



Journeys to the Top: The Case of Women Rectors at Selected Public Universities in Vietnam

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**Journeys to the Top: The Case of Women Rectors at
Selected Public Universities in Vietnam**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores factors contributing to the career advancement of four Vietnamese women, who have been appointed to be Rectors¹ at selected public universities in Vietnam, where they are minority in senior ranks. Its intention is to seek a preliminary understanding of how women become leaders in higher education in the context of Vietnam by documenting these four Vietnamese women's successful journeys to gain the top leadership position in their institutions and what they have experienced in their time as leaders and as women.

While female students in Vietnam have made up more than half of college and university enrolling population in recent years (Nghĩa, 2009), only three women currently occupy the position of Rector in public universities; and historically, no more than seven Vietnamese women have done so in the total of more than one hundred public universities in Vietnam. Because of such a small number, knowledge about tangible personal experiences of those few successful women has remained distant from the literature on women leaders in higher education in general.

This study fills in parts of an unexplored space by making visible the experiences of over half of that small group of Vietnamese women Rectors by applying a multi-case qualitative case study, which involved in in-depth interviews complemented by field observations, and documentary data. Since this study is about women in an area, where male practices dominate and where women's experiences have been largely ignored, feminist standpoint epistemology has been used to build an accurate and authentic understanding about women's problems. The aim in this research

¹ a position similar to that of Vice-Chancellor or University President in other contexts.

then, is that it should start from what women themselves have experienced in concrete situations; and feminist standpoint epistemology offers a reasonable theoretical framework to make sense the practices of four participating women Rectors.

The analysis of journeys to the top of women participants revealed a number of characteristics, some of which were not new and could be found in elsewhere, but others only pertained to these Vietnamese women and in the distinctive Vietnamese setting. Their taking up of the top decision-making position had been achieved in a special context, where women were seen as being capable of aspiring only to second-in-command duties, which aligns with long-held cultural and social beliefs of women being one division below men as heads of households and bread winners, where the women's role resides in bearing and nurturing children and with a duty to support of their husbands in work and in careers above their own.

The contributions of this research is that, within its scope, it (i) makes the experiences of senior women leaders in higher education in Vietnam visible by presenting a general picture of the first generation of women Rectors at selected public universities in Vietnam based on what was gained directly from them; (ii) locates the experiences of women participants within the uniqueness of Vietnam to understand how their journeys to the top occurred in the social, political, economic and cultural structures in the context of Vietnam; and (iii) provides a new and perhaps a truthful understanding of the situation of senior women leaders in higher education in Vietnam from the very own perspectives of a group of Vietnamese women university Rectors who have experienced this phenomenon.

Since women are marginalised in senior ranks in higher education in Vietnam, examining the journeys to the top of those four women Rectors not only benefits themselves as women participants have a chance to reflect their own career paths; to

share, to contrast and compare their own experiences but also helps increase the number of women in this field. This study would serve as a source to encourage and support other Vietnamese women, who are currently in entry level administrative positions to work aiming at senior leadership positions. In addition, it would assist educators, administrators, and consultants, even sitting college and university leaders in Vietnam to review administrative structures and design leadership interventions with a view to increasing the role of women in university management.

In a larger scale, the experiences of four Vietnamese participating women Rectors may contribute a new aspect to the current understanding of gender in global higher education leadership across the very different political, cultural, social and economic contexts.

*This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university.
To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously
published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis
itself.*

Signature

Date

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There is an idiom in Vietnam “*Ăn quả nhớ kẻ trồng cây*”, which means when you eat fruit, think of the people who planted the tree or, in other words, never forget where one’s success comes from. As my studying journey comes to an end, it would be great to acknowledge all the people who helped me make it a success. I understand that I cannot recognise everyone here and I hope they will forgive me if I miss someone out. However, I am sincerely grateful for their wonderful support.

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Finally, it is very difficult when I think and write about my family because of all they had sacrificed for me and because no words can express my feelings for them. To my parents, I dedicate this thesis to you. Without you, I am not who I am today. My parents in law, my younger sister, my husband and Lam, my little nephews Bip and Bo, I can only say that if there are other lives, I will always want to be their daughter, her sister, his wife, her mother and their aunt.

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GLOSSARY

CPV	the Communist Party of Vietnam
DOI MOI	an economic restructure policy implemented in Vietnam since 1986
DRV	the Democratic Republic of Vietnam
MOET	the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam
SRV	the Socialist Republic of Vietnam
USSR	the former Soviet Union
VWU	Vietnam Women's Union

Prologue: My story

The aim of this research is to provide an understanding of the experiences of senior Vietnamese women leaders in higher education with reference to women Rectors at selected public universities in Vietnam. The study has sought to examine how four Vietnamese women have successfully moved up on the top decision-making position in selected public universities by investigating the influential factors including education and personal backgrounds, career path, opportunities and leadership practices that may contribute to those women's successes. I am using this prologue to detail my personal background and experiences, and my standpoint, which I believe will give an insight into some aspects of women's lives in contemporary Vietnam. This opening also provides the reader with some brief information about me, a Vietnamese woman, a learner and a research student, and the choice that have led me on a doctoral journey to this thesis.

I am a Vietnamese woman, who lives in Vietnam and has worked in the higher education sector in Vietnam since 1996. Eight years ago, I could hardly believe that I would leave my country and my family one more time to continue my higher education in Australia. The change in culture, the different social life and the homesickness that I had previously experienced in this country when I was a masters student should have kept me in Vietnam. However, personal observations and the experience during my education and working process left me with more thought-provoking questions. As a Vietnamese woman, who has always been given opportunities to have a decent education and to improve knowledge in life and in career, in my mind, I have always obsessed with finding out why there have been few women, who are faculty members and senior administrators in Vietnam's colleges and universities and how that minority

of women have achieved decision-making positions in their institutions. That personal passion combines with circumstances happening in my own life that made me return to Australia to continue my study. The meaning and personal significance this thesis has been the motivation, and the major source of strength, courage and determination to help me overcome the difficulties not only in my education and my career, but also in my life.

I am the eldest daughter in the family. My parents were married in 1972 in Hanoi, in the North of Vietnam, and one year later, I was born. My younger sister joined us two years after.

After graduating from a university in Vietnam in 1968, my father became a lecturer at an engineering college for a short time before moving to work for the Ministry of Education and Training [MOET] until he retired in 2005. My father did the best he could in his career. He once held the positions of Deputy Chief of Minister's Office, Deputy Director General and finally, Acting Director General of the Department of Planning and Finance.

My mother used to be a worker. She did not go to university simply because this opportunity was not available for her. After graduating high school, my mother became a worker in a glass factory. My mother's job was extremely demanding and travel was difficult. I remember she had to wake up early in the morning, at four o'clock and ride on a bike for nearly one hour to her workplace, which was very far from our house. My mother retired in the early 1990s due to her heavy workload. She was willing to stay at home and take care of housework while the three of us were working and studying. I am close to my mother. She is my best friend. I can tell her everything even when I am married. I have had the feeling that I am always small to her. Though in my family, my

father is the person, who has a strong influence on my life, my education and my career orientation, my mother also has contributed greatly to my upbringing.

From their own experiences, both my parents learnt that an educated person could achieve success in his or her life. Thus, in my family, education always had been the first priority. They encouraged, nurtured and supported me and my sister to pursue a dream of obtaining a university degree, because they knew that this would be a foundation for our future success. As a result, both my sister and I passed the national entrance examinations and went to universities¹. I followed in my father's footsteps to work for the MOET after graduation in 1996 as a junior official of Higher Education Department. In 2004, after several years working in a design institute, my sister also moved to work with me in the MOET, but in a different department.

I was married in early 2000. At the end of that year, my daughter was born. I was lucky because my husband supports me unconditionally in my career. He hardly ever complains whenever I come home late from work. More than once, he told me that he has always had positive thoughts that I could assume a more important responsibility in my department.

At the MOET, people have often said that I resembled my father and have his characteristics; that I am honest and dedicated to my job. I was willing to learn from other colleagues and senior officials to strengthen my ability. Gradually, I had gained

¹ In Vietnam, at present, to be offered a place in universities, candidates must take one of four national groupings of university admission exams depending on their choices. There are four fixed groups of subjects: Group A including Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry [e.g. for students of engineering, computer science, physics]; Group B: Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry [e.g. for students of medicine and biology]; Group C: Literature, History, Geography [e.g. for students of social sciences and humanities] and Group D: Literature, Foreign Language, Mathematics [e.g. for students of foreign trade, foreign languages, either in education, translation, or interpretation].

the trust of the leaders in my department. I was given favourable conditions such as taking part in seminars, conferences, and short training courses in Vietnam and abroad to improve myself in the MOET's working environment. As my job was related to universities and colleges in Vietnam, I was appointed to take part in some key projects to learn more about higher education management. In all that time, I had never thought about the advancement in my career. My goal was to do my best in my position to demonstrate that I was qualified to work in this place; and I did not rely on my father's influence. My father was a righteous person. He would never use his authority to ask for help if I was not a capable official.

In 2002, I was offered a place to study at the University of Queensland [UQ], Australia for eighteen months to get a master degree under the sponsorship of the Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation². I hesitated to accept the offer because my daughter was only one year old then. My parents, especially my father advised me to take this chance. At first, my husband did not enjoy the fact that I would study abroad for this long. He believed in my ability and encouraged me to broaden my knowledge, but he did not expect me to go to Australia when our daughter was so small. He was convinced by my parents with their promise to help him look after my daughter. In the first months in Australia, I suffered from cultural change, the loneliness and homesickness. Eventually, I got used to the student life here. However, from January 2002 to July 2003, I had to travel six times from Vietnam to Australia. At the completion of my master program, my father mentioned a doctoral degree. I was grateful for this

² The Atlantic Philanthropies [AP] is a private foundation created in 1982 by US businessman Charles F. "Chuck" Feeney. The Atlantic Philanthropies grant-supports health and social projects in Australia [UQ is one of the key benefactors], Bermuda, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, the United States and Viet Nam. Source from <http://en.wikipedia.org> retrieved on May 26th 2010.

suggestion but I was thinking also of my husband's sacrifice for the last eighteen months. I decided to be with him and my daughter to support him in expanding his architecture office. So as to make my father feel satisfied, I promised him that I would get this terminal degree at the right time. Actually, at that time, I did not know when my right time would come, and I also was not sure that I could make another of my father's wishes become true. I returned to Vietnam at the end of July 2003 and continued to work for the Higher Education Department of the MOET.

In late 2005, a woman was appointed to be the general director of my department. She was the first woman in this position since the establishment of the MOET. Before this historical appointment, there were only a few women who were being appointed to senior administrative positions such as Rectors/Directors³ in some universities, academies and colleges in Vietnam. As a part of my department, I had a chance to work either directly or indirectly with all those senior women leaders. I saw their achievements as well as the challenges they met as leaders and as women. I gradually came to respect their success, their knowledge, their determination in the job and the balance they had between their careers and their families. I truly admired them. I did not expect that later, this admiration would lead me to a research process and a thesis about them.

In 2006, suddenly, there was a rumour that I was unofficially considered as one of the candidates, who had the potential to be promoted in my department. I did not

³ In my thesis, terms "President", "Vice-Chancellor", "Rector" and "Director" are used interchangeably depending on the word used in the original works in different contexts such as "President" in the US, "Vice-Chancellor" in the UK, Australia or Hong Kong. In Vietnam, the English translation of "*hiệu trưởng*" at colleges and universities is "Rector" and "*giám đốc*" in equivalent academies is "director". Those English versions of this position in Vietnam have been used in the book titled "Vietnam Education and Training Directory", which was first introduced in 1995 and revised in 2000 in English version edited by the Department of International Cooperation of the MOET.

know from where this idea had come, but it had both negative and positive impacts on me. In terms of the negative, all the colleagues paid more attention to me. They observed my relationship with others and the results of my tasks. I felt terribly uncomfortable as if their eyes followed me everywhere. They became envious. I was embarrassed by them. Obviously, in their minds, the fact that I did my best in my position and had never thought about going up was unusual. They assumed that I was silently preparing to accumulate this good fortune and look for a future promotion. In the positive side, I started to think consciously about my future career. Up until then, I had never seriously taken a minute to think about where I was and how I had become the person I am today. Spiritually, I relied very much on my father's expectations and advice. Being considered as the role model for my younger sister, I always thought that what I have done so far was what my father expected from me and I would feel guilty if I did not fulfil his wishes. I discovered that I had never included myself in decision-making processes connected directly to my career. I had never thought about my own professional desires. Whether accidentally or intentionally, the rumour had helped me to define who I was and who I would become in the future. I want to go up in my career. I want to become a successful woman in my career. I want to prove my ability if I have an opportunity. My goal now is to be recognised as an effective female administrator, who would hold an important position in my department in the future.

At the end of that year, another serious incident happened to my life. My father had a heart attack. He had to undergo an emergency cardiovascular intervention. We were all shocked because my father used to play sport and lead a healthy life. Seeing him lying in the hospital, I was nervous. We felt fortunate that the operation was successful, but my father's health became unstable. Potential heart attacks can happen

unpredictably. I remembered my father's suggestion urging me to continue and study for a doctoral degree when I finished my master's course. I also thought of my own aspirations in my career. Now I understood how important it was when following my father to work for the MOET, as he said once to me "*if your education continues to increase, more opportunities will come to you*"⁴. I was afraid of a possibility that my father would never see me being successful in my education as well as in my career with a doctorate.

I decided this was my right time to pursue further study for a doctoral degree. I acknowledged that getting this degree might not be a guarantee for a promising position in my career, but it would prepare me if and when it was needed. Moreover, my decision was a positive remedy for my father's health problem. I could realise my father's wish with powerful hopes that his condition would be stable, letting him see my career grow. At first, I intended to continue my education in Vietnam, to have time to look after my family and to be close to my parents; but after all things had been considered, Australia was my choice. Firstly, education in Australia is better than in Vietnam both in theory and practice. I had experienced this advantage when I was a graduate student here. Secondly, I could spend all my time to focus on my study as a full time student, and make my education journey shorter instead of dividing my time between my job and my learning. Thirdly, I had lived eighteen months in this country before. So far, it was my longest time abroad. Though I had to struggle to get used to living there, I reasoned that I was now older and more experienced. While I was not sure that I could meet all of these challenges, I still had a strong commitment from my husband. He agreed with my decision. My husband could not go with me to Australia

⁴ *Nếu con càng học cao thì cơ hội sẽ đến với con nhiều hơn*

because of his job, but he promised me he was going to see me whenever I needed him. I also had the strong support of my parents-in-law. The only concern was my parents, but I was happy that they moved to live near my younger sister's family. She agreed to take care of them while I was away. So I brought my daughter with me. She was seven years old. Lam⁵ was an independent and sensitive girl. I want Lam to share the same opportunities with me: to access a good quality education and to open her world to the international culture. I hope that in the future, by remembering those days and by reading this thesis, Lam can understand why my husband and I always repeat my father's words to expect the best education for her. I want to encourage my daughter in this way to nurture a desire to study hard in whatever subjects she chooses and to be a decent, diligent and successful person she can become wherever she lives.

In August 2007, I returned to Australia to start my Doctor of Education program at Griffith University in Queensland. It was harder than I thought to do two jobs; a mother and a research student at the same time. I also had problems with my health that distracted me at times. However, nothing could stop me now. I understood the purpose and the price of being away from my family and my country. Owing to what happened in my life and my career, owing to my family's deep support, I overcame the difficulties. With those help, I was persevering in my educational journey to obtain a doctoral degree; and here is my study.

⁵ Lam is my daughter's name.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

After the World Conference on Higher Education, held in Paris in October 1998, resolutions were made to promote women's participation at all levels in all disciplines, in which women were under-represented, especially, "to enhance their active involvement in decision-making positions". In the last two decades, further efforts have been carried out to improve women's role in higher education leadership worldwide⁶. Though more women have assumed decision-making positions in colleges and universities, the increase has been not been at expected levels, especially in Asian countries where the available numbers of women in senior are considerably lower than in the West. The proportion of women Executive Heads⁷ in South Asian universities such as in India and Pakistan have comprised no more than 10 percent (Singh, 2008). In 2006, there were only four women Presidents in the total of seventy three national universities in mainland China (Tsang & Zhang, 2006). In its history, Hong Kong has had only one woman Vice-Chancellor (Tsang & Zhang, 2006).

A considerable amount of literature identifies the impediment of a proverbial "glass ceiling"⁸ that deters women from moving up to senior leadership positions in higher education. References to a "bamboo ceiling" (Vo & Strachan, 2008, p. 13) could

⁶ Among those, the National Colloquium for Senior Women Executives and the Australian Technology Network Women's Executive Development Program (ATN WEXDEV), a consortium of five leading Australian universities including Curtin University of Technology; Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University; Queensland University of Technology; University of South Australia; University of Technology are examples of well organised, enthusiastic and effective contexts, which works on the issue of under-representation of women in senior university management. Source from <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/database/> retrieved on April 26th 2010.

⁷ Equivalent to vice-Chancellors in Australia

⁸ This term has been thought to have first been used to describe the invisible barriers that impede the career advancement of women in the American workforce in an article by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt in the March 24th 1986 edition of the *Wall Street Journal* (Baker & Lightle, 2001).

be applied to gender relations in Asian countries, in non-Western worlds. This ceiling may involve similar barriers, for example, work-life conflict; women's low career aspirations, gender and workplace stereotypes. These and other aspects such as an unwelcoming academic culture shaped around masculine values may continue to be obstacles preventing women from achieving senior administrative positions in higher education worldwide. But, what is not known, however, is how these obstacles are generated by local cultures, politics and how social gender relations impact on the prospects of senior women leaders in Asian settings. How this problem is played out in the context of Vietnam is the topic of this thesis.

1.2 The problem

While women make up two thirds of educational professionals in Vietnam, the heads of educational institutions are usually men (Worldbank, 2006). According to Mai (2007), recent statistics of the Department of Planning and Finance of the MOET show that women comprise around 15 percent in the total Rectors, Deputy-Rectors and Faculty Deans. In 2004, there were no women in these positions in ten out of the total of fifty three public universities (Mai, 2007).

This study takes its shape from a consideration of Mai's (2007) survey-based research conducted on the role of women in university management, which is the most recent among an extremely limited number of research articles, reports and studies tapping on women in higher education in Vietnam. Mai's (2007) statistics were revealing in that they documented current impediments to career advancement and continuing shortage of women in university management. But an understanding of personal experiences of women leaders as well as of why so few women move into

senior positions in higher education in Vietnam goes beyond abstract survey figures and statistical trends. This demanding task requires researchers and policy makers to examine the real situations and tangible experiences of successful Vietnamese women leaders in this area. To this end, my qualitative research study seeks to provide insights into this issue. My research suggests an alternative way to view the issue of women in university management in Vietnam by giving some texture and colour to necessary statistical facts as they are detailed in surveys such as in Mai's (2007) study.

Mai's (2007) research has tapped into aspects of the place of women in higher education but subjects of her study were women working at all levels of university management. This research focuses only on a group of senior women leaders with reference to four women university Rectors. The reason for this is that, unlike women at other levels, those women have been the first among seven in Vietnam to have entered the domain of Rector of a public university. As mentioned previously, the situation and the practice of Vietnamese women university Rectors have remained a little noticed and unaddressed area. While some aspects of higher education in Vietnam, for example, university governance, cost and training quality, already have been investigated by researchers (see, for example, Grant, Hayden, & Nghi, 2010; MOET, 2005, 2009; Sloper & Can, 1995), it is now timely to examine the experiences of women, who have involved in operating such missions, which would both add to a low data base on this topic and also serve as a crucial avenue for women's development given the existing women's under-representation in this field in Vietnam. My study was advised to deal with these concerns.

1.3 Purpose of the study

Starting from barriers preventing women from participating in university management, where Mai's (2007) survey research concludes, the purpose of this study is to employ qualitative methods as a research tool to make the experiences of women in higher education in Vietnam visible; by offering an understanding of four women Rectors at selected public universities in their journeys to the top from their own voices.

The aim of the study is to:

- describe a range of factors that may have contributed to career success; including, personal and family backgrounds, education and other influential factors [people or circumstances] that helped them rise to the rectorship;
- discover some realities about their leadership, their operating styles and operating methods these women used to lead their universities and challenges that they may have gone through in their leadership positions; and to
- examine their personal perspectives on women as leaders; and suggestions or advice that might pass on to women seeking similar career paths.

Since the literature on the experiences of Vietnamese women university Rectors is scarce, and given the ongoing women's under-representation in the decision-making positions in higher education in Vietnam, the results of this study may be used as guidelines for other Vietnamese women in their attempts to reach a similar leadership level.

1.3.1 Why public universities?

At present, colleges and universities in Vietnam are either public or private. The reasons I chose to study on women Rectors in selected public universities are as follows.

Public universities play a fundamental role in higher education development in Vietnam. In these institutions, infrastructure and regular operational expenses are mostly funded by the Government. According to the latest college and university planning scheme in Vietnam⁹, all fifteen key national universities in higher education system are public universities. Although there has not been any official college and university ranking in Vietnam, public universities are unofficially considered as prestigious universities, or first tier higher institutions. This is because of their long established history, as well as the quality of their training in comparison with non-public universities, which have been booming since the beginning of 1990s. Obtaining a place in a public university is seen as a pivotal step towards a successful career for any young person in Vietnam. In the 2008-2009 academic year, public universities made up to 69 percent of the total of 146 universities in Vietnam, with approximate enrolments of one point one million students¹⁰.

The rector position in public universities in Vietnam had been a forbidden area for women for quite a long time in their development history. Until recently, this position was totally occupied by men. As mentioned earlier, of all college and university Rectors, and in the history of Vietnam, the number of women including those retired could be counted on two hands out of a total of more than one hundred public universities¹¹. The expansion of the public sector in higher education has indeed opened avenues where a few women could become Rectors in certain public universities. It is essential and meaningful to understand their experiences of being the first Vietnamese

⁹ Promulgated in accordance with the Decision of the Prime Minister on the approval of the college and university planning scheme for 2006-2020. Decision no. 121/2007/QĐ-TTg, 27 July 2007.

¹⁰ Source from the Educational statistics in the 2008 -2009 academic year - MOET.

¹¹ Source from the Educational statistics in the 2008 -2009 academic year - MOET.

women to become Rectors and to situate their accomplishments within the historical contexts of Vietnamese society. This is the purpose of my study.

1.4 Research questions and procedures

To accomplish that aim, the central research question of this thesis was to gain an understanding of how these women moved into rectorship. This would be done through tapping the lived-experiences of a few successful women Rectors at selected public universities in their journeys to the top. The following guiding questions were developed to explore the central research question to ask:

1. What are the personal backgrounds of these women?
2. How they ascended to the top leadership position in their institutions?
3. What leadership practices of the women Rectors did they draw on to meet challenges to their leadership?
4. What contribution they would save for other women working in higher education, who aspired to senior leadership positions?

These questions were framed within feminist standpoint epistemology, which claims to take women's situated experiences as starting points for generating new knowledge about the situations of women, for example, in male dominated areas and professions. The cases of four women, who previously or currently have held the rector position at selected public universities in Vietnam, were therefore investigated to secure their standpoints as the first female Rectors in Vietnamese public universities. Based on in-depth interviews, these women's standpoints provided a rich description and interpretation of the various factors affecting their career successes as they moved into their rectorship from their own words. My aim was to be both objective and subjective;

to uncover some of the accidental and intentional, subtle and overt factors influencing those women's lives, their career emergence and advancement.

1.5 Significance of the study

Contributing to human knowledge is the primary goal and the final value on which research should be judged. The intention is for this study to ultimately contribute to a better understanding of how women rise to high academic positions in the following five ways.

Firstly, prior to this study, little was known about the experiences of senior women leaders in higher education, including the progress of their careers and the personal histories of these women, who became Rectors at public universities in Vietnam. This topic has not been specifically explored in any academic articles or research projects, conducted by either Vietnamese or by foreign authors. This study, therefore, fills a gap in the literature, in which the practices of these women are missing.

Secondly, higher education in Vietnam faces a lack of women at all administrative levels, especially, in the top decision-making positions. To maintain and recruit more women, research is needed to focus on the practices and experiences of the successful women in this realm. It can be said, as hooks (2000) argues, women must share their experiences with those, who are in need, who are marginalised to give them choices of how to end their subordinated situation. To do so, an agenda should be built to gather Vietnamese women working in higher education to exchange their ideas and to work from the examples of shared lived-experiences. The results of this study on the experiences of four women Rectors at selected public universities will produce a useful reference on the career advancement for other women in this field. It can be a source of

encouragement for them to aspire at becoming senior women leaders. By understanding what four women participants had gone through, other women may be more aware of the skills and the expertise needed so as to develop their own plans to achieve similar goals. Kolodny (2000) states that in order to increase the number of women in senior higher education leadership, it is essential to produce a “critical mass” (p. 144) of educated women to take leadership positions. Perhaps, women who have served as senior leaders in this area can help understand the significance of Kolodny’s “critical mass” by sharing their own experiences in research similar to mine.

Thirdly, given women’s ongoing under-representation in senior leadership positions in higher education in Vietnam, the results of this study could also benefit educators, administrators, and consultants in charge of designing future leadership development interventions to increase the number of women in those positions. Kolodny’s (2000) “critical mass” of educated women seems to be not enough. There is also a need for critical acts and effective strategies. In order to formulate these policies, it is important to hear what successful Vietnamese senior women leaders have actually experienced in their career advancements and leadership positions, and in their own words. This would avoid the use of generalisations as the foundation for laws and policy reforms.

Fourthly, this study can contribute to literature on cases where the diversity of women’s experiences in this field is investigated in local situations. Describing the experiences of women leaders in Vietnam has the potential offer a more comprehensive approach to the current understanding of gender within higher education leadership in different social, cultural, political and economic contexts.

Finally, it is hoped that this study may be used as a reference source for comparative studies on a similar topic or future cross-cultural comparison in the fields of higher education leadership, women's studies and other related disciplines.

1.6 Thesis design

Outside of the prologue and this introduction, Chapter 2 reviews studies on women leaders in higher education in the other context outside Vietnam. Because of the critical shortage of literature on this issue in Vietnam, this review serves as a source of references on a similar topic. Chapter 2 also supports an argument for feminist standpoint epistemology as a valuable theoretical tool to study the topic from the points of view of women who have been the first to have been university Rectors in Vietnam.

Chapter 3 presents the context of the study, which includes the social, cultural, economic and political conditions of Vietnam. As well, this chapter describes the role of Vietnamese women and their participation in the workforce and their current situation in higher education leadership. The aim is to help the reader to obtain preliminary ideas about Vietnam and its people; to better understand the environment in which this study is conducted and where the lived-experiences of Vietnamese women participants in their journeys to the Rectorship have been formed.

Chapter 4 details the methodological approach used to conduct this qualitative study. A research process including choice of methodology, data collection and data analysis is described. The four women participants are briefly introduced and the technique of their selection is described. Also, the issue of how to guarantee the validation of this research is discussed in relation to the technique used.

Chapter 5, 6, 7 and 8 in turn portray individual stories of four women university Rectors, who were willing to take part in this study. Each woman's story is constructed based on topics identified in prior researches in the literature, which are relevant to the research questions as well. Those themes are related to their personal background, education obtained, career path, and leadership practices.

Chapter 9 offers a data analysis in which the common themes derived from the four stories are discussed based on a revision of the initial research questions. Two domains are identified, those of becoming and being a woman Rector. Material from the four Rector's stories is analysed to ask: (a) what has made it possible for selected women to prove that they could become Rectors and, (b) how did they prove themselves as leaders once they had been appointed to the position? The analysis of these questions is then reframed within the history and context of Vietnam, as described in Chapter 3.

Chapter 10 closes the thesis. Firstly, the study summarised, the purpose of the study and how it is conducted are reaffirmed. The contribution of study to the theory and practice about senior women leaders in Vietnam in particular and higher education in general is then elaborated. While it is suggested these cases of women Rectors offer examples of how higher level ranks are opened up for women to play key leadership roles, generalisations can as yet not be taken too far from Vietnamese history and context. A brief epilogue follows.

Chapter 2: Review of literature

While the scope of this research was on senior Vietnamese women leaders in higher education in Vietnam, the literature related to this issue is scant. The review in this chapter, therefore, refers to knowledge on the similar topic developed in other contexts to complement the understanding the topic of this study. The chapter comprises of three sections. The first section offers an argument for feminist standpoint epistemology as an appropriate theoretical approach to guide this study. Section two provides an overview of women and leadership and the contribution of female leaders' experiences in the leadership study. The final section takes up issues begun in Chapter 1 about studies of senior women leaders in higher education focusing particularly on women university Presidents and Vice-Chancellors conducted in other contexts.

2.1 Feminism - a multi-faceted theory

Central to this study is a premise that the experience of Vietnamese women university Rectors at selected public universities in Vietnam can be sought within a feminist framework, since feminism addresses the issues of women directly. As Luke (2001) states, while feminism can be criticised for its theorisation of a universal category of women and global forms of women's oppressions, it has for years "been instrumental in excavating the local, it gives a voice to silenced and marginalized identities and experiences" (p. 72). As such, feminism has been a catalyst for raising awareness of ways women and men are treated differently, and where women often encounter unequal life situations and opportunities.

Being developed from social and political movements that aimed at redefining and defending equal opportunities for women, feminism now is a recognised social

theory that has become more complex, multifaceted and has continued to evolve over time. Feminism is not viewed in the same light, even among feminists (Beasley, 1999). As hooks (2000) observes, it would seem that “a central problem with feminist discourse has been our inability to either arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is or accept definition (s) that could serve as points of unification” (p. 17). In general, feminist scholars are of the same mind in the recognition of women’s subordinate status in society, but they are considerably different in seeing its sources and what should be done to alter them (Jaggar, 2004). Consequently, there are number of volumes, in which feminism is classified as “liberal”, “Marxist”, “socialist”, “radical”, “postmodern”, “postcolonial” feminism among others (see, for example, Jones & Jackson, 1998; Tong, 1998). There are also people, who have identified themselves as certain types of feminist to express their particular points of view in seeing and solving the problems of women’s subordination. Different situations ask for different theoretical approaches to serve different purposes. The aim of this study is to make visible the ignored experiences of a few Vietnamese women Rectors at selected public universities in Vietnam by examining what they have experienced in their journeys to the rectorship from their own voices. As a result, instead of in turn describing in detail existing feminist theories, I will now argue that feminist standpoint epistemology provides an appropriate theoretical framework that can be applied in conducting this investigation.

2.2 Feminist standpoint epistemology

The intention in this section is to describe the emergence and aspects of feminist standpoint epistemology. According to Harding (1989), feminist theory began by trying

to extend and reinterpret the categories of various traditional theoretical discourses to make women's activities and gender relations more analytically visible in explanations of human life. As traditional social theories had not been derived from women's experiences, applying women's activities or gender relations to any theory based on male experience could be a distortion of women's realities (Harding, 1989). To avoid this, global feminists had tried to establish their own methodological base that relies on women's personal and collective experiences as the foundation to make visible women's lives and feminist views of gender relations. Feminist standpoint epistemology was the result of such process. Feminist standpoint epistemology places women at the centre of the research process and claims to take women's situated experiences as the starting point, from which to build knowledge (Brooks, 2007). Feminist standpoint scholars emphasise that in order to correct the exclusion of women both inside and outside academia, we need to begin with women's lives "*as they themselves experience them*, in order to achieve an accurate and authentic understanding of what life is like for women today" (p. 56). On another level, feminist standpoint epistemology also aims to challenge researchers to critically understand society as a whole through accurate description and analysis of the views of women. This is an important point in considering subtle or unseen ways, in which females have been excluded from positions of power.

In class societies, according to Marx, the dominant groups maintain their control over a society by imposing their ideologies on it. Thus, in a given society, knowledge is produced and controlled by the ruling classes and the interpretation of existing reality reflects the interests and values of these privileged groups. This interpretation of reality, therefore, will be distorted as the "suffering of the subordinate classes will be ignored,

redescribed as enjoyment or justified as freely chosen, deserved, or inevitable” (Jaggar, 2004, p. 56)¹². Vice versa, subordinate groups have to understand both their inferior positions and the dominant groups’ practices because they have a greater wish to understand why they are in oppressed position and have fewer interests to maintain and justify the existing state of affairs in the society than the dominant groups. Therefore, these standpoints of oppressed groups are objective and impartial since they have represented the interests of society as a whole while the standpoints of the ruling classes reflect the interests of a certain section of the population. Thus, starting from the standpoints of the oppressed includes and is able to explain the standpoints of the ruling classes (Jaggar, 2004).

Based on Marx’s concept of the “proletarian standpoint” (Lukács, 1971; Marx, 1964), in which, the proletarian workers, by virtue of being oppressed and central to the system of the capitalist mode of production, then were thought to be able to attain an epistemic privilege of new knowledge to understand the whole society, feminist standpoint scholars, in general, argue that women can actually produce better knowledge about society due to their sex-class position (Hartsock, 1987). Dorothy Smith (1987) states that women’s material situations [the situation of marginalised group], invisible for a long time in the traditional culture [which is manufactured by the those in positions of dominance, typically but not necessarily, men] provides a distinctive epistemological perspective. This particular perspective is not only merely a different perspective but also a privileged perspective for it makes it possible to understand reality better, more complete and less distorted by recognising the partiality

¹² These ideologies block the formulation of counter forms of knowledge, in the case of this thesis, women’s understandings of how men rule in organisations and what it is like to be subordinate to men in senior ranks of the organisation.

of traditional dominant understandings. Harsock (1987) argues that women's epistemic advantage rests on the fact that they have better access to information and are in a better position to see whose needs get better served and whose interests are ignored in the family while men, because of their dominant position [in the family], have the privilege of ignoring how their actions undermine the interests of others [of subordinates]. Since women are in marginalised positions in sexual division of labour [the situation of an oppressed group], they have an interest in revealing this truth rather than covering it. Thus, women have no reason or motivation to misinterpret the reality. To understand their subordinate position, to survive socially, women must understand and view their own subordinate social status as well as that of the dominant group [of men] clearly, accurately and unflatteringly. They are able to understand things both from the perspectives of men [of the dominant group] and from the perspectives of their own [of the marginalised group] and, to comparatively evaluate both perspectives. Therefore, women's judgements are closer to the real world and more scientifically creditable in terms of objectivity. Feminist standpoint scholars refer to this as a "double vision" or "double consciousness" (Brooks, 2007, p.63). On this point, Harding (2004b) believes that "starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order" (p. 128).

It is evident that women's standpoints will not be the same, and they will vary to some extent within different countries, according to the historical conditions in which gender relations are socially structured. Having acknowledged that women themselves occupy many different standpoints and experience many diverse social realities (Hekman, 2004 cited in Brooks, 2007), feminist standpoint epistemologists have

pondered how to incorporate women's differences strategically and actively within the research process (Brook, 2007). Harding (1993, 2004a) proposes several standpoints for this discussion. Her first approach requires considering women's different standpoints, but at the same time stresses that some standpoints may generate more truthful, objective knowledge claims than others. According to this author, the higher level of oppression, the more objective its explanation as well as the views of the most oppressed group of women will generate the most truthful and the most accurate research findings. However, this approach depends on the researcher's analysis and critical evaluation to determine which social situation is likely to generate the most objective knowledge claim (Brook, 2007). In a second approach, the same author calls for a heightened attention to the differences and even the conflicts between and across women's standpoints. For example, "[f]eminist knowledge has started off from women's lives, but it has started off from many different women's lives; there is no typical or essential woman's life from which feminisms start their thought" (Harding, 1993, p. 65). In this approach, Harding (2004a) emphasises that it is just the differences, the diversity, and the conflicts between women's experiences that help to develop distinctive insight about social relations system in general. In her edited book titled "The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies" published in 2004, when mentioning to research findings on different groups of women belonging to different classes, ethnicities, races and sexual orientations in their situated settings, Sandra Harding claimed that accounts of this type "enable us to understand how each oppressed group will have its own critical insights about nature and the larger social order to contribute to the collection of human knowledge" (p. 9). This approach is supported by other feminists (e.g. Haraway, 1991; Longino, 1999) when they assert that

paying attention to either the distinctive experience of each woman or the diversity among and between women's experiences does not obstruct the capacity to build a new knowledge. "In fact, it is precisely within the distinctive characteristics of a particular standpoint or the uniqueness of a particular woman's experience that we can hope to find new knowledge" (Brooks, 2007, p.72). These points are taken up in the next section.

2.3 Feminist standpoint epistemology as an appropriate theoretical guidance

Obviously, women in Vietnam occupy similar situations with women in other countries, where they are under-represented at senior ranks in higher education. When conducting this research, I have found that there has been very little information available on Vietnamese women in higher education. As well, a comprehensive study relating to senior Vietnamese women leaders in this field would now come to almost nothing. There has been no single study or official statistics on this topic in Vietnam. Maybe, because the experiences of those marginalised women are viewed as not important by the Vietnamese patriarchal society's dominant group [men], that type of research is almost excluded from mainstream journals. The result of such gender exclusivity is partiality and distortion in dealing with issues of gender in this area. Thus, in examining the situation of senior women leaders in higher education in Vietnam, starting research from the lives that those women actually have lived or from their standpoints helps reduce bias and distortion. Their views are more truthful in comparison with others since their insights are the legacy of which they have gone through (Narayan, 2004). In the context of this study, the experience of a group of women Rectors at selected public universities in Vietnam is used as a "starting point"

for generating new knowledge to understand the situation of senior women leaders in higher education leadership in the Vietnamese context. As well, starting from the standpoints of groups that have been ignored enables the experiences of those groups to become visible. Since Vietnamese women have been almost absent in the academic debates on women leaders in higher education at all levels, feminist standpoint epistemology gives the women participants in this study a voice in expressing their experiences to echo with voices of women working in higher education in other cultures.

Having outlined the theoretical apparatus underpinning my research, I will now review relevant literature on leadership. This section begins with an examination of women and leadership in general and extends to a focus on the situation of senior women leaders in higher education in the international setting. However, before moving to this part of the review, because this study is about women Rectors at selected public universities in Vietnam, it is necessary to understand the position those women occupy. In this regard, a possible confusion in terminology needs to be addressed.

2.4 Leadership or management?

In a recent Vietnamese study into women's participation in the university management in Vietnam, Mai (2007) used the term “*quản lý*” in Vietnamese or “management” in English but not “*lãnh đạo*”, the term for “leadership”. Based on definitions of leadership of Stogdill (1974), and management of Hersey and Blanchard (1977), Mai states that these two concepts are somewhat similar in her research. “[M]anagement is a concept, which includes leadership. Management is understood as orienting process, decision making, directing, guiding, managing and monitoring

individuals and other resources within organisations to achieve the setting goals”¹³ (Mai, 2007, p.62). Between those two, management emerged later, around the turn of the twentieth century with the arrival of industrialised societies while leadership can be traced back to Aristotle’s time (Northouse, 2007). Leadership and management can be seen having quite different functions with management providing order and consistency to an organisation and leadership producing change and forward movement (Kotter, 1990). Although there were more scholars, who confirmed the differences between management and leadership (e.g. Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Zaleznik, 1977 cited in Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991), these two constructs overlap (Northouse, 2007). According to Northouse (2007), for example, both leadership and management involve in working with people and effective goal accomplishment. When managers influence others to achieve tasks, they are involved in leadership and vice versa, when leaders are involving in planning, staffing, organising, and controlling, they are involved management. Leadership and management are not the same things but the concepts are sufficiently intertwined (J. Taylor & Machado, 2006). To be effective and prosperous, organisations need to nourish both competent management and skilled leadership toward goals achievement (Kotter, 1990). In this thesis, I use the term “*lãnh đạo*” in Vietnamese, which means “leadership” in English and have focused my investigation around this notion. My aim is not to justify whether Mai’s use of these concepts or mine are more appropriate in the context of Vietnam but to confirm that we treat the roles of leaders and managers similarly and do not emphasise the differences between them. A change in usage may be seen in the fact that, the term “*lãnh đạo*” or “leadership” was

¹³ *Quản lý được dùng như một khái niệm, trong đó bao hàm khái niệm lãnh đạo. Quản lý được hiểu như quá trình định hướng, ra quyết định, chỉ đạo, điều hành, giám sát các cá nhân thành viên, và các nguồn lực khác trong tổ chức, nhằm đạt các mục đích đề ra (trang 62).*

used by all of the women Rectors participated in this study when describing their responsibilities at their institutions. It is on this point that I turn to analysis of literature on women and leadership.

2.5 Women and leadership

Feminist movements since 1970s have strongly influenced traditional theories and practices including leadership study by making women's activities and experiences become more visible in this account. The issue of gender adds a distinct facet to leadership study.

