

Local Insights from the Vietnamese Education System: the impacts of imperialism, colonialism, and neo-liberalism of globalization

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The paper fills a gap in the literature by examining how local dimensions have been demonstrated and fostered in the Vietnamese education system under the differing impacts of imperialism, colonialism, and neo-liberalism of globalization before and after 1986. Thematic analysis of relevant literature and policies reveals that the local dimensions were characterized by local people's responses, such as adaptation, appropriation, creativity, nationalism, and patriotism, in the imperial and colonial times. Under the impetus of the neo-liberalism influences of globalization in the post-colonial period, the local dimensions have been featured by higher education reforms and internationalization policies. Cheng's multiple theories of fostering local knowledge in globalized education were employed to discuss such local dimensions and associated challenges.

Keywords: local dimensions; local knowledge; local wisdom; (de-) colonialism; (de-) imperialism; neo-liberalism of globalization; Vietnamese education system; internationalization

INTRODUCTION

The immense growth of the global knowledge society along with the vagaries of information and communication technologies have led to growing concern about the possibilities of hegemony and re-colonization, whereby the local becomes dominated by global trends. The concern has fuelled a considerable number of investigations in the Asia-Pacific region into the role of local knowledge and wisdom in higher education and in the knowledge system more generally (Cheng, 2000, 2004; Teasdale and Ma Rhea, 2000). Simultaneously, the spirit of de-colonization and de-Westernisation has been expressed in a huge body of literature across the world (Altbach, 2003, 2004, 2016; Chen, 2010; Huang, 2007; Mok, 2007; Pennycook, 1998; Phan, 2017; Takayama, Sriprakash, & Connell, 2015; Zhang, Chan, & Jenway, 2015).

However, little is known about what local dimensions involve and how they vary under differing contexts, such as under imperialism, colonialism, and neo-liberalism of globalization. The paper addresses this challenge by scrutinizing how local dimensions have been demonstrated and fostered in the Vietnamese knowledge system and, particularly, in the higher education sector before and after the watershed of *Đổi Mới* (Open Door policy) in 1986. From thematic analysis of relevant literature and policies, several key local dimensions are identified: in the imperial and colonial eras, these included local people's responses; in the post-colonial times, there have been national reforms and internationalization policies. Cheng's (2000, 2004) multiple theories of fostering local knowledge in globalized education were employed to discuss such local

dimensions and associated challenges resulting from imperial and colonial histories, as well as the contemporary political regime.

METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Bowen (2009, p. 29) postulated that documents “are the most effective means of gathering data when events can no longer be observed”. They can “track change and development” and “provide background and context”. To investigate local dimensions in Vietnamese imperial and colonial times, relevant literature on the Vietnamese knowledge system was collected. Key policy documents also were collated to explore local dimensions in the Vietnamese higher education sector in the post-colonial period. Document analysis described by Bowen (2009) as “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents” (p. 27) is the key method of this paper. Document analysis proves to be an effective instrument, revealing meanings, gaining understanding and offering insights pertinent to the research issue (Merriam, 1998). A theme-based approach, which is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) and “a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis” (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 82), was adopted to analyse such documented sources. The thematic analysis centres on “identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data” (Guest, Macqueen, & Namey, 2011, p. 9), organizing and describing a data set with “a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (Braun & Clarke, p. 78).

Cheng (2000) proposed the theory of “triplisation”, which consists of three interrelated ideas: individualization, localization, and globalization, as a coherent process in reforming education. Individualization is a pivotal part of localization, and localization is a must in globalization of education (Cheng, 2000, 2004). He viewed globalization as a certainty, with challenges and opportunities for local developments, and insisted on ways to foster local wisdom and human growth through making use of globalization. In turn, he claimed that: “the growth of local knowledge and wisdom may contribute back to the pool of global knowledge system and generate impacts on other countries. This becomes a part of globalisation of local knowledge” (Cheng, 2004, p. 15). The local knowledge system in globalized education comprises economic and technical knowledge, human and social knowledge, political knowledge, cultural knowledge, and educational knowledge (Cheng, 1996). They are “the knowledge that has been tested valid in a local context and accumulated by the local community or people” (Cheng, 2004, p. 9). He proposed a multitude of theories to foster local knowledge and wisdom in globalized education, namely: the theories of tree, crystal, birdcage and DNA, which highlight the local base; and the theories of amoeba and fungus, which emphasize the global base (Cheng, 2004).

