

# The Development of the Higher Education Sector of Vietnam within the Globalization Discourse: Using Futures Methodologies

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## Abstract

*In almost every society, it is argued that education is vital to social, cultural, economic and scientific development. Education contributes to the development of society through equipping people with high level knowledge and skills so that they can create technological and scientific inventions to improve people's lives. However, there is currently a paradox in many countries (including Vietnam) that education is falling behind fast developments of science and technology. Furthermore, it is slow to respond and reply to changes created in the context of economic globalization. Why is this so? Finding some answers to this question is the main issue of this paper. More specifically, using two futures' methodologies, the paper will investigate how Vietnamese higher education and Vietnamese vocational and technical education are responding to impacts of globalization. First, the futures triangle (Inayatullah 2005) helps reveal three influences on Vietnamese higher education (the push and the pull of the future and the weight of history) under the impact of globalization. Then, Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) (Inayatullah 2004) will be applied to examine why Vietnamese vocational and technical education has not yet been able to catch up with changes in today's world.*

**Key words:** Futures' Triangle, Push of the future, Pull of the future, Weight of history, Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), Litany, System, Worldview, Myth/Metaphor, Utopian/Dystopian

It is widely accepted in the literature dealing with social and educational change, that the world is experiencing an information and technology revolution. Globally, more and more people are entering a "post-industrial, globalized, pan-capitalist" world and a "post-information" and "networked" society (Milojevic 2002: 166). Rapid changes via scientific and technological advance-

ments have influenced all aspects of society in general and the educational sector in particular. Vietnam is no exception. Since the country opened itself to communication with the outside world in 1989, global forces such as technology, economics and politics have been like a fresh wind bringing a new atmosphere to all aspects in the society, including education. As a result, the education system of Vietnam at all levels has been under pressure to carry out marked changes to adapt to the new circumstances. However, it would be beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the situation of the Vietnamese education system at all levels under the impacts of global forces. Therefore, within this paper I only attempt to focus on discussing two main educational sectors which have recently caused a lot of controversies and attracted much attention of the public. These two sectors are Vietnamese higher education and Vietnamese vocational and technical education. My main purpose is to investigate why these two sectors have not been able to respond to the new discourse effectively. To tackle this issue, I use two futures methodologies: the futures triangle and Causal Layered Analysis (CLA).

In the first part, I will apply the futures triangle (Inayatullah 2005) to discuss how globalization impacts on Vietnamese higher education. I use this method first because it enables us to map, contextualize and historicize the issue. This section looks at broader, complementing yet qualitatively different dimensions of the future in order to better understand plausible futures (Inayatullah 2002: 205). This mapping is crucial before we can conduct an in-depth analysis of a more specific issue. Subsequently, then, in the second part, Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) (Inayatullah 2004) will be applied to find some answers to the question of why Vietnamese vocational and technical education has not yet been able to catch up with changes in today's modern world. These two futures methods are chosen as they can help us understand current tensions and contradictions and also unveil many layers of reality, including the not so visible discourses.

## **Part I: Applying the Futures Triangle to Discuss Vietnamese Higher Education under the Impact of Globalization**

### **What is the futures triangle?**

Seen as contested, according to Inayatullah (2005), the future is created by the tensions between the pull and the push of the future and the weight of history. The pull includes competing images which can be perceived as perfect or good (utopia or eutopia) on the one hand, or bad (dystopia) on the other. The push or drivers of change can constitute economic, technological, political and demographic factors. The pull of the future and the push towards the future facilitate and accelerate social and educational change. The weight of history, on the other hand, limits possibilities for social change through barriers that include deep structures – such as gender, class, and ethnicity – or institutional barriers (Inayatullah 2005). Thus, the future is not seen as fixed but as being created by a tension between the pushes, the pulls and the weights. In the case of Vietnam, these three dimensions that are creating changes in the context of globalization are summarized in Figure 1 and the Table 1.

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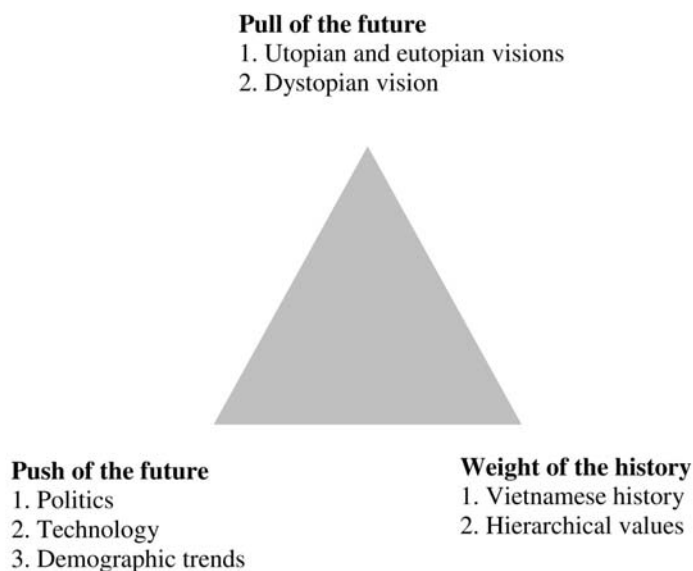


Figure1: The Futures Triangle Applied to Higher Education in Vietnam

Source: Adapted from Sohail Inayatullah. 2005: 103.

Table 1: Vietnamese Higher Education in the Globalization Discourse

Dimensions	
The push	Politics ("Renovation" policy in 1989) Technology (new ICT's, the Internet) Demographic trends
The pull	Utopian promise: new opportunities to build virtual schools, an advanced and diversified education system for all, changing the hierarchical administrative structure Dystopian dangers: commercializing education, reduction in teaching and learning quality, increase in competition for student recruitment, Westernization
The weight of history	Consequences of long-lasting and continuous wars (poverty, illiteracy and colonization), hierarchical values (Confucianism, top-down management)

## The push of the future

This section briefly identifies some key drivers (push factors) which, in my view, are crucial shapers of the future of Vietnamese higher education in the globalization discourse. These drivers include political, technological and demographic trends.

