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## **"The New Trends in Urban Lifestyle in Ho Chi Minh City" (serial in 4 parts)**

**Part 4 : Vietnam's tradition and new life culture, and exchanges with Japan**

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## **Introduction**

Vietnam has an elongated land stretching from north to south, and its geographical characteristics are a source of diversified natural features. In the country 90% Kinh people and 54 minority groups are coexisting while they treasure each unique lifestyle and traditional culture. This part reports transition from traditional lifestyle to new urban lifestyle by describing the representative Kinh people's traditional lifestyle and cultures. The report also grasps the present state of new lifestyle and business style being generated under the influence of Viet Kieu and foreign cultures and through exchanges with Japan. Then, the report considers challenges with which the geographically advantageous Vietnam should grapple for creation of wealthy life, society and nation in cooperation with other ASEAN nations in future.

## **Agendas**

### **1. Traditional lifestyle in Vietnam**

- 1) Vietnamese sense of values sets great store by hometown and family
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**Vietnam will play a role of engine for ASEAN economy and culture with its tolerance and geographical advantage**

### **1. Traditional lifestyle in Vietnam**

#### **1) Vietnamese sense of values sets great store by hometown and family.**

The traditional culture and lifestyle in the northern plains of Vietnam have been formed on the basis of agriculture blessed by the Red River Delta whose upriver district is Chinese Yunnan, as well as influence by China. The administrations in the past have marked their history by water control and waterway utilization; from around 17th century, polders were started to be constructed, where settlements were created, to protect houses and farmlands against flood. The settlements were characterized by communities of dense houses and population, which are strongly tied with each other and fight against disasters or invasion of external enemies by whole village. Outside a dike, unique industrial colonies of pottery, silk textile, brewing, wood craft, etc have been formed and supported various economic activities of the whole area along with commercial colonies.

Such settlements should be regarded as a community of regional bonds and blood relations rather than an ordinary organization of local industries. In other words, the whole village serves as a "huge family". This is why all Vietnamese people value their hometown as their roots and the proverb says "the laws of the emperor yield to the customs of the village". The Vietnamese people treasure their family equally to or more highly than their village. For the Vietnamese, family is their foundation and something they can rely on. Parents bring up their children with benevolence, sons and daughters provide for their old parents, elder brothers and sisters take care of their younger brothers and sisters; these are ethical codes based on Confucianism and unchanged morals of the Vietnamese people.

However, during the time of agricultural collectivization under socialist policy (1958-'86), free economic activities and traditional practices of the communities were

severely restricted. It was extremely difficult to freely sell local specialty products or to break away from farm villages. At the same time, emigration from urban areas to rural and mountainous areas was promoted for reclamation work. Consequently the society has grown stagnant and the economy has become impoverished. Even then, the strength of family bonds has never changed. For example, they never fail to go back to their hometown in the Chinese New Year and reunite with their family, which is their traditional practice and pleasure. On New Year's Yves, they receive talismans for good fortune, and on New Year's Days, they celebrate their family's happiness and prosperity enjoying Banh Chung (a kind of steamed rice cake wrapped in a special leaf) and firecrackers. This is a wonderful moment for the Vietnamese. They forget the past year and open their mind toward the New Year to invite good fortunes in. The Vietnamese people never forget traditional, special events to deepen family and regional bonds.



\*The Vietnamese have traditional culture to respect their ancestors.

## **2) Religious view of the Vietnamese people, who are tolerant of various religions**

Vietnam is a country of plural religions, where various religions and faiths are established in life. Though the country has freedom of religion, it restricts excessive occult art or divination from a standpoint of socialist nation. Currently the government authorizes 6 religions. Buddhism boasts the largest number of worshipers of 80% Vietnamese; also Catholics, Protestantism, Muslim, Cao Dai and Hoa Hao have widely spread. Furthermore, many Vietnamese people believe in time-honored religions of nature or ancestor worships, occult arts and divination.

One of the characteristics of religions in Vietnam is that they have strongly emotional aspects. While believing in each religion, the worshipers often lack full understanding of the teachings. Since many have found salvation because of emotional reasons or invitation, they have low consciousness as a believer.

Another characteristic of Vietnamese religions is that they have come into the country originally from abroad via trade and cultural exchanges in the course of nature instead

of territorial or religious disputes. As for Catholics and Protestantism, they have come into the nation by colonial policies. From historical viewpoint, the Vietnamese people are ready to accept foreign religions without refusal. This is owing to tolerance and gentleness of the Vietnamese people.