In this paper, I share Cheng’s views on the dynamics of individualization, localization and globalization. Thus, the forces of imperialism, colonialism, and neo-liberalism of globalization have been an integral part of and interactive with local dimensions in driving and shaping the Vietnamese education system. On the one hand, I acknowledge the inevitable effects of such powers; on the other hand, I argue for the significance of localization and individualization in relation to globalization.

Vietnam has evolved its social, political, cultural and economic structure from feudal, semi-feudal, colonial, socialist to socialist-oriented regimes under Chinese, French, Soviet and Anglo-Saxon impacts. Hence, the Vietnamese education system has been subjugated and internationally oriented for centuries. The following discussion provides

a critical analysis of local dimensions in the Vietnamese education system in the times of imperialism and colonialism. This sets an essential background to exploring local dimensions in the system and, particularly, the Vietnamese higher education (VHE) under the impacts of the neo-liberalism of globalization in the post-colonial period.

Contextualization and criticism under Chinese imperialism

Under the 1,000-year Chinese incursion from 111BC to 938AD (Wright, 2002), Vietnam underwent “a comprehensive initiation into the scholarship political theories, familial organisation patterns, bureaucratic practices, and even the religious orientations of Chinese culture” (Woodside, 1971, p. 7). Confucianism’s educational philosophies were regarded as the fundamental grounding of the Vietnamese education system (Dang, 2009), exerting wide impacts on the system; “legacies of these impacts remain” (London, 20112014, p. 8). As claimed by Tran, Le, and Nguyen (2014), the Confucian-based feudal system adopted classic Confucian books as the main teaching and learning materials, popularizing incontestable knowledge and rote learning. Teachers and learners were positioned as knowledge transmitters and receivers respectively.

The long-century Chinese rule strongly influenced the local people’s social, cultural and educational paradigms. The local education system was subjugated by uprooting the local identities and replacing them with imperial thoughts and practices. However, the local people resisted Chinese hegemony by contextualization that met Vietnamese indigenous identities and socio-cultural settings (Tran et al., 2014). For instance, the local people learnt Chinese characters and used them for writing but had a different way of pronunciation (World Bank, 2008). They then developed their own system of Vietnamese characters: *Chữ Nôm*, in the 13th Century and created a Romanised Vietnamese writing script, *Chữ Quốc Ngữ*, in the 17th Century with the support of Alexandre de Rhodes, a French missionary and scholar (Dang, 2009). The advent of *Chữ Quốc Ngữ* facilitated more accessibility to Vietnamese people, enabled changes in politics and society, as well as impacting Vietnamese education in a substantial way (Dang, 2009). The wave of criticism against the Chinese imperial regime and Confucian-based thoughts was evident in the work of Vietnamese intellectuals, such as Nguyễn Du, Hồ Xuân Hương, and Cao Bá Quát in the 18th Century (London, 2011). It can be argued that such local responses showed an awareness of independence and a refusal to assimilate by the Vietnamese people in the face of imperialism (World Bank, 2008).