### Political trends

Politics is an influential driver, pushing the opening up of Vietnam to the outside world. According to Gidley (2004), politics has no interest in education, but still always governs this sector. The history of Vietnamese education has proved this argument. Before 1989, Vietnam only had diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and other former socialist countries. Consequently, during this time the country's main educational collaborations were with these countries. Before the collapse of communism, the former socialist countries helped Vietnam train over 30,000 undergraduates, 4,500 Ph.D. postgraduates, and 9,000 graduates, more than 25,000 technicians, and thousands of scientists, key economic leaders and managers of government and local organizations throughout the country (Pham 1999).

However, when the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Eastern Europe collapsed in 1989-1991, Vietnam experienced similar ideological challenges. The economic shock waves were far-reaching because the country had been dependent on aid and investment from those countries, particularly Russia for many years. This shock interrupted the relationship between Vietnam and these countries. Then, Vietnam started realizing that it cannot exist in isolation from the rest of the world. Therefore, the government issued a "Renovation" policy (known as *Doi Moi* 1989) with the motto of expanding bilateral relations between Vietnam and all other countries. The country also announced that it welcomes all educational supports from governmental and non-governmental organizations, international organizations and individuals.

Since then, the country has established ties with over 40 countries, 40 international organizations and dozens of non-governmental organizations, firms and private organizations throughout the world (Tran 1999). Every year Vietnam sends more than 2,000 undergraduates, graduates and postgraduates abroad to study (Tran 1999). The country also welcomes experts from different countries to Vietnam to give lectures in special courses and exchange experience in training scientific researchers and to promote cooperation in joint research projects. In fact, the new policy, or in other words the change in political orientation, is seen as a milestone opening up Vietnamese education in general and Vietnamese higher education in particular to engagement in the globalization discourse.

### Technological trends

Technology, or the development of new ICTs, is another driver pushing Vietnamese higher education to move away from the limitations imposed by the previously described political constraints. Since Vietnam opened its doors to the outside world and actively joined international and regional organizations such as ASEAN in 1995, the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1996 and in 1995 applied for membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Tran 1999), barriers which prevented

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imports coming to Vietnam have been greatly reduced. Therefore, technological advancements have been widely imported to Vietnam. Modern facilities for teaching such as text-based systems (electronic mail, computer conferencing and fax), audio-based systems (audioconferencing, audiographics and audio on the Web), and video-based systems (videoconferencing, one way and two way, video on the Internet) (Rossman 1992) are increasingly used in Vietnamese higher institutions. These technologies are making Vietnamese teachers and students throughout the country, especially in big cities, part of "the electronic community" (Lowerison, Sclater, Schmid, & Abrami 2004: 1). Also, they have helped Vietnamese students communicate and exchange information in what Milojevic (2005: 2) describes as "transnational and transcultural dialogues".

Although the notion of the "electronic university" (Rossman 1992:1) is still very new in Vietnam, thousands of Vietnamese students have now been able to take certain courses electronically, especially courses offered by overseas universities. In fact, globalized education is providing Vietnamese students with a learning environment described by Mason (1998: 4) as:

*Whether potential students be geographically remote, time constrained, financially constrained, house-bound, disabled, or simply unable to find a course on the subject they want locally, there exist large un-met educational needs which every research report, policy study and educational analysis shows are interesting.*

It is quite certain that the dream of establishing an "electronic university" in Vietnam will become reality in the near future because according to the investigation of the European Mathematical Society (2005) – Vietnam together with Thailand is one of the two countries which have experienced the fastest development of the Internet in Asia.

Although many people, especially in developing countries, worry that international electronic education may become a new form of cultural and economic colonialism by rich industrialized countries (Rossman 1992), in the context of Vietnam, my view is that once such universities come into being, they will bring about more benefits than challenges to the Vietnamese. This is especially the case for the 80 per cent of the population who live in rural areas, because they will be able to access the same "educational resources, specialist courses, and renowned experts" as those who live in big cities (Mason 1998: 5). Moreover, electronic courses are also helping more and more Vietnamese students to receive education from prestigious institutions throughout the world. These institutions are no longer exclusive places for elite people from advanced countries. Obviously, these courses can help marginalized people and countries participate in discourses which have been traditionally dominated by advantaged groups and advanced countries.

Another effect of technologies is that the application of technological advancements, such as computers and the Internet in delivering lectures, are helping to change the traditional learning and teaching styles in Vietnam. Traditionally, the images of Vietnamese students and teachers have been claimed as: For students, they were taught "not to answer back when superiors speak to them" (Reagan 2000: 110). Therefore, their learning style was described by Waitt (1987) as: learning is Confucian; memorizing is the key; research usually means the gathering of compara-

tive data; theory has higher status than practice; and breadth of study rather than depth produces flexibility. The learning concepts were all contained in the Confucian classics, which were "studied, memorized, and then expounded at the examinations" (Hu 1960: 412). This means that students were completely passive recipients of information. And for teachers, they were supposed to be the only provider of knowledge. What teachers said was thus not questioned and became unquestionably standard norms. Therefore, teachers maintained a very high profile in their function as the norm of knowledge, wisdom, and behavior which may explain current difficulties in teachers' acceptance of their new role as "instruments to see that learning takes place" (Medgves 1986).

However, in the global context, what students learn is not limited to classrooms, but comes from various recourses and globalized curricula which provides "a wide variety of information in various areas" (Miller 1998, cited in Hicks & Slaughter 1998: 120). Moreover, curricula in the global era use "computer-based technology as a major means for delivering instruction and making sense of information" (Miller 1998, cited in Hicks & Slaughter 1998: 120). Therefore, teachers can no longer remain the only ones who present information and provides knowledge. In other words, the "one talker" method (teacher) is being replaced by the "mass talking" method (students), and students are being allowed to debate and arrive at the conclusion considered correct by objective fact (Cleverley 1991: 195-196). Therefore, students will increasingly need to become self-directed in their learning.

