

A Study on the Policy and Governance of “New Model Universities” in Vietnam: Focusing on Vietnam-Japan University

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ABSTRACT: Owing to “Đổi Mới” in 1986, Vietnam has been striving to improve higher education. Transnational higher education (TNHE) has been diversifying with higher education internationalization, while Vietnam has entered the global higher education market as a receiver country. Adopting the “Higher Education Reform Agenda 2006--2020” (HERA) in 2005 and participating in the WTO in 2017, the Vietnamese government and foreign governments established “New Model Universities”, which have been obtaining financial support from different governments, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). As “international joint universities”, these universities are also regarded as public universities instead of private universities. This paper aims to explore Vietnam-Japan University through historical analysis, document analysis, and field research. Three interviews, with two members of Vietnam-Japan University and one Japanese researcher, were conducted in January and June 2024. This paper aims (1) to discuss the establishment and development from the context of Vietnamese higher education development and the perspective of stable geopolitics; (2) to compare new model universities and explore the governance issues of Vietnam-Japan University; and (3) to provide implications for Taiwan.

KEYWORDS: Vietnam, Japan, higher education internationalization, New Model University, Vietnam-Japan University.

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1. Introduction

Globalization has driven the movement and exchange of people, goods, capital, and technology. Since the 1980s, higher education worldwide has embraced the trends of “cross-border”, “transnational”, and “borderless” activities, becoming routine. By the 1990s, higher education had significantly transcended national borders, achieving substantial growth, and “transnational higher education” (TNHE) became a key term. In higher education, the movement of people (teachers and students), goods (research equipment), capital (international joint universities, transnational donations, loans, international industry-academia revenue, and expenditures), and technology (academic exchanges, curriculum collaboration, distance

education, quality assurance, evaluations, rankings, technology transfer, etc.) has resulted in more forms of cooperation and competition. Additionally, the roles and significance of universities, governments, and markets have continually evolved. Launched by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) officially included educational services as part of trade in services. It clearly outlined service models such as “cross-border supply,” “consumption abroad,” “commercial presence”, and “presence of natural persons”. Subsequently, terms such as “transnational education”, “cross-border education”, and “borderless education” emerged (Chiang, 2011; Lin, 2013). After Taiwan joined the WTO in 2002, the domestic prediction of

the “impact” and “response” related to higher education service models became a hot research topic. In 2007, Vietnam’s accession to the WTO in 2007 saw Taiwan actively recruited students there, aiming to lead international student recruitment (Lin, 2013).

In December 1986, Vietnam undertook comprehensive economic reforms (Đổi Mới), transitioning from a planned economy to a “market economy”. At that time, the Eastern European revolutions, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and China’s reforms and opening up led to the collapse of the existing Cold War structure. In this context, Vietnam sought domestic political stability and economic growth, with most of the leadership favoring reform and opening up; therefore, “multilateralization” became an important strategy (Chikada, 2005). In 1995, Vietnam normalized relations with the United States. It actively joined international organizations, such as ASEAN in 1995, APEC in 1998, and the WTO in 2007, significantly enhancing Vietnam’s political and economic interactions and cooperation on the international stage (Lin, 2020). The market economy had a significant effect on higher education. For example, economic development has led to different labor demands, which has led Vietnam’s higher education to be unable to meet the needs of international society, domestic economic development, and individuals’ educational and career planning needs immediately. Consequently, higher education policies underwent significant reforms. Vietnam-Germany University (VGU) was established in 2008, the University of Science and Technology of Hanoi (USTH) was established through Vietnam--France cooperation in 2010, and Vietnam--Japan University (VJU) was established in 2015, which are collectively known as “New Model Universities”. Within the above context, the three universities established demonstrate profound distinctions from other Vietnamese higher education institutions in terms of their founding bodies, governing authorities, sources of funding, institutional positioning, academic specializations, and even modes of international collaboration.

On the other hand, Vietnam has been an

important partner with Taiwan in international higher education. In 2024, out of the 116,038 international students in Taiwan, 16,111 were Vietnamese, accounting for 13.9% of the total, making them the largest group (Ministry of Education, 2024). However, globally, there are over 200,000 Vietnamese international students. Vietnam became a more attractive partner than before. In 2016, Taiwan’s Executive Yuan announced the “New Southbound Policy”, and the Ministry of Education formulated the “New Southbound Talent Development Plan”. The aim was to provide quality education for professional talent development (Market), expand bilateral exchanges of young scholars and students (Pipeline), and enhance bilateral education cooperation platforms (Platform) to promote Taiwan’s enrollment and exchanges in Southeast Asia (Ministry of Education, 2016; Lin, 2020). After 2018, the policy also categorized eight key initiatives: strategic marketing, specialized training talent classes, R&D and management talent programs, holiday schools, specific field internships (including economic and cultural aspects), new immigrant empowerment programs, Southeast Asian courses, and academic exchanges. Vietnam ranks high in several categories, such as specialized training talent classes (2nd place), R&D and management talent programs (1st place), holiday schools (3rd place), specific field internships (including economic and cultural aspects) (1st place), and Southeast Asian courses (3rd place) (Ministry of Education, 2020; 2021). On the basis of the development of Vietnam’s higher education and partnership with Taiwan in higher education, it is important to discuss the New Model Universities and explore the issues to find implications.

On the basis of the research background, the research questions of this paper are as follows:

(1) How were the new model universities established in the context of Vietnamese higher education development, and what are their positions from the perspective of stable geopolitics?

(2) In what ways are New Model Universities similar, and what governance issues can be identified in the case of Vietnam-Japan University?

