

Vietnam: Challenges and Opportunities for Publishers

Nguyen Manh Hung¹

Published online: 27 July 2016
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2016

Abstract Little is known about the publishing industry and the cultural complexities of Vietnam and, therefore, this article provides a summary of the essential information and related data on the demographics of the country. The development of the publishing industry is traced from 1945 before the unification of North and South Vietnam in 1975 to the present status. The role of the book publishing industry is examined in relation to television and radio media. A review of the reading culture is presented to understand the current status and potential for printed books as well as E-books in Vietnam.

Keywords ASEAN Book and Publishing Association · Publishing law · Textbooks · ThaiHaBooks · Vietnam Books

Vietnam located on the Indochina peninsula and is one of 10 ASEAN countries. Based on the location, Vietnam has big influences from India, China, Europe and America. The population of Vietnam today is almost 100 million including 93 million inside of Vietnam and about 5 million overseas. Vietnam is 13th most populous country in the world and 8th most populous country in Asia. The current annual GDP per person is USD\$2230.00 which establishes limited funds for such purchases as books.

Vietnam has 58 major cities including five major cities (Hanoi, Hochiminh, Danang, Cantho, and Haiphong) and 58 provinces. The biggest cities are Hochiminh City with a population of about 9 millions people, followed by Hanoi with about 7 millions, Haiphong with about 2 millions, Cantho and Danang with about 1 million people.

Vietnam consists of 54 nationalities, among them the Viet (or Kinh) which represents almost 87 % of the population and the other nationalities represent 13 % of the total.

✉ Nguyen Manh Hung
Hungnm@thaihabooks.com

¹ Thai Ha Books Publishing House, 53 Pham Than Duat Street, Mai Dich Ward, Cau Giay District, Ha Noi, Vietnam

The Vietnamese language is part of the Austroasiatic language family. The Old Vietnamese alphabet was a modified set of Chinese characters but the Vietnamese alphabet from the eighteenth century and in use today is a Latin alphabet.

The Labour force in the ages from 15 to 60 years in Vietnam is 58.4 % of the total population. Among them women represent 48.3 % and men represent 51.7 % of the total.

The demography of Vietnam is in a golden period today. In the year of 1979, 43 % of the population was under 15, but from 2012, the number was 24 %. Today the population from 15 to 64 is 69 % of total population. This fact may show that the reading culture should improve in recent years.

Reading Culture

A reading culture in Vietnam has been developed very much during last few decades. Before Independent Day in 1945 the reading culture was very poor. Even then, the years before 1975, the reunion of the North and the South of Vietnam, both in the North and South there were only 4000 new titles published per year. By the year of 2010, there was 20,000 titles were published, five times more than before the reunion of Vietnam. The number of newspapers, journals and magazines are almost 400 titles with about 500,000 copies distributed in the country.

But in Vietnam, the reading culture is still low. Annually, each Vietnamese reads only 3.4 books. One of the reasons may be because more than 71 % population of the country are farmers and they live in the countryside. Another reason may be because of the wars that have ended in 1975.

Today, the total number of new books published is 25,000 titles per year, but more than 80 % are text books.

Young people read in Vietnam. Based on the latest research, 62 % read comic book, 57 % read novels, romance and fiction books, and 27 % read non-fiction books.

It is important to note that 67 % read translated books from foreign languages. The top five languages which are translated for local editions are English, French, China, Japanese, German, and Korea.

The libraries were only in the cities or central urban places before 1975. Now, Vietnam has 63 provincial libraries and one National Library in Hanoi. In the country there are 626 district libraries and about 10,000 community and village libraries. In the countryside there are about 300,000 reading clubs, reading places for people who want to read.

My latest research has identified that 28 % of Vietnam's population reads regularly, 44 % read but not regularly, 9 % people use libraries. The National Library of Vietnam has only 30,000 regular readers per year.

Publishing Industry

There are 63 government publishing houses and they are all under the control of Vietnam Publishing, Printing and Distribution Office, Ministry of Information and Communication.

In Vietnam there are now more than 100 private publishing and book distribution companies. In accordance to the law, all of them have the right to collaborate with government publishing houses to publish their books. It means, today in Vietnam there is a total of about 200 publishing organizations and they may compete with each other in the open market.