Nationalism and patriotism under French colonialism

The year 1858 marked the first step of France into Vietnam and its colonial control over the country, replacing the Chinese feudal Confucian system. Tran, Marginson, and Nguyen (2014, p. 130) claimed that “during the eighty years of French domination, the VHE system was designed as an elite public system”, aiming to serve the children of local French colonists and training people for the colonial apparatus (Pham & Fry, 2004; Tran, et.al, 2014). Although *Chữ Quốc Ngữ* was adopted throughout Vietnam, French was the main language of instruction in secondary and post-secondary schools as well as in administrative bodies (Ngo, 2016) and “the curriculums developed had little relevance to Vietnam and mirrored those in France” (Pham & Fry, 2004, p. 203), leading to 95% of Vietnamese people being illiterate (World Bank, 2005).

As noted in Tran et al. (2014), the period between 1919 and August 1945 witnessed a wave of patriotic education launched by Vietnamese scholars. The first was *Đông Du* (Eastward Travel), launched by Phan Bội Châu aimed “to send talented Vietnamese

youths to Japan for academic and military training to fight against the French as well as to build the country afterwards” (Tran et al., 2014, p. 88). The second, *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tokin Free School), was a reaction by Vietnamese patriotic scholars to *Chính sách ngu dân* (Ignorant People Policy) imposed by the French colonists. The third *Truyền Bá Chữ Quốc Ngữ* (Promotion of National Language Use) was “a practical and strategic political tool to promote patriotism and the aspiration for national liberation and independence during this historical period” (Tran et.al, 2014, p. 88). The patriotism under the French colonial regime was also highlighted by the upsurge of scholar mobility sponsored by the French Government or spontaneously run by strong-willed Vietnamese nationalists. The most typical instance of mobility resulting in a radical change for the liberation of Vietnam nation was the expansive overseas experiences of Hồ Chí Minh (1890–1969) in France, the USSR, England, the US, China, Siam, and Asian and African countries from 1910 to the 1930s (Pham & Fry, 2004).

Even after National Independence Day (2 September 1945), the higher education curriculums remained heavily French-dependent. At first courses were conducted in both Vietnamese and French but, subsequently, totally in Vietnamese; the curriculums were translated into Vietnamese and adapted to suit local contexts (Dang, 2009). In 1946, the French returned to colonise Vietnam again with a regime that was met with rigorous resistance until 1954. Even in the revolutionary times, the Vietnamese Government, under Hồ Chí Minh’s leadership, secured many educational achievements, such as raising the literacy rate from about 6% to over 90%, opening two junior colleges and five specialty colleges and attracting many Vietnamese intellectuals who were living abroad to become involved in the wars against the French and the construction of a new educational system (Ngo, 2016). The Vietnamese education system between 1945 and 1954 was, thus, formed by Hồ Chí Minh’s educational philosophy, which valued the children’s potential and talent in society, centred on the well-roundedness in human development and emphasising the interrelationship between practice and theory (Tran et al., 2014).

This spirit of nationalism and patriotism resulted from “the combination of French repression and injustices, the long Vietnamese tradition of resistance to external rule, the flourishing of vernacular writings in Vietnamese raising broad political and social consciousness, the emergence of powerful and dynamic nationalist leaders” (Pham & Fry, 2004, pp. 205–206). According to Tran et al. (2014, pp 88–89), the campaigns and travel conducted by Vietnamese scholars during the French colonialization period typified the mobility and flexibility of Vietnamese education because they promoted “criticism against the conservative, examination-oriented education” and fostered “learning about the advances of the West” to lead to development and prosperity.

Globalization means “the transfer, adaptation, and development of values, knowledge, technology and behavioural norms across countries and societies in different parts of the world from a society, a community, an institution, or an individual” (Cheng, 2000, p. 159). The above discussion demonstrates that the times of Chinese imperialism and French colonialism witnessed such a process of globalization. In particular, there is evidence of Cheng’s theories of fungus and amoeba, which compel the local people to absorb significant and relevant global knowledge for local development (Cheng, 2004), in action. However, the local people criticized, and contextualized imperial and colonial practices to accommodate their local desires. They also submitted to the West and other advanced countries through transnational mobility for lessons and collaboration in order to improve the existing systems. The local people’s responses represented

individualization and localization, referring to transferring, adapting, and developing “related external values, knowledge, technology and behaviour norms” to accommodate local and individual needs, as outlined in Cheng’s triplisation model (Cheng, 2000, p. 160-161).

