

VIETNAMESE WOMEN IN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP: EXPERIENCES OF MID-LEVEL
WOMEN LEADERS IN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES IN THE MEKONG DELTA

By

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ABSTRACT

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Academic women in the Mekong Delta (MD) in southern Viet Nam remain underrepresented in key leadership positions and other positions of power and influence in their institutions. This situation exists regardless of various local, national, and international policies on gender equality and the implementation of numerous action plans, strategies, and activities to enforce this equality on Vietnamese campuses. No existing literature in Viet Nam examines the experiences of women in higher education in the MD and their underrepresentation in positions of power and leadership. Accordingly, this study sought to understand the lived experiences of a limited number of women leaders in higher education in the MD and the processes they have undertaken to advance into key positions of influence in their institutions. The study was framed within the larger context of gender equality in Viet Nam, but it focused on the nature of the leadership development process of women in academia in the MD. In particular, it explored the lived experiences of mid-level women leaders in two multidisciplinary public universities and two community colleges in the MD, to see how gender inequality issues have manifested themselves in this context. The women leaders' experiences, coupled with gender issues, were approached through the lens of feminist theories, together with insights drawn from the history of Confucianism and feudal ideology in Viet Nam.

Phenomenography was the primary research approach employed in this study. Data were collected from in-depth face-to-face interviews, participant observations, and documents in the four selected higher education institutions. The study's findings show a gap between gender equality policies and gender practices. Women and men in Viet Nam in general and in higher

education in particular are equal in all spheres of life in law, but not in reality. The findings specifically reveal that although women encounter significant opportunities for their professional development and career advancement, thanks to the gender equality law and policies, there are still various barriers hindering their advancement and equality with men in real life. More important, traditional Vietnamese culture, which is still heavily influenced by Confucian and feudal ideologies, continues to affect adversely not only men's but also women's perceptions of women's roles, status, and forms of participation in different spheres of life. The negative impact of these collective beliefs on the academic women leaders in this study is pervasive and intense, regardless of their age. Even though they had subtle desires to become leaders, none of them developed strategies to move up their career ladder or to hold senior leadership roles. Rather, they all became leaders "unintentionally."

This study offers several suggestions for improving gender policies and practices, theories, and future research on women and leadership in academia. First, there must be changes in gender policies and practices at the national, institutional, and individual levels before academic women's leadership status in Viet Nam can be ameliorated. Moreover, the current study clearly describes and interprets how women who lack parental encouragement and career ambitions attain leadership roles, while not much Western and Asian literature on women's leadership delves into these issues. Similarly, it contributes to feminist theories (e.g., MacKinnon, 1989) by describing what sex differences and inequalities truly exist in Vietnamese higher education and society, and how they should be addressed. Finally, to better inform and benefit not only women but also men and policy makers, future researchers should conduct longitudinal qualitative and/or quantitative studies with large sample sizes to examine the lived experiences of both women and men in higher education in Viet Nam and other Asian countries.

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DEDICATION

To An Ton T. Truong, my stepmother,
who encouraged me to pursue and complete my doctoral education;
and to Viet Ho, my husband, and Nhan Ho, my son,
who accompanied and supported me throughout my Ph.D. program.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

CCC	Clay Community College
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women/ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CTU	Can Tho University
HALE	Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MD	The Mekong Delta
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MSU	Michigan State University
OCC	Orange Community College
RU	Rice University
SCCC	Sugar Cane Community College
SCU	Sugar Cane University
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESOL	Teaching English as a Second Language
VCP	Viet Nam Communist Party
WUSC	World University Service of Canada

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

General Background

Women in academia in the Mekong Delta (MD) in southern Viet Nam are poorly represented in key leadership positions, and there is no existing literature looking into this problem as well as their work and life issues. Accordingly, in this research study I explored the lived experiences of a limited number of women leaders in four higher education institutions in the MD, including the specific ways they advanced to positions of power and leadership, although none had ambitions and plans to become leaders in their careers. The following proverb explains a core value that is one of the root causes for women's subordination in Viet Nam.

Having a son means having everything;

Having ten daughters means having nothing.

Since I was a little girl, I have heard this proverb, particularly from my grandmother and mother as they chanted it in an effort to put me to sleep. Almost 35 years after I first heard it, it still prevails in Viet Nam, and its implications remain true in multiple areas of social life. This saying depicts the supremacy of Vietnamese men and the subordination of Vietnamese women. Deeply rooted in Confucianism, it reflects severe prejudice against women in feudal times, particularly from the second half of the 11th century to the second decade of the 20th century, when Vietnamese rulers used Confucianism as the foundation of the educational system (L. T. Nguyen, 1995). In fact, Confucianism nurtured the ideology of “valuing men and disparaging women,” tying women to their families and domestic responsibilities and excluding them from all types of social work and activities (K. Vu, 1997). In other words, women had no rights in their family or in society, and their economic lives depended entirely on their fathers, brothers,

husbands, or sons. In this respect, it is Confucianism that laid the foundation of the firmly-established patriarchy in Viet Nam in feudal times.

Because Confucianism was imposed on the spiritual life of the Vietnamese by Chinese invaders during their domination in Viet Nam for more than one thousand years, from 179 BC to 938 AD (D. A. Nguyen, N. T. Nguyen, P. M. Nguyen, & Pham, 2010; L. T. Nguyen, 1995), its ideology and norms are hard to abolish in today's society. Further, the feudalists in Viet Nam soon turned it into a mandate for an entire way of life that lasted until 1945, when the August Revolution was successful and President Ho Chi Minh declared the coming into existence of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. Meanwhile, many generations of Confucian teachers tried to etch words like those in the above proverb into the consciousness of the Vietnamese (Bergman, 1975). Consequently, Confucianism, coupled with its negative factors, still has an extensive influence on the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people in general, and Vietnamese women in particular, despite the turn toward liberation, individual freedom, and gender equality for women since 1945.

The negative impact of Confucianism on Vietnamese women manifested itself clearly in the old higher education system. The first university in Viet Nam was founded in 1076, but it enrolled only men (L. T. Nguyen, 1995). Women were not allowed officially to enroll in higher education until the early 20th century (L. H. Phan, 1987). Nevertheless, the first Vietnamese woman, who obtained her doctoral degree, Ms. Nguyen Thi Du, lived under the Mac Dynasty in the 16th century (T. N. T. Le, 2002; L. H. Phan, 1987; Van, 2009). Ms. Du, in fact, had to change her name into a male name and disguise herself as a man in order to participate in a national exam for all men. After passing the exam, and as she was about to be appointed as a mandarin, she was discovered to be a woman. Fortunately, the contemporary king, who had a radical mind,

pardoned her from lese-majesty (lack of respect for the King) penalty and asked her to be the teacher for royal maids (T. N. T. Le, 2002; Van, 2009).

Under feudal dynasties, Vietnamese women were not allowed to participate in any type of learning, irrespective of their high capabilities and burning desires for knowledge acquisition. Without literacy and diplomas, they could not be hired and get paid in order to support themselves and their families. As a result, their economic life depended entirely on the men in their families. During French colonialism (1858-1954), only a few daughters of elite families in urban areas could pursue schooling and advanced education (L. H. Phan, 1987).

In 1946, the first Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam declared, “Women and men are equal in all domains of life,” which was valid for half of the country, from Parallel 17 up to the northernmost part of Viet Nam, for 46 years. This principle of gender equality was not applicable in the South of Viet Nam, the remaining half of the country, from 1946 to 1975, because it was ruled by a different regime, called Nguy Quyen Saigon. After the two parts of the country were reunified and its name was changed to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, the Constitution of 1992 clearly confirmed this principle. In addition, Viet Nam is one of the first countries that signed and implemented CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), aiming to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure women’s full development and advancement (T. Le, 2009; National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam, 2006). Equally important, in the two prolonged wars against the French and the Americans, Vietnamese women changed their traditional roles by getting out of their kitchens, fighting the enemies, and making important contributions to regaining independence and freedom for the country. To acknowledge their great progress and outstanding contributions, President Ho Chi Minh rewarded them with eight golden

words: *anh hung, bat khuat, trung hau, dam dang* (heroic, unyielding, loyal, and resourceful) (Viet Nam Women's Union, 1996).

Nowadays, women account for more than half of Viet Nam's population, and they increasingly hold powerful positions in politics, economics, culture, and education. Therefore, gender equality has become a major national priority in order to ensure social justice, democracy, and civilization, as Madam Nguyen Thi Binh, former Vice President of Viet Nam, asserted (1997). In fact, Viet Nam passed its gender equality law in 2006, regulating the responsibilities of individuals, families, organizations, and government bodies for implementing and ensuring gender equality. Since then, there have been innumerable strategies and action plans at the national, city, provincial, and district levels to increase women's participation in all spheres of life and levels of decision making.

The Problem and Purpose of the Study

Regardless of the prohibition of discrimination against women described in the Constitution and CEDAW, along with the implementation of the gender equality law, gender disparities and inequalities continue to exist, and new challenges face women as they increasingly participate in politics, economics, education, and other important areas in social life (Dang, 1997; Karl, 1995). Research on gender practices in Viet Nam has shown that the public still does not highly value women's social roles and positions, and the prejudice which disparages women and presumes that they cannot assume important responsibilities still exists (M. D. T. Tran, 2006; V. A. T. Tran, 2000). The majority of women are assigned lower leadership positions, usually acting as deputies for their male counterparts, and thus they do not have real power (H. D. Nguyen, 2007). In this regard, very few women hold key leadership positions in government administration, economics, politics, information and culture, and science and technology.

In higher education, according to some leading educational Vietnamese scholars such as T. N. T. Le (2002), K. T. Nguyen (1997), and Pham (2006), although the populations of males and females are almost equal, the rates of female faculty and staff members who hold master's and doctoral degrees, coupled with titles such as associate professor and professor, are still low compared to those of their male counterparts. Similarly, the rate of women in leadership positions in educational and training centers, colleges, and universities is not sufficiently high in correspondence with their population (Luong, 2008; Pham, 2006). Women in public colleges and universities in the Mekong Delta (MD) are confronting the same problem, lagging far behind their male counterparts in terms of higher academic degrees and professional qualifications, irrespective of the support from various policies, strategies, action plans, and activities to promote gender equality and to ensure their progress and advancement. Even though there is no official research or statistics on the number of female faculty and staff members in senior leadership positions, ranging from vice deans or deputy directors to rectors, it is not difficult for a local senior administrator in academia to recognize that only a very small proportion of mid-level leadership positions are held by women. In addition, even fewer women are in high-level positions such as rectors and vice rectors. In other words, regardless of the execution of various local, national, and international laws on gender equality in Viet Nam and the implementation of numerous action plans, strategies, and activities to enforce this equity on campuses, women in higher education in the MD, despite their equally large population, remain under-represented in powerful positions of influence and leadership along their academic career ladder. Evidence shows that academic women in this region comprise only a minority of mid- and high-level leadership and management positions, while most of the key and top positions are held by their male counterparts.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of mid-level women leaders in higher education in the MD and the processes they undertook to advance into powerful positions of influence. The study of these women helps illuminate issues and processes of gender inequality in academia in the MD and in Viet Nam. The study specifically explored, described, and interpreted their pathways to positions of power and leadership; their leadership and management styles; opportunities for and challenges to their career advancement, coupled with their conceptualization, perception, and understanding of these opportunities and challenges; and the influences of traditional Vietnamese culture on their experiences.

Conceptual Framework

It is important to emphasize that this study was framed within the larger context of gender equality in Viet Nam, but it focused on the nature of the leadership development process of women in higher education in the MD. In particular, it explored and described the lived experiences of mid-level women leaders in two multidisciplinary public universities and two community colleges in the MD, in order to see how gender inequality issues have manifested themselves in this context. The women leaders' experiences, coupled with gender issues, were approached through the lens of feminist theories, involving sex inequality, difference, dominance, and patriarchy (Johnson, 1997; MacKinnon, 1989), together with insights drawn from the history of Confucianism (T. N. T. Le, 2002; Ngo, 2004; L. T. Nguyen, 1995; Phan, 2004; K. Vu, 1997) and feudal ideology in Viet Nam (Barry, 1996; Ha, 2001; Q. T. Le, 1996). Equally important, their experiences of career advancement were interpreted in light of Cheung and Halpern's (2010) *Step-by-Step Model of Leadership Development* and their theory of the culture of gender. Overall, this study explored whether and how traditional social attitudes and norms rooted in history and culture have influenced the nature of their professional advancement process. It

described and interpreted, with respect to Vietnamese cultural values, norms, and beliefs, the women's stories of (1) how they attained mid-level positions of leadership; (2) their leadership and management styles; (3) what challenges and opportunities they, as women, daughters, and/or mothers in a highly patriarchal society, encountered on their career paths; and (4) how Confucianism, along with feudal ideology, influenced their thoughts as well as their professional behaviors and decisions.

Research Questions

The key research question and sub-questions that guided this study are as follows:

What is the nature of the experiences of mid-level women leaders in higher education in the Mekong Delta, and how do they advance into positions of influence and power?

1. How did the women in higher education in the MD achieve their leadership positions?
2. How did they prepare themselves for leadership and management?
3. What challenges or obstacles, and opportunities or facilitating factors, have they encountered?
4. How did they conceptualize, perceive, and understand these challenges and opportunities?
5. In what ways has traditional Vietnamese culture influenced and shaped the nature of their experiences, their advancement process, the problems they have faced, and the professional decisions they have made?
6. What strategies and techniques, if any, have they adopted to succeed and advance in their careers?
7. How did they perceive themselves as women leaders in a male-dominated world?

Because there were not enough top-level women leaders in academia in the MD that I could select for my sample, my study focused on the mid-level women leaders who held positions as deans, vice-deans, support department directors and deputy directors, and service center directors and deputy directors. These women leaders were appropriate to study because they obviously had certain experiences in their advancement to senior leadership positions and could perceive, conceptualize, interpret, and articulate their conscious experiences, which this study strived to explore, describe, and interpret (Creswell, 1998; Holloway, 1997; Marton, 1981; Orgill, in press).

Due to the top-down administrative system in the MD as well as in Viet Nam more generally, senior appointments are usually based on a combination of political and meritocratic considerations. Nevertheless, depending on the specific political and administrative contexts of each institution, political considerations may outweigh meritocratic considerations, and vice versa. Political appointments are primarily based on the potential leader's family background. This means whether his or her parents and/or grandparents joined the revolutionary forces and made significant contributions to either or both of the two wars against the French and the Americans. Meritocratic appointments are based on the potential leader's professional qualifications, meaning whether he or she holds a master's or a Ph.D. degree, or whether he or she has any scholarly publications.

Usually, an academic woman, serving as a faculty or a staff member, ascends the leadership ranks from the time she is appointed to the position of department chair or deputy director of an institutional research center, a service center, or a support department. Subsequently, she may or may not advance to more senior positions, such as vice-dean; dean; director of research center, service

center, or support department; vice rector; or rector. The reality in multiple postsecondary institutions in Viet Nam shows that the more senior the position is, the more political the advancement becomes.

Significance of the Study

So far no empirical research in Viet Nam has examined gender equality in higher education in the MD and the ways the culture influences and shapes women's experiences and perceptions of their roles and positions in the academic world and in social life. Overall, there is a paucity of literature on Vietnamese women in academic leadership, because the scholarship on gender issues in Viet Nam primarily focuses on other themes, such as (1) women and work; (2) family, sexuality, and society; and (3) the sociopolitical dimensions of gender (Scott & Truong, 2007). Moreover, the review of the literature for this study showed that almost all studies of gender equality have been conducted by scholars and researchers in the North, particularly in Ha Noi, the capital of Viet Nam. Because of this research practice, it is extremely difficult for women in universities and colleges in the MD to advance to key leadership positions because of the shortage of not only resources but also guidelines and consultation from successful predecessors. Therefore, the findings of this study can serve as a valuable resource for academic women in the MD, in Viet Nam, and perhaps in other developing Asian countries. This study's main aim is to begin to build the non-existent body of knowledge about women in academic leadership in the MD. It also challenges the status quo of lack of research on women in higher education in southern Viet Nam and thus encourages more research in this area.

Equally important, the research findings, which include the female participants' various experiences of and conceptions about their career advancement process (Marton, 1994; Orgill, in press), provide guidance and perspective for aspiring women leaders in higher education in the MD. The findings shed more light on these aspiring leaders' strengths and weaknesses and inform them of

potential opportunities for and barriers to their career paths. In this regard, they may use the findings as a reference and develop appropriate strategies and techniques for their professional advancement. Further, the study provides insights into the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions and their inferior status compared to that of their male counterparts. It also sheds light on underlying issues regarding women in academia and the essence of their advancement process, which are usually inadequately recognized by both numerous institutional leaders and by male faculty and staff members. These insights and new knowledge about academic women can be transferred to the policy and decision makers in Vietnamese higher education institutions so that they can effectively improve the policies and decisions concerning women. Similarly, appropriate leadership development programs for women can be developed to train and nurture women with leadership potential and to advance more women to leadership positions so that they can bring new priorities and perspectives to institutional leadership.

Moreover, after the findings are published and disseminated, they ideally will motivate colleges and universities in the MD and nationwide to change their extant curricula to include leadership development programs in order to train and prepare young women to be promising, powerful leaders. These women will act as the key force in speeding up the agenda for gender equality in their hometowns, in the country, and possibly in the world. Finally and most importantly, women account for more than half of the faculty and staff in many universities and colleges in the MD. As a result, if they are neglected and their participation at different levels of decision making is unequal to that of men, there cannot be true democracy, social justice, and balance in institutional as well as social development.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

Because of the substantial dearth of literature on women in higher education leadership in Viet Nam, this literature review made use of the available Vietnamese literature on women's status and issues related to gender equality. In this regard, the review focused on (a) Vietnamese women's status and gender inequality throughout the nation's history; (b) Viet Nam's national policies and international perspectives on gender equality; (c) challenges faced by women, current gender practices, and gaps between the policies and the practices, especially those in the area of leadership; and (d) the relevance of contemporary research on gender equality and the status of Vietnamese women to my research study. Furthermore, the literature related to women and leadership in a few Asian countries whose cultures and socioeconomic conditions are close to Viet Nam's was reviewed to help me deepen my understanding of the women leaders under study, and to connect their experiences with those of academic women leaders in these countries.

A Historical Overview of Women's Status and Gender Inequality in Viet Nam

The influences of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism on Vietnamese women's status.

Confucianism in Viet Nam. Under Chinese feudal domination for more than 1,000 years, Viet Nam was heavily influenced by the dominant ideology of Confucianism. According to Confucian ideology, Vietnamese women were seen as "second class" citizens, and their status and role were always inferior to those of men. While men were linked with yang to indicate brightness, mightiness, and vigor, women were connected with yin, symbolizing darkness, weaknesses, and passiveness (N. Phan, 2004). Nationally, the highest power belonged to the king, and in a family to the father, who possessed all the family's land and property. Confucianism considered women mean

and difficult-to-educate people who usually spoiled things or were easily spoiled. In this respect, it devalued women and even disparaged them, both in the family and in society. Likewise, it substantially confined their societal roles and restricted the freedom in their life (Frenier & Mancini, 1996; Ha, 2001; Hodgkin, 1981; Rydström & Drummond, 2004).

Moreover, women did not have any educational and employment opportunities, nor could they get involved in any social, economic, or political activities, because they were expected to stay behind “high walls and closed gates” (Ha, 2001; Ngo, 2004). Both single and married women were not allowed to make their own decisions nor their own choices for their future, and so they were economically dependent on their fathers or husbands. In their village, for instance, women were not allowed to sit on a straw mattress placed in the middle of a large yard to discuss village affairs (Ngo, 2004). Instead, this position was only reserved for men. In contrast to their male counterparts, ideal women were supposed to stay inside their homes and work around the kitchen. Significantly, they had to abide by three types of obedience (“tam tong”),¹ and four feminine virtues (“tu duc”),² which required them at the same time to be *me hien*, *dau thao*, *vo dam* (gentle mother, nice daughter-in-law, and dedicated and industrious wife) (Ha, 2001; T. N. T. Le, 2002; Ngo, 2004; K. Vu, 1997).

The practice of “tam tong” was obligatory for women under Chinese rule. Abiding by “tam tong” meant that women could not be remarried if their husbands died before them, either young or old. On the contrary, a man was completely free to marry another woman after his wife’s death. In other words, women were the ones who had to withstand all the sufferings and

¹ Three types of obedience: (1) to obey their father when single, (2) to obey their husband when married, and (3) to obey their eldest son if their husband passes away.

² Four feminine virtues: (1) industry (cong), (2) proper appearance (dung), (3) proper speech (ngon), and (4) right conduct (hanh).

disadvantages resulting from the inequality and unjustness of their society and family.

Furthermore, married women had to be patient, tolerant, obedient, industrious, and respectful to their husbands and their husbands' families. While all their lives were devoted to their husbands, their children, and their husbands' families, they did not have any powerful or important positions in the family, nor in society.

“Tu duc” are also Confucian morals, which required women to be good in cooking, doing household chores, and embroidery (industry); to be reserved and walk gracefully (appearance); to speak softly and politely (speech); and to be kind-hearted, show filial piety, and behave properly (right conduct). These morals not only tied them tightly to heavy domestic responsibilities, but also restricted their lifestyle with an array of prohibitions and taboos (Ngo, 2004, p. 49):

- Do not talk to a man who is not a relative;
- Do not say hello to him, so as not to arouse suspicion;
- Do not make friends with women who are not virtuous;
- Do not alter your clothes without a reason;
- When sewing, do not let your needle be idle;
- When alone, do not sing or declaim poetry;
- Do not look out the window with a pensive air;
- Do not shrug nor sigh;
- Do not laugh before you have even said a word;
- When laughing, do not show all your teeth;
- Do not gossip or talk crudely.

Confucianism entered Viet Nam and prevailed during the Chinese domination for more than one thousand years, from 179 BC to 938 AD (D. A. Nguyen, N. T. Nguyen, P. M. Nguyen, & Pham, 2010; L. T. Nguyen, 1995). During the 14th century, it became the official ideology of the Vietnamese feudal regime. One century later, it dominated the Vietnamese court, became the foundation of the educational system, and guided political and social life (Bergman, 1975; Buttinger, 1968). When adopted as a system of beliefs and a social ideology in Viet Nam, efforts were made to adapt Confucianism to Vietnamese culture; nonetheless, the elements of the ideology in regard to women have had a profound impact on many aspects of social life in Viet Nam nowadays (Rydstrøm & Drummond, 2004). As a political and moral doctrine, it has strongly influenced the conception, cognition, emotion, and behavior of millions of Vietnamese people, especially women (Ha, 2001; N. Phan, 2004).

Neo-Confucianism or feudal ideology. Neo-Confucianism , which emphasizes the family as the foundation of society, coupled with male supremacy and female subordination as the foundation of the family, emerged in Viet Nam after the French had established and sustained their colonization, from late 1858 to early 1945 (Tétreault, 1996). After colonizing Viet Nam, the French claimed their mission was to bring modern civilization to Viet Nam. By contrast, their colonization caused tremendous suffering for the Vietnamese people, especially for women, since the French maintained a feudal patriarchy as the basis of their colonization, bringing into use the key tenets of Confucian doctrine and applying the norms of “valuing men and disparaging women” (Tétreault, 1996). In other words, Neo-Confucianism promoted the spirit of thinking highly of men and stimulating contempt for women (Ha, 2001; Q. T. Le, 1996). The proverb, “Having a son means having everything, while having ten daughters means having nothing,” illustrates the oppression and subordinate status of Vietnamese women under feudalism and French rule. Only sons were given ritual responsibilities

and could continue their father's patrilineage (Rydström & Drummond, 2004; Frenier & Mancini, 1996; To, 2007; K. Vu, 1997). While a number of international and Vietnamese scholars refer to the norms of "valuing men and disparaging women" as Neo-Confucianism, the majority of Vietnamese people call them feudal ideology.

Feudal ideology continued to confine women's social roles and participation in all spheres of life. The Vietnamese education system during the age of feudalism (from Chinese rule in 179 BC to the mid-19th century) and during the French domination was strong evidence of this confinement.

Although women during the French time were allowed to enroll in schools at the primary and secondary levels, only a very limited number of them from wealthy families in cities could afford schooling, so higher education remained male-dominated. According to a Vietnamese historian, L. H. Phan (1987), during the periods of feudalism and colonialism only two Vietnamese women obtained a Ph.D. degree, including Ms. Nguyen Thi Du (Van, 2009), who was mentioned in Chapter 1. Despite their remarkable talent and strong desire for schooling, women were not provided with equal opportunities to access higher education. The French, like the Vietnamese feudalists, did not encourage and provide equal access to education for women at all levels. In addition, under French colonization most Vietnamese women were poor peasants (Bergman, 1975). They worked hard in the field to feed themselves and their families, but they did not have a chance to be economically independent since they were not allowed to own land (Bergman, 1975; N. T. Tran, 2006). In contrast, men, by law, were the ones who inherited their family's entire fortune and controlled the means of economic survival.

Nevertheless, regardless of being deprived of almost all of the fundamental rights and privileges that men were given by the feudal laws, a few Vietnamese women, by their self-education, still thrived and contributed their talents to the development of their nation and culture

(T. N. T. Le, 2002). The history of Viet Nam from the 15th century has registered the names of a number of outstanding women intellectuals, such as scholars Ngo Chi Lan (15th century) and Trinh Thi Ngoc Truc (17th century), who compiled the Sino-Vietnamese dictionary; Doan Thi Diem (18th century), the greatest poetess, teacher, and translator in Le Dynasty; poetess Ho Xuan Huong (late 18th and early 19th centuries), who used Vietnamese script (Nôm) in her poems and was dubbed “the Queen of Nôm poetry;” and poetess Nguyen Thi Hinh (early 19th century) with the well-known pen name Ba Huyen Thanh Quan, who was invited by King Minh Mang to teach the royal maids, including the princesses and the King’s concubines.

Overall, Confucianism and the feudal and colonial ideologies have tremendously impacted the Vietnamese people’s perceptions, emotions, and behaviors. These ideologies set up the highly patriarchal social organization of Viet Nam and produced gender prejudices, conservative gender norms, sex-role stereotypes, and discrimination against Vietnamese women. Even though laws and many governmental programs have strived to eliminate inequalities and to create equal status for men and women in social, political, economic, and cultural life, the prejudices, stereotypes, and traditional ideology of men’s and women’s roles are extremely hard to abolish. Their existence, even only in the form of “reminiscences of feudalism” (Rydstrøm & Drummond, 2004), hinders the achievement of the national goals of eliminating all types of discrimination against women and advancing more and more women to leadership positions.

Vietnamese Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism as presented above contradict the spirit of Viet Nam’s Constitutions of 1946 and 1992. They also go against the key principles of the gender equality law and CEDAW. However, they help to explain women’s continued unequal status with

men and their underrepresentation in leadership positions. Importantly, not only did Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism inform my research and provide me with the lens through which I viewed the practices of women in academia in the MD as well as offered me the conceptual framework to generate my research problem and questions, but they also heavily influenced the experiences of the women leaders participating in my study and helped me explain and interpret the findings of this study (Merriam, 2009).

Changes in women's status. In 1930, the Women's Union came into existence under the auspices of the Indochinese Communist Party, later named the Viet Nam Communist Party (VCP). Since its founding, the Women's Union has been responsible for political mobilization, education, and representation of Vietnamese women at every level of society, beginning with the village (Tétreault, 1996). The VCP set its tenth and last goal as the liberation of women. In addition, President Ho Chi Minh laid a strong foundation for women's liberation in Viet Nam with his liberal words, "Women are half the people. If women are not free, then the people are not free." In order to have a successful mobilization of women to serve the war, the Women's Union encouraged women to reformulate the values of Vietnamese femininity and to break the rigid Confucian norms (Ngo, 2004). Furthermore, the VCP used various mobilizing techniques, including sending the first woman, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, as its representative to the Seventh International Congress in Moscow in 1935.