The foreign religions have been absorbed into the society in the course of propagation receiving influence of the natural climate, traditional culture, time-honored ancestor worship and various religions. Originally, Vietnam has traditional belief and primitive religions deeply rooted in the spiritual life of the people. While preserving their traditional sense of values, the Vietnamese are capable of accepting various religions, deftly absorb them and recreate as a new religious culture. In this age of globalization when different cultures and values are confronting, such quality will greatly contribute to new development of Vietnam.



\*In Ho Chi Minh City, a great number of Buddhist Temples attract numerous worshippers.

## **2. Changes in living habits and new lifestyles**

### **1) Transition of wedding ceremonies and funerals from traditional form to urban style.**

In Vietnam, a marriage used to be regarded as a bond between two families rather than a consequence of free love. Under the influence of Confucianism, the people had strong sense of virtue, married an arranged partner, and after marriage brides were required to obey mother-in-law and to give birth to heir for family prosperity. For the Vietnamese people, a wedding ceremony was a sacred ritual that occurred just once in their life. Therefore, they carefully decided the best day both for bride and bridegroom to hold the ceremony consulting the Buddhist calendar. If they held the ceremony on a bad day, the marriage was believed to lead to divorce, illness, financial loss, or even death of the couple. As betrothal gifts, a bridegroom present betel leaves and areca nut. Since wedding was a festive occasion when the families could display their social status, in some cases grand wedding ceremony continued several days. This used to be a

traditional Vietnamese wedding.

In recent years, however, the idea of marriage has varied in urban areas along with the changing lifestyle. The young people enjoy free love and often find their partner via their friends or on the Internet. Not a small number of youths who have come out of rural villages to cities for study or work start living with their partner without their parents' knowledge. Recently, partly because of the deregulation, the number of marriages with Viet Kieu has been increasing.

Today, business establishments of marriage hall offer various services. The bride and bridegroom take photos in wedding costumes in front of Cathedral and celebrate their marriage in a grand style inviting about 300 guests including families, friends and co-workers to a wedding reception. With a low average age, Ho Chi Minh City is enjoying a rush of wedding ceremonies. After marriage, many couples live apart from their parents and make nuclear families.

Divorces are no longer abnormal; because of sexual delinquency and lavish spending of husbands, a growing number of women decide to lead their marriage to an end. Even if they have children, they can work in the same way as before because they can rely on their parents. For the Vietnamese women, divorce has become no longer a social disadvantage. In this way the urban areas have started to see new ideas of marriage and family.

Vietnam has another style of marriage. International marriages are arranged by agents with men in farm villages of China, Korea, Taiwan, etc. In these cases, the brides generally send money to their family in Vietnam after marriage. However, the arranged international marriages in different cultures and lifestyles have brought about various problems such as isolation and abuse of the brides. Owing to the overseas emigration of eligible females, domestic marriage and population have started to lose the balance.

At the same time, funerals have drastically changed. Since the Vietnamese people respect their ancestors and the departed, they put importance on funerals. First anniversary is highly esteemed and all family members never fail to meet to hold a memorial service for the departed. Naturally each religion has different style of funeral; in Buddhist style, the departed has traditionally been buried under the earth and in third anniversary reinterred. However, in this age of urbanization, interment is a great burden for ordinary citizens because of the soaring cost of burial ground. Considering such issues as space shortage, hygiene and environment, the government is encouraging cremation. The style of funerals has been changing as the people started to carry out cremation.



\*In front of Cathedral, couples who love commemorative photos take pictures in various poses.

## 2) Festivals as a unifying power of community and ceremonials in future.

Festivals in Vietnam are a sacred occasion when the whole community pay respect for ancestors and make a wish for peace and prosperity of the village, and enhance the unifying power of the community. A researcher of Vietnamese culture says there are about 500 major seasonal festivals across the country. The festivals are partly meant to worship historical heroes and persons who have contributed to the nation. They also play a role of bridge between the past and the future.

On the other hand, in newly urbanizing areas in cities, the new inhabitants have poor exchanges and varied feelings for festivals. In order to activate the urban communities in future, creation of new festivals will be required, including redefinition of "festival", as an enhancement of unifying force of the communities.

