one can see the achievements and the crucial role of the Asia Foundation in building up university libraries, including those at the University of Hue, the University of Saigon, and Dalat University. Accompanying the University of Hue since its establishment, the Asia Foundation not only advised and aided in building the library infrastructure but also became the leading partner in providing sources for the University of Hue to enhance its library. During its first ten years in South Vietnam, from 1956 to 1966, the Asia Foundation sent 30,000 books annually to schools, agencies, groups, and individuals [23]. The Asia Foundation and other American organizations, including the International Rescue Committee, American Friends of

Vietnam, CARE, and Newland Foundation donated two-thirds of the total 10,000 books to the Faculty of Letters at the University of Hue [25]. Particularly, 1,000 French books and 300 English books and art books were sent to Hue by order of Rector Cao Van Luan.

Similar to how the Asia Foundation worked in Hue, the books, newspapers, and magazines donated and sent to the University of Saigon were primarily based on specific demands. For example, in 1959, the School of Science at the University of Saigon sent a list of 100 research books related to the field of science to the Asia Foundation. These books were predominantly published in English, a few in German. Besides books, the School also sent a list of journals, including the Journal of the American Chemistry Society, Analytical Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, Chemical Reviews, and Industrial and Engineering Chemistry, to the Asia Foundation. All the above-mentioned documents were collected by the Asia Foundation and sent to the University of Saigon [31].

In 1971, the Asia Foundation spent US\$ 1,500 to modernize the library and US\$ 7,000 to purchase special reference materials for Dalat University. Similarly, Van Hanh University received US\$ 2,000 for this expenditure. In another category, the budget for the procurement of laboratory equipment, tools, and school supplies was allocated by the Asia Foundation with US\$ 3,500 for Dalat University and US\$ 25,000 for Van Hanh University [28].

By supporting the RVN educators in organizing and participating in international scientific forums and seminars, the Asia Foundation helped to connect the RVN education community with the international communities via official and regular channels. Consequently, educators in the RVN could address and explore many distinct education issues, such as educational management, curriculum innovation, and compilation of education law. Education issues of the RVN were also presented, and subsequently, received comments from international educators in other countries. Experience in forming and developing the education of the Republic of Vietnam also helped develop education in countries with similar circumstances.

Based on support and cooperation in human, financial, and material resources, the Asia Foundation became a bridge for transmitting and importing the American educational model to South Vietnam. Although the imprint of the French educational model remained in the RVN education, it cannot be denied that the American educational elements gradually penetrated and defeated the monopoly of the French education system in Vietnam in the second half of the twentieth century.

2.3. Features of the educational collaboration in South Vietnam during the war

2.3.1. The inevitable tendency of international collaboration in education

The Asia Foundation's educational cooperation and support activities in South Vietnam in the years 1956-1975 served as the pilot projects and later became an experience to build upon, to adjust, and to perfect policies regarding the international cooperation aspect of RVN's education. From the effectiveness of cooperation programs with the Asia Foundation and other international organizations, the Republic of Vietnam recognized that international cooperation in education is an inevitable trend in modern education. In fact, during the course of South Vietnam's history prior to 1975, there was no period when international cooperation was exercised as widely and strongly as in the 1954-1975 period.

The US's presence and support for South Vietnam in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s germinated other engagements of US allies in assisting RVN's education development. As Robert Russell LaFollette, the USAID Higher Education Adviser, noted the phenomenon of 'many flags' on the task of advancing higher education in South Vietnam: 'New Zealand was helping to finance a new Science Building at Thu Duc, and Canada was assisting in the expansion of the Faculty of Medicine at Hue, while West Germany was supplying the Hue Faculty of Medicine with materials

and two professors; and France was involved in the recruitment of faculty at both Saigon and Hue' [13].

The involvement of an international agency in developing the education of Vietnamese people is not novel, even being prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century when the French educational model hardly monopolized the system. However, only in the second half of the last century was international cooperation diversified, with many partners instead of being solely controlled by the French. The assembly of international institutions in the field of RVN's education was more meaningful when considering it in the context of the war. The tragedy of war could not defeat the will of South Vietnamese educators in advancing their education. This was shown in the efforts of South Vietnamese professors in contacting many sources and asking for financial and human resource assistance from international institutions and organizations. As in the case of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Hue, in the process of seeking assistance to establish this faculty, Rector Cao Van Luan paid a visit to several offices, including the USAID/Saigon, the French Embassy, and the German Embassy, without obtaining any official assurances from any of them. Nonetheless, he consistently supported the idea of having a medical school in Hue. In the following week, he received an initial assistance offer from the German Embassy for the establishment of the Faculty of Medicine [32]. This support could not occur by chance, but rather by a great endeavor of the South Vietnamese educators.

There could be varying, even opposing assessments and views about the Republic of Vietnam government, including the point of view from insiders (people who used to live under that regime). However, when only considering RVN education, it appears that there was a fairly advanced and modern education in South Vietnam with positive echoes enduring in the present system. Mentioning that achievement gives one a chance to acknowledge the contribution of the international cooperation policies promulgated by open-minded educators of the Republic of Vietnam, with the case of the Asia Foundation serving as an example.

2.3.2. From military allies to educational partners

Derived from the political and military ally relations, the United States gradually intervened intensely in the affairs of the Republic of Vietnam government, including education matters. With the expectation to build a democratic government that surpasses the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government in North Vietnam, in accordance with military aid, the United States had paid increasing attention to developing non-military fields in South Vietnam, comprising of economy, culture, and education. From a political-diplomatic viewpoint, the relationship between the United States and the Republic of Vietnam created the foundation for implementing aid and cooperation policies on education development. However, there was not only a one-way effect but an interplay between politics-diplomacy and education in the context of the Vietnam War.

