

Book Review

Managers and management in Vietnam: 25 years of economic renovation (*doi moi*), Edwards, Vincent and Phan, Anh, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013. Hardback: £85.00, \$145.00, 132pp, 978-0-415-58459-345.00, 132pp, 978-0-415-58459-3

Some say ‘China today - Vietnam tomorrow’. A new book *Managers and Management in Vietnam* by a UK-based academic and a Vietnamese-based one to some degree confirms this point and examines how management there has evolved since the country opened itself up to market forces with the ‘Renovation’ (*doi moi*) policy in 1986, as China did with its ‘Open Door’ eight years earlier. Professors Vincent Edwards and Anh Phan attempt to cover 25 years or so of this economic renovation to the present in an overview of management based on extensive interviews carried out in Vietnam workplaces. It also attempts to deal with the subject from an indigenous perspective rather than a Western one, which is all to the good.

The book is divided into a wide range of chapters, namely, introduction, philosophical foundations, the evolution and structure of the Vietnamese economy, company context, evolution of Vietnamese management, sense and sensibility, development and self-development, characterising Vietnamese managers and management and finally whither Vietnamese management. There are also three appendices, one on statistical data, another on interview-profiles and a last one on a dateline for Vietnam’s reforms.

Like its giant neighbour, Vietnam was once a command-economy, run on Marxist Leninist lines, with a top-down management structure, inspired by Soviet example. The large state enterprises were run by ‘economic cadres’, who were appointed by the party-state Organisational Department. For a long time, they were relatively ‘red’ rather than ‘expert’. For many years, Vietnam was divided into two jurisdictions after the 1954 Peace Accords and the North was run on state-socialist lines and the South on a capitalist basis; eventually with reunification in 1976, the whole country became a planned economy.

The economic reforms of the mid-1980s changed all that and Vietnam is now a ‘transitional economy’, attempting to throw off its *dirigiste* past. The State still offers ‘guiding hand’ but there is now a good deal of private enterprise. There is now a wide gamut of ownership forms, ranging from the reformed state firms, through the domestic SMEs, to the joint ventures and the wholly-owned foreign enterprises. The authors of this monograph carried out empirical research in five Vietnamese companies ranging in size from 500 plus employees to 60 plus. They were all private businesses but ranged to a considerable extent ‘with regard to size, area of business, organisational structure, leadership, or in other words their demographic profiles’ (p. 58). The companies varied in their training practices but all had common issues. The authors point to the importance of cultural values and the process of learning-transfer and show how managers and management in Vietnam have been influenced by a diversity of the influences, be they ‘traditional and modern, domestic and foreign, Western and Eastern, which coexist in a multiplicity of forms’ (p. 89).

Although economic growth has been rapid about seven per cent or so per annum, if a little less than in China, the degree to which a ‘managerial revolution’ has occurred is moot. It is true that there has been ‘an enormous qualitative change since the beginning of the *doi moi* process’ [p.103] but Vietnam have still long way to go before it can be seen as a market economy. Given the ravages of the Vietnam War, on the other hand, the country has achieved a great deal and should be given credit for that. How soon it will progress to become a middle income country is uncertain but to date Vietnam ‘has achieved a greater degree of integration in the regional and global economy’ [p. 114] than one would have expected a couple of decades ago.

This is a concise, well-written book of around 130 pages, which is both scholarly and readable. It has a substantive bibliography and a short index. It should serve both as a short text and a work of reference. It should appeal to both an undergraduate and postgraduate readership, as well as to academics and researchers.

Since there is very limited amount of literature available on Vietnamese management compared with what one can find on the Chinese case, one can only welcome this new work as a helpful contribution to the literature and to understanding this new variation of management in a transitional economy.

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