Before socialization (before 1945), ceremonials in Vietnam used to be festive occasions when people pray for prosperity of their family and village in accordance with tradition, and the wealthy people display their social status. After socialism was promoted, the people were forced to practice self-control in large-scale, ostentatious ceremonies; but after the Doi Moi, the situation has significantly changed. While the people uphold essential style of tradition and sense of values, improved life and globalization have brought about new-style ceremonials. Such changes are occurring in Ho Chi Minh City and other urban areas, where tradition and innovation are combined into new lifestyles.



\*Statue of "Tran Hung Dao", a hero of the nation who fought back against Mongol invasion.

### **3. Another Vietnam "Viet Kieu"**

#### **1) The presence of overseas Vietnamese**

Some of the Vietnamese people living abroad have Vietnamese nationality, while others have obtained foreign nationality as a result of their long stay in the country. As Part 2 of this report described, the number of overseas Vietnamese is about 4.5 million, and of which, the largest number of about 2.2 million reside in the US (as of 2010). The Viet Kieu live in more than 100 foreign countries and about 80% of them live in developed countries.

The history of Viet Kieu started in 1954 when privileged class who occupied important positions in Hue Dynasty and French Colonial Administration emigrated to France, Canada (Quebec), and other French-speaking countries from fear of persecution. Also after the end of Vietnam-America war in 1975, officials of South Vietnam administration, the wealthy, the resident Chinese, and many other people risked their lives to flee the country by boat for freedom as "Boat people".

Even now, some of the Viet Kieu can't forgive the socialist government of Vietnam because of their bitter experiences in the past. However most of the Viet Kieu care about their homeland and family and hope the development of their fatherland. The domestic Vietnamese people have a good image of the Viet Kieu because their life looks richer, cooler and financially affluent. After the Doi Moi policy in 1986, the government backed off its hostile attitude toward the Viet Kieu and started to appreciate their cooperation for national benefit. And then, after recovery of diplomatic relations with the US in 1995, the government amended the Constitution in 2011 and promoted "reconciliation policy" for the people. As a result, the Viet Kieu have started to come home more frequently and make greater investment in the country. As a matter of fact, the Vietnamese economy, particularly that of Ho Chi Minh City in south, has been supported by investment and remittance from the Viet Kieu.

The behaviors of Viet Kieu always attract attention. Nowadays, a daughter of Vietnamese Prime Minister and a Viet Kieu male have got married. The Viet Kieu husband, who has made a great success in his business partly thanks to support of Minister's family, is often featured in media. He is reported to assume a post of Vietnam Macdonald representative this year. Macdonald, which has not branched into Vietnam yet, was given permission by Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee and at last will open the first store next year.

#### **2) Viet Kieu has a great influence on life culture and business**

Music is the most distinguished connection between the Viet Kieu and the domestic



people. Most of the singers, lyricists and composers who have been popular from the age of America-Vietnam War reside in the US. The music of Viet Kieu has a great influence as spiritual culture on the domestic Vietnamese people.

Since Vietnam is promoting market economy under socialism, not only economy but music is being liberalized, but the reality is still chaotic. From the viewpoint of singers' performance, the Vietnamese music market hardly has high quality, where models or actresses easily turn to singers. For the music-loving people, the quality or beat of such domestic music don't strike the right chord of their heart. Many Vietnamese people are still comforted by the Viet Kieu singers and music.

In the world of fashion and diet, or of leisure activity and lifestyle, the domestic people are greatly influenced by the Viet Kieu and actively adopt the Viet Kieu style into their own lifestyle. In the world of business, the Viet Kieu who have abundant business experiences in the US and other countries have good effect on the domestic corporate management. The Viet Kieu's service businesses (restaurant, franchise and consultant) in Ho Chi Minh City provide numerous new successful cases and attract attention as a new management model.

Besides, the Viet Kieu contribute to their fatherland in education. It is a symbol of "National Reconciliation". They provide advanced knowledge of cutting-edge technology in developed countries. In recent years, a great number of Viet Kieu scholars have held lectures and academic conferences in Vietnamese research institutes and universities and had a good influence on domestic academic world. Overseas remittance of 10 billion dollars annually from the Viet Kieu is certainly significant; but in the future, their contribution is expected in the field of education that the Vietnamese people are most interested in.

Although the Viet Kieu had left their fatherland to escape prosecution and seek for freedom, many returned to the country and are contributing to its development. Many of the Vietnamese intellectuals have great expectations on Viet Kieu, saying that "they will have a positive effect on the future of Vietnam".