(3) What implications can be drawn for the policy of higher education internationalization in Taiwan?

2. Literature Review

This paper focused on the new model universities established in cooperation between Vietnam and foreign governments. Therefore, the following analysis covers the aspects of “Higher Education Internationalization”, “Vietnamese Higher Education”, and “Japan’s International Cooperation with Vietnam, Research on Japan-Vietnam University”.

2.1. Higher Education Internationalization

The definition of higher education internationalization varies widely, with numerous international studies exploring the topic from diverse perspectives. Among these, Jane Knight’s research is particularly well known. Knight (2006) revised the framework of cross-border education, categorizing it into people, programs, providers, and academic project services, with “development cooperation”, “educational linkages”, and “commercial trade” as forms and conditions of mobility. This framework can be used to examine Vietnamese higher education internationalization and cooperation projects. The collaboration between the Vietnamese government and foreign joint venture universities encompasses multiple categories, differing in scope and degree from overseas branches.

The recent comprehensive work by Eggins, Smolentseva & De Wit (2021) on higher education brings together contributions from various international scholars. The book is divided into five main sections: academic profession, admissions, governance issues and the social role of universities, the public–private mix in higher education, and aspects of higher education internationalization. De Wit & Altbach (2021) emphasize cooperation with entities such as the British Council, DAAD, OECD, UNESCO, and Southeast Asian nations, highlighting the crucial role of government involvement, particularly in China and Southeast Asia. They also noted that the goals and interests of exporting and importing countries, universities, and stakeholders differ

when overseas branches are established, requiring analysis from academic, economic, and even ethnic perspectives. However, the book does not focus on any specific country and lacks detailed analytical frameworks.

2.2. Vietnamese higher education

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of books on English-language higher education in Vietnam. Tran & Marginson (2018) cover a wide range of topics, including policy, university quality assurance, advanced programs, cross-border education, the influence of international organizations, EMI education management, student mobility, international students, push–pull theory, contributions of returnee students, employment issues, brain drain, brain gain, and Vietnamese students in international NGOs. This diversity reflects the multifaceted nature of Vietnamese higher education research.

Hoang et al. (2018) discuss the Ministry of Education and Training’s 2006 Excellent University Project to have Vietnamese universities ranked among the world’s top 200 by 2020. This goal, intended to be achieved through the development of new model universities, was not met because of insufficient government funding and faculty shortages, providing insights into the Vietnamese government’s mindset.

Nguyen (2018) addresses diverse forms of cross-border education in Vietnam, including the operations of RMIT’s overseas campus and the issues revealed by Tuoi Tre News in 2012 regarding Hanoi National University and Griggs University’s joint programs and Australian higher education providers. This underscores the importance of quality assurance and risk management in international education.

Yang (2020) focused on RMIT’s Vietnamese campus, explained the background and model of international branch campuses, and used PEST (political, economic, social, and technological) analysis to assess environmental and strategic risks, providing new information for this paper. Although RMIT is the oldest overseas campus in Vietnam and, legally, a “private university”, it enjoys greater curricular, financial, and personnel

freedom than new model universities do, making it a competitor. However, new model universities receive financial support from both governments and employ foreign faculty, quickly catching up with research outcomes and making them relevant comparative subjects.

Lin (2013) offers an in-depth exploration of Vietnamese education, including an analysis of cross-border education development and institutional formation, a comparison of the history and significance of foreign educational systems transferred to Vietnam, and a classic reference. Lin (2014) also positions various higher education institutions between centralization and school autonomy, analyzing the “freedom” of national universities, public universities, new model universities, and private universities in terms of curriculum, personnel, admissions, and finance. This analysis is critical for this paper, although it primarily explains new model universities from a legal perspective and does not provide operational analysis. Lin (2018; 2020) focuses on strategies for recruiting Vietnamese students to Taiwan, offering political, economic, social, and cultural analyses of the push and pull factors influencing Vietnamese students’ decisions to study abroad, which are applicable to understanding the differing positions and considerations of Vietnamese and foreign governments in establishing new model universities. Lin (2022) examines tuition policies and discusses the financial autonomy of universities and student choice criteria, highlighting the impact of new model universities’ competitive positioning within the Vietnamese higher education market.

2.3. Japan’s International Cooperation with Vietnam and Research on Japan-Vietnam University

As mentioned, cross-border higher education is highly diverse, with foreign governments and international organizations playing crucial roles in establishing and operating new model universities in Vietnam. For Japan, the budget for Japan-Vietnam University (VJU) comes from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which operates under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and funds the university through “technical cooperation”.

Wei & Wang (2021) explained that after Japan’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) Charter was passed in 1992, ODA activities were driven by four principles: humanitarian considerations, mutual coexistence and prosperity, environmental protection, and self-help efforts. They emphasized that ODA activities were not intended to create “overseas market opportunities”. In recent years, with the advent of global development issues such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ODA has focused on “high-quality growth”, “promoting peace”, and “strengthening responses to global-scale challenges”. The research highlights that Taiwan’s new Southbound Policy includes establishing strategic alliances with countries such as Japan and connecting with ASEAN countries in infrastructure and regulatory systems. It also highlights the shift in ODA assistance to Vietnam since 2014 toward a “technical cooperation leading to financial aid” model, particularly emphasizing grassroots technical cooperation projects post-2010 to cultivate Vietnamese talent. Thus, establishing VJUs can be contextualized within this framework of technical cooperation. However, according to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2020), the “Vietnam-Japan University Campus Construction Project” was funded through “yen loans”. Initially, economic assistance through yen loans was provided for a project by Hanoi National University. However, the Vietnamese government decided that 10% of the costs would be borne by VJU, indicating that Japanese government support for universities also includes financial aspects.