In conditions, where most leaders were men, the ideas of leadership were primarily defined from male perspectives, with leadership research being mostly conducted for men and by men (Middlehurst, 1997). Relations between men and women then became, as discussed above, an accepted element of a dominant ideology so as “(t)he languages of leadership has masculine connotations, images of leaders are often male heroes (Great Men) and popular contexts for leadership encompass traditionally masculine scenarios. Common perceptions of appropriate leadership behaviours also carry stereotypically masculine overtones” (Middlehurst, 1997, p. 13). When it comes to the problem of gender and leadership, women were early described as ineffective leaders as they were seen as lacking leadership characteristics (S. M. Brown, 1979). If women want to succeed, they had to model men's behaviour in their leadership positions (Hennig & Jardim, 1977). The presence of women in leadership positions over the last three decades have not only transformed that stereotype of the powerlessness of women, but also been a catalyst for the research interest in the study of women leaders with questions such as whether women bring any differences in leadership or are they

more or less effective leaders in comparison with men leaders (Hoyt, 2007). Some scholars (e.g. Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990) argue that men and women leaders are different, even that women are more effective than men because they are more inclusive, better able to listen to and involve in working with subordinates. However, since the mid 1990s, research had moved its attention to sex roles and the interaction between female and male traits to support leadership effectiveness in changing situations and organisations (Waring, 2003). Park (1997) proposes that an androgynous leadership style, a leadership style that blends sex role identities previously supposed to belong solely to men [competitiveness, aggressiveness, high self-confidence, low emotionality, task-oriented, assertiveness] or to women [emotionality, kindness, forgiveness, interpersonal sensitivity, and human relation skills] is the most effective approach to achieve higher performance in organisations. This author also indicates that leaders, who use androgynous leadership style, can have greater success in encounters with the world than the other leaders because they have a wider range of possible reactions to any situation.

Visibly, the emergence of women in leadership positions has contributed much to the human understanding of leadership. In the company of stimulation from feminism, theories and analysis on leadership has become a much more sophisticated research area. Feminist scholars not only criticised the absence of women's experiences and perspectives in the traditional leadership studies but also made gender integral to contemporary notions of effective leadership styles. With a change in standpoint, feminists have tried to turn female characteristics that had been usually mistaken by traditional male leadership culture as traits to inhibit career progress into advantages that benefit women and the whole society (Harding, 2004b). There is also suggestion

that the leadership role is starting to be seen as less masculine and more androgynous (Schein, 2001 cited in Hoyt, 2007). Both women and men leaders now advocate leadership combining control and command with collaboration.

Despite empirical research showing that women possess characteristics necessary to lead and to make them effective in leadership positions and more women worldwide are participating in the workplace, women are still scarcely presented in the top decision-making positions in all occupations and organisations (Hoyt, 2007). The “glass ceiling” effect still exists, leading to the fact that women often gather at the bottom of the organisational hierarchies (Luke, 2001). The extremely small number of women Rectors, Presidents, Vice-Chancellors at colleges and universities mentioned in Chapter 1 is one of the signs.

In the next section, I will overview some of the obstacles women are reported to encounter and factors contributing to their career advancement in academia within the literature. This is also done to illustrate the standpoints about women’s experiences in higher education taken in other contexts.

2.6 Barriers to women’s career advancement in higher education

It is true that the number of women, who have entered the workforce including higher education, has risen dramatically over the last decades. Nevertheless, “in all countries, without exception, women occupy the lower levels of the institutions, their numbers decrease significantly in the upper echelons of academia” (Singh, 2000, p. 19). As described in Chapter 1, in recent years, even if there has been an improvement in the number of women, who are able to move up to the senior leadership positions in higher education, this fact is far from the expected situation. The firm foundation, from which

the decision-making positions are likely to be generated has not been sufficiently established for women (Eggins, 2009). Literature indicates that there have been a number of personal, interpersonal and organisational barriers that have prevented women, who are believed to demonstrate the effective leadership characteristics empirically, from achieving senior positions in higher education.

Among the main barriers, work-life conflict is the most quoted. Currie *et al.* (2002) assert that “home and family responsibilities still isn’t evenly shared and that women unlike men have to deal with the conflict between a home or family responsibility and the academic pursuit” (p. 126). Ten percent of women in comparison with 3 percent of men college and university Presidents in the US had never married or had children and 15 percent of women Presidents who had changed their careers to take care of children or family, whereas only 5 percent of men had done the same (ACE, 2007). Most women leaders in Chinese and Hong Kong universities in Tsang and Zhang’s (2006) study reported that they had given up their career pursuits and promotion chances at certain points of their life because of family demands and childcare responsibilities. Women in some other Asian countries in Luke’s (2001) group study chose to be single or to marry late and had few if not only one child in order to be successful in their careers. Finding the balance between work and family is a long-lasting process, a struggle that women have to face at all administrative levels in higher education. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) contends that the choice between family and work poses a dilemma that “is sharp pronged and hard” (p.111).

Another individual barrier is women’s modest attitudes and motivation to go up. “Women tend to be more modest than men about their achievements and less apt to see themselves as qualified for top position even when their credentials are equivalent or

superior” (AAMC, 1996, p. 805). They often attribute their appointments to luck (Sederburg, 1991) or being at the right place at the right time rather than to recognising their own abilities (Helgesen, 1990; Hennig & Jardim, 1977). Madsen (2008) concludes that women, sometimes, tend to be their own obstacle to their career advancement. Personal uncertainties and perceptions such as lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, low self-efficacy and fear of failure can delay their advancement to higher positions.

In terms of organisational barriers, because of the male dominance in governing boards, men feel easy to work with people like them (Chliwniak, 1997; Luke, 2001). White (2003) asserts that the existing under-representation of women at the senior leadership positions in Australian universities is a result of the dominant male executive profile. It makes male leaders tend to promote men while ignoring the majority of women. Therefore, women are more likely to be assistant, associates than they are in principle leadership position as Dean, Vice-Presidents and Presidents (Kaplan & Tinsley, 1989; Moore, 1984).

Because higher education is still a male-dominated field (Chliwniak, 1997), women academics often have peer groups that are made up mainly of men. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) describe women at all levels in academia as “outsiders in the sacred grove”¹⁴ as they are not informed about available positions, and are mostly not recommended by their male peers. According to Cyranoski (2001), most of the promotional chances to professor positions in Japanese universities are based on the personal relations among university classmates or drinking friends. But because these informal networks in Japanese culture are completely male, Japanese women are ignored. Similarly, an integral part of professional relationships among men in the

¹⁴ The name of the book of those two authors.

Western contexts is the so called Old Boy's Network. As defined by Hennig and Jardim (1977), "it is a subtle, active system of support, which is dependent on friendships, persuasions, favours, promises and connections with people, who already have influence" (p. 77). This network operates through playing sports, dining and drinking out among men and women are almost not invited to participate in those activities. White (2003) again claims that constructions of merit and networks operate within senior management are part of this boy's club, which marginalises women from the informal communications and decision-making channels.

Other barriers are related to sociocultural context, in which determines social norms regarding gender roles, and attitudes towards women in management. As a result, women leaders often fall in a double bind situation (Jamieson, 1995). According to Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001), leadership ability is often perceived as male behaviours. Because of this gender stereotype judgement, women are often regarded as not capable enough to be effective leaders. Results in Warner and DeFleur's (1993) survey indicate that women administrators have to overcome and fight against stereotypes of not having the qualities necessary for supposed leaders such as independence, authority, aggressiveness and confidence. "It has been reported that women have not been selected for senior positions because they may not "look" or "act" like a dean, Vice-President or President" (p. 18). As well, the incongruity between the expectation about women such as being caring, sensitive and supportive and the expectation about leaders such as being assertive, forceful, and competitive can lead to prejudices towards women leaders. Women leaders with autocratic behaviours are judged negatively by their staff, both male and female (Chliwniak, 1997). Instead of being assertive, they got criticism for being pushy. Chinese and Hong Kong women

leaders in Tsang and Zhang (2006) had experienced negative comments from their colleagues, both males and females, towards them as they were too ambitious and aggressive. The women reported that they were often considered what they thought mockingly as “superwomen” (Tsang & Zhang, 2006) or even as “third sex” (Wei, 2007).

Besides obstacles causing by men and male dominant culture mentioned above, conflicts over promotion information and supporting resources even among women are often unseen but this fact has happened. In some cases, women administrators have experienced difficulties to establish relationships with other women as well as they do not receive an adequate support from their female peers (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Luke, 2001). Senior women academics in Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore in Luke’s (2001) study echoed with one another to allude the tension, rivalry, viciousness and lack of support among women that were displayed by “small talks, unnecessary criticism, the non-support offered by the female towards each other” (p. 169). Jackson and Harris (2007) even coined a phrase “we do not hire the competition” (p. 122) to emphasise the uncomfortable relationships among women administrators at the same levels. There is also the “queen bee” syndrome, which implies that women, who have climbed the ladder of success believe that “there is only room for one outstanding woman in an organization” (Bower, 1993, p. 93). For that reason, women who have achieved successes are hesitant to support less-experienced women in career advancement to secure their position.

It can be seen from this discussion that women in higher education worldwide do face a number of personal, interpersonal and organisational barriers. However, as Luke (2001) argues, cultural differences would create more local challenges as variables

of the “glass ceiling” for women in academia as it was evident in her case study of Southeast Asian women in higher education management. This review is now turning to this issue in Asian settings.

2.7 Local challenges to Asian women’s career advancement in higher education

While many of Asian women’s experiences of career barriers corresponded to those documented in the Western contexts, for example, conflict between work and family responsibilities, facing gender stereotypes at the workplace, lack of support among women themselves and being excluded from informal networks, cultural differences are evident across Asian higher education institutions that women in the Western settings have seldom experienced (Luke, 2001).

At the outset, it is Asian values supporting specific concepts of femininity that militates against meritocratic equality and academic career aspirations to senior management levels of women (Luke, 2001). For example, with regard to the politics of gender relation, there have been sceptical attitudes to women, who professionally interact with other male colleagues (Luke, 2001). Talking about her difficulties at the university, a woman doctoral student in Japan (cited in McNeil, 2007) said that “I wrote a paper with a male colleague, and there were rumours that I had a relationship with him”. A similar result was found in Wei’s (2007) research on Chinese women administrators when women participants explained that distance should always be watched when interacting with male colleagues in the universities to prevent gossips or other negative reactions.

Another set of distinct Asian cultural values that can deter women from career aspiration to senior leadership positions, according to Luke (2001) are the politics of

face and an ethos of connection or patronage. Being influenced by Confucian thought¹⁵, juniors are considered to owe admiration and respect to seniors. Contesting professionally one's senior in public forums such as committees or councils are considered inappropriate institutional conduct because it will lead to the loss of face for both junior and senior players in such relationship (Luke, 2001). While Western people are encouraged to speak up, argue against or support any issues, this rule of face saving in Asian contexts prohibits contestation from subordinates. There is always a repayment, an obligation and eternal gratitude to those, who supported one's institutional advancement or promotion (Luke, 2001). In this aspect, for women, who are more likely to be supported by senior males or females, face saving can particularly weaken their attempts to get ahead.

The political factor, sometimes, has been counted for a reason that makes the career development of women leaders in Asia different from those in Western countries. Observing the situation of women administrators in higher education in Malaysia, Luke (2001) confirms that the term "glass ceiling" becomes "concrete ceiling" in higher education leadership in Malaysia. "There is nothing hidden or transparent in women's inability to reach the most senior ranks of university management, because all senior executive positions in the sector are political appointments" (Luke, 2001, p. 203) and the basic of this selection is subjective and has elements of favouritism in Malaysian male favoured society.

In general, in any cases, women, who hold decision-making positions in higher education institutions generally are required to be competent in all roles as wives as

¹⁵ an originated Chinese complex system of social, moral, philosophical, political, and quasi-religious thought that might be considered as a promoted philosophy of some countries include China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Vietnam. The influence of this philosophy in Vietnam is also mentioned briefly in Chapter 3.

mothers and as leaders (Villadsen & Tack, 1986). Given the demands placed upon them, women have to overcome the impediment described above to be successful. Through the years, a number of women have managed to break through the barriers and find their own ways to be legitimately accepted as college and university Presidents, Rectors and Vice-Chancellors. The following review focuses on the studies of those women, mostly in the US setting.

2.8 Profiles of women college and university Presidents

The study of women in leadership roles in higher education, has produced a growing body of literature on this issue, especially in the US (Astin & Leland, 1991). Scholars and research students have discussed certain characteristics of women Presidents from the formation years to their journeys to the top. Following are common characteristics in women college and university Presidents' profiles and career patterns in these studies.

Firstly, although there are exceptional cases, where women Presidents are orphans or raised by single-parent families (Waring, 2003), most of them come from stable, two-parent and middle-class families with their mothers' educational background that are equivalent or sometimes better than that of their fathers (Madsen, 2008; Sanford-Harris, 1990; Tessler, 1976; Touchton, Shavlik, & Davis, 1991). Secondly, many are the first born or the only children in their families (Madsen, 2008; Sanford-Harris, 1990; Tessler, 1976). Thirdly, most of women Presidents are less likely to have both family and career at the same time (ACE, 2007; McGee, 1979; Touchton, et al., 1991). If being married, they tend to have not many children with a maximum of two (Madsen, 2008; Sanford-Harris, 1990; Touchton, et al., 1991). Fourthly, the traditional

career path of Presidents within academia of Birnbaum and Umbach (2001), which has taken place within academia is mostly the common route for women to get the presidency (Madsen, 2008; Turner, 2007; Waring, 2003; Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009). In this process, the early experiences of full time faculty members are essential for women in their journeys to the top (ACE, 2007; Madsen, 2008; McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999; McGee, 1979; Tessler, 1976; Touchton, et al., 1991; Turner, 2007; Waring, 2003). Fifthly, those women are unintentional leaders. Many of them do not set their goal to be Presidents early in their careers (David & Woodward, 1998; Madsen, 2008; McGee, 1979; Touchton, Shavlik, & Davis, 1993; Turner, 2007; Waring, 2003; Wolverton, et al., 2009). The women's appointments are "draft" (Waring, 2003, p. 37) by others, who see their leadership potential and help them to develop it. Thus, luck is acknowledged as an important factor and it has played an significant part in defining those women Presidents' career pattern (Helgesen, 1990; Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Sederburg, 1991). Finally, because of family relationships, child bearing and child rearing, women Presidents are less likely to be mobile and more likely to be promoted within one institution (Chesterman, Ross-Smith, & Peters, 2003; Moore, 1982).

How do those women get to the top decision-making position in their colleges and universities? The next sections will present a number of factors that presumably contribute to their journeys to the top. It is claimed that attaining education qualifications, for example, a doctorate; having mentors and similar supporting relationships; expanding network by participating in development activities; having

strong family support; possessing an appropriate leadership style are major factors contributing to the women Presidents' career advancement.

2.9 Factors contribute to the advancement of women college and university Presidents

2.9.1 Education achievement

An excellent academic result in schools is definitely a strong foundation for the future women college and university Presidents in the literature. Results of studies on women leaders in colleges and universities in different contexts (e.g. Astin & Leland, 1991; Durnovo, 1990; Tsang & Zhang, 2006) indicate that the educational motivation and drive to succeed, which are nurtured from early childhood, are the determining factors in the later academic accomplishments. As well, obtaining a doctorate has become a standard for entering the top leadership level position at the colleges and universities (ACE, 2007; Madsen, 2007b; McFarlin, et al., 1999; Sanford-Harris, 1990; Thompson, 1999; Touchton, et al., 1993; Waring, 2003). The higher the position a woman holds on in the higher education administrative ladder, the more likely she is to have earned her doctorate (Falconer, 1995).

Outside of a solid educational foundation, future college and university Presidents are reported to enhance their careers through accompanying support systems and leadership practices. Some examples from within this literature are now discussed.

2.9.2 Mentoring and similar supporting relationships

Mentoring is understood as a professional relationship between an individual and another person, in which the more experienced person provides career guidance to the person of less experience (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). In higher education,

mentoring is identified as a key factor contributing to women successful ascension to the presidency as mentors can suggest strategies for career advancement, open doors, initiate contacts, give advices and share relevant information from their experiences (T. M. Brown, 2005; Durnovo, 1990; VanDerLinden, 2005; Warner & DeFleur, 1993). Especially, having or working with male mentors was an advantage for women in Warner and DeFleur's (1993) study as this relationship makes women being known in the Old Boy's Network, an informal network that may facilitate women to advance in their career.

Nevertheless, an absence of mentoring does not limit chances of being successful. In addition to the effectiveness and the necessity of mentors in women's career development in higher education in the mentioned above studies, some women in Madsen's (2008) study did not have formal mentors but they spoke about other significant people, who had influenced their lives and career development. These persons were referred as coaches, tutors, advisors, sponsors, encouragers or role models, who encouraged the women to seek new positions and promotions and provided essential support to them at various critical times in their careers.

2.9.3 Developmental activities

To offset the difficulty of being less access to informal network, which is sometimes crucial for career advancement (Kanter, 1993; Luke, 2001), a range of development activities such as taking part in leadership training programs, seminars, workshops, networks and actively involvement in professional, social organisations are used by women Presidents to increase their visibility (Madsen, 2008; McFarlin, et al., 1999; Sanford-Harris, 1990; Touchton, et al., 1991). As parts of these supporting networks, women have chances to exchange and develop leadership skills, meet

[powerful] people, establish and strengthen local, national even international reputation, which are important to them. Women Presidents in Madsen's (2008) study stated that owing to joining in these development activities, they were provided developmental experiences and opportunities; and continued to connect with individuals, who could help them learn and develop or provide needed support and encouragement in their career goals.

2.9.4 Parental influence and encouragement

Similar to mentoring, networking and other supporting relationships, strong family influence presents a coherent relationship between family and career. A parent's positive influence also guides women to achieve their goals. Regardless of how the parents are, a positive parental influence and support are essential to women leadership (Bowen, 1976; Lorenzen, 1996). In a survey on a number of successful women administrators, Woo (1985) found that all the women received encouragement equally from both parents to pursue careers. The finding of Astin and Leland (1991) on women leaders in different settings including in educational institutions shows that the women leaders have a solid foundation based on supportive and encouraging family relationships with high parental expectations. Though there are differences in recent studies on the level of influence between fathers and mothers (Coutu, 2004; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Madsen, 2008; Matz, 2001; Waring, 2003), in general, parental support and encouragement play an important part in women college and university Presidents' journeys to the top.

2.9.5 Supportive husbands or partners

Besides the strong parental influence, the support of husbands or spouses to women leaders in higher education is fundamental as well. Women administrators in Woo's (1985) research said that their husbands' support had been a crucial factor in their careers as without that backup, they would leave the job rather than dissolve the marriage. Supporting this fact, other researchers (e.g. Astin & Leland, 1991; Luke, 2001; Madsen, 2008; Turner, 2007) verify that the encouragement of husbands, spouses and partners immensely help women career growth. In those authors' studies, the men were described as helping women do whatever was necessary to help them succeed. They also helped to increase women's feeling of competency as they listened, brainstorm when asked and provided guidance and advice when needed. This is understandable given the fact that men leaders also often rely heavily on their wives for support.

2.9.6 Collaborative and androgynous leadership styles

As mentioned previously, women leaders are more likely to use transformational behaviours in their leadership styles. They emphasise collaboration, participation and sharing power as well as they focus on teamwork and encourage the followers. The results of Touchton's *et al.* (1993) study indicate that a collaborative, participative style is one of the leadership traits that all women college and university Presidents participants agreed on. Most of the sixteen women college Presidents in Switzer's (2006) research described themselves as collaborative leaders. Wolverton *et al.* (2009) conducted collective case studies examining the leadership experiences of nine women community college and university Presidents. Reflecting on leadership styles, these women favoured collaboration, sharing power in decision making, empowerment, and considered themselves "as good as the team" (p. 2) they work with. As Matz (2001)

concludes, women leaders in academia prefer the consensus leadership style, which is characterised by empowering others, enhancing others' sense of self-worth, sharing power, energising others, and encouraging participation.

There is also evidence that university climate possibly encourages more androgynous managers (Leonard, 1981, cited in Madsen, 2007a). In Waring's (2003) study, most women Presidents had adopted a variety of androgynous attributes such as skilled-base, decisiveness, willingness to take responsibility for actions, quickness of decision making, communication, delegation of authority and responsibility to others in the organisation and relationship-orientation. According to them, different styles work with different circumstances and with different people. Being flexible, approachable and looking for common ground are the leadership principles of those women in Waring's (2003) study. Women university Presidents in Madsen's (2008) research employed collaboration, androgynous and situational leadership styles and they applied each of these approaches to specific strategic situations. The women were ethical, flexible, participatory, and connective as they shared power, information and decision making with others. Using different leadership methods allows "alternative ways of considering problems and a repertoire of behaviours from which to choose" (Birnbaum, 1992, p. 65). And this makes women Presidents succeed in their leadership positions.

To this point, it can be seen that a great amount of literature in contexts outside of Vietnam are concerned with both the barriers to women's advancement in academia and with strategies for surmounting them. This can be seen as a summary of standpoints on women's careers in higher education as they are documented. As such, the literature mentioned above provides a helpful analytical foundation for the topic of this study. To understand more clearly about the life of Vietnamese women and career advancement of

senior women leaders in higher education Vietnam, in the next section, the discussion will extend to the direct context of this study - Vietnam, women in Vietnam and Vietnamese women in higher education leadership.

Chapter 3: The Vietnamese context

Little has been published on the experiences of senior women leaders in higher education in Vietnam. After all, women in Vietnam and women from other backgrounds share similar situations as they lack representation in senior positions in this area. Nevertheless, it would be risky and misleading to apply such a framework mechanically and uncritically to the situation in Vietnam due to the differences of tradition, history, and culture, social, economic and political environment in different societies. Feminist standpoint epistemologists propose that knowledge is local, historically specific, and aim to understand and explain the structures that are available to a particular social location (Sprague, 2005). To understand the experiences of Vietnamese women university Rectors more clearly, it is imperative to clarify the characteristics of the society, in which those women work and live. Therefore, this chapter will focus on political, social, cultural and economic aspects of life in Vietnam. The status of Vietnamese women in society, in workplace and their access to education from history to the present will also be mentioned within this environment. Finally, attention given to the current situation of Vietnamese women in higher education leadership will be covered. My aim is to help readers gain a full image of Vietnam and of women in Vietnam before specifically examining the experiences of a group of Vietnamese women Rectors at selected public universities in Vietnam.

3.1 Country profile

Vietnam shares its border with China in the north, Laos and Cambodia in the west and the South China Sea in the east and south. In its history, Vietnam was ruled by the Chinese conquerors for roughly one thousand years and became the French colony

of Cochin China for nearly one hundred years until 1945, when the Democratic Republic of Vietnam [DRV] was established. In 1954, after a nine year conflict with French, the Geneva Accords temporarily divided Vietnam into two zones: the Communist North based on the former Soviet Union [USSR] and the Republic South supported by the United States. Political and ideological oppositions quickly turned into armed struggle leading to the Vietnam War, which began in 1965. With many casualties and losses from both sides during nearly ten years, after the Paris Peace Agreements was signed in 1973, and Vietnam was completely reunited on April of 1975 with the victory of the Communist North and became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam [SRV].

Vietnam is an agricultural country with more than 80 percent of the population living in rural areas. It has had a rapid population growth with an estimated population around eighty six million people in 2009¹⁶. There are fifty four different ethnic groups in Vietnam¹⁷; among which, the Kinh group [Viet group] is the largest. They account for roughly 86 percent of the population¹⁸. As the largest social and ethnic group, the Kinh group exerts political and economic control. With regard to culture, the Kinh is also the source of the cultural dominance among fifty four ethnic groups throughout Vietnam. Vietnamese is the official language of Vietnam. This also is an official language of the Kinh group. This is a tonal language with strong influence from Chinese in pronunciation and writing. In seventeenth century, there was a great change in

¹⁶ Source from Preliminary results of 2009 population and housing Census on the 1st April 2009 implemented according to Decision No 94/2008/QĐ-TTg promulgated on 10th July, 2008 of the Prime Minister.

¹⁷ Source from Decision No 121-TCTK/PPCĐ promulgated on 2nd March 1979 of the General Statistics Office of Vietnam - GSO.

¹⁸ Source from Preliminary results of 2009 population and housing Census on the 1st April 2009 implemented according to Decision No 94/2008/QĐ-TTg promulgated on 10th July, 2008 of the Prime Minister.

writing when Chinese characters and indigenous phonetics scripts were altered to the Romanised alphabet, which was introduced by Alexander de Rhodes, a French Jesuit missionary (Nguyen, 1997). A complete Vietnamese Romanised alphabet including twenty four characters has been officially used in Vietnam since 1945, when the DRV was established. Besides Vietnamese and this alphabet, most other minority groups use their own spoken languages in daily conversations.

3.2 The Communist Party of Vietnam

Viet Nam is a one party state controlled by the Communist Party of Vietnam [CPV]. The CPV directs policies, strategies, the development and orientation of the country. The Article 4 in the recent SRV's Constitution approved in 1992 has made CPV as the sole leading force to guide the state, the society and set the political line. "The party's monopoly in the political arena and its close relationship with the state ensures that the government enjoys majority support, and policy initiatives are usually accepted even after a change in government leadership" (Vo, 2009, p. 226). The CPV exercises its leadership through its organisation system [a Party committee] in each state institution, political and social mass organisation¹⁹ that is formed and run by its members working in those bodies and organisations.

¹⁹ Party organizations system is set up corresponding organizations and administrative system of the State under the charter of the CPV. The Supreme Party organ is the National Congress which is held every five years. The National Congress elects the Central Party Committee consisting of one hundred and sixty full members and twenty one candidates. This Central Committee usually meets twice a year. At lower level, it is the local Party committee in each province through out of Vietnam and lower are Party committees in each state institution. It is almost compulsory to establish a Party committee in every state institution. This CPV's committee is formed by a number of people working for those institutions, who are simultaneously the Communist Party members. Source from www.cpv.org.vn retrieved on August 20th 2010.

Currently, CPV has over three million members²⁰. The CPV's membership has been the key element to one's career advancement in almost all occupations in Vietnam, especially; joining the CPV is a critical condition for advancement to senior administrative positions in governmental and public organisations, state owned enterprises and other institutions belonging to state sector. Article 1 in the Resolutions on personnel appointment and recommendation, promulgated in pursuance with Decision 68-QĐ/TW on April 04th 2007 of the Central Party committee of CPV clarifies that the Party is the sole force, which is in charge of personnel development and management²¹. In the selection criteria for any senior positions, apart from the good skills in management and ability to lead, potential candidates also have to gain their support by showing a commitment to the ideologies and ambitions of the government [that is under control of the CPV]. In general, selection criteria for senior levels in Vietnam are more likely political (Bruynooghe, et al., 2009) since becoming CPV's member has played an important role in the career development in all state institutions and some other social, economic and cultural organisations.

3.3 Confucianism

In comparison with women in some other countries in the region, women in Vietnam seem to be more progressive because they do not have to endure the strict religious rules on women, for example, of Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia. However, to a certain extent, the role of women in society in Vietnam is still much influenced by the patriarchal tenets of Confucianism. Not only ruling over in history, Confucianism is still persistent in the Vietnamese society today. Confucianism was introduced to

²⁰ Source from the www.cpv.org.vn retrieved on August 20th 2010.

²¹ Source from the www.cpv.org.vn retrieved on August 28th 2010.

Vietnam during the Chinese one thousand years of occupation from 111 BC to the early tenth century and it was later adopted as the official ideology of the Vietnamese feudal state. This philosophy has had a very strong impact on gender relations in Vietnam (Tuyet, 2005). There are several ethical principles of Confucianism that characterise the life and society of contemporary Vietnam. Firstly, Confucian philosophy encourages and values family life. It emphasises close family relationships. To fulfil parents' expectations is the way that children express their sincere thanks for giving birth to them (Loi, 2003). Secondly, family is patriarchal [men are the head of households], patrilineal [children bear the father's name; kinship and inheritance are in father's side] and patrilocal [women are part of husbands' families when married] (Loi, 2003). Thirdly, the tenets of Confucian ideology prefer sons to daughters and favour boys over girls because men are considered more important for their social, economic and symbolic value, for their role in maintenance of the family line, and for their position in honouring the tradition of ancestor worship. Confucian sayings such as "one hundred women are not worth a single part of man" and "a woman's is in the home" suggest the relatively lower regard of women in Confucian ideology (N. T. N. Bich, 2000). For years, Vietnamese women are supposedly subordinate to men and as women they have to practice "three obediences"²². As daughters they have to obey their fathers; as wives, they obey their husbands, and finally as widows they obey their sons [the eldest son]. Once accepting those obediences, the roles of women in Vietnamese society are expected as daughters, mothers and wives, who look after the parents, children and housework. This Confucian philosophy is principally oppressive toward women because it values patriarchal hierarchy in the family and recognises suffering acceptances such

²² *Tam tòng*

as “three obediences” of women as their positive values (Bradshaw, 1994). This strong influence has fettered Vietnamese women within family responsibilities for years, even today.

3.4 Collectivism

Another feature of the Vietnamese culture is the view of individualism and collectivism. While in Western countries, individualism is the value that parents expect children will possess, in Vietnam, this is not encouraged or nurtured (Bui & Stimpfl, 2000). Vietnam is considered a fairly collectivist society. In this way, as children, Vietnamese people are taught to think of the family [of grandparents, parents] before thinking of their own aspirations and concerns (Bui & Stimpfl, 2000). As adults, the needs and interests of the community often surpass the individual’s desires. Often, close relationships between extended families and communities can have a major influence on individual behaviours. Collectivism encourages preservation of traditional values and beliefs that conform to social norms (Triandis, 1989). Generally, Vietnamese women are found more collectivist than men (Đ. Long & Hường, 2002). Being influenced by collectivism, traditionally and culturally, Vietnamese women are raised and grow up to conform to patriarchal Confucian social gender relation expectations as supportive role to men and hold lower social prestige than their husbands.

3.5 Women’s status, their access to education and their representation in the workforce

To better understand the situation of senior women in higher education in Vietnam, it is important to provide background information on women in Vietnam, their position in the society, their access to education and their participation in the national

development. Without this account, it would be difficult to comprehend the essence of Vietnamese women's career development in modern-day society.

3.5.1 Historical feudal time: the totality of women's subordination

In the history of ancient Vietnam, women were once in the highest positions as they were often considered as goddesses of the cultivation of rice and other food crops (Vo, 2009). This tradition of matriarchy was eroded during a thousand years of Chinese domination and replaced by a Confucian patriarchal society throughout the feudal time in Vietnam (Tuyet, 2005). The responsibilities of women in feudal Vietnamese society were completely within the boundary of domestic works, household handicrafts, childbearing, childrearing and looking after the elderly. They were totally subordinate to men and were completely denied access to any form of education or allowed to participate in public activities. Women at that time were bound by traditional gender roles influenced by Confucianism and feared of accusations of immorality if they "consorted freely with men" (S. C. Taylor, 2003, p. 23).

3.5.2 Colonisation period: the reluctant enlightenment

Under the French colonisation since the middle of nineteenth century until 1945, most Vietnamese women had still suffered barriers in their status because the French colonisers subtly recognised the men's right. The French implicitly accepted the feudal culture in Vietnam, which had traditions of power stratification along gender lines as well as refusing to deal with inherent issues of gender inequality from their root (Bergman, 1975). Most of the Vietnamese women at this time lived narrowly bounded lives, usually confined to the home and the family rice paddies (Bunck, 1998). Education was firstly only available for men. In response to the slogan demanding the

rights for [upper class] women to go to school and calling on women to learn a trade in order to live independently as a solution to the implementation of women's rights, French colonisers then extended education to a very limited number of female children, who were daughters of upper class families and the educated elites in the society (Bergman, 1975). In 1924, only 3 percent of female children [roughly ten thousand girls] were enrolled in schools (Bergman, 1975).

3.5.3 The establishment of DRV [in 1945]: officially promoting gender equality

In early 1930, gender equality had been advocated by the Vietnamese Communist Party [prototype of the CPV] founded by Ho Chi Minh (Werner, 2009), who claimed that gender equality is as one of the main tasks of the Vietnamese revolution. He was often quoted “women make up half of society. If women are not liberated then society is not free” (Eisen, 1984, p. 85). Thus, Ho Chi Minh emphasised that the aim of the Vietnamese revolution was to ensure equality of rights for the women and the Vietnamese Communist Party must educate its members and the people in respecting equality between husband and wife (VWU, 1969). Since 1945, right after the DRV was established; the formal equality between men and women was established in the Constitution and in many other government policies. Article 1 and Article 9 in the first Constitution of Vietnam in 1946 stated that “*all power in the country belongs to the Vietnamese people, regardless of race; sex; wealth, class, religion...and women are equal to men in all aspects*”²³ (Vietnam, 1946). This Constitution was the first official legal document in Vietnam to proclaim the economic and political equality of women

²³ *Tất cả quyền bình trong nước là của toàn thể nhân dân Việt Nam, không phân biệt nòi giống, gái trai, giàu nghèo, giai cấp, tôn giáo...và đàn bà ngang quyền với đàn ông về mọi phương diện*

and men, to define the rights of women (Tetreult, 1996). It also stressed that women had the right to access education at all levels and to benefit as men in this field.

3.5.4 During the wars [from 1946 to 1975]: women's mobilisation and the national liberation

The period from 1946 to 1954 was also the resistance war against France in the history of Vietnam. During this time, women were called to contribute to and participate in the national revolution. This was the first time gender equality was addressed in Vietnam practically (Vo, 2009) as this mobilisation brought women out of the home to engage into the public arena. In the early 1950s, there were about eight hundred and forty thousand female guerrillas operating in the north and roughly one hundred and forty thousand in the south (Tu & Tuyet, 1978, pp. 101, 161). Women then played a vital role in community mobilisation, intelligence gathering and the transport of materiel (Tetreult, 1996).

From 1955 to 1975, when Vietnam was divided into two zones, while men were summoned to the fronts in the Vietnam War, because of the shortage of labour along with the collectivisation, women's role in the North of Vietnam became more visible as they were called upon to assume new responsibilities that were formerly assigned to men, especially in the economic management and state governance (Mitchell, 2000; Vo, 2009). Besides engaging in combat, between 1965 and 1967, the proportion of women's participation in political councils had increased both at local and central levels (VWU, 1968). In economic activities, many women held the position of director at co-operatives in the North of Vietnam. By 1975, women accounted for more than 60

percent of the total labour force in the North of Vietnam²⁴.

3.5.5 After the reunification [from 1976 to 1986]: socialist movement supporting women's full integration

The position of Vietnamese women was strengthened by state policies under the socialist regime and the direction of CPV after reunification in 1975 (Thi, 2001). Women's equal participation in all spheres was considered as crucial for the development of a socialist state (P. V. Bich, 1999).

The Party and the Government, despite the many difficulties they are encountering, try their best to improve the livelihood of labouring women and their children, so as to alleviate the familial burden and ensure women's health. In 1983 paid maternity leave in Vietnam was extended from 60 [to] 75 days. In December 1984, according to Resolution No. 176a, paid maternity leave was extended to 180 days. More crèches and kindergartens have been set up by the State, factories, cooperatives... In many city wards, special groups of babysitters have been set up by the women's union for children who for one reason or another cannot go to the crèches or kindergartens (VWU, 1985, p.2 cited in Mitchell, 2000).

Nevertheless, despite such positive policies, during the period since 1976 to 1986, the number of women, who engaged in social and economic activities, began to decline gradually (Huong, 2001; Que, 1995). For example, in politics, from five female ministers in 1982, there were only three in 1986 and the number of women participating in the National Assembly fell from 26.88 percent in 1976 to 17.8 percent in the 1987 election²⁵. To answer the question why this situation was happened, it is necessary to recap the liberation of women in the history of Vietnam.

3.5.6 The truth revealed: women's rights in connection with the national interests

²⁴ Source from <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/vntoc.html> retrieved on September 16th 2010.

²⁵ Source from the *Số liệu thống kê về phụ nữ Việt Nam. 1985-1994. Hà Nội: Thống kê, 1995*. [Statistics on the Vietnamese women 1985-1994. Statistical Publishing House, Hanoi, 1995].

Because every century in Vietnam had been marked by wars, from the beginning, the liberation of Vietnamese women was tied to the national movement of the country and women's interests were surpassed by the interests of the nation state. In the first decades of twentieth century, the national movement under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh identified that "just with the participation of women, the national liberation struggle will easily achieve success" (VCP, 2000, p.301 cited in Chi, 2007). Since women were considered as a symbolic form of the liberation of the Vietnamese nation, within the scope of the nationalist movement, gender relations were not the critical issue because of the concern that this problem would redirect attention away from the goal of national unity (Marr, 1985; Enloe, 1990 cited in L. D. Long, Hung, Truitt, Mai, & Anh, 2000). Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, a leading communist woman, a member of Vietnam Women's Union [VWU] since its establishment in 1930s stressed that the defence of common interests to all social classes rather than the struggle between men and women should be the goal of the movement (Molony, 2004). The liberation of women was the aim of the communist revolution leaders to gather women to participate in revolutionary activities. "If we want women to participate in the revolutionary struggle, firstly, we have to knock over all religious or moral customs, and provide them political trainings ... make them more conscious of their social class in order to attract them to join in the union of the proletarian class" (VCP, 1988, p.155 cited in Chi, 2007). Thus, the liberation of Vietnamese women was generated from the need to mobilise women, to involve them in the struggles for national liberation rather than from their conscious struggle based on women's self-awareness and their subordinate status in a patriarchal society, where men are considered as a privileged group.

Furthermore, because of the strong influence of collectivism, while women in Western contexts fought and are fighting for their rights, women in Vietnam have considered their rights as a part of government policy and the fights for women's rights are often inspired and supported by the state (Mitchell, 2000). They themselves put their personal and private ambitions behind the goals of the socialist regime (Bunck, 1998). As a result, that state-derived liberation of women in Vietnam had never dealt with the paternalistic social system, as the root of women's subordinate status in Vietnam had never been addressed thoroughly.

Women's possession of political and social economic responsibilities reached the peak in the early 1970s and gradually dropped after Vietnam reunited in 1975 (Molony, 2004; Tetreult, 1996). During the period from 1976 to 1986, although the Vietnamese government officially encouraged and gave priority to advance women in their career, there was a tendency that women gradually withdrew from social activities and state management (Huong, 2001; Que, 1995). Following the long period of wars, it was the time now for national unification and economic restoration. Production and economic activities became important, as the demand for consumer goods was very high. Accordingly, political and social activities, such as issues related to women's equal rights, were put behind economic activities (Que, 1995). Confucian philosophy on gender relations that had not been addressed thoroughly had opportunities to be stronger again. The wars ended. Men came home from the battlefield and reassumed the tasks that unofficially assigned to them by Confucian views as the dominant group in the society and the heads of families. Many female leaders were replaced by returned male officers (White, 1989) and many others put husbands' careers before theirs and were willing to return to family duties. This tendency has been continuously existed along

with the endeavour to promote gender equality and equity of the Vietnamese Government during DOI MOI period.

3.5.7 DOI MOI era since 1986: gender's complexity

Recognising at the Sixth Party Congress in 1986 that the hybrid economic model borrowed from the former USSR would not work in the condition of Vietnam at that time, the CPV took a more radical approach to introduce DOI MOI – an open policy to renovate the economic system (L. D. Long, et al., 2000) and to engage Vietnam in the international arena. The shift from a centrally planned economy to a market economy operating via state regulations and orientations towards socialism had brought fundamental changes in Vietnam. Along with DOI MOI, the government had continued to initiate laws and policies to promote gender equality including legislating gender equality; promoting women's participation in education and production; attempting to reduce women's domestic responsibilities; introducing new ideologies of equality, and organising women to advance their interests (Que, 1995). In education, the number of female students had been improved at all levels. In primary and secondary education, the literacy rate of female students aged ten and up was 88.2 percent in 1999 (Anh & Hung, 2000), especially, impressive achievements had been made with regard to the number of women accessing colleges and universities. In 1988, the number of women enrolled at the universities reached 41 percent and 37.5 percent of university graduate²⁶. In recent years, the number of female students enrolled in colleges and university has occupied more than a haft of the total (Nghĩa, 2009).

²⁶ From the paper presented by Dr Chu Tuan Nha, professor of Ministry of Technology and Environment at the conference of Women intellectual's role in the renovation of Vietnam held in Hanoi September 1993 in Que, T. T. (1995). Gender issues in Vietnam's development (p.187-206). In I. Norlund, C. L. Gates & V. C. Dam (Eds.). (1995), *Vietnam in a changing world*. Curzon Press.

In terms of employment, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs of Vietnam [MOLISA] on employment and unemployment in the period from 1996 to 2005 (cited in Vo, 2009), women constituted 49 percent of the labour force with 21.7 million women of working age from fifteen to fifty five in 2005. DOI MOI, therefore, brought more opportunities for Vietnamese women to be involved in economic and social activities, especially when women could contribute to the family income, which leads to the improvement in equality with men (Vo, 2009).

3.5.7.1 Challenges for women in DOI MOI

Despite the above promising numbers, a result that any previous regimes in the history could not achieve, practically, women's full participation in the society was still under-expected. In education, for example, even if the number of female students had improved over the years, women's representation in the higher levels of education [master and doctor] was still lower than that of men. In her edited book on the image of Vietnamese women in the twenty first century, Tuyet (2005) describes the development of intellectual women as a tower-shaped chart that has no high summit. In 1999, only 14.19 percent of women gained doctoral degrees, 4.14 percent were conferred the title associate professor and 2.9 percent were professors (Tuyet, 2005). The number of women faculty members, who ranked above lecturer were rarely, and a few universities had female administrators (Bunck, 1998).