To sum up, changes which are taking place in the Vietnamese higher education system under the impact of technology can be summarized as follows:

<i>From...</i>	<i>Toward...</i>
School time	Learning anytime, any place
Teacher-centered	Student-centered
One pace for all	Different rates and styles of learning
Buildings	Multiple access points for learning
Mass instruction	Personalized instruction
Printed materials	Various resources
Marginalized	More equal

### Demographic trends

If the technological driver is helping modernize the Vietnamese higher education system remarkably, the demographic driver is helping expand the system from an elite model to a mass one. Prior to the reunification of the country in 1975, Vietnamese higher education was just a much undeveloped system with only around 50 universities and colleges (Vu 1999). Attendance at that time was generally limited to men and those with either proven financial wealth or high social positions. Pham (1999) calculated that up to 1975, while the population had exceeded 40 million, the total enrolments at all higher education institutions were just around 200,000. However, after the end of the final war in 1975, higher education faced a new dilemma because a postwar baby boom placed a heavy burden on educational resources. From 1976 through to

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1980, nearly 2 million babies were born in Vietnam each year (General Statistics Office of Vietnam 2004). As these children matured, undergraduate enrolments have increased dramatically since the late 1990s. Accordingly, higher institutions also needed to be expanded and developed to meet the schooling demands of these boomers.

Furthermore, the process of urbanization is also creating new impacts, forcing the system to carry out more expansions. This process is pushing many families to cities where they can take advantage of greater economic opportunities. Urbanization has created a reduction in the population working in agriculture, but an increase in the population available for schooling in cities. Consequently, the number of higher institutions and students has increased remarkably during the last years. The table below will show this increase since 1997 up to now.

Table 2: Higher Education: The Number of Institutions and Students

<b>Year</b>	1997- 1998	1999- 2000	2000- 2001	2001- 2002	2002- 2003	2003- 2004	2004- 2005
<b>Institutions</b>	148	153	178	191	202	214	230
<b>Students</b>	797890	893754	918228	974119	1020667	1131030	1319754

Source: The MOET. 2005. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.net.vn> on February 20th, 2006.

In addition, due to the diversified demand of the labor market, forms of institutions, classes and training programs need to diversify also. While before 1989, public institutions were the main, if not only, places for students, the country now encourages various forms of education – such as public, private, exchange programs and international institutions – to co-exist. According to Education Statistics (2005), until 2005, 30 of 230 higher education institutions in Vietnam were run by private individuals and organizations. Regarding international cooperation, Tran (1999) reported that by 1999, the country had established higher education relations with 19 countries, 34 non-governmental organizations, 10 international organizations and more than 60 foreign universities.

In conclusion, these three drivers together are pushing the higher education system of Vietnam to carry out marked expansion. In effect, they are helping modernize and diversify the whole system. Higher education is no longer selective and exclusive, but is slowly becoming a reachable "product" for more people.

### The pull of the future

As discussed above, three pull factors (drivers) in the globalization discourse are bringing about tremendous changes in Vietnamese higher education. These changes include both new opportunities creating a utopian/eutopian vision, and challenges creating a dystopian vision for this sector.

The utopian vision argues that "globalization is the best thing that has happened in



the lifetime of the post-war generation, including those residing in non-western countries" (Martin 2000: 12-13). Global forces, especially technology and Internet networks, are making the dream of establishing the "electronic university", as a part of a global learning community, in Vietnam come true. This promises to provide all Vietnamese people, young and old, male and female, with or without physical disability, from urban and rural regions, from majority and minority groups, with more opportunities to get access to education.

In addition, since modern technologies have been applied in delivering education, the hierarchical administrative structure of Vietnamese higher education system is being challenged too. Thanks to the Internet, a university now can seek to extend its programs overseas and exchange courses with foreign universities easily. Therefore, individual universities no longer have to wait for instructions ordered from the top (meaning the Ministry of Education and Training - MOET) passively. This has weakened the hierarchical management of the MOET. A good example illustrating this argument is the Decree No.14 of the MOET issued in 2006 regarding the consideration of giving independence to all higher education institutions in Vietnam. This Decree states that the model of putting higher education institutions under the supervision of the MOET has caused many difficulties for these institutions; therefore, the MOET will try to give freedom to all these institutions in the next 5 years (Vietnam News, 2006). The media has announced that the Decree is a marked breakthrough by the MOET in the process of revising its governance style. This event is proving what Rossman (1992) says is true: when space for students receiving lecture instructions is no longer limited to within four walls, the traditional forms of organization, such as army or bureaucratic-type hierarchical authority applied to universities, will no longer work very well.

However, good prospects are not all that globalization is promising to bring to Vietnamese higher education. Opposite to the "ideal picture" of the utopian/eutopian vision, the dystopian vision warns that the boom of commercializing education in this global time is turning Vietnamese higher education into a product to be bought and sold. The project of changing the present education system – which is offering higher education to only 1.6 per cent of the population – to a system which can assure 4.5 per cent of citizens going to university in 2020 (Nguyen 2004), is allowing investors to open a great number of private institutions. With such a dramatic increase in quantity, it is becoming much harder for the sector to provide all students with qualified places. Therefore, Vallely (2006), the manager of the Vietnamese program at Harvard University, reports that given that the number of students in Vietnam has increased 10 times during the last 15 years, Vietnamese education institutions are failing to provide an ensured quality of education for all students (cited in Vietnam News 2006).

In a recent interview, the Vietnamese minister for Education and Training warned that:

*Perhaps Vietnamese education has never been criticized as heavily as it is now. The greatest challenge of Vietnamese present education is its poor quality and low effectiveness. This problem is taking place at all levels from primary to tertiary (MOET 2003).*

Besides, the dystopian vision also warns that the popularity of English as a *lingua franca* is moving students from "south to north", from "east to west" and from "non



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English-speaking countries to English-speaking countries" (Luke 2001a: 38). It is now a fashion that young people tend to choose to study for foreign degrees, pushing prestigious educational opportunities to be associated with social advantage (Marginson 2004). Therefore, almost all non-English speaking countries, including Vietnam, are facing a big challenge in regard to recruiting and retaining students. A question for Vietnamese education in the coming years will be how to compete with foreign institutions both in Vietnam and overseas to not only keep local students but also attract international students.