JICA, Oriental Consultants, Co., Ltd., Japan International Cooperation Center & Japan Vietnam Economic Forum (2014) published a preestablishment assessment report the year before VJU was founded. The report is diverse, covering the development of higher education in Vietnam and Hanoi, legal aspects, the management of Hanoi National University, the introduction of the University of Science and Technology of Hanoi, Vietnam--Germany University, the expectations of Japanese companies and Vietnamese students for VJU, campus plans, discussions on the establishment

model, and VJU's scale and development plans. This report provides substantial information for this research.

In 2020, the Human Development Department of the JICA organized a survey team in August 2019 to investigate the performance of VJU five years after its establishment. The report covers the development of the VJU concept, the list of universities in Japan that assisted, and the achievement of key performance indicators (KPIs). It emphasizes that VJU is positioned within Japan's Vietnam assistance policy (February 2012) under the "growth and strengthening competitiveness" category, particularly in "industrial development and human resource development support", and aligns with the UN's SDG Goals 4, 8, and 9. This report offers insights into VJU's future development goals and the expectations of the Japanese government.

2.4. Higher Education Development in Vietnam, Government Role and Policy Factors

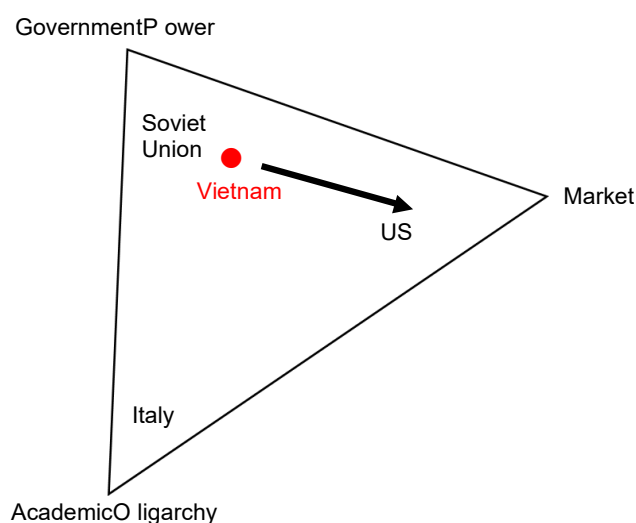
Vietnam, located on the Indochina Peninsula, has been deeply influenced by Chinese Confucian thought since ancient times. For example, when the authors visited the Temple of Literature in Hanoi, they observed that the sages Confucius and Mencius were dressed in "Ming Dynasty" official attire. Vietnam experienced significant political and economic influences from various foreign powers, including China, France, the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, and China, through the 19th-century French colonial period (leading to the creation of Vietnamese Romanized script), the division between North Vietnam and South Vietnam in 1945, and reunification in 1975. As a result, higher education in Vietnam has a strong "transplanted" character, constantly changing with regime shifts. The government has played a significant role in this process (Lin, 2013; Chikada, 2005; Sekiguchi, 2019).

From the perspective of higher education institution development, after North Vietnam and South Vietnam split in 1945, North Vietnam established national universities following the Soviet model, with no private universities. In contrast, South Vietnam had comprehensive

national universities, specialized universities, private universities, and community colleges. After reunification in 1975, the government reorganized the national universities in South China, creating comprehensive or specialized universities according to existing faculties and forming a "socialist-type" higher education system. To meet the market economy's labor demands following the Đổi Mới reforms, the higher education system underwent significant reforms in the 1990s, with the establishment of new institutions. During this period, national universities, regional universities, and local universities were established, including semipublic schools operated by the government, "people-founded" (Dân lập) universities linked to the Communist Party, and "private" (Tur thực) universities with shareholders and boards of trustees. After the "Private University Regulations" were enacted in 2005, "people-founded" schools gradually transformed into "private" schools, which are often referred to as "nonpublic" (Lin, 2022). The number of universities increased from 178 in 2000 to 426 in 2014, but this number was reduced to 223 when vocational education institutions were removed by the Ministry of Education and Training in 2015. By the end of 2020, there were a total of 236 universities (175 public and 61 nonpublic), with 1.92 million students (1.67 million in public and 610,000 in nonpublic) (Lin, 2022; Nguyễn, 2021).

During the 1980s, many Western governments faced financial difficulties, leading to reduced funding for higher education and altering the relationship between governments and universities. B. R. Clark, in his 1983 work "The Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-National Perspective", described the "triangle of coordination" in higher education, consisting of academic oligarchy, government, and market power. He explained the distribution of major countries within this triangle, with the U.S. being market oriented, the former Soviet Union having strong state authority, and Italy being characterized by academic oligarchy (Clark, 1983/1994). This dynamic triangle also changed in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea in

the late 1980s. Vietnam, which had modeled its political system after the former Soviet Union and China after 1945, naturally followed their higher education systems. As Vietnam embarked on comprehensive economic reforms after 1986 and with the economic reforms and opening-up of China and the Soviet Union in the 1990s, market forces gradually strengthened, leading Vietnam toward its own path of reform. Notably, the higher education market is not limited to the domestic market; since 2000, Vietnam has gradually opened up to foreign investment in higher education, with the expansion of private universities and efforts toward internationalization bringing a new landscape to Vietnamese higher education (see Figure 1).



Source: Drawn by the authors concerning Clark (1983/1994:161).