\*Foreign-financed developments of office buildings and commercial facilities

#### **4. Overseas contents culture and lifestyle that have influence on Vietnam**

##### **1) Vietnamese unique culture and when the Hong Kong culture was influential**

Before Doi Moi, the contents culture of Vietnam focused on propaganda films for national unity and the war. After the Doi Moi, however, the new policy had an influence on film culture such as liberalization of themes. Though there were some constraints, many Hong Kong films and Hollywood movies were imported.

Long before then, from around 1975 when amusements were scarce, Hong Kong films were imported to Vietnam and enjoyed great popularity among the people. The fashion, lifestyle and manners described in the films had a great influence on the people. Since Hong Kong has a Chinese culture, the Vietnamese people who have Chinese-affected view of life could easily sympathize with the films. As Hong Kong actors and the Vietnamese share similar appearance, not a small number of the Vietnamese enjoyed imaging themselves into the world of film and copying the actors' lifestyle. Furthermore, the Hong Kong films featured familiar themes such as family, friend, work and love; the Vietnamese audiences could use many examples from the films in their real life. Hong Kong movies and TV dramas still enjoy popularity in Vietnam today.

##### **2) Influence of Korean Brand Strategy**

The Korean government started to export Korean TV dramas to Vietnam from around 1998 as a course of national brand strategy. The national brand strategy includes: the Korean government supports the production of Korean dramas through which understanding and affinity toward Korea would be developed; the image of Korean products would be improved and sales would be promoted; and the image of Korea itself would be enhanced.

The first Korean drama aired in Vietnam was a love story titled "Doctor Brothers". In the socialist society, national TV had not aired any drama on freedom to fall in love; as such, the love story reached the heart of Vietnamese and Korean dramas enjoyed a boom.

The Korean dramas are of great help for image improvement of Korea among the Vietnamese females and youths. Korea has made good use of the dramas' influence and quickly started to develop various businesses. For example, service businesses including hair salons, make-up salons, fashion stores and restaurants have come into Vietnam. In the course of the advancement, the businesses needed Korean-speaking human resources. In the days of around 1995, the number of Korean speaking workers was limited and their wage was very high. Therefore, the Korean side has visited

universities in Vietnam and made a desperate appeal to establish Korean language department. At the same time, scholarships and volunteer organizations were established for students who would like to study Korean language in Korea. These activities were meant to remove negative image toward Korea (for the Korean army had joined the Vietnam War with the US army), and to foster and train many Vietnamese workers who had a sense of affinity toward the Korean culture and speak Korean.

After that, the Korean side has reversed their stance. Instead of having the Vietnamese study Korean language, they have the Korean workers study Vietnamese language and hired Vietnamese-speaking Korean workers. Even though the Vietnamese had a bad feeling against such selfish Korea, the Korean side may have thought their strategy has succeeded by giving a great influence on Vietnam.

However, the Vietnamese and the Korean have so different disposition and sensitivity that the Korean culture failed to infiltrate deeply into the general Vietnamese people. Certainly K-pop and Korean contents are enjoying Korean boom on the superficial level, but closer examination would reveal that the impact is rather limited. The same goes for Korean products. In the present circumstances, the Chinese products are so inferior that the people are forced to purchase cheap and relatively good Korean goods instead. If possible, the Vietnamese people would like to use reliable Japanese products. Unfortunately, however, the Japanese products are too expensive for ordinary Vietnamese people to purchase.

### **3) Japanese brands lack presence among the general public of Vietnam**

Among the affluent people in urban areas, Japanese luxurious cars such as Toyota Lexus or Camry are very popular; among the middle upper class people, such products as cosmetics of Shiseido or Menard, Japanese powdered milk, dietary supplement and paper diapers are highly prized. Through these products, they have started to understand the Japanese life culture and warm thoughtfulness of the Japanese people. However, the general Vietnamese are aware of Japan only when they use motorbikes, Japanese monosodium glutamate, or dine at a Japanese food restaurant, so they are unlikely to understand Japan very deeply.

For example, Japan has a wide variety of fashion fields which should be attractive for the Vietnamese young people, but in reality only Shibuya or Harajuku-style fashions have been introduced. Though Japan has a great number of good TV dramas, almost none of them are aired in Vietnam owing to the disagreement on cost of broadcasting rights and the problem of pirate printing. Animated cartoons are popular, but some have an impression of adult-oriented abnormality.