One feature that could be noticed in the relationship between the United States and the Republic of Vietnam as well as aid issues is that the increase or decrease in US aid was proportional respectively to the positive or negative attitude in the relationship of the two governments. As cooperation was promoted, and the two governments maintained a good and harmonious relationship, aid would subsequently be increased. This problem can be seen clearly in two periods: the early period of the First Republic of Vietnam, when the US government still put faith in President Ngo Dinh Diem, and the period from the late 1960s to early 1970s when President Nguyen Van Thieu headed the Second Republic. In the early years of the First Republic, requests to support education development from South Vietnam were quickly responded to with positive results. The assistance of the Asia Foundation for the University of Hue is one example. As this institution seemed insufficient in almost all aspects of human resources and facilities to build an independent university in Hue, the Asia Foundation's enthusiastic support from its own resources combined with the funds that the Foundation raised from other resources were undoubtedly significant for the establishment and operation of the University in the early years.

Conversely, the activities of the Asia Foundation and other American organizations in South Vietnam during the years 1956-1975 also helped connect and maintain the relationship between the two governments. Among the programs that the Asia Foundation implemented in South Vietnam was the Public Administration program, which trained district officials to work on administrative issues professionally and effectively. This program assisted in consolidating and reforming the administrative apparatus at the local level under the Republic of Vietnam government, implementing the strategy of 'winning hearts and minds' of Vietnamese people [33].

2.3.3. Enduring Legacies

In 1995, Vietnam and the United States normalized and re-established diplomatic relations after being frozen for nearly two decades. Then, cooperation activities between the United States and Vietnam were also resumed. Many American organizations that previously worked in Vietnam before 1975 started to cooperate again with Vietnam, the Asia Foundation being one of those. At this time, the staff of the Asia Foundation, working at the office in Bangkok, Thailand, was also responsible for running the programs in Laos and Vietnam. The Asia Foundation's mission was, and still is, to promote mutual understanding in the regional relationship between the United States and Asia, encourage economic freedom, and endorse the development processes of democratic institutions. The Asia Foundation continues to focus on exchange and training programs, providing opportunities for students and scholars to attend international seminars, field trips, and short-term as well as long-term study programs at US institutions [34].

In 2000, a representative office of the Asia Foundation was established in Hanoi, helping the tasks of connection, communication, and cooperation between the Asia Foundation with Vietnam to be handled more quickly and effectively. The Asia Foundation's strengths of providing books, newspapers, and educational materials, continue to be major activities in the collaborated programs between the two countries. In 2009, the Asia Foundation employed the US\$ 400,715 budget from the Bill and Melina Gates Foundation to carry out an 18-month project, strengthening the public library system and facilitating internet access in Vietnam [35]. During the 2000-2017 period, the Asia Foundation signed six agreements with the National Library of Vietnam on the issue of providing reputable educational resources. During those 17 years, more than 500,000 books, equivalent to US\$ 20 million, were directed to Vietnamese libraries as concluded in signed agreements [36].

The Asia Foundation, in the new phase of cooperation, still persists with its goal of helping all subjects, especially those with less favorable conditions to access educational opportunities. In 2017, the Asia Foundation granted 333 scholarships to female students in high schools in Nam Định, Cần Thơ, An Giang, and Hậu Giang provinces. The Asia Foundation, through the Merali and Ludlow-Teilon Scholarship Program, provided 120 scholarships to disadvantaged female students enabling them to continue their studies at the university level. In addition, the Asia Foundation also organized classes such as English classes, soft skills training, career orientation, and counseling courses to prepare the necessary background for students to better their opportunities in the recruitment market [37].

3. Conclusions

The period from 1956 to 1975 in Vietnam is a complicated historical period, and it is impossible to we cannot fully understand this period only through the prism of the war. South Vietnamese society at that time not only existed in conflict and antagonism, nevertheless, cooperation also played an essential role in this society's functioning. In a unique circumstance, the military allies of the Republic of Vietnam government became educational partners. The existence and operation of the Asia Foundation in South Vietnam are one of the examples to support the above statement.

The Asia Foundation's activities in South Vietnam were part of the US strategy to expand American influence, especially the American culture and education in this region, to replace the long-term influence of the French in Vietnam. The direct involvement of the United States in South Vietnam since 1954 not only aimed to control the military and political situations in this area but also the indigenous culture, which was imbued by the French model for a century. The educational assistance from the Asia Foundation and other American institutions and organizations paved the way for a new generation to be nourished with less French impact and more American style.

The activities of the Asia Foundation contributed to transforming the educational model in South Vietnam from elite education to mass education. This is clearly shown in the increased number of schools and students in South Vietnam from 1955 to 1975. Consequently, the intellectuals who were trained under this education were not only open-minded to ideas from American architects in nation-building projects but also played a more active role in designing those. However, in the war context and being a small country compared to the United States, the Republic of Vietnam was more inclined to be a recipient of this cooperation, not an equal exchange.

Based on the specific activities of the Asia Foundation, the tight relationship between education and politics could be thoroughly observed. As such, the focus and programs of the Asia Foundation's activities consistently and closely followed changes in the US foreign aid policies toward developing countries, including the Republic of Vietnam. This also clearly shows a trend that, even in a time of fierce war, maintaining tension and military confrontation was not a long-term plan for the United States and the Republic of Vietnam.

Above all, after the war, the humane values and the cooperation achievements in education continue to be maintained in the current period, facilitating the relationship between Vietnam and the Asia Foundation, and thus proving the truth that peace and development are the long-term goals of progressive humankind and states.

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