Figure 1. Movement of Vietnamese higher education within the “Coordination Triangle”

The diagram appears to represent Clark’s “triangle of coordination” model in higher education, showing the position of various countries on the basis of the dominance of academic oligarchy, government authority, and market power. The red dot indicates Vietnam’s position, which is moving toward the market side.

However, Vietnam’s reforms have not been achieved overnight. Owing to the one-party political system, the Communist Party of Vietnam holds precedence over administrative agencies and the National Assembly. This

leads to various policies being implemented through rules, regulations, and orders issued by the Party and various ministries, making it difficult to grasp the hierarchical structure and system of policies. After the 1990s, ministries systematized their existing rules into bills, which were then submitted to the National Assembly for deliberation. Therefore, the formulation and amendment of the aforementioned “Education Law” were carried out through National Assembly deliberation. Moreover, not all higher education institutions in Vietnam are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Training but are instead managed by relevant ministries, resulting in the nonunitary management of higher education.

Chikada [trans.] and Vo [supervision] (2001) reported that initially, the Vietnamese government formulated the “Education Law” in 1998, which was implemented in 1999 and specifies many education-related matters at various levels, including higher education. The Education Law was comprehensively revised in 2005. After the National Assembly passed the “Higher Education Law” on June 18, 2012, the relevant higher education provisions were integrated into the law. However, by making significant changes to higher education development policies in the Law on Higher Education No. 34/2018/QH14, the Vietnamese government has shown that it is committed to strong quality control. It is possible to identify certain positive developments, such as the university’s ability to determine its own tuition and enrollment procedures and its inability to accept new students without verifying the program’s quality.

In addition, the “Education Law” passed by the National Assembly in 1998 recognized and rewarded private schools, private educational investments, and foreign educational cooperation. At the Communist Party Congress in 2001, the education and training mechanism was declared a policy innovation to activate domestic and foreign financial resources. The national budget prioritized secondary education and rural areas while announcing a 5% annual increase in higher education students. This

naturally created a dilemma between “higher education development” and “other education development”.

Through the amendments of the “Education Law” and the “Enterprise Law” in 2005, the government used the term “socialization” (meaning that education is a “collective responsibility” that should be borne by all levels of the populace) to maintain socialism under state control while also leveraging private and foreign resources to invigorate higher education (Ishimura, 2008; Nguyen, 2010). This rationalized the direction toward the marketization of higher education and maintained the Communist Party’s governing power.

For example, foreign-owned universities such as RMIT University in Australia and the establishment of “New Model Universities”, such as the Vietnamese–German University (VGU), University of Science and Technology of Hanoi (USTH), and Vietnam–Japan University (VJU), were all “specially approved” by the government. This demonstrates that the role of the Vietnamese government in the development of higher education is vital, but its position is also shifting, which in turn accelerates the promotion of the internationalization of higher education.

Although Vietnam introduced university autonomy policies later than many other countries did, it has developed a relatively comprehensive legal framework over the past three decades to promote higher education autonomy (Do, 2023; Dang et al., 2022). The establishment of Vietnam National University, Hanoi, in 1993, followed by Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, in 1995, together with the institutionalization of university councils, represented a significant

turning point (Marklein, 2019; Quốc Hội, 2019). In practice, however, university autonomy in Vietnam is characterized as “conditional autonomy.” Article 32, Clause 2 of Law No. 34/2018/QH14 on higher education (amended in 2018), stipulates that only higher education institutions meeting six specific conditions are eligible for autonomy (Quốc hội, 2019). Despite this legal framework, Nguyen (2021) reported that the average autonomy score for public universities in Vietnam remains low, at only 2.97 out of 5, suggesting that most institutions continue to operate under a form of “controlled autonomy.” This raises a key question: what are the critical autonomy issues in New Model Universities?

3. Methodology

This paper employs a case study approach, analyzing publicly available data and literature related to New Model University and VJU, supplemented by in-depth interviews (see Appendix). In other words, the sources of primary data consist of excerpts from interview transcripts recorded by the author, whereas the sources of secondary data include official reports from Japan, legal announcements from the Vietnamese National Assembly, Vietnamese newspapers, and official reports from Taiwan. In addition, monographs and academic articles authored by experts and scholars from Japan, Vietnam, and Taiwan are referenced. The interviews were conducted on January 23, June 24, and July 8, 2024, and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Four interviewees were interviewed: two members of the VJU faculty, one researcher from Japan, and one from Vietnam (see Table 1).

Table 1. Interviewee Data

Occupation	Code	Interview Method	Interview Date
VJU faculty	A	Face-to-face	January 23, 2024
VJU faculty	B	Face-to-face	January 23, 2024
Researcher	C	Online	June 24, 2024
Researcher	D	Face-to-face	July 8, 2024

Resource: Authors

4. Results

4.1. Establishment of New Model Universities in the Context of Vietnamese Higher Education Development

To meet the significant demand for a market economy workforce following the Đổi Mới reforms, the higher education system underwent significant reforms in the 1990s, leading to the establishment of various higher education institutions. During this period, national universities, regional universities, and local universities were established, including semipublic schools operated by the government, “people-founded” (Dân lập) universities linked to the Communist Party, and “private” (Tur thực) universities with shareholders and boards of trustees. After the “Private University Regulations” were enacted in 2005, “people-founded” schools gradually transformed into “private” schools, which are often referred to as “nonpublic” (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2021; Lin, 2022). The number of universities increased from 178 in 2000 to 426 in 2014, but this number was reduced to 223 when vocational education institutions were removed by the Ministry of Education and Training in 2015. By the end of 2020, there were a total of 236 universities (175 public and 61 nonpublic), with 1.92 million students (1.67 million in public and 250,000 in nonpublic) (Lin, 2022; Nguyễn, 2021).