Complex hybridity under mixed imperialism

France was defeated at the battle of Điện Biên Phủ in 1954. In the same year, however, the Geneva Agreement¹ led to a split between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The former received assistance from the Soviet Bloc countries while the latter was under the control of the US (Pham & Fry, 2005). In terms of educational philosophy, in Northern Vietnam, under immense Soviet influence, popular education continued to be promoted with the emphasis on personal development. It then shifted to *giáo dục dân chủ mới* (new democratic education) fostering nationalistic, scientific, and mass education (Tran et al., 2014). South Vietnam, under US influence, followed the three principles called *nhân bản* (humanistic), *dân tộc* (nationalistic) and *khai phóng* (liberal) (Tran et al., 2014). These distinct educational philosophies, with, nevertheless, quite contrasting political orientations, both placed strong emphasis on overall individual development complemented by the promotion of nationalism (ibid). With respect to language use, Vietnamese was the language of instruction, totally replacing French in the North after 1950 (Ngo, 2016) while French was still used along with Vietnamese and English in the South until 1966 (Pham & Fry, 2005). With regard to educational structure and governance, VHE in the North adopted the Soviet model in 1956 in which all institutions were public, specialized and mono-disciplinary under highly centralized government. By contrast, South Vietnam adopted the US model in which both public and private institutions ran academic curriculums under a decentralized government (Tran et al., 2014; Ngo, 2016).

After the triumph over the US army in the South in 1975, North and South Vietnam reunited into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. This period saw Vietnam confronted by overwhelming challenges brought about by the multiple legacies in the north and the south as well as developing a unified education system that had been subjugated for centuries. The Soviet legacy was a system of highly centralized governance with line-ministry management, specialized and mono-disciplinary training, teaching and research separation, and a strong emphasis on fundamental natural and social sciences related to heavy industry (Vu & Marginson, 2014). In stark contrast, the American legacy included philosophies of “democratic decentralisation and pragmatic utilitarianism with a strong element of state and local control at the provincial level” (Nguyen, 2003, cited in Tran et al., 2014, p. 132).

Among the chaos, outbound academic mobility and modelling were common local responses. In the north, the Government sponsored Vietnamese students to travel to Soviet Bloc countries for undergraduate and postgraduate programs whereas in the south,

¹The conclusion of the Geneva conference held on 7 May 1954 to negotiate peace settlements for French Indochina had in attendance of the foreign ministers of France, Britain, the US, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China, as well as representatives from Laos, Cambodia, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam. Vietnam divided the country *de facto* into the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) under [Ngo Dinh Diem](#) in Saigon, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) under [Ho Chi Minh](#) in Hanoi (Riches & Palmowski, 2016 from A Dictionary of Contemporary World History (4th ed.)).

Vietnamese students were assisted and oriented towards US scholarships. Although the Vietnamese Government and the local people underwent a new form of imperialism from communist allies through such mobility, they chose to go outward by will and agency rather than force (Phan, 2017) with aspirations to model good practices to fill post-war and post-colonial discrepancies. In this sense, the theory of DNA, which is “to replace the invalid local knowledge with the vital global knowledge through globalisation” (Cheng, 2004, p. 13), is a valid depiction of the situation in Vietnam during this phase. Due to suffering from multiple imperial and colonial powers, the local dimensions within the Vietnamese educational system and the society as a whole cannot be purely local but hold complex hybridity.

