

## DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIEF

PHAM NGOC BAO LIEM. *Private Higher Education in South Vietnam from 1957 to 1975*

Major: History of Vietnam

Code: 9229013

Private higher education in particular and higher education in general in South Vietnam in the 1954-1975 period remains one of many relatively new socio-cultural issues. Research on private higher education in the South during this period contributes to restoring the picture of private higher education, from which the history of development, training objectives, organization and operation of private higher educational institutions in the South is perceived more and more fully. This is also the basis for a clearer and more correct and scientific understanding of the education policies of the Republic of Vietnam under the auspices of the United States.

In the current context of (higher) educational reform, especially the policy changes for non-public higher education with many issues being discussed vigorously, the thesis offers to assess and evaluate the characteristics, properties, roles and contributions as well as limitations of the private universities in the South in the 1957-1975 period, thereby drawing lessons from the development of non-public higher education in the current period.

In addition to the Introduction, Conclusion, References and Chapter 1 of the literature review, the thesis is presented from Chapter 2 to Chapter 4.

*Chapter 2: Background and establishment of private higher education institutions in the South from 1957 to 1975*

The historical context as the premise leading to the formation of private universities in the South includes political, military, economic and social developments in South Vietnam in the period 1954-1975 gave rise to the need for private institutions, for the Republican government's policy on private education and higher education, for the continuation of the French higher education tradition after 1954 in South Vietnam.

The thesis explores the context of the birth of major private universities such as the University of Dalat, the University of Van Hanh, the Minh-Duc University, the University of Hoa Hao, and the University of Cao Dai. Besides, the establishment of other private universities such as Phuong Nam University, Dan Tri University, Vietnam computing company, Régina Pacis Academy, Cuu Long University, Tri Hanh University, Canh Tan University, Dong Nai Technical University, Thanh Nhan University of Pedagogy, Lasan University, Minh Tri University is also taken into account. In the context of several great changes in politics, military as well as socio-economic issues in South Vietnam in the period 1954-1975, appropriate policies to develop education, especially (private) higher education by the government of the Republic of Vietnam were a significant effort to build a human source for the development of all aspects of society in South Vietnam

in the confrontation with socialist North Vietnam.

*Chapter 3: Organization and operation of the private higher education institutions in South Vietnam from 1957 to 1975*

In terms of personnel organization, the thesis concludes that the organizational model of private higher education institutions in South Vietnam was strongly influenced by the American ones. In general, the private universities in South Vietnam before 1975 made special efforts in building facilities, providing training equipment. The universities received investment from the budget and aid from organizations and individuals at home and abroad. Particularly, the churches (Catholic, Buddhist, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao) played a significant role in financing private universities. Regarding enrollment work, despite the dearth of general regulations on enrollment organization and training management among these private universities, their enrollment work shared certain similarities.

Regarding the curriculum, it can be seen that the social and humanities disciplines in many universities did not pay much attention to subjects related to Vietnamese culture and history. The curriculum was also heavy and stereotyped following the model of European-American universities. In general, the activities of private universities in the South range from building facilities, organizing enrollment, evaluating students in the learning process to organizing training programs, teaching programs, curriculum, etc. had their typical features. However, due to its short existence time, the Vietnamese identities in these

universities seems to be very blurred. The slogans “Humanity - Ethnic - Liberation” and “Ethnic - Science - Humanity” were always encouraged by the government as well as universities, but in practice, it has not been fully implemented.

*Chapter 4: Some comments*

*Traces of religion in the operation of private universities:* Due to the formation of major private universities in the South from 1957 to 1975 associated with religions, their development process was permeated with religious features.

*Autonomy:* “Autonomous universities” was defined in the Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam, which is reflected in the fact that the government of the Republic of Vietnam, directly the Ministry of Education, not deeply involved in the issues of organization, enrollment, curriculum, teaching programs of universities. The autonomy created maximum favourable conditions for private higher education institutions in the South to maximize their capabilities in the process of operating university activities.

*The “open” and the synthesis in the teaching program:* The “open” characteristic is considered as a prominent feature of the private higher education in the South, manifested through the flexible curriculum of the universities. The curriculum was not constrained to the framework or subject to strict regulations, but instead, it was always adjusted and updated to ensure that students have access to new, practical and relevant knowledge. The quite flexible bachelor’s degree program offered many options for learners in their access to higher education.

*Significance for education and higher education in the South:* In the Southern context in the period 1954-1975, private higher education with its special position parallel with public higher education resolved the practical needs in training highly qualified human resources to serve the Southern society (under the regime of the Republic of Vietnam).

*Significance for Southern religions and society:* Due to the specific characteristics related to the formation of large private higher education institutions in the South that most of them were put under the auspices of large religions, they were not only assumed the usual social functions of a higher educational institution, but also a place for religions to “promote credibility to the church”. Socially, private higher education institutions made a significant contribution to addressing the educational needs of many groups in society, from high school graduates to employed people whose desire to improve their qualifications or discharged soldiers.

Besides, together with public universities, private higher education institutions in the South contributed significantly to the training of human resources to serve all aspects of Southern social life. However, because the context of their presence and goals were determined by politics, the training program focused much more on the literary, law and humanities, less on the sciences, engineering, and technology (especially in the beginning). Moreover, the obvious influence of the organizational model and aid by the United States on the operation of private universities

partly prevented them from promoting Vietnamese identities at their discretion. Their operations were strongly governed by war and politics. The training program was still heavy in theory; there was a lack of teaching staff (private universities often invited professors from major public universities to lecture).

The thesis states that in the 1957-1975 period, the private universities in the South managed to define the organizational model, gradually complete the enrollment work in a variety of ways and suitable for the conditions of the universities and the reality of the Southern society. Examinations, curriculum, and teaching content in universities were organized in the spirit of autonomy and required academic freedom in teaching and scientific research. Scientific research activities and foreign relations of these private universities were quite diverse in forms, with some initial achievements in many fields.

Research on private higher education in the South from 1957 to 1975, compared with the current development of non-public / private higher education, lessons learned (both successful and limited) in the development of higher education from history will contribute to making policies that are increasingly suitable for the real development of private higher education in particular, Vietnamese higher education in general.

The thesis was successfully defended before the Thesis Examination Board of Hue University in 2019.

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