As well, the number of women, although was higher than that of men in the labour force, mostly clustered around low demand fields and low wage jobs. Women occupied 70 percent of workers in textile and garment labour, 100 percent in preschool; 80 percent in primary education schools and 82 percent in health care as nurses (Anh &

Hung, 2000). Research in China suggests that gender relations become more unequal during market transition and economic development (Xie & Hannum, 1996). This question also has already been raised in the former USSR and Eastern European countries (Anh & Hung, 2000). Generating from this fact, the questions were posed about the effects of socialist policies in the fight against centuries of patriarchal Confucian and their influence on gender relations and policies for reducing familial burdens for women in Vietnam (Knodel, Loi, Jayakody, & Huy, 2004).

3.5.7.2 Women are both the winners and the losers in DOI MOI

The fact that Vietnamese government as the patron of women's rights intentionally converted the gender issue into a political ideology resulted in the women's subordination embedded in patriarchy of male centre family and kinship networks, symbolic system and socioeconomic structures, was unchallenged. In addition, the original reason to implement the DOI MOI was generated from the economic downturn rather than from the social issues including gender relations. Thus, the lingering patriarchal Confucian tradition still pervades contemporary Vietnamese society. In spite of many socialist policies for decades that encourage gender equality, son-preferred custom remains strong and housework is even so considered unsuitable for men (Belanger, 2002; Goodkind, 1995; Que, 1995). Vietnamese people have continued to unconsciously welcome a definition of a good woman by her adherence to the Confucian women's three obediences.

The increasing number of women participating in the labour workforce during DOI MOI did not prove that women's family duties were alleviated. According to the results of 2001 World Values Survey [WVS] conducted in Vietnam, being influenced

by the push for gender equality of the socialist regime, nearly all Vietnamese [97 percent] think that both husband and wife should contribute to the household income (Dalton, Hac, Nghi, & Ngoc, 2002). Thus, being a working woman becomes a legitimate identity in contemporary Vietnam. At the same time, being affected by the patriarchal system of gender relation, adherence to traditional roles of women is common among Vietnamese women. Consequently, women in Vietnam carry double responsibilities because they not only earn a living from work but also fulfil their roles as mothers and as wives at home (Ha, 1992). Changing from a centrally planned economy to a market economy means a reduction in state subsidies with families having to pay for the increasing costs of medical care and educational expenses (Vo, 2009). For example, before DOI MOI, the state subsidised education from primary education to the college and university levels. However, this policy has been changed when DOI MOI was implemented as the government only subsidises primary education and supports some poor families and ethnic minorities in higher levels of education. Thus, women have to face the tension between the pressure to earn money and the responsibility of the caregivers of children and housework (Thi, 2001). That decline of subsidised state service for childcare and family duties is claimed to lead to greater housework burdens placed on Vietnamese women since DOI MOI had implemented (Chen and Hiebert, 1994 cited in Knodel, et al., 2004). The length of women's working day is increased with the lack of this supporting system. The figures of the 2002 Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey (cited in Vo, 2009) showed that the average hours spent per day on housework by women aged 15 and over is 2.5 times more than men in urban areas and 2.3 times in rural areas.

Although the DOI MOI gives women freedom in choosing jobs, [especially in

the newly developed private sectors], exchanging and assessing necessary information about production and consumption (Anh & Hung, 2000) and women's full participation in political, economic and social activities has been legalised and promoted, studies have argued that inequality between men and women in society has increased in practice and women status has been gradually eroded unofficially (e.g. ADB, 2002; Anh & Hung, 2000; Beresford, 1994; Thi, 2001). Most of the employers, even in the state sector, do not like to recruit women because of the potential financial loss associated with child bearing and child rearing (Vo & Strachan, 2008). Among the workers, who lost their job in market economy in DOI MOI, women accounted for from 60 to 70 percent (Huong, 2001). Therefore, women have to work harder to compete with men in the workplace to secure their positions as well as to do their best at home to maintain family happiness. As long as women are treated equally as men regardless of their different natural and social responsibilities and special needs, it will be another type of gender discrimination. The ambivalent influences of DOI MOI on women life in the contemporary Vietnam are indeed complicated and the situation is yet in a state of flux. As Anh and Hung (2000) argue, Vietnamese women are both the winners and the losers in the market economy in Vietnam. In such context, how do the Vietnamese women's careers advance?

3.6 Women's career advancement

While there is an extensive of literature on women's career advancement in other contexts, especially in the Western settings, knowledge on this issue in Vietnam is still limited. Career advancement for Vietnamese women is mostly described by achieved numbers and percentages of women in their working positions by types of

positions, institutional characteristics, earnings, effects of gender and years of experiences in the reports of government, national and international organisations and in some independent studies on gender relations, gender equality and equity; and other women's issues conducted by Western specialists and a group of Vietnamese scholars (e.g. Anh & Hung, 2000; ILO, 2003, 2007; L. D. Long, et al., 2000; Mitchell, 2000; NCFAW & GSO, 2005; Thi, 2001; Tuyet, 2005 et al.).

Despite these optimistic numbers mentioned earlier, the under-representation of women in leadership positions in practice has shown an existing gender disproportion in the workplace. In other words, those mentioned figures on labour force participation rates of Vietnamese women could not translate into similar figures of women's representation in leadership and management. The career advancement of Vietnamese women, therefore, significantly lags behind that of Vietnamese men.

In all organisations and occupations, men hold the majority of senior administrative and upper level positioning (Vo, 2009). In the state sector, the number of women as Department Directors and Deputy Directors in ministries and state-owned enterprises had been falling from 13 percent and 12.1 percent in 1992 to 12.1 percent and 8.1 percent respectively in 2002 (NCFAW & GSO, 2005). In 2005, while the proportion of women Deputy Directors had increased to 14 percent, the number of women Directors was down to 6 percent (Quý & Nga, 2008). The barriers or the "bamboo ceiling" effect that deter women's career advancement in Vietnam ranging from personal, organisational to social obstacles such as work-life conflict; recruitment policy that exclude women candidates²⁷, fewer opportunities in training and career

²⁷ In Vietnam, employers, including those in state-owned enterprises, do not like hiring women because of the potential financial loss associated with child bearing and child rearing. Although prohibited by

advancement; excluded from informal network; prejudices to women managers and the Confucian male preference that makes women be thought to deserve little authority, to show less commitment, being perceived as less intelligent and less experienced than men (Vo, 2009; Vo & Strachan, 2008). The opportunities for women to obtain senior positions in Vietnam also have been affected further by requirements for the political involvement [becoming VCP member] in the state sector and women's retirement age policy [women working in public sector are obligated to retire at fifty five, while men can work until sixty]. There are concrete examples of these barriers and challenges that occur in all occupations throughout Vietnam. The current situation of senior women leaders in higher education is one of these cases.

3.7 Current situation of women leaders in higher education

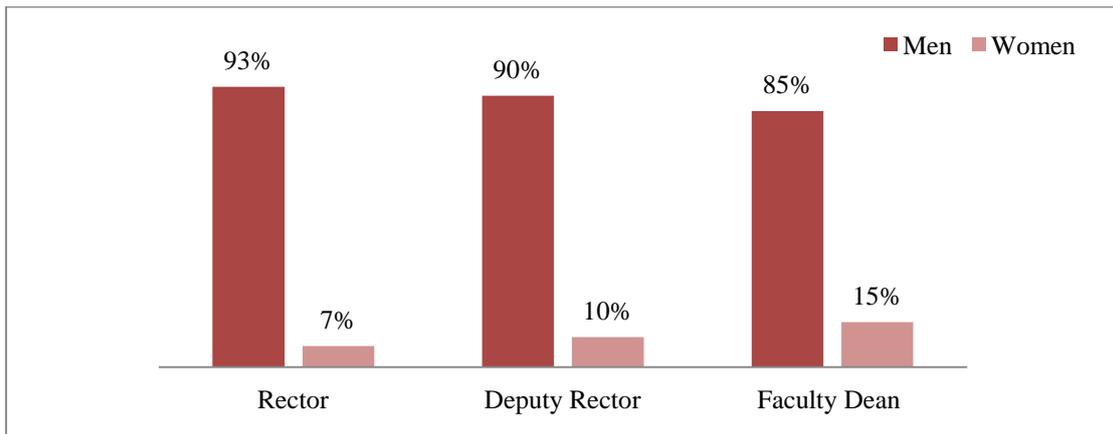
The career advancement of women in higher education is closely linked to the national development and changes in the social awareness of women status in the social life. Despite the progress made over the last two decades, for example, female literacy was 90.5 percent in 2008²⁸ and women occupying half of the student population in the colleges and universities (see Nghĩa, 2009), only a minority of Vietnamese women could attain senior leadership positions in higher education. Survey data in thirty five higher education institutions conducted by Nghi and Sloper in 1991 showed that the representation rate of women at that time in the Rector and Deputy Rector positions was very low with only 4.7 percent. More than fifteen years later, though this number had

labor laws and other regulations, recruitment advertisements sometimes state publicly “*male candidates only*”, even when the jobs can be done by both sexes. So far this practice has not been subjected to any warning or penalty from authorities (Vo & Strachan, 2008).

²⁸ Source from the speech of Ms Nguyen Thanh Hoa, Deputy Minister of MOLISA at the fifty fourth session of the Commission on the status of women of the United Nations in New York, March, 2nd 2010.

increased, as presented in Mai's (2007) study in fourteen public colleges and universities in Vietnam, the result confirmed that women are still under-represented at all senior levels in university management.

Figure 3-1: *The percentage of women and men at different senior managerial levels in fourteen public colleges and universities of Mai's (2007) research*



Source: Adapted from Mai (2007)

This modest number of women also reveals that the journey to the senior positions of women in higher education in Vietnam is not easy. Especially, as cited in Chapter 1, Vietnamese women are extremely scarce in the Rector/Director position in public universities. Before examining the reasons leading to this disappointing situation of women in higher education leadership in Vietnam, I want to describe briefly the governance of higher education, the criteria and procedures for selecting Rectors in public colleges and universities in Vietnam that women in this field have experienced.

3.7.1 The governance of higher education

At the national level, higher education in Vietnam is firmly under the control of the state as “the public sector of higher education remains effectively a part of state bureaucracy” (Khanh & Hayden, 2010). The government has exercised its power in

higher education management through several ministries with regulatory responsibilities across the system (Hayden & Thiep, 2007; Khanh & Hayden, 2010). For example, the MOET has managed about thirty public higher education institutions (Thiep, 2004). A number of other public higher education institutions are under the supervision of ministries²⁹ that related to their areas such as laws universities, institutes and colleges are under Ministry of Legislations, art schools and conservatories are belonging to Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Some provincial authorities are in charge of the public colleges and universities located in their areas. Thus, the senior leadership appointments at public higher education institutions in Vietnam have to abide to the selection criteria as in other state owned organisations, services and enterprises. In higher education in Vietnam, in the past, all Rectors were appointed by the Minister of the MOET. Since 1990, an electoral process for the Rector selection was used firstly in the large universities (Nghi & Sloper, 1995) and now has been legalised at all colleges and universities in Vietnam. However, the final result of Rector/Director voting of all higher education institutions in Vietnam must be reported to the MOET (Hayden & Thiep, 2007; IIE, 2004).

3.7.2 Rector selection process in public universities

Different from the Rector selection in most Western contexts and in some other countries in the region, the Rector selection in public universities in Vietnam is not transparent as it not advertised publicly or decided through open national competitions, which are assessed by independent committees. The electoral process for the Rector

²⁹ Currently, there are thirteen ministries [excluded the MOET] that manage a number of public higher education institutions (Khanh & Hayden, 2010)

selection is happened merely within a higher education institution based on the voting of all people working in that institution. It is understood that the nominated candidates should be the members of that university or college. A process of canvassing the staff's opinions is usually conducted before voting begins. This process is often influenced by a tendency for university staff to focus their supports and votes for the only one candidate, who is considered most likely to be acceptable to the relevant ministry (Khanh & Hayden, 2010). The key figure behind this canvassing process is the board of rectorate/directorate in consultation with the general secretary of the college or university Party committee³⁰.

To be nominated as a Rector candidate at public colleges and universities, according to the Article 31 in the Charter for Higher Education Institutions promulgated in pursuance of the Decision number 153/2003/ QĐ-TTg dated of July 30th 2003 by the Prime Minister, a person has to possess³¹:

- (a) Good moral and political loyalty³²; high prestige in the scientific research and education, and appropriate leadership skill with at least five years experience in the administrative positions at division level upward;*
- (b) A doctorate;*

³⁰ As mentioned previously, each Vietnamese state institution has to establish a Party committee of its own as the symbolic governing body. Though the rector is the most powerful person in the colleges and universities, the General Secretary of this Communist committee also plays a crucial part in the university's decision making process.

³¹ In Vietnamese:

a) Có phẩm chất chính trị, đạo đức tốt, có uy tín trong giới khoa học, giáo dục, có năng lực và đã có ít nhất 5 năm tham gia quản lý giáo dục đại học từ cấp bộ môn trở lên;

b) Có học vị Tiến sĩ;

c) Có sức khỏe; tuổi khi bổ nhiệm Hiệu trưởng trường đại học công lập không quá 55 đối với nam và 50 đối với nữ.

³² This condition assumes that the candidates should be Communist Party members.

(c) *Good health and no more than fifty five years of age for men and fifty for women at the time of the appointment for public institutions*³³.

Also, in this Article, “*in special cases, the Minister of Education and Training [MOET], in cooperation with other agencies [governing relevant ministries] asks for the consultation of the Prime Minister before making the decision*”³⁴. It means that in some special cases, for example, when candidates may not meet one or more of the selection criteria, or in the situation, where there is no consensus within the university about the nominated candidate but because of a very special condition of a certain higher education institution, this candidate is considered the best choice. Thus, the Rector position in public colleges and universities in Vietnam may sometimes, be considered as political arrangements. Each Rector’s term lasts for five years and a person can be voted to assume this leadership position for a maximum of two terms³⁵. It is noted that although most of the Rector candidates in Vietnam are well-trained in their academic specialisation, none of them either officially takes part in management courses or has been trained in management before being promoted. “Almost all Rectors, deans, and other managers have had to acquire their management knowledge and skills on-the-job” (Nghị & Sloper, 1995, p. 108)

In the past, the Rector positions at public universities were totally occupied by men. The presence of women in this position had begun since the middle of 1990s with the extremely limited number that can be estimably counted on two hands.

³³ A rector term is five year period. The retired age from administrative positions is fifty five for women and fifty for men. This criterion is set up to ensure that appointed persons can be in their rector position for at least one term.

³⁴ In Vietnamese: *Những trường hợp đặc biệt Bộ trưởng Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo thống nhất với cơ quan chủ quản xin ý kiến Thủ tướng Chính phủ trước khi quyết định;*

³⁵ Source from the Charter for Higher Education Institutions promulgated in pursuance of the Decision number 153/2003/ QĐ-TTg dated of July 30th 2003 by the Prime Minister

3.7.3 Challenges to women's representation in university management

As mentioned in Chapter 1, though it did not directly touch on senior women leaders' experiences in higher education in Vietnam, Mai's (2007) research indicates the problems that Vietnamese women have to face to participate in university management.

Among the main obstacles that prevent Vietnamese women from university management are factors such as personal barriers, including work-life balance, lack of confidence and lack of motivation (N. T. N. Bich, 2000; Mai, 2007). Forty five percent of women participants in Mai's (2007) survey reported that they had to refuse promotion opportunities in their career due to family responsibilities and a slightly lower number [43 percent] had to give up other life goals to concentrate on the job. In trying to fulfil their responsibilities both at work and in the family, women have to work hard twice as much as men do. Normally, they have to spend 9.2 hours in their offices and 4.5 hours for housework (Mai, 2007). Meanwhile, according to a survey on the status of intellectual women in their families, with regard to the division of labour, husbands in those families were reported to carry out household tasks such as going to market with 4.5 percent; cooking - 1.1 percent; house cleaning - 2.4 percent and washing dishes and clothes - 1.1 percent and elderly care was 3.4 percent (Diem, 1990). Thus, fifty five percent of women believed that they lacked of time and felt stressed in trying to maintain a balance between work and family. Mai (2007) argues that living in a culture, where the power of Confucianism, which emphasises the value of the family and patriarchal gender relations, still pervades; women find out that it is very hard to leave their roles as wives and mothers to completely engage in leadership.

Women in Mai's (2007) research were also less likely to promote themselves to leadership positions. Social expectations and women's socialisation make Vietnamese

women tend to believe that having a successful career is the men's goal while women are not obligated to fight hard to advance their career for social capital. Also, they are afraid of failure when entering the environment, where men are traditionally considered the best leaders. They are less ambitious, less confident to compete with men in senior positions and generally are passive when being appointed to those positions (Mai, 2007). Eighty six percent of women respondents considered their appointments were the institutional assignment but not from their own wishes or interests whereas only 13 percent of them expressed that they had motivation to go up to higher positions.

Gender stereotypes at the workplace are other barriers for women to advance in senior higher education leadership in Vietnam (Mai, 2007). As women are regarded as lacking in leadership experience and not competent enough to be promoted to the top level, 56 percent of respondents in Mai's (2007) study asserted that they were less likely to be promoted to more important managerial levels than their male counterparts. Gender stereotypes also contribute to decrease inherent low confidence and low motivation for promotion by the women surveyed (Mai, 2007). Forty six percent of respondents thought that women only were capable in positions such as librarians or clerical staff. With regard to the senior administrative levels, only 11 percent believed that women could undertake the principal responsibilities while 33 percent suggested that women should stay in assistant roles. Similarity, only 13 percent asserted that women could be effective at university level [Rector, deputy Rector]. These numbers were 23 percent at faculty level [dean, deputy dean] and 33 percent at division level [chief of division].

Another challenge is the sense of incongruity between their roles as leaders and as women (Mai, 2007). Thirty six percent of women stated that they had to be very

tactful in their leadership positions to avoid the criticisms that they lack of feminine characteristics while showing their assertiveness and determination. Twenty six percent received negative attitudes when performing command and control leadership style, which is considered suitable for male leaders. Other 39 percent said that their appearance and poise were more strictly observed than those of their male colleagues.

Lack of institutional support has contributed to the under-representation of women in the university management in Vietnam (N. T. N. Bich, 2000; Mai, 2007). Though all the public universities in Vietnam are committed to include more women at all ranks and management, policies have not been implemented effectively. Most of the women in Mai's (2007) research considered these policies were heavily propagandic and less feasible because they were top-down policies, but were not originated from the consciousness that women play an important part in the university management and the need to strengthen women's role in this field (Mai, 2007). Fifteen percent of respondents asserted that there had been a lack of commitment from the university leaders to advance women as leaders. Another 15 percent stated that this issue [enhancing women's status in the university management] was not a priority in their university leaders' piles of work lists.

Cultural and traditional views on gender relations are another impediment senior women in higher education in Vietnam have to face in their careers (Mai, 2007). Like other women in academia in some Southeast Asian countries and women leaders at the universities in China, Hong Kong and in Japan shown in studies and reports by Luke's (2001); Wei's (2007) and McNeill's (2007), women in Vietnam have experienced sceptical views in their relations with male colleagues as well. To expand a supporting network and to be recognised, leaders need to actively socialise both with women and

with men. In Vietnam, these opportunities often happen after work. But Vietnamese women can neither drink nor go out after working hours. They will be observed inquisitively and their virtues will be questioned by not only the society but also by their family members. A woman in Mai's (2007) study said that:

“as a woman manager, I have met some difficulties. Time for my parents, my husband and my children is less than before. At the beginning of my term, because of the fact that I was not trained or did not participate in any management courses, I had to read documents on university management as well as personnel issues by myself. I had to meet with other university leaders and senior managers to ask about their experiences or discuss with them about specific situations happening in my daily work. My husband sometimes misunderstood and my marriage had been threatened”(p.139)³⁶

For this reason, more than 30 percent of women in Mai's (2007) study claimed that they were excluded from informal networks which could help them share difficulties in their jobs as well as learn more from senior administrators. Furthermore, it prevented them from assessing promotion information and the necessary steps to advance in their career. Seventy eight percent women in Mai's sample stated that they had fewer promotion opportunities in comparison with their male colleagues.

One more reason leading to the under-representation of women in the senior leadership position in colleges and universities that was missed in Mai's (2007) study but this situation has happened in Vietnam in practice as it is quoted in studies on women leaders in higher education in other contexts, especially, in the Asian countries. It is the small proportion of women, who hold higher education qualifications; an important criterion for promotion to senior position and a strong indication of research activities (see Cooke, 2006; Luke, 2001; Tsang & Zhang, 2006). In Vietnam, the

³⁶ Với tư cách là nữ cán bộ quản lý, tôi đã gặp những khó khăn sau. Thời gian dành cho chồng con, ba mẹ ít hơn so với lúc chưa làm quản lý. Giai đoạn đầu, khi mới làm quản lý, trong điều kiện chưa được đào tạo qua trường lớp quản lý, tôi phải tự đọc tài liệu khá nhiều về công tác quản lý nhà trường, công tác nhân sự. Tôi phải tiếp xúc nhiều hiệu trưởng, cán bộ quản lý giáo dục lâu năm để học hỏi kinh nghiệm hoặc trao đổi để xin ý kiến xử lý những tình huống khó khăn của cơ quan. Đôi lúc còn bị chồng hiểu lầm, có lúc tưởng chừng hạnh phúc gia đình tan bị vỡ.

percentage of female professors, associate professors and PhDs at colleges and universities remains very modest. Currently, women only account for roughly 11 percent of total doctors and masters, 5 percent of full professorship and associate professors and only 1 percent of professors are women³⁷. In comparison with the statistics on intellectual women in 1999 in Tuyet's (2005) edited book mentioned previously [see 3.5.5.1], the number of women professors was considerably decreased. This low number of women with higher degrees has led to a stalling of women's career progress at colleges and universities in Vietnam in contrast to a faster rate for their male counterparts. According to one female Vietnamese professor, who has been just conferred this title in 2010³⁸; scientific research is hard work, which involves a lot of energy and time. Meanwhile, women cannot expend all their time on research activities as they have to fulfil their family duties. This woman professor confirmed that in general, women in Vietnam have to put more effort and work harder than men in order to achieve successes in their careers.

Besides the common obstacles that Vietnamese women share with women leaders in higher education in all over the world mentioned above, like other working Vietnamese women, women in higher education in Vietnam, especially, women in public colleges and universities face other local challenges that may affect their career advancements. To some extent, the appointment to senior leadership positions in public sector of higher education in Vietnam tends to be political selection but it is not as

³⁷ Speech of Prof. Dr. Banh Tien Long, Vice-President of the State Council for Professor Title of Vietnam at the meeting with female professors and associate professors appointed in 2010 on the occasion of Vietnamese Women Day on October 20th, 2010. Source from <http://english.vietnamnet.vn> retrieved on October 26, 2010.

³⁸ In the meeting with female professors and associate professors appointed in 2010 on the occasion of Vietnamese Women Day on October 20th, 2010. Source from <http://english.vietnamnet.vn> retrieved on October 26, 2010.

transparent as that happened to Malaysian women in higher education in Luke's (2001) research. In case of Vietnam, to be a member of CPV is unofficially compulsory for those, who want to be appointed to leadership positions in all occupations, particularly, for people working in the state sector. Among more than three million CPV's members³⁹, women have only occupied a very modest number in Party committees at all levels with less than 13 percent in the term from 2006-2011⁴⁰. According to the statistics of the Central Party Committee and VWU in 2006, the percentage of women participating in the Tenth Party Congress was 8.12 percent, among those, the number of women, who are party members at city/provincial; district and commune/ward levels were 11.75 percent, 14.74 percent and 15.08 percent respectively⁴¹. Based on this information, the ratio of men to women in party membership was nearly ten to one. This fact indicates that women are minority in CPV's membership. It also means that the promotion opportunities to senior positions in public sector, for example, in public colleges and universities for women are narrower than that for men in Vietnam.

The compulsory retirement age for women in all state public sectors including public colleges and universities in higher education in Vietnam is fifty five, whereas men can work until sixty. Thus, being promoted, women have to prepare in five years earlier than men. This could be a double challenge for Vietnamese women, who may also have had to pass over earlier opportunities in their career development (Worldbank, 2006). Following is a speech of woman, which summarises difficulties that Vietnamese

³⁹ Source from the www.cpv.org.vn retrieved on August 26th 2010.

⁴⁰ Source from the Office of the National Committee for Advance of Women (NCFAW) from <http://hoilhpn.org.vn/> retrieved on August 26th 2010.

⁴¹ Source from the www.cpv.org.vn and <http://hoilhpn.org.vn/> retrieved on August 26th 2010.

women working in the state sector have experienced in their career advancement because of the current retirement age policy.

“I am 30 years old and just completing my master’s degree. There is a special political training for senior civil servants, which is an important condition for civil servants to be promoted to a leadership position. The criteria for participants are men under 41 and women under 36 years old with a certain salary level (3.6). In order to get this level, I would need 8 years more. By this time I will be 38 years old and will no longer be eligible to participate in the training. If I were a man, I would still be eligible until I was 40. It is so unfair. I have worked so hard but already my chances are over before I ever really began!”⁴²

Because of such policy, by the time a Vietnamese woman rises to a senior position she is close to compulsory retirement age and automatically is not considered for further trainings or promotions. Most of women in Mai’s (2007) research [57 percent] already were between forty to fifty years old when they were appointed as chiefs of division, the starting point of administration in the colleges and universities. “This effectively puts an early hold on women’s advancement to senior positions comparison with men” (Vo, 2009, p. 233).

It is important to note that according to the Government’s Decree No. 71/2000/ND-CP issued on November 23rd 2000 regarding to the prolongation of retirement age for public employees including those, who have possessed a doctorate or have been conferred titles of associate professor and professor working in public institutes, academies, and universities can be considered to extend their working time from one year to no more than five years. However, during this time, as cited in the Article 3 of this Decree, they do not hold any leadership or managerial positions. It means that at the age of fifty five, women working in academe have to retire from the

⁴² Speech of a female officer of Ministry of Planning and Investment at World Bank gender workshop in Hanoi Source from Worldbank. (2006). Vietnam Country Gender Assessment. Retrieved 27/9/2007, from www.worldbank.org

administrative positions but can continue to work [for example, as full time teaching staff] until they are sixty unless they possess such credentials. However, as mentioned previously, with only 11 percent of total doctors and masters, 5 percent of full professorship and associate professors are women⁴³; this chance is very slim for women working in the public sector of higher education. Because this retirement age extension policy is also applied to men and it does not allow both male and female academics to hold any decision-making positions, the essence of the compulsory current retirement age is still a cutting Vietnamese women's careers short five years early and harming their professional development.

From the review of literature in the Vietnamese context, it appears that journeys to the senior leadership position in higher education have not been smooth for Vietnamese women. Besides common barriers that Vietnamese women shares with senior women leaders in higher education worldwide, they also have to deal with further challenges that generated from the distinctive cultural, political, economic and social characteristics of the Vietnamese society. These challenges are the legacies of the patriarchal Confucian philosophy on gender relations that is not thoroughly addressed, which preserves unconsciously traditional values and beliefs that welcome women's subordination to men, for example, by recognising "three obediences" as women's virtues; of constant wars, in which, because of the influence of collectivism, the essence of women's liberalisation and movements was relied on and for national interests [as means to gather women to take part in the national liberation] but not based on gender relations in a patriarchal society; and of a DOI MOI, a renovation policy that

⁴³ Speech of Prof. Dr. Banh Tien Long, Vice-President of the State Council for Professor Title of Vietnam at the meeting with female professors and associate professors appointed in 2010 on the occasion of Vietnamese Women Day on October 20th, 2010. Source from <http://english.vietnamnet.vn> retrieved on October 26, 2010.

push women at the same time to have to work hard to compete with men in the workplace while fulfilling their multiple roles as wives, mothers and daughters. It is within a combination of these factors and influences, a few Vietnamese women have stood out and achieved the top position as Rectors and directors in public higher education institutions. But how did they get there?

The literature review in the previous chapter helped to inform several factors that are considerably important for women in other settings, especially, in the US, to advance in higher education with the position of college and university President. Given the influence of parents, husband and spouses; educational achievement; mentoring; networking and appropriate leadership styles have helped women in those contexts in their career successes, this study aimed to reveal the practice of a number of Vietnamese women Rectors at selected public universities in Vietnam to study how these factors exhibit in the Vietnamese women Rectors' lives and to identify other factors, if any, that enable them succeed in obtaining their leadership positions. In the next chapter, I will discuss the specific processes and steps in conducting this research.

Chapter 4: Research methods

To this point, the theoretical bases of the study and some links to literature on leadership have been outlined. A sketch of aspects of Vietnamese history and culture was also provided in the previous chapter as a means to situate the study and the contexts, in which the occurrence of women Rectors can be understood. To recap this far, it can be seen that the possibility of women becoming Rectors in Vietnam arose at a particular time; with the implementation of the DOI MOI policy in 1986. Further to this, it has been argued that knowledge these women have of this new social reality, their standpoints as female Rectors, can be found in experiences they recount of moving into and working as a Rector. With this in mind, to answer the core question of what understanding about women leaders in higher education in Vietnam can be obtained from the lived-experiences of a few successful women Rectors at selected public universities in their journeys to the top, the questions guiding this study were to do with: their personal backgrounds, the paths they followed to gain this top level position; their leadership practices including challenges [if any] and solutions; and the advice they would pass on to other women aspiring to enter similar senior leadership positions.

This chapter details the research methodology and the forms of analysis used to describe and interpret these questions. This is done across four sections. The first section explains the reasons for the use of qualitative research and the approach taken to a case study approach and a multi-case case study design. The bases for participant selection, how they were approached and profiled are then detailed. Data collection methods and processes are outlined in section two which includes a description of how the in-depth interviews and observations were carried out and details of document reviews of the participant's backgrounds. In section three I describe the data collection

process and how I prepared myself to do the fieldwork on location in Vietnam. A description is then given of the problems involved in transcribing the interviews and then translating them from Vietnamese into English. Section four provides an overview of the processes of data analysis and the generation of categories and themes for determining the standpoints of the four Rectors and how the data were coded and presented. The chapter concludes with the problems of validation of the research, ethical considerations, issues of conducting research in the Vietnamese context and my own thoughts from the field.

4.1 Reasons for qualitative research

My study was conducted based on qualitative research methodology. According to Dorothy Smith (2007) what happens to women and how they experience it can contribute to new models and “alternative ways of thinking” (p.86) about how women express their concrete experiences. This can be the point for building new knowledge from concrete descriptions of their own life histories. Qualitative research is used in the manner Smith describes for two reasons. The reflections of the women Rectors provides little known information of what women do in gaining and operating as Rectors in an area previously the domain of men. The number of women Rectors in public universities, only no more than a handful since 1986, means that quantitative approaches are not useful due to this small population. On this basis, the study began with asking “what” Rectors did and “how” they went about their work as Rectors. Qualitative questions are a kind that is especially suitable for studies, which are exploratory and aim to establish a basic understanding of the overall situation (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & S.Lincoln, 2000; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The approach is

especially useful for researchers when information is lacking in an area and it is important to discover rather than validate or confirm the results of preceding studies. Given the fact that the situation of senior women leaders in higher education in Vietnam is a little known topic and their experiences are still hidden, qualitative approach is a suitable choice to implement this study.

Furthermore, qualitative researchers seek to understand about the way things are, why they are that way and how the participants in the context perceive them (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002). It means “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (2005, p. 3) without a guiding statement about what might or might not be true about those experiences or their contexts (Gay, et al., 2006). This type of research allows a researcher the opportunity to enter participants’ worlds and to see this world through their lens while making discoveries, which will “contribute to the development of empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 16). These characteristics of qualitative research define and blend with my aim, which was to gain an understanding the situation of women leaders in higher education in Vietnam through the experiences of women Rectors at selected public universities.

According to Creswell (2007), there are five acceptable qualitative approaches that are most frequently used including narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. Each method represents a different approach, but all are exploratory and aim to describe the human situations through rich language in essence (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & S.Lincoln, 2000). While a form of auto ethnography was used to describe my personal history and my position within the field studied, a

case study, specifically, multi-case case study approach was intentionally taken to capture the experiences of women rector participants.

4.1.1 Case study approach

Case study approach is used primarily when researchers aim to obtain a comprehensive understanding of a relatively small number of persons, phenomena, or situations (Patton, 2002). It also helps to gather, analyse and interpret data about a phenomenon which is inadequately explained within existing theories (Merriam, 1998). As cited in Chapter 1, while other problems of contemporary higher education in Vietnam such as autonomy, financing, quality and quantity have been discussed, studying gender in higher education in leadership, on the situation of a few senior women leaders is a new issue in this field. As preceding studies have not adequately focused on this problem, the case study method becomes an instrumental tool for examining multiple perspectives on this topic. Within a case study design, it is possible to uncover concrete aspects of the lives of women Rectors as they are bounded in time and by activities, which have to be carried out by women as university Rectors. As I see, the strengths of a case study helps to not only understand a particular individual or organisation but also to understand the broader context and other related issues (Stake, 2000). Insights obtained from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research (Merriam, 1998) and to suggest implications for the situation of women leaders in higher education in Vietnam as a whole. This move from method, to descriptions of the cases of women as standpoints in Chapters 5 to 8 and the ways in which women become and engage as Rectors is the basis for defining the implications

for the continuation of women into these positions in contemporary Vietnam in Chapter 10.

4.1.1.1 Multi-case case study design

I applied multi-case case study design in my research with the intention to pursue women Rectors to share their unique stories. With a small population of women Rectors in public universities in Vietnam, a collection of cases helps me to understand the researched problem more thoroughly based on the use of a replication strategy. I lean towards Yin's (2003) view that the development of consistent findings, over multiple cases, then can be considered a very robust finding, which mitigates inherent weaknesses of a single case study approach. This means that two or more cases investigated within the same study can be considered as equivalent to multiple experiments that is, to follow replication logic. If the replications are found in several cases, the researchers can have more confidence in the overall results. Both case studies and multi-case studies are usually studies of particularisation more than generalisation (Stake, 2006). A multi-case study increased the confidence of my analytic inferences and conclusions by serving me informing the common characteristics of women participants in journeys they followed as they became respected and established Rectors in selected public universities in Vietnam. In addition, since my study identified itself an exploration in nature, if all four cases of women Rectors, or most of these, provide similar results, the result of this study could be a considerable supporting source for the development of a preliminary knowledge on the study of women leaders in higher education in Vietnam (Eisenhardt, 1989).

4.1.2 Participants' selection

4.1.2.1 The search for participants

This qualitative multi-case study research's population were derived from purposive sampling, a strategy in which, sample members are selected because they have particular criteria (Miles & Huberman, 1994) or who have knowledge or direct experiences regarding the research inquiry (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003). This has been the purpose in my study required women Rectors at public universities in Vietnam. Owing to my working experience for the MOET for more than a decade, I was able immediately to name those women. However, being conscious to recognise the importance of choosing the cases (Yin, 2003), and to ensure my own interests would not bias the research study, I had to seek the permission of the Chief of the Minister's Office in the MOET to allow me to access internal annual college and university phone directories to look for my potential participants. These annual directories provide the Rector's mailing addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers. Based on my search on these documents, there have been seven women, who have been appointed as Rectors at public universities in Vietnam. Serving as a woman official of the Higher Education Department of the MOET, I was lucky enough to have either direct contact or effective relationships, which allowed me to approach six of them including both sitting and retired women Rectors. One former Rector, because of her present high ranking status in politics⁴⁴, could not be contacted. All six remaining women were initially contacted by direct phone call and later by email to explain the purpose of the research and asking them to volunteer to participate in this study. Of these, four women agreed to

⁴⁴ This woman who changed from higher education to politics when she was in her available age to engage in senior leadership position in the public sector [under 55 years old]. Since she has moved to the politics, she also gained a special privilege that secures her position with strictly special protection as her position is equivalent as the Vice President of Vietnam.

involve themselves in the research while two others; one has been just in her position for two months and one, because of her busy schedule refused to take part in my study.

The four women Rectors came from different institutional contexts according to Mai's (2007) college and university grouping with one from Engineering and Industries, one from Arts and Cultures, and two from Economics and Law. This fits with Stake's (2006) emphasis on the value of diversity in a multi-case study. "An important reason for doing the multi-case study is to examine how the program or phenomenon performs in different environments. When cases are selected carefully, the design of a study can incorporate a diversity of contexts" (p. 23). On this base, the women participants each comprised a case of the past and present population of women in this position in Vietnam.

4.1.2.2 Profiles of participants

Four women Rectors were willing to take part in this study. Their ages ranged from middle forties to sixty. At the time of the interviews, all four women were married and had children with maximum of two. One woman has been in her first rector term for nearly two years and three others already retired from their offices and returned to full time teaching job at their institutions⁴⁵. Among them, three women have been promoted to be the Rectors after serving their universities for more than one or two decades. One woman had the very deep and special attachment to her institution, for which she worked because of her alumni status. They all have had institutional memory through their experiences to present their thoughts, feelings, ideas that enabled me to get a better understanding of women Rectors and what they have gone through in their journeys to

⁴⁵ See 3.7.2 in Chapter 3, part about the extension retirement age policy for people working in the public sector in Vietnam

the top. While all of the four women Rectors began their careers as faculty members in public universities, they were appointed to administrative positions at some different occasion and in different capacities. This provided an opportunity to learn of the complexity of their journeys to the rectorship and the contexts, in which they occurred.

4.1.3 Data collection methods

Given that the population was a small but elite group of women and that the purpose was to document and describe their experiences and points of view, the data collection methods had to rely mainly on in-depth interviews with Rectors themselves. Other fundamental methods relied on by qualitative researchers such as participating in the setting and direct observation and analysing documents and material culture as described by Marshall and Rossman (2006) had to be approached in other ways. The fact that I had encountered these women as part of my work made it possible for me to approach them personally for an in-depth interview, but the differences in rector status and interviewer had to be considered and planned for prior to the interviews. In this section I will describe the approach taken to interviewing and ways I used to back this up with other details that could broaden contextual aspects.

4.1.3.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews as employed in my study have been used extensively in qualitative research as the main method for data collection (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). An advantage of this form of interview is that it allows the interviewee the scope to reflect on past experiences and elaborate on them with much more depth than in a survey, where questions are asked without consideration of the contexts. Conducting in-depth interviews gave me the opportunity to capture the thoughts,

perceptions, feelings and experiences of the women participants in their own words for subsequent data interpretation. This type of interview also differs from direct observation as the intention is to elicit data that can not be observed. As Patton (2002) argues:

We cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things (p. 341).

This method of interviewing also fits within the traditional feminist model of qualitative research that claims to “convey a deeper feeling for or more emotional closeness to the persons studied” (Jayaratne, 1983, p. 145) since the voices of women have been ignored for a long time in social research and recorded history. This is also the case of these women Rectors within Vietnam. A difference is that the women being interviewed occupy high status positions, which had to be addressed when designing the interview questions and in conducting the interviews.

In Vietnam, Rectors, both women and men in public universities, are considered as elites. Working with those elites places a demand on the ability of the interviewer (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) who is often from a lower social position. This being the case for me. I had to prepare myself carefully to project an accurate understanding of the research and provide thoughtful interview questions. Otherwise, I would not be taken seriously by these women, who are themselves sophisticated in managing the interview process, for example from their experiences of interview with the press or other media (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Luff (1999, cited in Warren, 2002) points out that most feminist researchers often study “powerless” women. They always try to conduct interviews in a manner that does not further oppress the interviewees by

emphasising power-sharing and by not making the respondents feel vulnerable during the interview. Feminists claim that it is unacceptable for researchers to further oppress women in the name of academic research (Westmarland, 2001). However, these inherent assumptions in feminist studies may not be transferred to research on powerful women like mine on women Rectors. Interviewing those women indicates that the balance of power is not always tilted mainly towards the interviewer.

My aim was to focus on the experiences of women university Rectors. As this inquiry was considered as an exploratory one, and given the research topic is little-known, within its scope, I decided to exclude the voices of others such as the university staff, who work with them and their friends or family members. I wanted to listen only to the voices of the women rector participants first. Time constraints on the availability of the Rectors and my having to return twice to Vietnam to conduct the interviews meant that the one opportunity open to meet with them had to count if the research was to succeed in its purpose. This was to allow them the chance to give their own interpretations and thoughts about their experiences rather than rely on other people's interpretations on their lives.

Depending on the research questions, in-depth interviews are usually carried out based on a number of interview options such as structured, semi-structured, or open-ended forms (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In conducting this research, a semi-structured interview format was used. An advantage of this format is that while the researchers ask set of questions, the conversational style allows it to flow more naturally and make more room for the interviewees to react and talk freely about their common interests (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Thus the semi-structured interview format I used ensured that the same questions were asked to remain focusing on the topic of this study

as well as allowing for additional items emerging to be expanded on as the interviews progressed. The set of open-ended interview questions to answer guiding research questions [see Appendix 4] used in this study based on the research questions raised in Chapter 1 and with reference to the literature review. The interviews questions consisted of major areas about each Rector's family background, education, stages in her professional career, leadership experiences, challenges or barriers [if any] she encountered and coping strategies, views on women leaders and advice to other women contemplating an senior position in career. All the questions designed originally in English were then translated into Vietnamese to be sent to the Rectors in the lead into the interviews.