From the viewpoint of economic exchanges, Japan's ODA has been contributing to infrastructure construction of roads and bridges in Vietnam and highly appreciated by the Vietnamese government officials, but the general public have little knowledge of such contribution. Japan has been a great help for refurbishments of airports etc, but after the completion of work, Korean TVs were installed in the airports. In this way, Japan falls short of policies to spread Japanese products and appropriate communication activities to improve the image of Japan.

In general, Japanese products, which have good quality but high price, are targeted at the wealthy and middle upper classes in Vietnam. In future, the middle class will certainly increase and the consumption market will expand in Vietnam. Japan should communicate with the potential middle class via various contents such as TV drama, music and movie, and actively pursue spread of Japanese brand in Vietnam. Through the sophisticated Japanese products unlike those of Korea or China, Japan's comfortable lifestyle is expected to be brought into Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi citizens' life.



\*Although popular among the wealthy people, Sony has little visibility in general.



\*Ajinomoto has created a new culture of canned coffee

## 5. Understanding of Japan and beginning of Vietnam-Japan cultural exchanges

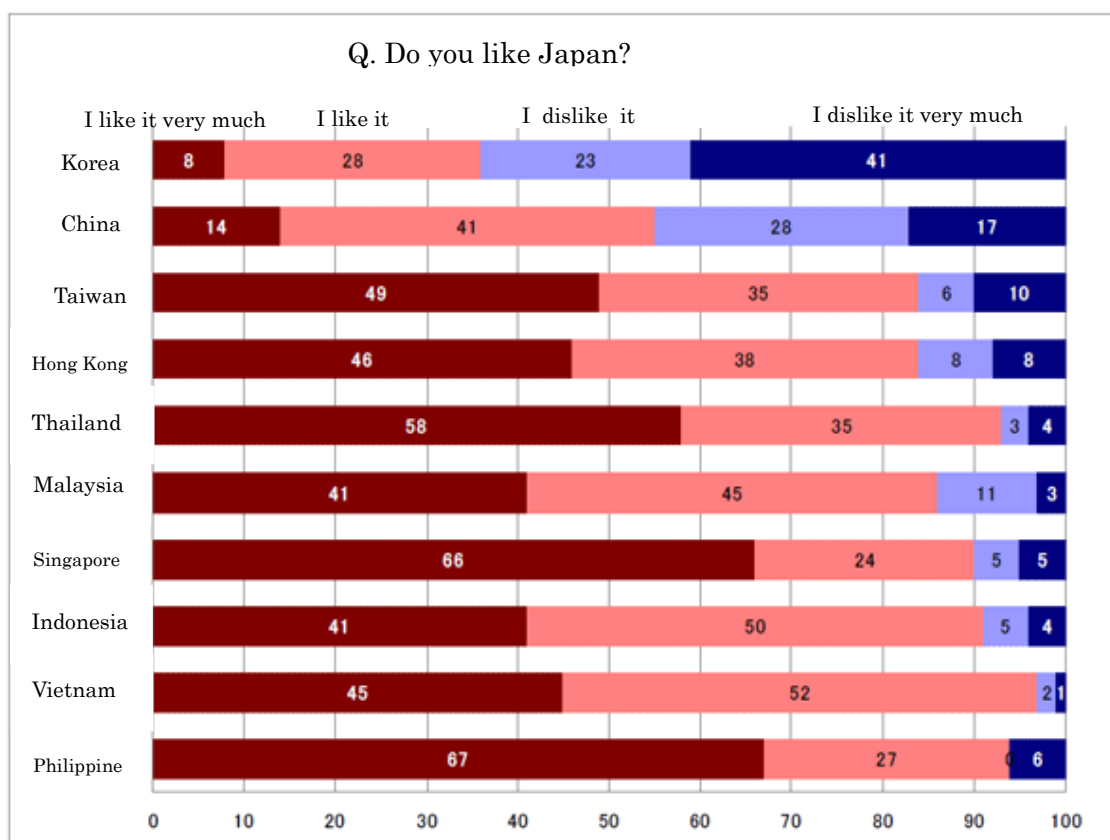
### 1) Great change in the Vietnamese people's understanding of Japan

A significant event has occurred by which the Vietnamese people understood the Japanese people. It is the Tohoku Earthquake on March 11, 2011. In the face of unprecedented disaster, the sufferers helped and encouraged each other and behaved in an orderly manner while they all endure unspeakable suffering. The news aired every day how all the Japanese people joined together and helped the sufferers. Such benevolent acts have deeply moved the hearts of the Vietnamese people. They

understood the national character and nature of Japanese people, and had greater sense of affinity toward the Japanese and Japan. Until then, they had an image of sober and workaholic Japanese people; after the disaster, they had respect for the great inner strength of Japanese who help their fellow beings.