***Đổi Mới* - Open Door Policy in 1986**

The year 1986 marked a watershed for Vietnam. The proclamation of *Đổi Mới* (Open Door Policy) saw Vietnam “shifting from a bureaucratically centralised planned economy to a multi-sector economy operating under a market mechanism with state management and a socialist orientation” (Dang, 2009, p. 10). As part of this approach, Vietnamese VHE had to undergo changes in structure, operation, and governance. Specifically, Pham and Fry (2004) claimed that there were huge shifts in VHE from: (i) narrow specialization training to multiple fields training; (ii) subsidy regime with no tuition fees to market regime with tuition fees; and (iii) from Russian and Chinese as second languages to English. Furthermore, universities gained more autonomy and privatization of higher education was promoted (Pham & Fry, 2004). As claimed by Tran et al. (2014), the post-*Đổi Mới* key reform areas included socialization, diversification, and democratization, which have been fundamental to internationalization policies in the 21st Century. The first refers to the contribution of the whole society to national education under state guidance, followed by the massification of education and fee-paying mechanisms. The second is concerned with diversifying types of institutions and educational methods to meet new educational demands of industrialization and modernization. The third aims to offer encouraging environments for all people to get involved in improving educational management through removing authoritarian bureaucracy (Tran et al., 2014).

The enactment of *Đổi Mới* and of VHE reform policies were Vietnam’s responses to the push of “transition” or “post-communist framework” (George, 2010), “restructuring” or “structural adjustment” (Le, 2014), and the growing neoliberalism of globalization. Vietnam’s signals of privileging the more advanced and aspiring to keep pace with the world can be seen in looking to the West, especially Anglo-Saxon countries, adopting English as a prominent foreign language, improving mainstream curriculums and importing foreign curriculums. As aforementioned, this has led to a risk of re-colonization and learning from the West and should receive critical consideration. Tran and her colleagues, in their influential book on VHE, drew on Vietnamese traditional values of practicality, flexibility, and mobility in many aspects of life and suggested that these values should be treasured and maintained as remedies to the reform of VHE under the impetus of globalization and internationalization (Tran et al., 2014). Their work highlights the significance of incorporating such local wisdom in VHE and national development as a whole. Nonetheless, Vietnam has experienced differing forms of imperialism and colonialism, causing complex hybridity, as elucidated earlier; hence it has become more challenging to foster local elements in the education system in a systematic and consistent manner.

Internationalisation Policies in the 21st Century

Since the US lifted its embargo in 1994, Vietnam has been actively engaged in expanding relationships and joining regional and international organisations. Vietnam has also been granted opportunities for multilateral loans, international trade, development projects and financial support from globally privileged organisations.² In order to respond to this growing trend of regional and international integration, and to address the deficiencies during the above reform process, The Vietnamese Government and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) have continuously designed new policy directions for VHE development in the 21st Century. From 2000 onwards, industrialization and modernization through international integration and cooperation have been clearly stated in policy documents for socio-economic and educational development, with a strong focus on human resources and knowledge economy development. Such education policy documents as the *Higher Education Reform Agenda- Resolution 14* (Prime Minister, 2005) and the *National Strategies for Education Development 2001-2010, 2010-2020* (Prime Minister, 2001, 2012) reveal that outbound mobility and transnational higher education are two key pillars of internationalization in VHE.

Outbound academic mobility

Previously, the form of outbound academic mobility mainly catered for a modest number of elite individuals allied with the political agendas of imperialism and colonialism. Since the 1986 Open Door Policy, the Vietnamese Government, the MOET and universities have been increasingly proactive in expanding and enhancing international cooperation in education, research, science and technology. This has resulted in an accelerating trend of outbound mobility among students and academics. At the macro and meso levels, this trend has helped to accommodate the national and institutional demands for a high-quality workforce and advanced technologies under the thrust of the knowledge-based economy. At the micro level, individuals have a tendency to study overseas for academic and professional purposes as well as immigration possibilities.