Although Viet Nam briefly regained its independence and freedom from the French and proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam in September, 1945, it had to enter a harsh battle with the French after their return to Viet Nam, thanks to the victory of the Allies in World War II. After the French were defeated at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, only the North of Viet Nam was liberated, and its South was under the rule of the Nguy

regime, supported by the US Government. As a result, Viet Nam was still at war, in which the North fought against the South and the Americans. During these two wars, obligations to preserve the four feminine virtues in their traditional orthodoxy gave way to promotion of the “new socialist woman” image, and various women became revolutionary martyrs and national heroines. Further, President Ho Chi Minh, in recognition of their outstanding contributions, rewarded them with eight “golden” words: “anh hung, bat khuat, trung hau, dam dang (heroic, unyielding, loyal, and resourceful)” (Viet Nam Women’s Union, 1996).

While women accomplished as many distinguishing achievements as men during the war era, their status was not equal to men’s in peace time, when the society came back to its equilibrium, and when Confucianism and feudalism had favorable conditions again to promote their latent power over women. Women returned to their traditional roles, and there was little change in the scope of their economic activities (Ungar, 2000). As Q. T. Le (1996) emphasized, “Recently the spirit of thinking highly of men and slighting women, a product of Confucianism, seemed to be restored in some places [in Viet Nam]” (p. 66).

In the literature related to Vietnamese women’s status and gender inequity, some foreign scholars, such as Bergman (1975), Rydstrom and Drummond (2004), Frenier and Mancini (1996), and various Vietnamese researchers, such as Ha (2001), Q. T. Le (1996), T. N. T. Le (2002), Ngo (2004), L. H. Phan (1987), N. T. Tran (2006), and K. Vu, (1997), have studied the influence of Confucianism on women’s status, education, and married life. Yet, there has been very little, if any, research on the impact of Confucian norms and feudal ideology on the lived experiences of women in governance, politics, economy, and higher education since the end of the two prolonged wars. Similarly, how the remnants of feudalism affect women’s perceptions, behaviors, and decision making has never been examined. Therefore, the underlying obstacles

and challenges to women's development and career advancement in many spheres of social life remain hidden and unaddressed.

National Policies and International Perspectives on Gender Equality in Viet Nam

In 1946, the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam proclaimed the economic and political equality of women and men, laid the foundation for women's access to higher education, defined the equal rights of women within the family, and provided women with the right to vote for the first time in their history (T. Le, 2009; Tétreault, 1996). Then, the Constitution of 1992 of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam clearly confirmed that women and men are equal in all rights and responsibilities. Both sexes are equal in learning, training, professional development, labor, job opportunities, salary, promotion, participation in government bodies at all levels, gaining benefits from material and spiritual welfares, and using and owning assets. Significantly, they are also equal in the family, deciding important issues, not just taking care of children (T. Le, 2009; T. N. T. Le, 2002).

Moreover, based on the amendments of Articles 103 and 106 of the Constitution of 1992, the National Assembly passed the gender equality law on November 29, 2006. The law enforces gender equality in a wide range of fields such as politics; economics; labor; education and training; science and technology, culture, information, physical exercises, and sports; health care; and the family. In addition, measures to promote gender equality, to administer and monitor the execution of the law, and to punish those who make violations were delineated. Likewise, responsibilities of government bodies, organizations, families, and individuals for the execution of the law were also prescribed.

In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and used it as an international bill of rights for

women. In order to keep pace with the world's trend towards women's progress and equity, Viet Nam adopted and put the Convention into implementation in 1985, which was reported to have brought about the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of Vietnamese women (CEDAW, 2001). Additionally, a study conducted by the World Bank in 2006 showed that Viet Nam has made good progress in improving gender equality, and it noted that in the East Asia region Viet Nam has become distinguished for its success in closing gender gaps in the last 20 years. Furthermore, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam's Government approved the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam by 2010 (National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam, 2002). One of the strategy's noteworthy objectives was to provide women with equal rights to education, and the proportion of women among graduate degree holders increased to over 35% by 2010, compared with 30% in 2005.

Challenges Faced by Women and Current Gender Practices

Challenges. In spite of recent progress on gender equity, as found in this study, there still are a variety of challenges or obstacles facing Vietnamese women as they advance in their careers.

Gender prejudices and sex stereotypes. Current Vietnamese laws always reinforce women's and men's equal status. Conversely, in reality, regardless of the implementation of a large number of legal documents on gender equality in Viet Nam, gender prejudices and stereotypes of girls and women continue (T. Nguyen, 2012; T. H. T. Nguyen, 2008; To, 2007; Vuong, 2012). Typically, women are considered to be weak in both their character and physical health; to talk too long; to care a lot about their physical appearance; to be passive, dependent, indecisive, equivocal, and shallow; to trust people too easily; and to be more suitable for housework and needlework (T. H. T. Nguyen, 2008; H. Tran, 1996). Men, by contrast, are

believed to be strong, active, brave, intelligent, creative, independent, objective, dynamic, self-confident, determined, knowledgeable, and profound, and to be born to work outside the home (T. Nguyen, 2012; T. H. T. Nguyen, 2008; H. Tran, 1996; Vuong, 2012). Consequently, the public frequently disparages women and does not trust their leadership capabilities, nor believe in their ability to assume important responsibilities in society (H. D. Nguyen, 2007; M. D. T. Tran, 2006; V. A. T. Tran, 2000; Vuong, 2012).

However, a few educational scholars and non-governmental organizations in Viet Nam argue that the people's perceptions of the roles of women have generally changed. Yet women do not advance in their career paths or are not so progressive as men because they themselves have not yet changed their own views about their traditional role and position in the family and in society (K. T. Nguyen, 1997; Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; Thai, 1997). Even though their argument is interesting, these authors and reporters did not identify the causes of women's rigid or limited self-perceptions, which this study explored and described. Furthermore, their papers were based on government-sponsored demographic and census data rather than the results of empirical studies. There are similar problems with the articles on sex stereotypes presented below, in which the conclusions relied largely on secondary data sources.

In Viet Nam, sex stereotypes have created substantial challenges to women's development and career advancement. The stereotypes that favor males over females are often reinforced in school textbooks and other educational materials (T. Nguyen, 2012; Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; To, 2007; Vuong, 2012). A recent review of the ninth grade Citizenship Education textbook in Viet Nam illustrates the disparity in the status of women and men. For instance, female characters in the textbook are an unhappy girl who engaged in premarital sex and married early, a female worker who illegally left her job, and a

woman who did not repay her debt. In contrast, male characters were described as people in positions of power and leadership, such as a director of a successful company, a mayor of a city, a distinguished teacher, a well-known scientist, and a noble medical doctor.

Furthermore, most families in Viet Nam still prefer having sons to daughters. Because the father's surnames are used as his children's, only through the births of sons can the male family line be continued (Bélanger, 2004; Ha, 2001; To, 2007; G. H. Tran, 2004). In this regard, a woman's status becomes lower in her family unless she gives birth to at least one son. Additionally, the preference for sons may result in early terminations of female fetuses (To, 2007). As a result, some statistical sources show increasing gaps in the sex ratio at birth in some provinces and districts in Viet Nam. For example, in some districts, especially in urban areas, the ratio of baby boys to girls is as high as 175.5 to 100 (To, 2007). If this trend continues in the next few decades, Viet Nam will have a severe shortage of females, and this will of course have a negative impact on the division of labor in society as well as the country's overall natural development. In short, gender stereotypes exert a negative impact on the survival and growth of not only women but also the whole society.

Family versus work. Modern Vietnamese women, particularly those who are married and employed, are facing substantial challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities (Ha, 2001; Hoang, 1996; T. N. T. Le, 2002; Ngo, 2004; Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; Thai, 1997). Research shows that Vietnamese people still expect women to have “valuable traditional virtues” such as diligence, industry, dynamism, creativity, altruism, and high commitment to family and society (Ha, 2001; Hoang, 1996; T. N. T. Le, 2002; Ngo, 2004). According to dominant cultural norms, acting as a wife and mother is the first duty and a sacred mission of every Vietnamese woman. In this respect, Vietnamese women generally have the highly significant function of and responsibility for human reproduction (Q. T. Le, 1996; T. Le, 1997; T. N. T. Le,

2002), and they have to take charge of 90% of household chores (Ha, 2001; Hoang, 1996). Research shows that their time, health, strength, and creativity are tremendously constrained by the “Seven Roles Framework”: (1) parental/maternal role, (2) professional role, (3) conjugal role, (4) domestic role, (5) kin role (referring to responsibilities as daughters, sisters, grandmothers, nieces, etc.), (6) community role, and (7) individual role (International Labor Organization’s survey cited in Ha, 2001). Men in Viet Nam, on the other hand, are not expected to assume similar roles; therefore, they can concentrate their efforts fully on their careers and career development. In contrast, women have to overcome innumerable obstacles emanating from the multiple responsibilities that their families and society impose on them before they can commit themselves to their professional careers (Ha, 2001; T. Le, 1997; T. N. T. Le, 2002; Ngo, 2004).

Gender gaps in education, training, and leadership. Article 59 of Viet Nam’s current Constitution clearly states, “Every Vietnamese citizen has both the right and the obligation to receive training and education.” However, a large number of women have lower educational levels and professional status than their male counterparts, particularly in higher education institutions. Many educational scholars (Luong, 2008; Pham, 2006; B. T. T. Vu, 2008) have shown that fewer female than male academics hold doctoral degrees and titles such as associate professor and professor. Additionally, the percentage of women leaders of departments of education at provincial or city levels and in universities and colleges is still very low (Luong, 2008; Pham, 2006; Thai, 1997). For example, at the University of Natural Sciences—a division of Ha Noi National University—the percentage of women holding doctoral degrees in 2007 was 13%; at Ha Noi University of Technology, 19%; at National Economics University, 15%; and at the University of Fine Arts and Industries, 0%. All over the country in the same year, only 9.26% of academic women were promoted to full professor, and 20% to associate professor (Luong, 2008).

Table 2.1 shows the gap between the numbers of male and female students pursuing formal education from elementary to postsecondary levels. Although the gap is not really big, girls tend to lag behind boys at most educational levels. Particularly, the higher the level is, the lower the number of girls becomes. For example, in the academic year of 2010-2011, girls accounted for 53.19% of students at the college level,³ yet at the university level⁴ the percentage dropped to 48.28% (MOET, 2011a). It is also noteworthy that the percentages of women ascending to key leadership positions in the education sector and achieving advanced degrees (doctorate and master's) and titles as professor and associate professor are much lower than those of men (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3) (Luong, 2008; Pham, 2006).

Table 2.1

Female Students in Viet Nam in the School Year of 2010-2011

Level	Total (Males & Females)	Females (Number)	Females (%)
Elementary	7,043,300	3,392,100	48.16
Lower Secondary	4,945,200	2,416,500	48.87
Upper Secondary	2,804,300	1,495,800	53.34
College	726,219	386,265	53.19
University	1,435,887	693,175	48.28

Note. Adapted from the webpages of the General Statistics Office and the Ministry of Education and Training of Viet Nam (see the references for further details: General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2012a, 2012b; MOET, 2011a, June).

³ At the college level, students are trained in three-year programs.

⁴ At the university level, students are trained in four-year to six-year programs, depending on the disciplines that they pursue.

Table 2.2

Women Leaders in Provincial/City Departments of Education⁵ in the School Year of 2004-2005

Position	Number	Percent (%)
Director	11	17.2
Deputy Director	64	32.0

Table 2.3

Highly Qualified Women in Vietnamese Higher Education in 2004-2005

Graduate Degree and Title	Total (Males & Females)	Females (Number)	Females (%)
Doctorate	5,747	974	16.98
Master's	13,360	5,249	39.3
Professor	389	18	4.7
Associate Professor	1,759	203	11.6

Generally, today's parents, teachers, and people at large, together with the government and the Party, encourage girls to pursue formal education and to develop their aptitude and talent in all areas so as to eliminate gender gaps in education and development, to reduce poverty, and to make useful contributions to the nation's economic development (Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; Pham, 2006; G. H. Tran, 2004; B. T. T. Vu, 2008). Yet women's educational and professional levels still cannot be comparable to men's, as outlined above. There are a variety of reasons for their low levels of achievement. First, in poor families, parents tend to convince or force their girls to drop out of school early to earn money to support the education of their brothers (Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; To, 2007). Second, married women

⁵ These statistical numbers were generated from 50 departments of education in 50 cities and provinces in Viet Nam in the school year of 2004-2005. In each department, there is one director, and there are usually three deputy directors.

frequently give their husbands the priority to pursue higher education, while they choose to stay home to fulfill the duties of a reasonable woman or to uphold Vietnamese cultural and moral values, such as giving birth to children and taking care of young children, old parents, and/or old parents-in-law (Ha, 2001; T. Le, 1997; K. T. Nguyen, 1997; Thai, 1997). Third, female teenagers may encounter problems of early pregnancy, unwanted pregnancy, and abortion because of their early marriage, lack of sex education, or sexual violence against them in school or in society (Khuat, 2004; Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; Pham, 2006; G. H. Tran, 2004). Facing these problems, they are easily distracted from learning and are more likely to drop out of school than male teenagers.

Current gender practices: Equality in policies and inequality in reality. Since the founding of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, particularly since the start of *doi moi* (renovation) in 1986, the Vietnamese Communist Party and government have enacted and implemented a wide range of laws and socioeconomic policies to promote gender equality by increasing women's participation in public decision-making and political life (T. Le, 1997; Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; To, 2007; G. H. Tran, 2004). Viet Nam's Constitution of 1946 asserts women's right to participate in politics. Article 63 of the amended Constitution of 1992 emphasizes that "Vietnamese citizens have equal rights in all aspects of economics, politics, culture, society, and the family." At the same time, women have been offered more favorable conditions to be equally involved in all types of social activities and to gain equal benefits with men in their work and daily life (B. T. Nguyen, 1997; T. Le, 1997; G. H. Tran, 2004).

However, during the implementation of these statutes, policies, and activities, numerous problems and challenges have occurred, and women have gained less than men from the consequences of the renovation process (T. Le, 1997; G. H. Tran, 2004; Viet Nam Women's

Union, 2005). For instance, while efforts have been quite successful in increasing the number of women who hold public office, little effort has been made to build women's capacity to perform effectively in office. Thus, even when women do manage to enter the political arena, they often find themselves marginalized in this male-dominated world and culture, with real power remaining in the hands of a selected group of men (To, 2007). In other words, even though women have equality by law, they are not yet equal in reality (Khuat, 2004; Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; Viet Nam Women's Union, 2005). This gender inequality in practice results from a variety of factors: (1) policy makers' limitations in approaching gender issues when formulating gender policies, (2) lack of attention to gender in the formulation and implementation of the socioeconomic policies, (3) the legacy of Confucian and feudal ideologies from the former eras on gender relations, (4) limited capacities of the agencies implementing and enforcing the gender policies, and (5) little knowledge and awareness of legal rights by the entire people in general and women in particular (Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; G. H. Tran, 2004; Viet Nam Women's Union, 2005). Consequently, there is a gap between the stated policies and the public's understanding and implementation of these policies in Viet Nam, and women's equality with men in reality has not yet been achieved (Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; The Asia Foundation, 2001; G. H. Tran, 2004; Viet Nam Women's Union, 2005).

Relevance of Contemporary Research on Gender Equality and Vietnamese Women

The literature on gender issues in Viet Nam is rarely generated by faculty and researchers in higher education institutions. Rather, it is usually produced by multiple agencies promoting gender and development research and analysis, involving (1) international donor and development agencies (e.g., the Asia Foundation, the United Nations Development Program, the

United Nations Development Fund for Women, and the World Bank), (2) Vietnamese NGOs and international NGOs (e.g., OXFAM), (3) foreign researchers, (4) Vietnamese academics working as consultants for international NGOs and donor agencies, and (5) Vietnamese NGOs (e.g., the Institute for Social Development Studies and the Center for Research on Gender, Family and Environment in Development). It is noteworthy that most of the authors are from the North and the Center of Viet Nam or live in big cities like Ha Noi, Hue, and Ho Chi Minh. As a result, they have concentrated on the populations from these areas rather than those from the Mekong Delta, whom I recruited for my study.

Generally, the literature on women and gender equality in Viet Nam provides a rather thorough picture of women's changing roles and social status through different historical periods. A large part of it focuses primarily on gender and gender equality as fundamental principles for organizing society and for developing an equitable, democratic, and civilized society. This is because the authors were considerably inspired by the Vietnamese government and the Party's statutes, policies, and programs addressing gender inequity and women's unequal development from the 20th into the 21st century. Equally important, a rather large number of articles and books have addressed women's subordinate status in feudal times and their unequal status in modern times, as well as the challenges facing their development and career advancement. Moreover, some book chapters, written by both domestic and international scholars such as Ha (2001), Ngo (2004), To (2007), K. Vu (1997), Bergman (1975), Frenier and Mancini (1996), and Rydström and Drummond (2004), have discussed the impact of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism or feudal ideology on the roles, social status, and married life of Vietnamese women in general. Various Vietnamese scholars—especially Hoang (1996), Khuat (2004), To (2007), Q. T. Le (1996), T. N. T. Le (2002), and G. H. Tran (2004)—have concentrated on gender concepts and issues in society in general and in education in

particular. Overall, the popular themes of gender research in Viet Nam consist of (1) women, work, and social justice; (2) family, sexuality, and society; (3) the level of education and professional qualifications of women; and (4) women's rights, empowerment, and gender equality.

On the one hand, the literature under review provided me with rich information and insights into women's current status coupled with the gender practices in Viet Nam as well as the challenges and opportunities women have encountered in their life and work. On the other hand, none of it discussed the lived experiences of women and women leaders who are employed by the government or by private businesses and industries, let alone the experiences of those in higher education. In the literature which I was able to locate, only Ha's (2001) article, describing the barriers to women's advancement into leadership positions in Viet Nam, and T. H. T. Nguyen's (2008) dissertation, examining gender prejudice against women leaders at the grassroots level, are closely related to my research, but these women are not in academe. There are also some articles and book chapters discussing academic women's educational and professional levels compared to their male counterparts' (Hoang, 1996; T. N. T. Le, 2002; G. H. Tran, 2004). Nevertheless, although research on women and gender issues in Viet Nam is blooming, the majority of researchers base their findings on quantitative and secondary data, and most of the research is descriptive rather than theory-based. In this respect, the depth of women's experiences, along with their emotions, has not been explored. Except for Ha's article and T. H. T. Nguyen's (2008) dissertation, I could not find any scholarly articles, magazines, and books discussing the leadership, professional, and lived experiences of women leaders in Viet Nam in general and in the Mekong Delta in particular.

Overall, there is very little, if any, scholarly literature and empirical research on women, gender equality, and women's leadership in higher education in the MD. Accordingly, in-depth research in this field which explores women's lived experiences and the impacts of the traditional

culture on their career paths is definitely worthwhile. In this respect, my research on the experiences of women leaders in higher education in the MD is really necessary and significant.

Women Leaders in Asia

My search for printed and electronic publications on women in academic leadership in Southeast Asia resulted in very little literature in this area, which completely fits with Luke's (2001) comment that "women in higher education" is not a research area or priority in Southeast Asia (p. 104). Consequently, I had to extend my search to include additional literature on women leaders in non-academic environments in a number of Asian countries such as China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. My review of this literature did not present a full picture of women and leadership in these developing countries. Rather, my major purpose was to gain an overview of the status and experiences of women leaders, including but not restricted to those in academia, in the developing countries located in the same continent as Viet Nam, and to link them with the experiences of those in my study.

The literature that I found and reviewed shows such recurrent themes as (1) barriers to women's career advancement, (2) opportunities for and facilitating factors of women's career advancement, and (3) women's leadership styles.

Barriers to women's career advancement. Women leaders in the developing countries listed above experience a variety of common barriers to their career advancement which are primarily determined by their traditional cultural values and norms (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998; Huirong; 2006; Luke, 2001, 2002; Tang, Au, Chung, & Ngo, 2000). First, they have to balance the dual responsibilities of family and work (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998; Huirong; 2006; Luke, 2001). It is their traditional cultures that define their different family roles over the course of their lives: daughter, sister, wife, mother, and daughter-in-

law. Women in Indonesia and Hong Kong, for example, are not considered to have completed their life mission unless they are married, have children, and bring them up (Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998; Luke, 2001). Because of these multiple roles, coupled with family obligations which they have to integrate with their professional career demands, activities, and aspirations, they usually have to deal with competing responsibilities, role conflicts, and social pressures (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998; Huirong; 2006; Luke, 2001).

Second, gender stereotypes of women remain popular in China (Huirong, 2006), Hong Kong (Tang et al., 2000), Indonesia (Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998), and Singapore (Morriss, Tin, & Coleman, 1999), although their manifestations vary slightly from culture to culture. For instance, Indonesian women are believed to be “emotional, passive, weak, dependent, decorative, obedient, unassertive and incompetent except for household tasks” (Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998, p. 87), and Singaporean women are said to be “caring, creative, intuitive, aware of individual differences, non-competitive, tolerant, informal, and subjective” (Morriss et al., 1999, p. 194). Similarly, Thai women are depicted as being emotional and talkative and thus are not appropriate to hold executive positions (Luke, 2001). In this regard, women in these countries have to expend greater effort compared to men to move up their career ladders because they have to start at a negative point.

Third, women leaders in multiple Asian countries who do not yet rise to the top rank tend to think that men are better for high-ranking positions than they themselves (Luke, 2001; Oplatka, 2006). Luke identified that this way of thinking results from their cultural mindsets and related lack of aspirations for and self-confidence in attaining top-level positions. Finally, regardless of the execution of gender equality laws in China (Huirong, 2006), Hong Kong (Tang et al., 2000), Indonesia (Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998), and Singapore (Luke, 2001), latent and covert sex

discrimination against women in education, employment, promotion, payment, and benefit distribution continues to exist, both in society and in higher education.

Opportunities and facilitating factors. Despite the substantial barriers outlined above, Asian women still have quite a number of significant facilitating factors that have provided them with favorable opportunities to advance in their careers. National gender equality laws and policies are the first important factor that has created numerous opportunities for women to access further higher education, to develop their professions, and to have equal rights with men (Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998; Huirong, 2006; Ismail & Rasdi, 2006; Luke, 2001). It is worth pointing out that achieving high educational levels is an important path toward self-efficacy, development, and success for most contemporary women leaders (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Luke, 2001). This is also a strategy for the upward mobility of women academics in Asia (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Luke, 2002), and their parents play a pivotal role in encouraging, inspiring, and motivating them to learn and pursue education as a key to a better life, which women themselves, later in their lifetimes, realize as the needed preparation for their career advancement (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Ismail & Rasdi, 2006). Moreover, it is extremely difficult for these women to move up their career ladders and to sustain their leadership positions without family and spousal support. Research shows that women holding senior leadership positions and high-flying female academics in many Asian countries usually rely on support from their husbands, their extended families, and/or hired help in societies where domestic help and baby-sitters are available (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998).

Women's leadership styles. The literature on women and leadership in multiple Asian countries, namely China (Cheung & Halpern, 2010), Indonesia (Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998), and Singapore (Luke, 2001; Morriss et al., 1999), distinguishes between male and female leadership

styles. Because women's styles of leadership are frequently in line with their cultures, personal values, and feminine attributes (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998; Morriss et al., 1999), their specific practice of leadership is varied in different countries. Nevertheless, irrespective of the differences in their practice of leadership, women generally seem to perform a nurturing, caring, non-autocratic, and non-aggressive leadership style. For example, a study of Indonesian women managers found that they preferred practicing transformational leadership; yet, their style was highly democratic, and they were more likely to exert "beneficial influence" rather than to impose direct orders on their employees (Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998, p. 93). In addition, the Chinese women leaders in Cheung and Halpern's study emphasized the concept of leaders as moral and role models. In this respect, they were particularly serious about their work and worked hard to maintain the "highest personal standards," to promote communication, and to show consideration and respect to their subordinates (p. 188). Like the Indonesian women leaders, they preferred performing transformational leadership because this empowers their subordinates, creates consensus among them, and raises themselves and others under their purview to "higher levels of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1978, cited in Cheung & Halpern, 2010, p. 188). Morriss et al. also revealed that female Singaporean leaders in education chose to uphold such attributes as "caring, humane, creative, intuitive, and aware of individual differences" (p. 194).

Reflections on the Literature on Women Leaders in Asia

Regardless of the scarcity of the literature on women in leadership and academic leadership in Asia, the articles under review gave useful information not only about my research participants but also for my research methods. First, they provided insights into the status and experiences of women leaders in the countries located not far away from Viet Nam. This helped me better understand my research problem. Second, most of the studies reviewed in this section employed qualitative research

methods to investigate women's status and professional experiences in their contemporary societies. Specifically, case studies, coupled with life history and in-depth interviews (Huirong, 2006; Ismail & Rasdi, 2006; Luke, 2002), were most frequently employed. However, some studies were based on existing government data as well as reports and surveys made by women research institutes, international NGOs, and non-profit organizations (Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998). Additionally, some authors reviewed existing literature related to women and women's leadership so that they could provide a full picture of the changes of women's socioeconomic and political status over different times in their country (Tang et al., 2000), or develop a new leadership model appropriate for women in diverse global contexts (Cheung & Halpern, 2010).

On the one hand, the reviewed articles informed my research study of experiences of academic women leaders in the Mekong Delta in southern Viet Nam. As presented above, they made explicit the opportunities and barriers that Asian women leaders have encountered and the leadership styles that they have adopted to correspond with their traditional cultures and personal values and attributes. On the other hand, these articles provoked my curiosity concerning whether the women leaders in my study encountered similar obstacles and opportunities or exercised similar styles of leadership. This is because, although Viet Nam, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore are all located in Asia, their histories, traditional cultures, and sociopolitical and socioeconomic conditions are not the same. For example, the literature review above showed that both Vietnamese culture and the cultures of the countries under review have imposed extra roles and family responsibilities on women as well as women leaders compared to their male counterparts. Nonetheless, the existing literature did not show that Vietnamese women are discriminated against in multiple fields, like women in China, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Consequently, there was a wide range of interesting issues for me to explore in this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theories of sex inequality, difference, dominance (MacKinnon, 1989), and patriarchy (Johnson, 1997) within feminism were powerful theoretical frameworks for this study. These Western theories explain gender inequality, male supremacy and dominance, and female subordination and oppression within socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts, and they allowed me to develop theoretical lenses for viewing the sociopolitical and cultural conditions in which my participants lived, interacted, formulated their perspectives, and made sense of their life views and world views. In addition, traditional Vietnamese culture, heavily influenced by Confucian ideology and norms (T. N. T. Le, 2002; Ngo, 2004; Phan, 2004; K. Vu, 1997), helped me understand and explain the experiences and perspectives of these academic women leaders, although this did not serve as a theoretical framework. Significantly, the Western theories presented below provided a comprehensive explanation for the participants' behaviors and attitudes towards their decisions and choices related to their work and life.

Sex Inequality

Inequality because of sex defines and situates women as women.

(MacKinnon, 1989, p. 215)

Interestingly, MacKinnon (1989) pointed out that “equality is an equivalence not a distinction, and gender is a distinction not an equivalence” (p. 216). Unless the sexes are unequal, women will not experience unequal, differential or disparate treatment, desperation, marginality, economical subjection, and sexual force and exploitation. If there is sex equality, women will have their own voice, power, privacy, respect, and more resources. MacKinnon's central argument about sex inequality is “treating likes alike and unlikes unlike” (p. 216). By equality, sameness is

presupposed, while inequality presumes difference. With this reasoning, MacKinnon wanted to treat issues of sex inequality as issues of sameness and difference.

Difference Approach

The difference approach proposes that sex is a difference, a division, and a distinction. Furthermore, it treats sex equality issues as issues of sameness and difference. MacKinnon (1989) claimed that difference results in division and dominance. Interestingly, gender neutrality is also the male standard (MacKinnon, 1989). On the basis of the sameness and difference standards, women are measured according to their correspondence or lack of correspondence with men. In this regard, women usually have to adjust their behaviors and compromise their values in order “not to be excluded from most of life’s pursuits” and to be in harmonious relationships with men. MacKinnon argued that because “the mainstream law of equality is already fundamentally equal,” the law gives women more than what they actually have in reality (p. 234). In other words, women are given the same rights as men according to the law, but in reality they do not have equal rights. Eventually, unless sex equality is not limited by sex difference, women’s status will remain unchanged, meaning that they will still be devalued during their entire life.