In addition to the formulation and revision of the Education Law and the Higher Education Law, important blueprints for higher education include the “Vietnam Education Development Strategy Plan 2001--2010” (Chiến Lược Phát Triển Giáo Dục Việt Nam Thời Kỳ 2001-2010) and the “Comprehensive Renovation

of University Education in Vietnam for the 2006-2020 Period” (Về Đổi Mới Cơ Bản và Toàn Diện Giáo Dục Đại Học Việt Nam Giai Đoạn 2006-2020). The internationalization of private universities has been a notable feature. Many private higher education institutions were established in 1998, and different operation models emerged, including wholly foreign-owned, international cooperation, and foreign joint ventures. Examples of wholly foreign-owned institutions include the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), established in 2004; the Dresden University of Technology (Technische Universität Dresden, TUD), which opened the TU Dresden Vietnam Education and Research Center (TUD Vietnam ERC) in 2004; and the British University Vietnam (BUV), established in 2009. Examples of foreign joint ventures include the Vietnam–Germany University (VGU) established in 2008, the University of Science and Technology of Hanoi (USTH) established through Vietnam–France cooperation in 2010, and the Vietnam–Japan University (VJU) established in 2015, which are collectively known as “New Model Universities” (Kamibeppu, 2018). These new model universities prominently showcase their teaching features and research achievements (particularly the number of publications) on their websites (see Table 2). Furthermore, emerging private universities are also making significant strides in research, teaching, and internationalization. This finding indicates that higher education in Vietnam is moving toward diversification and internationalization, especially with foreign-invested universities, new model universities, and emerging private universities, which show considerable potential in research and teaching.

Table 2. Trends in Vietnam's Politics Higher Education Post-1990

Year	Political Developments	Higher Education Developments
1990	Establishment of the Ministry of Education and Training	
1992	The New Constitution was promulgated based on the Đổi Mới reforms	Higher education population exceeds 200,000
1993		Establishment of Hanoi National University
1994	Official recognition of private universities	

Year	Political Developments	Higher Education Developments
1995	Normalization of relations with the United States Joining ASEAN	Establishment of Ho Chi Minh City National University
1996		Higher education population exceeds 500,000
1998	Joining APEC	Declaration of the “Education Law”
2000		Declaration of the “Private University Regulations”
2001		Formulation of the “Vietnam Education Development Strategy Plan 2001-2010”
2002		Higher education population exceeds 1,000,000
2003		Declaration of the “University Law”
2004		Establishment of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) Vietnam campus
2005		Amendment of the “Education Law”, Declaration of the “Private University Law”
2006		Implementation of the “Comprehensive Renovation of University Education in Vietnam for the 2006-2020 Period” (legal basis for New Model Universities), and the transformation of people-founded universities into private universities
2007	Joining WTO	
2008	Promulgation of the “Foreign Workers in Vietnam Law”	Establishment of the Vietnam-Germany University (VGU)
2009		Amendment of the “University Law” and the “Private University Law”
2010		Establishment of the University of Science and Technology of Hanoi (USTH)
2012		Declaration of the “Higher Education Law” and the “Decree on Foreign Cooperation and Investment in Education”
2014		Pursuant to Resolution No. 77/NQ-CP on the Pilot Reform of Operational Mechanisms for Public Higher Education Institutions during the 2014-2017 Period
2015		Establishment of the Vietnam-Japan University (VJU)
2018		Amendment of the “Decree on Foreign Cooperation and Investment in Education”
2022		Strategy for Education Development in the period of 2021–2030, Vision 2045 Building “Strategic Framework for Higher Education Development from 2021 to 2030, Vision 2045”

Sources: Chikada (2005, 392); Lin (2014, 12-13); Sekiguchi (2019, vi); Nguyen (2024:187), revised by the authors.

Interviewee A explained that the first idea the Vietnamese government established for the New Model Universities is to import foreign universities because it is the fastest way to enhance Vietnamese higher education and the

international ranking of universities.

Of course, the initial idea of this model, the university model, is to, I think, advance the quality of the higher education system in Vietnam because we want to import the

curricula, educational technologies, and everything and learn educational models and systems from developed countries. Therefore, that is why. Moreover, owing to the investment and coinvestment of other governments, we hope to establish a kind of international ranking of universities. Therefore, that is the first idea. (Interviewee A)

4.2 New Model Universities and the Perspective of Stable Geopolitics

The importance of international cooperation in higher education is vast. In addition to academic exchange and dissemination and commercial benefits, international surveys and collaborations are methods used to demonstrate diplomatic strength and efficacy, contributing positively to geopolitical stability. With respect to international cooperation, various organizations and entities, from governments and international organizations to NGOs and other civil society groups, are dedicated to providing economic assistance to help developing countries achieve appropriate and sustainable social and economic development.

The “general definition” of international cooperation, which is based on funding sources, can be categorized into (1) official development assistance (ODA), (2) other official flows (OOF), (3) government-funded initiatives similar to ODA, (4) private flows and (5) NGO grants. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of

the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) refers to these financial flows as “development cooperation”, which primarily involves “economic cooperation”. In Japan, this is commonly referred to as “economic cooperation”. ODA can be divided into bilateral aid and multilateral aid (funding provided to international organizations). Bilateral aid mainly includes “loan aid”, “grant aid”, and “technical cooperation”, along with volunteer dispatch, international emergency assistance, and civic participation.

Japan, which transitioned from being an aid recipient after World War II to being an aid donor for more than fifty years, became the largest provider of international aid in 2000, with its ODA amounting to 13.5 billion USD, surpassing the United States at one point, highlighting its uniqueness (Yang, 2012; Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2022).