The top ten major publishing companies are: Thai Ha Books, Kim Dong, Tre, Phu Nu, Alphabooks, First News, Nha Nam, Dong A, Huong Trang, Đinh Ti.

The new publishing law No 19/2012/QH13 came into force on July 1, 2013 to replace the old publishing law No 30/2004/QH11 of 2004 and No 12/2008/QH12 of 2008. Based on this current publishing law, all private publishing companies may participate in the publishing and distribution of books. Based on the law of Vietnam, all books must have paper of publishing decision or publishing permission. Namely, I mean that in Vietnam, to publish any books, private publishing houses need approval from Governmental Publishers.

In 2014, more than 26,000 new titles with more than 361 million copies were published.

Normally in Vietnam the first printing of a new title will be average from only 1000 up to 3000 copies per title.

E book digital book industry is still very small with less than 1 % of total revenues. The e-book may have effect on book reading and buying, it is expected to have e-book share for the market by the year of 2017. For now, the Internet has a limited impact on book reading. The people want to read free on the Internet so it is hard for publishers to control the digital distribution of their published books. Namely, many readers would like to read free books, so they will try to crack the digital files to download books for free (pdf files). Also, E-book Security in Vietnam still has some limitations, so some people can crack and download books for free. That's reason why publishers will meet with some difficulties in controlling and managing e-book and paperbacks.

The average list prices and first printing for the following major categories of books:

	List price	First printing
Children's books	VND24.000–VND200.000 \$1.10–\$8.90	3000–5000 copies
Young adult	VND50.000–VND55.000 \$2.25–\$2.45	2000–3000 copies
Novels	VND80.000–VND160.000 \$3.55–\$7.15	3500–5000 copies
Non-fiction	VND45.000–VND120.000 \$2.00–\$5.35	2000–3000 copies
Reference books	VND20.000–VND200.000	10,000–20,000 copies
Mass paperbacks	VND145.000–VND200.000	1500–2000 copies

Book Distribution

Currently, there are more than 12,000 book shops in Vietnam. Book shops are located in all 63 provinces and cities. There are very few in countryside. The biggest book shop chain is FAHASA (Book distributor based in Hochiminh city) which has 87 book shops in Vietnam. The second biggest is Phuong Nam, which has 34 book shops in the country.

Book sales by e-commerce currently represents 35 % of total retail sales and is increasing. The two biggest distributors are Tiki and Vinabook.

Book Fairs and Book Promotion

From the year of 2000, the first Hochiminh City Book Fair was organized. Since then, this biggest book fair in Vietnam takes place every 2 years. In 2014 there were one million visitors. In March 2016, there was the ninth Hochiminh City Book Fair.

In 2014, Hanoi city has organized for the first time the Hanoi Book Fair. The second Hanoi Book Fair took place from October 1 to 5, 2015. The Ha Noi International Book Fair took place in Hanoi from October 6 to 11 this year and will take place every 2 years in the future. The result is that annually there will be a big book fair in Vietnam, or in Hanoi or in Hochiminh city.

Another book event in Vietnam is the Hochiminh city annual Vietnamese Lunar New Year Book Festival. The sixth Book Festival is scheduled to take place in February 2016.

In Vietnam there are three major publications, namely, the Publishing journal, Reader journal and Book & Life journal which help to promote books.

Throughout Vietnam there are 838 press organizations with 1111 names, including 86 central newspapers, 507 journals and magazines. In the provinces there are 113 newspapers and 132 journals and magazines. There are 70 electronic newspapers, 19 electronic journals. There are book information announcements, new book launch information, reading culture, and book analyses in these newspapers, journals and magazines. They all help to promote books and publishing in Vietnam.

“Best Book” and “Beautiful Book” prize ceremony are organizing annually in April. It attracts authors, publishing houses and readers from all over Vietnam.

The role of the Vietnam Book and Publishing Association is increasing. They organize book meetings, book tours, and copyright workshop; represent authors and publishing house to protect their titles.

Television and Radio Media

Currently, in Vietnam there are 180 radio and TV broadcast stations among them 105 TV channels and 75 radio channels. There are 40 foreign TV channels. TV covers more than 95 % and radio coverage is more than 98 % of the territory of

Vietnam. There are different book introduction and book promotion programs presented by different TV and radio channels so it is good promotion for books and reading culture. One of the best programs is “One book per day” of VTV1, where every day they introduce one new book. The program is broadcast in the morning and repeated in the evening.