Dominance Approach

The dominance approach is an alternative to the difference approach since it provides a dissident answer, in law and philosophy, to the equality and gender questions. According to MacKinnon (1989), the equality question is a question of the distribution of power. Social power is comprised of legitimate power and the power to produce reality or to make decisions on socialization processes. In addition to the issue of difference, gender is also a question of power, of male supremacy and female subordination. Hierarchy of power produces both authentic and epistemological differences, and differences are also inequalities between men and women. It is

the unequal distribution of power that has subordinated women in most if not all cultures (Wolf, 1992). Unlike the main purpose of the difference approach, which examines gender issues in relation to the issues of sameness and difference, the goal of the dominance approach is not to make rules to fit reality but to critique reality.

Patriarchy

Johnson (1997) pointed out that a patriarchal society is one that is *male-dominated*, *male-identified*, and *male-centered*. Obviously, one of its key aspects is the oppression of women. First, a society is male-dominated when men generally assume a wide variety of positions of authority in such areas as politics, economics, religion, law, education, military, and domestics. When a woman advances into such a position, people are likely to be struck by the exception to the rule and maintain some stereotypes as well as prejudice against her leadership abilities and styles. Usually, they wonder how she can be compared to a man holding the same position since a woman's capacity is supposed to be more appropriate to domestic and caring work. In addition, male dominance creates power differences between men and women, which mean that men can shape culture in ways that reflect and serve their gender's interests, e.g., enacting laws that permit husbands to rape their wives. Male dominance also reinforces the idea that men are superior to women.

Second, a society is male identified in that core cultural values are associated with male values and masculinity. A good example of this is the popular use of male nouns and pronouns to represent people at large, for instance, "man" referring to human beings and "he" to doctors (Johnson, 1997). Moreover, male identification is presented by the terms used to describe masculinity and the ideal man, including "control, strength, efficiency, competitiveness, toughness, coolness under pressure, logic, forcefulness, decisiveness, rationality, autonomy, and self-sufficiency." In contrast, terms used to describe women not only are culturally related to

femininity and femaleness but also denote inappropriate qualities for a decisive leader in the traditional view, such as inefficiency, mutuality, cooperation, equality, sharing, caring, compassion, vulnerability, emotional expressiveness, and intuitiveness. Interestingly enough, Johnson argues that male identification, as one of the most important aspects of a patriarchal society, narrows women's perception of their professions. Most women see themselves to be more suitable for caring occupations (e.g., teaching, nursing, and child care) and personal relationships. In this respect, to see themselves as leaders, women must first deal with the fact that leadership is masculinist in a male predominant world. Hence, women need to be bold enough to sustain themselves in the world beyond caring relationships, and they must confront the conflict between their culturally based identity as women and the male-identified positions that they assume.

Third, another aspect of a patriarchal society is male-centeredness. Patriarchy is male-centered in that the focus of attention is basically on men and their actions. Newspapers and movies are full of stories about men and what they have done or have not done. Stories and movies usually attach such qualities as heroism, moral courage, spiritual transformation, and endurance to men, and patriarchal culture is more likely to employ men's experience to represent human experience and the enduring themes of life. Not only can a male center of focus be found in newspapers, stories, and movies, but it also occurs in conversations in business meetings and in classrooms at all educational levels (Johnson, 1997). In these settings, men are often dominant speakers or take central positions, and their voice frequently receives more credit.

Johnson's theory of patriarchy not only complements the difference and dominance approaches of MacKinnon's (1989) feminist theory, but it also provides the basis for a deeper understanding of feminist theory. Patriarchy thoroughly explains why men are dominant and why women are treated differently and unequally. Deep-rooted in the culture of a society,

patriarchy offers more convincing explanations and evidence for male dominance, male identification, and male-centeredness, which lead to differential, disparate, and unequal treatment of women. At the heart of patriarchy is the oppression of women, including the exclusion of women from major institutions such as churches, state, and universities as well as multiple prestigious occupations (e.g., medicine, law, engineering, etc.). In a patriarchal social hierarchy, women along with their work tend to be devalued and at times made invisible primarily because of male identification and male dominance.

Relevance of the Western Feminist Theories to This Study

Many portions of these Western theories had direct applicability to my research study. Not only did they shed light on the unequal status of Vietnamese women in general and women leaders in academia in particular, who were my population, but they also clearly and thoroughly explained why women are treated differently, are discriminated against, and are poorly represented in male-dominated fields such as leadership. Although created by Western researchers whose empirical studies were based on contexts completely distinct from those in Viet Nam, the theories provide clear and comprehensive explanations for critical issues related to gender relations in Vietnamese society, as identified in the literature review section. The gender issues addressed in the theories are very similar to those which have existed in Viet Nam for centuries but have not been fully resolved, irrespective of the continuous intervention of the Vietnamese government and Party as well as diverse governmental and non-governmental organizations. Accordingly, these theories helped me make sense of the happenings in the life and professional career of my participants. Most importantly, they provided me with a lens through which to view the phenomenon under study—the experiences of mid-level women leaders in higher education in the Mekong Delta, southern Viet Nam—and to make sense of the data I collected from them (Merriam, 2009).

However, the Western theories of sex inequality, difference, dominance, and patriarchy presented above could not help me fully make sense of Vietnamese women leaders' experiences. This is because these theories do not explain how traditional cultures impact Vietnamese women's life and work experiences. In fact, through my interviews with a number of female deans, vice deans, directors, and deputy directors of colleges, service centers, and support departments (my participants) at two comprehensive public universities and two community colleges in the MD, I realized that Western theories could not completely make sense of the data collected. Research shows that people's existence is always connected with the world and the culture in which they live (Holloway, 1997). Consequently, the experiences of my population cannot be separated from Vietnamese society and its traditional culture, which have been philosophically driven by Confucian ideology. This also means that it was important for me to integrate Confucianism and feudal ideology, outlined in the literature review section, with the Western theories to understand and explain the issues that the Western theories could not address. Furthermore, Confucian and feudal ideologies helped best explain my participants' views of life and the world around them and the decisions and choices that they made regarding their lives and academic careers.

A Model of Leadership Development for Southeast Asian Women

There would be a big gap in my theoretical frameworks unless a theory of women's leadership development were included. In fact, it was extremely difficult for me to choose a model of leadership development which is appropriate for my women participants, who have been living in a highly hierarchical patriarchal Eastern society and have been driven by conservative traditional cultural values and norms. A wide range of Western women's leadership development theories and models, such as Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1986); Gillett-Karam's (1989); White, Cox, and Cooper's (1992), and so on, did not provide a powerful

framework for the focus of my study because of the different social contexts and cultures in which the Western women leaders lived. Therefore, it was essential for me to locate a leadership development model which offers insight into how women in developing Eastern societies like Viet Nam negotiate among their “personal attributes, processes, and environments in leadership” (Cheung & Halpern, 2010, p. 182) to advance in their careers. After searching the literature on women and leadership in higher education in a number of developing countries in Asia, such as China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, I found that many factors of the *Step-by-Step Model of Leadership Development Incorporating Work and Family Roles* developed by Cheung and Halpern had direct applicability to my research study, although this model was created based on the authors’ review of recent studies of women holding top-level leadership positions not only in education but also in economics and industries in diverse global contexts.

According to Cheung and Halpern (2010), this is an alternative model of leadership encompassing a fuller picture of leaders as human beings who successfully manage their lives. Interestingly, the authors asserted that this model is supplementary to leadership models based on Western men. In this regard, it was developed based on cross-cultural perspectives of women in a wide range of global contexts, and it highlights “the importance of relational orientation and work-family integration in collectivistic cultures” (Cheung & Halpern, p. 182). Similarly, it operates in the context of a “culture of gender,” which defines expectations for both men and women as leaders. Inglehart and Norris (2003) point out that despite cultural differences, as people frequently understand cultures, there are common gender norms across cultures that create opportunities and obstacles for women leaders. This argument was applicable to the circumstance of the women leaders in my study. Importantly, at the core of this model are the concepts of *family* and *work integration*, which I realized are also the dual responsibilities that the majority of academic women

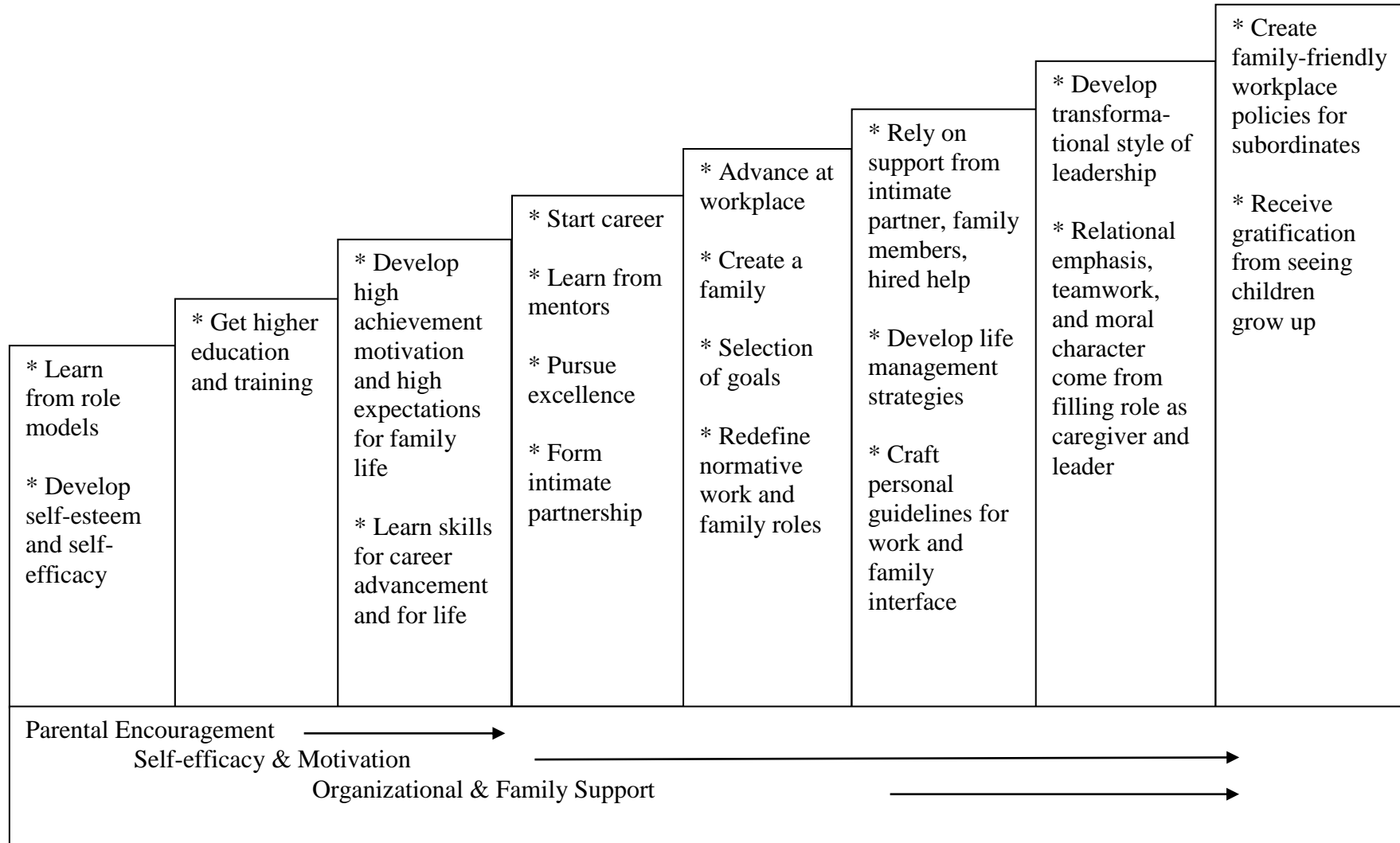


Figure 2.1. Step-by-step model of leadership development incorporating work and family roles.

leaders in Viet Nam and the Mekong Delta, particularly those who are married, have to balance on their career advancement paths. Moreover, this model focuses on women in collectivistic cultures, with which Vietnamese culture fits in nicely. Additionally, it was especially helpful that Cheung and Halpern's model identifies the developmental steps that leaders undertake to navigate through their lives. Likewise, it recognizes the importance of the incorporation of a variety of domains in a leader's life. Overall, these factors were very useful for my research questions and shed more light on the lives and careers of the women leaders in my study.

The next chapter presents the research methods that I employed in response to the key research questions and the scarcity of the literature on women and leadership in higher education in the MD and Viet Nam.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative research design was very suitable for this study. First, its key research question is consistent with qualitative research (Creswell, 2003) because it sought to understand the lived experiences of women leaders in higher education in the Mekong Delta (MD) in southern Viet Nam and how they advanced into positions of influence and power. Further, the research problem required me to explore the reasons why academic women in the MD have been under-represented in senior leadership positions, despite the availability of considerable support from the national Gender Equality Law and multiple gender equality policies, strategies, and action plans implemented on their campuses. To do so, I needed to examine the multiple perspectives, perceptions, and understandings of academic women leaders in the MD (Creswell, 2003; Holloway, 1997; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Merriam, 2009), about how the traditional Vietnamese cultural values and norms have influenced their career advancement process and their social roles and positions in the highly patriarchal society of Viet Nam.

In this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 mid-level women leaders (more details about them are presented in the sampling section) from two multidisciplinary universities (hereafter called Sugar Cane University [SCU] and Rice University [RU]) and two community colleges (hereafter called Orange Community College [OCC] and Clay Community College [CCC]) in the MD, in order to elicit narratives of their experiences of advancing into and attaining their existing leadership positions (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009). How they understood, perceived, and made sense of their experiences in relation to traditional Vietnamese culture was a focal point of the interviews. In addition, participant observation and document analysis were

conducted to complement the interview data as well as to enhance data quality and the quality of data interpretation (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Finally, the women leaders' experiences were presented through their own perspectives, but interpreted through mine, since I was the only researcher in and primary instrument of this study (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006; Holloway, 1997; Merriam, 2009).

Phenomenography was the most appropriate method to allow me best to answer my key research question and solve the research problem defined, although phenomenology seemed to be an applicable approach as well. In fact, there are some similarities and overlaps between phenomenography and phenomenology. Marton (1981), the creator of phenomenography, sought to exploit the association between phenomenography and the long-established tradition of phenomenology (Richardson, 1999). Marton agreed that there are similarities between the two approaches. In addition, in his publications in 1986 and 1988 he asserted that both phenomenographic and phenomenological research are relational, experiential, content-oriented, and qualitative.

However, there are several distinct characteristics of phenomenography that caused me to choose it as the primary research approach of this study, even though some phenomenological criteria were utilized to support my research work. First, phenomenography allowed me to employ a variety of methods to collect data, in addition to in-depth interviewing as the dominant one. Indeed, by employing a phenomenographic approach, a researcher can use other techniques such as "group interviews, observations, drawings, written responses, and historical documents" to gather information (Marton, 1994, p. 4425). This completely fitted into my research design since I employed participant observation and document analysis to support and supplement in-depth interviewing (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

Second, this research approach was designed to study not only the subjects' experiences of a social phenomenon but also their understanding, perception, conceptualization, and interpretation of it (Holloway, 1997; Marton, 1981; Orgill, in press). Phenomenographic study generally aims to describe, analyze, and understand experiences, and from the "second-order perspective" it aims at describing "people's experience of various aspects of the world" (Marton, 1981, p. 177). These aims were completely suitable to the main purpose of this study, which was to understand and interpret the experiences of women leaders in academia in the MD as they advanced in their careers.

Third, because phenomenography focuses on the conceptions of a specific group of people about a given phenomenon, rather than on whether those conceptions are considered correct or incorrect by existing standards, it enabled me to elucidate different possible conceptions that these women leaders had for their career advancement process (Orgill, in press). Conceptions are defined as the product of the complex interplay between individuals, their experiences, and the external world (Orgill, in press). Therefore, phenomenographic research does not merely focus on the essence of people's experiences about a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998), or their "conscious experience of their life-world" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25), which is the primary focus of phenomenology; it also takes into account the individuals' connections with their social context and lived environment. In fact, Marton (1981) identified phenomenology as aiming to "describe either what the world would look like without having learned to see it or how the taken-for-granted world of our everyday existence is 'lived'" (p. 181). He also commented that phenomenological research is concerned with "immediate experience," rather than with conceptual thought (Marton, 1986, 1988). In contrast, phenomenography deals with "both the conceptual and the experiential, as well with what is thought of as that which is lived" (Marton, 1981, p. 181). These factors of phenomenography were directly applicable to this study

because it focused not only on women leaders' experiences of moving up their career ladders but also on how they made sense of their experiences and the impact of their traditional Vietnamese culture on themselves, their experiences, and their status.

Fourth, as an empirical research approach, phenomenography enhances the possibility of studying the subjects' personal awareness and reflection (Marton, 1994; Orgill, in press). Marton (1994) defined awareness in phenomenographic studies as "a person's total experience of the world at a given point in time" (p. 4424). In this sense, through a phenomenographic study I could understand how the women leaders perceived and understood different aspects of their professional and personal world from their cultural perspectives.

Overall, the phenomenographic research approach was very applicable in this study for understanding the experiences of mid-level women leaders in higher education in the MD and their career advancement process. Understanding the experiences of this very limited number of women leaders who succeeded in attaining and sustaining powerful positions within higher education in the MD is essential in deepening and broadening our understanding of gender inequity and women's underrepresentation in senior leadership positions in higher education in Viet Nam as a whole. Finally, it is worth emphasizing that although phenomenography was the primary approach employed in this study, a few phenomenological techniques, such as sampling, bracketing, and interviewing (Creswell, 1998; Holloway, 1997; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005), were brought into use to support and complement phenomenography.

Sampling

Sampling Techniques

There is no consensus on the exact number of participants that a phenomenographic researcher needs to recruit. Marton, in his earliest phenomenographic study of qualitative

differences between individual students in the outcome and process of learning, interviewed 30 first-year students by using a structured protocol. A typical sample size of a phenomenological study is from 5 to 25 individuals (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, in this study, I initially planned to transcribe and analyze 12 to 15 in-depth interviews with mid-level women leaders in higher education in the MD, because this sample size is within the normal range for a phenomenological as well as a phenomenographic study (Creswell, 1998; Holloway, 1997; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Further, as I employed the sampling technique of phenomenology, the sample should be “very small” due to the depth of the interviews and data analysis (Holloway, 1997, p. 120). However, 20 mid-level women leaders from different disciplines in two multidisciplinary public universities (SCU and RU) and two community colleges (OCC and CCC) in the MD were eventually selected for in-depth face-to-face one-on-one interviews. Three women were interviewed twice in order to clarify some pieces of information that they gave in the previous interviews and to obtain additional data. The women leaders held positions as deans, vice deans, directors, and deputy directors of support departments and service centers of their universities and colleges. Their ages ranged from 29 to 53, and their years of service in higher education were diverse, from less than 10 years to over 30 years. The majority of them were married and had children; some were divorced with and without children; and some others remained single. Being able to interview more participants than expected, I could still guarantee the adequacy of the sample size when 16 interview transcripts were finally selected for data analysis due to the quality of the information obtained in them (e.g., consistency, clarity, thoroughness, and relevance).

After looking at the websites of the universities and colleges under study and based on my relationships with some of their leaders, I knew that three to five mid-level women administrators

could be selected from each institution. Thus, the number of women leaders across the four institutions could ensure the number of participants that needed to be sampled in this study. Then, I wrote four advertisement letters (see Appendices E and F) and sent each of them to the rector of each institution, asking him to allow me to conduct my study on his campus as well as to assist me in selecting between three and five mid-level women leaders. Also, I asked for the rector's permission to interview him or his vice-rector about the practices of women leaders and promotion procedures in his institution. I used not only purposeful sampling but also the snowballing technique (Creswell, 1998; Holloway, 1997) to recruit sufficient participants for my study, since the number of mid-level women leaders in higher education in the MD was considerably limited, and some of them cancelled their interview at the last minute because of their family or work commitments.

Sampling Rationale

The two universities and two community colleges selected for this study had the population suitable to my research interests, and their organizational structure was typical of the majority of public higher education institutions in Viet Nam. The universities were multidisciplinary and public, and they received funding from the Ministry of Education and Training annually, whereas the community colleges were funded by the provincial people's committees. Additionally, all these institutions were located not far away from my home city, so transportation to the research sites was not too costly for me, given the limited research funding I received. Also, because the selected institutions have had close relationships with my home university, getting permission from their top-level leaders to recruit the participants and to implement the research activities (interviewing, participant observation, and locating relevant documents) on their campuses was not very difficult for me. There were some other multidisciplinary universities in the MD, but they were newly founded and/or privately funded.

More important, their administrative systems and organizational structures were not yet stable. Therefore, they were not selected for my sample.

The primary reasons for sampling mid-level women leaders rather than top-level ones were presented in the introductory chapter. It is also noteworthy that the women leaders in my sample had direct experience with my research topic, which is an important criterion that I applied to this study based on the phenomenological approach described by Creswell (1998).

Access and Rapport

Obtaining permission to conduct this study and accessing the participants were comparatively complex. First, I had to get the approval of the institutional review board (IRB) of Michigan State University. Since there were no IRBs at universities and colleges in the MD, advertisement letters which explained the purpose and significance of this study and detailed the procedures used in data collection, coupled with the approval letter by the MSU IRB, were sent to the rectors of the four institutions under study. In each letter, I also requested the rector to permit me to conduct my study on his campus and to interview him or his vice rector and three to five mid-level women leaders about the practices and experiences of women leaders or administrators in his institution. For Rice University (RU), because of my limited professional relationships with its leaders as well as faculty and staff, I had to ask the rector of my home university to write me a letter of recommendation, which clearly explained the objectives and primary purpose of my research, and to have it mailed to the RU rector.

After receiving the approvals from the rectors of the four institutions, I traveled to their campuses and met with the mid-level women leaders whom the rectors assigned to participate in my research. Then I scheduled the interviews with them and asked for their contact information, including email addresses. I let them choose the venues for the interviews; all of them chose their

offices on campus. Approximately one week after the interviews, I sent them thank-you notes along with some follow-up and clarification questions about the interview data through their emails. Through these emails, I also asked them to recommend to me one or two more mid-level women leaders at their institutions to include in my research sample.

Data Collection

In this study, data were collected by multiple methods, including in-depth interviewing, life history, participant observation, and document analysis. There were several reasons for the employment of multiple methods. First, the findings were validated by triangulation, and thus the trustworthiness of the data was substantially enhanced (Glesne, 2006; Maxwell, 1998; Patton, 1990; Reinharz, 1992). By combining methods, I was able to relate different types of data and to counteract the threats to validity associated with each type of data (Glesne, 2006; Maxwell, 1998). Second, multiple data-collection methods enabled me to “illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experiences” of the participants, which a single method could not do (Reinharz, 1992). Third, the incorporation of multiple kinds of data sources generated from interviews, not only with the mid-level women leaders but also with the gatekeepers, who were the rectors and vice rectors of the four institutions under study and were directly involved in the promotion processes on campus, contributed to increasing confidence in my research findings (Glesne, 2006). Further, the multiple methods outlined above also increased the utility and the applicability of my research to practice (Reinharz, 1992), because they allowed me to examine thoroughly the topic of women in academic leadership in the MD, which lacks available literature. Finally, multiple methods work to increase and enhance researchers’ understanding of what they are studying by adding layers of information and by using one type of data to validate or refine another (Reinharz, 1992). In this respect, I could then communicate my thorough and comprehensive understanding of the research topic, coupled

with the veracity of the findings, to the readers in a convincing manner. Following are more details about the research methods utilized in this study.

In-Depth Phenomenographic Interviews

Marton (1994) asserted that the individual interview is the most preferred method, regardless of various ways of collecting data in phenomenographic research. In general, interviews are conversations with purposes, allowing the researcher to move back and forth in time—to reconstruct the past, to interpret the present, and to predict the future (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because of the empirical character of phenomenography, researchers or interviewers have to keep in mind that they are studying their subjects' "awareness" and reflection rather than their own (Marton, 1994, p. 4424). According to Marton, people's awareness consists of all their experience, even though they are not always simultaneously aware of everything in the same way. In this regard, a phenomenographic interview has to be conducted as a dialogue which facilitates "the thematization of aspects of the subject's experience not previously thematized" (Marton, 1994, p. 4425). The interviewer needs to get the interviewee to express his or her conceptions by asking questions that open up his or her reflections and thoughts (Pramling, 1996). Significantly, the interviewer and interviewee together constitute the experiences and understandings, which do not exist prior to the interview but are aspects of the subject's awareness, changing "from being unreflected to being reflected" (Marton, 1994, p. 4426). Moreover, Marton (1994) and Orgill (in press) pointed out that a phenomenographic interview should not have too many questions posed in advance, nor too many details determined in advance. Rather, most questions follow from what the interviewee says until he or she has nothing else to say and until the interviewer and interviewee have gained some kind of common understanding about the topics being discussed.

This study, indeed, brought into full use the above guides of phenomenographic interviewing. Specifically, the protocol used for semi-structured in-depth interviews with mid-level women leaders was generated based on the available literature on Vietnamese and Asian women and women leaders, and on the phenomenographic interviewing techniques, along with my own gendered professional experience and knowledge as a mid-level woman leader in Vietnamese higher education (see Appendices A and B). The main purpose of the interviews was to encourage the participants to reconstruct their experience and to reflect on the meanings they made of it (Seldman, 1985). All the interviews were face-to-face because that enabled me to elicit distinctive and private data from the participants (Creswell, 1998) and to observe their behavior, feelings, and ways of interpreting the surrounding world (Merriam, 2009), which made it easier for me to probe for further essential information.

More specifically, the interviews focused on the meanings of the women leaders' experiences of advancing into positions of influence and leadership and how traditional cultural values and norms impacted their advancement process, personal perceptions, and professional choices and decisions. Several interview questions were framed to collect these participants' life histories so that I could attain deeper and broader understandings of their experiences, consciousness, or awareness (Marton, 1994). The questions also sought their perceptions of the past and present opportunities for and barriers to their career advancement as well as the causes of those opportunities and barriers (Geiger, 1986). In addition, the questions regarding life history evoked important constructs that these women may have taken for granted, and enabled them to discuss in-depth the problematic and questionable issues of their work/life that may have been unspoken and unaddressed for a long time. Importantly, I searched for the central underlying meanings of their experiences and explored the different ways in which they were

able to be aware of, to experience, and to conceptualize the opportunities for and obstacles to their career advancement in relation to their traditional cultural values and norms (Marton, 1981, 1994). In other words, I dealt with what the participants had learned “culturally” and what they had individually developed to relate themselves to the surrounding world (Marton, 1981, p. 181).

All the interviews were digitally recorded and ranged from 90 minutes to two and a half hours long. Two or three days before the interviews, I called the participants on their office phones, which I found on their institution websites, in order to remind them of the interview appointments and the informed consent form (see Appendices G and H), which had been approved by the MSU IRB and sent to them through their emails. I asked them to read the form in advance in order to make sure that they understood the important points, including the primary purpose of my study, the requests for them as research participants, the potential risks, and so on. At the beginning of the interviews, I explained to them the main topic and the purpose of the upcoming conversation as well as the importance of and lack of risks to their participation. After that, I asked them whether they still wanted to participate in my research and had any questions about the consent form. All of them told me that they were ready for the interviews and that what was written in the form was very clear, and each one signed it. Also, I told them they did not need to answer any questions with which they were uncomfortable. After the interviews were transcribed (in Vietnamese) about three months later, I sent them copies of the transcripts through emails and asked them to double check the wording and contents. All the 16 participants responded to my emails, and five of them did some minor editing; the rest said that the transcriptions were precise, truly reflecting what they wanted to say, so they totally agreed about them.