4.1.3.2 Observation and document review

Observations and document reviews were also carried out to supplement the in-depth interviews. This use of multi-methods or methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978 cited in Denzin, 2006) reflects an attempt to secure a significant understanding of the phenomena in question. Observation prior to and during the interviews provided a chance to understand the contexts, in which the women's behaviours took place, to note their body language and to learn things about which women might be reluctant to discuss in the interviews. Reviewing documents is "an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying the values and belief of participants in the setting" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 107). This was a useful source of well-grounded data that I drew on to gain information from curriculum vitae [CV], websites and newspaper and journal articles about the universities and women Rectors. In utilising these methods, it became apparent that as Fontana and Frey (2000) suggest, that "[h]uman beings are complex, and their lives are ever changing; the more methods we use to study them, the better our

chances to gain some understanding of how they construct their lives and the stories they tell us about them” (p.668).

4.1.4 Data collection process and fieldwork preparation

The data collection process actually began at the time when I received the confirmation to participate in my study from four women Rectors. Following their acceptances, I requested each of them to email me their CVs to enable me have a deeper understanding of their personal background, education and career path prior the interviews. I also looked for more information about them, their appointments and their institutions by a source of documents mentioned above to provide an audit trail corresponding to their CVs where information was available. Although I had initial contacts with those women at different levels while working for the MOET, this investigation in advance made me feel more secure and confident in later interviews with these elite women.

After receiving approval from the Ethic committee of Griffith University [EBL/24/08/HREC] in Australia in August 2008 for this study, I contacted the women again by mail and requested them to join me in planning the fieldwork by making suggestion how and at what time they would like to proceed. I informed them that I could start from the end December 2008 after preparing logistics to conduct interviews in Vietnam. I also reminded them that I would bring my daughter home and need time to settle down her study here. As a result, the interviews were undertaken in two stages.

In the first stage, two women were interviewed from late December 2008 to March 2009 and the next two between December 2009 and February 2010. The reasons for this long delay, on the one hand, was because of the timetable of some women were busy with two retired women Rectors teaching abroad for one semester. Because of the

nature of this study and the small population of women Rectors in public universities in Vietnam, I had little control over the choice of when the interviews were conducted; this depended on each woman's schedule. Therefore, I had to wait on their convenience and at one point; I thought that the thesis could not be completed if I had to wait longer.

On a brighter side, after bringing my daughter back to Vietnam from school in Australia, I realised the time it was taking for her to get used to the studying environment in Vietnam she was only in a first grade student when we left for Australia. On our return for the interviews I found that she could not write or think in proper Vietnamese. Thus, she had to learn again all those things and I had to help her in this matter. However, owing to this break after the first two interviews, I had time to review what I had done and to be better prepared for the last two interviews.

4.1.4.1 Conducting interviews

The interviews took place in two cities in Vietnam, in Hanoi and Hochiminh city, where the women lived and worked. The distance between these two was about nearly three hours by plane. I interviewed two women in each place. All the interviews took place in their women's campus offices. This gave me the chance to observe them and their colleagues in the workplaces. Each interview was scheduled from sixty to ninety minutes but they all lasted more than the allotted time. Because Vietnamese is the official national language, all the interviews were carried out in this language. It was convenient for the women participants as their native language made it easier for them to tell their stories more smoothly. The interviews were digitally recorded with the participants' permission.

Conducting the types of interviews I was doing was challenging, first because of the difficulty it poses for securing the anonymity of the subjects and for encouraging

honest and open responses (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In addition, in the collectivist Vietnamese culture, it is not appropriate to talk with strangers about individual life in a direct way, especially when each woman interviewee was considered powerful women in their profession. From the Rector's point of view in the interview, to speak of individual success could be taken as their being boastful or seeking taking too much credit for themselves over others working for a common goal. For elite or powerful women, saving face is more important than that for others, more ordinary women. However, I still hoped to have successful and meaningful interviews. This aim is only fulfilled if the interview was to be an exchange of trust and honesty between me and the women participants. In my case, because all of four women had their doctorates and conducted their theses overseas, at least, I already shared with them this common characteristic. But there remained the problem of whether they could tell me their stories openly and see me as an insider, a woman, like them, working in higher education. Thus, before each interview, even if the participant did not ask me about my research and my personal information, I still offered her that information to gain her reliance.

During the interview, field notes were taken to capture non-verbal expressions as well as the reactions of the women participants that were difficult to detect from the digital voice recordings. This tactic provided further information during the data analysis process. At the end of each interview, I told the women that I would give them copies of all the transcriptions to review for their correction.

4.1.4.2 Transcribing the interviews

Transcribing began once the interviews were completed. I remained in Hanoi to do the transcription as this was close with my family and I could save money to pay for the high cost of renting a house in Australia, as I was constrained by the financial resource to complete the program. Also, being in Hanoi was important as I wanted to be in close contact with the women Rectors to make any alteration they might have wanted to their stories. Initially, I had intended to pay for the interview transcription, the cost was a considerable amount of money and in doing so, I would miss what Creswell (2007), Marshall and Rossman (2006) call a full engagement [immersion] with the data when it came to the process of data analysis. Thus, I became very familiar with my women participants' stories by transcribing all the interviews by myself. I started to transcribe right after each interview was finished. It helped me to keep the event fresh in my mind. The transcription was done as follows. Firstly, I transcribed the interviews directly into Vietnamese by hand. Then, my sister helped me finish the typing. After cross checking my hand writing draft, my sister's typed version while listening to the interviews again, a complete copy of each transcription was sent to each woman participant to check if there were any errors or confusions regarding their interview responses. This tactic ensured that the source for later data analysis was accurate and truthful.

Transcribing is time consuming but it is a crucial step for the data analysis and interpretation (Cohen, et al., 2007). It took me hours with more than one hundred A4 pages of transcriptions in Vietnamese. The way Vietnamese people answer the interview questions is not direct. They talk around for some time before going to the main ideas. I felt frustrated, occasionally, with listening again and again to repetitions in the interviews. During the time I was waiting for the feedback from the women, I was

worried because even though I designated the date for the women to return me the transcription after checking written information on it, the fastest time I received it was a fortnight later than the due date. However, no one requested any amendments.

4.1.4.3 Translating the interviews

Because the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, after receiving the transcriptions from women Rectors, I had to translate them into English, the medium of instruction of my doctoral course in Australia by myself for later presentation for data analysis and presentation. And being aware that wrong translation would distort the data, I carefully chose the words and phrases that would precisely convey the meaning of the data as accurately as I possible. But it was challenging experiences because of the language connotations as a great deal of meaning can be lost in translation. Where a simple phrase in Vietnamese, for example, can have extensive and implicit meaning for a Vietnamese person who picks up on nuances, the same phrase loses all contextual and cultural meaning in English.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), there are not any simple strategies to address issues associated with translation. They recommend that including phrases and words in the original language in the final draft serves as an ethical reminder to the readers that the interview is originally conducted in a language other than English. Therefore, in this thesis, to inform the readers that translation has occurred, all the translations shown in the analysis were italicised and put into quotation marks. I also put the original phrases and words of women participants' in Vietnamese, often italicised, in the footnote for each translation. I have accepted this state as a present reality of carrying out research across two countries, which is more truthful than

projecting one into the other as if the difference are not theoretical and practical matters in themselves.

It was critical that the research was truthful and transparent and that all reasonable safety measures were enforced. Therefore, the data analysis process was open and followed the procedure stated in the next section.

4.1.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is a critical component of all research; it is “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcriptions, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 147). Nevertheless, a clear formula for analysing data in qualitative studies bearing an exploring nature like mine is not available. Merriam (1998) contends that “case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis” (p.28). Patton (2002) further notes that “qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes. But no recipe... the final destination remains unique for each inquirer, known only when - and if - arrived at” (p.432). However, qualitative researchers, in general, analyse data inductively by organising them into categories or themes, constructs and concepts that produce a descriptive, narrative synthesis (Gay, et al., 2006).

The analysis of this study actually happened simultaneously with the data collection process (Gay, et al., 2006; Merriam, 1998). I wrote field notes by noting ideas and reflections and I also took notes during the interview. This information facilitated a more complete and contextualised analysis of the data. The data collected from the interviews then were organised for each woman and saved on the computer. Each recording was labelled and following transcription [which was checked by women

Rectors], all stored in the individual computer files. The data were also backed up on an external hard drive. The later analytical procedure of this study was implemented following steps.

4.1.5.1 Generating categories and themes

Generating categories is a fundamental step in data analysis of qualitative studies. Based on the literature and guiding research questions, I identified several provisional categories. These categories were developed as a priori codes and they were broad and both descriptive and interpretative (Johnson & Christensen, 2003). Those codes were either kept as stated or were modified and checked against new data in the subsequent interviews. Prior categories were identified including: biographical data, career development, leadership practices, challenges and solution strategies and advice. Based on these priori codes, interview transcriptions, observations, field notes, and documents, I followed “categorical-content perspective” narrative method of data analysis (Lieblich, Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) to identify subcategories or inductive codes (Johnson and Christensen, 2003). The “categorical-content perspective” method of analysis involved “breaking the text into relatively small units of content and submitting them to either descriptive or statistical treatment” (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998, p.112). In this stage, the broad provisional categories identified were subsequently broken down into subcategories by line-by-line analyses of interview transcriptions [see an example in Appendix 5] supported by field notes, and other documents. Neuman (2006) suggests that these smaller, more concise segments give a more accurate analysis of the data and consequently this allowed me to the space identify new categories that emerged in the data collection. I then reread these documents several times and continuously grouped, regrouped subcategories, which shared similar qualities until a

point was reached, in which a theme was fully developed, saturation was reached, where new evidence did not provide any additional insights (Creswell, 1998).

4.1.5.2 Coding the data

This phase involved the assigning of the categories or themes with a label or a sign. In this study, relevant information, which was either a sentence or paragraph in the transcriptions, was highlighted by different colours in accordance with subcategories and themes [see Appendix 6 and 7 for examples of coding process at intrapersonal level and interpersonal level with the coding framework is applied to woman's speeches to identified initial subcategories or inductive codes]. This process was implemented on hard copies of the transcriptions because it was easier for me to read. These documents were then referred to in the Word processing to highlight like information. The information was then again collated and cross referenced.

4.1.5.3 Data presentation

A narrative structure was a chosen as a means to present the life stories of each women Rector participating in this study. The data analysis was presented firstly using within-case analysis information, where each single case is treated as a comprehensive case, and then, a cross-case analysis was built into a story across a number of cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through the joining of words and categories, those women's stories were described and insights into their experiences and perceptions and the circumstances or moments in their lives and careers could be revealed.

4.1.6 Researcher's role

As was mentioned earlier, in qualitative research, the role of the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, from the beginning it was necessary for me to identify any personal values, assumptions, biases related to the subjects of this study as I was aware of how they may influence this study.

I am a Vietnamese woman born and raised in Vietnam. I also have worked in higher education sector in Vietnam for quite a long time, and I am very familiar with higher education within this context. From my own personal observations during my education process and the experience while working for the MOET, I came to see that women were minority in senior ranks in colleges and universities in Vietnam. As an insider, I was also obsessive about revealing the voices of these successful women Rectors and to work with them to make sense of their experiences. However, within feminist standpoint epistemology, I could be seen as an outsider. I was inspired by a prior experience of interacting with the four women Rectors. But this standpoint that gave me a new understanding of the women's marginalisation in higher education in Vietnam and allowed me to reconsider my past experience and probability of my future as a Vietnamese woman working in the higher education sector. Thus, I wanted to clarify and put aside any speculations, beliefs and preconceived notions of what the answer should be in the interviews and during my analysis. This process was one of "epoche", or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). During the interviews, I listened to the participants' stories in an open and receptive manner so as to see their experiences in a new way and from a fresh perspective. As suggested by Moustakas (1994), I also tried to push away, at least temporarily, my biased thoughts or feelings that I felt might hamper my being as objective as possible during the interviews and later, in data

analysis. My aim was to represent the realities of the interviews as truthfully as possible while constantly controlling my biases.

Nevertheless, it was very difficult as Moustakas (1994) further argues that performing “*epoche*” is a challenge for researchers as it is difficult to suspend one’s biases completely, especially for a novice researcher like me. Otherwise, all biases must be recognised and transparent. I started this thesis by telling my story, which was one strategy to achieve a more objective status when conducting this research. However, I do not believe that my link with the researched topic is a real obstacle to this study. Actually, it helped me to understand the experiences of women participants on a deeper level as I was persuaded by an argument of Glesne (2006) that “subjectivity, once recognized, can be monitored for more trustworthy research and subjectivity, in itself, can contribute to the research” (p. 119).

4.1.7 Validation

Qualitative research has been criticised because it fails to “adhere to canons of reliability and validation” (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982, p.31 cited in Creswell, 2007) in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, since qualitative research is inductive (Merriam, 2002), validation and reliability have distinctly different implications within quantitative research. Creswell (2007) focused on some strategies frequently used by qualitative researchers to ensure the validation of the qualitative research method such as prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field; developing deep, thick description; clearing the researcher biases from the outset of the study; external audit; triangulation; peer review; member checking and so on. This author also recommended a minimum of two procedures for verification in any given study. In this research, to establish validity and dependability of the data, I applied some of recommended tactics.

Firstly, I used multiple and different sources as methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978 cited in Denzin, 2006) to corroborate evident of the phenomenon under study. To supplement the interviews, I reviewed document from CVs, journal and newspaper articles, and website regarding the universities and women participants' personal background and career path. These sources are stable and reliable as they are free from researcher effect since the information and actions were kept in them occurring before conducting this research. In addition, rather than relying solely on the interviews to get direct words from those women Rectors, observation allowed me to see their responding manners and behaviours in the interviews, their interacts with faculty staff and colleagues and gained a better understanding of the research setting. Conclusions of a study are more persuasive when they are corroborated through multiple sources of information (Yin, 2003).

Peer review (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Meriam, 1988 cited in Creswell, 2007) was another strategy that I used as an external check of the research process. I was lucky to have several colleagues, both Vietnamese and foreign-born, who listened to me when I talked about how I had reached my interpretations. They also gave me their point of views about this process.

Along with this peer review, member check (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam 1988 cited in Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994) was taken as an important step to strengthen the validation of the data collected. All copies of written transcriptions were sent to each participant so that they could judge the accuracy and credibility of the accounts.

As I mentioned above, the research process was challenging because of the influence of the lack of literature on this issue and my own personal experience as a

Vietnamese woman working in higher education in Vietnam. However, I was aware of the fact that it was the critical voices of the women participants which would be heard first and any preconceived notions or biases from me would not influence on this study which belonged solely to the voices of the women participants.

4.1.8 Ethical considerations

In conducting this qualitative research, my aim was to present trustfully and honestly the experiences of women Rectors that had happened in their lives and in their journeys to the top from their own words. Because of such subjectivity and intrusive nature of qualitative research, ethical concerns may emerge in relation to the benefit and confidentiality of the women participants. This study followed guideline of informed consent and protection from harm of Ethic committee of Griffith University.

At the beginning of each interview, each woman participant was provided a written statement about the purpose of the study in order to make an informed decision. The women were advised that their participation was voluntary and as such, they were free to withdraw from this study at any time. They were informed of any known benefits or risks attributed to their participation in the study. The women also knew that their privacy and confidentiality would be protected by assigning pseudonym to each of them. And, I confirmed that all personal data recordings would be destroyed on completion of this thesis. Actually, I myself did the transcribing, coding and the analysis of the interviews partly because of these secrecy concerns. Finally, all of the women were asked to sign an informed consent form detailed that they understood and agreed to participate voluntarily in this study. However, I saw a dilemma here.

4.1.9 Doing qualitative research in the Vietnamese context

As a Vietnamese woman research student, I had assumed that if I adhered to the research protocols that were approved by the Griffith University in Australia, it would guarantee that my research would go smoothly with its all research process. However, I found that, sometimes, this was not the case. Qualitative methods were used along with some analysis of my own place within the study. These approaches do not have the history and standing in Vietnam as they have in other countries, as Vietnam is a country sustaining a collective outlook and modes of presentation, where reasons for taking certain actions are given in terms of working for a common good and not for purely individual pursuits.

For instance, I met a difficulty when collecting the signed informed consent documents. The requirement of the informed consent form is unique for Western practice as it based on the principles of individualism and free will (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In fact, it is unnecessary and culturally unsuitable to transfer this qualitative research convention to the collectivist Vietnamese context (N. T. N. Bich, 2000), where individuals' thoughts or opinions that are not beneficial to the communities they represent should not be exposed. Being a part of Vietnamese culture, it was difficult for me to meet the demand for the protection of human subjects required by Griffith University in Australia while still respecting the cultural norms operating in Vietnamese context. Putting people's names on a piece of paper means to put them in a more responsible situation rather than protect them in a culturally appropriate way in Vietnam. Though all four women participants trusted me and were willing to share their private stories with me, they seemed to be very reluctant to sign the consent form. According to those women, it is safer if they talk to you than they sign a paper or in

other words “*words fly, writing remains*”⁴⁶. More than once in the interviews, I was reminded that those women would be bound by what they wrote. I had to thank all the women participants in my research for letting me finish this difficult task when they accepted my explanation to sign in the consent forms.

Another example is the question about the role of the CPV in these women appointments. As described in the literature, this is an important factor in career advancement of not only women but also of most people working in public sector in Vietnam including in public colleges and universities. Since no woman wanted to talk about this because of political sensitiveness, I had to assume that they all gained the political support from CPV in their appointments and this assumption was reinforced by the fact that in their written CVs, all four women declared that they were CPV’s members. But how did they get that support and how significant it was in their appointment was not discovered in the interviews from their own voices. As a result, this issue was omitted from data presentation and analysis of this study as a given support that these women gained in their career advancement.

Balancing between western perspectives, which emphasis the individual’s rights and empowerment, and my own Vietnamese cultural norms was a challenging experience. In their discussion on the cultural complications in translating ethical research principles into practice in cross-cultural research, Tilley and Gormley (2007) argue that “without applying sensitivity to the ways in which research intersects with cultural norms, participants may be placed at risk when research designs and data collection procedures are inappropriate for the specific research context” (p. 373). This statement spoke well for my case.

⁴⁶ *Lời nói gió bay or Bút sa gà chết*

In the next four chapters [Chapter, 5, 6, 7 and 8], the stories of the four women Rectors are presented as individual cases. This presentation allows for an opportunity for each woman's life and their individual career development to the rectorship to surface based on their personal reflections. Each woman's unique story is presented both in the form of what they have to say and my interpretations of their responses. Since my interview questions followed a roughly chronological progression, I choose to present the story of each woman under the following identified themes generated from the data collection: biography, family and education; ascension to the rectorship; leadership practices; challenges, solutions and strategies; and contributing to improve status of women. Some of the topics in this arrangement fall in line with what were used by other researchers (e.g. Luke, 2001; Madsen, 2008, 2010; Walton, 1997; Waring, 2003) in their discussions on the experiences of women university Presidents and administrators in higher education, women in academia in other countries. They are also relevant to the research questions of my study as well. Given each woman participant leads an individual life, the beginning of each story will start by a brief description about the setting, where the interview took place. Also, the end of each story is following by my reflection [researcher's thoughts] as a concluding remark. Because the sample size of this study is limited to the small number of four women in the total of no more than ten women Rectors [both sitting and retired] at public universities in Vietnam, to a certain extent, the identities of the women participants may be exposed. To minimise this possibility, each woman is assigned a pseudonym to maintain their confidentiality and respect their privacy.

Chapter 5: R1

R1 was the youngest and the first woman leader I interviewed. She was in her middle forties, fashionable and attractive. R1 started her career in higher education in 1991 as a faculty member and steadily climbed up to the leadership ladder until her appointment as Rector at a two campus university in Hochiminh city⁴⁷ in 2008. My first acquaintance with R1 was in Hanoi⁴⁸ in 2005 where she represented her university in an annual conference on higher education. In my memory, R1 was a young woman, who spoke distinctly and appeared self-confident.

5.1 The setting

R1's university is a single professional, public university in Hochiminh city, the most dynamic city in Vietnam. The university offers four-year undergraduate degrees as well as master and doctoral programs for students from various places and ethnic backgrounds throughout Vietnam. The university employs around two hundred and fifty staff and the total of ten thousand and five hundred students studying at seven different faculties⁴⁹. There are two campuses, one in the inner city and the other in a suburb. My interview with R1 took place at the city campus; a site surrounded by small, busy streets, which looked more like a complex of offices than an academic place. The campus was under renovation and very dusty. There was a new nine-storey building mixed with some older buildings. I saw some university staff busy moving out from the old buildings to the new building. R1's office was located on the sixth floor of the new building. My appointment with R1 was at 2 p.m. but I had to wait more than thirty

⁴⁷ The so called the most dynamic city in Vietnam

⁴⁸ The capital of Vietnam

⁴⁹ Source from Education and Training Statistics in academic year 2008 – 2009 of the MOET

minutes for her to finish her functional lunch with other colleagues.

The interview was conducted in R1's office, which was orderly with deep brown tones of wooden furniture, a number of books, certificates, and pictures. R1 received me with a smile and asked a female assistant to get water for both of us. She was dressed in a fashionable suit with careful makeup. I reminded her of my personal background and briefly explained the purpose of the study before beginning the interview, which was interrupted several times when R1 had to answer the phone or staff came in to ask for her advice or signature in some personnel and financial issues. At one time, I had to stop the interview for fifteen minutes while colleagues asked her advice about a breakdown of an escalator at the university. Explaining my presence, R1 told her colleagues that I was a research student interviewing her for my thesis and that she had agreed to participate in my study. Altogether, I spent three hours in her office to complete the interview. What I observed was a demanding but welcoming working environment, where R1's personal staff or others could phone or call at her office with concerns and questions. It was clear the university staff gave her much respect and confidence, and that R1 was active and involved in all levels of the university operation. I felt grateful that she could take part in this study despite her busy working schedule.

5.2 R1' story

5.2.1 Biography, family and education

R1 comes from an intellectual family in the South of Vietnam. During the Vietnam War, her family moved to the North where R1 was born. When Vietnam was reunited in 1975, her family returned to Saigon [now Hochiminh city] where she spent her high school years. Her good academic results led to R1 being selected to study

abroad at a famous university in the former USSR, where she gained a degree and then a PhD in Law at the age of twenty seven.

R1's family places a lot of emphasis on the pursuit of university education. Her younger sister who works at another university and her father was an editor in chief of an educational journal of the North Government of Vietnam. Her mother, a lawyer, passed away some years ago. When asked about her family background, R1 mentions her father to some extent, but says *"I was close to my mother's side, especially, I spent much of my time with my grandfather"*⁵⁰. R1 was married early and had her first child in the final year as an undergraduate student. She has two children. Her husband also has a doctorate. He was a university lecturer but is now a successful director of an information technology institute.

5.2.2 Ascension to the rectorship

R1's career combines both law education and legal practice. Her grandfather encouraged her to enter higher education and it was under his influence that the idea of being a faculty member was shaped in her mind from her undergraduate days: *"my grandfather wanted me to become a lecturer at the university"*⁵¹. Marriage to a university lecturer strengthened her career orientation resulting in R1 gaining a teaching job on her return to Vietnam in 1991. As a young and capable woman R1 distinguished herself among her colleagues as having a doctorate from a prestigious foreign university with a happy family, a successful husband and two children. R1 had generated a goal, to be an administrator after several years of teaching. This was a refutation of what might be expected in Vietnam at the time, but it was something she had learnt from

⁵⁰ Tôi gần gũi với bên mẹ của tôi, đặc biệt tôi sống gần ông ngoại nhiều

⁵¹ Ông ngoại tôi muốn tôi trở thành giảng viên trong trường đại học

overseas faculty leaders. *“I started to think about being an administrator because I wanted to apply my ideas into practice. I wanted to contribute to the higher education development in Vietnam and did what I thought was good for this cause. This would only be happening when I was the person in charge”*⁵². Secondly, while she recognised that she could be of benefit to small groups as a lawyer or as a member of faculty staff, gaining an administrative position meant her influence would cover a bigger population. From the position of a staff faculty in 1991, one year later she was promoted to be the chief of a division. R1 was chosen as the faculty dean in 1995, then deputy Rector in 1996. Finally, after seventeen years working in higher education, she was appointed as Rector in 2008.

In her journey to the rectorship, R1 did not mention any influential people during the interview, but she did refer to her family members with great excitement and deep affection. R1’s grandfather and her mother played significant roles in her life, her education and her career orientation. She had learnt greatly from them. They were her models. *“My grandfather had a strong influence on me. He was an intellectual. He studied Laws at the Sorbonne University in Paris, France... I did what my grandfather expected me to do... My mother also was a good lawyer. She was a role model to me. I wanted to be like her”*⁵³. R1’s husband also had influenced her career choice because *“at the time we were married, my husband was a lecturer at a famous university in*

⁵² Tôi bắt đầu nghĩ đến việc trở thành người quản lý bởi vì tôi muốn áp dụng những ý tưởng của tôi vào thực tế. Tôi muốn đóng góp cho sự phát triển của giáo dục đại học Việt Nam và làm những việc mà tôi cho là tốt đối với sự nghiệp này. Điều này chỉ xảy ra khi tôi là người có quyền lực.

⁵³ Ông ngoại của tôi có ảnh hưởng lớn đối với tôi. Ông là một nhà trí thức, ông đã từng học Luật ở trường đại học Sorbonne ở Paris, ở Pháp. Tôi đã làm những gì mà ông tôi hy vọng ở tôi. Mẹ của tôi cũng là một luật sư tốt. Bà là hình mẫu của tôi. Tôi muốn trở thành một người như bà.

*Vietnam. This fact made me more consistent with my career choice*⁵⁴.

While teaching in the classroom, R1 also served as a part-time legal consultant in various organisations such as the city's Bar Association, Vietnam Lawyers' Association and the Vietnam International Arbitration Centre. Those part time jobs helped her to gather concrete examples when talking to students about the application of how they, as lawyers, apply law into practice. Thus, her lectures were always convincing and she was often recognised as a good lecturer in her field. While there was not enough time for R1 to continue teaching after she became a Rector, she still remained loyal to her part-time job as an arbitrator of the Vietnam International Arbitration Centre to update her practical knowledge.

5.2.3 Leadership practices

Although R1 had no formal degrees or certificates in higher education management, her success was built on *“self-confidence”*⁵⁵. This was her belief. *“I think self-confidence is really important... You have to believe in your capability. When I was a lecturer, I was a good one. So (I knew) I could be an authentic leader”*⁵⁶. Her skills in higher education management improved through informal learning by watching senior staff at work and gaining experience from them. Observing those senior administrators and seeing what did and did not work as leaders for them helped R1 to develop her own style.

R1 saw herself as a confident, determined woman and she used these personal values to lead her university. R1 remembered her first year as a Rector as very

⁵⁴ Vào thời điểm chúng tôi cưới nhau, chồng tôi đã là giảng viên của một trường đại học nổi tiếng ở Việt Nam. Việc này càng làm tôi kiên định hơn với lựa chọn nghề nghiệp của mình.

⁵⁵ sự tự tin

⁵⁶ Tôi cho là sự tự tin rất quan trọng... Bạn phải tin tưởng vào khả năng của mình. Khi tôi là giảng viên thì tôi là một giảng viên tốt. Vì vậy tôi cũng có thể trở thành một người lãnh đạo thực sự.

challenging when she tried to establish some structures, for example, using technology to publish university reports, setting new agendas, milestones and due dates to accomplish her missions of running an efficient university. She faced criticisms that she was over-ambitious and too demanding. However, with accomplishments building over the last few years, R1 felt quite happy with her choice. *“Maybe my leadership style is not highly appreciated in other contexts, even when it is too fast for my staff to absorb my ideas, but I am comfortable with that”*⁵⁷. R1 seemed not to be afraid to effect changes in her office as long as the changes helped her to perform better and achieve positive results.

R1 viewed her leadership style as totally different from her predecessor’s⁵⁸. Through her career up to now, she had developed a leadership style combining elements of collaboration, command and control. R1 was an inclusive type of Rector. She liked to know everything happening in her university. *“Sometimes, people think I am too detailed, but I am a sort of person, who likes to hear, see, do and participate. I am the Rector of this university. I need to share information and be involved in most of the activities happening in the university”*⁵⁹. R1 saw herself as a good team member, whose decisions were affected by the input of others: *“I listen to the ideas of my staff, my colleagues and combine those with my own ideas to make the final decision”*⁶⁰. During the interview, R1 was engaged, for example, in conversation with her staff on how to

⁵⁷ Có thể phong cách lãnh đạo của tôi không được đánh giá cao ở trong những hoàn cảnh khác, thậm chí là quá nhanh để các nhân viên của tôi có thể hiểu nhưng tôi thấy thoải mái với phong cách này.

⁵⁸ R1 did not indicate what his leadership style was. Because my study did not aim to differentiate the leadership style of men and women rectors, thus, the information on this matter was not further investigated.

⁵⁹ Nhiều lúc, mọi người nghĩ tôi quá chi tiết nhưng tôi là người muốn nghe, nhìn, làm và tham gia. Tôi là hiệu trưởng của trường và tôi cần phải được chia sẻ thông tin và tham gia vào những gì đang diễn ra trong trường.

⁶⁰ Tôi cũng lắng nghe ý kiến của cán bộ trong trường và các đồng nghiệp kết hợp những ý kiến này khi đưa ra quyết định cuối cùng.

guide students to use the new escalator responsibly in the campus by collecting ideas from students themselves.

In her recruitment strategy, R1 emphasised that she needed people qualified for the jobs but not those who needed a job.

“In my opinion, in most universities in Vietnam, the recruitment policy is often based on the personal relationships of the Rectors. They recruit staff in the circle of their friends or relatives, then, give them positions that make more interests for those. For me, every position is given based on the requirement of the job. Principally, I separate my work from friendship. The application procedures are transparent. Who is qualified will be interviewed”⁶¹.

R1 also confirmed that she was inclined to empower the people who work with her. She delegated tasks to her team deputy, but she kept the responsibilities for financial and personal issues. *“I encourage my staff; give them opportunities to show their abilities. However, with the responsibility of the leader, I monitor the final results”⁶².* R1 also had high expectations of her staff. *“My concern is the result of the tasks. The more autonomy a faculty has the better result I have asked from its dean and staff”⁶³.* R1 believed that her leadership style had brought improvements to her university. *“In the last two years, under my leadership, the university has gained considerable achievements both in terms of scale and in quality of education. Maybe years later, things will be different but at the moment, I think my leadership is suitable*

⁶¹ Theo cá nhân tôi, việc tuyển dụng trong các trường đại học vẫn dựa và quan hệ cá nhân của hiệu trưởng nhiều. Họ tuyển những người có quan hệ thân thiết hay họ hàng vào các vị trí đem lại lợi ích cho những người này. Đối với tôi, mỗi vị trí tuyển dụng đều phải dựa vào yêu cầu của công việc. Về nguyên tắc, tôi tách rời quan hệ bạn bè ra khỏi công việc. Quá trình tuyển chọn phải công khai, những ai đủ tiêu chuẩn sẽ được phỏng vấn.

⁶² Tôi khuyến khích cán bộ của tôi, đem lại cho họ cơ hội để thể hiện khả năng của mình. Tuy nhiên với trách nhiệm của người đứng đầu, tôi giám sát kiểm tra kết quả cuối cùng.

⁶³ Mọi quan tâm của tôi là hiệu quả công việc. Các khoa càng có nhiều quyền tự chủ, tôi càng đòi hỏi cao ở các trường khoa và các cán bộ của khoa.

for the university and I am persistent to this style”⁶⁴.

5.2.4 Challenges, solutions and strategies

R1 was married and her children were virtually grown up when she began her administrative career. *“I am lucky that my children are very independent. They can do their homework without my supervision”⁶⁵.* However, R4 did not deny that, whether she wanted it or not, her job impacted on her family. Accepting this fact as natural, R1 played a leading role in organising the family life by designing the menu for family meals in advance. She went to the market every morning to buy food for the family but left cooking, washing, and cleaning the house for housekeepers. According to her *“in a modern society, a woman can reduce her heavy family workload by delegating housework and overseeing everything, rather than spending a lot of time on it by herself”⁶⁶.* Whenever R1 had time, she joined in housework as *“I love cooking and decorating my house”⁶⁷.* R1 was happy with the support of her husband; though busy with his own career, *“he always encourages and supports me in whatever I want to do”⁶⁸.* He shared the responsibility of taking care of their children with her and sometimes, accompanied them to school functions when R1 was busy. As far as family responsibilities were concerned, she believed that she had few problems combining her roles as a mother, a wife and a Rector as others would expect and without stress and strain. .

⁶⁴ Trong vòng hai năm qua, dưới sự chỉ đạo của tôi thì trường đã có những thành công nhất định cả về qui mô và chất lượng. Có thể nhiều năm sau, mọi việc sẽ khác đi nhưng tại thời điểm này, tôi nghĩ là phong cách lãnh đạo của tôi phù hợp với trường và tôi sẽ kiên trì với phong cách này.

⁶⁵ Tôi may mắn vì các con tôi rất độc lập. Các con tôi có thể làm bài tập ở nhà mà không cần sự hướng dẫn của tôi.

⁶⁶ Trong xã hội hiện đại, người phụ nữ có thể giảm tải công việc nhà bằng cách giao nhiệm vụ và giám sát hơn là tự mình vất vả làm việc này.

⁶⁷ Tôi thích nấu ăn và trang trí nhà cửa

⁶⁸ Anh luôn khuyến khích và ủng hộ tôi làm những việc tôi muốn

But R1 did not escape social conventions which assert that a woman, who aspires to be equal or more successful than her husband cannot be a good wife and good mother. Thus, her image became distorted and she was the centre of gossip.

“I was a model of an excellent young woman lecturer but it turned into rumours when I was appointed to be the Rector. It is said that I am too ambitious, too confident even (that) I have trouble with my marriage, or I was divorced. They tried to ruin my personal image from a successful lecturer and then an effective administrator to a greedy woman, who is obsessed with fame and power. Sometimes, I think it would be better if I still was a lecturer because my teaching method was impressive and students, especially, female students admired me and considered me as their role model. When being appointed to the Rector position, the rumours unofficially demolished that model image”⁶⁹.

To cope, R1 chose to ignore the rumours by concentrating on her job. *“Instead of thinking negatively about why others did this to me, I chose to ignore them, turned my energy to focus on the other things that were useful for me, for my family and for the university. For example, this was in 2002 at the same time; I was conferred Associate Professor Title while successfully being reappointed to be the Deputy Rector in second term”⁷⁰.*

Though being considered as a successful woman in higher education, when talking about women in leadership, R1 accepted that there have been gender stereotypes in appointments to the senior positions, which are not beneficial for women. *“Actually, people do not want a woman in the highest position. Outwardly, they like to see both*

⁶⁹ Tôi là một hình mẫu giảng viên nữ giỏi nhưng mọi thứ đã bị thổi phồng lên khi tôi được bổ nhiệm làm hiệu trưởng. Người ta nói rằng tôi quá ham hố, tôi quá tự tin và tôi có vấn đề với cuộc hôn nhân của mình, thậm chí là tôi đã li dị. Họ đã tìm mọi cách phá hủy hình ảnh của tôi từ một giảng viên tốt, một người quản lý có năng lực trở thành một người đàn bà bị ám ảnh bởi quyền lực và danh vọng. Thỉnh thoảng tôi cũng nghĩ rằng sẽ tốt hơn nếu tôi vẫn là giảng viên bởi vì các em sinh viên, đặc biệt là sinh nữ rất ấn tượng với phương pháp giảng dạy của tôi và ngưỡng mộ tôi, coi tôi như là thần tượng của họ. Khi được bổ nhiệm vào vị trí lãnh đạo này thì các lời đồn đại đã phá hủy hình ảnh mẫu này của tôi một cách không chính thức.

⁷⁰ Thay vào việc ngồi nghĩ tại sao họ lại làm vậy, tôi lờ họ đi và chuyển hướng tập trung của mình cho các việc làm có ích cho bản thân tôi, cho gia đình và cho nhà trường. Như là trong năm 2002, tôi vừa được phong phó giáo sư, vừa được bổ nhiệm làm hiệu phó nhiệm kỳ thứ hai.

men and women leaders but inwardly, they are reluctant to accept that women can lead effectively”⁷¹. R1 said that though the government’s policies have confirmed and ensured the equality between women and men in political, cultural, social and family life but in practice, women leaders like her have to face subtle resistances to their leadership. In sharing her experiences R1 said that: *“Since I have been the Rector of this university, I have concentrated very much on encouraging women staff in their careers. But I have to face the situation that most of male employees do not support me in this issue. They subtly resisted my target to increase the number of women in middle level administrative positions by resigning from their posts and left this university for others”*⁷². According to R1, there are two possibilities in this situation. On the one hand, men are threatened by women’s abilities and they worry about more women going into the positions of power. On the other hand, they undervalue women’s capability. *“Those men really do not support women or believe that women could be doing the same work as they do. I supposed that if these men had been in the leadership positions, there would have not been any progress in staffing situation of our women”*⁷³. In fact, although there are high numbers of women in middle levels of management at R1’s

⁷¹ Trên thực tế, người ta không muốn phụ nữ ở vị trí lãnh đạo cao nhất. Bên ngoài, họ cũng muốn nhìn thấy cả nam và nữ lãnh đạo, nhưng thực tâm, họ không muốn chấp nhận rằng phụ nữ có thể lãnh đạo một cách hiệu quả.

⁷² Kể từ khi tôi là hiệu trưởng của trường này, tôi tập trung nhiều vào việc khích lệ các cán bộ nữ trong công tác của họ. Nhưng tôi phải đối mặt với tình huống là hầu hết các cán bộ nam không ủng hộ tôi trong vấn đề này. Họ khôn khéo chống lại mục tiêu của tôi là tăng số lượng phụ nữ ở các vị trí quản lý trung cấp bằng cách rời khỏi vị trí của mình và chuyển đi làm cho các trường đại học khác.

⁷³ Những người đàn ông này thực sự không ủng hộ phụ nữ và không tin rằng phụ nữ có thể đảm đương được các công việc giống như họ làm. Tôi cho là nếu những người này ở vị trí lãnh đạo thì sẽ không có bất kỳ tiến bộ nào trong tình hình cán bộ nữ ở trường chúng tôi.

university, they are still far behind men as women have occupied only 21.87 percent in the total administrators at all levels in higher education in Vietnam (HEP, 12/2003).

5.2.5 Contribution to improve the status of women

R1 was concerned about the low number of women in senior positions in higher education in Vietnam. She indicated some reasons behind this underrepresentation. First of all, the price to pay for being successful in Vietnamese women's career is very great because family responsibilities naturally come with being a woman, especially in the patriarchal context of Vietnam. Women, she said, have always experienced difficulties when facing the dilemma of choosing between family and job. Secondly, R1 also criticised women for their lack of support for one another. *"It is a fact that women are their own rivals at low administrative levels. They are not willing to support other women as they have to. There is always envy among women at the same levels. Only when women are at different levels, the women in higher status then think about supporting other junior female colleagues to go up in their career"*⁷⁴. Thirdly, because of cultural and social perceptions, Vietnamese women often have to bear the sceptical view if they get in touch comfortably with their male colleagues both in work and after work. *"Men could drink or play sport with their friends and partners but women could not"*⁷⁵. Thus, Vietnamese women in general have, according to R1, missed chances and potential supports for their career promotion. R1 thought that the Vietnamese government has promulgated relatively appropriate policies to support women's career advancement, but that practically, these plans are implemented ineffectively. She highly

⁷⁴ Thực tế là phụ nữ là đối thủ của nhau ở khi họ ở cấp quản lý thấp. Họ không sẵn sàng hỗ trợ nhau như là họ nên làm. Luôn có sự ghen tị giữa các nữ đồng nghiệp ở cùng vị trí. Chỉ khi nào phụ nữ ở các vị trí khác nhau, người nào ở vị trí cao hơn mới suy nghĩ về việc hỗ trợ các đồng nghiệp nữ cấp dưới thăng tiến trong sự nghiệp.

⁷⁵ Đàn ông có thể uống rượu vui đùa hoặc chơi thể thao với bạn bè của họ nhưng phụ nữ thì không.

appreciated the extension retirement age policy for people working in higher education institutions, who have got doctoral degrees or associate professor and professor titles but she still insisted on closing the gender gap in the existing compulsory retirement age. *“It is unfair for women when they have fulfilled their roles as daughters, wives and mothers in family while their talent such as leadership skill in the social sphere are limited by this policy”*⁷⁶.

Despite these barriers for women, R1 believed that women bring different aspects to leadership positions. *“Women leaders often talk about the common interests than their own positions and powers. Their openness, communication skills and collaborative leadership style become their strengths and comparative advantages when they are in leadership positions”*⁷⁷.