As a developing country, Vietnam receives economic aid from various countries because of its geopolitical, economic, and friendly relations. From 2017 to 2021, Japan consistently ranked first in providing economic aid to Vietnam, significantly surpassing other countries, demonstrating Japan’s substantial contribution to Vietnam’s economy (see Table 3) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Cooperation Bureau, 2023).

Furthermore, when viewed from the perspectives of “loan aid”, “grant aid”, and

Table 3. Economic aid statistics for Vietnam from major advanced countries

Unit: million USD

Year	1 st Place	2 nd Place	3 rd Place	4 th Place	5 th Place	Total
2017	Japan 1,389.60	Korea 187.73	German 179.57	France 135.71	USA 124.66	2,185.82
2018	Japan 673.85	German 220.27	Korea 157.99	USA 119.31	France 119.22	1,476.89
2019	Japan 650.57	France 225.69	German 192.54	Korea 108.53	USA 101.00	1,434.66
2020	Japan 620.42	German 210.93	France 146.07	USA 137.48	Korea 137.25	1,388.66
2021	Japan 439.59	France 234.64	German 223.03	USA 147.76	Korea 107.02	1,356.62

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Cooperation Bureau (2023:14).

“technical cooperation”, the various aid methods and amounts are shown in Table 4. Notably, one of the subjects of this paper, “Vietnam--Japan University”, is classified under “technical cooperation”. Two projects have been undertaken:

1) “Establishment of the Vietnam–Japan University Master’s Program” (implementation period: April 2015–March 2020).

2) “Vietnam–Japan University Education, Research, and Management Capacity Enhancement Project” (implementation period: April 2020–March 2025, with a budget of approximately 3.8 billion yen) (Human Development Department, JICA, 2020).

If the budget for the second project is allocated over five fiscal years, it amounts to approximately 500 million yen per year. For the fiscal year 2020, the budget for Vietnam--Japan University exceeded 10% of the total for “technical cooperation.” This indicates the importance of the establishment of Vietnam-Japan University. One of the primary missions of its establishment is to deepen diplomatic relations between Japan and Vietnam, as evidenced by the fact that the primary source of Japan’s international aid to Vietnam comes from the “Ministry of Foreign Affairs” rather than the “Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology”.

Note 1: Figures in parentheses under “Grant Aid” are donations made through international organizations.

Note 2: Totals may not add up precisely because of rounding.

The University of Science and Technology of Hanoi, another “new mode university”, was established on the basis of an agreement between the French and Vietnamese governments, and it was approved by the Vietnamese Prime Minister in 2009 (No. 2067/QD-TTg). The University of Science and Technology of Hanoi received funding from the Asian Development Bank (2011--2018), with a financing amount reaching 190 million USD (of which 170 million USD was used to construct a new campus). French universities also support academic research.

Vietnam-Germany University is another new model university, and it received project funding from the World Bank (2011--2017), with a total budget of 180 million USD. The German government and universities also significantly supported management technology and teaching.

Thus, the significance of these three new model universities lies in the transnational higher education cooperation between foreign governments and Vietnam, which strengthens politically and economically friendly relations. International organizations such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank recognize this cooperation and provide regular funding, significantly contributing to geopolitical stability.

4.3 Comparison of New Model Universities

On the basis of the latest information on the three new model universities, the authors created a comparison table, as shown in Table 5. Model universities are national universities; however,

Table 4. Japan’s Different Types of Aid to Vietnam and Amounts

(based on OECD/DAC Report Standards)

Year	Loan Aid	Grant Aid	Technical Cooperation	Total
2016	1,061.32	9.28(2.76)	95.47	1,166.06
2017	832.20	19.60	76.17	927.96
2018	136.77	13.48(0.63)	53.51	203.75
2019	75.43	16.44(0.73)	56.76	148.63
2020	1.09	30.44(5.19)	43.66	75.18
Total	15,250.02	1,218.03(9.72)	2,128.91	18,596.96

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Cooperation Bureau (2021:15).

their supervising agency is the Prime Minister's Office rather than the Ministry of Education and Training. These universities have the following characteristics in common:

(1) Product of Coordination between the Party, the Ministry of Education and Training, and the Higher Education Market in Vietnam:

When foreign higher education models are introduced, these universities are supervised by the Prime Minister's Office, whereas general universities are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Training.

"The implementation process is much more difficult than expected because these New Model Universities do not have the basis. We do not have the basis of faculty members with traditional historical backgrounds. We have nothing, so we have to build from the beginning, that is why, like you say it is weird. It is strange that VJU or VGU are under the umbrella of Vietnam National University Hanoi or Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City. The reasons are that they wanted to make use of what has been done, of the faculty members, of everything, even the infrastructure, everything, and the reputation. In addition, then, with that foundation, we can build something more from that, rather than from zero". (Interviewee A)

As Interviewee A mentioned, new model universities have strong support from the Vietnamese government, and it was much easier to develop these universities under the umbrella of Vietnam National University-Hanoi or Vietnam National University-Ho Chi Minh City.

(2) Transnational higher education institutions (TNE):

New Model Universities conduct education and research in a transnational manner, involving not only Vietnamese teachers and students but also foreign faculty and international students.