What dystopian visions have predicted may make people disappointed about futures, but to a great extent the period in the late twentieth century proved that these visions were right. Thus, dystopians are taking the credit for preparing young people to enter the next century more consciously and actively. Slaughter (1995) states that "it is true that pessimism may lead to despair. However, it may also stimulate a person to search for effective solutions ... Optimism and pessimism can both inhibit and encourage effective responses" (cited in Gidley 2004: 9). In the case of Vietnamese higher education, acknowledging both of these visions can help educational authorities and policy makers determine accurate actions and decisions.

### The weight of history

Although there are a number of new opportunities for Vietnamese higher education to develop in the twenty-first century, the "ideal picture" of utopias seems still too unrealistic to this sector because barriers such as certain historical events and hierarchical values are still very influential. For instance, the history of long-lasting and continuous wars has put a great burden on the development of Vietnamese higher education. Serious consequences, such as poverty and illiteracy, left behind by these wars have prevented the country from investing in education. According to Vietnam Profile (2004), Vietnam is one of the four ASEAN countries that spend the lowest budget for education with around only 41630 billion dong (roughly 3.5 billion USD) per year (Vietnam News 2006).

In addition, hierarchical values which have been profoundly influenced by Confucianism for thousands of years are also blocking the process of developing Vietnamese education. Traditionally, the defense of Confucius' followers is that hierarchical values help bring about a society without disorder and rebellion. However, Tong (2000) has identified that:

*The remaining traditions do not always represent the most beautiful aspects of the people but may contain elements to hinder progress and create inappropriate attitudes toward improvement. One aspect of this tradition is reflected in the hierarchy of both the society and the education system (cited in Nguyen 2004: 1).*

Moreover, Le (2004: 2) argues that the Vietnamese education system is "a closed system and knowledge-centered". This system can be divided into three distinct levels with a strictly hierarchical management. The first level is the MOET which decides all the activities of the whole system. The second level is schools and universities which, as argued by Pham (2005: 4), operate in the following manner:

*Unlike in many western countries, where an innovation proposed by a young staff*

*member may be welcomed by the community for its level of creativity and challenge, Vietnamese culture places much importance on status and power which are determined by age, seniority and academic/political standing. In many Vietnamese institutions, it seems that who proposes change is even a more important question than what change is proposed. Vietnamese teachers tend to believe that innovation, reform or research should be conducted and put into practice by senior staff holding good academic titles and degrees. Classroom teachers usually prefer to learn from these more senior colleagues than do research or experiment with new ideas by themselves.*

The third level of the educational system is classes where teachers are "managers". Describing what happens in classrooms, Medgves (1986) observes:

*In Vietnam, teachers are the only providers of knowledge... Teachers maintain such a high profile in their function as the norm of knowledge, wisdom, and behavior that they do not accept their roles as instruments to see that learning takes place (cited in Le 2004: 3)*

In other words, the Vietnamese education system is typically like what Slaughter (2004: 195) describes as:

*...quintessentially "industrial era" organizations. In their stereotypical form they are rigid hierarchies, mandated and controlled by Central and State governments, with top-down structure. One of their key features, therefore, is inflexibility. Typically there is a minister at the top; teachers and students are at the bottom-not unlike a nineteenth century army. The "meat in the sandwich" is a layer of bureaucracy that must, at all times, obey prevailing political priorities.*

Obviously, the world has changed as a result of the computer and telecommunication advances and the explosion of information. Literature related to educational management has clearly shown that the hierarchical model with top-down management has become inappropriate in this postmodern time. Therefore, the old style of organizing in divisions, in self-contained departments, and specializations, which was highly successful at one stage of human development, is no longer functional (Rossman 1992). So, as long as the traditional governance model still exists, the process of renovating the education system in Vietnam faces barriers.

In conclusion, impacts coming from the outside world have brought about various changes to the current higher education system of Vietnam. Continuous changes of the outside world will certainly bring about more changes to the system in the future. Therefore, "the main question, then, is not whether modern education is going to change ... The main questions have thus become: what should education be like" (Milojevic 2005: 5). Actually, we cannot draw an accurate future for Vietnamese higher education because "the future is not predetermined, and we cannot really study something which has not yet happened" (Milojevic 2005: 38). In reality, globalization processes may both enhance as well as challenge the current system. On the one hand, they may modernize and democratize the whole system so that all the Vietnamese people can get more benefits from it. On the other hand, they may worsen current achievements and weaken the system. While current changes in the Vietnamese higher education system indicate possibilities for both positive as well as negative changes due to impacts of global forces, on balance, the potential benefits seem to outweigh

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the dangers. Although there are debates around the commercialization and standardization of Vietnamese higher education, as well as its lowered effectiveness and quality, undoubtedly global forces, especially global technology and economies have opened many new opportunities for the Vietnamese people to access a much more advanced and diversified higher education system.

Similarly, push, pull and weight of history factors are also impacting on Vietnamese Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), in similar manner. In the next section I am interested to more specifically look at impacts of worldviews and myths to this issue, and also examine how these worldviews and myths coexist with structural issues and "litany" discourses. This in-depth analysis is crucial because, as argued by Inayatullah (2002: 216) "how one frames the problem, [one] creates the solution".

### **Part II: Vietnamese Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in the Globalization discourse**

According to a UNESCO report on Vietnamese vocational and technical education (VTE) in 1990, the main trends in economic and social development in the last decades of the twentieth century were: the continuing movement of economic activity and employment from the agricultural sector to the manufacturing and service sectors, and the shift from blue-collar jobs to white-collar occupations. Obviously, this tendency is putting new demands on the workforce: manual and low-skilled workers are becoming redundant, "no longer is there any place for muscle without intelligence" (Beaumont 1968: 16). This new demand requires the Vietnamese education system to make a big change: shifting from overemphasizing academic education to developing an advanced and strong VTE system. This is a very difficult and time-consuming task, because Vietnamese VTE "[was] abandoned by the society for a long time and is still considered a backward system in comparison to that of other countries in the region" (Vietnam News 2004:1). Therefore, it would be worth identifying the remaining problems of this system so that feasible strategies can be worked out to improve the situation. This issue will be discussed after CLA is applied.