R1 is now a well known woman Rector, famous for her knowledge in higher education management and her confidence as a leader. She has appreciated every opportunity given to her and was happy about her preparation for them.

“My career development is based on both unintentional chances and my own desire. In comparison with other women, I feel I have had more chances. For example, I got married early and got my PhD when I was young. Thus I have more time to focus on my job. But the most important is that I do prepare and be ready to take advantages of those opportunities to realise my dream of becoming a person in charge in my career. For example, when I returned to Vietnam [in 1991], Russian was out of date. I quickly enrolled to study English and after that – French. As a result, I was one of the two persons in the university, who had met the needed conditions [the age, a doctoral degree, controlling at least one popular foreign language, have a proper management experience] to be appointed to the senior administrative position. I was promoted to be the deputy

⁷⁶ Sẽ là không công bằng đối với phụ nữ khi họ đã hoàn thành vai trò của họ như là người con, người vợ và người mẹ trong gia đình, trong khi tài năng của họ ví dụ như kỹ năng lãnh đạo trong lĩnh vực xã hội bị hạn chế bởi chính sách này.

⁷⁷ Phụ nữ là lãnh đạo thì thường nói về những lợi ích chung hơn so với vị trí và quyền lực của họ. Sự cởi mở, kỹ năng giao tiếp và phong cách lãnh đạo thiên về hợp tác của phụ nữ trở thành thế mạnh và lợi thế so sánh khi đương nhiệm.

Rector, who was in charge of international relations and academic issues”⁷⁸.

At this point, R1 seemed to be confident in her career and satisfied with her current position. *“I do not think I am egotistic, but I think I do a good job; I make this university work well and change much better. There may come a day when those achievements possibly will be reevaluated but I am consistent with my way”*⁷⁹. With that same tone, R1 encouraged other women working in higher education in Vietnam to strive for the senior roles by giving them practical advice. She emphasised the importance of the possession of a doctorate. To win over the staff respect and admiration, a university Rector should be a strong academic. *“This is the prerequisite condition to become a Rector in higher education”*⁸⁰. Based on her own experience, being ready and prepared to take chances was another practical advice that R1 saved for other potential women in higher education. Besides, R1 stressed that *“I think women Rectors should be strong, determined and decisive but it does not mean you ignore your femininity. I myself consider my feminine value is one of my strengths. I like fashion and always take care of my appearance. You should make people recognise you, as you are*

⁷⁸ Sự phát triển nghề nghiệp của tôi dựa vào cả những cơ hội tình cờ lẫn sự mong muốn của riêng tôi. So với những phụ nữ khác, tôi có thể có nhiều cơ hội hơn ví dụ như tôi lập gia đình sớm và có bằng tiến sĩ khi tuổi còn trẻ. Vì vậy tôi có nhiều thời gian để tập trung cho công việc. Nhưng vấn đề quan trọng nhất là tôi có sự chuẩn bị và sẵn sàng tận dụng các cơ hội để hiện thực hóa ước mong của tôi là trở thành lãnh đạo trong sự nghiệp của mình. Ví dụ như khi tôi trở về Việt nam, tiếng Nga đã trở nên lỗi thời. Tôi lập tức đăng ký học tiếng Anh và sau đó là tiếng Pháp. Kết quả là tôi là một trong hai người có đủ các điều kiện để được bổ nhiệm lên vị trí lãnh đạo cao hơn. Tôi đã được đề bạt làm hiệu phó phụ trách quan hệ quốc tế và đào tạo.

⁷⁹ Tôi không nghĩ tôi là một người tự cao nhưng tôi đã làm tốt công việc của mình, tôi làm cho trường này hoạt động tốt và có những biến đổi tích cực. Sẽ có ngày, những thành công này có thể bị đánh giá lại nhưng tôi kiên trì với đường lối của mình.

⁸⁰ Đây là điều kiện tiên quyết để trở thành hiệu trưởng trong giáo dục đại học

a person, who has the ability to lead effectively, as not because of your powerful position”⁸¹.

5.3 Researcher’s reflection

At the conclusion of our interview, I was very impressed by R1’s straightforward manner. She graduated from the university in 1986 and started her career as the DOI MOI was implemented. In comparison with other women participants of this study, she had benefited positively from the DOI MOI policy of promoting women to senior positions. The broadening access to career information had opened and widened women understanding and their visions. In the interview, R1 openly admitted that she was an ambitious woman. *“I wanted to be a person in charge”*⁸², *“I have learnt that if I had not got the power to express my ideas, it would have been better that there were no ideas at all”*⁸³, *“I had no other way but to go up”*⁸⁴ were her words when she talked about her career ambition. R1 also disclosed that she did not have the support from her predecessor. This man supported another male candidate. Thus, she had to work hard and fight for the trust of the university staff and won their votes to be the first woman Rector of the university. *“I want to prove that I am capable for the Rector position and I will do my best to make other people recognise it”*⁸⁵. Because R1 would have nearly a decade ahead of her before she reached fifty five, the current age of

⁸¹ Tôi nghĩ nữ hiệu trưởng cần phải mạnh mẽ, cương quyết và quyết đoán nhưng không có nghĩa là từ bỏ nữ tính của mình. Bản thân tôi cho rằng nữ tính của tôi là một trong những thế mạnh của tôi. Tôi thích thời trang và luôn quan tâm đến vẻ ngoài của mình. Bạn nên làm cho mọi người công nhận bạn, như bạn là một người có khả năng lãnh đạo hiệu quả chứ không phải công nhận bạn vì vị trí quyền lực của bạn.

⁸² Tôi muốn trở thành người lãnh đạo

⁸³ Tôi nhận ra rằng nếu tôi không có quyền lực để bày tỏ ý tưởng của tôi thì tốt nhất không nên có ý tưởng gì cả.

⁸⁴ Tôi không có cách nào khác là phải tiến lên.

⁸⁵ Tôi muốn chứng minh rằng vị trí hiệu trưởng là đúng với tôi và tôi sẽ làm tốt hết sức để mọi người công nhận điều đó.

retirement from administrative positions for women in the public sector in Vietnam, I asked her about her future plan as I supposed that this could be a Vice-Minister position at the MOET. R1 answered that she always looked forward, she believed in her abilities, and that she could assume a more responsible role in the education sector in Vietnam in the future. But that higher position was another story. It depended on many factors as it would be more political. R1 said that she had thought about this possibility. She opened and prepared for that chance as well. Thus, her concentration now was to do her best in the Rector position to prove her efficiency. Her aim was to make the university develop and become one of the top universities in Vietnam during her term. R1 joined in the very modest number of women [5 percent], who had the motivation to look for the higher positions once they were in the senior administrative positions in Mai's (2007) research.

Among three women participated in this study, R1 was the closest to my age. Thus, I felt very close with her points of view. As a result of my interview with R1, I was confident that she would make a positive model for younger women working in the higher education sector in Vietnam. R1's ambition, confidence and her successful career up to now have encouraged women like me more believe in ourselves and continue to try our best to grow professionally and personally in our journeys to the top.

Chapter 6: R2

R2, the second woman leader I interviewed, was an experienced lecturer and a leader with thirty years of teaching and administrative experience. She was appointed as the Rector of her university in 1998 and finished her second term in this position in 2007. R2 is a reserved woman in her late fifties. Besides some higher education conferences, where we met formally as participants, I had met R2 directly twice before this interview, when accompanying my director to visit the university. She had a soft convincing voice with the mixture of the south and north accents. R2 spoke slowly and cautiously. At time of the interview, R2 had retired from being a Rector and was a senior member of the teaching staff of her university. She also had a busy schedule giving lectures in Vietnam and abroad, and participating in the professional and community activities. She was teaching in China when I emailed her to inform her of the purpose of my study and invite her to participate in this research. After many attempts to arrange a suitable time for both of us [with more privileges on her side], finally, I felt grateful that R2 accepted my invitation to give me a personal interview in her office at the university campus in Hochiminh city.

6.1 The setting

R2's university was the biggest of the four universities that I visited to conduct interviews. It is one of the leading public universities specialising in teaching and research activities in engineering and technology. Its mission is to train engineers in the fields of capital construction, industry, resources exploration and exploitation mainly for the southern areas of Vietnam. By the academic year 2005- 2006, this university had

one thousand, one hundred and twenty five employees⁸⁶, with eleven faculties, ten science research and technology transferring centres, four training centres, ten functioning offices and one limited company⁸⁷. Its graduate students have strong professional skills, which are recognised as equivalent to those in other Southeast Asian countries. A number of graduates are either important figures or leading experts in different industries in Hochiminh city and the southern provinces of Vietnam.

The university has two campuses and one dormitory. R2 agreed to meet me in the city campus; a big campus in comparison with other universities. R2's office was on the third floor of an old building in a complex of buildings, large trees, green grass and plants. She had moved here after retiring as Rector. The room was modest. There were no traces of the fact that its owner used to be the first woman Rector of this university.

My appointment with R2, at 12 p.m. on a Saturday was delayed until 12.45 p.m. because R2 could not finish her tutorial with PhD candidates as planned. R2 looked like the same woman Rector I had seen before. It seemed to me that nothing had been changed in her fashion style, as she was wearing a grey simple dress. After an introduction time, R2 started by asking me to share a little bit about my personal information such as my family and my research. The interview ended at 2:30 p.m. During this time, R2 stopped once to answer her husband's call to have lunch with him. R2 told her husband that he had have lunch himself because she was busy with my interview and that she might not be home for dinner too, as R2 accepted an invitation for a dinner of Youth committee of the university for a special occasion. Though retired from the Rector position several years ago, it was her appearance, her voice, her manner

⁸⁶ MOET Educational Statistics, academic year 2005 –2006

⁸⁷ Ibid.

to response my questions to prove that she was an experienced leader.

6.2 R2's story

6.2.1 Biography, family and education

R2 was born into a two parent family in the South of Vietnam who moved to the North when the father accepted a job there during the Vietnam War. *“My father was a national intellectual, who studied at the Sorbonne University in France before returning home to work as a diplomat for the Government. My mother was a house wife”*⁸⁸. R2 thought that she was lucky to be born in a family that emphasised education. Because of such a family background, she did not miss much school, even in the time of the Vietnam War. R2 was proud of both parents but she emphasised that her mother played an important role in her childhood, though her mother did not attend any form of formal education at any time in her life. *“I think my mother greatly contributed to our upbringing because my father went abroad for business very often, and my mother was the only person, who looked after us”*⁸⁹. R2 had a big family with five siblings including two brothers and three sisters. Though with a large family, her parent gave due care to their children as *“all my brothers and sisters were well educated and successful in their careers”*⁹⁰. R2 herself completed most her school education in Hanoi and then successfully obtained an undergraduate degree and a PhD in Czechoslovakia, both in Computer Sciences.

R2 married at the age of twenty five and has two sons. Her husband worked as a

⁸⁸ *Bố cô là một trí thức yêu nước học ở Đại học Sorbonne ở Pháp trước khi trở ra Bắc làm giao cho Chính phủ. Mẹ cô thì là một người nội trợ.*

⁸⁹ *Cô nghĩ rằng mẹ có công lớn đóng góp trong việc nuôi dạy các con bởi vì cha cô đi công tác ở nước ngoài thường xuyên, và mẹ cô là người duy nhất chăm sóc cô và các anh em.*

⁹⁰ *Tất cả các anh chị em cô đều học hành tử tế và thành đạt*

diplomat for a time, before moving into business in a private company until he retired.

6.2.2 Ascension to the rectorship

R2 chose Computer Science, a subject that was considered new to Vietnam at her time and still considered a male subject now, because *“at my time, the vocation did not totally depend on the personal wishes. It belonged to the need of the country. Based on my academic results in high school, they chose me and sent me to Czechoslovakia to study electronics. In my third year at the university, computer science attracted me and I decided to choose it as my major”*⁹¹.

R2’s career in higher education was unintentional. Being born in the South but moved to the North when Vietnam War happened, R2 wanted to come back to work in the South when the War ended. *“The decision to be a university lecturer was made by chance. When I returned to Vietnam, computer science was a very new subject. My brother in law told me that the Informatics faculty was just established at his university in Hochiminh city and there was a lack of lecturers. He advised me that if I wanted to go back to the South, this was my best choice. Then I became a university lecturer”*⁹². After five years teaching, R2 returned to Czechoslovakia to study for a PhD in Artificial Intelligence, a branch of Computer Science. She finished her doctorate in three years. R2 was satisfied with being a teaching staff and did not entertain a dream of being an

⁹¹ Vào thời của cô, nghề nghiệp không không hoàn toàn phụ thuộc vào mong muốn cá nhân. Nó thuộc về sự cần thiết của đất nước. Dựa trên kết quả học tập của cô ở trường trung học, nhà nước đã chọn cô và gửi cô đến Tiệp Khắc để học ngành điện tử. Trong năm thứ ba của cô tại trường đại học, khoa học máy tính đã thu hút cô và cô quyết định chọn ngành này.

⁹² Quyết định trở thành giảng viên đại học cũng rất tình cờ. Khi cô trở về Việt Nam, khoa học máy tính là một ngành rất mới. Anh rể cô có nói rằng khoa máy tính mới thành lập ở trường đại học của anh tại thành phố Hồ Chí Minh và đang thiếu giảng viên. Anh đã khuyên cô rằng nếu cô muốn trở lại miền Nam, đây là sự lựa chọn tốt nhất của cô. Sau đó, cô đã trở thành một giảng viên đại học

administrator. However, her academic qualifications were the foundation for her becoming the deputy dean and then the faculty dean. Being satisfied with these positions, which related much to the teaching and curriculum development, R2 was surprised when she was offered to be the assistant to the university Rector [as Deputy Rector]. R2 did not know why she was chosen because this position was determined by the Rector, not by voting. Initially, she was reluctant to accept the offer because she was committed to teaching. Finally she was convinced by the Rector, who had confidence in her. *“With his explanation and encouragement, I started to think that I could do this job and I moved forward”*⁹³. R2 did not regret her decision. She found the job fascinating, as it involved her in the community activities; and she liked that. She also had opportunities to make an impact and to promote changes from her position in the university. R2 said: *“I did not set a goal to be a Rector. I wanted to be a good professor and a prestigious expert in my subject. I did not have any desires to get a senior administration position [as Deputy Rector and Rector]. It was fate. It was luck to me, but as the proverb says, ‘Strike while the iron is hot’. When I happened to be chosen as the Vice Rector, I was initially surprised and hesitated... Then the predecessor convinced me that it was not a privilege, it was an assignment, a big responsibility, and I accepted”*⁹⁴. This position became an important preparation for R2’s later advancement to the Rector status in 1998, where she remained for nine years.

⁹³ Với lời giải thích và khuyến khích của chú, cô bắt đầu nghĩ rằng cô có thể đảm đương được công việc này và cô quyết định tiến về phía trước

⁹⁴ Cô không đặt mục tiêu sẽ là một hiệu trưởng. Cô muốn trở thành một giáo sư giỏi và một chuyên gia có uy tín trong ngành của mình. Cô không mong muốn có được vị trí quản lý cao. Đó là số phận. Đó là may mắn như người ta hay nói “Cờ đến tay ai người đó phát”. Khi cô tình cờ được chọn làm hiệu phó, cô đã ngạc nhiên và lưỡng lự. Sau đó, chủ hiệu trưởng cũ thuyết phục cô rằng nó không phải là một đặc ân, đó là một nhiệm vụ, một trách nhiệm lớn, và cô chấp nhận

Apart from the Rector's responsibility, R2 also involved in teaching, supervising graduate students and writing articles for scientific journals. However, she gave priority to her administrative duties whenever there was a time conflict. R2 was also a member of professional and social organisations. Through this networking outside the university, R2 could establish good relationships with industries, which could bring promising jobs for her students after graduating from the university.

Becoming a woman Rector was R2's fate as she recalled her career path. She did not follow her father's step to be a diplomat, but she did recognise the role of her family on her personality. *"The role of family is important. My parents had a great influence on the development of my personal characteristics"*⁹⁵. They were great models of honesty and hard work. They provided their children with the necessary support to make them growing well educated. R2 described her family as a supportive environment for her to grow up responsibly and honestly. This support was an implicit motivation to foster R2 for being the best in her career. There was no other than her predecessor, who encouraged her to accept the position of the deputy Rector, who was recognised as the influential person to R2's career advancement.

6.2.3 Leadership practices

R2 held senior administrative positions after more than twenty years of teaching. Like R1, she did not take any formal courses on higher education leadership but according to her, the experience that she was born in war time, when community work was stressed. That she had grown up in a family that emphasised education and studied computer science abroad helped to shape and to develop the characteristics needed

⁹⁵ Vai trò của gia đình rất quan trọng. Bố mẹ cô đã có sự ảnh hưởng lớn trong việc hình thành tính cách của cô.

when she was selected as a leader. Those were community spirit, honesty, responsibility, discipline and logical thinking. *“After nearly ten years working in this position, I thought those were very important characteristics”*⁹⁶.

A Rector, according to R2 was the person who should be competent to make hard decisions, who was fair, decisive, responsible, determined and organised. R2 believed that she was that type of leader and she *“was loyal to those values in my rector position”*⁹⁷. R2 liked clearness in her job. She said that women leaders like to please everyone staff if they want to get the followers’ support but as a Rector, she did not welcome that approach. R2 demonstrated to a candid style, she was straightforward in her views, open to discussion in problem solving.

*“I did not like the style of ‘a bad compromise is better than a good lawsuit’. I did what was positive, what was right for the university and made sure those decisions were based on sound reasons to prove that nothing was done arbitrarily or simply as a favour to anyone. Of course, I had to struggle in that process but I did not cover up the mistakes of anyone, even if they were my closest supporters. I had to be fair, transparent and authentic in my relations with all staff to gain their trust”*⁹⁸.

According to R2, tough decisions did occasionally disappoint some people, and if she expected that she needed everyone’s approval, her stress would be high. Thus, she was decisive and ready to accept criticism whenever hard decisions were to be made. Because of her straight manner, people often saw R2 as tough as a man even stronger than a man. *“Others said that I was tougher than men because I was a straight person. I*

⁹⁶ Sau gần mười năm làm việc, cô nghĩ những tính cách này là rất quan trọng

⁹⁷ trung thành với những tính cách này trong vai trò là người hiệu trưởng.

⁹⁸ Cô không thích kiểu dĩ hòa vi quý. Cô làm những gì là tích cực, những gì đúng cho trường và đảm bảo rằng những quyết định đó đều dựa trên những lý do chính đáng để chứng minh rằng không có gì được thực hiện tùy tiện hoặc đơn giản là một đặc ân cho bất cứ ai. Tất nhiên cô cũng đã phải đấu tranh trong quá trình đó nhưng cô không bao che cho những sai lầm của bất cứ ai, ngay cả khi họ là những người gần gũi cô nhất. Cô phải công bằng, minh bạch và chính xác trong quan hệ của cô với tất cả mọi người trong trường để có được lòng tin của họ.

did not avoid the clashes; I did not mind facing difficulties in my leadership position”⁹⁹.

R2 smiled when making this comment as though it was not a negative statement on her character.

R2’s recruitment policy was an open, transparent process designed to find the most suitable person for the required jobs. According to her, *“eighty percent of the job results depend on the capability of the person in charge”¹⁰⁰*, thus, the requirements of the needed job ask for the right person. It was not her responsibility to design a post for her favourite types.

R2 said, *“I think a Rector should have the art of persuasion and gathering people”¹⁰¹*. In her relationships with her employees, R2 respected and had confidence in their ability as well. She delegated duties to her subordinates then let them decide their own ways to carry out the tasks. She was both team-mate and coach, who provided support and advice for the best results. *“If I found out someone, who could do the job, I believed in them but it did not mean they could do what they want. This trust must be built on a proper monitoring and supervising mechanisms”¹⁰²* to ensure the best quality of the job done. She also shared her responsibility in the decision making process by discussing and seeking their opinions and advice. *“I was very careful when making a decision. I set up a structure that gives my staff chances to express their ideas. Generally, I collected suggestions of my staff in two or even more than three rounds. The original idea might be mine but I had never made any decision by myself because it would affect the whole university. Nevertheless, I was responsible for making final*

⁹⁹ Mọi người đều nói rằng cô mạnh mẽ hơn đàn ông vì cô là người thẳng thắn. Cô không ngại va chạm và đối mặt với khó khăn trong vị trí lãnh đạo của mình.

¹⁰⁰ Khả năng của người được giao nhiệm vụ quyết định đến tám mươi phần trăm kết quả công việc.

¹⁰¹ Cô nghĩ người hiệu trưởng phải có nghệ thuật thuyết phục và tập hợp mọi người.

¹⁰² Nếu cô tìm thấy ai có thể làm được việc, cô tin tưởng ở họ nhưng không có nghĩa là họ muốn làm gì thì làm. Sự tin tưởng này phải dựa trên một cơ chế kiểm tra và giám sát hợp lý.

decisions”¹⁰³.

R2 was the woman Rector of a university in which over eighty percent of staff and students were men. Men responded to her decisions directly. Whenever this happened, R2 relied on her “soft”¹⁰⁴ characteristics: being convincive and attentive. The softness of a woman combined with her leadership traits had helped her overcome the challenges in the position of being “a woman Rector in a man’s world”¹⁰⁵.

R2 believed her leadership characteristics and perspectives had helped her in the rector position. When R2 was appointed to be the Deputy Rector, some colleagues did not totally agree with that selection. They thought this appointment was far beyond her capability and she could not assume this responsibility but later on “those people were convinced... They could see that I was honest, I was hard working; I was impartial and ready to sacrifice my own interests...I was ready to confront with and be responsible for any university problems”¹⁰⁶.

6.2.4 Challenges, solutions and strategies

R2’s family commitments did not hinder her career, but it had an influence on her family. R2 thanked her husband and her children for letting her do her job so well. “My husband and my sons had to endure my busy work schedule but they were very tolerant”¹⁰⁷. It was her husband, who picked up the children to and from school

¹⁰³ Cô rất cẩn thận khi đưa ra quyết định. Cô thiết lập một cấu trúc cung cấp cho cơ hội cho nhân viên của cô được thể hiện ý tưởng của họ. Nói chung, cô lấy ý kiến của các cán bộ công nhân viên trong trường hai hoặc thậm chí là ba vòng. Ý tưởng có thể xuất phát từ cô nhưng cô chưa bao giờ thực hiện bất kỳ quyết định nào một mình bởi vì nó ảnh hưởng đến toàn bộ trường. Tuy nhiên, cô chịu trách nhiệm về các quyết định cuối cùng.

¹⁰⁴ mềm mỏng

¹⁰⁵ nữ hiệu trưởng trong thế giới đàn ông

¹⁰⁶ những người này dần dần bị thuyết phục... Họ thấy mình làm hết sức, mình vô tư và sẵn sàng hy sinh lợi ích cá nhân ... Mình luôn luôn sẵn sàng đương đầu và chịu trách nhiệm với mọi vấn đề của trường.

¹⁰⁷ Chồng và các con cô là những người phải chịu thiệt thòi vì công việc bận rộn của cô nhưng họ rất bao dung.

whenever she was busy at work. It also was her husband, who was willing to cook and to eat alone whenever she went home late. Nevertheless, R2 never jeopardised her role as a woman of the family because of work. To maintain balance, sometimes, official duties took second place to family responsibilities. For nearly ten years as a Rector she tried to have dinner with her family every day. *“I often prepared dinner for the whole family and monitored my sons’ studies when I was at home. Cooking takes much time, but for me, it creates a warm family atmosphere and harmony”*¹⁰⁸. If R2 had to attend a mandatory late meeting, she attempted to finish her opening speech as soon as she could and left for her family. Though this strategy limited her socialisation with her colleagues but *“it was the way I got the full support of my husband and my children”*¹⁰⁹. Working under high pressure, R2 sometimes felt stressed and needed to chat about her job. Her husband was the person, who shared her feelings, her thoughts and gave her advice. *“My husband always was ready there [to share her thoughts]. Owing to his care, I felt mentally relieved”*¹¹⁰. Because of such strong support from her husband, R2 devoted herself to the job without feeling uneasy about not being able to take care of her family as much as she would have liked.

Though there were suspicious views when she was promoted to be the deputy Rector, according to R2, *“they were not intentional”*¹¹¹. It was because *“this is a big university. I was an ordinary dean. I was not a well known figure in my university and not all people know much about me, thus, some people were doubtful of my*

¹⁰⁸ Cô thường chuẩn bị bữa tối cho cả gia đình và giúp các con trai làm bài tập về nhà khi có thời gian. Nấu ăn mất nhiều thời gian, nhưng đối với cô, nó tạo ra một bầu không khí gia đình ấm áp và hài hòa.

¹⁰⁹ Đó là cách để có được sự ủng hộ từ chồng con

¹¹⁰ Chồng cô luôn sẵn sàng chia sẻ. Nhờ đó mà cô giải quyết nhiều về tư tưởng.

¹¹¹ Họ không có ý

management skills”¹¹². It was also hard to find thing that made her feel difficult in her position as Rector as well. This was because she was equipped with competent characteristics of a Rector and accumulated appropriate leadership experiences in previous positions. She also had the trust of all staff.

However, R2 was not satisfied with inertia of some senior staff within the university. Most of the senior lecturers were trained in the former USSR and other Eastern European countries. They were heavily influenced by the higher education philosophy in the age of centralised and subsidised economy. They reluctantly adopted new ideas of higher education in a market economy of the DOI MOI, as they had to work harder to survive in the academic market competition. *“Though most senior university members were intellectuals, there had been some stagnant thoughts that still existed”*¹¹³. Being influenced by the politics of face, which endorses the practice that people [including leaders] should be respectful and loyal to the seniors, who support them in their career advancement; R2 found this challenge *“was not easy to deal with”*¹¹⁴ as criticising seniors is impossible as this could be seen as betrayal to them and losing face for both sides involved (Luke, 2001). This fact, sometimes, affected the efficiency of R2’s leadership within the university.

6.2.5 Contribution to improve the status of women

R2 stressed that occasionally, there had been disagreement with her decisions, but she never had met any direct complains due to she was a woman. Leadership to R2

¹¹² đây là một trường đại học lớn. Cô là một trưởng khoa bình thường. Cô không phải là nhân vật nổi tiếng ở trong trường và không phải là người nào cũng biết về cô nhiều, vì vậy, có người đã nghi ngờ khả năng lãnh đạo của cô.

¹¹³ thành viên đại học lâu năm là những người tri thức, tuy nhiên cũng có những lẽ lỗi quá lâu rồi mà nó không phù hợp.

¹¹⁴ cũng khó mà giải quyết.

was gender neutral. *“I think that women can do the same jobs as men can. If I had been a man, I would not have been sure that I could be more successful”*¹¹⁵. The key thing is that women are different from men when they exhibit their leadership skills. According to R2, women’s strength is not as mental and physical as men’s but rests on the characteristics that women have in nature. It was “soft”¹¹⁶ leadership characteristics. *“Women leaders are convictive because they are attentive and less ego driven”*¹¹⁷.

R2 echoed R1’s voice that family responsibility is one of the factors that deter Vietnamese women’s career advancement. *“Firstly, to be successful in their career, professionally, women have to do well as men do. Besides, they are socially expected to be good wives and good mothers to look after a family. Clearly, men do not need to think about the second side. Thus, they have more advantages in career development”*¹¹⁸. She also supported R1’s perception that most of people, especially men *“do not wish for the fact that leaders are women. They subtly do not recognise the role of women in university management because they are afraid of being in a disadvantageous position in comparison with women, an unexpectedly cultural and social gender relation in Vietnam. Thus, when being nominated as potential candidates for senior positions, most women do not accumulate enough votes”*¹¹⁹. As well, R2 mentioned the age of retirement from administrative posts for women [at fifty five]. She

¹¹⁵ Cô nghĩ rằng phụ nữ có thể làm các công việc tương tự như nam giới. Nếu cô là đàn ông, cô cũng không chắc chắn rằng cô có thể thành công hơn.

¹¹⁶ mềm mỏng

¹¹⁷ Phụ nữ lãnh đạo dễ làm người ta tin tưởng vì họ chu đáo và ít thể hiện cái tôi.

¹¹⁸ Đầu tiên, để thành công trong sự nghiệp của mình, về chuyên môn phụ nữ cũng phải làm tốt như đàn ông. Bên cạnh đó, họ vẫn phải là những người vợ tốt và người mẹ tốt chăm sóc gia đình theo như yêu cầu của xã hội. Rõ ràng là đàn ông không cần phải nghĩ đến về thứ hai. Vì vậy họ có nhiều thuận lợi hơn trong phát triển nghề nghiệp

¹¹⁹ không muốn một thực tế là phụ nữ là lãnh đạo. Họ đã khôn khéo không công nhận vai trò của phụ nữ trong quản lý trường đại học bởi vì họ sợ bị ở vị trí bất lợi so với phụ nữ, một sự thật về quan hệ giới mà văn hóa và xã hội Việt Nam chưa ngờ tới. Vì vậy khi được đề cử là ứng viên tiềm năng cho các vị trí cấp cao, hầu hết phụ nữ không tích lũy đủ số phiếu bầu.

stated that *“at that age, women have still contributed excellently to the society in their leadership positions but they have to retire. This policy should be more flexible for women working in an academic environment”*¹²⁰.

R2 shared her thoughts about what women should possess if they want to be successful in higher education leadership in Vietnam. R2 validated R1’s opinion that women should have a solid base of expertise by getting terminal degrees. They also should prepare themselves with skills needed by people in leadership roles, such as organisational skills, determination and convincingness, honest and high community spirit. R2 acknowledged the differences in the family and education backgrounds of each woman but *“they need to overcome themselves and never think that they are incapable of doing something”*¹²¹. Finally, R2 added though women could be successful as men could, they should keep their image as women. She said that *“in my daily life, I am very feminine. I like household arts as cooking, needlework and I am always a woman of my family outside of my work”*¹²².

6.3 Researcher’s reflection

R2 told her story in a deliberate accent. Our interview happened in a slow pace. R2 was precise and cautious. She chose her presented words carefully and addressed each issue with the same self-controlled manner. Occasionally, she stopped for seconds before mentioning to something. She seemed to be thoughtful of the questions I asked and the answers she provided. R2 was also very reserved. She did not tell much about

¹²⁰ Ở tuổi đó, người phụ nữ vẫn còn đóng góp tích cực cho xã hội trên cương vị lãnh đạo của họ nhưng họ đã phải nghỉ hưu. Chính sách này cần được linh hoạt hơn nữa đối với phụ nữ làm việc trong môi trường học thuật.

¹²¹ họ phải vượt qua bản thân và đừng bao giờ nghĩ mình không thể làm được việc gì.

¹²² trong cuộc sống hàng ngày, cô rất nữ tính. Cô thích nghệ thuật gia đình như may vá, nấu ăn và cô luôn luôn là một người phụ nữ của gia đình khi cô không đi làm.

herself but spoke generously about her professional experience in her position. She was a strong woman with demonstrated administrative and organisational skills. R2 also was humble when talking about the achievements of her university under her leadership terms. She said that, *“it would be better to let this issue for others to comment”*¹²³. However, to a certain extent, she was satisfied with her latest administrative job as *“most of the Rectors were experienced the position of the academic staff before entering administrative positions and not all of them succeeded in their new roles. I did not dare to say that I was successful but I fulfilled my job”*¹²⁴.

When R2 spoke, every word in her speech had the strength of an experienced leader. She was skilful to avoid mentioning too much about her own and always found exact words to express her ideas. Thus, there was never any doubt in her voice when she spoke out. Caution was her characteristic that prevailed during our conversation.

¹²³ tốt hơn nên để những người khác đánh giá về việc này

¹²⁴ hầu hết các hiệu trưởng đều xuất thân là giảng viên trước khi được bổ nhiệm làm quản lý và và không phải tất cả trong số họ đều thành công trong vai trò mới của mình. Cô không dám nói rằng cô đã thành công nhưng cô hoàn thành nhiệm vụ của mình

Chapter 7: R3

My interview with R3, who was the first woman Rector of a famous university, was in Hanoi. R3 was a sixty year old woman who was a Rector for more than seven years. R3 became a university lecturer in 1974 after obtaining her degree at a prestigious university in the former USSR. Prior to becoming a Rector, R3 was a faculty dean, a chief of the international and research offices and a deputy Rector. Her career rested on an outstanding record in a variety of university functions including fundraising, academic affairs, research and public services, international relations and human resources. R3 also was famous for her passion for her work. She is now a professor teaching at the same university where she was a Rector.

7.1 The setting

R3's university is one of the famous public four-year universities in Vietnam with annual enrolments around 6,400 students at all levels and nearly four hundred staff¹²⁵. The university specialises in business and foreign trade training with the National University Entrance Examination pass mark is sometimes reached to 26.5 out of the 30¹²⁶. Its students are highly sought after, not only for their academic knowledge, but also for being dynamic, creative and self-confidence in social and community activities. The university has three campuses in three regions throughout Vietnam: one in the North [Hanoi], one in the South [Hochiminh city] and one in the Central. Among these, the Hanoi campus is the main site. This campus is high in its prestige in

¹²⁵ Source from Education and Training Statistics in the academic year 2008 – 2009, MOET

¹²⁶ As cited in Chapter 1, the national university entrance examination in Vietnam including 3 subjects in each group and each subject is marked based on 10 mark scale. To study in this university, the candidate sometime has to achieve over 8 out of 10 for each subject, a very high competitive mark.

comparison with other universities in Vietnam. There was a new sport complex, which had just been built besides high standard lecture rooms and libraries. There were some research centres that had been built by the funding of research co-operations between this university and other foreign partners such as Japan and France. Becoming a student of this university was my unsuccessful dream twenty years ago.

R3's office was on the second floor of a research centre in Hanoi campus. The office was slightly disorganised but with an atmosphere of a working office. It was quite a big room for a university lecturer and filled up with the books, presents, medals and certificates of merit since R3 was the Rector. When I arrived to meet R3 at the university, she was sitting in her office reading a document.

R3 was not glamorous, but she was good-looking woman who liked simple clothes, which were comfortable for work such as suits or shirts with trousers. R3 had a compelling voice suited to those who could hold the floor to be heard. When she spoke, she combined what she said with her body language to convey her meaning. There was energy in her speech. I had many chances to meet R3 when she was a Rector, both at her university and in the MOET's site. Because of such friendly relation, we were chatting for half an hour before starting our interview. R3 wanted to hear more about my research and my career aspirations. She was very interested in my study as there hasn't been any research like this before on Vietnamese women Rectors in higher education. Our conversation then moved to topics such as friends and hobbies. Later, our interview lasted for nearly two hours. Sometimes, R3 had to stop to answer the phones. Besides her role as a lecturer, R3 was an affiliate of some social legal organisations such as Vietnam's International Arbitration Centre and Vietnam's Women Union. She was in charge of several legislation projects there. R3 still maintains her

connections with those organisations. R3 enjoyed speaking about her experiences and was enthusiastic about the idea of sharing her story as a means of helping other potential Vietnamese women to strive for the success in higher education leadership. There also had been some regret when she had to leave the administrative post at the age [fifty five] that she considered this to be the most mature part of a woman's career.

7.2 R3's story

7.2.1 Biography, family and education

R3 was born in the North of Vietnam in a family that had a tradition of working in the education sector. Her father was a general director of a Department of the Ministry of Education [now MOET] in his time. Her mother was a housewife and did not go to university. R3 has two siblings. Her older sister was a high school teacher. Her younger brother was a university lecturer and concurrently a director of a research institute. *"All my family works in education"*¹²⁷.

R3 and her siblings were given the most favourable conditions when they entered school age. She finished high school in Hanoi with excellent results and was sent to the USSR to study International Economic Law. She returned to Vietnam in 1974 and purposefully applied to work in a university as a lecturer. R3 was then a famous woman lecturer, who had a strong influence on her colleagues and students by her passion for being the best lecturer and her innovative teaching methods. Students were so attracted to her teaching that they always rated her highly in evaluations among other staff. In 1984, R3 went back to the former USSR to get her PhD in the same subject that she studied at undergraduate level. In this period, her teaching skills and

¹²⁷ *Tất cả gia đình tôi đều làm trong ngành giáo dục*

research capability was more improved. As a result, when R3 returned to Vietnam, she was the lecturer, who had the highest number of published research articles in her university.

R3 married in her late thirties. This age was considered too late for marriage or “to be left on the shelf”¹²⁸ according to Vietnamese culture. Her husband was her long time friend, who worked for a bank and then retired. They had a daughter, who now was a third year university student.

7.2.2 Ascension to the rectorship

R3 started her administrative career in higher education from the position of deputy dean after she returned to Vietnam with her doctorate in 1987. During this time, DOI MOI policy had been implemented. To adopt new ideas of higher education in a market economy in transition time, many university lecturers in Vietnam were sent abroad to take part in short courses on their expertise. Those courses provided university lecturers with competent knowledge to help them understand and know how to survive in the academic market competition. R3 was among the first lecturers, who benefited from this policy. She took twelve-month intensive course in France. “I had a chance to meet lecturers of a developed country that is totally different from a socialist country like Vietnam. I familiarised myself with new approaches in curriculum development, research and teaching methods”¹²⁹. R3 quickly applied what she had learnt from this course into practice. Because of her passion for her job and her keen mind, R3 was appointed to be the chief of Science Research and International Relations Office. Being

¹²⁸ bị ế chồng

¹²⁹ Tôi có cơ hội được tiếp cận với giảng viên của một nước phát triển, khác hẳn với mô hình nước xã hội chủ nghĩa như Việt Nam. Tôi được làm quen với cách tiếp cận mới đối với việc phát triển nội dung chương trình, nghiên cứu và phương pháp giảng dạy.

described as energetic, engaging, experienced, and enthusiastic, R3 was appointed to be the deputy Rector in 1994 and four years later, she was unanimously selected as a solo finalist for the rectorial search and became the first woman Rector in her university.

Recalling her journey to the Rectorship, R3 claimed that there were many factors leading to this success. Those included her love of the job; her strong academic and research knowledge; and her solid reputation in leadership practice; since she was appointed to be the division vice chief of that helped her gain the respect of her colleagues and students. When she was in this administration post, she tried to help her colleagues earn more by organising extra classes for them in the evenings or at the weekends. Owing to this experience, when she was appointed to be the Rector, she knew how to gather university staff support because she was close enough to understand what they want and their expectations. The fact that R3 married late and had a daughter at thirty nine years was turned into a critical advantage. While other women were busy with their marriages and children, she had earned her terminal degree and achieved prestigious titles and awards [associate professor, best lecturer of the year] in her job. *“I did not dream of a Rector’s position but since I would not think I was anyone, other people already knew about me. When talking about this university, they often mentioned me and two other persons among hundreds”*¹³⁰. Those factors helped R3 stand out from all other university staff when it was thought of a potential Rector.

There were persons in R3’s life, who had a strong influence on her career choice and development. R3 recognised the great influence of her father and two other women in her life and career. *“My father worked in the education sector until he was retired...*

¹³⁰ *Khi tôi chưa nghĩ tôi là ai thì mọi người đã biết tôi. Khi đề cập đến trường này là họ có đề cập đến tôi là một trong số ba người tiêu biểu trong hàng trăm người.*

He was a diligent educational official.... He was very dedicated to his job. He held many senior administrative posts [university Deputy Rector, chief of Minister's Office, General Deputy Director] in his career... I followed him to work in education. I was so much influenced by such family tradition that later, when there were many offers to work in other fields, I did not change my job"¹³¹. When R3 was an undergraduate student, her role model was a woman lecturer. This woman influenced her so much that she wanted to be like her. "I was listening to her lectures as if I wanted to swallow her words. At that time, I wished I would become a lecturer like her"¹³². There was another woman, who also served R3 as her role model when she was a PhD candidate. "This woman was my doctoral supervisor. She was a woman of patience and energy. She was harsh but she made a strong impression on me of persevering in the chosen job. It was her who inspired my enthusiasm for research by encouraging me to publish research articles though it was not compulsory for all doctoral candidates at that time"¹³³. The mixture of family tradition and those experiences had helped R3 become who she was now.

There was also a man who played important part in R3's career advancement. R3 recognised the fact that she would not be successful if she had not had a very supportive predecessor behind her. It was he, who saw that R3 had a talent for management, that she was capable, and that she could make a difference for the

¹³¹ *Bố tôi làm trong ngành giáo dục cho đến khi về hưu. Ông là một công chức giáo dục mẫn cán. Ông rất tận tụy với công việc. Ông từng làm nhiều vị trí quản lý giáo dục. Tôi theo ông làm việc trong ngành giáo dục. Truyền thống gia đình đã ảnh hưởng đến tôi mạnh đến nỗi sau này có nhiều cơ hội nhưng tôi vẫn không chuyển nghề.*

¹³² *Tôi lắng nghe bài giảng của bà như nuốt từng lời. Vào lúc đó tôi mơ ước là tôi sẽ trở thành người như bà.*

¹³³ *Đó là bà giáo hướng dẫn của tôi. Bà là một người có chí và nghị lực. Dù bà là người nghiêm khắc nhưng bà để lại cho tôi ấn tượng là chọn việc gì phải làm đến cùng. Chính bà là người truyền đam mê nghiên cứu trong tôi bằng cách động viên tôi đăng báo dù lúc đó không bắt buộc nghiên cứu sinh phải đăng báo khoa học.*

university. R3 was indebted to this man as he often encouraged her, pushed her into more responsible tasks. *“Regardless how good you are, if your leader does not recognise you and support you, you are still no one”*¹³⁴.