Participant Observation

Participant observation, in which I acted as a “pure observer” or a “spectator” rather than an active participant (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p. 19), was conducted at two to three monthly institutional meetings at each of the four institutions. These are the meetings among top and middle-level leaders held at most higher education institutions in the Mekong Delta every month or every two weeks. In these meetings, the mid-level leaders usually report academic and administrative activities implemented in their colleges, faculty units, departments, or centers in the previous week to the top-level leaders, who then give the former feedback and guidelines on what they need to do in subsequent weeks. Each meeting of this type lasted from one to two hours, and I observed the entire meeting. While observing the meetings, I took descriptive notes; reflective notes were written afterwards, on the same day as the observations.

These meeting observations benefited my study in several ways. First, they helped me attain a deeper understanding of the power relations between men and women leaders in the selected institutions as well as the participants’ behaviors and status. Second, on the basis of what was observed, I adjusted and modified the questions used for the in-depth interviews, and cross-checked some of the information that the participants had provided me. Third and significantly, these observations helped enhance the quality of the interpretation of data collected by the other methods employed in this study (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). It is also important to mention that as an outsider, I simply conducted pure observation and played the role of a passive participant, given the limited time I could spend in the field (I had only two months to observe two to three institutional meetings at each of the research sites scattering all over the Mekong Delta) (Creswell, 1998; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

Document Analysis

In addition to in-depth interviewing and participant observation, Viet Nam's gender equality law together with documents related to gender issues in Viet Nam, historical background and development of the four institutions under study, and institutional leadership promotion and appointment were reviewed and analyzed. First, the review and analysis of these documents provided me with information to write the profiles of the four institutions. Second, the documents supplied additional information to enlarge some of the findings derived from interview data. Third, the document analysis helped triangulate the data obtained from the in-depth interviews and the observations, thus increasing the internal validity of the findings. Finally, the Vietnamese gender equality law and documents on gender issues deepened my understanding of the legal support that women in general and women in academia in particular receive and helped me compare and contrast women's status in law and in reality.

Data Analysis

Approaches

The data were analyzed by embracing the different steps of phenomenographic analysis (Marton, 1981, 1994; Orgill, in press). First, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Second, "bracketing," which is defined as a process by which researchers make explicit their preconceptions and suppositions about the phenomenon under study so that readers can understand it through the voices of the participants (Creswell, 1998; Holloway, 1997), was applied. I "bracketed" my preconceptions about and assumptions of the experiences, status, and practices of academic women leaders in the MD in order to focus on the transcripts and to examine similarities and differences between the ways in which the participants conceived and understood their experiences of their career advancement (Marton, 1994, p. 4426). The most important reason for this bracketing, or self-examination, was to elucidate my professional

experiences and theoretical beliefs that influenced the data analysis and categorization (Orgill, in press). Further, in so doing, I was able to inform the potential reader and user of all the variables that might have affected the research results.

Third, while examining the transcripts of the interviews, I developed an initial set of “categories of description,” which characterized the variation in how the women leaders experienced, conceptualized, and understood their lived experiences associated with their professional career advancement (Marton, 1981, p. 194; 1994, p. 4427). Because each interview covered multiple aspects of or topics about their experiences, such as (1) the ways they attained their existing leadership positions; (2) their preparation for leadership and development; (3) obstacles to and opportunities for their professional advancement and their meanings, (4) the strategies and techniques they have employed for their advancement; (5) the ways their traditional Vietnamese culture influenced and shaped the nature of their experiences; and (6) their perceptions of themselves as women leaders in a male-dominated world, I developed an “outcome space” for each topic (Orgill, in press, p. 3). “Outcome space” is defined as a set of different ways in which a group of individuals understand a specific topic, an “ordered complex of categories of description” (Marton, 1981, 1994, p. 4427), and a research result (Marton, 1994; Pramling, 1996). The “categories of description” and the “outcome space” are the main results of a phenomenographic study (Marton, 1994).

Fourth, with these initial categories in mind, I reread the interview transcripts to determine whether the categories were sufficiently descriptive and indicative of the data. The goals of the second review were to modify, add, or delete the category descriptions. After that, the data were examined a third time to double check the internal consistency of the categories of description. This process of data review and modification was continued until there seemed to be consistency between the modified categories and the interview data. In other words, “Definitions for categories are tested

against the data, adjusted, retested, and adjusted again” (Marton, 1986, p. 43). The rate of change in the categories gradually decreased, and the whole system of meanings was finally stabilized.

Significantly, when the “outcome space” was stable, I would develop a deep understanding of what was said or meant. To do so, I considered not only specific categories of description, but also the logical relations between them and those between one participant’s conceptions and different topics (Marton, 1994; Orgill, in press). Finally, the data collected from meeting observation and document analysis were compared and contrasted with the interview results to provide more ideas and insights.

There was still one further important step in my data analysis. Marton (1994) pointed out that it is important for the “outcome space” of a phenomenon to be communicated in such a way that other researchers can recognize “instances of the different ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question” (p. 4427). In this regard, I asked a Vietnamese doctoral student, who was also trained at Michigan State University, to check the reliability of the results, because the interviews and transcripts were all in Vietnamese. Since he and I reached agreement on approximately two thirds of the cases, the reliability of my research results was supported (Marton, 1994, p. 4428).

About the Researcher

Creswell (1998) posited that it is important for the researcher to begin data analysis with a thorough description of his or her own personal experience of the phenomenon. This is called “bracketing,” or *epoche*, meaning to refrain from judgment. The objective of bracketing is to suspend or to put aside the researcher’s prior beliefs, prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions about a phenomenon of interest so that he or she can examine the “consciousness itself” in the same way that “an object of consciousness” can be examined (Merriam, 2009, pp. 25-26). Thus, the paragraphs below describe my professional experiences, preconceptions, and assumptions about the status of women academics and the gender practices in higher education in the MD.

I am a female Ph.D. candidate in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) program of the College of Education, Michigan State University (MSU). My research interests are in gender equality, administration and governance, and women and leadership in academia. Feminist perspectives make a lot of sense to me, especially in explaining the unequal status between males and females. Therefore, it is quite appropriate for me to use them as a main part of the theoretical framework of this study. In the summer of 2009, after having conducted pilot interviews with 11 mid-level women leaders at two public multidisciplinary universities and one community college in the MD, I formulated some preliminary ideas about the nature of these academic women's experiences regarding their career advancement.

Before starting my doctoral degree program in August 2007, I had worked as a full-time international relations officer and a part-time English teacher at Can Tho University (CTU) in the MD in southern Viet Nam for more than 12 years. After attaining my master's degree in educational management and human resource development from the University of Sydney in Australia in January 2002, I came back to Viet Nam and continued serving CTU. In October 2002, I was promoted to the position of Deputy Director of the CTU Department of International Relations, and I served in this position until I left for MSU in August 2007.

During the period of serving in this leadership position, I was working in a "male-dominated," "male-identified," and "male-centered" environment (Johnson, 1997). Despite the existence of the gender equality law in Viet Nam and the Committee for the Advancement of Women at my home institution, as well as at most postsecondary institutions all over the country, I frequently witnessed academic women's and women leaders' silence, subordination, and powerlessness. In other words, gender inequality, gender stereotypes and prejudices, male dominance, male identification, and male centeredness are issues that I have encountered in my

own professional and personal life. These negative experiences motivated me to choose “experiences of Vietnamese women in academic leadership” as my dissertation research topic. My preconceptions of Vietnamese women in academia were that they did not have equal status with their male counterparts, and they were discriminated against and underrepresented in leadership positions in the academic world. In this respect, I assumed that there has not yet been gender equality in higher education institutions in the MD, nor all over Viet Nam.

Throughout the processes of data analysis and interpretation, I tried my best to suspend my personal experiences, prior judgment, and preconceptions of the phenomenon under study by simply focusing on the data obtained from the interviews, observations, and documents. The women leaders’ experiences were described and presented from their own perspectives and words and were occasionally compared and contrasted with those of the gatekeepers. However, due to previous experiences of working as a mid-level woman leader in academia in the MD, I may have brought certain biases to this study, especially the interpretation of the findings.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIET NAM AND PROFILES OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

How women in higher education in the Mekong Delta (MD) experienced leadership and how they advanced into powerful positions of influence are key research topics that I explored with mid-level women leaders at two public multidisciplinary universities and two community colleges in the MD. This chapter first presents an overview of the Vietnamese higher education system, including types of institutions, women's access to higher education, their leadership practices, trends influencing the development of Vietnamese higher education, and the overall organizational structure of the system. Next, some facts about the MD, coupled with the characteristics of its higher education, are provided, and synopses of the four higher education institutions selected for this study are presented. The final section outlines brief profiles of the research participants, including their demographic information and interesting facts about their professional careers.

An Overview of the Higher Education System in Viet Nam and the Mekong Delta Vietnamese Higher Education System

Viet Nam is a small country located in Southeast Asia. Its total area is 331,051 square kilometers, slightly larger than the state of New Mexico in the United States. Yet it is a densely populated country, with a population of 86,927,700 (General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2011a). Higher education was started rather early in Viet Nam, with the founding of its first university in the capital city in the North by the middle of the 11th century. However, women could not register for this advanced study until after 1945, when half of the country was liberated from the French and the late President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independent Democratic

Republic of Viet Nam (which is the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam today) in Ha Noi's Ba Dinh square. The history of Viet Nam shows that for a long period of time, since the death of the Trung sisters and Lady Trieu, who were Vietnamese queens in the early the AD 40s and AD 248, respectively, women have not held the position of president of the country (Woods, 2002). Today, although there have been various improvements for women since the enactment of Viet Nam's first Constitution in 1946 and the implementation of the gender equity law in 2006, still, in reality, a gender gap remains in all spheres of social life (T. H. T. Nguyen, 2008). Numerous barriers confront women in their social, economic, cultural, religious, and political participation (Institute for Scientific Socialism, 2007). Therefore, far fewer women than men hold managerial and leadership positions at all levels in almost all fields of life. Furthermore, the positions which the majority of women hold are at low ranks, and thus women do not really have decision-making power (H. D. Nguyen, 2007).

Nevertheless, increasing globalization in the world and its influences in Viet Nam have opened up new opportunities for Vietnamese women to grow and develop, despite their lack of authentic decision-making power. January 11, 2007, marked a turning point in the history of Viet Nam and its higher education when it officially became the 150th member of the World Trade Organization and signed the General Agreement on Trade in Services (WTO, 2008). This agreement has created both opportunities for and challenges to Vietnamese higher education, since cross-border higher education may now enter Viet Nam officially (Varghese, 2007). As a result, women as well as men in academia have been influenced by new trends in the country's drastically changing higher education system. They need to be trained differently and equipped with new skills to best position themselves to find jobs and perform effectively in a turbulent and competitive environment.

Indeed, the new trends in higher education mentioned above have put Viet Nam on a trajectory to educational reform over the past few years so that this enterprise can operate more effectively and make important contributions to the country's socioeconomic development. However, the organizational structure of higher education is still complicated, and its administrative system has many overlaps, hindering its progress. At the top of this system is the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), which supervises and controls the curriculum and almost all academic activities of member institutions. Generally, undergraduate programs last between two and six years, but there is a diversity of public, semi-public, and private colleges, universities, and research institutes or academies offering these programs. Colleges include professional or vocational secondary colleges,⁶ community colleges,⁷ and teacher training colleges.⁸ Universities are specialized or mono-disciplinary⁹ and multidisciplinary.¹⁰ Research institutes¹¹ both conduct research in their specializations and deliver degree programs at the master's and doctoral levels. In the 2009-2010 academic year, there were 149 universities, 227 colleges, and 32 research institutes, both public and non-public, in Viet Nam. In addition to these institutions, existing in Viet Nam today are branch campuses of several foreign universities from Australia, Singapore, and the United States (MOET, 2011b). Domestic higher education institutions accommodated 45,961 university and

⁶ E.g., College of Electricity, College of Mining Techniques, College of Fine Arts and Decoration, etc.

⁷ E.g., Vinh Long Community College, Kien Giang Community College, Ha Tay Community College, etc.

⁸ E.g., Can Tho Teacher Training College, Dong Thap Teacher Training College, Ca Mau Teacher Training College, etc.

⁹ E.g., Nha Trang University of Fisheries; University of Banking, Ho Chi Minh City; University of Economics, Ha Noi; etc.

¹⁰ E.g., An Giang University, Can Tho University, Da Lat University, etc.

¹¹ E.g., Institute for International Relations, Vietnam Academy of Aviation, Viet Nam Academy of Science and Technology, etc.

24,597 college faculty and staff, with women accounting for 45.36% and 48.66%, respectively, coupled with 1,358,861 university and 576,878 college students, among whom female students were 48.56% and 53.03%, respectively (MOET, 2011b).

Although the MOET plays a pre-eminent role, many institutions fall under other ministries and government agencies. For example, universities of medicine and pharmacy are under the Ministry of Health; universities of foreign affairs and foreign trade are under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the Vietnam National University, Ha Noi, and the Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, are under the Prime Minister. These two national universities are part of a network of several universities and colleges in different disciplines and are also called regional universities (MOET, 2011c). In this regard, there are three other universities of this type located in Thai Nguyen in northern Viet Nam and in Hue and Da Nang in central Viet Nam. Regional universities have more autonomy than other universities and colleges. Significantly, they may confer doctoral degrees, send their faculty and staff abroad to be trained in short-term non-degree programs or in long-term degree programs, invite and receive international visiting professors and students to work and study on their campuses, and deliver new training programs which are not on the degree-training list of the MOET. Other universities and colleges in Viet Nam, on the other hand, can only perform these activities with the approval of the MOET and/or their associated ministries. Generally, universities and colleges are under the control of the MOET in terms of curriculum and professional activities (e.g., curriculum development, designing and delivering a new degree program, faculty and staff members' professional training and development, etc.), yet a number of them may receive funding from the people's committees of their cities or provinces. In this regard, their human

resource management, institutional administration, and governance are under the supervision and control of these committees. Clearly, this is a complex system.

A specific look at the Mekong Delta and its higher education will further clarify the intricacies of the Vietnamese higher education system.

The Mekong Delta and Higher Education

Located in the southernmost part of Viet Nam, the MD is an important agricultural region that produces more than 50% of the national rice yield. It has a natural area of 40,518 square kilometers, approximately 12% of the total area of the country, and a population of 17,272,200 people, 20% of the country's population (General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2011a). About 77% of the people in the MD live in rural areas and make their living on farming, growing rice and fruit trees (General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2011b). There are 12 provinces and one city in the MD, and the four institutions recruited for this study are located in four different provinces scattered all across the delta.

Over the last few decades, the MD has been grouped among the regions where higher education, as well as K-12 education, is the least developed. Until recently, there have not been any regional universities in the MD. In fact, the beginning of the 2000s saw the emergence of a diversity of universities in this region, three private and six public, together with multiple professional and community colleges. Before 2000, Can Tho University (CTU) was the only higher education institution responsible for training high quality human resources, which have bachelor's degrees and up, for the whole region. Nevertheless, although CTU has tried hard for many years to improve the quality of its teaching, research, and community service as well as to help other newly-founded institutions to grow, it has not yet met the qualifications set by the MOET to become a regional university. In this respect, the entire system of higher education in

the MD is strictly under the MOET's control, particularly the curriculum and academic affairs. Also, the number of higher education teachers and students has been very low compared with that of other geographical regions in Viet Nam.¹² For example, the total number of university and college students in the MD in 2010 comprised only about 6% of those in the entire country, and the number of faculty members, about 8%, while in the Red River Delta those numbers were 41% and 39%, respectively (General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2011c).

Furthermore, as mentioned above, the implementation of the gender equality law in Viet Nam since 2006 (Gender Equity Law of 2006, 2007) has not resulted in genuine gender equality in women's and girls' access to higher education and their participation in academic leadership. In other words, gender equity in higher education is not any better for females in the MD. In most of the institutions under study (3 out of 4), female students have accounted for approximately 30 – 45 % in the last three academic years. In addition, although female faculty and staff in these four institutions accounted for 45% - 51%, they occupied only 22% - 31% of senior leadership positions. Most of the women held positions as deans, vice deans, directors, and deputy directors of support departments and service centers. At the top level, only one woman in the four institutions held the position of vice rector for academic affairs, but she is currently retired. Without any women in the top rank of administration, women leaders do not truly have a powerful voice and are not equal to men leaders in making important decisions in their institutions.

Promotion to senior leadership positions in higher education institutions in the MD, as well as in many other universities and colleges in Viet Nam, is both merit-based and political.

¹² There are six geographical regions in Viet Nam: (1) the Red River Delta, (2) the Northern midlands and mountain areas, (3) the Northern Central area and Central coastal area, (4) the Central highlands, (5) the Southeast, and (6) the Mekong Delta.

Senior positions are not advertised and then opened for application and competition, as in the U.S. In Viet Nam, the Communist Party is the only political party in power, and it is the leading governing body of the country. As a result, leaders in all governmental organizations are supposed to be Party members. At the university level, a rector or a vice rector must have a doctorate and be a member of the Party; a dean, a vice dean, and a department chair also must have a doctoral degree and be a Party member; and the positions of directors and deputy directors require the candidates to have at least a master's degree. Sometimes, directors or deputy directors need not to be Party members. At the college level, the merit standards are usually one level lower, but the political factors may be more demanding, meaning that candidates for all senior positions must first be Party members. For instance, holding a master's degree and being a Party member may put a competitive candidate in the position of rector or vice rector of a college, while leaders of support departments and services centers may be required to have only a bachelor's degree.

The following brief introductions to the four institutions under study further clarify the complicated structure of higher education in the MD and Viet Nam. Along the same lines, the underrepresentation of women in senior positions of academic leadership as well as their lower levels of advanced education is made clear.

Profiles of the Four Recruited Institutions

Sugar Cane University (SCU)

Founded in 2001 as a community college, called Sugar Cane Community College (SCCC), SCU was turned into a public multidisciplinary university in 2006 to meet the increasing need for tertiary education of its local people. It is located in a poor province in the MD with a population of 1,005,900 (General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2011a). As the only

higher education institution in its province, SCU's mission is to produce high quality human resources at different levels and disciplines, to conduct scientific research and promote its application, and to provide services for the community, making practical contributions to the socioeconomic and cultural development of its home province and the entire MD. The majority of SCU's revenues come from the People's Committee¹³ of its province. In this respect, it has to report its administrative and governing activities to the Committee and is under the Committee's leadership and management. In addition, it has to report its academic affairs to the MOET quarterly and annually.

SCU, just like the other three institutions in this study, employs a vertical centralized structure (Bolman & Deal, 2003). At the top of this structure is the Board of Rectors, consisting of the rector and three vice-rectors, but two of them retired about a year ago. Both the current rector and the remaining vice rector are males. At the same level as the Board is the institutional Communist Party committee, which has 15 members. The Board and the Party committee have the highest decision-making power in the university, and they work together to make all important decisions related to finance, physical facilities, human resources, academic affairs, scientific research, and international relations. They in fact control the work of all the units on campus through authority, annual and quarterly planning, institutional and governmental rules and policies coupled with the Party's policies and guidelines, and monitoring systems (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Right below the Board and the Party Committee is a system of seven colleges, two specialized departments

¹³ The People's Committee is the executive arm of provincial governments, which are subordinate to the central government. The People's Committee of a province is responsible for implementing the Constitution, laws, regulations of government bodies, and resolutions of the provincial People's Council. In each provincial People's Committee, there is a chairman, and there are usually three vice chairmen, and about seven to 13 other members.

equivalent to colleges,¹⁴ 12 support departments, eight centers, and one main library. Under the colleges are specialized departments, and under the support departments and centers are specialized teams or groups. There were no women serving as rector, vice rector, or dean. Although there are women leaders at the middle level, they occupy a smaller percentage of the positions at this rank compared with their male counterparts (42%) and most of them (70.00%) hold positions of deputies or assistants to their male superiors.

SCU is currently one of the fastest-growing key universities in the MD. After more than 10 years of operation, its number of students has increased about 124 times, from 200 in 2001 to 24,799 today (with 11,049, or 44.6%, females). It provides both short-term non-degree and long-term degree programs to meet lifelong occupational and educational needs. Regarding the long-term degree programs, SCU delivered 16 professional secondary (3- or 4-year), 36 college (3-year), and 18 undergraduate (4- or 6-year) programs in the 2010-2011 academic year. In addition, over the last three years, SCU has cooperated with the University of New South Wales in Australia to offer a joint training undergraduate program in economics.

In charge of the domestic training programs are 601 faculty and staff members, of whom 286 (47.59%) are women. Most of the faculty and staff members, about 39%, hold bachelor's degrees; a lower number of them hold or are pursuing master's. Only one SCU faculty member holds a doctoral degree, and he is male. Table 4.1 compares the educational levels of SCU's male and female faculty and staff. As mentioned above, senior appointments at SCU as well as at other higher education institutions in the MD are both merit-based and political. In this respect, no women at SCU could be in the top-rank leadership because none of them has a doctorate.

¹⁴ These departments are under the purview of a board of rectors, not of a college like other specialized departments, and they will be turned into a college in the future when there are sufficient numbers of faculty and staff members with master's and doctoral degrees and enrolled students, according to the standards set by the MOET.

Table 4.1

Educational Levels of SCU's Male and Female Faculty and Staff Members in 2011

Level	Total (Person)	Males (Person)	Percentage (%)	Females (Person)	Percentage (%)
Doctorate	1	1	100.00	0	0.00
Doctoral Students	17	8	47.06	9	52.94
Master's Degree	110	55	50.00	55	50.00
Master's Students	93	43	46.24	50	53.76
Bachelor's Degree	266	122	45.86	144	54.14
Total	487	229	47.02	258	52.98

Overall, more women than men at SCU acquired undergraduate and graduate degrees. However, this does not mean that an equal number of women are in senior leadership positions. The reality at SCU shows that women occupy a small proportion of key leadership positions (see Table 4.2), and the decision-making power is in the hands of their male counterparts and superiors, who serve in higher and more important positions. At SCU, just like at the other institutions in this study, the Director of the Department of General Administration, which has the widest and strongest influence among the support departments, is a male.

Table 4.2

Males and Females in Senior Leadership Positions at SCU in 2011

Position	Total (Person)	Males (Person)	Percentage (%)	Females (Person)	Percentage (%)
Rector	1	1	100.00	0	0.00
Vice Rectors	1	1	100.00	0	0.00
Deans	6	6	100.00	0	0.00

Table 4.2 (cont'd)

Vice Deans ¹⁵	8	2	25.00	6	75.00
Directors	33	25	66.66	8	24.24
Deputy Directors	23	15	65.22	8	34.78
Total	72	50	69.44	22	30.56

Rice University (RU)

Developed as a teacher training college, RC received approval for its establishment from the Prime Minister at the end of 1999. It is the only university in its province, which has a population of 2,149,500 (General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2011a), despite belonging to the system of more than 100 public universities in Viet Nam. Like SCU, it is governmentally and financially administered by the provincial People's Committee, and is academically monitored by the MOET. RU is located in an agricultural province that has been well-known for rice cultivation but has become increasingly commercialized and industrialized. To meet the needs for tertiary education, high professional skills, and standardized knowledge of 1,255,000 working-age inhabitants (from 15 years old and above) (General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2011d), as well as to contribute to the socioeconomic development of its home province and the neighboring provinces in the MD, RU is accountable for (1) training human resources at graduate and undergraduate levels and below, (2) conducting applied research, and (3) transferring technology to production.

Over the past decade, RU has grown not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. In the academic year of 2000-2001, it recruited and trained the first group of students in only five undergraduate programs. Yet, there are today six colleges and one department equivalent to a

¹⁵ Some colleges have two vice deans.

college at RU, offering 28 undergraduate programs, seven college programs in teacher training, and seven professional secondary programs. In addition, since the 2005-2006 academic year, it has trained part-time students, most of whom are employed and want to upgrade their educational levels. Significantly, the year 2009-2010 marked a turning point in RU's development process when it changed its training system from the academic year into the credit system and simultaneously offered its first graduate program in business administration.¹⁶ Also in this academic year, it accommodated 10,695 students, among whom 7,880 were full-time, and employed 1,012 faculty and staff. Although women made up 51.50 % of the RU faculty and staff, full-time female students only accounted for 42.96%. Additionally, though women faculty and staff outnumbered men, fewer women held graduate degrees and served in positions of senior leadership. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show these discrepancies.

Similar to the circumstance at SCU, more women than men at RU hold only bachelor's degrees. In contrast, more RU men than women hold graduate degrees and are pursuing graduate degree programs, while at SCU women and men are almost equal in their education at all levels. However, at both institutions, men are predominant in top- and mid-level leadership positions (see Tables 4.2 and 4.4).

¹⁶ Formerly, in the academic year system, Vietnamese students had to spend a fixed number of years, e.g., 4, 4.5, or 6 years, to complete their bachelor's programs, because in each semester they could only register for a fixed number of courses, e.g. 8, 10, or 12 courses, which had been planned for them. This means that students of the same cohort were enrolled in the same courses throughout their degree program. Conversely, with the credit system today, students can decide the type and the number of courses they want to be enrolled in every semester. In so doing, they can graduate earlier or later, depending on their learning abilities.

Table 4.3

Educational Levels of RU's Male and Female Faculty and Staff Members in 2011

Level	Total	Males (Person)	Percentage (%)	Females (Person)	Percentage (%)
Doctorate	16	15	93.75	1	6.25
Doctoral Students	54	45	83.33	9	16.67
Master's Degree	279	152	54.48	127	45.52
Master's Students	198	151	76.26	47	23.74
Bachelor's Degree	465	207	44.52	258	55.48
Total	1,012	570	56.32	442	43.68

Table 4.4

Males and Females in Senior Leadership Positions at RU in 2011

Position	Total (Person)	Males (Person)	Percentage (%)	Females (Person)	Percentage (%)
Rector	1	1	100.00	0	0.00
Vice Rectors	3	3	100.00	0	0.00
Deans	6	5	83.33	1	16.67
Vice Deans	14	11	78.57	3	21.43
Directors	15	11	73.33	4	26.67
Deputy Directors	25	16	64.00	9	36.00
Total	64	47	73.44	17	26.56

Concerning management, RU has a hierarchical vertical organizational structure in which most of the authority is centralized in the Board of Rectors and the institutional Party Committee. Just like the situation at SCU, the Board and the Party Committee at RU are the most powerful and influential units. There exist at RU six colleges, one specialized department at the college level, nine

support departments, six services centers, and one main library, all of which are under the supervision and control of the Board and the Party Committee. Interestingly, RU also founded the Committee for the Advancement of Women in 2009, and in the last election of the City Council, it recommended the first woman candidate, who was a mid-level leader.

Orange Community College (OCC)

OCC is located in an agricultural province with 1,026,500 people, which is industrializing rather quickly. Founded in 1979 as a college for in-service training, OCC changed its name several times to fit its mission and accountability and to attend to the needs of the Vietnamese education system. MOET founded OCC as a community college in April, 2002. It is a public college under the governmental administration of the provincial People's Committee and under the professional or academic management of the MOET. In this regard, like at SCU and RU, the People's Committee supplies most of OCC's annual revenues, and thus the college has to report all its administrative activities to the committee. Yet the MOET still controls and monitors its curriculum, academic programs, and academic activities, such as the faculty's and staff's professional development, testing, offering new degree programs, and the like. OCC's mission is to train high quality human resources in multiple disciplines at multiple levels (undergraduate, college, and professional secondary), to conduct scientific research, and to transfer research results to local agricultural and industrial production.