This is because the great earthquake has reminded the Vietnamese of their own history; when their own country was invaded by outer enemies or ruined by natural disasters, villages and families united and stood up to fight against difficulty; accordingly, they sympathized with the Japanese people's persevering spirit.

Graph 1: Survey on percentage of pro-Japanese people in GDP top ten Asian countries.



Source: AUN Consulting Inc.

Survey period: October 26 – November 2, 2012, survey on the Internet, valid responses from 1000 males and females (100 persons of each country) aged 18 year old and above.

## 2) Vietnam and Japan expect active cultural exchanges

This year marks 40th anniversary of Vietnam-Japan exchange. The Vietnamese government puts importance on exchanges with Japan. In order to activate the exchanges, governments and industries of both countries hold various exchange programs.

Japan's retail industries hold introductory events of Japanese cultures such as tea ceremony, calligraphy, flower arrangement, origami etc. at college facilities or youth centers. In the apparel field, Vietnamese fashion designers have joined fashion shows in Japan and introduced Vietnamese culture and fashion to many Japanese people. In the world of music, Vietnam-Japan exchanges are boosted. The number of interchanges between Vietnamese and Japanese singers and exchange events such as concerts has been increasing. As for sightseeing, given the alarming situation in China where anti-Japanese movements are organized, the number of Japanese tourists to Vietnam has increased to 0.48 millions in 2012. Though the number of Vietnamese tourists to Japan is still limited, it has increased to about 40 thousands.

As such, Vietnam and Japan interact in a wide variety of fields from business to culture, which greatly contributes to enhancement of mutual understanding and trust; the exchanges are expected to further increase in future.

Note that the relationship between the Vietnamese and the Japanese has one major barrier. It is the problem of Japanese people's poor English skills and the Vietnamese people's poor Japanese skills; in other words, a language barrier. Many of the Vietnamese wealthy people speak English, but the Japanese are not good at speaking English. With the enhancement of economic exchange with Japan, Japanese language has become popular and the number of Japanese language schools has been increasing in Ho Chi Minh City in these years. A greater number of Vietnamese who speak Japanese would promote the communications in business or cultural activities.

## **6. Economic exchanges between Vietnam and Japan and their influence on Vietnamese working style and lifestyle**

### **1) Economic relationship of Vietnam and Japan**

Vietnam has a larger number of economic interchanges with foreign countries after the market-oriented economic reform. The Official Development Assistance (ODA), from Japan and European countries, and assistance from the World Bank and other international donors greatly contribute to roads and other infrastructure developments.

In addition to the ODA, foreign direct investments (FDI) have greatly developed Vietnamese economy. Especially the FDI from Japanese companies have been growing in the past 10 years while those from Singapore or Korea have declined, and the economic relationship between Vietnam and Japan has become closer.

The Vietnamese government ranks Japan as a strategic partner for future global strategy and is improving environment for effective use of Japanese ODA by legislation, creation of appraisal methods, and human resources development. In order to promote

Japanese FDI, the government offers advantageous terms for Japanese companies to advance into Vietnam. The Vietnamese commerce-and-industry meetings of various regions are actively trying to promote trade with and investment from Japanese companies by not only waiting for their advancement but visit various parts of Japan and perform welcome-enterprise activities through the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry etc.

The total amount of the bilateral trade between Vietnam and Japan has been expanding thanks to the Vietnam Japan Economic Partnership Agreement in 2009. When the Trans-Pacific Partnership, for which participants are conducting fierce negotiations, is agreed and takes effect, tariffs and nontariff barriers are abolished among the member nations. As for the bilateral trade between Vietnam and Japan, it is expected that export of mainly primary products out of Vietnam and import of industrial products from Japan will expand. In an effort to deepen the bilateral relationship of Vietnam and Japan to a strategic partnership, it is most essential to develop mutual understanding and build trustful relations through cultural exchanges and other efforts.