### **What is causal layered analysis (CLA)?**

Causal layered analysis (CLA) is a futures methodology developed by Sohail Inayatullah (2004) and Richard Slaughter (2002) in "an effort to use poststructuralism...as a way to conduct inquiry into the nature of past, present and future" (Kelly 2004: 349). The attraction of this method is that it is concerned less with predicting a particular future and more with opening up the present and past to create alternative futures. CLA, according to Anthony (2004: 439), is a popular method to find "the deeper meanings imbedded within texts through an exploration of four specific components, and to acknowledge other ways of knowing".

- (1) The first component examines the litany level. This is the most superficial layer. Therefore, this level is very "visible and obvious, requiring little analytic capacity" (Inayatullah 2004: 12). At this level, problems are most commonly oversimplified and exaggerated, most commonly in purely quantitative

terms. This often gives people a "feeling of helplessness (what can I do?), or apathy (nothing can be done), or projected action (why don't they do something about it?)" (Inayatullah 2004: 12).

- (2) The second component is concerned with social causes. These include "social, technological, economic and environmental political and historical factors" (Inayatullah 2004: 12). This level is beneath the surface and considered "proof" of the problem. Here, problems are explained and analyzed by exploring the engagement of the state and of other factors and interests.
- (3) The third component is the worldview level. At this level, underlying belief systems and deeper assumptions are revealed and unpacked. The worldview is different for different people. Therefore, it is not limited to a single entity with a unique solution; rather different worldviews are often discovered. And, of course, different worldviews are to propose different solutions to the problem, different understandings of the issues. When the worldview changes so does the history.
- (4) The last component is the metaphor which deals with "deep stories, the collective archetypes - the unconscious and often emotive dimensions of the problem or the paradox" (Inayatullah 2004: 13). At this level, analysis attempts to "uncover hidden and explicit mythologies, narratives, symbols and metaphors within the text" (Anthony 2004: 454). In sum, this is the deepest, most emotive, and most creative of all the levels.

After applying CLA, tensions, contradictions and invisible layers of Vietnamese VTE in the globalization discourse can be seen in the table below.

Table3: Vietnamese VTE in the Globalization Discourse

Levels	
Litany	Teaching staff: shortage in quantity and poor in quality Curricula: outdated Infrastructure: backward and shortage in quantity
Systematic causes	The economic system: 1. Consequences left behind by the colonial economy 2. Fast development of the global economy The political system: 1. Centralized and top-down governance 2. Ineffective development orientation
Discourse/worldview	Competing discourses: 1. Traditional (conservative) 2. New emerging
Myth/metaphor	Traditional story and proverbs

### **Litany level**

Since VTE is a really weak area in the Vietnamese education system, it would not be a big surprise to see why critics of VTE institutions appear very commonly on the news media. Critics often focus on three main weaknesses of VTE: teaching staff, curricula, and infrastructure.

### **Teaching staff**

The shortage of teaching staff has become a severe problem for Vietnamese VTE institutions. Nguyen (1999) argues that at present VTE institutions nationwide have a total of only 10,000 full-time teaching staff, accounting for around 65 per cent of the required number (cited in Vnexpress 2002). This shortage has led to a situation in which the ratio of teachers to students in Vietnamese VTE institutions is 1:25 (1 teacher per 25 students) while the standard ratio in the world is only 1:15 (Vnexpress 2002). According to the MOET (2005), to meet the demands of the rapid increase of VTE students in recent years, there needs to be approximately 6,000 more VTE teaching staff.

More serious is that the teaching quality of VTE teachers is very low. Teachers with B.A. degrees account for 69 per cent (and with M.A. degrees only 2%) of all staff; moreover, not all VTE schools have enough teachers who can deal with IT and foreign languages (Nguyen 1994). This is inadequate in terms of standards which a VTE teacher should have: "vocational teachers must have extensive training and experience in the occupation of technology which they teach" (Swanson 1968: 23). To compensate for the shortage of teachers, many VTE institutions have to invite technicians and skilled workers from various sources such as companies and enterprises to become teachers. Unfortunately, no one can ensure the quality of these teachers. Thus, quality reduction is becoming a leading concern for the whole society.

### **Curricula**

Curricula are also a big concern. The curricula are outdated compared to today's production technologies. The institutions and their technology have been used for dozens of years without improvements. Nguyen (2005: 1) argues that "while the number of training professions in other countries has increased to thousands, Vietnamese VTE institutions can currently offer only 256 professions in 82 different industries". In fact, although the society is changing continuously with new demands for new skills in all industries, Vietnamese VTE institutions still use curricula which were designed to meet the needs of the state-owned economy tens of years ago.

### **Infrastructure**

This is the last but not the least concern of Vietnamese VTE. In general, all VTE institutions do not have enough laboratories, libraries, teaching and learning equipment, and workshops. Specifically, Nguyen (2004) says that only 19 per cent of facilities and equipment in these institutions is still good and modern enough to be used for training; more seriously, almost all VTE institutions in rural areas have very few, and in some cases no learning and teaching materials or pieces of equipment, meaning that students can study only theory. In reality, although many scientific and technological

advancements have been imported to Vietnam, many VTE institutions are still using old facilities and equipment sponsored by the Soviet Union or the other former socialist countries. Therefore, upgrading these facilities and equipment is becoming an essential task for the system. This is because, as Siddiqui (1992: 88) claims: "facilities and equipment can account for 40 per cent of success of vocational and technical education".

**Solution:** At this level, it is suggested that the most effective strategy to improve these weaknesses is the government's responsibility. The government should rebalance its budget to invest more in VTE because so far the national funding for VTE has been very low compared to that in other sectors. One example is that while the annual cost of educating a university student is six million dong (roughly 400 USD), on average only four million dong (roughly 230 USD) is spent on a VTE student (Hoang, cited in Giao duc va doi song 2004). Similarly, according to data of the MOET (cited in Nhan dan 2004), in 2003 while the government spent 100 billion dong (roughly 75000 USD) upgrading facilities and equipment in universities, VET only received 30 billion dong (roughly 20000 USD).