OCC also has a vertically coordinated and centralized structure (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The Board of Rectors and the institutional Party Committee control all the academic and administrative activities on campus. Its seven support departments, three services centers, seven faculties, and two specialized departments (at the faculty level) have to report to the Board, which in turn discusses outstanding and important activities with the Party committee to come up with appropriate solutions

or development orientations. In charge of all the existing academic and administrative activities of OCC are 164 faculty and staff members, among whom 45% are women. More women than men at OCC hold master's and bachelor's degrees, 67% and 60%, respectively. However, like at SCU and RU, no women at OCC hold the positions of rector and vice rector. In addition, among 40 mid-level leaders, there are only 13 women, accounting for 32%, and the majority (62%) assume deputy positions. Table 4.5 further reveals the gender gap in leadership roles at OCC.

Table 4.5

Males and Females in Senior Leadership Positions at OCC in 2011

Position	Total (Person)	Males (Person)	Percentage (%)	Females (Person)	Percentage (%)
Rector	1	1	100.00	0	0.00
Vice Rectors	2	2	100.00	0	0.00
Deans & Dept Chairs	9	7	77.78	2	22.22
Vice Deans	7	4	57.14	3	42.86
Directors	10	7	70.00	3	30.00
Deputy Directors	14	9	64.29	5	35.71
Total	43	30	69.77	13	30.23

Clay Community College (CCC)

Clay Community College received the approval from the MOET for its founding in June, 2006. Formerly, it was a continuing education center located in a poor, remote province in the MD, with an existing population of 1,300,800 (General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2011a). Despite being a community college, it is a unique multi-level and multidisciplinary higher education institution in its home province, training high quality human resources at college, professional secondary, and undergraduate levels. CCC's mission is to assist learners in selecting the fields of study suitable for their learning abilities and in applying what they have learned to

their work. Further, it acts as a bridge between intellectuals or scientists and farmers as well as between engineers or technicians and companies, businesses, and factories in its province and all over the MD.

Since the 2007-2008 academic year, CCC has offered six college-level and 12 professional secondary programs and has initiated transfer programs with various universities in the MD and in Ho Chi Minh City. It currently accommodates 5,194 students, 2,744 of whom are females(53.83%). Because of the small number of full-time tenured faculty and staff, totaling 122 people, CCC has had to employ a wide range of adjunct faculty from universities and colleges in the MD and in Ho Chi Minh City to fulfill its instructional responsibilities every year. Nevertheless, it has made many efforts in recruiting young, capable faculty, staff, and administrators, along with upgrading the professional qualifications of its existing personnel, so that it can meet the increasing need for tertiary education of the local residents.

What is most interesting about CCC is that although it is located in a poor and remote area of the southernmost region in Viet Nam, where people are not as well-educated as those in other regions of the country, its female students and female faculty and staff outnumber their male counterparts. Women make up over 53% of the total faculty and staff members of CCC. Moreover, the Board of Rectors and the Party Committee have generated plenty of favorable conditions for women to wield power and to participate in making decisions at multiple levels. In fact, CCC is the only institution in my research sample which had had a female vice rector.

On the one hand, CCC has implemented an array of measures to empower its women faculty and staff and to increase the number of women in leadership roles at all levels. Additionally, the implementation of the gender equality law at CCC sets the quota for women in leadership positions. On the other hand, women hold the smallest proportion of mid-level

positions of leadership at CCC in comparison to the other three institutions. In fact, women currently account for only about 22% of all leadership positions and 25% of mid-level positions (see Table 4.6). Further, at the top level, after the retirement of the only woman vice rector in August, 2011, a male faculty member rather than a female was appointed to fill this position.

Table 4.6

Males and Females in Senior Leadership Positions at CCC in 2011

Position	Total (Person)	Males (Person)	Percentage (%)	Females (Person)	Percentage (%)
Rector	1	1	100.00	0	0.00
Vice Rectors	2	2	100.00	0	0.00
Deans & Dept Chairs	4	2	50.00	2	50.00
Vice Deans	3	3	100.00	0	0.00
Directors	7	6	85.71	1	14.29
Deputy Directors	6	4	66.67	2	33.33
Total	23	18	78.26	5	21.74

The sections above provide a better understanding of the contexts of higher education in Viet Nam and the MD as well as of women's inferior leadership and educational status. The next section specifically profiles the 16 mid-level women leaders along with the five gatekeepers selected for this study. This provides a fuller picture of the experiences and status of women in academic leadership in the MD.

Profiles of Research Participants

The 16 mid-level women leaders who participated in this study were selected because they held positions of power and influence in their universities and colleges and had certain outstanding experiences in their career advancement. They were all from the higher education institutions located in the Mekong Delta in southern Viet Nam. Although I could hardly find

other women leaders at the middle level to interview at their institutions because of their small number, the majority were very happy and willing to participate in my study, and they offered me all necessary support in the field as well as during my data analysis. Moreover and significantly, I was also able to conduct in-depth face-to-face individual interviews with five gatekeepers (three male rectors, one male vice rector, and one female vice rector) from the four institutions under study. These interviews provided me with very useful information about institutional promotion processes and procedures, their perspectives on women's leadership, and the conspicuous gender issues at their institutions. Profiles of the women leaders and the gatekeepers are presented in the order of the institutions where I came to collect data. Within each institution the women leaders' last names appear in alphabetical order and are placed before those of the gatekeepers. All the names of the participants, as well as their institutions, used in this study are pseudonyms, and the names of their centers, departments, faculty units, and colleges are partly changed in order to obscure their identity.

Women Leaders and Gatekeepers From Sugar Cane University (SCU)

Vy Bui (37 years of age). Born into a poor, large family of six siblings, Vy is the only person going to college. Her mother has been a housewife and a saleswoman of a small business her entire life. Her father used to serve as a soldier in the army of the opposite side¹⁷ before the liberation of South Viet Nam in April 1975; after this point in time, he worked as a carpenter for a number of years before he quit and helped his wife, Vy's mother, to run the business. Vy has three important positions at her institution: (1) Interim Director of the Department of

¹⁷ During the Vietnam/American War, the "opposite side" or the "other side" was used to refer to the army of the Nguy regime, which was also the loser. The winning side was the revolutionary force, which liberated the South of Viet Nam and reunified the country on April 30th, 1975, and has been in power since then. From now on, I use "before 1975" to indicate the period during the American or Vietnam War, and "after 1975" is the period after the war.

International Cooperation, (2) Director of the Department of Scientific and Technological Affairs, and (3) Associate Editor-in-chief of the SCU Scientific Journal.

Graduating from her undergraduate program in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in 1996, Vy's intention was to make her living as an English instructor at SCU. She taught for six years. Subsequently, the cooperation projects between her university and the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) – a nongovernmental organization – along with some Canadian universities and colleges since 2003 have created good opportunities for her professional development and involvement in administrative activities. It is these opportunities that shifted her occupation from instruction to administration and caused her to become a full-time administrator. As a result, Vy decided to earn her master's degree in educational studies in 2006.

Despite her continuous service in higher education for more than a decade, Vy became a Party member only two years ago. She commented on the importance of being a Party member: “You see in our management mechanism the Party is the leader, so key positions are usually held by Party members.” She indicated that all of her current positions were appointed by the SCU Board of Rectors with the approval of the provincial People's Committee, which recognized her working and leadership capabilities, coupled with her Party membership. Yet, all her current positions are not permanent. Rather, after five academic years, the Personnel Department of her university collects “approval ballots” from all of her subordinates to help the Board of Rectors decide whether she is still suitable for every single position. Unlike most women leaders at her age, Vy is still single and finds her joy of life in her work and extended family.

Thanh Huynh (42). Thanh is the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning Methodology of SCU, which she has served for more than 20 years. She earned her bachelor's degree in teaching English as a second language (TESOL) and worked as an English instructor in a

high school in her hometown for the first two years of her career. When her province established the first continuing education center, which is SCU today, the provincial Department of Education moved her to the center and promoted her to leader of the foreign languages team. One year later, she became the chairperson of the Department of Foreign Languages. By the end of 2002, when the continuing education center had been turned into a community college, she was transferred to the Teacher Training division and was appointed the head of the division. In 2006, when her community college was upgraded to a multidisciplinary university, her Teacher Training division became the Center for Teaching and Learning Methodology, and she has held the position of director of the center since then. In response to her administrative responsibilities, she decided to pursue her master's program in educational studies, and she attained the degree in 2007.

Although Thanh is currently a Party member, her Party development process was more challenging and time-consuming than Vy's. This process took her almost 10 years because of her father's "bad" work history. Thanh's mother was simply a kindergarten teacher before and after 1975, but her father served as a high-ranking officer in the army of the other side. Reflecting on the purpose of being a Party member, Thanh stated,

Later in my career, I decided to be a Party member. . . . Do you know the reason why? In order to apply for the scholarships for my Ph.D. studies. . . . There have been several cases in this institution that the applicants had won graduate fellowships; yet, when their documents were sent to the People's Committee, they did not receive the approval to start their programs because of bad family histories. In my case, I have got the Party membership, so my family history has already been reviewed and justified to be fine enough.

Born into a large family of seven siblings, Thanh is the first and only person in her family to go to graduate school. She has also set the goal to earn a doctorate within the next few years. Thanh is married and has two young children, one in middle school and the other in elementary school. Her husband is a high school teacher. Many times during the interview she mentioned that she has been so fortunate to be married to a very good and supportive husband, who

constantly shows high empathy and respect for her career and heavy workload, and thus has spent more time cooking and taking care of their children. She felt that for her, as well as for other women, giving birth to, bringing up, and educating children are more important than her career advancement.

Mai Le (39). Mai was the only one among the 16 women participants who was a Ph.D. candidate at the time of the interview. She earned her bachelor's degree in TEFL in 1994 and started her master's and doctoral programs in linguistics a couple of years apart from each other. Mai began her career as an English instructor, and although her job has been oriented more towards administration, she still enjoys teaching and acts as a part-time English teacher at SCU. Currently, she is the Director of the Department of Student Affairs and has served in this position since 2008.

Mai has held two leadership positions in the same institution. In fact, she has been working for SCU since 1994. Before her current position, she served as Director of the Department of International Relations and Head of the Office for Curriculum Development when SCU was a community college. All of her positions were appointed by the SCU Board of Rectors and Party Committee. According to Mai, she did not actually get any promotion in her professional career since she was only transferred between positions at the same level. She argued that perhaps "the management mechanism" and not being a Party member have not enabled her to get any promotion. During the interview, she expressed substantial concern over not being accepted as a Party member because of her husband's very bad family history, in which her father-in-law served as an active member for the other side.

Mai is married and has a young son, who is in elementary school. Her husband also works as an administrator at SCU. Mai has been living around her four sisters and parents since she started working for SCU, and she often receives support for domestic work from them. Thus,

she can commit more time to her work and professional development. Both of Mai's parents served on the revolutionary side during the war.

Chuong Phan (35). Chuong's family, education, and early work backgrounds are relatively different from other participants' at SCU. First, her whole family, consisting of her parents and two siblings, live in Australia; her mother works in a factory, and her father is retired. She is now living with her aunt in her hometown. Second, Chuong was divorced two years ago and does not have any children. Third, her undergraduate degree was in tourism, rather than TEFL, and it was conferred by a university in Ho Chi Minh City. After her graduation in 2000, she worked for a fashion company in Ho Chi Minh City for almost two years before moving to the MD to work for SCU and to rejoin her husband, who had been working for SCU prior to Chuong's graduation. When beginning her job at SCU, she worked as a staff member of the Strategic Plan Development group. Since 2003, she has assumed the position of Chairperson of the Department of Office Administration, which is at the college level. Further, in May 2009, the Board of Rectors assigned her an additional position, Director of the Department of Personnel. Chuong managed to earn her master's degree in public administration in the middle of the 2000s, while she was occupied with a variety of work responsibilities.

Chuong is not yet a Party member. She pointed out that this was because all of her family members are living abroad. Nonetheless, her lack of Party membership has not prohibited her from doing what she wants and prefers at SCU. In fact, according to her, the Rector has a great deal of trust in her and her capabilities and thus always creates favorable conditions for her to fulfill her duties and develop her talent. Chuong did not want to move to Australia to live with her parents in the future, because

If I go there [to Australia], with my characteristics, I can still build my career, but Australia does not lack of talents.... Because talents are not insufficient, I will not be needed [over

there]. In contrast, human resources with high educational levels are not many [in this province]. Consequently, I think that I should stay here to be of some help for the students...

Overall, all the four participants from SCU held master's degrees which they earned while being employed by the university. In so doing, they had to struggle hard to balance study with work and family responsibilities. None of them was a professor or an associate professor. Three were the first generation of college goers in their families. Despite the fact that not all of them were married and had children, they all believed that families and children are more important to women than their careers. All except one began their careers as instructors, but all have been working as full-time administrators and part-time instructors for SCU throughout their professional life. Two of them are Party members, and the other two are not. It was challenging for the latter to attain Party membership because of their "bad" family histories. Moreover, their impossibility to be Party members was attributed to the fact that their home province is located in a "politically sensitive area," where there are plenty of ethnic minorities, particularly the Khmer,¹⁸ as one participant reflected. Accordingly, "the administrative staff members have to undergo strict scrutiny" to be accepted as Party members.

In addition to the interviews with the four women participants presented above, I had the opportunity to interview SCU's Rector and Vice Rector about gender issues, along with the promotion process and procedures for men and women in their institution. Following are some of their demographic information, education, and length of service at their current institution.

¹⁸ Khmer is one of the three ethnic minority groups in the MD, including Khmer, Cham, and Chinese, which usually have lower levels of education compared with the Kinh, the dominant ethnic group in Viet Nam.

Rector Cong Truong (50). Dr. Cong Truong has been Rector of SCU as well as Secretary of the Party Committee¹⁹ at this institution since its founding in the middle of 2006. He is currently also a member of the National Assembly and the Provincial Council (equivalent to a city council in the U.S.). Before holding the position of Rector of SCU, Dr. Cong served as Rector of SCCC for one term, from 2001 to 2006. At the time of the interview with him in March 2011, Dr. Cong was the only person holding a doctorate at SCU. His doctorate is in Vietnamese letters.

Vice Rector Cuong Bui (54). Mr. Cuong Bui was a vice rector at SCCC for five years. Since this college was upgraded to Sugar Cane University in June, 2006, he has held the positions of Vice Rector for academic and domestic (administration, finance, construction, entertainment, and sports) affairs and Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee. His position in the Party Committee requires him to develop and oversee the activities of the university's Youth Union, Labor Union (of which the Women's Tasks Board is a unit), and all the student associations. He was originally trained to be a vocational trainer and worked as an instructor in a vocational school from 1976 to 1993. After that, he earned a master's degree in teacher education and moved to work for SCCC as one of its vice rectors in the beginning of 2001.

Women Leaders and a Gatekeeper From Rice University (RU)

My Cao (49). My is currently assuming many important positions at RU: (1) Director of the Department of Research Management and International Relations, (2) Director of the Resource Center for Community Development, and (3) a member of the Standing Committee of the RU Communist Party. She began her career as a teacher of Russian in 1986. Nonetheless, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990, the Vietnamese people and students no longer wanted to study Russian. As a result, My had to retake an entrance exam, like a high school

¹⁹ The Secretary of the Party Committee is the highest position of authority in an institutional Party committee.

graduate, to pursue her bachelor's program in teaching English as a second language (TESOL), which she completed in 1997. Almost a decade later, she earned her master's degree in TESOL.

My's leadership talent developed rather early in her career. She was elected as associate chair of the department of foreign languages of a teacher training college in her hometown within the first three years of her professional life. Then, two years after earning her second bachelor's degree in TESOL, there was another election in her department, and she was elected as the chairperson and served in this position until she was promoted to two positions as director, as previously mentioned. In fact, My has been working first as a Russian teacher and then as an English teacher and administrator at RU for approximately 25 years. She reflected that she did not set initial goals for attaining her leadership positions. Instead, her capacities and morality were highly valued by her colleagues and the RU Board of Rectors, who also put her in the positions she has held. The Board of Rectors together with the Party Committee also recommended My as a candidate for the city council election last year.

My is still single and is living alone at present. She is the second daughter in a big family of eight siblings. Her parents were elementary school teachers for their entire lives. She reported that her parents were very good followers of Confucius, and she was brought up with many Confucian norms, which have heavily influenced her personal characteristics.

Thu Duong (53). Thu is the most senior among the four participants selected at RU. Thirty years was her length of service in academia in the MD. Yet her leadership started even earlier, in 1975, when she acted as the first student leader of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union in her hometown. Thu has been a Party member for 35 years; her Party membership was accepted when she was still a high school student.

Thu earned her bachelor's degree in political reasoning in 1981. Not until a decade later

could she pursue her graduate program and attain her master's degree in philosophy, with a focus on scientific socialism. She is the first generation of her family to go to college. Thu began her career in 1981 as an instructor of politics in a province located far away from her hometown in the MD. Six years later she moved to work for a teacher training college in her hometown, which is RU today, and was elected as Vice Dean of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities in 1993. After three years, she was transferred to the Department of Marxism – Leninism, which was at the college level, and served in this position until she was appointed as Dean of the College of Political Studies at RU in 2006. Overall, Thu has been working for RU for 24 years, since it was a teacher training college.

Thu's parents both joined the revolutionary force to fight against the French and then the Americans when she was three years old and her youngest brother was one month old. Consequently, she was brought up by her uncle and his wife, and her two younger brothers were brought up by her grandmother's sister. Several times during the interview, she recollected her growing up memories in tears. Because of the lack of parental love and care, she said,

I gave considerable care to my husband and children. [Formerly], when I did not yet do administrative work, I spent most of my time taking care of my husband and children. I took very good care of them.

Thu is the mother of two sons and the grandmother of a little granddaughter. Her older son and her husband also worked in higher education in the MD, and her younger son was a senior in computer science at RU.

Ngoc Le (35). Ngoc has been the director of her university's main library since 2007. After graduating from her bachelor's program in TEFL in 1997, she started her professional career as an English teacher in a high school. More than one year later, with the founding of RU, she moved to work for this university as a full-time librarian and a part-time English teacher. In 2002, she won a

full fellowship awarded by the Henry Luce Foundation, covering all the expenses of her two-year master's degree program in library information at Boston College in the US.

Ngoc was the only participant in this study who articulated that she desired to become a leader right after earning her master's degree. She said this desire originated from her wish to “contribute” and to “do this and that” for her institution. In addition, she saw a number of her colleagues get leadership appointments thanks to their graduate degrees. Nonetheless, she noted,

I was not appointed as a leader then [in 2003] perhaps because I was so young or because of my family responsibilities. After coming back home from my degree program in the U.S., I was not yet able to settle my family affairs down; therefore, the members of the Board of Rectors did not take me into consideration.... However, when the Board of Rectors recognized that good time had arrived, or they saw that I had been mature enough, they promoted me to this position at the end of 2007.

Ngoc is the big sister of her only brother. Her mother was an elementary school teacher before 1975 but shifted to be a small businesswoman after 1975 because of the extremely low salary of teachers after the war. Her father was a bank officer before and after 1975. Ngoc was accepted as a Party member at the end of 2010. She is married and has two young children. Her husband also started working for RU at the same time as she did. Many times during the interview, Ngoc stated how supportive her husband has been throughout her life and since she became a leader. In fact, she commented, “Thanks to my husband support, I have been able to perform well at work. Unless he supported me, I would give up my work a long time ago.”

Dinh Tran (34). Dinh has been the Director of the Center for Foreign Languages and Informatics of RU since 2007. Among the youngest and most capable women leaders at RU, as described by some other participants who recommended her to me, she was appointed Interim Director of this center when she was only 28 years old, and she was promoted to Director two years later. In addition, as an undergraduate student, she was a proactive leader of the Youth Union and thus was admitted into the Party in her senior year. Nevertheless, Dinh did not intentionally plan to

attain these leadership positions because she argued that leadership “is quite new compared with what I do every day.” Consequently, she had mixed feelings of “having good luck and being coerced” when the Board of Rectors first appointed her as Interim Director.

After attaining her bachelor’s degree in TEFL in 1999, Dinh came to work for RU, which was then a teacher training college, as an English instructor in the Department of Foreign Languages. In 2002, through a cooperation project between her university and the US Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), she was sent to Bluffton University, to be trained in a two-year master’s degree program in teaching English. Right after her graduation from Bluffton, she came back to work for RU and was promoted to Interim Director of the Center for Foreign Languages in 2005. She commented that at first she did not like administrative work at all, but

I currently really like it because it generates many interesting challenges and many situations which require me to have a general understanding of the work I am in charge of and to solve the situations in such a way that is able to please at least the constituents.

Dinh is married, and her husband is an architect. She wanted to pursue her Ph.D. program but had to delay it because “I must have a baby first,” due to pressure from both her parents and parents-in-law. Dinh is living with her husband’s extended family, in which women are supposed to do all the “work in the kitchen, but men have never touched it.” She is the big sister of not only her only blood sister but also of many cousins in her father’s extended family. She commented that as her father is the eldest son in his family, comprised of three sons, he was badly criticized when not giving birth to any sons. However, as Dinh is the first person in her extended family to go to graduate school, she has received substantial respect from her cousins, uncles, and aunts. As a result of her outstanding accomplishments in her career, which her male cousins could not achieve, her aunts’ and uncles’ criticisms of her father have ended.

Dinh's parents, before 1975, lived in a province in the North of Viet Nam, above the 17th parallel,²⁰ and were students. After 1975, both her father and her mother moved to the South and worked for a forestry company. Prior to her father's retirement, he acted as one of the top leaders in his company. Dinh noted that whenever she encounters difficulties and challenges in her work, she usually consults with her father, although his expertise is not in education; "because of his rich experiences of human resource management, he can give me many good ideas."

In this study, five women from RU were originally identified and selected, first through my professional network, and then through snowballing techniques. However, after reviewing their interview transcripts, I could pick only four to analyze because the information provided by the fifth participant was not clear and consistent. All four women presented above have been working for RU since it was a teacher training college. They all hold master's degrees, two of which were from the United States, and two from Viet Nam. Interestingly, they are the first generation of their family to go to graduate school. All these women began their careers as instructors and have been working as instructors and administrators throughout their professional career. Unlike the women leaders from SCU, they all are Party members, and their Party development processes were not so challenging. It is noteworthy that leadership capabilities emerged rather early in two of them, when they were in high school and in their undergraduate program.

Rector Thong Ly (59). In addition to the interviews with five mid-level women leaders, I conducted an in-depth face-to-face interview with the Rector of RU, Mr. Thong Ly. Besides the position of Rector of RC, he is also the current President of the Committee for the Advancement of Women and Vice Chairman of the People's Committee of his province. He has served as

²⁰ The 17th parallel was a natural border line dividing the North and the South of Viet Nam during the Vietnam/American War.

Rector of RC since the end of 2007. Before that, he was a vice rector for finance, scientific research, and Party affairs at RU for four years and Director of the provincial Department of Science and Technology for another four years. Rector Thong received a Fulbright scholarship and earned his master's degree in public administration at Harvard Kennedy School of Government in the United States before assuming these top positions.

Women Leaders and a Gatekeeper From Orange Community College (OCC)

Le Ho (48). Growing up during the war years, Le had to move from one province to another in the Mekong Delta for her schooling. She is the fifth child in a family of 11 siblings. Before the American War, her father was a teacher in an elementary French school; during and after the war, he worked as a truck driver. Her mother was a housewife. Despite having to support 11 children, her father, as she said, always tried to find good schools for her as well as for her brothers and sisters. One of her younger brothers is now living in the US and is serving in the US marines, and she commented that this was possibly one of the main reasons for her not being accepted as a Party member. Nevertheless, she noted that she was still promoted to important leadership positions at OCC due to the liberal minds of her institution's top leaders, her working capabilities, and her high commitment to the common work of her faculty.

Le has held the position of Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of OCC since the beginning of 2008. Prior to being promoted to this position, she served as Vice Chairperson of the Department of Foreign Languages for two terms or eight years, and as Associate Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences for two terms. With 24 years of service at OCC, Le is among the leaders who have spent most of their professional lives at this institution. She in fact began her career as an instructor of Russian at OCC in 1987. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990, which led to a considerable decrease in the popularity of Russian in Viet Nam,

she decided to earn her second bachelor's degree in TESOL. Then, regardless of the heavy workload of an associate dean and then a dean, Le managed to complete her master's program in 2009, becoming the first person in her family to hold a master's degree.

Le was divorced about 15 years ago. She reflected that among the sisters in her family, she was the "most miserable" because of her broken up marriage. However, her marriage break-up has caused her to become stronger and more independent, as she recollected,

As my husband was still with me, I was so dependent on him: I did not learn how to drive a motorbike; I waited for him to do everything for me, and even the clothes I wore I could not pick; rather, he liked that color, I wore that color; he did not like me wearing jeans, I did not wear jeans; he liked me wearing my hair long, I wore long hair.... However, when he left, I suddenly thought that if I collapsed and could no longer stand up, life would continue going on rather than stop for me. Consequently, I had to be better than I was before to redefine myself and to make myself known to the others.

Le has chosen to be a single mother since her divorce. Her only son, who was a second-year undergraduate student, is her "valuable property." Bringing him up and helping plan his upcoming activities have been her joy and love of life.

Thuy Huynh (48).

I think that I have been working here for many years. Moreover, through, first, my level of education; second, my professional qualifications; third, my working capability; and last, my ability to solve problems, the Board of Rectors saw that I had the knowledge and the capability required, so they appointed me to this position. (Thuy Huynh)

Thuy was appointed Director of the Department of Scientific Affairs and International Relations at OCC about a year ago, and she was admitted to the Party five years ago. Before holding this position, she had served as deputy director of this department for one term. Like the majority of mid-level women leaders in the MD, Thuy did not have any ambition to attain senior leadership positions and thus did not develop any strategies for her career advancement. For her, professional advancement just happened when she performed her work to the best of her ability, had professional

talents, and worked hard for the common good of her division. In addition, she commented repeatedly during the interview that as “an unmarried woman,” her biggest passion in life is “working and lifelong learning.” It is her non-stop learning, she believed, that helped her perform her work most effectively, which in turn helped her achieve the attention, trust, and respect of her colleagues and the top leaders of her institution who put her in leadership positions.

Like Le, Thuy spent almost her entire professional life, 23 years, at OCC. After earning her bachelor’s degree in agriculture in 1987, she began her career as an instructor at the Faculty of Agriculture. However, “because of the college’s new work requirement, I was transferred to the Registrar’s Office to be in charge of the academic planning.” While working at this office, Thuy commented, she had to read a wide range of reference materials in English. As a result, she decided to earn her second bachelor’s degree in TESOL in 1996. Not until a decade later could she attain a master’s in agriculture. She reflected that she had to try hard to balance her work and study responsibilities while pursuing her master’s program, but she was proud that she was the only person in her extended family going to graduate school.

Thuy was born to a family of five siblings. Before and after 1975, her parents owned a small business and also worked on their small farm. Both of them passed away years ago. Despite being single and living on her own, Thuy really enjoys her busy work life.

Bich Ly (45). Bich is currently Director of the Department of Academic Inspection and Quality Accreditation and a member of the OCC Communist Party Standing Committee. Prior to holding the position of director, she assumed a number of key leadership positions at OCC, such as Chairperson of the Department of Social Sciences, Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, and Director of the Department of Scientific and External Affairs. Bich commented that her leadership started when she was an undergraduate student, sharing a room with five

other female students. Although there were two more senior students in the room then, everybody “respected me and considered me the room leader. They asked for my opinions about everything. This was generally because I did whatever I could for everybody without requesting them to do the work with me or for me.” This is also her existing leadership style. She reflected, “After everybody saw I did whatever I could for them, they came and did the work with me perhaps because they respected me. And I have seen the same thing in my work environment.”

Bich planned to be a Russian teacher when completing her undergraduate education in teaching Russian as a foreign language. Due to a lack of demand for Russian, she could teach it at OCC for only one year. Just like some other participants, she had to earn another bachelor’s degree in TESOL, due to the loss of interest in Russian after the fall the Soviet Union in 1990. It took her four years, from 1992 to 1996, to complete her second degree program. Currently, irrespective of numerous work and family responsibilities, she is pursuing her master’s program in educational administration.