(3) Institutions established through intergovernmental cooperation:

These universities were jointly established through collaborations between Vietnamese and foreign governments. While Vietnam Germany University (VGU) has been under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), both the University of Science

and Technology of Hanoi (USTH) and Vietnam Japan University (VJU) have been overseen by the Prime Minister's Office, resulting in a relatively high level of administrative authority. These institutions conduct academic programs and research activities in collaboration with partner universities from Germany, France, and Japan. However, according to the governmental decision issued on March 10, 2025, both Vietnam National University-Hanoi and Vietnam National University-Ho Chi Minh City will henceforth fall under the jurisdiction of MOET, even though they continue to use official seals bearing the national emblem. According to the government, the Vietnam National Universities will still retain a high degree of autonomy in training, scientific research, financial management, international relations, and organizational structuring (Le, March 11, 2025).

(4) Objectives of Economic Cooperation by National and International Organizations:

Vietnam-Germany University (VGU) receives financial assistance from the World Bank, University of Science and Technology of Hanoi (USTH) from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and Vietnam-Japan University (VJU) from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

However, foreign governments must evaluate various conditions when establishing such universities, adjust their roles after the official establishment, and find new funding sources. Furthermore, according to each foreign government, there are different funding principles for new model universities. For example, Interviewee C described that Japan (JICA) usually considers it short-term, whereas Germany (DAAD) conducts it long-term.

"I think in Germany's case, since DAAD is providing support—yes, DAAD—it does not seem to follow the five-year aid cycle like JICA does. Of course, I assume that there are formal agreements between the Vietnamese government and Germany, probably through the DAAD, but unlike the JICA, it does not feel that there is a fixed five-year endpoint. That is just my impression, though—it's not something that was clearly stated or that I've heard directly.

Table 5. Comparison of New Model Universities in Vietnam (2024)

University Name	VGU	USTH	VJU
Established Year	2008	2009	2015
Founder	Vietnamese Government & German government	Vietnamese government & France government	Vietnamese government & Japan government
University System	Public	Public - Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology	Public - Vietnam National University, Ha Noi
Number of Campuses	2	2 (one of them is under construction)	2
Number of Students	2,470	Approximately 3,000	Approximately 1,000
Number of Full-time Faculty	31	89	20
Number of Programs	Undergraduate Program 10 Master Program 11 Doctoral Program 3	Undergraduate Program 10 Master Program 6 Doctoral Program 6	Undergraduate Program 6 Master Program 8
Tuition Fee (USD per year)	3,249	2,200-5,300	2,281

Source: The authors compiled this information via data from each university's website.

Regarding budget, I would not say it's indefinite, but Germany's support seems to be quite long-term." (Interviewee C)

4.4 Discussion

On the basis of the above arguments, the authors' field research and interviews, the main issues regarding the characteristics of Vietnam--Japan University can be summarized as follows:

(1) Support from foreign governments versus financial independence

Resolution No. 77/NQ-CP, issued in 2014, allowed 23 public universities to pilot a "financial autonomy" model, laying the groundwork for the implementation of "self-financing" universities (Chính phủ, 2014; Lacking & Vo, 2020). Since 2019, Vietnam has issued four governmental decrees, one resolution, four prime ministerial decisions, and eighteen directives from the Ministry of Education and Training to further refine the legal system related to university autonomy (Nguyen, 2021). VJU was established as part of ODA's technical cooperation, with expected benefits for improving diplomatic relations and contributing to geopolitical stability. However, the "Vietnam--Japan University

Development Project" by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has effectively become a loan aid, with the Vietnamese government bearing 10% of the project's costs. Since the Ministry of Foreign Affairs's technical cooperation will continue in 2025, achieving financial independence for Vietnam-Japan University is urgent.

(2) Personnel Issues

While Vietnam-Japan University receives support from both the Japanese and Vietnamese governments, it faces administrative inefficiencies due to local control by various agencies: personnel by the Prime Minister's Office, curriculum by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), and research by the Ministry of Science and Technology. However, pursuant to the governmental resolution issued on March 10, 2025, the VJU will be placed under the administrative authority of MOET. Although the government asserts that VJU will retain a high degree of autonomy in areas such as academic training, scientific research, and financial management, the processes concerning the appointment and dismissal of key leadership positions—including the director, deputy director, and chairperson of the University Council—

must still be submitted by the minister of MOET for approval by the prime minister. Given this structural arrangement, it remains uncertain whether the reform effectively alleviated existing administrative inefficiencies or, conversely, led to a decrease in the institutional status of VJUs.

(3) Faculty and Staff Issues

As Interviewees A and C stated, a persistent challenge concerns the overreliance on the ‘flying faculty’ model in New Model Universities. While this arrangement facilitates short-term knowledge transfer and enhances international visibility, it undermines institutional sustainability and capacity building. Despite the nominal autonomy granted by the Vietnamese government, the absence of long-term foreign faculty engagement and the limited integration of Vietnamese academics hinder the development of stable teaching and research communities. This structural dependency not only reflects an imbalance in the governance of international partnerships but also highlights the urgent need for policies prioritizing the recruitment, training, and retention of domestic faculty to ensure the viability of these institutions. Moreover, Japanese faculty dispatched through ODA’s technical cooperation receive relatively high salaries, whereas the salaries of hired Vietnamese faculty adhere to the standards of Vietnamese universities. This disparity creates financial instability and challenges in boosting the motivation of Vietnamese faculty.

“Although it is a kind of international university, the income is not international. The income is a very Vietnamese system...We lost many lecturers to private universities recently. That is a truly big dilemma.” (Interviewee A)

“They learned a lot, and they left. Not JICA experts but Vietnamese. The Vietnamese staff are trained. Being replaced very quickly. Yeah. Therefore, they learned a lot and very quickly and found a position with a better salary. Something like that. Right, Japanese experts stay here longer than the Vietnamese staff do.” (Interviewee B)

Therefore, whether Japanese or Vietnamese, the high mobility of faculty and staff at VJU constitutes an unfavorable condition for a university’s long-term development.