### System level

At this level, two main systems – economy and politics – will be taken into consideration as drivers of the above-described "litany" weaknesses.

Regarding the economy, it can be said that both the colonial and global economies of Vietnam have created many difficulties for the VTE system. The colonial economy before 1975 did not leave any premises for the VET system because one of the main policies of colonizers in Vietnam at that time was applying modern technologies to exploit Vietnamese economics, but strictly prevent the local people from accessing them (Bernard 2005). That is why for many decades the local people had no chance to develop technological skills.

It was not until 1989 when the 'Renovation' policy was put into operation that more and more foreign investors have come to Vietnam bringing with them technological and scientific advancements. This presented as a good opportunity for the people to access modern technologies. However, the introduction of new ICTs to Vietnam has also caused a number of problems for VTE. While work places have been equipped with various modern technologies, VTE still use out-of-date facilities for training. Therefore, the system has been criticized for failing to keep up with the world's technological and scientific advancements. Duong (2005: 8-9), the Deputy Director General of the Department of Vocational Training, says:

*At present almost all VTE institutions fail to train learners with modern information and technology (IT) skills because IT develops very fast and most of teachers can not catch up with new situation.*

Moreover, although the application of modern technologies and machines is now very common in the workplace, almost all Vietnamese VET institutions still use old technologies in training. Therefore, what students have learned may not be able to be used in the practice. Concerning this problem, Tran (1999: 170) argues that "it appears that in many places, about one half of the workers need retraining, 90 per cent of managers and 96 per cent of other cadres need to apply for attendance of skill-improving



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courses or retraining programs".

Similarly, the centralized and closed political system of Vietnam has also created a number of obstacles to the VTE system. Traditionally, training programs and developing strategies of VTE are not designed by VTE institutions themselves but by both the MOET and the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (Vietnam Economic Times 2004). Unfortunately, these two ministries do not usually keep a close track of the continuous changes within the labor market. Therefore, many VTE programs are inadequate for the demands of the labor market, and "many job training courses provide students with skills which are often not in high demand" says Nguyen, H., the director of the ministry's Labor-Vocational Training Center (cited in Vietnam News 2004: 1).

Besides, the policy of overemphasizing urban training, in my view, is leading VTE in an ineffective direction in development. With 80 per cent of the population living in rural areas, VTE should focus more on rural development since developing it does not necessarily provide only training in professions related to industry and technology. UNESCO (1990: 40) reports that "many developing countries have widened their VTE by emphasizing rural development and incorporating crafts and fine arts into the technical and vocational education system". Nguyen (1994) argues that once the government changes its funding and development direction, 90 per cent of the labor force in the rural areas who are yet to be given any kind of training, even short-term or over several months, would be trained and find real jobs.

**Solution:** First, to solve the problem related to the economic system, the most effective strategy which the Vietnamese VTE system should carry out, in my view, is to set up collaborations with local employers and co-operative joint projects with other countries. By doing this, VTE institutions can find sponsors from various enterprises and create a good environment for teachers and students to practice their real knowledge. Evaluating what benefits collaborations can bring about to participants, it is argued that:

*Once these collaborations are set up, they would benefit students, teachers as well as industrial enterprises. For students, they can have direct experience of work in industry during their study; their knowledge and practical experience can be increased. For teachers, they can be aware of changes and innovations occurring within local industries and what new skills are required so that they can update the curriculum in relation with actual needs. For industrial enterprises, these collaborations offer them a chance to make a preliminary selection of future employees as well as give trainees the opportunity to obtain and improve their scientific and technical knowledge and skills during their training, thereby producing a better-quality workforce for the future (UNESCO 1990: 34-35).*

Besides, at the international level VTE institutions can exchange information, curriculum materials, textbooks and audiovisual aids as well as policy statements, research findings and staff fellowships with advanced countries. This would be a useful way for Vietnam to design appropriate and updated curricula for training courses in newly emerging areas.

Second, to solve problems related to the political system, the best solution is to change the current political system of Vietnam. The centralized system should be



replaced with a decentralized system which will give rural/or local governments greater responsibility for developing appropriate policies according to their specific needs. Actually, this shift needs to be carried out as soon as possible because various literature has shown that the centralization orientation is becoming out-dated in today's postmodern era. Specifically, Arenas (2005) identifies that since the 1980s, policies, infrastructure, and ideologies that in the past supported centralization, universalism, and top-down decision making, have been replaced to a certain extent by decentralization.

### Worldview level

The worldview is a deeper level which underpins the belief system and hidden assumptions. At this level, I attempt to discuss the traditional views of the Vietnamese people about academic education and VTE as a root cause of the issue. These views are not simply a cause, but a constitutional framing of the issue. In addition, I also attempt to discuss a second worldview which I name "the new emerging worldview" to see how differently the Vietnamese younger generations perceive VTE.

First, the traditional notion of education in Vietnam has been heavily influenced by Confucian ideologies which stereotype that vocational education is for an inferior breed of man, academic education is for the edification of the individual and for the benefit of society and the true goal of academic education is to develop man's natural talents (AcaDemon 2002). Therefore, for the Vietnamese, intellectual labor is always highly appreciated, whereas manual labor is always undervalued (Reagan 2000). In the Vietnamese society formal education and qualifications have been considered a means to "maintain face", establish social status, and gain power, whereas vocational schools are thought to foreclose entry to high-status occupations (Hoare 2004). When comparing the foundational attitudes to learning of Western and Asian students, Nile (1995: 8) has made a clear identification: "while students coming from individualist societies [Western societies] consider diplomas and certificates of little symbolic value, Asian students [including Vietnamese students] are exposed to strong family pressures toward high levels of academic achievement, attendance at prestigious universities".