Bich is the mother of a 12-year-old girl. Her husband is working for a construction management company in their home province, yet his work always sends him away from home. Bich reflected that many times within a year she had to live as a “widow” for a couple of weeks or months, and had to get up before 4 a.m. to prepare meals for her and her daughter. However, “whenever he [her husband] is at home, I can sleep until 5 a.m. or 6 a.m. because he always gets up early to cook for our daughter,” she said.

Hong Nguyen (39). Hong’s career as an English instructor at OCC began right after she graduated from her bachelor’s program in TESOL in 1995. She did not attain her first administrative position as Chairperson of the Department of Foreign Languages in the Faculty of Social Sciences until 12 years later. However, less than two years after assuming this first

position, she was appointed Director of the Center for Foreign Languages. Hong has served in these two positions since then. Moreover, she has been a Party member since 2003.

Hong is the only child in her family. Her mother was an elementary school teacher for her entire working life, but her father did many different jobs in his life. Before 1975, he attained his bachelor's degree from a university of pedagogy and worked as a middle school teacher for a couple years. After that, he was drafted into the army of the other side and served as a captain. After the war, he had to support his family by working as a radio repairman and sometimes as an English interpreter, but he passed away more than 10 years ago from a serious illness. Hong reflected, "I only understood many years later that I had learned a lot from my father..., especially from listening to a variety of foreign radio programs with him."

Hong had an unforgettable experience with her undergraduate years. She noted that her family led a very poor life around the time she first entered the university, so she tried her best to be a high-performing student:

I only wanted to get high scores in order to win a fellowship and not to pay my tuition fees. Therefore, I did my best to be in the top 25 students of my class. To achieve this goal, I could not do anything else except trying my best to learn, learn, and learn, and not to go out with friends. In addition, because I did not have extra money for entertainment, I could only study in my free time. Also, because of my family's severe financial difficulty, I came here [went to the university] only for my studies. All day long, there was only the word *learning* in my head.

Hong went back to her old university to earn her master's degree in English teaching methodology in late 2008. Although she wants to earn her doctorate abroad, she has not been able to do that because her mother really needs her to be by her side. Currently, as a single divorced woman without children, Hong is not under pressure to balance work and family but can devote most of her time and energies to work. Nevertheless, despite being the first person in her family to attain a graduate degree, she feels guilty with her parents and grandparents because

“So far I have been a nice daughter and granddaughter. But regarding my marriage issue, I am not nice.... I am getting older but have neither a husband nor a child.”

Diem Tran (53). Diem is the most senior among the five women at OCC who participated in this study. In fact, she has been working at this institution first as a biology instructor and then as a biology instructor and an administrator since 1981, right after graduating from her bachelor’s program. She is now in her second term as Associate Dean of the Faculty of Basic Sciences, and she also serves as Chairperson of the Labor Union of her faculty. As a senior Party member, Diem discussed the influences of the Party membership on her professional appointment:

In governmental organizations and companies, the influences of the Party are very heavy. Although I was elected by my colleagues, I guess that if I were not a Party member, the [top] leaders of my college would not approve my nomination. Because on my election day, there was the presence of the members of the Board of Rectors, and all of them are Party members. Accordingly, if I had not met the standards they set up, they might have nominated other candidates.

In addition to the factor of being a Party member, Diem attributed her attainment of leadership positions primarily to her “high level of education,” “excellent professional expertise,” “leadership capability,” “commitment to the common good,” “fairness in treating people,” and “ability to be a center of solidarity.” Unlike leadership positions in the support departments at her college, those in faculties are elected, rather than appointed. Consequently, she commented that without these factors, her colleagues would not have voted for her.

Diem is a widow and a mother of two boys, one of whom has earned his undergraduate degree, and the other is in college. Her husband died from a fatal disease a few years ago. Diem reflected that her husband was a “smart and talented man” and had held leadership positions before she did. Accordingly, to help him fully concentrate on his work, she had to sacrifice her own development and advancement in order to “spend the entire [all] of my time taking good

care of our children, educating them, cooking for them, taking them to school, and picking them up”. This was also the main reason causing her to delay pursuing her master’s program until both of her children could take good care of themselves. Furthermore, Diem believed that “It was extremely difficult for high-achieving women to balance family and career.... The majority of successful women are divorced. Beside their achievements are their imperfect families.”

Overall, the five women from OCC selected for this study are rather diverse in their specializations as well as their marital status. Three of them had to earn second bachelor’s degrees in English teaching because of the environmental change and the requirements of their new work. Although one of them is not yet a Party member, she was quite happy with her non-Party status and identified that this did not bring about any impediments to her career advancement. All the women started their careers as instructors and have been working at OCC from 15 to 30 years. Moreover, they all are the first people in their families to go to graduate school.

Like at SCU and RU, I had the opportunity at OCC to conduct a face-to-face interview with its rector. Although the interview was less than 45 minutes long, 15 minutes shorter than those with other gatekeepers, since the rector had an urgent meeting with the Director of the provincial Department of Education, the information on women leaders that he provided was really informative and fascinating.

Rector Bach Nguyen (53). Mr. Bach has been the Rector of OCC since October, 2009 and the Secretary of the institutional Party Committee since June, 2010. Before moving to OCC and holding these most pivotal positions, he assumed important positions of power in a number of commercial and industrial governmental companies in his home province, where OCC is located. For example, immediately prior to his career at OCC, he worked as Director of the Department of Investment Management under the Industrial Zone Managing Board of his province for nine years.

Nonetheless, Rector Bach began his career as an instructor of economics in a college of commerce. Both of his bachelor's and master's degrees are in economics.

Women Leaders and a Gatekeeper From Clay Community College (CCC)

Dao Luu (29). Dao is the youngest participant in this study, as well as the youngest woman leader in her college. Unlike other participants in this study, Dao earned two baccalaureate degrees – one in youth mobilization and the other in politics – and shortly thereafter she attained her bachelor's degree in governmental administration. Before moving to CCC and assuming the position of Deputy Director of the Department of General Planning, she worked for a couple of years as a program manager and treasurer for the Children's House, which was under the supervision of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union in her city. Attaining her existing leadership position at CCC resulted from a combination of her own intentions, professional aspirations, and fortunate opportunities, as she reflected:

At that time, the Rector of the college [CCC] was looking for a deputy director, and he wanted to find a female because personnel management requires both rigidity and gentleness. In addition, this task needs a woman's considerateness. And I heard the Rector looking for a female with such and such characters. The Rector himself was formerly a leader of the Youth Union in this province. Thus, I came to see him and asked him to accept my transfer from the Children's House to his college. I wanted to create a new challenge for myself to diversify my work and to have more opportunities.... I then thought that this was a great opportunity that I had to take in order to advance further in my career.

This job transfer was right after her graduation from her bachelor's program, when she also recognized that "My existing job was no longer appropriate for me." So far, Dao has been in this leadership role for nearly four years. Moreover, she is also Secretary of the Party Committee of her department.

Dao is the big sister of three siblings. Before 1975, her father joined the revolutionary force and acted as a security guard, and since 1975 he has been working as a policeman; her mother has been an elementary school teacher throughout her career. Dao is married and has two

young children at kindergarten age. Her husband is a police officer. Dao and her family are living with her parents-in-law, and she complained that “Men have time to participate in many programs and activities in their institutions. Women’s time is more limited. Living in in-law families, women cannot frequently go on business trips far away from home as men can do.”

Hoa Ngo (53). Hoa’s parents fought as guerrillas for the revolutionary force during the American War. Her father was killed in a harsh battle in the MD in 1964, when he was only 28 years old, leaving her, along with her four siblings, for her “frequently absent” mother. Therefore, she reflected in tears that after her father’s death, she and her four siblings had to live with her paternal grandparents in poverty, because her mother continued participating in the war and could not live with them.

Trained and employed right after the wartime when the socioeconomic and political conditions of Viet Nam were not yet stable and the whole country was undergoing extreme poverty and hunger, Hoa experienced multiple changes in her occupation. She reflected,

Right after the reunification of the country [in 1975], because my family was too poor to support my undergraduate studies in a university, I planned to pursue my tertiary education in a teacher’s training college. However, the local authority of my home province placed me in an only two-month teacher training course [rather than a three-year program like today] because of the pressing needs for teachers of many localities in the country then. And after the course, I was assigned to teach in a worker-farmer supplementary school.²¹

Six years later, Hoa moved to teach in an elementary school located about 60 kilometers away from her home province. In the next 15 years, because of her husband’s changing workplace and the high need for teachers of multiple localities in the MD, she had to change her workplace several more times. Hoa did not end up working for CCC, which was a continuing education

²¹ A worker-farmer supplementary school was constructed to provide remedial programs in reading, writing, and fundamental math for workers and farmers, who were the two basic revolutionary forces during the war, many of whom were illiterate.

center then, until she was 40 years old. As soon as her career started at this center, she was promoted to Director of the Office for Personnel Management and General Administration because of “my maturity compared with that of other staff members.” Regardless of her family’s good history, Hoa was not admitted to the Party two years after holding this position, because, as she commented, developing Party membership for elementary school teachers was very limited.

Hoa served in the above-mentioned leadership position for nine years, until her center was upgraded to community college. She then asked the Board of Rectors to allow her to resign from this position, since she believed that “Administrative work is too complicated for me, as a woman.” By that time, Hoa had earned two bachelor’s degrees, one in elementary education and the other in political education, and she was only 49 years old, so the Board members decided to appoint her as Chairperson of the Department of Political Studies, which is directly under their purview. She was very pleased to have served in this position since 2007, because “I primarily work in my specialized field, which means teaching the general courses in political education, such as basic principles of Marxism and Leninism, ... and do the management within my field.”

Hoa is married and has three adult children, all of whom have graduated from college. Her husband works for the Books and School Supplies Company of her province; he formerly held some leadership posts, including principal of an elementary school.

Linh Pham (49). Linh has been employed for 30 years but has been working at CCC for only five years. Interestingly, she came directly into CCC as Director of the Department of Finance and Facilities Management, and she has been in this role since 2006. In addition, she is holding some other powerful positions: Secretary of the Party Committee of her department, Associate Chairperson of the CCC Labor Union, and Head of the CCC Women’s Tasks Board.

Like Hoa, Linh pursued her tertiary education and began her career during the period after the American War, so there were many changes in her career path. After completing her first year as an undergraduate student in Vietnamese literature, she had to drop out and work as an accountant for a company of which her uncle was the director, because her family could no longer financially support her. While working for this company, she managed to attain her bachelor's degree in finance and accounting from a continuing education center. In the next 10 years, her work was shifted to two other companies and to the Center for Culture and Information of her home province. It was this center that saw the emergence of Linh's leadership, first as Vice Head of the Office for General Administration, next as Head of this office, and finally as Deputy Director of the center, to which she was appointed four months prior to her transfer to CCC. Linh identified that her former job at the center motivated her to earn her second bachelor's degree in journalism. Currently, she is studying for a certificate in advanced political reasoning.

Linh's personal interest is learning, and she noted that she did not intentionally plan to attain any leadership positions in her career. Her appointment to the position of Director of the Department of Finance and Facilities Management was "my whole process of continuous efforts to develop and improve myself." She reflected that leadership is a "continuous" and "tireless" learning process:

My current position is not a leadership position but is a reflection of my ability. But in order to perform my existing work well, I need to devote myself to self-training. This means that every day I have to further improve myself and try to fill the gaps in my knowledge. Consequently, since I started my work at this college, whenever there is a problem related to my specialization, I have read more books or consulted with my colleagues or other professional organizations like the Department of Finance or the Treasury [in her province]. Generally speaking, knowledge is unlimited. I do think so, and from now until the time I retire, I think that I still have to learn and improve myself.

Linh and her husband have an adult child, who was in his senior year of college. Her husband is a musician and a music composer. She described her husband as "very supportive" to her career and commented that he frequently assists her in "cooking and rearing and educating

our son” and always offers her “professional encouragement.” Linh’s father was a government official before 1975 and only worked on his farm after 1975. Her mother has been a housewife over the course of her life.

The three women from CCC presented above have different professional backgrounds, which are also more diverse in comparison with those of the women from SCU, RU, and OCC. Two of them held two bachelor’s degrees in different disciplines, but none of them went to graduate school. In addition, they did not start their careers at the same institution, like most of the women in the three other institutions did. Consequently, their length of service at CCC is relatively short, ranging from three to 13 years, even though one woman will retire in two years. All of them are Party members, and two are secretary of their department’s Party committee.

I also conducted two in-depth face-to-face interviews with the dean of the College of Agriculture and Fisheries, but the information obtained from both interviews was very general and neutral; therefore, I decided not to use her transcripts for my data analysis. Moreover, I was fortunate to be able to interview the vice rector of CCC, who was the only top-level woman leader among the four institutions under study. However, she retired nearly five months later and did not respond to any e-mails that I sent her for some follow-up questions.

Vice Rector Dep Tran (55). Throughout her professional career, Mrs. Dep worked for higher education in the Mekong Delta as a teacher and administrator. Right after earning her bachelor’s degree in mathematics, she began her occupation as a math teacher in the Teacher Training College in her home province. Her leadership advancement process took a rather long time because she was not promoted to Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences of this college until 15 years later. A few years after that, the provincial People’s Committee transferred her to the Continuing Education Center to be its deputy director. She held this position for two years,

and then the center was upgraded to a community college, which is currently Clay Community College, and she was reappointed as Vice Rector for academic affairs and training. My interview with Rector Dep was in the first week of March, 2011, and she said that she would retire by July, 2011, at the age of 55. Her highest degree is a master's in algebra, and she felt regretful that she did not have any opportunity to earn a doctorate in her professional life.

Summary of Participants' Profiles

To sum up, the 16 women participants were somewhat different in age, marital status, and family backgrounds. The youngest participant was in her early career, the three oldest ones were in their late career, and the majority (75%) were in their midcareer. Three had never been married nor had had any children; two were divorced without children and one was divorced with children; eight were married with children and one married without children; and one was a widow with children. Their parents did different things before 1975: fighting for the revolutionary force, fighting or working for the other side, or being normal people earning their living from farming, teaching, or running small businesses. However, the participants were similar in that the majority of them (87.5%) started their careers as instructors and have been working as faculty members and administrators throughout their professional lives. Also, more than half of them (62.5%) held bachelor's degrees in teaching English and/or Russian as a foreign or second language, and most of them (81%) went to graduate school. Further, an overwhelming majority (94%) did not plan to become leaders in their careers. For them, appointments to leadership positions just happened when they demonstrated that they were professionally capable, attained more advanced degrees, and had a long-established reputation of being committed to the common good. Nearly all of them accepted that being a Party member played a decisive role in their career advancement, but not all of them were admitted to the Party. Significantly, because I had promised to keep their information

confidential, most participants were very open and articulate in the course of the interviews and thoughtfully described their work and life experiences at length. Moreover, some of them were hugely emotional and cried when describing their past experiences. One of them told me through emails later that a few of my questions accidentally touched the most sensitive parts of her emotion. Last but not least, 12 participants (75%) gave feedback and minor corrections to their interview transcripts, which I sent to them by email. Table 4.7 below briefly summarizes the profiles of the 16 women participants.

Table 4.7

Professional Background of Women Participants

Participant	Age	Job Title	Years of Service in Higher Education
Sugar Cane University (SCU)			
Vy Bui	37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim Director of Department of International Cooperation • Director of Department of Scientific and Technological Affairs • Associate Editor-in-chief of the SCU Scientific Journal 	15
Thanh Huynh	42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Center for Teaching and Learning Methodology 	20
Mai Le	39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Department of Student Affairs 	17
Chuong Phan	35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairperson of Department of Office Administration • Director of Department of Personnel 	10
Rice University (RU)			
My Cao	49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Department of Research Management and International Relations • Director of Resource Center for Community Development • Member of the Standing Committee of RU Communist Party 	25

Table 4.7 (cont'd)

Thu Duong	53	• Dean of College of Political Studies	30
Ngoc Le	35	• Director of Main Library	> 12
Dinh Tran	34	• Director of Center for Foreign Languages and Informatics	12
Orange Community College (OCC)			
Le Ho	48	• Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences	24
Thuy Huynh	48	• Director of Department of Scientific Affairs and International Relations	24
Bich Ly	45	• Director of Department of Academic Inspection and Quality Accreditation • Member of the OCC Communist Party Standing Committee	21
Hong Nguyen	39	• Chairperson of Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Social Sciences • Director of Center for Foreign Languages	16
Diem Tran	53	• Associate Dean of Faculty of Basic Sciences • Chairperson of the Labor Union of Faculty of Basic Sciences	30
Clay Community College (CCC)			
Dao Luu	29	• Deputy Director of Department of General Planning • Secretary of the Party Committee of Department of General Planning	4
Hoa Ngo	53	• Chairperson of Department of Political Studies	> 13
Linh Pham	49	• Director of Department of Finance and Facilities Management • Secretary of the Party Committee of Department of Finance and Facilities Management • Associate Chairperson of the CCC Labor Union • Head of the CCC Women's Tasks Board	5

Regarding the five gatekeepers, three of them have been full-time administrators throughout their professional life; the two others were instructors at the beginning of their careers for several years before moving to full-time administrative ranks and holding powerful positions of leadership. All three rectors used to or are currently holding additional leadership positions outside their institutions. All the gatekeepers are highly knowledgeable about gender issues and the practices of women's leadership in their institutions, as well as in their provinces. Therefore, the information that I collected from their interviews was very beneficial to my data analysis.

The next chapter will summarize the major findings which are organized by themes emerging from the data.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

This qualitative study sought to understand the nature of the experiences of women leaders in higher education in the Mekong Delta (MD) and their professional career advancement processes. This chapter presents the major findings obtained from the analysis and synthesis of information gathered from the in-depth interviews with 16 mid-level women leaders,²² from the participant observations of a number of high-ranking institutional meetings in the four selected institutions, and from the review of national documents on gender equity along with institutional documents on faculty and staff promotion and appointment. Some of the findings were based on or compared and contrasted with the data obtained from the interviews with five gatekeepers (three rectors and two vice rectors of the four institutions under study). The major recurring themes are (1) contrasts between gender equity policies and social and institutional practices, (2) women's pathways to powerful positions, (3) women's leadership and management styles, (4) opportunities for and challenges to women's career advancement, (5) cultural influences, and (6) the participants' recommendations for enhancing women's career advancement.

Gender Equality Policies Versus Social and Institutional Inequalities

At the National Level

Viet Nam passed its gender equality law on November 29, 2006 (Gender Equity Law of 2006, 2007). According to Article 14 of this law, men and women have equal rights and access to schooling, higher education and training, and professional development. Moreover, the National Committee for the Advancement of Vietnamese Women implemented a project for the advancement

²² Hereafter I will use the terms *the participants*, *the women participants*, *the women*, or *the women leaders* to refer to the mid-level women leaders, and *gatekeepers* to refer to the rectors and vice rectors of the four institutions under study.

of Vietnamese women, from 2006 to 2010. Also, the Party has launched the project, *Increasing the Proportion of Women Participating in Leadership Roles*, so that there will be more and more women leaders at the national level. Regardless of this law and the implementation of these projects, women in Viet Nam still have lower educational levels and leadership positions than men. In 2010, the percentage of women pursuing graduate education was less than 35% of graduate students (National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam, 2006), while women outnumbered men in the population, 50.54% and 49.46%, respectively (General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2010). Further, the statistics provided by 13 ministries in Viet Nam at the end of 2011 showed a substantially lower proportion of women than men holding leadership positions in the central government bodies: ministers, 2/22 (9.09%); deputy ministers, 10/133 (7.52%); department directors and equivalent positions, 34/567 (6%); and department vice directors and equivalent positions, 218/1,434 (15.2%) (Chau, 2011).

The above gender inequalities were reflected in the comment of Le, a participant from Orange Community College (OCC), “By and large, gender equality does not exist in society.” She gave a specific example of the Vietnamese women’s national soccer team, saying that when this team won the championship in the Southeast Asian Sea Games a few years ago, the money they received as their prize only equaled a small fraction of the money their male counterparts received for a lower prize. Le explained,

This is not fair because women also played for the same amount of time, the same number of halves, and even won a higher prize.... Moreover, in the government bodies, you see, how many women leaders there are. You can only count them on your fingers, but men do not outnumber women in the population. (Le, OCC)

Interestingly, some other participants argued that the gender equality law was enacted because there has not yet been gender equity in society. Further, more than half of the participants (56%) and the majority of gatekeepers indicated that men’s and the public’s conservative perceptions of

women's social roles have largely not changed. In other words, change is going on "very slowly, only step by step." Significantly, "men seldom like women to be their directors or superiors and thus are not willing to have them trained to be leaders" (Mr. Thong Ly, Rector of Rice University—RU—Vice Chairman of the People's Committee in his province, and President of the provincial Committee for the Advancement of Women). However, the change in people's and, in particular, men's perceptions as well as its influence on women and their social status is very important to women's development and advancement in their careers. The overwhelming majority of participants noted that "women's potential" cannot be "fully" or "further developed" unless "people's views," "perceptions," or "thinking" of women and their roles really change. An in-depth look at some typical administrative activities implemented by the four institutions under study will further clarify the gap between gender equality policies and practices in higher education in the MD.

At the Institutional Level

At the two universities and two colleges in this study, all the women participants and gatekeepers commented that although gender equity is an issue of great concern to the boards of rectors and the party committees, there were not any education programs to help faculty, staff, and students learn about and master the key contents of the gender equality law. Moreover, none of the institutions developed any support programs or services to assist women in overcoming challenges and moving up their career ladder.

Professional promotions and appointments. Promotion to leadership positions is a significant event in a woman's professional life, and most of the participants talked proudly about their past and most recent leadership appointments, despite their efforts not to show that they were ambitious and immodest. On the one hand, the institutional documents, the

gatekeepers, and more than half of the participants (56%) indicated that the promotion standards and criteria applied to men and women are the same. In other words, there is nothing different on paper regarding the promotion of men and women academics. Additionally, three among the five gatekeepers (60%), but only one among the 16 women (6%), noted that women usually receive priority for promotion over their male competitors if they both are equally qualified. The views of 56% of participants that promotion is an equal process for men and women are best illustrated by the following comments:

The standards must be unified. Both men and women, for example, must hold a master's degree if they are to be promoted to dean of their faculty. Besides, they must certainly be trained in an appropriate field. That's it. It is not the case that deans must be men, and women are supposed to be others. (Hoa, CCC)

Hoa is from Clay Community College (CCC), where one of the foremost standards required from candidates for a dean's post is their master's degree. At a university, this standard is higher: candidates must hold a Ph.D. degree. Moreover, their specialization must fit the specialized field of their future faculty unit or college. For instance, the dean of a college of agriculture must have a master's or Ph.D. degree in agronomy, soil science, agricultural economics, and the like. If a man or a woman candidate meets these requirements, according to the current gender equality law, Hoa suggested either he or she should have an equal opportunity to be promoted to dean, rather than having her serve as associate dean for her male competitor. Some other participants indicated that requirements for leadership appointments include professional capabilities (usually including one's work abilities and excellence in his or her specialization), party membership, moral standards (generally being a good citizen, being a nice colleague, and getting along well as well as collaborating effectively with people inside and outside of the institution), and colleagues' support; the candidate's sex is not an overt focus:

In my last promotion, sex was not mentioned. Nothing was mentioned about males and females, but only professional capabilities were, professional capabilities coupled with some political factors such as being a Party member. In fact, professional capabilities, personal morality [moral conduct], and Party membership were taken into consideration, but not men and women. (Hong, OCC)

I realize that promotion is very open and democratic. This means that those who meet the requirements of professional capabilities and moral criteria will be recommended, and whether they get a promotion or not depends on the percentage of approval ballots that they receive [which must usually be over 50%]. At this institution, one's morality is more important because it is the root of a person. Apart from that, appointment is carried out according to a precise process: a candidate first gets the approval from his or her division and then is appointed by the Board of Rectors and the Party Committee. I do not see any difference in the promotion of men and women. (Linh, CCC)

On the other hand, the most recent statistics of the four institutions showed that women occupied between 25% and 33% of mid-level leadership positions. There was only one female vice-rector for academic affairs at CCC, who actually retired in August, 2011 and whose position was filled by a man. At most institutions, the majority of dean and vice dean positions were held by men, and at Sugar Cane University (SCU) there were no female deans. In the same vein, the remaining 44% of participants argued with some strong evidence that regardless of the existence of the gender equality law, there has not yet been authentic equality in women's professional promotions and appointments. In other words, "underlying inequality still exists" (Dinh, RU). Vy—a participant from SCU—gave a specific example of inequality in a promotion at her institution. She said that more than a year ago, one of her female colleagues, Mrs. Nu Nguyen, acted as Interim Dean of the College of Agriculture and Fisheries. When there was an election for a new dean, she got the most approval ballots from the faculty and staff of her college, but eventually a male faculty was appointed as the dean rather than she. Vy argued that "this is because of the subjective perception of the Board of Rectors. That Mr. Nam Tran was promoted to dean rather than Mrs. Nu Nguyen resulted from the intention of Mr. Cuong Bui, Vice Rector for internal affairs." In my interview with Vice Rector Cuong, he commented that women were

not strong or determined enough, especially “when they have already had the right to equality in their hands, they do not use it.... They do not confidently bring it into play.” According to him, this was also one of women’s weaknesses, which considerably hindered their career advancement. In addition, some other participants reported that men are preferred for important leadership positions, and women can get their career promotions thanks to some obligatory quota delineated by the gender equality law.

Many people [top-level leaders] prefer to pick men to women.... Regardless of the equality in promotion standards, people sometimes think that women have certain limitations, so they are more likely to select men.... If a woman is highly capable, they have to promote her, but this is first because of the gender equality policy... The Vietnamese gender equality policy has it that one-third of the members of a board or something similar must be women. It is written in the policy that women must be included in any promotion. Perhaps we are promoted thanks to such a policy. (Thuy, OCC)

Also, almost all the participants perceived their male colleagues as having greater leadership capabilities as well as being able to access more favorable conditions to be successful leaders (this will be presented in detail in subsequent sections). Generally, while men have more time to do their work as well as freedom to communicate broadly and widely with men and women in society and in their institutions, women have to spend time out of their office fulfilling their domestic responsibilities, and their communications, especially with men, are restricted by Vietnamese culture and norms. Further, several of the interview participants indicated that women rarely believe in themselves and their female colleagues as capable top leaders. A number of participants said that if they had to choose between a male and a female candidate who were equally qualified for the position of rector, they would vote for the man. For them, women are mainly responsible for domestic work, like “cooking, educating children, taking care of sick children, and so on,” so they can hardly fulfill the heavy workloads of a rector. Some other participants identified the preference for men in personnel recruitment and argued that this

was because “leaders still sometimes do not have a correct understanding of gender equity so as to create opportunities for women” (Thu, RU). Thu went on listing the reasons for not recruiting women:

Today job recruiters hesitate to employ many women because women may be pregnant and give birth, and this will influence the work effectiveness and quality of a division. As a result, people are somewhat hesitant [to recruit women]. Additionally, their babies may get sick, and they may do this and that.... So men are more likely to be recruited. (Thu, RU)

Thu’s ideas were reinforced by Diem’s—a participant from OCC—comment:

In our society men are leaders. Men are preferred [for leadership positions] because, for example, I will get married, will be pregnant, will suffer from morning sickness, and will give birth to my baby. Then I will have the maternity leave and so can I be fully in charge of my work? As a result, there has not been equality between men and women, and that’s why women have struggled for it. (Diem, OCC)

Interestingly, nearly all of the participants noted that although women’s learning abilities as well as their intelligence are not lower than men’s, very few women could advance highly in their careers or hold high positions of authority in society. Many participants believed that this is because domestic responsibilities along with innate feminine characteristics restrict women’s employment opportunities and professional advancement (which will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections). Furthermore, gender inequality was also shown in the weekly or monthly meetings between middle- and high-level leaders in the four selected institutions. This topic is discussed next.