Table 1: Trend in FDI new approvals by countries and regions, 2010 - Jan-Jun 2012

Countries	2010				2011				2012 (Jan~Jun)		
	cas es	investm ent value	compo sition ratio (%)	growth rate(%)	cas es	investm ent value	compo sition ratio (%)	growth rate(%)	cas es	investm ent value	compo sition ratio (%)
Singapore	88	4,350.2	25.2	827.4	105	2,004.7	17.3	▲ 53.9	45	146.7	3.1
Korea	256	2,038.8	11.8	27.6	270	873.1	7.6	▲ 57.2	90	272.9	5.7
Japan	114	2,040.1	11.8	1375.1	208	1,849.3	16.0	▲ 9.4	126	3,536.6	74.3
Taiwan	95	1,180.6	6.9	▲ 12.9	64	371.7	3.2	▲ 68.5	19	59.8	1.3
Hong Kong	43	154.0	0.9	▲ 79.3	49	2,948.2	25.5	1814.4	13	406.7	8.5
France	27	27.9	0.2	▲ 68.3	17	46.2	0.4	65.5	10	24.0	0.5

Source: Japan External Trade Organization, excerpt from "Vietnam, the Nation and the People" P31

(JETRO's creation based on material by the Ministry of Planning and Investment)

Table 2: Statistics on Vietnamese Export (by country and region) unit million dollars, %

	2010	2011		
	value	value	composition ratio	growth rate
the US	14,238	16,928	17.5	18.9
China	7,309	11,125	11.5	52.2
Japan	7,728	10,781	11.1	39.5
Korea	3,092	4,715	4.9	52.5
Germany	2,328	3,367	3.5	44.6
Malaysia	2,093	2,832	2.9	35.3
Australia	2,704	2,519	2.6	-6.8
Cambodia	1,552	2,407	2.5	55.1
the UK	1,682	2,398	2.5	42.6
Total (including others, FOB)	72,192	96,906	100.0	34.2

*Source: Vietnam General Statistics Office, General Department of Customs*

*Note: on a customs clearance basis*

Table 3: Statistics on Vietnamese Export (by country and region) unit million dollars, %

	2010	2011		
	value	value	composition rate	growth rate
China	20,019	24,594	23.0	22.9
Korea	9,761	13,176	12.3	35.0
Japan	9,016	10,400	9.7	15.4
Taiwan	6,977	8,557	8.0	22.6
Singapore	4,101	6,391	6.0	55.8
Thailand	5,602	6,384	6.0	14.0
the US	3,767	4,529	4.2	20.2
Malaysia	3,413	3,920	3.7	14.8
India	1,762	2,346	2.2	33.2
Total (including others, CIF)	84,801	106,750	100.0	25.9

*Source: Vietnam General Statistics Office, General Department of Customs*

*Note: on a customs clearance basis*



## 2) Influence on working style and lifestyle

Under the influence of the FDI enterprises targeted at Vietnamese consumption market, the Vietnamese retail market, food cultural market, and lifestyle and working style in urban areas have significantly been changing.

Japanese convenience stores deployed in Ho Chi Minh City etc offer new convenience of life to the citizens. Motorbikes made in Japan have enlarged the citizens' scope of activities, and now the bikes are essential for their daily life including commute to work or school. Also the manufacturers of food and drink (instant noodle, seasoning, snack, beer, etc) have established new eating style of convenience. Furthermore, chemical-free vegetables and other foods produced by Japanese companies are greatly supported by the Ho Chi Minh citizens who are conscious of safety and health.

The Japanese companies in Vietnam train the Vietnamese workers from the basics through training programs of production and sales, as well as in working manners, management methods, 5S methodology, and reporting, contacting, and consultation until the workers master them. Although individual Vietnamese people are aspiring and competent, they are not good at working as a team and making a concerted effort to carry out objective management and fulfill commitments. For their growth as business persons and development of business entities, such management know-how is extremely important.

In order to realize a richer Vietnamese society of market economy on the basis of socialism, innovation is required for more comfortable lifestyle and working style with efficiency and job satisfaction. In this sense, it is essential to make good use of experiences and knowledge of Japanese and other developed countries' business entities.



\* Honda dealer in Ho Chi Minh City



\* Sapporo Beer is increasingly popular among the citizens

## **7. For the pride and future of the Vietnamese nation**

The history shows that Vietnam has survived robustly through the repetition of wars and peace times. The nation was ruled by China for a thousand years but won independence at the beginning of 15th century. In recent history, the country won against France and the superpower America. Today, Vietnam has established a friendship with the ex-enemy America<sup>1</sup>.