As a result, how VTE is treated in the Vietnamese society is very similar to what Swanson (1968: 25) observes:

*Although the society emphasizes the important role of vocational education, parents, students, the public and even teachers still look upon vocational education as an educational activity for second-class citizens; teachers are adamant in advising all youth with an above-average academic aptitude not to go into vocational programs; parents show an interest in vocational education in their local school but take a vehement stand against their own child being a vocational student; and culturally different groups take a strong stand against any of their group being advised to enroll in vocational programs.*

This undervaluing of VTE has resulted in young Vietnamese being biased towards academic education and aggressively avoiding vocational schools (Tran 1999). They only choose a "blue collar" career if they fail to enter university. According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2006), every year only 20 to 30 per cent of sec-

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ondary students sitting exams for tertiary institutions pass, and those who fail will wait to take the next year's exams, but do not enroll in vocational schools.

This explains why the ratio of Vietnamese VTE students is much lower than that in many other countries, even in Asian countries. Specifically, Dang (2004: 1) claims that:

*... for every 15 Vietnamese senior school students, only one is enrolled in vocational training. This is contrary and unhelpful for any country's education development. UNESCO recommends a one-to-four ratio for developing countries, and one-to-nine ratio for developed countries.*

This situation has resulted in a significant shortage of trained workers needed by the foreign and local employers in the country. Vu (2006) calculates that at present only around 15 per cent of the total labor force have undergone training. This is a major problem in the socio-economic development plan, a big task for the training establishments all over the country.

Although after the reunification of the country in 1975, Marxist-Leninist ideologies, which highly appreciate the role of the working class, were imported to Vietnam, these ideologies were not strong enough to create a revolution to change the traditional worldview. There might be two main explanations for this. First, Marxist-Leninist ideologies were ubiquitously propagated in Vietnam for only a short period, from 1975 to the early 1990s when the socialist world collapsed. Therefore, these ideologies only helped direct the people towards a new political orientation, but did not really go deeply inside to change their mentality. Second, although the country was united in 1975, in reality the North and the South did not follow the same political orientations. While the North considered socialism a firm foundation for social development, the South was influenced by capitalism, especially the U.S. (because the South was governed by the U.S. from 1954 to 1975). This led to a fact that Marxist-Leninism was not ever accepted wholeheartedly and widely by the whole nation like Confucian thoughts in previous centuries. Therefore, one conclusion can be drawn out that Marxist-Leninism is just political, whereas Confucianism, known as the core of the traditional worldview, with its existence in Vietnam for thousands of years has become culture of the Vietnamese, so it is hard to change.

However, this evidence does not mean that VET is completely ignored by society. In fact, during recent years a new worldview which I name "the new emerging worldview" is becoming popular among younger generations. Unlike the traditional worldview, the new worldview emphasizes the important role of VTE in developing effective manpower. Those who follow this worldview have recognized that the global economy has a strong demand for skilled workers rather than for a plethora of intellectuals. Although these "pioneers" of the new emerging worldview still account for only a small percentage, it is a positive signal for the country because the number of students choosing to take VTE is gradually increasing. Currently, in fact, many VTE institutions are unable to provide enough places for students. Consequently, apart from a period some years ago when students could enter VTE institutions freely without having to pass entrance examinations, now the number being admitted is very limited. Specifically, Duong (2005), deputy minister of VTE, says that in 2004, out of every five students applying for VTE, only one was accepted, and it is estimated that this

competitive ratio would be much higher in the future (cited in Vietnam News 2004). As a result of this situation, the country is trying to direct half of the total number of children into VTE while the other half enter senior secondary education schools. Under this program, every year the country will have one million persons drawn to VTE courses or schools. This will raise the percentage of trained laborers from 15 to 22-25 per cent in the next decade (Lam 2005).

In short, the traditional worldview has constituted a core belief system of the Vietnamese people. It has been rooted in society and imbedded in many generations' memories. It is hard to change this worldview, especially among older generations. However, this does not mean there is no way to develop the VTE system because the new emerging worldview has been gradually accepted by an increasing number of young people. Therefore, the notion of undervaluing VTE can be eliminated if there is a shift from the traditional worldview to the new emerging worldview.

**Solution:** The solution offered here is consciousness-raising among the people about the important role of VTE. This solution has been applied in some countries. For example, in the U.S., in debates surrounding school reform in the 1990s, the Congress of the United States emphasized that vocational-technical education is an integral element in building a strong workforce as part of the overall national defense strategy (National Center for research in vocational education 1993). Similarly, various studies in this country have warned students that in the global economy employment in the service and manufacturing sectors will continue growing; therefore, vocational-technical education should be taken in their consideration (Cho & Imel 2003; Cetron & Davies 2003).

More strongly, in Australia the federal government has forced students to learn VTE by combining vocational competencies as main subjects in almost all schools. The government also asserts that from 2006 the certificate will no longer be based solely on learning at school. Rather, vocational education and activities outside of schools such as in communities and through employment will be recognized for Senior Certificate (Queensland the Smart State 2005).

In the case of Vietnam, since the role of VTE has not been understood properly, it would be worthwhile to teach students about VTE right when they are in school. For example, the current curricula of senior schools should be redesigned to give equal status to vocational education alongside academic subjects because, as Hoang (2001: 82) says: "Vietnamese senior schools still keep academic education as the main, if not the only, stream". In addition, a career guidance system should be established to instruct young people on how to choose careers suitable for their actual abilities. This would eliminate the traditional thinking: university is the unique way for senior school graduates to continue their higher education.

### The myth/metaphor level

This layer constitutes the strong culturally-linked metaphors (Terranova 2004). It is concerned with deeper cultural stories behind the worldview. In this sense, the disregarding of VTE in Vietnam is supported by some of the most influential stories and proverbs passed from generation to generation. These, as shown in the discussion below, include a story praising the industriousness of Vietnamese women during

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imperial times and some well-known proverbs. The story is that:

*[In] the feudal time, the Vietnamese imperial governments appreciated men of high learning very much. Anyone who could pass the imperial examinations was employed by the king and became an important mandarin in the kingdom. Then, he [not she because Vietnamese females were not allowed to go to school at that time] could bring good reputation not only to his family but also to the whole village. Therefore, many Vietnamese wives were willing to take care of the whole family: earning money and raising children for their husbands to focus on only studying. They had a strong belief that once their husbands got PhD degrees and became a mandarin, the whole family could be supported by the husbands (Ca dao 2005).*

Obviously, for thousands of years the society considered high degrees of learning were a means to change people's social position. That is why now in many Asian countries, including Vietnam, payment/wage is determined by academic degrees and certifications, but not by real ability.