According to UNESCO (2018), the number of Vietnamese students studying overseas is 70,328 for undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The top five destinations are the US (19,336), Australia (14,491), Japan (10,614), France (4,860) and the UK (4,146). The students are divided into three groups: (i) those who receive scholarships from foreign governments, organizations or institutions; (ii) those who are the recipients of Vietnamese Government scholarships; and (iii) those who fund their own studies (Nguyen, 2009). Among these groups, self-funded students often outstrip others thanks to an increasing number of rich families, the impact of ICT, and the growing aspiration of young people to migrate to more developed countries. Scholarship holders are qualified Vietnamese students granted privileged scholarships³ at undergraduate and postgraduate levels owing

² The World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the [Asian Development Bank](#) (ADB), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UND), Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Official Development Assistance (ODA) sources.

³ For example, Erasmus Mundus Scholarship from EU, Chevening Scholarship from British Government, DAAD from German Government, Australian Awards Scholarships from Australian Government, New Zealand ASEAN Scholar Awards from New Zealand Government, Fulbright Scholarship from American Government, Japanese Development Scholarship from Japanese Government, Irish Aid from Irish Government, to name but a few.

to expanded diplomatic relations between the Government and the MOET with developed countries, international organisations and foreign institutions all over the world. In addition, an increasing number of Vietnamese academics and students with outstanding academic merit and high English proficiency have obtained scholarships from foreign universities. Apart from the above foreign scholarship schemes, the Government and the MOET adopted outbound academic mobility through the implementation of Projects 322,⁴ 165, and 911⁵ for doctoral studies and Projects 322 and 599 for bachelor and masters studies. Pursuant to such projects, a large amount of the national budget has been spent in sending potential academics from research institutes and universities nationwide overseas for postgraduate research or coursework programs.

In spite of exercising more autonomy in international cooperation, Vietnam has been featured as a receiver and importer of international education with the dominance of outbound mobility in both policy and practice. The National Strategies for Education Development 2001-2010, 2010-2020 (Prime Minister, 2001, 2012) prioritized outbound flow of mobility in order to augment the national and institutional human resources capacity. The policies encouraged both self-funded overseas study and foreign scholarship for individual growth to accelerate international integration.

Transnational higher education

Transnational higher education (THE) in Vietnam has been characterized by internationalization of universities through institutional mobility and model borrowing. Typical examples of institutional mobility are the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the first fully foreign-owned university opened in 2000 with two main campuses in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi; the British Vietnamese University opened in 2009; and the Fulbright University, the first US university, opened in 2016. The introduction of the “Excellent University” project from the Government represented an act of model borrowing, escalating the scope and scale of THE. The project was launched in 2006 with the aim of building four institutions in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city that reach global standards with academic support from developed countries, one of which could join the ranks of the top 200 universities in the world by 2020. The universities under this project include the Vietnamese-German University established in 2008 in Ho Chi Minh City; the University of Science and Technology Hanoi founded in 2009; the Vietnamese-Russian University opened in Hanoi in 2013; and the Vietnamese-Japanese University within Hanoi National University established in Hanoi in 2014. These universities have been operating under academic support and partnership from foreign government partners in curriculum, management and delivery. The most recent is VIN University, founded by Vietnamese real estate (the VIN Group) in collaboration with the Ivy League Cornell University. This new, private, non-profit university aimed to be the first world-class, internationally accredited and ranked university in Vietnam (VIN University, 2018).

⁴ Project 322, between 2000 to 2010, spent each year VND 100 billion for each academic batch and at the end of the scheme, a total cost of VND 2,500 billion was spent for training 4,590 academics (Nguyen, 2009; Tran et al., 2014).

⁵ Project 911, between 2013 to 2020, aims to fund 10,000 lecturers nationwide to pursue their doctoral study in foreign institutions and 13,000 lecturers in domestic institutions with the nearly sevenfold cost of around VND 14,000 billion (Nguyen, 2009; Tran et al., 2014).