Institutional meetings among senior leaders. The primary purposes of these meetings are to report and review the activities that all divisions conducted in the past week or month,²³ and to go through the activities that the divisions plan to do in the next week or month. At the beginning of each meeting, the director of the department of general administration, who is

²³ Some institutions in the MD hold these meetings once a week, and some others once a month.

always a man, reads a summary of the activities which the deans and the directors of other departments reported to him on the last day of the past week or month. Then the members of the rectorial board and mid-level leaders comment on the past activities (what was and was not achieved and why), and they discuss the upcoming activities (e.g., adding some specific details that were missed in the report, suggesting ways to implement the upcoming activities, recommending solutions to the activities that are hard to implement, etc.).

In these meetings, based on my observations, the majority of women tend to sit far away from the rector, in the second half of a big oval table, and to group among themselves or with the male colleagues with whom they can talk comfortably. Unlike men, they rarely raise issues for discussion, and most women only talk when there are issues related to their divisions or under their purview, or when they realize that some activities or decisions might influence an array of people. For example, as one woman leader reported:

Like currently, when I see there is something directly related to my division, I will talk; by contrast, if the thing is unrelated, I will keep silent. Or when the issue is directly related to each faculty and staff member, I think I have to make my voice heard. However, if it is only related to your division but not mine, and I talk about it, then other people will look at me from a different angle. (Dinh, RU)

By “a different angle,” she explained that other leaders in the meeting might think that she was “aggressive” or was “showing off” [immodest]. Additionally, the majority of participants argued that women usually talked when (1) they had to clarify the tasks of their divisions, which are related to many other divisions; (2) there was an urgent problem heavily influencing the well-being or development of their division; (3) they had a better understanding of the issue being discussed; (4) their opinions were constructive and harmless to everybody; or (5) they were “brave and fearless” of conflicts and negative reactions of some other leaders (Ngoc, RU). All the participants also expressed their diverse opinions about why people, especially women, chose

to keep silent during the meetings. For instance, (1) they think that “their ideas are not as important as the others’ within the time frame of the meeting” (Diem), (2) “they do not want to compete with anybody” (Hong), (3) they do not want to be in conflict with other leaders or make them lose face in front of many important people, or (4) the issues brought into discussion are not related to their responsibilities or the affairs of their divisions.

Moreover, at some institutions, whether the women leaders talked or not at such meetings depended largely on the levels of openness and democracy of the rectors and the institution’s tradition. For example, at SCU and OCC the women leaders actively raised their voices and passionately participated in the discussions because, as the participants indicated, they had been like that for years, and their rectors usually listened to them and gave them good feedback. At these two institutions, there was also an atmosphere of openness and acceptance of women; therefore, mid-level women leaders outnumbered those at the other two institutions, where the atmosphere was more male-dominated.

Overall, women leaders in higher education in the MD are facing a paradox. On the one hand, their career advancement is facilitated by the gender equality law and the efforts of many high-level institutional leaders to ensure gender equity on campuses. On the other hand, the gender inequality in society in general and in higher education institutions in particular, as discussed previously, hinders their advancement, lowers their career aspirations and self-confidence, and places them in subordinate positions. Confronting this paradox, how did women in academia in the MD advance to key leadership positions, regardless of their small number? The following section specifically reports and describes their unique pathways to these positions.

Women’s Pathways to Powerful Positions

Occupational Choice and Early Career Path

My conversations with the women leaders turned out to be the most engaging and exciting when they recollected how they chose their occupations and began their careers. They all enthusiastically and eloquently reflected on these experiences. The majority (13 out of 16, or 81%) began their careers as teachers, and the reasons for their choice of teaching were not the same. Eight of these 13 women said that they had the definite goal of becoming a teacher when they were still “very little,” as students in an elementary school. This strong professional desire resulted from seeing their parents and good people around them as teachers. Moreover, several stated that they really loved their elementary school teachers and especially liked teaching. As children in elementary schools, some of them even pretended to be teachers and played the “teaching game” with other kids in their neighborhood. When asked why they chose education as their career, two participants reflected,

I am not really sure, but perhaps this is because of my fate. When I was little, still sitting in the classroom of my elementary school, I really loved to be a teacher.... I chose teaching as a game to play with the children around me; I instructed small children. (Ngoc, RU)

The job that I have chosen since I was still very little is teaching. This means that I chose it when I was in elementary school, choosing to be a teacher but not anybody else.... Because my mother was a teacher, I preferred to be a teacher.... When I was at school, I loved my teachers dearly, and they also loved me. (Thanh, SCU)

Although the other five women also started their careers as teachers, they did not decide to be teachers while they were little. Rather, after graduating from high school, they had to select a discipline before taking the national entrance exam to be admitted into a public university. They took their parents’ advice and picked education as their future specialized field. This idea is best illustrated by the reflection of one participant:

Formerly, I came to education because of my father. He really wanted his children to be teachers, so he set up that goal for me before I took the [university entrance] exam.... My father liked teachers very much because he stated that they were moral models, and as a teacher, I could educate my children more easily later in my life. (Vy, SCU)

In addition, two participants among these five ended up with teaching because of other personal reasons, such as failing the first university entrance exam, in which another discipline was chosen, and family's low socioeconomic status, which could only afford teaching as a low-cost discipline.

The three remaining participants in this study did not begin their careers in a higher education institution. As presented in chapter 4, Dao had worked as a program manager and treasurer for the Children's House in her home province before starting her job as Deputy Director of the Department of Personnel and General Administration at CCC. Like Dao, Linh came straight into CCC as Director of the Department of Finance and Physical Facilities. Before that, she had worked as an accountant for three food companies and served as Deputy Director of the Center for Culture and Information located in the same city as CCC. Unlike Dao and Linh, Chuong began her career at SCU as a staff member of the Strategic Plan Development group after quitting her job in a fashion company in Ho Chi Minh City.

All of the participants worked in their fields of specialization, namely teaching, accounting, youth administration, and tourism, at the start of their careers. However, none of them pursued an administrative career in higher education from the beginning. Rather, their professions started to change when they moved to work in higher education or when they were first assigned administrative posts. The overwhelming majority (12 of 13) of the participants who were originally instructors had been working as an instructor and administrator throughout their professional lives, while one of the three participants beginning their careers as employees outside of higher education ended up working as a faculty member and administrator. The three remaining participants were eventually full-time administrators.

On average, it took the participants between six and 25 professional years to be promoted to their current positions as deans, associate deans, directors, and deputy directors of support departments and service centers. Overall, the participants' current positions were one level higher than their immediately previous positions, for example, from department chairperson to associate dean, from associate dean to dean, or from deputy director to director. However, in some cases, a woman was promoted directly to interim director from an instructor position, or her position was only a shift from an equivalent position, for instance, from director of one support department to another. Dao was the only woman from a different field coming directly to higher education as a deputy director, without holding a previous leadership role. Given six to 25 years, how did the women grow and move up their career ladder? The next section particularly explores their career advancement experiences.

Women's Ways of Attaining Key Leadership Positions

Based on the data provided by the participants, it is essential to make clear that there is some difference in professional advancement patterns of academic leaders (e.g., department chairs, deans, and associate deans) and administrative leaders (e.g., directors and deputy directors of support departments and service centers). Academic leaders are usually nominated by faculty and staff members of their colleges, and then a list of nominees is sent to the board of rectors, who will in turn meet with the institutional Party committee to review and approve candidates on the list. After the list is approved, it is sent back to the college with a recommended date for an official election. On the election day, all the faculty and staff members in the college and the candidates themselves cast their ballots, while one or two members of the rectorial board and the Party committee come to supervise the election. At the end of the election, a member of the rectorial board announces the result to all voters and attendees. About one or two weeks later, the result will be announced officially to the

entire institution population. Administrative leaders, on the other hand, are typically not nominated by the staff members of their divisions. Rather, they are frequently nominated by their superior, who might be their direct boss or a member of the rectorial board, and they get their appointments after both the Party committee and the rectorial board approve their nomination. At some institutions, after half a term (about 2.5 years) or at the end of each term (5 years), administrative leaders' performance is reviewed based on their subordinates' approval ballots, upon which the board of rectors rely to decide whether these leaders are still eligible to hold their existing positions for another term, unless they assume a higher leadership role. The sections that follow describe the women's experiences of advancing into their current positions of authority.

Career plans and advancement strategies. The overwhelming majority (15 of 16 [94%]) of the participants claimed not to have had career aspirations beyond becoming teachers in schools, instructors or lecturers in colleges and universities, or experts in their specializations since the start of their careers. Consequently, instead of developing strategies, techniques, or action plans to advance into key leadership positions, they only focused on doing the jobs they were in charge of and “fulfilling the assignments” they were delegated. They reported that they did make plans every week, month, and year, but only to best accomplish the tasks which the boards of rectors delegated to them and their divisions. When asked whether she had done any preparation for her current position, My commented, “I only make a plan for a certain task that I am responsible for carrying out. Making a plan for advancement, I am not that type of person.” Similarly, Mai said, “I think this is my weakness; I have neither techniques nor strategies to attain a certain position.” Along the same lines, two other participants reflected on this issue as follows:

I have not developed any strategies [for advancement] for myself. For example, what position I should hold in the next five years is not my plan because I do not have the high aspiration to be in such a position. Commonly, I prefer to be in a normal position, only doing the jobs related to my specialization, investing my time in my specialization, best

fulfilling my professional tasks, and spending my remaining time taking good care of my family and children. However, because my university and college put me in this position, I have to try my best to fulfill my responsibilities, which usually put me under a lot of pressures. (Thu)

Although Thu did not intentionally plan to be a leader, when assuming the position of authority, she tried her best to fulfill her responsibilities. However, she commented that the work was sometimes so demanding that “I cannot find any joy and happiness for myself.” At about retirement age (53), Thu said that her health was no longer suitable for the heavy workloads of a dean, so she really wanted to step down to rest and to have more time for her family. Despite the fact that Bich could work for 10 more years, she did not make any plans for moving up.

Um, strategies and techniques to move up, this may be true for some other people. Perhaps because I am not as active as the others, I have not developed any plans to move up, to hold any leadership positions. I only work to the best of my abilities. This means that when I realize I have to do something or should do something, I just do it. I do not plan to do such and such things in order to be able to hold such and such positions. I have never thought in such a way, but I have seen that in some people. (Bich, OCC)

Regardless of the fact that Bich has not developed any action plans for her professional mobility, she indicated that other women might do that. In fact, Chuong and Diem admitted that they had some strategies and plans for their career advancement, although Diem’s desire to become a leader only came later in her career, after her two children had finished high school. Chuong stated that she prepared carefully for every single activity in her career because “if I have no preparations, I prepare for my failures.” Accordingly, attaining her current leadership positions was included in her career plans. For Diem, her strategies to move up were “my continuous learning, particularly in my specialized field, building trust with the Board of Rectors, performing my work well, and trying to be a Party member.”

Like Thu and Bich, the majority of participants claimed that they did not have plans or strategies to advance in their careers, but their responses to my probing questions showed that

they did not deny the opportunities for leadership promotion that they were provided. Moreover, once they were in leadership roles, they always performed their jobs to the best of their abilities and responsibilities. Also, most of them reported that they always tried hard to be distinguished in their expertise and “personal abilities.” Finally, the data show that they did most of the things that Diem described as her strategies. The reasons why they did these things and how they attained their current leadership positions, given no clear-cut career goals and ambitions, are discussed in the next few paragraphs.

Advancement into leadership positions. In this study, 10 women were administrative leaders (nine directors and one deputy director), four were academic leaders (two deans, one associate dean, and one department chair), and two were both administrative and academic leaders because they simultaneously held administrative and academic leadership positions as department chairs and directors of a service center and a support department. All the administrative leaders pointed out that their positions were appointed, while all the academic leaders, except one, stated that they were elected.

The administrative leaders were initially employed as faculty or staff members (called specialists in administration) by specialized or support departments, whereas the academic leaders began their careers as instructors or lecturers in their specialized fields. Over time, the former were promoted to deputy directors, interim directors, and directors of support departments and service centers, and the latter to team leaders,²⁴ assistant department chairs, department chairs, associate deans, interim deans, and deans of colleges (in universities) or faculty units (in community colleges). In some cases, the women, as faculty members, were

²⁴ In a specialized department, there are usually several specialized teams. For example, in the Department of English of RU, there are such specialized teams as applied linguistics, methodology, literature, culture and society, translation, and English for non-major students (who do not major in teaching English).

promoted directly to associate deans or interim directors after they had earned their master's degree. In addition, some directors of support departments were allowed to move back to their fields of specialization, and they served as department chairs, associate deans, or deans. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 below depict the women's academic and administrative career paths to mid-level leadership. The model in Figure 5.2 applies to eight of the 10 administrative leaders because two administrative leaders at CCC, Dao and Linh, came into higher education directly as deputy director and director of two different support departments.

As presented earlier, most of the women did not have career plans and ambitions to attain senior administrative positions, but they did a variety of good things for their professional development and advancement. This process is further illustrated by the reflections of two participants on how they moved up to their current positions of authority:

You know that my position came to me just by chance. Providing that I wanted it, it doesn't mean that I could get it. We can control our studies, right? Preparing our lesson plans and teaching well are what we can control. But for the positions in Vietnamese society today, if we can have one, this is only by chance.... My position was elected; the instructors in my faculty unit voted for it. First, in order to be nominated, you must have real capabilities. If your position is appointed by the board of rectors, it may be an imposition, a matter related to your personal connections, or your good family history. In contrast, my position was elected by my colleagues and friends, so I had to meet many requirements. First, my educational level must be high; [it is important that] people can count on me in my major. [Second,] I need to have leadership capabilities. [Third,] I need to have public spirit: I treat my friends nicely, know how to solve work problems, maintain equity in the workplace, and can act as a center of solidarity. (Diem)

My advancement process came very naturally [without any intention]. Based on my working spirit and attitude coupled with my work capacity, the people in my college trusted me, nominated me, and put me in this position [first as associate dean]. Frankly speaking, deep in my heart, I do not like to be a leader. Therefore, when I first moved here in 1987, I had an inner wish to simply work in my field of specialization. And I did work in my field until 1993 when my college needed a second associate dean, who should be elected through the faculty's approval ballots. Although there were many instructors more senior than I, the faculty nominated me and voted for me, perhaps because of my work style or so.... Then, I worked persistently to the best of my ability, and when my new college was founded, it needed a dean. Everybody looked around and saw that only I with such professional capacity could assume the post, and thus they

promoted me.... My advancement process is rather spontaneous, rather contingent, although my development process is not spontaneous and not even contingent. (Thu)

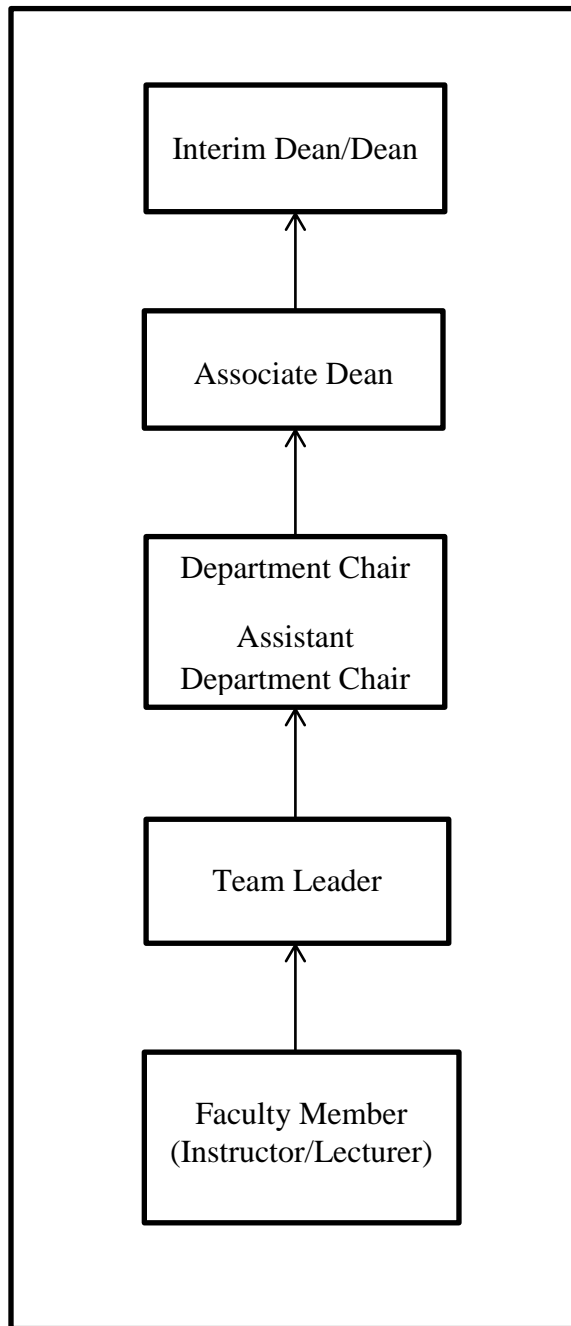


Figure 5.1. Academic career path to mid-level leadership.

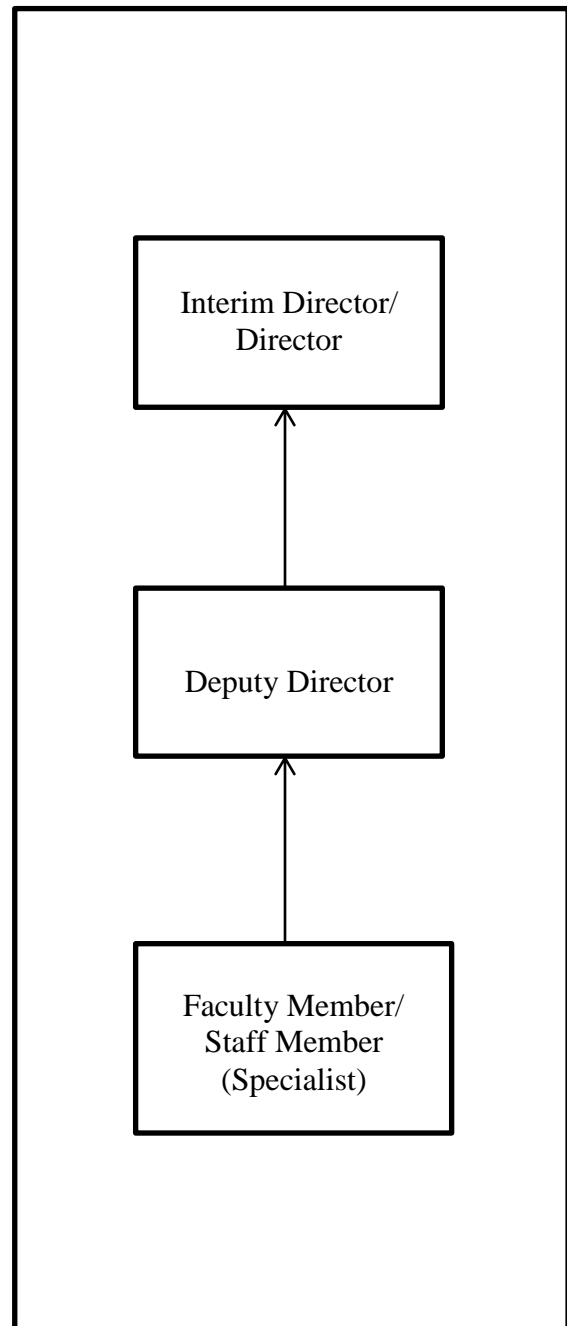


Figure 5.2. Administrative career path to mid-level leadership.

Both Diem and Thu claimed that their advancement to leadership was a “spontaneous,” “contingent,” “by chance,” or unplanned process. Diem is currently Associate Dean of the Faculty of Basic Sciences at OCC, and Thu is Dean of the College of Political Reasoning at RU. What is common in these women’s advancement experiences is that they were elected to their positions by the faculty members in their divisions when the latter recognized the former’s excellent expertise, work capacities, interpersonal skills, and leadership abilities. Even though Diem and Thu described their experiences in different ways, both admitted that their professional development or growth was not contingent or unintentional. In other words, while they did not have ambitions and did not make plans to be leaders in their careers, they always worked hard to improve their expertise and tried to be excellent in their specialized fields. Furthermore, their interpersonal skills also played a key role in winning their colleagues’ and friends’ hearts and putting them in their current positions of power.

Despite the fact that the administrative leaders’ positions were appointed, there were some similarities between their advancement experiences and those of the academic leaders described above. Two of the participants summed up their appointment experiences as follows:

I think that the Board of Rectors appointed me to this position [Director of the Department of Scientific Affairs and International Relations at OCC] because of first, my long-term career here, since 1987; second, my level of education coupled with my level of expertise; and third, my abilities to approach and perform my work. Generally speaking, they saw that I have the capacity and knowledge to perform this job well, so they promoted me to this post. (Thuy)

Well, the Board of Rectors saw that I had a long working process, and at that time I was already 40 years old and so was more mature than my colleagues. That was why I was appointed Director of the Department of Personnel and Administration. (Hoa)

Later in the interview, Hoa added that the rectorial board of her college also took into account “my behaviors towards my colleagues,” “my work style and reputation,” “my performance at work”, and “my personal traits.” Bich shared some of Thuy’s and Hoa’s ideas when saying, “How did I attain my current leadership position? I am not quite sure about this, but perhaps

because I have been working here for a long time, and the college [top-leaders] saw that I have certain capabilities.” In addition, Chuong recited that she could advance in her career thanks to her current rector, “who appreciates talents and knows how to bring them into use most effectively.”

By and large, no matter whether they were academic or administrative leaders, the women in this study were well-recognized by their colleagues and superiors through their professional abilities, work styles, excellent expertise, leadership capabilities, and professional behaviors. Moreover, their length of service, interpersonal skills, personal traits, and graduate degrees (usually master’s) were also key in winning their colleagues’ respect and superiors’ trust. For younger leaders, their expertise, high educational level, and leadership talents could outweigh their length of service when they were reviewed and recommended for positions of leadership. This finding shows that although almost all the women did not have ambitions and did not make plans to attain powerful positions at any stages in their careers, the above outlined positive factors associated with them as outstanding faculty or staff members put them in their current leadership positions. Nevertheless, without clear-cut career goals and aspirations to move up further, what are most of the women leaders going to do next, especially at the end of their current term? This topic is presented in the next section.

Future Plans

As mentioned at the end of chapter 4, in this study one woman was in her early career, 12 were in their midcareer, and three were in their late career. The early-career woman, Mai, said that she would pursue her master’s degree in public administration in the coming year. She pointed out that the reason she decided to come into higher education was to have more

opportunities to study at higher levels, which was also the most important activity to her in her professional life.

More than half of the mid-career women (7 out of 12) considered pursuing their master's or doctoral degrees in their specialized fields in the next one or two years. In fact, these women did not view a graduate degree as only a necessary prerequisite to attain a higher position.

Rather, they believed that it would help them perform their jobs more effectively and gain more respect and trust of their colleagues and subordinates. For example, Thanh, Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at SCU, explained why she wanted to earn a doctorate:

Provided that you have a different degree, higher, more professional, and more standardized, your position when you stand in front of various people will be different, and your sharing of new knowledge will be more easily welcomed. I only want to say so; I do not want to do anything extraordinary except sharing what I have acquired. However, people may not welcome me because they always expect the speaker at this level [much higher than theirs]. Only when this expectation is met will they listen to you. Don't you think so? Conversely, if you are just a little better than they, they will not welcome you. (Thanh)

Later in the interview, Thanh revealed that only with a doctorate earned from a prestigious university abroad could she achieve her goal of sharing her new and advanced knowledge with a wide range of university and college faculty as well as high school teachers. The main reason, according to her, is that this type of degree is more highly valued in Viet Nam, and it makes people listen to her much better. Linh shared some of Thanh's feelings when identifying her purpose of earning a master's degree, "If it is possible, I want to attain a graduate degree.... I still like to learn out of the awareness that I am able to apply my newly acquired knowledge to serving the society better." Moreover, some mid-career women did not consider earning a doctoral degree, but they wanted to spend more time with their families and to further develop their professional knowledge and skills in order to best perform their jobs and to contribute most

effectively to their institution. Significantly, they also considered training potential young faculty and staff to be their successors. This view is best conveyed in My's future plan:

Right now I only think about how I can wholeheartedly fulfill the tasks I have been delegated so as to achieve the best results. That's all for me. This means that I am trying to be helpful to the university until I retire and no longer work here. And I am thinking of searching for successors so that I can have time to train them to substitute the current leaders of this department in the future. Regarding my personal issues [development and advancement], frankly speaking, I have not thought much about them. I don't think that I will create any further advancement in my career, but I only want to continue improving my professional capacity. (My, RU)

Finally, a few mid-career women that were pursuing their doctoral program and master's program stated that they only wanted to complete their programs first, and then devote their time to their families and their professional development by applying for funding to participate in short-term training courses in some developed countries.

Training successors to take over their leadership roles after their retirement was also an important activity in the plans of three late-career women, Thu, Hoa, and Diem, although Diem said that she only trained those who really aspired to pursue higher education as their lifelong career. The reason for Diem's hesitance in mentoring promising young faculty and staff was her concern about the low income of educators in Viet Nam in general, which could cause them to quit their jobs if they found better paying jobs outside of education. Then, her efforts in training them would be wasted. However, according to Thu and Hoa, delegating important tasks that they had been in charge of to young faculty and staff in their divisions, and empowering them so that the latter could gradually take over the former's tasks, were these two women's professional responsibilities. This idea is clearly reflected in Thu's future plan:

At the end of next year [2012], I will officially retire as my birthday is 1958. Therefore, I have an intention that at the beginning of next year, I will gradually hand important activities, such as holding conferences in which I have acted as chairperson of the organizing committee, over to my potential successors. They will be playing my role directly, while I

will simply be standing outside and observing them. Then, I will help them fulfill their role so that they can actually carry out their tasks when I am no longer by their side. (Thu)

In addition to training their successors, these three women stated that within their remaining work years they would still perform their jobs to the best of their abilities, arguing that this was all they could do in their institutions. They noted that their career was on a descending path, so it was impossible for them to move up further. In the meantime, they also thought of applying for a part-time teaching job or any part-time jobs that fit their expertise because they wanted to keep themselves active subsequent to their retirement from higher education.

Generally, the future plans of the 16 mid-level women leaders show that despite their age and stages in their careers, none had aspirations or ambitions to rise to the top. Even Chuong, the only mid-career woman who previously said that she did prepare for advancement into her two current positions, did not give any thought about further moving up her occupational ladder. However, the only early-career woman and seven of 12 mid-career women planned to earn their master's or doctoral degrees. The remaining five mid-career women had other plans for their future, such as spending more time with their families, further developing their specialized skills and knowledge, preparing successors, and especially, completing their ongoing graduate programs. Eventually, the three late-career women only wished to best perform their work prior to their retirement in two years' time and to train the potential faculty and staff to replace them and to be the next promising generation of leaders.

Section Summary

The majority of participants in this study (12 out of 16) began their careers as instructors in a college or university; one (Hoa) began as a teacher in a worker-farmer supplementary school (see Chapter 4 for more detail) and three as employees outside of education and higher education. If we classify them in another way, 10 of them took the administrative career track, four the faculty track,

and two both types of track. Although all of them, except one, did not plan their careers or hold leadership aspirations, numerous positive factors such as their advanced academic degrees, length of service, and professional talents, coupled with their professional behaviors, interpersonal skills, personal traits, and moral conduct worked in their favor. In other words, these factors played a decisive role in putting them in their current positions of authority. However, none of them aspired to rise of the top. The next section on their leadership and management styles illuminates their usage of position power and interpersonal skills in administrative work as well as their strengths and weaknesses as mid-level women leaders in a male-dominated academic environment.

Women's Leadership and Management

All the women participants had not been trained and equipped with management and leadership knowledge and skills prior to their current appointments; instead, they learned to perform their work by trial and error. They drew useful lessons from their own administrative weaknesses, and they relied on the management and leadership skills they could learn from observing their superiors' performance in carrying out their responsibilities. Regardless of their lack of prior training, the women performed their management and leadership professionally and successfully, creating harmony and solidarity among their subordinates as well as guiding effective operation of their divisions. The following sections first describe the women's management and leadership styles and then present their strengths and weaknesses as women leaders, from the perspectives of the gatekeepers interviewed.