The following proverbs will illustrate how important high qualifications in education are:

- (1) *Good reputation and wealth come along with high qualifications in education;*
- (2) *What's learned in the cradle lasts till the tomb; thereby a child should be filled with literature when he/she is in the cradle. When growing up, he/she will become a success;*
- (3) *Once you have broad knowledge, you can become a teacher of others (Ca dao 2005).*

In short, these myths have been imbedded in the culture for generations. Therefore, it is easy to understand why parents almost always want to send their children to universities where they are guaranteed at least to become an intellectual, but prevent them from entering VTE schools where they are thought to tie their lives to manual jobs.

**Solution:** What is needed is a new methodology to accompany the new emerging worldview. This may be difficult because the traditional worldview is still very persistent. However, to lift the position of VTE, there need to be new thoughts. To do this, alongside stories and proverbs which respect academic education, other statements which praise manual works need to be more popularized. Some of these statements are:

- (1) *When we are full, we think intellectuals are the most important, but when we are hungry, we suddenly recognize that workers/farmers are the most important;*
- (2) *Labor is the most glorious thing;*
- (3) *Talking hundreds of times is less worth than doing one time (Cadao 2005).*

In sum, improving VTE's current position does not seem easy, because the weight of history, the worldview and the myth constitute great barriers for new changes to take place. Therefore, the future of Vietnamese VTE, in a fundamental sense, is unknowable. The best way to know about the future of VTE is to explore its alternative possible futures. For such an exploration, scenarios are admirably suited because they "open up the present and allow the creation of alternative futures" (Inayatullah

1996: 202). If based on the model of developing scenarios, four alternative futures of Vietnamese VTE are:

1. The first possible future is the "Status Quo" (Inayatullah 1996: 202), meaning the present situation of VTE will continue into the future. In the 21st Century, VTE would continue to be disregarded by society, and academic education is, and could remain, the main, if not the unique, stream for students. This future is very likely because even though the government and the MOET have made noticeable efforts over the last decades to improve VTE (such as spending more funding for VTE and designing more appropriate training programs), VTE's position has not changed much. An explanation can be that so far changes have been made only at the macro level. But changes at the micro level such as developing co-operation of the community, industry, teachers, and parents to direct students towards VTE have not been implemented. If this orientation continues, the future of VTE will not improve much.
2. The second future is the "Collapse scenario", meaning that the system "cannot sustain continued growth" (Inayatullah 1996: 202). This future could happen if there is a collapse in the economic system (e.g., the economic crisis in 1997) or in the political system (e.g., the collapse of communism in the early 1990s). Such collapse could cause anarchy in the VTE sector (i.e. funding scheme for VTE would be reduced at a minimum level because the government has to restore economic and social consequences; and foreign investors would withdraw from the country, leading to mass unemployment among workers with VTE skills). Such pressures could bring about a death to the VTE system.
3. The third future is the "Return" or "Steady State" scenario, meaning the sector returns to some previous time (Inayatullah 1996: 202). This scenario would occur if our society becomes "less industrial" (Inayatullah 1996: 202). Then, the Vietnamese society would return to the one like before 1989 where agriculture was almost the unique economy. The labor market would, thus, not require workers with VTE skills. As a result, the second worldview (the new emerging) would die, and the traditional worldview would become the main, if not the only one.
4. The last future is the "Transformation" scenario (Inayatullah 1996: 202). Here, fundamental change at both macro and micro levels is implemented to make a 'revolution' and improve the present position of VET. For example, regarding the national government and the MOET, in addition to spending more on VTE, decentralization policies aimed at giving local governments more authority (and more responsibility) to develop more appropriate training programs which can meet local demands are also implemented. Regarding VTE institutions, besides improving remaining problems, the use of external forces, such as corporate connections and technology in order to update present training programs and encourage parents and community to guide students towards VTE is used. If these changes are carried out, meaning a logical relationship between the macro and micro level is established, the whole structure, according to Cuban (1988), would be changed and persistent problems would have a much greater chance of being solved.

## Conclusion

The phenomenon of globalization is a widely in the social sciences. It is widely claimed that globalization is bringing about changes in all aspects of society: cultures are being hybridized (Pieterse 1995), social networks are transcending national boundaries (Castells 1996), and communications and transportation are expanding in a context of time and space compression (Robertson 1995). And education, of course, cannot avoid impacts of global forces. What has been discussed in the paper proves this argument. Since the wind of globalization flows to Vietnam, the whole education system has been under great pressures to change. All of current changes are promising to bring Vietnamese education to a new future. And this future is, in fact, unknowable. It could be better, or it could be worse as compared to current situation depending on how Vietnam makes advantage of new opportunities and avoids threatening dangers. The futures triangle has helped us recognize these new opportunities as well as threatening dangers. After discussing all tensions and contradictions, it is clear to see that to modernize and democratize education, in other words to reach a utopian/eutopian vision, what the country needs to do is to minimize the weight of history and to change conservative values. This is certainly not easy, but as long as these barriers still exist, the whole system is hard to change. It is the same case for Vietnamese VTE. After applying CLA to discuss the issue, we have seen that the traditional worldview and the myth are the biggest barriers blocking the journey to lift VTE's position. Thus, to develop a strong VTE system, alongside making financial efforts, the government and educational authorities need to help the people recognize the important role of VTE in developing an effective manpower in the global economy. Once these mental obstacles are eliminated, the new emerging worldview would build up a firm foundation to both develop VTE as well as positively transform Vietnamese higher education in general.

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