As such, Vietnam is tolerant enough to make peace with its enemies and has adopted, assimilated and evolved foreign cultures in its history. At the same time, the Vietnamese value their unique tradition and culture, and have a code of paternalism and diligence. When an outer enemy appears, all the people of the multiethnic Vietnam are patriotic enough to stand up of one mind to fight against the enemy for their independence, freedom and peace. In addition, with an average age of 28, the Vietnamese society is young and dynamic. The population is estimated to exceed 100 million in 2030 and provide a massive consumption market. Furthermore, Vietnam has approximately 4 million fellow Viet Kieu people who love their country. The land is blessed with beautiful nature and natural resources including petroleum. In geopolitical terms, the nation is located on the corridor of Indochina Peninsula and South China Sea. The Vietnamese people are proud of such fatherland of them.

Currently Vietnam has a mountain of issues including over-urbanization, inflation, pressing needs for better business environment, trade liberalization and territorial dispute. However, the Vietnamese are tolerant of foreign cultures and able to assimilate them; they have strong will power that have been cultured through history to overcome difficulty and pioneer the future, and love of their country. The nation is geographically advantageous being located on economic and cultural crossroad.

The Vietnamese people is expected to make concerted efforts for creation of richer life, more vigorous society and wealthier nation for the future by making good use of the above powers and using their pride as leverage. As a first step for the goal, representative cities of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi City are desired to develop urban lifestyle for happiness and comfort of individual and family life and build up creative cities that would attractive to the whole world.

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<sup>1</sup> Vietnam and the US made peace in 1995 and restored diplomatic relations. In 2000 they concluded trade agreement in which the US accorded most favored nation status to Vietnam. Since then, export from Vietnam to the US has expanded rapidly.



\*"Cathedral", a symbol of French colonial era



\* Stature of "Ho Chi Minh", Father of Vietnamese Independence

**Japanese co-researcher's viewpoint**

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**Vietnam will play a role of engine for ASEAN economy and culture with its tolerance and geographical advantage**

Owing to the geographical features, Vietnam has had various exchanges with neighboring and foreign countries in history. On the basis of national pride, the nation has accepted foreign cultures without denial and evolved them into a unique culture through such events as: approximately a thousand years of Chinese rule; exchanges with Japan<sup>2</sup>; trade and mutual migration with neighboring Cambodia, Thailand and Laos; French colonization (in 1856); exchanges with other western countries and their influence; and in the era of Northern and Southern Vietnams, the Northern Vietnam had exchanges with former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and had influence in social system, and the Southern Vietnam had influence in lifestyle and business from the US. These influences from foreign cultures caused by the geographical factors and tolerance of different cultures are significant factors that form current Vietnamese national trait and political entity.

A bird-eye view of the future development of the area shows that the Hanoi area interacts with the development of the South China Economic zone and the Ho Chi Minh Area interacts with Bangkok and Mekong Delta economic zone through East-West economic corridor (highway from Ho Chi Minh to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, and Dawai). In addition, an extensive Mekong area consisting of five countries on the Indochina Peninsula, Yunnan Province of China, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region have

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<sup>2</sup> Exchanges with Japan started as early as in 8<sup>th</sup> century, when a Japanese intellectual Abeno Nakamaro lived in Annam Protectorate (recently-found Imperial Citadel of Thang Long, Thang Long is an old name of Hanoi), according to historical evidence.

started to move for development of electric power, roads and other infrastructures. These areas and regional communities have much potential for growth. They are actively promoting free trade with the foreign countries through the ASEAN Economic Community and the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement, etc. They try to use not only their own power but overseas trading and investment from foreign countries to seek development of their own country and regional community.

In future, the socialist Vietnam is expected to develop in alliance with ASEAN countries and Pacific-rim countries including Japan, China and the US. For this purpose, it is important to strengthen diplomatic power without depending on military force. In this respect, Vietnam has a historically tough diplomatic power with which it has negotiated various tense relations with neighboring and foreign countries. Furthermore, it is important to promote cultural powers that enthrall other countries. Through the history, Vietnam has nurtured abilities to assimilate different cultures and recreate new ones. Vietnam has a high potential for such abilities and can demonstrate effective soft power strategies. Vietnam is greatly expected to play a key role in cultural and economic exchanges in Southeast Asia.

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