In terms of development activities, before accepting deputy position, she asked her Rector to let her continue her teaching job as she felt that it was vital to keep in touch with her students. R3 knew that it would be busier for her but if she had to leave the classroom, she would not have accepted this position. For her, being in contact with students was both her lifetime target and developmental opportunity. She could see the problems of the university from her students and her staff position. R3 adhered to this principle and for years, she *“was among the limited number of Rectors, who were doing well in both positions of an administrator and a lecturer”*¹³⁵. As well, she also was a member of academic and professional committees related to her expertise.

7.2.3 Leadership practices

Since her appointment as deputy dean in 1988, R3 had learnt how to deal with university management. During the time she was the first woman Rector of the university, she was continuously learning from the experiences of other senior administrators and Rectors. R3 valued the times when she was trained abroad as those chances equipped her *“with abilities such as to listen to others, to have good communication skills, to be visionary, to solve the problems and to accomplish a number of tasks at the onetime”*¹³⁶; the qualities that she thought were important in her job as a Rector. According to her, the success of a Rector comes firstly from the

¹³⁴ Dù bạn có tài giỏi đến đâu mà người lãnh đạo không nhìn ra bạn thì bạn vẫn chẳng là ai cả.

¹³⁵ là một trong số ít ỏi các hiệu trưởng vừa làm quản lý và vừa dạy học.

¹³⁶ với một số khả năng như biết lắng nghe người khác, có kỹ năng giao tiếp tốt, tầm nhìn rộng, và có thể giải quyết vấn đề và thực hiện một số nhiệm vụ trong cùng một thời điểm.

consensus of all university staff. Thus, when R3 made a decision, she always made sure to integrate all staff's input to give them the feeling that their ideas were respected. The right decisions were not necessary to generate totally from her but the decisions that benefited for the whole university. *"My staff and my students were my concerns. I often asked my staff's opinions before making a decision. I was open and receptive to their positive ideas. The more I shared with them, the more reliable base of the decision was"*¹³⁷.

R3 was a decisive and inquiring Rector. *"When a decision was made, I supervised, speeded up the implementation process regularly to get the best result of that task"*¹³⁸. She also was a responsible Rector. *"When a microphone was broken and worked improperly or there was a hole on the ceiling in a lecture room, I directly went to the field and urged for its immediate repair to ensure that my staff and my students were given the best conditions for their teaching and studying"*¹³⁹. Like R1, her manner also was inclusive. She gave her staff the flexibility to be innovative to do their jobs but she often involved in their activities. *"I let them perform but I included myself as a member in the team"*¹⁴⁰.

R3 confessed that she was tough but she believed that *"the effective woman Rector is a person, who understands and combines both male and female traits in her*

¹³⁷ Cán bộ và sinh viên trong trường là mối quan tâm của tôi. Tôi thường hỏi ý kiến cán bộ của trường trước khi đưa ra quyết định. Tôi thật tình tiếp thu những ý tưởng tích cực của họ. Tôi càng chia sẻ với họ thì nền tảng của các quyết định càng đáng tin cậy.

¹³⁸ Khi quyết định đã được đưa ra, thì tôi dồn đốc quyết liệt quá trình thực hiện, kiểm tra thường xuyên để kết quả đạt được tốt nhất..

¹³⁹ Khi một mi- crô bị hỏng hoặc chất lượng sử dụng kém hay có một lỗ hỏng trên trần nhà của giảng đường, tôi trực tiếp đến hiện trường và đề nghị sửa chữa ngay lập tức để đảm bảo rằng cán bộ và sinh viên của trường được trang bị các điều kiện tốt nhất cho việc giảng dạy và học tập.

¹⁴⁰ Tôi để họ thực hiện nhưng tôi vẫn coi mình như là một thành viên trong nhóm.

leadership position”¹⁴¹. Thus, R3 did not bother much on the comments that she was as rational or forceful as man sometimes. *“The image of university Rectors in Vietnam is still based on male standards. It’s a trap when a woman Rector tries to model strictly male traits in her position but using them flexibly in different situations would be the most effective”*¹⁴². R3 was skilful when she mixed both male attributes and female characteristics in her job. *“I was tough but when it needed, I used women’s sensitivity to understand other people’s activities and their thoughts to approach those issues appropriately and convincingly”*¹⁴³.

With regard to hiring people, R3 remarked that Rectors should hire competent people, who could assume the tasks and should have gained the truly respect of all others. The recruitment process should be clear, publicised and transparent and not based on the Rectors personal feelings. R3 had refused the demand of relatives or friends to work in her university; even those persons *“were very nice”*¹⁴⁴.

According to R3, her appointment was not her own personal achievement, interest or privilege. This position was the confidence of colleagues and students placed in her. In broader view, she thought that it also was a success and challenge for women working in higher education. Thus, she had to do this job with all her best and made herself as a role model to inspire other women to use their capacity to move forwards. *“I know that I was demanding. I know that my staff sometimes reproached me of having high expectations and concentrating on detail, but I also was a model of those high*

¹⁴¹ nữ hiệu trưởng hiệu quả là những người hiểu và kết hợp cả tính cách của nam và nữ ở vị trí lãnh đạo của mình

¹⁴² Hình ảnh của hiệu trưởng trường đại học ở Việt Nam vẫn dựa trên các tiêu chuẩn của nam giới. Nó là một cái bẫy khi một nữ hiệu trưởng cố gắng áp dụng một cách triệt để các đặc điểm nam tính ở vị trí của mình nhưng sử dụng chúng linh hoạt trong các tình huống khác nhau sẽ là hiệu quả nhất.

¹⁴³ Tôi rất cứng rắn nhưng khi cần thiết, tôi sử dụng sự nhạy cảm của phụ nữ để hiểu hành động và suy nghĩ của người khác để tiếp cận những vấn đề đó một cách thích hợp và thuyết phục

¹⁴⁴ họ là những người tốt

*expectations. I worked extremely hard in my position and I continually learnt to improve my knowledge*¹⁴⁵. R3 thought that her leadership style was suitable for her university's context during her seven years as Rector.

7.2.4 Challenges, solutions and strategies

Being a Rector made R3 felt guilty about her family. *“Eight working hours a day were not enough for me. I needed fifteen hours. As a result, my family responsibility was neglected*¹⁴⁶. R3 credited her husband for helping her overcome the difficulties in balancing work and life. Because they were aged and knew each other long enough to understand each other's characters, R3's husband was tolerant and supportive. He understood the demands of his wife's job and he accepted her absences from home. This man was willing to do the housework and look after their only daughter. Part of R3's success was built on this sacrifice. She would have been unable to focus on her career if her husband had not put aside his own career to help her take care of their family. R3 acknowledged that *“this was not the ideal arrangement, but it was part of the sacrifice for the job*¹⁴⁷...*In my seven years as a Rector, I could not spend a complete New Year holidays with my family, but I had never heard any complaints from my husband or my daughter*¹⁴⁸... *my husband and my daughter understood my job and were very proud of me*¹⁴⁹... *I had a simple family life... I had one daughter and a supportive husband. I was grateful to my husband for sharing my burden of social responsibility and*

¹⁴⁵ Tôi biết rằng tôi là một người đòi hỏi cao. Tôi biết rằng cán bộ trong trường đôi khi chỉ trích tôi là người kỳ vọng cao và tập trung vào chi tiết nhưng tôi cũng là một điển hình của những kỳ vọng đó. Tôi đã làm việc cực kỳ tích cực trong vị trí của mình và tôi luôn luôn học tập để nâng cao kiến thức.

¹⁴⁶ Tám giờ làm việc một ngày không đủ cho tôi. Tôi cần giờ mười lăm giờ. Kết quả là, trách nhiệm gia đình tôi đã bị sao lãng.

¹⁴⁷ đây không phải là sự sắp xếp lý tưởng, đó là một phần của sự hy sinh cho công việc

¹⁴⁸ Trong bảy năm làm hiệu trưởng, tôi không thể có một kỳ nghỉ năm mới hoàn chỉnh với gia đình của tôi, nhưng tôi chưa bao giờ nghe thấy bất kỳ lời phàn nàn của chồng và con gái tôi.

¹⁴⁹ chồng và con gái tôi hiểu công việc của tôi và rất tự hào về tôi

housework”¹⁵⁰.

R3’s journey to the Rector’s position was not a problem for her because she was qualified and people recognised her capability [since she was appointed to be the Deputy Rector]. R3 possessed the criteria needed for a university Rector candidate. She held a doctoral degree, she had a good reputation in teaching and researching with association the title of professor; and she had the proper management experience in the roles of deputy dean, office chief and then Deputy Rector. However, R3 admitted that she was appointed to be the Rector in a very challenging time when there was personal friction in her university. The former Rector, at the end of his terms had mismanaged and failed the trust of the university staff. For R3, the first thing she had to do as Rector was to reinforce staff confidence. It was not an easy task. R3 had experienced doubts during her first months as a Rector. *“People observed me subtly within my first six months because I was a woman and there had never been any woman Rector in this university. They were curious about my leadership style. Furthermore, the faction within the university when I was appointed was a part in this suspicion. People were worried that I could not unite my staff”*¹⁵¹. R3 did not let this suspicion last too long. With a solid background in management for several years plus an inquiring mind, she took the Rector role as was expected of her. She was eager to learn from other Rectors how to lead a university effectively. By learning from them, R3 gained valuable knowledge about different leadership styles and abilities. As a result, except for the first six months, R3’s achievements in the Rector position were highly appreciated by her

¹⁵⁰ Tôi có một cuộc sống gia đình đơn giản. Tôi chỉ có một con gái và một người chồng đầy thông cảm. Tôi biết ơn chồng tôi đã chia sẻ gánh nặng về các nhiệm vụ xã hội cũng như công việc gia đình với tôi.

¹⁵¹ Mọi người quan sát tôi một cách tế nhị trong vòng sáu tháng đầu tiên của tôi vì tôi là một người phụ nữ và chưa có bất kỳ một hiệu trưởng nữ nào trong trường đại học này. Họ tò mò về phong cách lãnh đạo của tôi. Hơn nữa, việc chia sẻ trách nhiệm trước khi tôi được bổ nhiệm đã góp phần vào sự nghi ngờ này. Họ đã lo lắng rằng tôi không thể làm cho cán bộ của trường thống nhất.

staff and other colleagues.

There was one personal characteristic that R3 recognised as weakness; her hot temper. *“Though I was a woman, I was hot tempered. At times, this personal characteristic negatively influenced on my job. It would be better if I was more patient. People do not always understand you whenever you are hot tempered or too hasty on results of the tasks though you work hard and do not ask for your personal rewards”*¹⁵². R3 gradually had learnt how to keep calm through her seven years working in the top position.

7.2.5 Contribution to improve the status of women

R3 believed that there many factors hinder women’s career advancement in higher education. Of all that factors, marriage and children are the most cause in keeping women from pursuing academic and career goals. In comparison with a male leaders, woman always have to struggle to balance work and life. *“This is the main factor preventing women from being successful in their careers. Men could not be pregnant so motherhood is women’s natural responsibility. We could not change it”*¹⁵³.

Because of social conventions, Vietnamese women always put their husband’s success before theirs. R3 honestly said that she was fortunate to have that *“ideal”*¹⁵⁴ man. In terms of government policies, R3 claimed that she was the woman, who was disadvantaged because of the compulsory age retirement for women in Vietnam. In her opinion, this policy minimises women’s contribution to their careers. R3 considered the

¹⁵² Mặc dù tôi là phụ nữ nhưng tôi rất nóng tính. Đôi khi, điều này đã ảnh hưởng tiêu cực đến công việc của tôi. Sẽ tốt hơn nếu tôi kiên nhẫn một chút. Người ta không phải luôn luôn hiểu bạn bất cứ khi nào bạn nóng giận hoặc quá vội vàng về kết quả của công việc dù bạn làm việc chăm chỉ và không yêu cầu phần thưởng cho cá nhân bạn.

¹⁵³ Đây là yếu tố chính ngăn cản phụ nữ thành công trong sự nghiệp. Đàn ông không thể mang thai vì thế làm mẹ là trách nhiệm tự nhiên của phụ nữ. Chúng ta không thể thay đổi được điều này.

¹⁵⁴ Lý tưởng

age from fifty five to sixty to the most mature time in the career life of women working in academic environment. When “*women can accumulate sufficient experiences to practice their duties in the most effective way and their family responsibility is lessened, they have to retire*”¹⁵⁵.

Regardless of the difficulties above, in addition to the advantages that women bring into leadership that other women commented, R3 emphasised that “*women leaders are good diplomat and negotiators. They bring their good communicative and negotiable skills to the table. Furthermore, in the context of Vietnam, women leaders are more determined to resist temptations and not easy to compromise with corrupt practices. They are more earnest than men*”¹⁵⁶.

R3 shared her useful thoughts for other aspiring women working in higher education. She echoed with R1 and R2 that, women must have strong knowledge by getting a doctorate degree and a range of characteristics that useful for them in leadership positions. In addition to what mentioned in the previous interviews, another piece of R3’s advice for potential women was “*to nurture a passion for the job*”¹⁵⁷. Passion was a motivation for women to enjoy their work and encourage them to learn new methods to deliver their work more effectively. “*If women passionately, continuously learn in their work, they will be successful*”¹⁵⁸. Lastly, R3 encouraged women, even in their successes should remain the feminine beings that they are. “*Women should not try to imitate men. They should know how to bring into play all the*

¹⁵⁵ người phụ nữ có thể tích lũy đủ kinh nghiệm để đảm đương nhiệm vụ của mình một cách hiệu quả nhất và khi trách nhiệm gia đình của họ giảm đi, họ lại phải nghỉ hưu

¹⁵⁶ phụ nữ lãnh đạo là những nhà ngoại giao và đàm phán giỏi. Họ thể hiện được các kỹ năng giao tiếp và thương lượng tốt trên bàn đàm phán. Hơn nữa, trong bối cảnh của Việt Nam, phụ nữ lãnh đạo quyết tâm hơn trong việc chống lại cám dỗ và không dễ dàng thỏa hiệp với các hành vi tham nhũng. Họ nghiêm chỉnh hơn đàn ông.

¹⁵⁷ Nuôi dưỡng niềm đam mê nghề nghiệp.

¹⁵⁸ Nếu phụ nữ nhiệt tình và liên tục học hỏi trong công việc, họ sẽ thành công.

advantages of women such as negotiable and consultative skills in every situation”¹⁵⁹.

7.3 Researcher’s reflection

R3 was a dedicated Rector. For her, *“the Rector position was not the aim of my career. It was the whole university’s trust in me and I had to finish this task with my most energy and knowledge and I did”*¹⁶⁰. R3 respected this position so much that she regretted leaving it in late 2005 at the age of fifty five. R3’s honestly believed that *“If I had had more five years, I would have done this job better and contributed more to the development of my university”*¹⁶¹. Nevertheless, R3 was a woman of work. She came back to teaching job as a full time lecturer in the university. *“I do not feel something missing. I still attach with my university and contribute to its development in the position that I already started from the very first day of my career [full time lecturer]”*¹⁶². Through her entire career, R3 had received many awards both in position of a lecturer and an administrator such as Outstanding Teacher Award, Medal for the Contribution for young generation, Medal of Labour and Honour of People’s Teacher. Besides, due to her contribution to the education cooperation between Vietnam and France, she was bestowed Cross of the Legion of Honour by the French Government. R3’s career made herself a role model for women working in higher education in Vietnam. The interview with R3 left me a feeling that if I continued to work hard and I was provided with the right opportunities, I could achieve similar successes.

¹⁵⁹ Phụ nữ không nên cố gắng bắt chước đàn ông. Họ cần phải biết cách phát huy tất cả những lợi thế của phụ nữ như kỹ năng thương lượng và tư vấn trong mọi tình huống.

¹⁶⁰ vị trí hiệu trưởng không phải là mục tiêu trong sự nghiệp của tôi. Đó là lòng tin của toàn trường vào tôi và tôi phải hoàn thành nó với toàn bộ sinh lực và kiến thức của mình và tôi đã làm như thế.

¹⁶¹ Nếu tôi có thêm năm năm nữa, tôi đã có thể thực hiện công việc này tốt hơn và đóng góp nhiều hơn cho sự phát triển của trường.

¹⁶² Tôi không cảm thấy có gì hụt hẫng. Tôi vẫn còn gắn bó với trường đại học của mình và đóng góp vào sự phát triển của trường ở vị trí mà tôi đã bắt đầu từ những ngày đầu tiên trong sự nghiệp của tôi

Chapter 8: R4

R4, who was the first woman Rector of a specialist music academy where she had a lifelong attachment; as a student, a lecturer and as an administrator. From 1996, she served her academy as its Rector for more than ten years. Even while she was a Rector, R4 also continued to be a music educator and performer. Before this interview, I had not talked with her personally. Our contacts were only the exchange of greetings in higher education conferences in Vietnam. R4 is a petite woman who looks younger than her age. She possessed a soft but slightly husky voice. For the interview she was dressed very smartly, wearing a nice soft dress and she wore her hair pulled back. It was very easy to see a perfect harmony between the lecturer and the artist in R4. She had held the noblest titles that were granted by the Vietnamese Government such as the Woman of the Year, People's Teacher and People's Artist. Leaving the Rector position in 2007, most of R4's time was now spent teaching performing. She also was a member of Vietnamese performing artist association, Vietnam's Women Union and others community organisations.

8.1 The setting

R4's academy was one of the comprehensive public higher education institutions in Vietnam focusing on music research and training. It offers professional music training ranging from secondary education up to bachelor, master and doctoral levels. There were approximately seven hundred students studying in its different music courses and programs¹⁶³. The academy had two hundred lecturers; many being awarded the title of People's Teachers and Meritorious Teachers. It is most often the graduates

¹⁶³ Source from Education and Training Statistics in academic year 2008 – 2009, MOET

from this academy who become prominent music performers, music teachers, musicologists, composers and conductors in Vietnam. Many win prizes at national and international music competitions. The academy was in the process of reconstruction when our interview took place. A complex of teaching rooms and a high standard concert hall had been built next to the old campus to position the academy as one of the top higher education institutions in Vietnam and in the Southeast Asia region in music training. This construction had begun during R4's terms. My appointment with R4 happened in the old academy campus one day before her trip to take part in a regional music competition. Under the guidance of a security guard, I had to pass a construction site that was full of bricks, cement and scaffolds. On the next day, R4 was flying to Jakarta, so she was very busy preparing for this. Her mission, besides the role of an examiner, was the leader of her academy competitors. When I arrived, R4 was discussing the competition program with her students and her colleagues about talking and how to perform beautifully in the entrance hall. I noticed some famous figures in the artistic circle, whom I have rarely met except in the media. I could see a tremendous amount of respect in their attitudes toward R4. It was a very hot day. When R4 saw me, she talked to a technical official to switch on the air conditioner in a teaching room and asked me to wait for a while. Observing R4's discussion with others, I realised that she was very supportive and dedicated to her students' success.

R4 received me in a teaching room of the old building. Because of the specific characteristic of music training, all of the teaching rooms here were air-conditioned, small and soundproofed. We were not disturbed by any outside noise. I guessed this room was for future pianists because there was a piano there. As in the other interviews, we had to stop our talk several times because R4 received phone calls. Knowing that R4

had to skip her lunch to meet me, I tried to finish our conversation within sixty minutes but we ran past the allotted time.

8.2 R4's story

8.2.1 Biography, family and education

R4 was born in a family that had music as well as revolutionary traditions in Vietnam. R4's father was an intellectual and a revolutionary. R4's mother was one of the first Vietnamese to receive a bachelor in music from the Prague Conservatory. Her parents had met in Paris and then, moved to Prague, where she was born. In 1951, their family returned to Vietnam and lived in the Northernmost Vietnamese base. Her father died here a year later during his mission without knowing that his wife was pregnant with their second child. At that time, R4 was only two and a half years old. After this tragic event, R4's mother moved to Hanoi to develop her career as a pianist and a music teacher. She remarried a famous writer and had a son in her second marriage. R4's mother was one of the founders of the music academy, where her daughter was to become its Rector.

Both R4's younger brother and her half-brother were musically talented. The former loved music and studied the piano for several years but he became an architect, with a doctorate and now he is the director of a Research and Design Institute in Vietnam. The latter, after gaining the first prize in a prestigious international competition became famous worldwide as a pianist and music lecturer.

R4 learnt how to play a piano when she was a child and she was a primary and secondary music student at her mother's faculty. She was then sent to the former USSR for her BA in music. Returning to Vietnam in late 1975, R4 followed her mother as a

music teacher at the academy. In 1983, at the time she was the dean of the piano faculty, R4 returned to the former USSR for a PhD in Music Studies in a famous conservatory.

Twice married, R4 has a daughter from her first marriage who has also followed a family tradition of studying music. She is also an undergraduate music student in a foreign country. R4 hopes that one day, her daughter like her grandmother and mother contribute to the academy in her own way. R4 did not say anything about her first husband and I respected her privacy in this matter. She was happy with her current marriage. They were friends before deciding to live together. Her husband was a famous singer before moving to administrative career. He was once a Vice-Minister. Several years ago, R4's husband retired from administration position and now worked at the same academy as R4 as a music lecturer.

8.2.2 Ascension to the rectorship

R4 obtained her doctorate in 1987, became an associate professor in 1991 and was appointed, first a faculty dean, then deputy Rector in charge of academic affairs by 1994. Over one year later, she was the academy's first woman Rector. R4 performed the role Rector in parallel with her teaching and performing careers.

Becoming a music lecturer was R4's sole dream. *"I was growing up with my mother's music and was trained in prestigious music academies. I loved piano, I loved music... I had never imagined other than being a music teacher"*¹⁶⁴. But becoming a Rector was her *"luck"*¹⁶⁵ as she explained. *"When I was young, I concentrated much on improving my music knowledge. I have never thought that I would be an administrator*

¹⁶⁴ Cô đã lớn lên với âm nhạc của mẹ cô và được đào tạo tại các học viện âm nhạc có uy tín. Cô yêu piano, tôi yêu âm nhạc ... Cô chưa bao giờ tưởng tượng đến việc trở thành một người nào khác hơn là một giáo viên âm nhạc

¹⁶⁵ may mắn

and later, a Rector. Then there was a time, when the female factor in administration became the centre of attention. It was said that in music training in Vietnam, the number of women have been occupied more than a half of population but there had never been any senior woman administrator or equivalent. At the same time, in my academy, there was also a need to prepare human resources for the handover from old generation to the younger one”¹⁶⁶. Owing to a continuous educational process, R4 had the qualifications for selection, and in that context, she was the top choice in the academy. R4 said that her appointment was a “brave”¹⁶⁷ decision of the higher authority because there were opinions, which supposed that “I was a woman, I was too young and I lacked the experience to undertake this position. It was a challenge for those, who took me seriously because at the time of my appointment, I thought I was the youngest female individuals in the top position in this field in the country”¹⁶⁸. Nevertheless, R4 did accept this challenge, as being young and a woman, by not letting those factors get in her way. R4 was also very aware of her family tradition. “...my mother is a Meritorious Artist, a People’s Teacher and one of the founders of this academy. My youngest brother is a People’s Artist and used to be a student of this academy. Their contribution to this academy was remarkable. I was facilitated to have

¹⁶⁶ Khi cô còn trẻ, cô tập trung nhiều vào nâng cao kiến thức âm nhạc của mình. Cô chưa bao giờ nghĩ rằng cô sẽ là một người quản lý và sau đó là một hiệu trưởng. Sau đó thì đến thời điểm, khi nhân tố nữ trong quản lý trở thành trung tâm của sự chú ý. Người ta nói rằng trong việc đào tạo âm nhạc tại Việt Nam, số lượng phụ nữ đã được chiếm hơn một nửa tổng số cán bộ làm việc trong lĩnh vực này nhưng chưa bao giờ có nữ cán bộ quản lý cấp cao hoặc tương đương. Đồng thời, lúc đó, tại học viện của cô cũng cần phải có sự chuẩn bị nhân sự cho việc chuyển giao từ thế hệ lãnh đạo cũ sang thế hệ lãnh đạo mới, trẻ hơn.

¹⁶⁷ dũng cảm

¹⁶⁸ Cô là một phụ nữ, cô còn quá trẻ và thiếu kinh nghiệm để có thể nhận chức vụ này. Đó là một thách thức cho những người đã tin tưởng cô bởi vì tại thời điểm bổ nhiệm, cô nghĩ cô là người phụ nữ nữ trẻ nhất giữ vị trí này trong lĩnh vực đào tạo âm nhạc của cả nước

an appropriate education. Thus, I had to do my best to be adequate with my family tradition”¹⁶⁹.

After eleven years of being an administrator, R4 left this job along with the titles of People's Teacher, People's Artist and other noble awards. Under her leadership, the academy expanded its campus and strengthened its image in regional and international circles. More and more students from other countries came to study at the academy, with students winning first prize in prestigious international and regional music competitions. R4 retired as Rector at the age of fifty seven. She was one of the special cases, allowed to continue in their administrative post two years after exceeding the women's retired age policy¹⁷⁰.

It was her mother, who inspired R4 to go into teaching and who was the most influential person in her life and career. *“My mother was my role model. Seeing her playing piano and teaching other students, I dreamt of one day, when I would be like her. I had always wanted to live in music and especially, I liked being a music teacher”*¹⁷¹. R4 proudly stated that *“I had experienced administrative positions [deputy dean, dean] that my mother held during her time here. I was very proud that I followed my mother's career path and contributed to the development of this academy”*¹⁷².

¹⁶⁹ Mẹ cô là một Nghệ sĩ ưu tú, Giáo viên nhân dân và là một trong những người sáng lập học viện này. Em trai út của cô là một Nghệ sĩ nhân dân và cũng từng là một sinh viên của học viện. Họ có những đóng góp đáng kể cho học viện. Cô được tạo các điều kiện để có được một nền giáo dục tốt. Vì vậy, cô phải làm hết sức mình để xứng đáng với truyền thống của gia đình.

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter 3, part about Vietnam and higher education in Vietnam, which described in detail the university rector selection criteria and appointment in this area.

¹⁷¹ Mẹ cô là hình mẫu của cô. Thấy bà chơi piano và dạy các sinh viên khác, cô mơ ước đến một ngày, cô sẽ được như bà. Cô đã luôn luôn muốn sống trong âm nhạc và đặc biệt, cô thích làm giáo viên âm nhạc.

¹⁷² Cô đã đã trải qua các vị trí mà mẹ của cô đã đảm đương trong thời gian làm việc ở học viện. Cô rất tự hào rằng cô đã đi theo con đường sự nghiệp của mẹ và đã góp phần vào sự phát triển của học viện này.

In addition to her mother, R4 gave credit to her predecessor. Since she was appointed to be the deputy Rector, this man gave her opportunities to test her leadership ability in other areas outside her responsibility in academic affairs as though she was a trainee. *“I thought this was his purpose, to train me as his successor. I had assumed this role until being officially appointed to be the Rector”*¹⁷³.

Because of the uniqueness of the music training, besides her role as a Rector, R4 had established her own music ensemble specialising in classical music performance. In this area her reputation grew within and outside of Vietnam, bringing international prestige in music training to the academy.

8.2.3 Leadership practices

R4 found it was very difficult to describe her leadership style, which she saw different from other Rectors. In her strong attachment to the academy, she considered it as her home; and her staff as her family. *“Studying music is often decided by the influence of family tradition”*¹⁷⁴. Like R4, most of her staff had had parents or grandparents who worked for this academy. As a result, in terms of administration, they were her subordinates; in an artistic circle, they were her colleagues and in everyday life, they were her friends. R4 felt that she should share her trust with them. *“I respected and was close to my staff. I was willing to listen to them and made sure that we all shared the same purpose that is to educate students and make this academy develop to a higher level”*¹⁷⁵ ...I encouraged my staff to show their abilities. I listened to

¹⁷³ Cô nghĩ đây là chủ ý của hiệu trưởng muốn đào tạo cô thành người kế nhiệm ông. Cô đã đảm nhận vai trò này cho đến khi trở thành hiệu trưởng chính thức.

¹⁷⁴ Việc chọn học âm nhạc thường được xác định bởi ảnh hưởng của truyền thống gia đình.

¹⁷⁵ Cô tôn trọng và gần gũi với cán bộ của mình. Cô sẵn sàng lắng nghe họ và đảm bảo chắc chắn rằng tất cả mọi người cùng chia sẻ mục đích là đào tạo sinh viên và làm cho học viện này phát triển đến một mức độ cao hơn

*their ideas as well as their criticism. I was always humble and honest to accept my weaknesses and learn from those with better experience*¹⁷⁶.

For R4, the power of a Rector was the ability to bring people together and build a strong team. *“My responsibility was to gather people and we all performed our jobs efficiently for the development of this academy”*¹⁷⁷. R4 thought that she did not need to be in charge or to be excellent at everything. She saw herself as the principal conductor, who kept everyone together, who led and provided direction, supervision and support to her staff to ensure the best joint performance. R4 had a supporting team including three male assistants; *“all the leading experts in their subjects”*¹⁷⁸. Those men had helped her greatly in running the academy and one of them later became her successor *“You should have strong organisational skills. Each of my male assistants has his strengths in their expertise and I found the best way to make them cooperate with each other and together exhibit their capabilities at full throttle”*¹⁷⁹. R4 did not find this a threat to her leadership. She believed in the capability of her team members, as they used to be her classmates, and they had known each other for long time. Nevertheless, she had never experienced a case when her feelings transgressed the principles in her job. In recruiting them, she emphasised that *“I respect their talents but I highly appreciated the loyalty,*

¹⁷⁶ Cô khuyến khích cán bộ trong học viện thể hiện khả năng của họ. Cô lắng nghe ý tưởng cũng như những lời phê bình của họ. Cô luôn luôn khiêm tốn và trung thực thừa nhận những điểm yếu của mình và rút kinh nghiệm từ đó để làm cho bản thân hoàn thiện hơn.

¹⁷⁷ Trách nhiệm của cô là tập hợp mọi người để thực hiện công việc một cách hiệu quả vì sự phát triển của học viện.

¹⁷⁸ Họ là các chuyên gia hàng đầu trong các lĩnh vực của mình.

¹⁷⁹ Bạn cần phải có kỹ năng tổ chức tốt. Mỗi nam trợ lý của cô đều có thế mạnh của mình trong chuyên môn và cô đã tìm ra cách tốt nhất là làm cho họ hợp tác với nhau và cùng nhau thể hiện khả năng của mình một cách tối đa.

*humbleness and objectiveness. There should be a harmonisation of those characteristics. We were a team, not a personal image*¹⁸⁰.

R4 invited participation and collaboration, but made her own decisions. *“I appreciated my staff’s ideas, but I was the person who finally made the decision after considering all positive thoughts. Sometimes, I had to convince them to follow my decisions but it did not mean a compromise. They must understand me, my leadership role and my style*¹⁸¹.

Attention to minor details and involvement in the miscellaneous things was a part of that style. *“If I saw dust in classrooms, I directly asked the handy people to clean it. I loved this place so much that I wanted to take care of it as I did to my house*¹⁸².

8.2.4 Challenges, solution and strategies

Like the other women in this study, R4 was aware that her career had affected her family. While her own daughter was grown up and studied abroad, she lived with her husband’s son and her two grandchildren. R4 accepted that it was not easy to balance family and work, so she had to be well-organised and conscious of her role in the family. She put work aside when she came home. *“At the academy, I was the Rector, but at home I had to remove that ‘leadership jacket’ to be a wife, a mother and*

¹⁸⁰ Cô tôn trọng tài năng của họ nhưng cô cũng đánh giá cao sự trung thành, khiêm tốn và khách quan. Nên có một sự hài hòa giữa những đặc điểm này. Đây là một nhóm, không phải là một hình ảnh cá nhân.

¹⁸¹ Cô đánh giá cao những ý tưởng của cán bộ của mình, nhưng cô là người cuối cùng ra quyết định sau khi đã xem xét tất cả các ý kiến tích cực. Có lúc cô phải thuyết phục họ làm theo ý kiến của cô nhưng không phải như là một sự nhượng bộ. Họ cần phải hiểu cô, vai trò lãnh đạo và phong cách lãnh đạo của cô.

¹⁸² Nếu cô nhìn thấy bụi trong lớp học, cô trực tiếp gọi người lao công đến làm sạch lớp. Cô yêu nơi này rất nhiều và muốn chăm sóc nó như chăm sóc cho ngôi nhà của cô.

*a grandmother, by taking care of my family members in the most appropriate way*¹⁸³.

R4 held her family responsibility through an overseeing mechanism. She hired other people to do the housework under her direct control. *“My family members were not happy to see me busy with a pile of unnamed family duties. The most important thing was that they enjoyed their favourite foods at every meal and were satisfied with my arrangements*¹⁸⁴ *...when I had time, I cooked, designed and sewed my family members’ and my own clothes; I knitted scarves, hats and coats*¹⁸⁵.

R4’s husband supports her unconditionally in her career. *“I am fortunate to have a husband, who understands my job, who is always caring and supportive*¹⁸⁶. Her position was a challenge for him as she had to travel a lot within Vietnam and abroad. She also often had to attend late meetings and performance. But he did not complain and was understanding, as they were in the same field and he had also been a senior administrator. His support made work-life balance easier for R4; and sometimes, his advice came in handy when she had problems in her work. .

Being the first woman in the highest leadership position in a university was not an easy job. *“I was very worried when accepting the position. I thought it would be very hard, and in fact, it was tougher than I thought*¹⁸⁷, because she was playing a multirole as a Rector, a music lecturer and a performer. At times, she felt exhausted when she had to be spread across areas outside of music, including admissions, budgeting, recruiting

¹⁸³ Ở học viện, cô là hiệu trưởng nhưng khi ở nhà, cô phải cởi cái áo khoác “lãnh đạo” để như một người vợ, một người mẹ và một người bà chăm sóc của các thành viên của gia đình cô một cách thích hợp nhất.

¹⁸⁴ Mọi người trong gia đình của cô cũng không thích thú với việc để cô nhẽ nhại bận rộn với một đồng công việc gia đình không tên. Điều quan trọng nhất là họ vẫn được thưởng thức các món ăn ưa thích của mình trong các bữa ăn hàng ngày và hài lòng với sự sắp xếp của cô.

¹⁸⁵ khi có thời gian, cô cũng nấu ăn, thiết kế, đan lát và may vá cho các thành viên gia đình của mình và chính bản thân mình quần áo, khăn len, mũ, và áo khoác.

¹⁸⁶ Cô may mắn có được một người chồng hiểu biết công việc của cô và luôn chăm sóc và hỗ trợ cô.

¹⁸⁷ Cô đã rất lo lắng khi nhận vị trí này. Cô nghĩ nó sẽ rất khó khăn và trong thực tế nó còn khó khăn hơn

staff, international and internal relations, building and planning. Coming from an artistic family, where music was the only interest, R4 admitted that she was not good at some of those other fields. Having a good assistant team around her lessened the pressure as the men were very supportive of her. *“In my terms, there were problems that I thought they seemed beyond my capability but finally, I finished those with the strong support from my staff”*¹⁸⁸. Besides, whenever R4 was in hard times, she also called on senior administrators for advice. *“I was a woman of persistence. I should not be hasty. I was not the smartest and I had to learn how to lead this academy step by step. Playing music was very difficult and I could do that. How couldn't I learn to be an effective administrator as easily”*¹⁸⁹?

Sometimes, R4 felt distracted with negative gossip. She herself experienced these on many occasions simply because she had a male assistant team. R4 was disturbed by the way other people could judge casual meals between her and her male team-mates as something negative, for example, an affair. But, having a husband working in the same field had its advantages. R4's husband showed his support, advising her that *“the best way to deal with this problem is just to ignore their talk and concentrate on your job”*¹⁹⁰, which she did.

8.2.5 Contribution to improve the status of women

¹⁸⁸ Trong nhiệm kỳ của mình, có những vấn đề mà cô nghĩ rằng dường như vượt quá khả năng của mình, nhưng cuối cùng, cô đã hoàn thành sự hỗ trợ mạnh mẽ từ đội ngũ các cán bộ của mình

¹⁸⁹ Cô là một người phụ nữ kiên trì. Cô không nên vội vàng. Cô không phải là người hiểu biết nhất và cô có thể học cách lãnh đạo học viện dần từng bước. Chơi nhạc rất khó mà cô đã có thể làm được điều đó. Thế thì làm sao mà cô không thể học để trở thành một nhà quản lý hiệu quả được.

¹⁹⁰ cách tốt nhất để giải quyết vấn đề này là lờ các câu chuyện của họ và tập trung vào công việc.

R4 believed that to be leaders, “*women have to work twice as hard as men do in leadership positions*”¹⁹¹. From her perspective, women are more dedicated to their work than men. Women leaders are also tolerant and scrupulous. “*Because women are familiar with family issues, they focus more on detail in their jobs*”¹⁹². But, if this characteristic is overused, it could be a disadvantage for women in comparison with men as they could be seen to “*lack vision*”¹⁹³. R4 also worried about the limited number of women in senior positions in higher education in Vietnam. “*It is very challenging when women want to have a career and family simultaneously*”¹⁹⁴.

R4 encouraged women to make good use of their feminine characteristics such as being convincing, listening, nurturing, and understanding. Additionally “*women should be humble enough to be a good team player. They have to know how to gather the strength of the whole university staff as well as to build a network of reliable allies around them*”¹⁹⁵. R4 advised women Rectors should honour themselves and pay attention to their health because she was in exhausted situations, sometimes. “*Women should take care of their health. It will help them to have the physical strength to cope with the high demanding working environment in a university*”¹⁹⁶.

But R4 thought women should be “*brave*”¹⁹⁷ enough to resign a leadership post if they could not perform their duties creditably. “*People should recognise, support and*

¹⁹¹ Phụ nữ phải làm việc gấp đôi đàn ông trong các vị trí lãnh đạo.

¹⁹² Bởi vì phụ nữ đã quen với việc gia đình nên họ chi tiết hơn trong công việc.

¹⁹³ thiếu tầm nhìn rộng

¹⁹⁴ Sẽ rất khó khăn khi phụ nữ đồng thời muốn có sự nghiệp và gia đình

¹⁹⁵ Phụ nữ nên khiêm tốn đủ để trở thành một người đồng đội tốt. Họ phải biết làm thế nào để tập hợp sức mạnh của toàn bộ nhân viên nhà trường cũng như để xây dựng một mạng lưới các đồng minh đáng tin cậy xung quanh họ.

¹⁹⁶ Phụ nữ thì nên để ý đến sức khỏe. Điều này sẽ giúp họ có đủ sức mạnh thể chất để làm việc trong một môi trường đòi hỏi cao như trong các trường đại học.

¹⁹⁷ dũng cảm

promote women by their merit and women themselves have to conscious about their own worth"¹⁹⁸.

8.3 Researcher's reflection

R4 was a woman of petite stature. She spoke so softly that I, sometimes, during the interview had to lean closer to her to hear what she was saying, even in a soundproofed room. She was the gentlest woman in this study from her appearance to her gestures as she answered my questions. R4 seemed to be more sensitive and closed when talking about her personal life than other women participants. She was a quiet and humble woman Rector. While R4 did not deny her personal efforts, she also credited her success in the Rector position to the people around her from her family members to her staff. The interview with R4 revealed many interesting perceptions that exhibited her leadership in this academy. Besides the reality that teaching music is possibly her chosen life, the fact that R4 was exceptionally approved and supported to stay in her Rector position until she was fifty seven years old, not only was a confirmation of her efficient leadership style, but also supported R2 and R3's opinions that women still contribute significantly to higher education management even when they are over fifty years old, the current women's age of retirement from the senior administrative positions in Vietnam. I deeply appreciated the time R4 committed to participating in this study and sharing her own story.