Secondly, curriculum importation has featured THE in Vietnam. Vietnamese universities have partnered with foreign universities and imported curriculums for their “joint programs” (JPs) and “advanced programmes” (APs) delivered in English for nearly two decades. JPs are designed and the degrees conferred by partnering universities, but are delivered by academics from both sides. There are around 500 available undergraduate and postgraduate JPs to date (MOET, 2017). APs are modified from JPs under transnational agreements and locally conferred (Nguyen et al., 2017). The MOET started implementing APs at some key universities for the purpose of attracting international students and scholars and advancing global rankings of these universities in 2006. The project has been expanded to other universities since 2008 and there are now about 35 active APs in 23 HEIs nationwide (MOET, 2017).

Undergoing continuous reforms and adopting diverse internationalisation policies, VHE has gained certain achievements; however, by 2009, the overall quality was still low and worrisome. The outputs did not “match the demands that arise from an economy struggling to develop its socio-economic infrastructures” (Nguyen, 2009, p. 4). Besides the acknowledged weaknesses in infrastructure, management, curriculum, teaching and learning in the whole system and the higher education sector particularly, there was a concern that the reform policies themselves contained inner contradictions about power among multiple sides, and tensions between mass enrolment and quality assurance, and between efficiency and equality (Tran et al., 2014). As a result, *Đổi Mới* has continued to enter a new and complex form of imperialism from inner-circle countries through its internationalization policies.

Vietnam has attempted to promote internationalization through outbound academic mobility and the implementation of imported curriculums in domestic settings. Although the policy shows the nexus between globalization, localization and individualization, as Cheng (2000) proposed, it remains a concern how to create a favourable environment to augment the potential of individualization and localization for local developments. A common criticism is that there is a lack of incentives to attract Vietnamese returnees to make contributions; hence there is an increasing trend of Vietnamese academics’ migration to other countries and a severe risk of brain drain. According to Docquier and Rapoport (2012), approximately 27% of Vietnamese international graduates migrate to the host country or another country. The figure is projected to increase in the years to come. It is a considerable loss because those who have lived experiences in foreign countries could bring global international, intercultural and diverse perspectives to the pool of local knowledge to accelerate reforms both inward and outward.

The origins of this issue could lie in the contradictory political regime of the disputed socialist-oriented market economy set up by the Vietnamese authorities in the contemporary period. Socialism and Capitalism have not, by nature, been the rooted values of Vietnamese people. However, they have acted as ruling, even dictatorial, guidelines for all social aspects, constraining the development of local knowledge and wisdom to a greater or lesser extent. Furthermore, the remains of the long out-dated influence of Confucianism and the Soviet models, coupled with the rise and dominance of China in political areas, are presenting new challenges for education renovation. In this sense, by face value, Vietnam’s reform policies reflect Cheng’s theories of “tree”, “crystal”, “birdcage” and “DNA” which refer to the processes of promoting local knowledge through optimizing global flows with a thoughtful consideration of the local base (Cheng, 2004). However, since the succession of colonialism and imperialism in Vietnam over centuries has created complex hybridity in all areas, no proposal in Cheng’s

theory can fully reflect the processes of fostering local knowledge and wisdom in globalised education in Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

Among the large volume of scholarly voices against imperialism, colonialism, and the neo-liberalism of globalization, the local dimensions have been highlighted as both concerns and potential resolutions. The paper examines how local dimensions have been demonstrated and fostered in the Vietnamese education system under such impacts before and after 1986. From thematic analysis of documents, literature and relevant policies, the local dimensions in the Vietnamese education system were identified as diverse and varying. They included local people's criticism, contextualization, nationalism, and patriotism in the imperial and colonial regimes. They also have been presented in national reforms and internationalization policies for higher education, such as outbound academic mobility, institutional mobility, model borrowing, and curriculum importation for the past decades of the 21st Century. They hold complex hybridity resulting from a mixture of imperialism and colonialism over the centuries. This paper explored several key local dimensions of the Vietnamese education system from documented sources. It offers a thorough discussion into the nature of these local dimensions and the ways to foster them for the use of future researchers.

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