5. Conclusion and Implications for Taiwan

After the economic reform and opening-up, the formulation of educational laws and regulations, and the infusion of foreign capital, Vietnam’s higher education has exhibited diversity and rapid development. The swift increase in the number of higher education institutions and the diversification of their types indicate rapid development, yet various problems have also arisen. Unlike the previous “simple” transplantation of foreign educational policies, this round of higher education reform has integrated elements of both socialism and capitalism, necessitating gradual adjustments in the process. The significance of the new model universities can be summarized as follows: (1) With the simultaneous globalization of economic development and higher education, Vietnam has adopted a more open attitude, allowing foreign entities and governments to establish schools independently or in cooperation. (2) New Model universities are categorized under the national university system, highlighting the importance the Vietnamese government places on them and the high expectations set for their operational models. However, these New Model Universities face several challenges while obtaining more autonomy: (1) Although VJU will be affiliated with MOET, numerous ministries are still involved in their operations, requiring more coordination in practice. (2) With founding entities spanning two national governments, these universities contribute to regional political stability. However, financial contributions necessitate assistance and supervision from national and international organizations (World Bank, Asian Development Bank), potentially reducing operational efficiency. (3) Faced with competition within Vietnam’s higher education sector, these universities must address fierce enrollment competition and the urgent need to retain quality faculty with reasonable salaries.

Additionally, from Taiwan’s perspective, despite these efforts conducted thus far, Taiwan’s new Southbound education export policies often rely on general, broad KPIs to measure effectiveness, lacking systematic

and continuous surveys on Vietnam's higher education development. The policies also strive for "balance" and "fairness", leading to unclear national policy positions for Vietnam. For example, in 2016, when the new Southbound Policy was developed, the "Taiwan University System" planned to establish an overseas joint branch, which ultimately did not materialize. After the "Guidelines for Subsidizing Taiwanese Universities to Establish Taiwan Education Centers Abroad" were set in 2007, 11 "Taiwan Education Centers" were established in Japan, Mongolia, and New Southbound countries, operated by domestic universities with partial government subsidies. However, in 2019, the Ministry of Education took back two centers in Vietnam, two in Indonesia and one in Malaysia, replacing them with education sections for local representative officers.

With respect to human resource training and demand, should the Taiwanese government reconsider establishing overseas branches or reestablishing Taiwan Education Centers in Vietnam? At this point, the three new model

universities serve as excellent references regarding government roles, funding arrangements, and program selection. In addition, during this interview, "Interviewee E," who specializes in international politics, was asked about the possibility of establishing a jointly operated university between Vietnam and Taiwan. The respondent immediately replied, "Without a foundation of diplomatic relations, it would be impossible for the two governments to establish a university jointly." If Taiwan seeks to deepen its cooperation with Vietnamese universities, it must adopt a more *pragmatic approach*, leveraging personal ties among scholars and fostering interuniversity research collaboration. Moreover, the scope of cooperation should be substantially broadened to include high-performing private universities rather than being limited to national universities. Moreover, it is recommended that Taiwan's academic community and government authorities allocate more resources to research on Vietnamese higher education and expand the breadth of such research to generate forward-looking policy recommendations.

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Appendix

Research Interview Outline on Vietnam’s “New Model Universities”

This research is a personal academic study (principal investigator: Professor Yang Wu-Hsun, National Chi Nan University) and does not represent the position of any official organization or individual. Please feel free to respond confidently.

After Vietnam’s comprehensive reform (Đổi Mới) in 1986, higher education underwent significant reforms starting in the 1990s. Along with the globalization of higher education, transnational higher education took various forms after 2000, with Vietnam entering the global higher education market as a receiving country. Following the promulgation of the “Higher Education Reform Agenda 2006-2020” (HERA) in 2005 and Vietnam’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2007, the Vietnamese government collaborated with foreign governments to establish “New Model Universities” with financial support from the World Bank (WB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). These universities, although established through international partnerships, are legally classified as public universities rather than private ones, which makes them uniquely significant.

This study focuses on new model universities (especially Vietnam–Japan University) with the following objectives:

1. Explore the significance of establishing new model universities.
2. Compare the current status of new model universities.
3. Investigate the management and operational challenges of new model universities.

Please respond to the following questions on the basis of your university and understanding:

1. Looking back historically, what are the characteristics of the development and internationalization of higher education in Vietnam?
2. What are the types and current status of transnational higher education in Vietnam? How do they compare with other countries?
3. What is the background, development, and current status of the establishment of new model universities?
4. As a government department, how does your government evaluate the policy formation process for new model universities? What are the key decision-making factors (political, economic, social, technological, and cultural)?
5. Given the unique characteristics of new model universities, administrative authorities span multiple entities, such as the “Prime Minister’s Office,” the “Ministry of Education and Training,” and the “Ministry of Planning and Investment.” Is there a potential issue of “too many stakeholders”? How do government agencies coordinate with each other?
6. How does your department support and manage the “curriculum” of New Model Universities?
7. How does your department support and manage the “organizational and personnel structure” of new model universities?
8. How does your department support and manage the “financial system” of new model universities?
9. How does your department support and manage the “admissions process” of New Model Universities?
10. What is your department’s vision for the governance and development of new model universities? How does this impact the macrolevel design and development of Vietnam’s higher education system?
11. How do the Vietnamese government and relevant international organizations evaluate the policy formation process for new model universities (your university)? What are the key decision-making factors (political, economic, social, technological, and cultural)?

Afterword:

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