¹⁹⁸ Mọi người nên công nhận, hỗ trợ và thúc đẩy phụ nữ bởi phẩm chất xứng đáng của họ và phụ nữ cũng phải có ý thức về giá trị của riêng mình

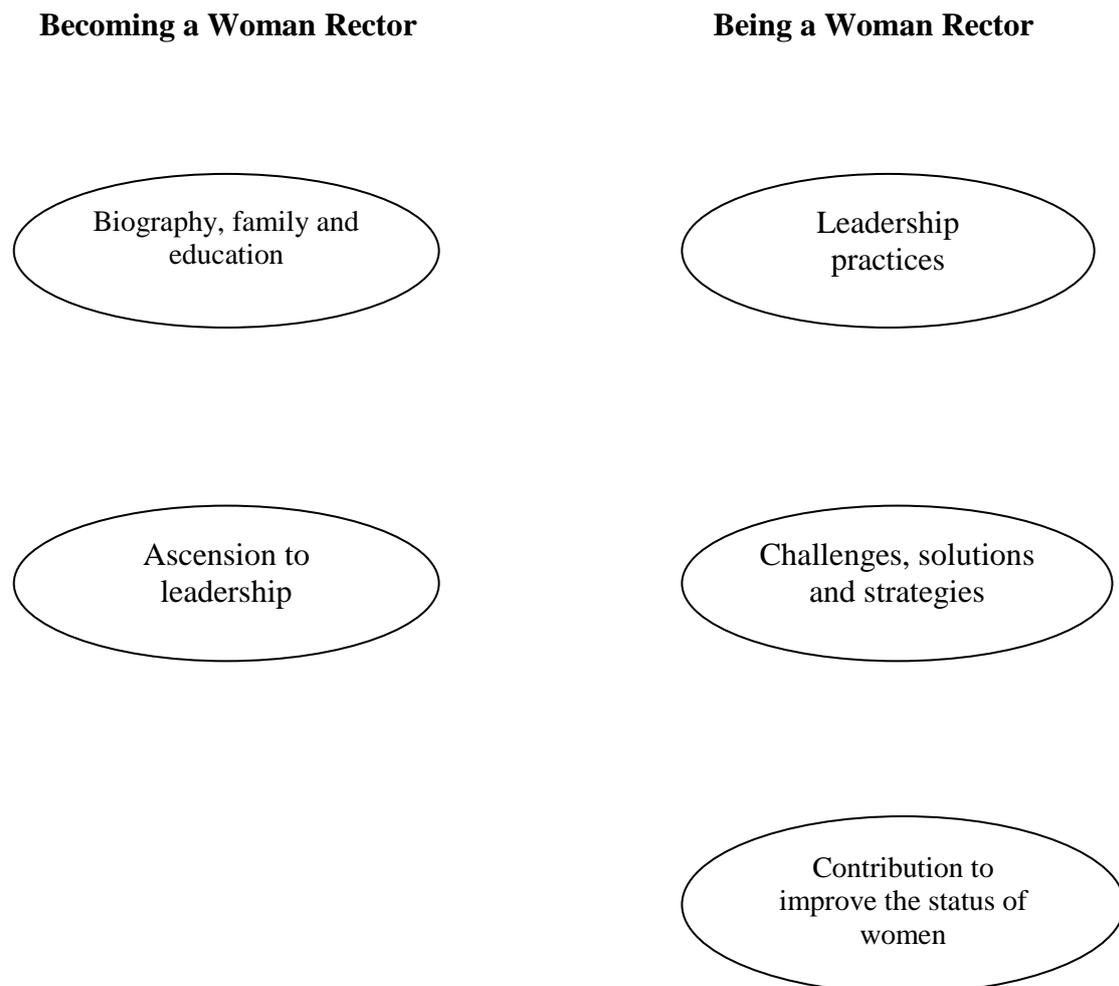
Chapter 9: Becoming and being women Rectors

Each of the cases presented in the previous four chapters allowed the women Rectors to speak for themselves about their individual careers. The task in this chapter is to examine and connect these cases to provide a better understanding of the position of women Rectors in higher education in Vietnam. As was shown in Chapter 3, the possibility of a woman becoming a university Rector, or attaining a senior position in Vietnam's public sector has only been promoted since the changes brought about by the DOI MOI, implemented in 1986. The analysis of each woman's story in the previous four chapters has illustrated how they gained the position; how this process came about and how each woman developed and took advantage of the opportunities given to them. Feminist standpoint epistemology has served in generating and understanding the experiences of four women Rectors in this study. I would, therefore like to propose that the research questions put forward in Chapter 1 can now be refined to address a point made by woman respondents in Mai's (2007) research that in Vietnam, women are not expected or are not capable of assuming more than second-in-command positions in organisations. Making clear how women can prove themselves in the leading position in charge is an important part of this thesis, in that each of the four women in this study, and three others, have crossed this prejudicial line to take full responsibility as the leaders of selected public universities in the last fifteen years. The revised questions are as follows: (i) what has made it possible for selected women to prove that they could become Rectors and (ii) how did they prove themselves as leaders once they had been appointed to the position?

From the analysis this far, it can be said that each woman Rector had her own separate set of practices determined by her individual circumstances but, taken as a

group they seemed to have similar journeys to the top. It could also be seen that at one time in their journeys, they had to work along with and adapt to what were male expectations of them as Rectors, and at other times, they held a particularly female line and style of leadership. These may well be examples of situations where women have to work on both sides of the gender line; where men exist in one for most of the time. These processes of proving their worth in becoming and being women Rectors are the major themes to be brought together in this chapter. The view to be taken can be seen in Figure 9-1 shown below.

Figure 9-1: *Becoming and being a Woman Rector*



As is implied in Figure 9-1, and argued in this chapter, a woman has to prove herself in two domains: the first as worthy of becoming a Rector in the selection process and in the second domain she has to display proof of her ability as being a woman to take command in the university in which she has been appointed.

The first two parts of this chapter are analysed and directed at these domains of becoming and then being a woman Rector of a university with five identified themes that were used in the description of each woman's life in the previous four chapters. As indicated in Figure 9-1, becoming refers firstly to aspects of each Rector's biography, their family and education. This is where I examine themes relating to their family backgrounds such as: growing up in an intellectual family; their education including overseas doctorates and being married women. The second theme in the domain of becoming a Rector pertains to their ascension to the position and highlights influential factors including career paths within academia; teaching experience; feelings of being unintentional Rectors; being appointed at the early age; luck; active involvement in different organisations, supporting individuals and being the first Rector in their institution. There are three themes in the domain of being a woman Rector. These are listed on the right hand side of Figure 9-1. Leadership practice refers to management styles and philosophies that shaped the women as Rectors. This includes the strategies and solutions used to maintain a balance between family and career and to deal with social stereotypes often directed at women leading a large public organisation such as a university. Finally, the overall nature of this study points to the advice as contribution that these women can pass on to women in the younger generations to improve the status of women in senior ranks in higher education in Vietnam. These two domains have also to be understood within the context of Vietnam at the same time as their becoming and being Rectors has taken place.

9.1 Becoming a Woman Rector in a public university

9.1.1 Biography, family and education

9.1.1.1 Growing up in an intellectual family

All of the women Rectors shared similar intellectual family backgrounds, where their parents or grandparents had studied overseas or had been prominent in their careers. Family background and educational levels attained by parents were evidently vital influences on these women's education. In this healthy and educated family, the Rector's parents had broken away from the Confucian son-favoured practices heavily embedded in the Vietnamese society. They supported their children, both boys and girls, to study and excel in their learning. R2 said, *"because I was born in such a family situation, I was provided with favourable conditions for us to go to school"*¹⁹⁹. For these women Rectors, education was a given, as R1 said, *"I knew that we [R4 and her sister] were going to university"*²⁰⁰. This is the reason why each woman was able to enter university and then to pursue a doctorate, which was extremely important to advance their careers.

9.1.1.2 Overseas education

The Rector's disciplines ranged from Law to Computer Sciences and Music studies gained from their PhDs with three from the former USSR and one from Czechoslovakia. While R1 moved directly from her degree into her doctoral program, the others studied for their terminal degrees after several working years as faculty

¹⁹⁹ bởi vì được cô sinh ra trong hoàn cảnh gia đình như vậy nên cô được tạo đủ điều kiện đi học

²⁰⁰ Tôi biết là chúng tôi sẽ học đại học, chỉ có là lúc nào thôi

members. Almost all of the women recognised the advantages of being trained abroad. This experience made them more self-reliant and self-confident when they returned and worked in Vietnam. R3 said that *“women, who are trained overseas like me, seem to have a broader view, and are more independent and assert themselves more than their Vietnamese peers”*²⁰¹. R2 added, *“there were many factors that influenced my leadership but one of the most important was that I was trained overseas, in a more developed country [than Vietnam], where I could not only develop my academic ability but also learn how to organise and work methodically”*²⁰².

9.1.1.3 Being a married woman

According to Vietnamese tradition, a woman’s success rests on the achievements of her husband and her children. To exist happily in Vietnamese society, women often feel obliged to fulfil their societal expectations; to marry and to give birth. These feminine roles are praised and girls are socialised to establish an ideal model of womanhood, which guides Vietnamese women’s lives (Hang, 2008). Despite the increasing number of educated and working women looking towards a legitimate identity in contemporary Vietnam, women have even since the DOI MOI, still had to abide by the social demands of having a family and a career at the same time. This pressure is strengthened by socialist state campaigns such as the “Three responsibilities” movement for women to study actively, to work creatively, to raise children well and to build happy families; and to be “good at national tasks and to be good at household

²⁰¹ Những phụ nữ được đào tạo ở nước ngoài như tôi dường như có tầm nhìn rộng hơn và độc lập hơn trong việc khẳng định bản thân mình so với những phụ nữ Việt Nam khác cùng thời của họ.

²⁰² Có nhiều yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến sự lãnh đạo của cô nhưng một trong những cái quan trọng là cô được đào tạo ở nước ngoài, ở nước tiên tiến nên không những cô phát triển được khả năng học thuật của mình mà còn học được cách tổ chức và làm việc khoa học

tasks”²⁰³ slogan (Schuler, et al., 2006, p. 386), which emphasise the conflicting tasks of women both in the family and in the social sphere.

All of women participants in this study did not avoid these social expectations. They were all married pursuing careers while raising their children. They accepted this fact as natural step in their life course though “an absence of family obligations, or fewer such obligations, favours women's career” (Eliou, 1988, p. 517). For these women it seemed that motherhood, household planning and management were probably a good preparation for higher education management. These tasks also demanded “many of the same skills: organization, pacing, the balancing of conflicting claims, teaching, guiding, leading, monitoring, handling, disturbance, imparting information” (Helgesen, 1990, p. 31). In this way R4 thought that “*women’s experiences in assuming family duties can bring advantages such as thoroughness in their leadership*”²⁰⁴.

9.1.2 Ascension to the rectorship

9.1.2.1 Career paths within academia

All the future Rectors began their careers as university faculty members, gradually moving towards the top after experiencing a number of administrative positions, including, faculty dean or chief of office, deputy rector, before ascending to the position as a Rector. Each woman was an internal candidate, whose academic career had been served within that same institution. On entering higher education, each woman had taken from seventeen to twenty four years to move through the ranks before rising to their appointment as a Rector. Having a career in the one institution is a reality

²⁰³ *Giỏi việc nước, đảm việc nhà*

²⁰⁴ *Kinh nghiệm của phụ nữ trong giải quyết các việc nhà đã có nhiều thuận lợi như sự cẩn thận trong lãnh đạo*

in Vietnam. The university rector selection system in higher education in Vietnam is not based on the open advertisements or national competitions that welcome independent or external candidates, as cited in Chapter 3. It is strongly influenced by Confucian thinking about respecting seniority, where seniority-based promotional practices are reflected in most of working environments in Vietnam (Truong Quang & Vuong, 2002). This is an inevitable fact.

9.1.2.2 Teaching experience

When seniority is the basis for advancement, then lecturers need to prove themselves as teachers and as faculty members to build a strong foundation for their work as administrators and eventually as Rectors. R3 acknowledged that she “*was famous for my teaching skills and researching potential, and people recognised me*”²⁰⁵. R1 was also seen as “*the ideal image of a female faculty staff member*”²⁰⁶. R2 thought that she was noticed by her predecessor because of an “*impressive amount of hard work in the faculty*”²⁰⁷. R3 confirmed that “*having been a faculty member was useful for me as a Rector as I know how students think, how faculty members work, what they want and how the faculties are organised*”²⁰⁸. Teaching actually continued to play an important part in the four women’s career because each retained a presence in the classroom concurrently with their leadership responsibilities where possible. This was a common factor in their individual stories as was a desire to return to lecturing once their terms as Rectors were completed.

9.1.2.3 Unintentional Rectors

²⁰⁵ Tôi đã nổi tiếng vì kỹ năng giảng dạy và tiềm năng nghiên cứu của mình nên mọi người nhận ra tôi.

²⁰⁶ Hình ảnh lý tưởng của một nữ giảng viên

²⁰⁷ Khối lượng công việc nặng ấn tượng trong khoa

²⁰⁸ Việc là một giảng viên đã hữu ích cho tôi trong vai của một Hiệu trưởng vì tôi biết sinh viên nghĩ gì, giảng viên làm việc như thế nào, họ muốn cái gì và cách tổ chức các khoa ra sao

It may have been through an understanding of seniority, the need to serve faculty interests or other points not mentioned in their interviews, but none of the women said they had aimed at the Rector position early in their careers. This included R1, who did not deny her preparation and ambition to go up, but she also acknowledged that *“it also was accidental. The idea just appeared when I was appointed to be the Division Chief”*²⁰⁹. But they all took advantages of opportunities as they were presented. Without the intention of being a Rector at the beginning of their careers, the women participants were mostly invited for skills that matched the institutional needs and goals along the way to the rectorship. They were first approached because of their scholarly work in their academic department. Then, each time, when a new and higher position was available, they were pursued and invited again to go higher. R4 explained, *“I never thought I would end my professional career with the Director position. My aim was music. But I couldn’t refuse the encouragements of people, who were my seniors, who trusted in me”*²¹⁰. As well, R2 was convinced by her predecessor and *“with his explanation and encouragement, I started to think that I could do this job and I moved forward”*²¹¹.

9.1.2.4 Luck

This process of not making an intentional play for a higher position binds luck and opportunities together. For these women, combining strong classroom accomplishments with hard work in administrative positions created pathways for

²⁰⁹ Nó cũng là tình cờ. Ý tưởng này chỉ xuất hiện khi tôi là trưởng bộ môn

²¹⁰ Cô chưa bao giờ nghĩ là mình sẽ kết thúc sự nghiệp của mình ở vị trí Giám đốc học viện. Mục tiêu của cô là âm nhạc. Nhưng cô không thể từ chối sự khuyến khích từ những người đàn anh của mình, những người đã tin tưởng mình.

²¹¹ Với lời giải thích và khuyến khích của chú, cô bắt đầu nghĩ rằng cô có thể đảm đương được công việc này và cô quyết định tiến về phía trước

success in their professional lives. R1 felt she was lucky because she married early [as an undergraduate] and gained her PhD while she was young. She said: “*my children were all grown up when I was appointed to be the Deputy Rector and then Rector*”²¹². She had more time to focus on her career development in comparison with her female colleagues. For R3 a late marriage turned out to her advantage, helping her to concentrate on completing all her qualifications and to secure administrative positions without worrying about family responsibilities. She said, “*I had more advantages in comparison with other women. While they had to struggle with obtaining qualifications, for example a PhD, I married late after achieving all the necessary qualifications for my career advancement*”²¹³. R2 considered she was lucky as her chances for promotion were unplanned and unexpected. For R4, “*it was only that I was lucky to be given continuing educational opportunities, was bestowed the academic titles earlier, so I was appointed at a relatively early age*”²¹⁴. Each woman believed they were lucky to live with their husbands because the men were very supportive of their career pursuits.

However, it is important to note that in comparison with the others, R1, the youngest woman in this study had a clear vision of her career ambition. In other words, R1’s advancement to the rectorship was the result of a deliberate plan. She shared, with others, the same intention to not consider being a Rector when she first entered higher education but, since being appointed to faculty administrative positions, R1 openly expressed her aspirations in the interview that she would like to become a more important person in her university. She was prepared to seize her chances to go up by

²¹² Khi tôi được bổ nhiệm làm hiệu phó rồi hiệu trưởng, các con tôi đã lớn

²¹³ Tôi có nhiều thuận lợi hơn so với những người phụ nữ khác. Trong khi họ phải vật lộn để có đủ các tiêu chuẩn chuyên môn, ví dụ như bằng tiến sĩ thì tôi cưới muộn sau khi đã đạt được những tiêu chuẩn cần thiết để được đề bạt trong công việc của mình.

²¹⁴ Chẳng qua cô ở đây thuộc vào loại may mắn được đào tạo liên tục, được phong học hàm sớm nên khi bổ nhiệm cũng vào loại tương đối sớm

working hard and to accumulate the experiences needed for promotion. In fact, her journey to the top was harder than that of R2, R3 and R4, because she had no support from her male predecessor, who opposed her. This could imply, perhaps, that for R1, as a member of the younger generation of women seeking to become Rectors went beyond fate or luck to pursue their career goals.

9.1.2.5 Being appointed at the early age

Higher education staffing profiles in Vietnam by Nghi and Sloper (1995) showed that Rectors and Deputy Rectors were on average over fifty one years of age; almost all were men. By 2007, Mai's study indicated that women aged between forty and fifty had already reached the highest administrative positions available to most of the Vietnamese women, that of deputy and faculty deans. In comparison with those statistics, obviously, all four women in this study advanced in their careers slightly earlier than most of their Vietnamese peers, both males and females. At the time of their appointment the women Rectors were aged between forty four to forty eight years, or forty-six years on average.

Women aged fifty to fifty five are rarely considered for promotion, because fifty five is the mandatory retirement age for women working in the public sector in Vietnam. Women over fifty are seldom considered as they would not have the time to lead their organisations at least for one term [normally of five years] before retiring. Women therefore have to plan for career advancement five years or even ten years earlier than men would. Although the women in this study said they had not planned to be Rectors, critical circumstances in their lives coupled with luck and sound credentials equipped them for promotion earlier than their peers.

Age can therefore be seen as central to the ascension of women to the highest levels in Vietnam. Being the right age with most appropriate credentials outweighs other factors by far. Nevertheless, this is not meant to dismiss the importance of having support from others and being active in relevant organisations. These are now discussed to close this section on the domain of becoming a woman Rector.

9.1.2.6 Support systems

To this point I have illustrated themes with most of them are particular to the Vietnamese context, but the existence of a strong support system could be typical of factors assisting women's careers in colleges and universities in many countries and contexts.

Only one of the women [R2] created a new career in higher education, while the other three re-lived a life similar either the father or the mother. It seems that the role of mothers was important in four women Rectors' lives. R1 and R4 stated that their mothers strongly influenced their career choices and development. These two women saw their mothers, who had university education and independent jobs as their role models. The others appreciated their mothers as the primary source of support to their daughters' development. R2 recognised her mother's great sacrifice as *"my mother was prepared to be a housewife for the whole of her life to look after her family"*²¹⁵.

It is thought that behind a successful man is a selfless woman. The same thinking seems to apply in reverse in this study. Besides influential parents, who lay the foundation for their later success, the role of husbands was critical. These men were not

typical of the hierarchical, patriarchal norms of marriage in Vietnam. They did not feel threatened in reversing normative roles that put their wives in the public spotlight and gave them higher status. This was especially in cases for R2 and R3, whose husbands were ordinary officials. It was evident that the four women could pursue academic qualifications and advance their careers while being married, mothering children and meeting family commitments with the support from husbands. For these men “the wife’s accomplishments and the resources she brought to the marriage were defined as collective assets to the family instead of threats in a power struggles” (Cheung & Halpern, 2010, p. 187).

Besides family members, among others supporting individuals, the roles played by their male predecessors were very important for R2, R3 and R4. These men encouraged the women participants to take more responsibilities so that they could strengthen and hone their skills as Rectors.

Outside of the university, the women were members of boards or officers, paid consultants or project directors. Participating in the community activities provided the opportunity to meet powerful people in specialised fields who could benefit their university faculty and students. R3 said: “*the participation in professional organisations and community involvement brought me chances to meet people, expand my relationships, and discover opportunities for cooperation and to increase the image of the university as well as my students and staff in the community*”²¹⁶. Their professional visibility was thus broadened within and outside their institutions. “*It is important to let people know that you are there*”²¹⁷, R3 added. The importance of these networks was

²¹⁶ Tham gia vào các tổ chức nghề nghiệp và các hoạt động cộng đồng đem lại cho tôi cơ hội gặp gỡ nhiều người, mở rộng quan hệ, tìm kiếm các khả năng hợp tác và nâng cao hình ảnh của trường và của cán bộ công chức, của sinh viên trường tôi trong cộng đồng.

²¹⁷ Quan trọng là mọi người phải biết là mình đang ở vị trí đó

clearly evident as R2, R3 and R4 continued their membership in those organisations while assuming their roles as Rectors and lecturers or even as a music performer in cases of R4. For R1, even when she ceased teaching, she still worked part time in discipline-related professional organisations as a legal consultant to regularly update her knowledge in the area.

Family history, the backing of parents and husbands, long-term educational investments, community and professional, coupled with the talents they brought to bear on the job, all worked as a support system. This system, developed over time, helped these women be who they were today. But, as mentioned earlier, where this support system may apply to women's career development across any number of contexts, there are still differences in the cases of the four women in this study. Where mentors are important to further the careers women university Presidents' in the Western contexts (e.g. T. M. Brown, 2005; Wolverton, et al., 2009), the Confucian and patriarchal system of seniority in Vietnam makes this difficult for women in Vietnam. None of the Rectors in this study had official mentors. Each of them was the first women Rector in her university. As well, those women were considered as the first generation of women Rectors in Vietnam and there was no female predecessor before them. They were also a small group in a larger pool of Rectors in over one hundred public universities with most of their peers were men. Furthermore, a sceptical view is still taken on women in Southeast Asian countries, who initiate professional contact with male colleagues and seniors. This is one of the local barriers women academics face in their career development (Luke, 2001). As similar situation is present in Vietnam (see Mai, 2007), to establish long-term, professionally centred relationships with male predecessors and senior colleagues for four women participants in this study was problematic, if not difficult. Thus, besides family members, the women participants were surrounded by

supporting individuals of [male] predecessors, [female] university lecturers, supervisors, and senior colleagues but none of these people was referred to as a mentor, a common concept that is widely used in Western literature when talking about this issue. According to Ncube and Washburn (2006), mentoring is “a more experienced person (mentor), who provides guidance, support, knowledge and opportunities to a less experienced individual or protégé” (p. 78). In cases of R2, R3 and R4, they were all assigned more important responsibilities to strengthen and perfect their leadership skill by their male predecessors. Therefore, these women participants’ description of their relationships with male predecessors has some resonance with Ncube and Washburn’s (2006) definition of mentoring.

This description of support systems being completed, I now turn to the second domain, that of being a Rector after one’s appointment.

9.2 Being a Woman Rector in a public university

9.2.1 Leadership practices

Along with characteristics individualised by their own circumstances such as confidence [R1], high community spirit [R2], passion to the job [R3], being humble [R4], responsibility and determination were regarded by women participants as the most distinct characteristics women should possess as leaders. Each woman saw herself as collaborative and participative. The essence of their leadership style appeared to be inspiring, cooperating with and empowering their staff. Their stories gave insights into their leadership capabilities which included: planning and organising, problem solving, clarifying roles and objectives, informing, monitoring, inspiring, consulting, delegating, supporting, team building, and networking. R4 said she *“like to listen to different ideas including mine to find the most workable decisions and solutions for the context of our*

academy”²¹⁸. The other women also valued having people around them and to listen to diverse opinions as part of the decision making process.

Their leadership styles combined traditional male traits such as being decisive with traditional female traits such as being collaborative and nurturing. For R3 “*the effective woman Rector is a person, who understands and combines both male and female traits in her leadership position...The image of university Rectors in Vietnam is still based on male standards. It’s a trap when a woman Rector tries to model strictly male traits in her position but when using them flexibly in different situations is more effective*”²¹⁹. They respected their staff, invited them in the decision making process but did not hesitate to make the final decision in a directive way; even when were not satisfied. As R4 said “*I appreciated my staff’s ideas but I was the person who finally made the decision after considering all positive thoughts. Sometimes, I had to convince them to follow my decisions but it did not mean a compromise. They had to understand me, my leadership role and my style*”²²⁰.

Their leadership practices supported the idea that women, who know how to balance both female and male traits, are often better adjusted and more confident leaders (Korabik, 1990). Successful leaders are able to match their style with the changing needs of the institution. Some situations call for consensus building and others require decisive, authoritative action. “Being flexible, approachable and looking for common

²¹⁸ thích nghe những ý tưởng khác nhau bao gồm cả ý tưởng của cô đưa ra những quyết định và những giải pháp khả thi nhất đối với bối cảnh của học viện của chúng tôi.

²¹⁹ hiệu trưởng nữ hiệu quả là những người hiểu và kết hợp cả tính cách của nam và nữ ở vị trí lãnh đạo của mình Hình ảnh của hiệu trưởng trường đại học ở Việt Nam vẫn dựa trên các tiêu chuẩn của nam giới. Nó là một cái bẫy khi một nữ hiệu trưởng cố gắng áp dụng một cách triệt để các đặc điểm nam tính ở vị trí của mình nhưng sử dụng chúng linh hoạt trong các tình huống khác nhau sẽ là hiệu quả nhất.

²²⁰ Cô đánh giá cao những ý tưởng của cán bộ của mình, nhưng cô là người cuối cùng ra quyết định sau khi đã xem xét tất cả các ý kiến tích cực. Có lúc cô phải thuyết phục họ làm theo ý kiến của cô nhưng không phải như là một sự nhượng bộ. Họ cần phải hiểu cô, vai trò lãnh đạo và phong cách lãnh đạo của cô.

ground is just as important as being a visible presence on campus” (Turner, 2007, p. 18).

To this point it also can be argued that the women Rectors did not transform themselves completely into an image of what a feminine university Rector might look like. In reality, there were few, if any images or guides available outside of those of male predecessors in leadership positions historically designed by and for males. In this situation, a standpoint was taken, of being a Rector who met previous expectations and incorporating a female dimension to their operating style.

9.2.2 Challenges, solutions and strategies

As stated above, working women in Vietnam face double social expectations to, for example, “work creatively, to raise children well and build happy families”; and to be “good at national tasks and good at household tasks”. But with regard to family and career balance, the women Rectors I interviewed seemed, in general, not to be as worried or as entangled in this issue as were other Vietnamese women, such as those in Mai’s (2007) research. These women’s work as leaders appeared not to suffer from the added responsibility of married life and child care or being wives and mothers. Although all the women agreed their role as Rectors affected family life but they had husbands who respected their wives’ aspirations as equal partners. In patriarchal Vietnam, they managed to meet the family responsibilities socially expected of them at an accepted level.

Socially, they did face sociocultural situations commonly encountered by career women in the Vietnamese context as described in Mai’s (2007) research. In the early stages of taking up the position, each of the women spoke of colleagues and other university staff placing them under suspicion as can be expected when leadership can

mean making tough decisions, especially when others watch to see how a woman will handle the pressures of the top job. As such, each woman faced the incongruity between their role as leaders and the social expectations on them as women. Some staff and colleagues saw them as exhibiting male traits, of being “*too ambitious*”²²¹ [R1], “*aggressive*”²²² and “*forceful*”²²³ [R2 and R3]. Like other Vietnamese women counterparts and women in academia in some Asian countries, R1 and R4 were the centre of the negative rumours about their family with some being sceptical about the basis of their relationships with male colleagues.

For R2, one challenge had to do with the inertia of some senior staff in her university, who maintained a civil service attitude inherited from the centralised and subsidised economy before DOI MOI. Where they were once considered as intellectuals with more privileges than other university employees, they were now nostalgic, not wanting to give up their prior form of advanced status. That R2 found it difficult to reengage them probably had little to do with her being a woman. According to the collectivist Vietnamese culture, people expect “in groups” to look after their members; to protect them and provide them with security in return for their loyalty (Quang & Vuong, 2002). Moreover, the Confucian value highly respects seniority, which comes into play in the form of seniority-based compensation in the workplace (Thang & Quang, 2005). Because of such reasons, Vietnamese people generally appreciate the importance of avoiding losing face with others and of harmonious fitting in as much as possible. In this case, Vietnamese people will do anything to prevent loss of face, even if it means avoiding confrontation or telling others what they want to hear rather than

²²¹ *quá ham hố*

²²² *xông xáo*

²²³ *mạnh mẽ*

dealing with immediate issues. R2 confessed that she could not do as much as she would have liked to better adjust this cultural thinking and harness it to her goals for her university. This problem affected R2's effectiveness in being a Rector.

While Mai (2007) indicates that women's personal insecurities could prevent Vietnamese women from participating in the university management, the Rectors in this study were confident with a strong sense of who they were as women. The difference between these women Rectors, and others cases reported by Mai, might be that they did not dwell on the negative side of a problem, because they saw much of what they had to deal with as generated from within the organisation itself; not from within them. In general, positive self-perceptions, gained from breaking through the constraints career on advancement for Vietnamese women, made it possible for them to rise above rumours to work hard to move their universities forward – and to do this as women treading this path for the first time.

On the basis of the analysis in this and the previous sections, and in the cases of each of these four Rectors, it can be argued that these women were capable of assuming more than the second-in-command positions expected of women in Vietnamese organisations. In the domains of becoming and being a woman Rector, each has proven themselves as a leader, in the sense of being the first one to take command and in their roles as a Rector of public universities. Their perspectives on their role and their advice now become their contribution to improve the status next generations of women seeking positions at the top of organisations, which is discussed follows.

9.2.3 Contribution to improve the status of women

Being Rectors had the advantage of making it easier to approach staff and students. As leaders, women are “open”²²⁴ and “collaborative”²²⁵; they are “interested in the common benefits than their own power”²²⁶ and often “think of themselves last”²²⁷. They are “less ego driven”²²⁸ and are “good negotiators and diplomatic”²²⁹. In the context of Vietnam, as in other developing countries in the economic transition, corruption is rampant in the public sector (Segon & Booth, 2010), R3 stressed that women leaders are less corruptible “because they are more serious than men”²³⁰. The Rectors saw the obstacles facing Vietnamese women in higher education as still those of work-life conflict, lack of women-to-women support and working harder than men to be recognised

Their advice for other women ranged from the broader systematic issues such as the “unfair”²³¹ age retirement for women working in the public sector in Vietnam and the persistence of Confucian thoughts on gender relations. Other advice was to do with pragmatic detail, about some women creating their own problems by being too meticulous leading them to have less vision than men in leadership. Gaining doctorates to gain the respect and trust of university staff and colleagues was crucial. While they should also be self-confident, decisive, persistent, responsible and hard working as men, women leaders should keep in mind their feminine traits of good negotiation and communication skills and the abilities of listening, nurturing, being convincing and gathering people to them. Based on individual experiences, R2 advised women aspiring

²²⁴ *Cởi mở*

²²⁵ *Cộng tác*

²²⁶ *Quan tâm đến lợi ích chung hơn là quyền lực của bản thân*

²²⁷ *Thường nghĩ đến mình sau cùng*

²²⁸ *Ít thể hiện cái tôi*

²²⁹ *Là những nhà ngoại giao và thương thuyết tốt*

²³⁰ *vì họ nghiêm chỉnh hơn đàn ông*

²³¹ *không công bằng*

leaders to learn how to “*work methodically and learn to inspire high community spirit*”²³², R1 suggested that “*women should prepare for and seize the opportunities*”²³³, R3 recommended “*to keep the passion on the chosen job*”²³⁴ and R4’s opinion was “*women should not abuse their health*”²³⁵ to cope with demanding working environment in the university.

Despite the accidental nature of their journeys to the rectorship, the four women had shaped and integrated their private lives and professional careers to become the first women Rectors in public sector of higher education in Vietnam; to that point, a male dominated field. They were torchbearers exploring a field that was inhospitable to women and to some extent, opening up the ranks for other women to play key leadership roles.

9.3 Women Rectors: coexisting with the Vietnamese history and context

Looking across the cases, I have been able to show commonalities in the four women’s journeys to the top to demonstrate that, woven together, their individual experiences produce a mosaic of what is involved in becoming and being women Rectors of selected public universities in Vietnam. Some aspects of their experience were supported by the literature but others that were not and could be said to have been generated from within the distinctiveness of the context of Vietnam. Literature and research on successful women leaders and their experiences, for example, are not only inadequate (Madsen, 2007) but also inclined to focus on the characteristics of women leaders after they have arrived, rather than on the foundation and background from

²³² *Làm việc một cách khoa học và tăng cường tính cộng đồng cao*

²³³ *phụ nữ phải chuẩn bị và nắm lấy cơ hội*

²³⁴ *Giữ lại niềm đam mê cho công việc đã chọn*

²³⁵ *Phụ nữ không nên lạm dụng sức khỏe*

which, those women originated. Barry (2009) argues that it is imperative that as many factors as possible should be drawn together to understand career advancement. These include historical factors, issues of social class, personal background, current context, sociocultural conditions, educational attainment, professional development, and career paths must be studied together. Such has been the case in the stories of the women Rectors in Chapters 5 to 8 and in the analysis provided in this chapter. The similarities in the four women Rectors' career paths, are due, in part, to the uniqueness of the social, historical, cultural, political and economic conditions of Vietnam, where they were born, grew up, attended schools and universities, married and entered and developed careers in higher education. Their position and standpoints should be seen as one of coexistence with a place and time, where breaking with tradition in some way became a possibility for some women. The standpoints of these women are not those of women in Western contexts who openly challenge men for the right to hold positions of power. Instead, the Vietnamese strategy is to continue to live as women within a domain historically designed for men. Further research could show this latter situation of coexistence to be analogous with women's "double consciousness", or "dual vision", as reported by Brooks (2007) and others within feminist standpoint epistemology.

Being from elite intellectual families, these women were given a very good education by supported and educated parents; or they were the products of an environment where not succeeding in education was not an option. As well, all the women were raised in the North of Vietnam during the Vietnam War and benefited from the policy of sending academic students abroad, which resulted from two education reforms in this region in the 1950s and 1960s. As observed by the German sociologist Max Weber, the healthier the economic situation, the higher the status and the greater one's power, the better one's life chances will be. Something similar could

be said about the times in which these women were situated and the opportunities given to them within the social context of their class of origin. Astin and Leland (2001) state that “our women leaders are the progeny of their historical and social periods” (p. 40).

Adding to those circumstances, the DOI MOI policy provided a window of opportunity for women to take advantage of from the time of its implementation in 1986. This economic renovation led, to a certain extent, to the strengthening of the social awareness on the role of women. Although this policy brought both favourable and negative effects for Vietnamese women, in general, to those women participants, this was a good chance for them to show their abilities. Already possessing overseas degrees and doctorates, these women were more self-reliant and self-confident than their Vietnamese female peers and they stood out. In addition, with the support from husbands, who did not validate the patriarchal Confucian thinking valuing men before women, their chances of entering a male domain were higher than in previous times.

It seems reasonable to conclude that these historical, social political, economic movements in Vietnam formed a special context. It probably helped them to develop identities as women with a role to play in Vietnamese society with a sense of purpose and ease as they moved up in their careers in higher education. It means who these women were today is in part due to the environments and opportunities that they experienced over the course of their lives. These points are continued into the next and final chapter.

Chapter 10: Conclusions and implications

This study is the culmination of a combined coursework and thesis doctorate designed for professionals in education, like me, who have entered Education Doctorates to develop and further their understanding of their own practice. I believe this has been the case for I now possess a clearer understanding of the situation of women in higher education, who like me, are seeking to build on their careers through further study and then to contribute in their areas of expertise. In all, the greatest lesson has been, not only in appreciating ways women Rectors have made paths into senior positions, but in reflecting on how this case of leadership fits within the history and the contemporary situation within my own country of Vietnam. Like some international students who come to a Western university in the hope of learning their theories and then applying them to their own countries, I have found that application is not the first step in this process. First there is the task of re-understanding the contexts and history of one's own country, seeing the standpoints possible within that situation and then slowly contemplating where a foreign theory might not or might find its own place of application. This is the logic of what is said and argued in this final chapter.

Considering the experiences of women Rectors presented in the previous chapters, this research has, I believe, been meaningful in that it has proved to have been a work of substance in investigating a critical issue. This, through an original examination of the journeys of women Rector participants in their own voices, an area long neglected in higher education discourse in Vietnam, was brought into focus and given some theoretical substance.

The purpose of this final chapter is to synthesise those experiences and to propose the contribution this study has made to knowledge of senior women leaders in

higher education in general and Vietnam in particular. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the study. This is followed by three sections, the first of which is a discussion of the implications for understanding the precarious situation for women seeking career mobility in Vietnam. The discussion concerns lessons to be gained from the experiences of the first generation of Rectors and raises questions of who and how many are to follow in the path of the first generation. The second section focuses on the women Rectors' use of non-traditional leadership styles to involve others and secure leadership positions and the section also provides a sketch of the characteristics of woman Rectors in Vietnam. The theoretical implications are discussed in section three which emphasises the value of feminist standpoint epistemology for building knowledge and empowerment through women's lived experiences. A brief epilogue following this chapter is where I outline of my standpoint and thoughts on the study.

10.1 Overview of the study

A review of literature supporting this study was presented in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. It was revealed that, although most women today enjoy more personal, political and economic power than before and more women are moving into the leadership roles, taken as a group, women in higher education worldwide still face challenges of career advancement by comparison with men. Universities are still considered as patriarchal institutions where women are structurally subordinate to men, especially in the senior ranks. Yet, within these circumstances, a number of women across countries have advanced in higher education institutions, as a university Rector, President or Vice-Chancellor. But little has been documented to describe the experiences and the situations of these women in non-Western contexts (Unterhalter, Gold, & Morley, 2003). Vietnamese women remain absent from this limited literature;

their journeys are yet to be included in this global trend. While female students in Vietnam now make up more than half of college and university enrolments in recent years (Nghĩa, 2009), only three women now occupy the position of Rector; and historically only seven women have done so in public universities. This study therefore makes a contribution in that, it fills in parts of an unexplored space by situating the standpoints of over half of all Rectors within the context of Vietnamese society. This is seen in the following overview of the study.

This study was designed to answer the core question of what understanding can be gained from the lived-experiences of a few successful women Rectors at selected public universities in their journeys to the top. As such, this study has followed a twofold purpose. The first was to explore the experiences of senior women leaders in Vietnamese higher education and to inspire the next wave of potential women leaders, who may be guided by them as role models, who were the first to walk these leadership paths before them. The second purpose was to make the practices of Vietnamese women leaders visible within the wider academic discourse. This aim was made possible through the use of feminist standpoint epistemology, which recognises the knowledge generated from the situated experiences of marginalised people, here, of women in relations of power that are male dominated. Given that only a small number of women have reached these positions in Vietnam, it can be said that the accumulated and present knowledge about becoming a Rector and ways to show one's worth in the position has been and it is still a male domain. Locating and describing how Vietnamese women become and work as Rectors is an important contribution now that these positions are, as the contemporary literature suggests, now available to women. On this premise, my study had to be situated directly in the lives and experiences the women if a theoretical advance was to be made. My intention was thus to work from the neglected voices of a

minority group of women Rectors to create a possibility for an initial understanding of some of the unique aspects pertaining to the lives of women in higher education in Vietnam.

The research question was investigated using a qualitative multi-case study approach. In-depth interviews were the main method for collecting women's stories, which was to present their career developments within the context of Vietnam and broader discussions about women and leadership in higher education. My research has evoked these women's thoughts, feelings about how they advanced in their careers which would, otherwise, have remained unaddressed and unexamined. Research of this type therefore adds to the limited literature on this topic and it can provide a source to inspire and encouragement for other Vietnamese women working in the same field wanting to advance in their careers in similar ways. This type of research on women Rectors can also inform policy on women's' role in leadership in higher education and be seen as an example of advocacy for advancing such policies in Vietnam.

The results of this study show that in their journeys to the rectorship in selected public universities in Vietnam, four women participants have exhibited a number of characteristics with some of those are not new and can be found in what is described in the literature on women leaders in higher education in other contexts while others pertain typically to the Vietnamese women in the context of Vietnam. It is because "women are eminently capable researchers and scholars, intellectuals, administrators, managers and leaders. But they are also the social and emotional glue of any society" (Luke, 2001, p. 240). Luke (2001, 2002) implies that career development of women in academia, with the western emphasis on individualism and goal-direction and self-promotion do not necessarily apply in the understanding of this issue in Asian contexts. This argument is supported by the results of this study.

In comparison with women leaders in higher education in other settings, to advance in their careers, by one way or another, Vietnamese women in this field have to represent, enact, translate and negotiate with the local challenges created by the Vietnamese context. Officially, Vietnamese women have only gained their fully legal status for more than a half century since 1945, when the DRV was established. They also have experienced more political upheavals (constant wars) in recent history than women in other countries. Furthermore, with the strong influence of collectivism and patriarchal Confucianism, women in Vietnam share one another a value to devote themselves to family household, to secure family happiness and harmony as a strong foundation for their professional careers. Therefore, practically, it may make take a longer time and more deliberate actions and efforts for Vietnamese women to recover their sense of self-worth.

To be accepted as successful women leaders, besides their own efforts, four women Rectors participating in this study had, from the early age, to have the support of their parents, who challenged the patriarchal favouritism towards sons in Vietnam, who had to take due care of their daughters' education, which was the essential foundation for the girls' later career successes. Since Vietnamese women are still the objects of a patriarchal Confucian mentality, they had to balance the tension at home in order to be ideal wives and mothers, to balance the pressure in the workplace and to perform as capably as men counterparts in order to maintain as authentic leaders and to balance the demand of maintaining a proper equilibrium between their private and the public lives. To find solutions, they needed the protective umbrella of husbands, who refused their customary privileged positions in the patriarchy to support their wives' career successes in the absence of little social tolerance to women to help them attain a high career status

usually reserved for men. They also need the support of male predecessors, who were not afraid of emerging women leaders.

