

# Development of geography in Vietnam: The past, present and future

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**Abstract:** The objectives of this paper are to review the history of the Vietnam geography from premodern geographical knowledge and identification to the present situation of Vietnam geography with special reference to the change of its field, method, technique, academic institution, and university level education. As pre-modern Vietnam geography was strongly influenced by Chinese regional geography. Useful geographical knowledge was accumulated to contribute national land problems and local administration system, and furthermore, the relevant maps were also made. But the style of regional geography was not exceeded a traditional Chinese form. In the period of French domination, conventional four - classification method were generally used : physical setting, economy, historical/political geography, and statistics. As for academic researches, toponymy and historical geography initiated by H. Maspéro in Paleographical Indo-China Institute were noticed. In the field of physical geography, Karst geomorphology and cave study were progressed by the archaeologist or the geologist. As for applied geography, the location study of industrial crop, irrigation systems, appropriate place for meteorological observing stations, and hill stations or beach resorts for French people were studied. In 1930s, the influence of the French human geography became remarkable. C. Robequain and P. Gourou played an active role in the regional geography of northern part Vietnam, or land use research. Although the Gourou's "Les Peasants du Delta Tonkinis" (1936) were the immortal achievements with exhaustive use of aerial-photos or detailed topographical maps, however, unfortunately it had been forgotten for a long time after World War II in the Vietnam geography. As for modern geography, the period of 1954 to 1975 became a epoch. It is under the overwhelming influence of the Soviet geography which makes the Moscow University the peak, and geology and topography took the lead. Many of the first generation was occupied by students studied in Communist bloc countries. Unification of north-south Vietnam was attained in 1975, and specific studies in Mekong Delta or the central part were conducted. Economic opening policy "doi moi" started in 1986, new academic trends of Anglo-Saxon geography has been introduced gradually, however, the pace was not so speedy. In the mean while, remote sensing or the technique of GIS raised the status of geography from a national development point. The major stream of geography in university is leaded by Hanoi University, Hanoi University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City University. They are characteristic respectively : the first is physical geography, geology, geomorphology, landscape ecology, and land management; the latter two are economic geography, human geography. Both have the special new trend in the tourism or applied studies using GIS, remote sensing, etc., and application. The Association of Vietnam Geographers was established in 1988 initiated by Hanoi University. Five-interval academic meeting is held, but there are no periodicals until now. Otherwise, a researcher in Institute of Geography, Vietnam National Academy of Science and Technology plays an important role in the field of natural resources, environment and natural disasters. Human geography is beginning to have power in the basis of the name of "Integrated Geography" in Vietnam in recent years. It covers man-made landscape, small- and meso-scale community studies, and urban or rural geography. On

the other hand, the geography made much of physical environment, planning and policy making, and socio-economic geography of the Soviet geography style is also important.

Author Keywords: French geography; GIS; Pierre Gourou; Soviet geography; Tonkin delta; Vietnam geography

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