Book Copyright

In 2004 Vietnam joined the Berne Convention. Since then, publishing houses began to sign the copyright agreements with foreign publishers. From that turning point, the first private publishing companies were founded. These private publishers have been focusing on buying foreign titles by signing translation rights and copyright contracts.

The problem is always to fight pirated books. Nowadays, the book may easily copied and printed. The government and book publishing houses are actively in the field of protecting copyright and other related rights to control privacy.

In Vietnam, the implementing of the Publishing Law has unfortunately not been very effective. In fact there has been only one case that has been brought to court with the fine of USD\$25,000 and one other case for the violation of printing a pirated book and was fined one year in jail.

Thai Ha Books publishing house is a private company and was founded in 2007. It became the first publishing house to commit 100 % to observe and follow the copyright law. By now, other publishing houses have also followed by adhering to and supporting the copyright and publishing law.

In Vietnam, implementing publishing and copyright laws is improving to protect book publishers and authors. The Publishing, Distribution and Printing Office of Vietnam organizes a review meeting twice per year, where all legal issues are discussed.

Book Industry and Reading Culture in Vietnam to 2010 and to 2030

In 2013, the Prime Minister signed the decree to announce the Book Day of Vietnam to take place on 21 April each year. It is very good signal for reading culture. Book Day of Vietnam is turning point for the book industry. It has helped to change the reading culture.

Another important document is the decision of the Minister of Culture, Sport and Tourism, No. 385/QĐ-BVHTTDL, dated February 6, 2015, to approve the project of development of the reading culture from 2015 to 2020. Based on this decision, the most important point is to improve the reading habit of the society and develop next generation of readers. Vietnam plans to increase regular readers from 30 % currently to 65 % in 2020, to decrease totally none reading people from 26 % now to 15 % in 2020. The country is focusing on students and young generation.

There are some others targets such as, 60 % of school and university student have the habit to read and use libraries, 70 % of libraries are to organize the seminars and

workshop on using library services; 40 % working force has the habit of reading and use libraries to read. 60 % of media to have book and reading programs, 100 % of the schools have libraries or reading rooms, and 100 % industrial zones and big corporation have libraries for working people. An important plan is to increase reading culture from the present 2.8 books per year per person to 7 books in the future.

Current Market Trends and Others Opportunities

Total revenue of publishing, distribution and printing in 2015 was 3.309 trillion VND (01 USD\$ = 22.000 VND). The import export of publishing was 24 million USD, among them import was USD\$20 million; export was USD\$4 million. The reading culture is increasing every year. There are cases when English and Vietnamese versions of a book were launched at the same time.

Vietnam is one of the five first members to found ABPA—ASEAN Book and Publishing Association. By the end of 2015 the ASEAN Economics Community will become fully operational. Another turning point will be TPP while Vietnam is one of twelve members. FTA between Vietnam and EU is finalizing. The copyright seminars and workshop are being organized in Vietnam on a more regular basis and attract all publishers and readers.

Book buying behaviour of the Vietnamese people is different from others countries. The readers like to go to the book shop to see all books and select them selves. Today, young people check all new books release online and they begin to order books through the Internet. The use of Credit cards is still not popular in Vietnam so there are some delivery companies that collect cash payments by delivering books.

Translation rights have been sold and there are Vietnamese books are publishing in other languages and it expected books on Vietnamese culture, Vietnamese cuisine, traditional music and art will be published in other languages. Currently, there are not detail data for how many translation rights were sold.

Audio books are so new in Vietnam that currently, there is only one organisation which publishes audio books. However, they publish audio book for free. Audio book may be expected as new area for growth.

Conclusion

Vietnam today has a big population with a large number of young people. All families invest a lot for education. It may provide good opportunities for the book industry while the government of Vietnam has been making some big decisions and established programs and it all may lead to the growing reading culture in the near future. Meanwhile the copyright laws are not yet well observed based on the agreement between Vietnam and others countries, the reading habits of Vietnamese are changing. The book challenges today should be a good opportunity for future development and growth. It is expected to see a good reading culture and book publishing industry in Vietnam by the year of 2020.