In their career advancement, these four women also had to grapple with the peculiarities generated from strict social values around femininity and collegial, work relations between men and women. With all Rectors being male prior to the DOI MOI (before 1986), these women had little in the way of mentoring when they became the first in a position dominated by men in the history of their universities. As well, in their personal development and professional advancement they had to inevitably internalise features inherent in the context of Vietnam in their time. These included: the constant wars, the effects of DOI MOI policy, the power of Confucian thoughts of respecting seniority over career promotions, the controversial retirement age policy, which forces women working in the state sector as in public universities have to retire five years earlier than men and the uniqueness of the highly-centralised higher education governance where Rectors are appointed unofficially in university rector selection processes in Vietnam.

In general, these four Vietnamese women Rectors' tangible experiences have helped to inform a new aspect of the understanding of women's standpoints on higher education within Vietnam. Therefore, the contributions of this research are that, within its scope, it (i) has made the experiences of senior women leaders in higher education in Vietnam visible by presenting a general picture of the first generation of women Rectors at selected public universities in Vietnam based on what was gained directly from them; (ii) locates the experiences of women participants within the uniqueness of Vietnam to understand how their journeys to the top occurred in the social, political, economic and cultural structures in the context of Vietnam; and (iii) provides a new and perhaps a truthful understanding of the situation of senior women leaders in higher education in

Vietnam from the very own perspectives of a group of Vietnamese women university Rectors, who have experienced this phenomenon. In the next section, this contribution is informed by the discussion of implications both in practice and in theory it brings through an exploration of women participants' experiences.

10.2 Implications for practice: the progression of women into senior positions in higher education in Vietnam

Only a small number of Vietnamese women have risen to senior leadership positions in higher education and successfully fulfilled their roles as Rectors in public universities. Their elevation has been achieved in a social and cultural reality, where the traditional images of women are merely as housewives in patriarchal society and where, women are, at best, seen as second-in-command employees in the Vietnamese workforce (Mai, 2007). The question, pregnant in this thesis, is whether or not this situation will be gradually displaced by more competent co-breadwinners and women principal leaders. The examples presented of successful women stand against a narrower perception where male dominance of leadership in higher education will widen, even in the event of a gradual inclusion of some women leaders. Several important implications for practice arise from the results of this study. Questions still remain in the balance, namely: What can be learnt from this first generation of women Rectors? Can their successes be replicated and if so who will follow their footsteps and how will they secure and continue to hold leadership positions in the context of existing male dominant higher education in Vietnam?

10.2.1 The first generation

Because the women participants in this study are considered the first generation of women Rectors at selected public universities, their journeys to the rectorship have

made a critical contribution to higher education in Vietnam. In the manner that the “(f)irsts pave the way for others to follow” (Turner, 2007, p. 32), these women are pioneers, who have explored new challenges and created new opportunities to inspire others to follow them. As modelled throughout their stories, the women participants, in their positions as Rectors can perhaps extend a helping hand to other women who follow behind them. This study presents a channel for aspiring Vietnamese women leaders working in higher education to examine their lives from standpoints of women Rectors at selected public university through a recorded source of their practical experiences. It also provides a chance for them to understand, in part, the personal and professional qualifications required to hold top positions in this area. Conflict between family and career, gender stereotypes at the workplace, unconstructive influences of distinctive socio-political and cultural factors of the Vietnamese context are presented in all occupations in Vietnam. But the researched women Rectors also indicated that they had effectively managed all responsibilities and believed the Rector position is worth the demands and commitments. As well, the women’s experiences pointed to the shortcomings they could not surmount during their terms as Rectors. An understanding of these obligations and perceived weaknesses may act as a guide for future women leaders in higher education in Vietnam.

Through data collection and analysis, it is obvious that those women participants have been, aside from their own efforts, the Rectors today, due to the support of other individuals and to a certain extent, due to chance and luck. Their successes also depended on historical and social contexts of their upbringing and development. Developing same characteristics that these women possessed is perhaps not easy or not appropriate for others because of differences in age, marital status, education background, working experience, individual career motivation and in historical and

social circumstances, under which, women enter higher education given the fact that Vietnamese society is not static but ever-changing.

In practice, recently, in October 2010, the first public Academy of higher education in Vietnam [equivalent to public four year degree universities] has advertised two vacancies for the Vice director title (Dũng, 2010). This public announcement is perhaps a turning-point in senior rank recruitment policy in public higher education institutions as it invites applications from candidates from both inside and outside of the institution. This opportunity makes for higher competition and for more democratic and transparent procedures. In this same advertisement, however, the age of women is still clearly demarked as five years earlier than men²³⁶. While this age policy, as well as other “bamboo” ceiling effects, continue to make women less desirable candidates for career promotion and cannot be corrected overnight, for younger generation of Vietnamese women leaders in higher education, their own efforts are more important than remaining in serendipity and collective support as it was the case of R1, R2, R3 and R4 in this study. Nevertheless, the experiences of the four women rector participants illustrated that it is imperative for women to remain confident, to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them, to keep an innate feminine dignity, and to maintain a strong sense of themselves and of their intellectual abilities so as to stay on course. This is the basic information about the first women Rectors and it continues to be developed by the following generations; but how?

10.2.2 How many and who will follow?

²³⁶ *Yêu cầu của trường là ứng viên nữ không quá 40 tuổi và ứng viên nam không quá 50 tuổi, trường hợp đặc biệt cũng không được quá 45 (nữ) và 55 tuổi (nam)*
Required age for candidates is no more than 40 years old for females and 50 years old for males, in special cases, it is not exceeded 45 for females and 55 for males (Dũng, 2010).

There were only three women holding the office of Rector at public universities in the academic year 2008-2009 in Vietnam²³⁷. Making a trend from this may be too simplistic but, obviously, there has not been a systematic preparation for the new generation of women who were prepared and equipped needed the characteristics to assume the top leadership position in Vietnam's public universities. It was clear from the experiences of the four women Rectors in this study that they were not given formal courses on leadership skills before and during their terms as Rectors, which is a fact for both women and men college and university leaders in Vietnam (Nghị & Sloper, 1995). It can be argued that without leadership training in general, "a major source of potential future leaders would be lost" (Ebberts, Gallisath, Rockel & Coyan, 2000 p. 376 cited in Madsen 2008). To create a "critical mass" of educated women to take leadership positions (Kolodny, 2000), more leadership training opportunities should be made available. This brings the notion of leadership style and how it is gained and formed through and by women in senior level positions as manifested in the case of four women Rectors in this study.

10.2.3 Women's combining of traditional and non-traditional styles to lead and involve others

In Mai's (2007) study of university management positions in Vietnam, the participants suggested women were seen to be only capable of holding second-in-command positions and then only at the faculty level. However, four women Rectors in this study proved to be the competent leading person in their universities normally for more than one term with the exception of R4, who had more than eleven years in her

²³⁷ Source from the college and university telephone directories MOET

office. The experiences of four women indicate that they developed styles for leading and managing staff which helped them to secure and maintain their positions.

Although the elite intellectual family status of the women participants offered those advantages over the other similarly situated working women, and even over women in their universities, the women Rectors in this study still have to deal with the constraints of patriarchal and hierarchical institutions of higher education in Vietnam. Weber (2001) states that within these constraints, “people resist subordination and in their resistance can develop positive skills, talents and abilities. These skills will fortify them to survive and to challenge more effectively the very system designed to limit their opportunities” (p. 23). Something similar can be said about these four women Rectors.

Research on management style and organisational effectiveness in Vietnam conducted by Quang and Vuong (2002) indicates that there is also no single management style that applied to lead in Vietnamese organisations but in the state sector, most leaders and managers tend to adopt a paternalistic approach in their management. They closely supervise subordinates to ensure that the work is done well but provide limited authority and less delegation to their subordinates in deciding their course of actions. They also rarely consulted staff for their opinions before making decision. This fact would seem to match with the styles of males and might also be applied to public universities in Vietnam, where almost rectors are men. The leadership style described by the women participants in this study challenge those traditional styles by exercising a more democratic or collaborative style combined with command and control to obtain the final results.

The women participants were the first generation of women Rectors at selected public universities in Vietnam. Whether they wanted to or not, they had to accept an existing culture of male leadership, which had existed long before their arrival. To be

successful, they implicitly understood the need to assimilate themselves within this male culture but as women, especially in the context of Vietnam, where patriarchal culture emphasises the traditional women's role of motherhood, nurturing and care giving, they were socially expected to represent attributes contributing to their gender. Falling into the double bind situation, there few alternatives available other than to mediate this paradox by creating a leadership style for themselves combining the characteristics of both the male expectations built into the position and their ways of acting as successful female academics and administrators prior to their appointments. Thus, the women Rectors became bicultural or bilingual leaders who knew how to play the rules of the male culture while still holding on to feminine ways of operating. These cross-gender styles, of merging the historical male expectations of leaders with a feminine reasoning and building common understanding was an effective way to make their way forward in their positions.

We can now turn to the issue of what is needed to be successful for future women leaders. In part, skills employed depends, as Madden (2005) asserts, on the fact that "leadership is contextual". Accepting this point, it would be a mistake to generalise the leadership skills as perceived by the women Rectors in this study to other potential women aspirants. The basics of leadership style mentioned above may thus need to be reconsidered in the circumstances of the ongoing social awareness of women's roles and their consciousness of themselves in the contexts of higher education governance in Vietnam in the coming years.

After describing the influential factors to explain how they had affected women university Presidents' lives, Madsen (2008) suggests that "[i]t is important to keep in mind that these findings are somewhat generational...This appears to be common for many women leaders of this and previous generations. Of course, young women today

can also attain leadership positions, but some may need to overcome family issues or lack of support that may not always have been present with women leaders in past generations. Some may have to master those leadership competencies, which were previously gained through enriching family environments, in different ways” (p. 16). But in the situation of being the first women Rectors in Vietnam, the four women in this study exerted a great influence on the how others can now view future developments to the position. Most significantly, it is perhaps as role models that they may influence the following generations of women seeking to themselves to become Rectors. The advancement of implications have been discussed here relies, to a great deal, on a consideration of the characteristics of the women Rectors outlined in this study. To this end, a sketch of the women Rectors participated in this study can be described in what follows.

10.2.4 The woman Rector

She is a Vietnamese woman, who is most likely born and raised in Vietnam in a middle or upper class and intellectual two-parent family. She is probably is the first or middle girl but not the only child in her family. She is currently somewhere between her middle forties and late fifties and lives happily with her husband. She is likely to have one or two children but no more. She is expected to spend her general education in Vietnam and then to complete her university and an overseas doctorate. The woman Rector most likely starts her career in higher education in a public university in Vietnam in a position of a teaching faculty staff and is likely to have worked solely for this university until she retires. The influential and supporting individuals around her tend to be her parents, her husband, family members, male predecessors, female university lectures and supervisors and colleagues. Although not likely to plan her career to the

rector position but she follows a career path within academia to the rectorship and assumes several administrative positions prior her rector appointment. She is expected to be appointed as the university rector as an internal candidate at the age of around forty six, the age that seems earlier than most of her peers. Luck is potentially involved in her career advancement. As a woman Rector, she may have experienced gender stereotyping and some challenges in the workplace or cultural and social expectations in femininity in the patriarchal Vietnamese society but certainly, none of these tends to dwell on her as her solution strategy is rising above them. She also tends to receive a great deal of support and help from her husband to balance her family and her career. As a university leader, it seems that she does not adhere to any single leadership styles. She possibly practices an inclusive leadership style of collaboration, participation, information sharing and team building to lead her university. She definitely has skills to delegate task but may be ready to assert a certain level of authoritativeness to achieve the best final results. She is surely studying and actively involving herself in professional, social and women's organisations to strengthen her leadership and professional skills. Finally, she definitely has worked hard in her position and has a feeling of career satisfaction.

This discussion of the situations, experiences and characteristics of women Rectors can now be directed broader theoretical considerations of the implications of further understanding of the standpoints of women in higher education.

10.3 Implication for theory: reflecting on feminist standpoint epistemology

At some point, a thesis or a research paper, latches on to a discipline and then becomes part of an existing theoretical or conceptual framework (Smith, 2004). In the case of this study, approaches within feminism and concepts of leadership could have

been drawn on for direction, either together or on their own. As Vietnam currently has few women leaders in high-level positions, I might, for example, have linked my research to that on the assessment standards entrenched in the literature in other contexts to evaluate women college and university Presidents. I might also have taken a number of Vietnamese cultural assumptions into the interpretation of these four women's practices in order to understand the experiences of women university rector participants in this study, since I was born, raised and grew up in the Vietnamese culture. To this end, feminist standpoint epistemology has, in this study, given an exploratory and concrete example from which a theory might be advanced as it has been based on the special cases of Vietnam and the careers of women Rectors whose journeys have been described herein.

Feminist positions on the status of women, both within and outside academia have, for example, been the basis for serious debates and arguments about women's mobility into high level positions, and from these various theories have evolved. Feminist standpoint epistemology offers a reasonable stance, from which the experiences of women, the Rectors in this study, can provide new knowledge about women in leadership positions. Smith (2004) argues that "[t]he only way of knowing a socially constructed world is knowing it from within" (p. 28). It is more likely for the four women Rectors in this study to "have critical insights into the conditions of their own oppression than it is for those who live outside these structures" (Narayan, 2004, p. 220).

The subjects of this study were women, who were rare in senior ranks in higher education in Vietnam, where women have continued to be neglected in the power relations in this field. In this study, the lives of women Rectors were presented in a true as possible way to the lives they lived and how they perceived themselves. The

understanding gained from the experiences of women participants in their journeys has helped provide the standpoints of women from within a space formerly open only to men. Their experiences cannot be those of Vietnamese male Rectors, and they probably also differ from those of other Vietnamese women working in other levels in higher education in Vietnam. The conditions they faced are not versions of the same experience. These women's standpoints would have been less candid and more or less distorted if they were read directly and too easily into other parts of higher education or into models available in feminist and leadership theories from the West. I am convinced that an understanding of what it means to reach the top position in a university in Vietnam has to begin and advance from the standpoints described. But this is not to say that theoretical bridges can be made. The four women participants' stories have built some part of a foundation for new knowledge about how career advancement in higher education was shaped by the uniqueness of the Vietnamese context. In doing this, I feel that to some extent "been instrumental in excavating the local" and given a voice to the experiences of a silent group Luke (2001) (p. 72).

I have tried to show that the women rector participants have developed and maintained a standpoint of their own as they sought to be accepted as authentic leaders and became recognised as Rectors in their own right. Their emergence to some degree corrects misconceptions of Vietnamese women as symbols of low confidence, low aspiration and ambition, mothers and nurtures, dependent and avoiders of career success. To this end they continue to use their experiences as that of successful women Rectors to promote younger women striving for decision making positions in higher education in particular and in the society in general.

Personally, feminist standpoint epistemology was applied to understand women's careers and to provide a separate view on what it meant to be a women leader

from the points of view of four Vietnamese women Rector. At such, this was the only level at which this study could be seen as “feminist” because while feminist standpoint epistemology is mentioned, conceptions of how feminist theories might or could impact on Vietnam, where they are little discussed, were beyond the scope of this study. But reaching the end of this thesis, I can see that feminist standpoint epistemology has been a good theoretical guide and companion for a female research student who carried out her studies on women. It gave me the power to gain a standpoint of my own to reflect upon my own experience, parts of which I share with the women Rectors. It is because “feminist standpoint epistemology asks not just that we take women seriously as knowers but that we translate women’s knowledge into practice, that we apply what we learn from women’s experiences toward social change” (Brooks, p. 77). I am a Vietnamese woman, who resides in Vietnam, who has worked for higher education sector in Vietnam and I am currently interested in my career advancement. At least, I share with women participants the same cultural background, race, gender and maybe, occupation aspirations as well. By sharing their experiences and perceptions in their journeys to the top, the four women Rectors empowered me to question the authenticity of what I once thought and took for granted as givens in my life and my career. They brought me to an understanding of my own past and present experience in a way that transforms me. The more experiences are shared, the more we learn from one another to end the marginalisation of women in senior ranks in this area. My exposure to feminist standpoint epistemology had enabled me to apply and better take on its advantages to study women Rectors at selected public universities in the Vietnamese context. This is the reason why feminism originated in the West, research on women in Vietnam, in non-Western contexts like mine can greatly benefit from its theoretical implications.

Epilogue: Final thoughts

I would like to conclude this thesis with a statement from my own standpoint as it was formed throughout this study. From my observations, the four women in this study are true leaders and role models for others because of their academic and career successes and the individual lives they have led as women in the journeys to a rectorship. I expect that the women will continue to be themselves and share their stories with other younger Vietnamese women. In my journey to find answers to the questions that obsessed me since I was undergraduate student, I have discovered further truths and realities.

My personal and education backgrounds were reflected in those of all four women Rectors in this study. My younger sister and I grew up with the ambition we kept at the very young age that we would receive a university education with our parents' encouragement and support. We all were sent to the quality schools and we had relatively fair chances to access other resources as our male peers. My parents, as those of the women Rectors ignored the Confucian son favoured traditional philosophy in Vietnam to let us enjoy a life that makes us now independent and competent in our lives and our careers. As well, we continued our academic and career endeavour while we were wives and mothers. I was also supported by my husband, who always thought that I could capably assume a more responsible position in my career. I realised that like women Rectors in this study, in my way to academic and career development, I had experienced the similar challenges. At times, I had endured sceptical views when interacting with my male colleagues in the MOET. It was rumoured that I had troubles in my marriage because I have stayed in Australia to pursue my higher education, while my husband lives in Vietnam taking care of my daughter. I also feel guilty for leaving

my parents and my husband a big responsibility that I, as Vietnamese women should traditionally bear for the family. As well, I once thought that it was better if I waited some more years until my daughter Lam was a little older to continue my study; but if I did so, I would miss opportunities because of the current mandatory age cap for promotion for women.

And the experiences shared by women participants in this study epitomise partly the notion of a senior woman administrators in the Vietnamese higher education, which I may become a part in the near future. But as part of the younger generation, my peers and I need to clearly determine our life goals and do our best to achieve what we aim for. I strongly believe that we are capable but it still will be a difficult task in pursuing an academic career concurrently with caring for my family in the context of Vietnam; even if we are in the era of globalisation, when more young Vietnamese women like me have an opportunity to access western ideologies, for example, feminism. As well, although the positive changes in the attitudes of those women's husbands, as well as of mine are encouraging, this is not so simple. The ideal model of womanhood in Vietnam still associates women with many heavy family responsibilities and it is still used "to guide girls in choosing appropriate occupations in society", where "...women also self-consciously plan their lives in accordance with this model" (Hang, 2008, p. 19). But I feel I need to find ways to productively combine a prolific career life and a satisfying family life in this context. And the influence these women have had on me has been life changing and encourages me to continue to strive for professional and personal growth. Actual change in our consciousness and experiences starts concurrently when we begin with the process of exchanging, thinking, and writing. My study is a link in that change course. I hope that one day, when Lam is old enough to read this thesis, she will understand how her mother and the previous generations of women in Vietnam made

their own attempts and have tried their best to create a better environment for future Vietnamese women to be successes in their lives and careers. And for that aim, this changing journey continues.

Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance



HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

SUBMISSION CERTIFICATE

This certificate confirms that an application for 'Journey to the top: women leaders in higher education in Vietnam' (GU Protocol Number EBL/24/08/HREC). This application will shortly be considered by the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

The applicant will be advised of the outcome of this consideration in due course.

This correspondence will list the standard conditions of ethical clearance that apply to Griffith University protocols.

The HREC is established in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*. The operation of this Committee is outlined in the HREC standard Operating Procedure, which is available from www.gu.edu.au/or/ethics.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries about this matter.

Gary Allen
Manager, Research Ethics
Office for Research
G39 room 3.55 Gold Coast Campus
Griffith University
Phone: 3735 5585
Facsimile: 5552 9058
Email: g.allen@griffith.edu.au

Appendix 2: Email letter to potential interviewees

(Letter head of Griffith University)

Researcher: Dao Hien Chi
Doctoral candidate, School of Education and
Professional Studies, Griffith University
Email: s2629523@student.gu.edu.au
or mobile 0423 591 168

Supervisors: Dr. Robert Funnell, School of Education and Professional
Studies, Griffith University
Email: r.funnell@griffith.edu.au or phone (07) 37355745

Dr. Clarence Ng Chi Hung, School of Education and
Professional Studies, Griffith University
Email: clarence.ng@griffith.edu.au or phone (07) 37355668

Dear Ms...

My name is Dao Hien Chi and I am a doctoral candidate of School of Education, Griffith University, Australia. My supervisors are Dr. Robert Funnell and Dr. Clarence Ng Chi Hung. My study focuses on the issue of women leaders in higher education in Vietnam. Results of my study will rely primarily on interviews with women such as you, who are the rectors of four-year universities or are in top positions of Higher education department of the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam.

I would like you to agree for me to meet you at a convenient time to talk briefly about my study and invite you to voluntarily participate in my project.

Thank you very much for reading this letter and I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Dao Hien Chi

In Vietnamese

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Kính gửi Bà....

Tôi là Đào Hiền Chi, hiện đang là nghiên cứu sinh tiến sĩ ngành Giáo dục của khoa Giáo dục, trường Đại học Griffith, Úc. Các giáo viên hướng dẫn của tôi là Tiến sĩ Robert Funnell và Tiến sĩ Clarence Ng Chi Hung, giảng viên của khoa Giáo dục thuộc trường Đại học Griffith, Úc. Đề tài nghiên cứu của tôi đề cập đến vấn đề phụ nữ làm quản lý trong giáo dục đại học ở Việt Nam. Kết quả nghiên cứu của tôi sẽ phụ thuộc rất nhiều vào các cuộc phỏng vấn với những phụ nữ đã và đang giữ vai trò lãnh đạo trong giáo dục đại học như các nữ Hiệu trưởng các trường đại học ở Việt Nam, các nữ lãnh đạo cấp Vụ của Vụ Giáo dục đại học, Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo.

Nếu bà cho phép, tôi xin được gặp bà ít phút để trình bày tóm tắt về đề tài nghiên cứu của tôi và mời bà tình nguyện (phi lợi nhuận) tham gia vào nghiên cứu này.

Xin chân thành cảm ơn bà đã dành thời gian đọc thư này và mong sớm được nhận phản hồi từ bà.

Trân trọng,

Đào Hiền Chi

Appendix 3: Information sheet

(Letter head of Griffith University)

Researcher: Dao Hien Chi
Doctoral candidate, School of Education and
Professional Studies, Griffith University
Email: s2629523@student.gu.edu.au
or mobile 0423 591 168

Supervisors: Dr. Robert Funnell, School of Education and Professional
Studies, Griffith University
Email: r.funnell@griffith.edu.au or phone (07) 37355745

Dr. Clarence Ng Chi Hung, School of Education and
Professional Studies, Griffith University
Email: clarence.ng@griffith.edu.au or phone (07) 37355668

Title of the study: Journey to the top: women leaders in higher education in Vietnam

This is a part of Chi's doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Robert Funnell and Dr. Clarence Ng Chi Hung from Griffith University.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the issue of women leaders in higher education in Vietnam. The study will explore the influential factors contributing to the career development of some women leaders in higher education, the barriers they have confronted when executing their duties and meeting the responsibilities of their jobs. This study is conducted under the supervision of Griffith University, Queensland, Australia. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a woman leader in higher education in Vietnam.

Description of procedures

Your involvement in this study will include a one-hour in-depth interview. During the interview, you will be asked about your childhood and background experiences, academic preparation, career paths, personal and professional barriers and possible advice that you might share with other women, who are seeking leadership positions in higher education.

This in-depth interview will be tape - recorded. You can refuse to answer any questions if you feel uncomfortable and you can discontinue the interview at any point at which you are no longer comfortable proceeding. If at any time, you change your mind about participating in this research, you are encouraged to withdraw your consent and to cancel your participation.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks at this time from the participation in this study.

Benefits

If you decide to participate in this study, you may gain some self-reflection, personal insight and significance self-awareness. What you have experienced along your journey to the top will inspire other women to pursue senior leadership positions and help them to be successful in higher education.

Cost and compensation

You will be advised that while participating in the interview, you will not receive any payment. Your participation is voluntary. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality will be respected. The information you provide will be kept confidential and secured to ensure your privacy. Pseudonym will be used to guarantee that your name and the name of your institution are not revealed. The tape from your interview will be kept in safe place and under control of the researcher only. You have the right to review the tape and request to destroy all or portions at any time. The tape will be destroyed once the study is completed. Results of this study will be reported to you as part of the reflection and checking for accuracy. In each case of disseminating results of this study, your name and the name of your institution will not be revealed unless you request those to be publicized. The researcher will ask your opinion when using your own words in the study to avoid exposing your identity.

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University's Privacy Plan at www.griffith.edu.au/ua/aa/vc/pp or telephone (07) 3735 5585.

We acknowledge your valuable opinions, and the time and information you provide because it is an important part of our study. If you have any further questions or wish to report the study related problems, you may contact the researcher or the supervisors by phone or email that given at the beginning of this information sheet. For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any complains about the ethical conduct of the project, you may contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on telephone (07) 3735 5585 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and contact the researcher to return it as your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Dao Hien Chi

In Vietnamese

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Tên đề tài: Con đường dẫn tới đỉnh cao: Phụ nữ làm lãnh đạo trong giáo dục đại học ở Việt Nam

Nghiên cứu này là một phần trong luận án tiến sĩ của nghiên cứu sinh Đào Hiền Chi dưới sự hướng dẫn của Tiến sĩ Robert Funnell và Tiến sĩ Clarence Ng Chi Hung thuộc trường Đại học Griffith, Úc.

Giới thiệu

Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là khảo sát vấn đề phụ nữ làm lãnh đạo trong giáo dục đại học ở Việt Nam. Nội dung của nghiên cứu sẽ tìm hiểu các yếu tố dẫn đến sự phát triển nghề nghiệp của một số nữ lãnh đạo trong giáo dục đại học ở Việt Nam, những rào cản mà họ gặp phải trong quá trình thực hiện nhiệm vụ và trách nhiệm của họ với vai trò là người lãnh đạo. Nghiên cứu này được tiến hành dưới sự giám sát của trường Đại học Griffith, bang Queensland, Úc. Bà được mời tham gia nghiên cứu này bởi vì bà là một trong số những nữ lãnh đạo của giáo dục đại học Việt Nam.

Mô tả quá trình

Nếu đồng ý, bà sẽ tham gia 1 cuộc phỏng vấn kéo dài trong 1 giờ. Trong quá trình phỏng vấn, người phỏng vấn sẽ hỏi bà những câu hỏi liên quan đến thời niên thiếu của bà, quá trình học tập và công tác, các rào cản về cá nhân cũng như nghề nghiệp mà bà gặp phải trong vị trí công tác của mình và những lời khuyên mà bà dành cho những phụ nữ đang chuẩn bị vươn tới vị trí lãnh đạo trong giáo dục đại học.

Cuộc phỏng vấn này sẽ được thu âm. Bà có thể từ chối trả lời những câu hỏi nào mà bà cảm thấy không cần thiết và bà có thể ngừng cuộc phỏng vấn vào bất cứ lúc nào bà muốn. Trong trường hợp bà thay đổi ý định về việc tham gia nghiên cứu, bà được khuyến khích rút lui khỏi nghiên cứu và hủy bỏ sự tham gia của bà trong nghiên cứu này.

Rủi ro

Không có rủi ro nào được xác định vào thời điểm này khi bà tham gia nghiên cứu.

Lợi ích

Nếu bà quyết định tham gia nghiên cứu, bà có thể nhìn lại chặng đường đã qua của mình và rút ra được những kinh nghiệm quý báu cho bản thân. Những gì bà đã trải qua trong quá trình công tác sẽ khuyến khích những phụ nữ có khả năng tiếp tục phấn

đầu và giúp cho họ thành công trong vai trò là những nữ lãnh đạo tương lai của giáo dục đại học Việt Nam.

Chi phí và sự đền bù

Nếu tham gia vào phỏng vấn, bà sẽ không nhận được sự hỗ trợ về tài chính. Sự tham gia của bà là tự nguyện. Bà sẽ không được đền bù gì khi tham gia vào nghiên cứu này.

Sự bảo mật

Vấn đề bảo mật sẽ được tôn trọng. Những thông tin trong quá trình phỏng vấn sẽ được bảo quản một cách tối mật để đảm bảo những bí mật cá nhân của bà. Tên của cá nhân bà và các cơ sở quản lý của bà sẽ được đặt bút danh. Băng ghi âm phỏng vấn bà sẽ được nghiên cứu sinh bảo quản và chịu trách nhiệm. Bà có quyền được nghe lại băng ghi âm và yêu cầu cắt bỏ từng phần hoặc cả quá trình phỏng vấn. Băng ghi âm này sẽ được phá hủy ngay sau khi nghiên cứu hoàn thành. Kết quả của nghiên cứu này sẽ được gửi đến bà để tham khảo và kiểm chứng sự chân thật. Trong trường hợp công bố kết quả nghiên cứu, tên của bà và các cơ sở bà quản lý sẽ không được tiết lộ trừ phi bà yêu cầu những thông tin này cần được công bố rộng rãi. Nghiên cứu sinh sẽ hỏi ý kiến của bà trong trường hợp sử dụng lời nói trực tiếp của bà vào nghiên cứu để tránh tình trạng những thông tin này có thể để lộ tung tích cá nhân của bà.

Việc tiến hành nghiên cứu này sẽ bao gồm cả thu thập những thông tin về cá nhân bà. Những thông tin này sẽ được bảo mật và sẽ không được tiết lộ cho bên thứ 3 mà không có sự chấp thuận của bà và tuân thủ theo đúng các quy định của nhà nước và pháp luật. Một bản copy dữ liệu không tiết lộ danh tính có thể sẽ được sử dụng cho mục đích nghiên cứu tiếp theo. Tuy nhiên trong mọi trường hợp, tên tuổi của bà sẽ được bảo vệ. Để biết thêm các thông tin tư vấn về việc này, xin liên hệ trực tiếp với Hội đồng đạo đức của trường Griffith theo trang web sau www.griffith.edu.au/ua/aa/vc/pp hoặc qua điện thoại (07) 3735 5585.

Chúng tôi trân trọng những ý kiến, thông tin và thời gian quý báu mà bà dành cho cuộc phỏng vấn bởi vì đây là phần quan trọng nhất trong nghiên cứu của chúng tôi. Nếu bà có ý kiến đóng góp gì về mặt chuyên môn cho nghiên cứu này, xin vui lòng liên hệ với nghiên cứu sinh và các giáo viên hướng dẫn theo số điện thoại và địa chỉ đã cung cấp ở ngay phần đầu trang thông tin này. Về những góp ý về quyền lợi của người tham gia hoặc bất cứ phần nào về vấn đề đạo đức nghiên cứu, bà có thể liên lạc trực tiếp với Giám đốc nhóm đạo đức nghiên cứu, thành viên của Hội đồng đạo đức nghiên cứu của trường đại học Griffith theo số điện thoại (07) 3735 5585 (hoặc email research-ethics@griffith.edu.au).

Xin trân trọng cảm ơn bà đã dành thời gian đọc trang thông tin này. Nếu bà đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu, xin vui lòng điền vào mẫu chấp nhận tham gia nghiên cứu gửi kèm theo và liên lạc với nhóm nghiên cứu để gửi lại mẫu này.

Trân trọng,

Đào Hiền Chi

Appendix 3: Consent form

(Letter head of Griffith University)

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Title of the study: Journey to the top: women leaders in higher education in Vietnam

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular that:

1. I understand that my involvement in this research will include interviews;
2. I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
3. I understand the risks involved;
4. I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research;
5. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary;
6. I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;
7. I am advised that if I participate, I am free to withdraw at any time without comment and penalty.
8. I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on (07) 37355585 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and
9. I agree to participate in the project.
10. I give my permission for my interviews to be recorded. I understand that the tape will be kept confidential and I am able to have a copy of it in Vietnamese or to destroy it if I desire.

Name	Signature	Date
(Participant)	(Participant)	(Participant)

In Vietnamese

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Tên đề tài: Con đường dẫn tới đỉnh cao: Phụ nữ làm lãnh đạo trong giáo dục đại học ở Việt Nam

Tôi ký tên dưới đây để xác nhận rằng tôi đã đọc và hiểu những thông tin về nghiên cứu này, đặc biệt:

1. Tôi đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu này dưới hình thức phỏng vấn;
2. Tôi đã nhận được những câu trả lời hợp lý về những thắc mắc của tôi liên quan đến nghiên cứu này;
3. Tôi hiểu được những rủi ro khi tham gia nghiên cứu này;
4. Tôi hiểu được là tôi không được trả lợi nhuận trực tiếp từ việc tham gia vào nghiên cứu này;
5. Tôi hiểu rằng sự tham gia vào nghiên cứu này của tôi là tự nguyện;
6. Tôi hiểu rằng, nếu tôi có thắc mắc gì, tôi có thể liên lạc với nhóm nghiên cứu;
7. Tôi được khuyên rằng, nếu tôi tham gia nghiên cứu này, tôi cũng sẽ được tự quyết định rút lui khỏi nghiên cứu mà không phải nói lý do cũng như không chịu hình phạt nào;
8. Tôi hiểu rằng, tôi có thể liên lạc với Giám đốc nhóm đạo đức nghiên cứu, thành viên của Hội đồng đạo đức nghiên cứu của trường đại học Griffith theo số điện thoại (07) 3735 5585 (hoặc email research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) nếu tôi có bất cứ thắc mắc nào về các điều khoản liên quan đến đạo đức nghiên cứu của đề tài này;
9. Tôi đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu này;
10. Tôi đồng ý cho phép cuộc phỏng vấn tôi được ghi âm. Tôi hiểu rằng băng ghi âm sẽ được bảo quản một cách tối mật và tôi có quyền được nhận một bản copy băng tiếng Việt hoặc yêu cầu phá hủy băng ghi âm này nếu tôi mong muốn như vậy.

Tên

Chữ ký

Ngày

Appendix 4 : Interview questions

Guiding research questions	Interviews questions
<p><i>Q1. What are personal backgrounds of these women?</i></p>	<p><i>1. Could you share with me your personal information in terms of family of origin, for example, when and where was you born, and grew up? Who are your parents and what did they do? How many siblings have you got?</i></p> <p><i>2. Could you please tell me about your marital status?</i></p> <p><i>3. What is your own experience in education including all your degrees and certificates?</i></p>
<p><i>Q2. How do they ascend to the top leadership position in their institutions?</i></p>	<p><i>1. How long have you been working at your university and how long have you been in the rector position?</i></p> <p><i>2. How did you obtain the rector position and could you describe that process?</i></p> <p><i>3. Did you aspire to this position?</i></p> <p><i>4. Why did you choose to enter higher education? What factors (e.g. individuals or events) are most likely to support your career choice and development?</i></p> <p><i>5. Are there any difficulties in your career development? If yes, how did you deal with them to advance in your career?</i></p>
<p><i>Q3. What are the leadership practices of those women Rectors including leadership styles, problems encountered (if any) and handled?</i></p>	<p><i>1. What are your responsibilities in your position?</i></p> <p><i>2. What is your leadership style?</i></p> <p><i>3. Is it effective in your institution?</i></p> <p><i>4. If any, what other challenges have you experienced in your leadership position?</i></p> <p><i>5. How did you overcome these?</i></p>
<p><i>Q4. What advice they save for other women working in higher education, who want to aspire to senior leadership?</i></p>	<p><i>1. From your perspective, what skills and strategies are most likely critical for women, who want to be leaders in higher education in Vietnam?</i></p> <p><i>2. Is there anything else about your life, your career, your role, your story or your philosophy that you would like to share if I missed that?</i></p>

Appendix 5: An example of developing categories and themes

Provisional categories [Priori codes]	Initial subcategories [Inductive codes]	Finalised subcategories [Finalised codes]	Themes
Personal background	Family status Parents Siblings Marital status Children General education Higher education Subjects of expertise Degrees obtained	Family of origin Marriage and children Education background	Biography, family and education
Career development	Positions held Mobility Aspiration Father's influence Mother' influence Both parents' influence Husband' s influence Grandfather's influence Male predecessor's support Female university lecturer's influence Female supervisor's influence Teaching experience Participation in different org. Luck	Professional career path Aspiration Family members' influence Non family members' influence Supporting activities Luck	Ascension to the rectorship
Leadership practices	Leadership characteristics Leadership styles Hiring right people Empowerment Using power	Leadership characteristics Leadership styles Leadership philosophy	Leadership practices
Challenges and solution strategies	Family responsibilities Suspicion Rumour Slanginess of senior staff Personal weakness Husband's support Ignoring Working hard	Family responsibilities Other problems Solutions	Challenges, solutions and strategies
Advice	Views on women leaders Advice	Views on women leaders Advice	Contribution

Appendix 6: An example of the coding process – intrapersonal level

Participants	Speech in Vietnamese	Translation into English	Inductive codes
R3	Bố tôi là một công bộc của nhà nước làm việc rất tận tụy vẫn dạy dỗ chúng tôi là đã nhận việc gì phải làm đến nơi đến chốn, một cách trách nhiệm nhất và tâm huyết nhất. Tôi được hai bà giáo ảnh hưởng như đã nói ở trên, ngay lúc đó tôi đã nghĩ rằng giá như tôi được như họ.	My father was a diligent official and he taught us how to do the job with the most responsibility and enthusiasm. I was influenced by two female lecturers as mentioned above, at that time, I wished I would become like them.	Father's influence Female University lecturers' influence
R3	Tôi sinh trưởng trong một gia đình trí thức... Cả gia đình tôi đều làm giáo dục, cụ thể chị cả tôi là giáo viên cấp 3... Tôi có cậu em trai bây giờ làm giảng viên đại học...	I was born and grew up in an intellectual family ... All my family worked in education sector. Specifically, my eldest sister is a high school teacher ... I have a younger brother, who is now university lecturer	Family status Siblings

Appendix 7: An example of the coding process – interpersonal level

Participants	Speech in Vietnamese	Translation into English	Inductive codes
R1	<p>Mình cảm nhận được việc mình làm lãnh đạo cũng là có yếu tố ngẫu nhiên và có những điều may mắn đối với mình...</p> <p>Đối với tôi, tôi cho là tự tin bản lĩnh quyết đoán, mình dám làm, dám chịu.</p>	<p>I myself had a feeling that it was a contingent effect, a good luck to me ...</p> <p>For me, I think that I am confident, determined and responsible.</p>	<p>Luck</p> <p>Leadership characteristics</p>
R2	<p>Cá nhân cô không đặt mục tiêu sẽ là một hiệu trưởng... Đó là số phận. Đó là may mắn như người ta hay nói cò đến tay ai người đó phát...</p> <p>Thứ nhất là suy nghĩ logic, thứ hai là trách nhiệm trong công việc, thứ ba là luôn luôn trung thực... Thứ tư là... tính cộng đồng, khả năng thuyết phục người khác...</p>	<p>Personally, I did not set a goal to be a Rector. It was fate. It was luck to me, as the proverb ‘Strike while the iron is hot’.</p> <p>Firstly, it is logical thinking, secondly, be responsible in the job, thirdly, always be honest... Fourthly, it is high community spirit, the ability to convince others.</p>	<p>Luck</p> <p>Leadership characteristics</p>
R3	<p>Yếu tố may mắn, về mặt số phận... Tôi là người rất quyết đoán và chịu trách nhiệm. Khi quyết định đã được đưa ra, thì tôi đôn đốc quyết liệt quá trình thực hiện, kiểm tra thường xuyên để kết quả đạt được tốt nhất.</p>	<p>It was luck effect, a destiny’s choice... I am very decisive and responsible. When a decision was made, I supervised, speeded up the implementation process regularly to get the best result of that task.</p>	<p>Luck</p> <p>Leadership characteristics</p>
R4	<p>Chẳng qua cô ở đây thuộc vào loại may mắn được đào tạo liên tục, được phong học hàm sớm nên khi bổ nhiệm cũng vào loại tương đối sớm...</p> <p>Mình phải là người khiêm tốn nhưng cũng quyết đoán.</p>	<p>It was only I was lucky to be given continuing educational opportunities, was bestowed the academic titles earlier, so I was appointed at a relative early age.</p> <p>I was modest but also decisive</p>	<p>Luck</p> <p>Leadership characteristics</p>

Appendix 8: Profiles of women participants

Participants	R1	R2	R3	R4
Born in	1963	1953	1949	1949
Marital status	Married	Married	Married	Remarried
Number of marriage	1	1	1	2
Children	2	2	1	1
Education	PhD	PhD	PhD	PhD
Fields of Expertise	Laws	Computer Science	Laws	Music Studies
Places of Study	The former USSR	Czechoslovakia	The former USSR	The former USSR
Years at the institution before the appointment	17	21	24	20
Age at the appointment	44	45	48	46
Positions held	Rector	Rector	Rector	Director
Institutions	Public university	Public university	Public university	Public academy
Years in the Rector/Director position	2	9	7	11

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