Feminine Management and Leadership Styles

The majority of the women noted that they were quite flexible in applying institutional management rules and principles to managing their subordinates, delegating tasks to them primarily based on the latter's professional abilities as well as their personal traits. Additionally, the women

leaders said that they frequently observed their subordinates, took into consideration their emotions, and showed respect for them when identifying and discussing their errors and weaknesses.

According to them, sincerity, openness, caring, inclusiveness, and respectfulness always brought about their subordinates' effectiveness, harmony, and solidarity. On the contrary, power and autocracy most of the time resulted in substantive failure in their leadership and discontent among the subordinates. These ideas were thoroughly expressed by the reflections of many participants on their management and leadership styles. For example, one participant commented,

I usually rely on the types of work to look for appropriate subordinates to perform them. This is my general [management] principle. However, based on each individual and his or her feelings and perceptions, I can modify and adjust my principle. This means that for the same piece of work, if I assign it to this person, I will not change my principle. Yet for those whose ways of living, to me, are more emotion-oriented, or those who are different from the others, I will behave in a more flexible way. (Vy)

Flexibility and considerateness in the women leaders' behaviors towards their subordinates were also shown in Diem's management and leadership:

My styles of management and leadership are always to have close relations with the faculty members in order to get to know their thoughts and emotions and to make prompt adjustment if anything goes wrong. I realize that in case [it is] necessary, I politely explore their opinions by meeting with them individually. According to me, this is a very effective way. In contrast, using principles [e.g., principles of faculty's and staff's proper workplace behavior] to talk to them in a public meeting always results in chaos. (Diem)

Diem further explained that she frequently met with her subordinates personally whenever there were some conflicts among them. She argued that if she pointed out their errors and criticized them in front of other faculty and staff in a meeting, that would embarrass them and result in their dissatisfaction and uncooperativeness. Hoa shared Diem's view and provided more insights into the issue of treating subordinates politely:

If a leader wants to create solidarity in his or her division, I think that he or she should first be a giver, not a taker. Also, he or she should use his or her heart to treat subordinates rather than use power to control them. In so doing, the common work may be accomplished more

effectively. We can, in fact, use our authority to make them do the work, but that may dissatisfy them, and they may say bad things about us behind our backs. (Hoa)

Hoa mentioned one important factor related to a leader's traits and behavior that approximately half of the participants concurred with: leaders should be givers, not takers. In other words, they should sacrifice their personal benefits for the benefits of their subordinates or for the common good of their organizations. Half of the participants also reflected that "sacrificing" was a characteristic which had grown up with them since they still lived with their parents and many siblings, and since they got married and had children. This idea is best illustrated by Le, who recalled the experience of her self-sacrifice in her childhood and marriage life with a highly emotional tone:

My father did not allow me to cook a lot of or little rice every day; the rice cooked had to be precisely enough for all people in the family in every single meal. I used to sit next to the rice pot and look at it. Whenever my family had a good appetite, I lessened my own amount of rice; conversely, whenever they did not eat well, I tried to eat more, otherwise my father would scold me when he saw there was a lot of rice left.... When I first started my marriage life, we [she and her husband] were very poor. So I used to give good foods to my husband and lied to him that I had already eaten or did not like the foods. And since I had my son, I have given him all the best things in my life. (Le)

Furthermore, the majority of the women said that they knew with certainty that they themselves alone could not fulfill the tasks of their entire divisions. Therefore, they needed the collaboration and support of their subordinates as well as of other support departments and colleges or faculty units in their institutions. In this respect, they were usually inclusive and consultative while carrying out their tasks and making decisions. They often treated all of their subordinates fairly and equally, consulted their subordinates' opinions before making major decisions, and promoted communication and collaboration not only among their subordinates but also across the divisions in their institutions. As one participant put it, "Generally speaking, whatever work we do, we cannot do it independently. Rather, we need the assistance of many

people” (Hong). Likewise, Vy commented that “when I receive an assignment [usually from the board of rectors], I have to know for sure from which divisions I need support in order to do it well.” Additionally, Ngoc emphasized the importance of consulting the opinions of her subordinates before implementing a certain task:

I am not arrogant and have never used my authority to bully my subordinates [into doing their work]; I have never been like that.... Consequently, as I told you previously, when there are some tasks that need to be decided whether to do or not, I usually ask for the opinions of the entire staff [in her library]. If they agree, I will decide to do them; if they don't, I will decide not to do them, because I do these tasks for the common good of my division, not for myself. So it is unwise to do the things that the majority of staff members are not pleased with. (Ngoc)

In the same vein, Dao (CCC) emphasized, “I rarely use my leadership power to solve work problems, but exchanging ideas and collaborating [with her subordinates] are my principal ways [of solving work problems].”

However, two of the 16 women noted that they were not always consultative in their leadership. There were various issues requiring their decisiveness and quick decisions. Accordingly, they sometimes decided on urgent and important issues by themselves, without consulting their subordinates' or superiors' ideas, and then they were responsible for their decisions in front of their superiors, usually the board of rectors. Finally, three women said that they led by actions, not by words; or they were doers, not supervisors. In this regard, they usually participated in all types of work in their divisions, and they were the people who did the most work. They commented that it was essential for them to be “good role models” so that they could manage their subordinates more easily.

In short, the women's management and leadership styles were quite collaborative and largely mirrored the feminine virtues that are prescribed by Confucianism. The majority of them tended to adopt a considerate, caring, inclusive, consultative, cooperative, and participative style of leading. In

addition, “sacrificing” their own benefits for those of their subordinates and their entire division, according to them, was an important characteristic and behavior of a leader, which mainly originated from their family education and lived experience. Finally, all of the women very rarely used their position power to manage and control their subordinates. Rather, role modeling and showing respect to subordinates, especially when discussing their errors and weaknesses, were their preferred and most frequently employed approaches.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Women as Leaders

When asked what they thought about women as leaders and their leadership capabilities, the five gatekeepers, consisting of four men and one woman, identified both women’s strengths and their weaknesses. Although their opinions were not quite similar, they were insightful and informative about academic women leaders in particular and women leaders in general.

Strengths. Both Rector Bach Nguyen (OCC) and Vice Rector Cuong Bui (SCU) commented that women leaders are more sensitive and have a more profound understanding of people’s emotions and needs. Thus, compared with their male counterparts, they are usually better at managing “sensitive jobs which require precision and the capacity for social perception” (Vice Rector Cuong). Similarly, Rector Bach indicated,

Apparently, with regard to leadership, if women do the leading, they treat the faculty and staff in their division more profoundly, especially in matters related to the latter’s psychology. Men leaders are often [more] shallow; they focus only on business and are not aware of difficulties or personal situations of individual faculty and staff. Consequently, men do not know about some conflicts in their division. Conversely, because women are gentler and more profound, they can master the desires and feelings of everybody. (Rector Bach)

Rector Bach added that leadership seems to be more suitable for women, and there are some women leaders with whom men prefer working to some men leaders.

Moreover, Rector Cong Truong (SCU) complimented women leaders on their

meticulousness and industriousness in their work performance. He also said that “if women are given good conditions, they can have good visions and can develop strategic plans for the development of their divisions.” Additionally, Rector Cong noted that women are more affectionate and clever in their leadership than men. Finally, Vice Rector Dep Tran (CCC), the only woman vice rector and gatekeeper in this study, commented,

Women [leaders] are more enthusiastic and devoted to their work than men. Well, it is not true that because they are women and are busy with child care, they cannot do the work. In contrast, because they are more enthusiastic and committed [to work] than men, they usually fulfill the tasks delegated earliest. (Vice Rector Dep)

By and large, four of the five gatekeepers were very happy and satisfied with the women leaders in their institutions as well as with their leadership styles, because the women were harder-working than their male counterparts, were more committed to the common work, fulfilled tasks before the deadlines, understood their subordinates and colleagues better, and behaved more nicely towards them. The remaining gatekeeper, Rector Thong Ly from Rice University, did not clearly identify the strengths of women leaders. Rather, he said it depended on each woman. For example, he pointed out that some women are very “strong, decisive, and talented,” but many others do not have these qualities. In other words, Rector Thong as well as the other gatekeepers also observed a number of common weaknesses of academic women leaders.

Weaknesses. Two of the gatekeepers asserted that “women leaders were indecisive and shy” (Rector Thong), or “their decisiveness was not really high” (Vice Rector Dep). Rector Thong went on commenting,

There were various factors [negatively] affecting women’s progress today. First and foremost is the women themselves. Women themselves have the innate responsibility to be mothers and many other innate responsibilities, which may impede their abilities.... Generally speaking, there are impediments in women’s abilities. In addition, women usually have an inferiority complex, so they are short of the will to move up. (Rector Thong)

By “an inferiority complex,” Rector Thong meant that women often lacked confidence in themselves

and their abilities, tended to feel that they were inferior to men, and did not believe that they could be successful leaders, especially at the top level. In contrast to Rector Thong, Rector Cong thought that “taking care of their children and husband is not a weakness of women because this is an innate function of women,” explaining that we could not say that an innate function was an impediment or a weakness. For instance, he added, “looking after sick children and breast-feeding babies” should be the most likely women’s jobs.

In addition to complimenting women on their strong points, Rector Cong identified the most conspicuous weakness of the women leaders at his university. Nevertheless, he noted that this is also a common weakness of many academic administrators in Viet Nam today.

I only see one weakness which is perhaps the common weakness of administrators in colleges and universities today. That is, they are not appropriately trained to be professional administrators. The current administrators mainly employ “trial and error” approach. Although they have attended a variety of training courses [related to higher education administration], the training is not systematic. And those who attended the courses still do not have any clear-cut application [to their work]. Even when faculty and staff have been promoted to leaders, they still perform their work as they were faculty and staff. This is the primary limitation of both women and men leaders when they are not appropriately trained. (Rector Cong)

That the lack of professional training will result in ineffective leadership, or that leaders who are not systematically or professionally trained will work like employees, is the main message that Rector Cong wanted to convey in his comment on women as well as men leaders. Furthermore, when asked what he thought are the weaknesses of women leaders, Rector Bach stated that women are not as “energetic” and “resourceful” as men. Additionally, Vice Rector Cuong observed that women’s biggest problem is that “although women are given the right to equality, they do not regularly use it and strongly develop it.” Last but not least, he indicated that because of the perpetuating influence of “the three types of obedience and four feminine virtues,” women academics today are still facing a number of constraints in their social communication and

participation in academic activities held outside of the campus and far away from their home. As a result, he commented that if women know how to bring into full use the policy support along with various supports from multiple social organizations to act more confidently, they will certainly advance much further in their careers.

In sum, a number of weaknesses of the women leaders originated from their lack of appropriate professional training, their “innate” responsibilities defined by their sex, and the legacy of Confucianism. Some other weaknesses may be caused by the personal characteristics of individual women. However, if women know how to overcome these weaknesses by relying on the support of the gender equality law and policies as well as the support available to them in society, they can make more professional progress and be more competitive with men.

Section Summary

As shown in Chapter 4, academic leadership is still a highly male-dominated world in the Mekong Delta (MD). However, the 16 women from four different higher education institutions in this study have entered this world, defining their new roles as women leaders and significantly contributing their outstanding capabilities to the common good and development of their institutions. Despite their weaknesses, basically resulting from the effects of traditional Vietnamese culture and lack of professional training, their strengths as leaders and managers seem to be more prominent. Under their management and leadership, which emphasize inclusiveness, considerateness, consultation, collaboration, participation, and respectfulness (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Luke, 2001), commitment and solidarity are created among their subordinates. Likewise, cooperation between their own divisions and many other divisions in their institutions has developed. As a result, most of their superiors, who are the gatekeepers in this study, talked very positively about them and their work styles.

Given the gatekeepers' comments on the women leaders' weaknesses, there might be a number of causes for these weaknesses. Possibly the opportunities and challenges they have encountered in their work and life play a big part in characterizing the weaknesses and make them hard to be overcome. The next section helps clarify this assumption.

Opportunities for and Challenges to Women's Career Advancement

Opportunities and Facilitating Factors

There are a number of common outstanding opportunities and facilitating factors for women's professional career advancement, although some participants described them in a slightly different way. Also, a few additional opportunities and facilitating factors cited by a smaller number of participants do not have a major impact on the women's careers. These are therefore not presented with supporting data and so are merely suggestive, but they are acknowledged and identified.

Development opportunities provided by institutions. More than half of the participants indicated that their institutions have created a number of opportunities for them as well as for other women to access higher education, to participate in leadership, and to develop their professions, both inside and outside of the country. Some participants noted that the board of rectors and the Party committee of their institution usually give capable women, especially young and talented ones, priorities for personal development, political participation, and advancement into leadership roles. Along the same lines, Rector Thong (RU) reported,

In this province, there is another priority for women because of the request of the provincial People's Committee and Party Committee. That is, normally in a government organization, at least 30% of senior administrative posts must be assumed by women. However, since women often have different conditions [for development] or abilities such as being weaker and more hesitant than men, their efforts to rise to the higher levels of their professions are less successful than their male counterparts. Therefore, in our promotion reviews, we frequently give women priorities. (Rector Thong)

In comparison with men, women in Viet Nam are usually considered the weaker sex in terms of both their mental and physical health, so it is conventionally assumed that they need men's protection. And this is the message that Rector Thong wanted to convey when explaining why women should be given priorities in professional promotion. To justify what he said about the priorities, he cited some examples of what had just happened to a number of women at his university. He pointed out that a woman candidate, rather than her male opponent, who was equally qualified, was appointed vice dean of an important college the week before "because of the very limited population of women leaders in the university at present." Further, he commented,

The university also creates good conditions for them [women] to participate in the sociopolitical life [of the city]. Just two days ago, our university was allowed to nominate a candidate for the City Council election, and we recommended Ms. My Cao, but not any man. (Rector Thong)

In addition to the opportunities outlined above, many women identified the opportunities emerging over the course of their occupations as follows:

There have been some opportunities opening up for me. For example, I could study at higher levels, develop my professional expertise, attend seminars and conferences, and interact with professionals in my major to enrich my knowledge. Additionally, favorable conditions have been created for me to fulfill my work. (Thuy)

"Favorable conditions" in her institution, as Thuy described, usually involve good physical facilities (e.g., a well-equipped office), a collaborative and supportive working environment, and opportunities for faculty and staff to further develop their professional careers. For example, several years ago, Thuy went to France on a three-month training program within the framework of an international cooperative project between her college and a college in southern France. Moreover, nearly half of the participants (44%) stated they were fortunate to access other remarkable opportunities in their professional lives, such as earning their master's degrees in the

United States or Ph.D.s in Viet Nam and attending short-term training courses and seminars in Canada, India, and Korea. Mai (SCU) recollected, “Since I started my career, I have paid two business visits to Canada and Korea.” Working at the same institution as Mai, Chuong also had very good opportunities to work with and learn from international scholars working for a certain period of time at her university. She reported,

During my ten years of working at this institution, the first opportunity for and also enhancing factor of my professional development was the Viet Nam – Canada Community College Project. [Participating in this project], I had the opportunity to interact with Canadian experts and learned a great deal from their work style. (Chuong, SCU)

What is most interesting for the married women who had already earned their master’s or doctoral degrees was the opportunity to pursue their studies while they were busy working and bringing up their young children. Yet the hardships they underwent while having to fulfill different responsibilities as a student, an administrator, a mother, a wife, and even a daughter or daughter-in-law, according to them, were useful, because it was their graduate degrees that played a decisive role in putting them into their current leadership positions.

In short, various opportunities were provided for women at the four institutions under study to pursue graduate degree programs, participate in leadership, and develop their occupations, even in foreign countries. Women usually received priorities for these opportunities compared with their male counterparts primarily because of their low proportion in academic leadership roles. Professional development and graduate degrees are key to women’s career advancement; thus, all the four institutions have made substantial efforts in creating opportunities for them to improve their professional capabilities in order to ensure gender equity on their campuses. These above mentioned development opportunities obviously enhance women’s professional mobility, as do the facilitating factors described in the following paragraphs.

Facilitating factors. In addition to the opportunities described above, there was a whole range of factors facilitating or enhancing women's professional mobility. In this study, facilitating factors are used as opposites of obstacles or challenges to women's career advancement, and they are discussed below.

Superiors' support. First, the majority of the participants emphasized that the professional support, advice, guidance, encouragement, and nominations from their superiors, including the members of the board of rectors, were key enhancing factors. These participants genuinely appreciated the trust and support of their superiors, without which the former's tasks could hardly be carried out effectively:

As generally stated, after the retirement of Dr. Bach [the former rector of RU], Mr. Thong [the current rector] has also been very supportive of me. By and large, whenever I have an idea and tell it to him and if he realizes that it is appropriate, he fully supports me. Since I assumed this position, he has created good conditions for me to work. For instance, I recommended forming the specialized groups of my library and nominated their leaders. Also, I asked for his permission to purchase e-books and e-journals for the readers in order to catch up with the trend of our modern times. He approved all my recommendations. The problem was only the financial resources. (Ngoc)

Ngoc meant that regardless of the fact that some of the activities she recommended may have needed big funding, the rector approved them because they were "appropriate" or beneficial to the development of her unit. Usually, getting the rector's approval for an activity is most important because with his approval, it is easier for a mid-level leader to look for funding from inside or outside of the institution (e.g., from nongovernmental organizations). Moreover, a superior may sometimes play the role of a mentor to the participant thanks to his or her visionary outlook and richer work experience:

Frankly speaking, I owed the rector of my former college a deep gratitude. When Russian language became out of date and not many people wanted to study it, I thought of studying English. At that time, my family was in financial difficulties, so I asked him to allow me to pursue my English studies at an in-service training center in my hometown. He then gave me

advice, “Do you think that you will be able to earn your living with a degree conferred by an in-service training center? Will you be able to survive in a university with such a degree? Hence, I advise you to continue your study over there [in her old university in Ho Chi Minh City] and not to attain your degree from this center.” I listened to him, retook my entrance exam, and continued my studies in Ho Chi Minh City. (My)

In Viet Nam, people do not value degrees conferred by an in-service center or a continuing education center²⁵ as highly as those conferred by a university because of the different training quality provided by these types of institutions. Consequently, My’s former rector was greatly concerned about her future work life when she planned to earn her second bachelor’s degree, which was supposed to help her find a better job and make a better living, from the in-service center in her hometown. According to him, studying in Ho Chi Minh City would be more worthwhile for her.

Overall, without their superiors’ support, women could hardly carry out their tasks successfully and make progress in their careers. Having a supportive and nice rector, like My’s former rector, is not the fortune that all women in this study had because most of their superiors only supported them in their administrative work rather than acted as mentors. If the women’s superiors were also mentors, like in My’s case, it might have been much easier for them to locate a more appropriate direction to move forward.

Family support. Apart from their superiors’ support, all the participants cited the importance of family support in moving up their career ladder. Those who were living near their parents, parents-in-law, or siblings relied on their help with household chores and child care. These people also provided the participants with spiritual support, such as giving the latter

²⁵ An in-service center or a continuing education center is often where most high school students who fail the national university entrance exams, and current employers and employees who want to upgrade their educational levels, are trained, mainly in bachelor’s and master’s degree programs. The admission criteria are frequently lower than those of public universities.

professional advice and encouragement when they encountered problems in their workplace. Dinh shared her experience, “My first advantages originate from my family. Generally, my parents are always willing to listen to my urgent and uncomfortable matters. Then, they give me good consultation and advice.” Further, whereas she and her spouse did not yet have children, they both were extremely busy with their heavy workloads. Thus, Dinh said that she was so fortunate to have her mother-in-law cook for them every day:

I am lucky to have my mother-in-law, who is very industrious. Despite 64 years old, she is still healthy. Whenever she does not visit our siblings, nieces, and nephews in Ho Chi Minh City, she does the cooking from A to Z. We only need to buy groceries and leave them at home for her. She then cooks them, and lunches are always ready for us. I only need to wash the dishes after that. (Dinh)

Without the help such as Dinh had, women academics in the MD usually have to come back home at about 11 a.m. every day and prepare lunch for their whole family. Mai and Thanh, two participants from SCU, reflected that this was unfair for women when they and their male counterparts had the same workloads. However, they could frequently ask their parents and sisters or their mother- and sisters-in-law for child care and some help with domestic chores. Mai commented,

If we [she and her husband] lived on our own, our son would be a great concern to us. But because we are living here, my parents can occasionally take care of him. In addition, we often get help with our housework. For example, yesterday I was so busy, and my big sister did all the cooking. When getting home, I only did whatever I could within my time left. (Mai)

Mai together with her husband and son were living with her parents, who lived close by her three elder sisters. As a result, she could get their help whenever she needed it. Like Mai, Thanh was often able to have her mother- and sisters-in-law cook for her husband and two children as well as take good care of the children when she was away on her business trips.

Not only is family an important source of spiritual support for the women leaders, but it also

provides them with domestic help. Women who are living close by their family can rely on their parents, siblings, or in-laws for child care and housework, which gives them more time to devote to work. For the women who do not have family support, spousal support is very important.

Spousal support. The married participants who did not live with or near their parents and sisters or their in-laws reported that they had to share household chores as well as child care and education with their husbands. Ten married women in this study, including Diem, a widow, mentioned repeatedly during the interviews how supportive their husbands have been throughout their professional lives, especially since they became leaders. More importantly, the emotional support and encouragement that their husbands provided had significantly contributed to their survival and growth in their careers. Some women emphasized that without their spouses' support, they would have stepped down from their demanding and challenging leadership roles. This idea is best illustrated by Ngoc's comment on her husband's share of housework:

In my family, I have had my husband's support, without which I have not been able to perform my work up to now. Because he is a teacher, he has more free time than I do. For me, I am fully occupied with my administrative work. Consequently, he usually comes home earlier, goes to the market [to buy groceries], and prepare meals. He has done these things instead of me. Thanks to his support, I have been able to perform my work well. Without it, I might have given up my work a long time ago. (Ngoc)

Similarly, Thanh reported that "my work responsibilities are heavier than my family responsibilities, which are lighter because of the shares of my husband and his family." Although some women did not need to share the housework with their husbands, thanks to their family support discussed earlier, they regularly expressed their emotions and discussed significant managerial issues with their husbands. Mai argued, "Normally, when I have a problem at work, I have to speak to my husband because I cannot sufficiently trust anybody else." Furthermore, a few participants indicated that while educating children to be good students and citizens is not their spouses' direct support for them, this share of domestic responsibilities enormously relieves the women's family burden and enables them

to concentrate more fully on their occupations and advancement. As a result, spousal support is a crucial facilitating factor of women's upward mobility.

Colleagues' and subordinates' collaboration and assistance. The majority of the participants (75%) noted that their work environment was quite collegial and inspiring. First, there were often good collaboration and support from colleagues in various disciplines and departments across the institution. Additionally and significantly, they emphasized that they could fulfill their administrative and leadership tasks successfully thanks to their subordinates' commitment and assistance in their daily work. On this point, Vy commented, "Even though my subordinates [administrative staff] are young and inexperienced, they are highly committed and enthusiastic. Moreover, they whole-heartedly support me in my work. Without them, I myself alone can hardly do anything." Like Vy, Chuong "was very lucky to have devoted collaborators who love me and help me a lot." As a leader of two divisions of SCU, the Department of Office Administration and the Department of Personnel Administration, Chuong's workload was double. Therefore, she said, "Only with my subordinates' mutual understanding, harmony, and support can I deal with such a huge workload." Other participants argued that their subordinates' support for them as well as their advantage in human resource management resulted from the fact that their age was much older than their subordinates'; therefore, the latter considered the former "sisters," "aunts," and "mothers" and often performed their delegated assignments with enthusiasm.

It is frequently not easy to obtain collaboration of colleagues from different disciplines as well as to get subordinates to be fully committed to the common work. However, the majority of the participants in this study could do these things effectively. Being able to do so, as the majority of them said, was their good luck.

Others. Several participants (7%-19%) stated that the enhancing factors for their career advancement included (1) trust, reputation, and passion; (2) their continuous and tireless self-learning; (3) support of people in power at the beginning of their careers, and (4) their ability to attend to institutional emerging needs.

First, three participants commented that it was important to build mutual trust with their superiors, colleagues, and friends because they believed that mutual trust at work would enhance their reputation. Also, these women reported that it was gaining the trust of their superiors and colleagues that helped them attain their current leadership positions. Moreover, the same number of participants indicated that what facilitated their career advancement was their passion for their current jobs, which were associated with the disciplines they chose for themselves when they were little or younger. Because of the passion for accounting, teaching and learning, or being a college instructor, they have devoted their time and energy to performing their duties most effectively, sharing their excellent expertise with their colleagues and subordinates, and enormously contributing to the overall well-being of their divisions. These activities in turn enhanced their reputation.

Second, two participants said that learning was their lifelong passion, and thus they usually participated in formal and informal learning, through which they could improve their professional knowledge and take some professional standardized tests to reach higher professional levels. Third, one participant noted that thanks to the recommendation of one of her old teachers who was a senior administrator at her old university, she was admitted into her current institution and received better work assignments than those who did not have a similar recommendation. This participant stated that this was an important opportunity on her career path. Another participant recalled that when her teacher training college was upgraded to a multidisciplinary university, there was a pressing need to

turn her department into a college to meet the new training requirements of a much bigger student population. Thanks to her enormous efforts as a department chair to meet these requirements of the university, her college was founded and she was promoted to dean.

Overall, although the factors outlined above are not typical facilitating factors for all the women selected for this study, they are additional factors that have influenced the careers of some women or individual women. It is noteworthy that these factors played an important role in putting them in their current positions of leadership and in helping them sustain these positions.

Summary of opportunities and facilitating factors. By and large, the opportunities and facilitating factors that the 16 women participants encountered on their career paths were created and enhanced by their institutions, superiors, families, colleagues, and subordinates. In their efforts to ensure gender equity on campus as required by the Vietnamese gender equality law, institutional leaders gave women opportunities and priorities for further training, professional development, and promotion. Significantly, with the support of their families, spouses, colleagues, and subordinates, the women fulfilled their heavy workloads and balanced their work and life responsibilities. Moreover, women's own efforts and desires for their self-development and the development of their divisions also enormously contributed to their attainment of leadership roles. However, the participants also identified various challenges confronting their professional progress and mobility. The section that follows describes and provides insights into the most conspicuous challenges and obstacles that these women encountered in their careers.

Challenges and Obstacles to Women's Career Advancement

There are numerous challenges and obstacles to both married and unmarried academic women's professional development and advancement primarily because of their sex. However, in the next sections, only substantial challenges and obstacles which had major impacts on the

women's progress and career advancement are presented. Conversely, the challenges and obstacles which did not mean very much in the large scheme of things are only briefly recognized.

Lack of structured mentoring programs and role modeling. When asked whether they had a mentor who was visionary, provided them with advice or opportunities, or prepared them for future leadership roles, all the participants, except one, said no. As mentioned previously, My (from RU) regarded her former rector (who advised her to earn her second bachelor's degree at her old university in Ho Chi Minh City rather than at a continuing education center in her home province) as her mentor, but that is it. At other stages in her career, she did not have any mentors. Some participants (19%) considered their family members, such as grandfather, father, mother, or uncle, their mentors. However, these people were more likely to give the participants advice about their occupational choice and reasonable ways of living and behaving rather than offer them advice and orientation that fostered their professional growth. Hong recalled the mentoring she received from her family:

Formerly, when I lived with my parents, they showed me how to study well, how to be a good student. However, because they later did not work in my field, they did not know clearly what happened to me. Then, after I failed my entrance exam to be admitted as a medical student, I stayed home for two years and my uncle, who is my aunt's husband, oriented me to pursue education as my profession. (Hong)

Unlike Hong's parents and uncle, Thu's uncle gave her advice about how to live a happy life:

In my life, there have been many unhappy events, and I have learned a uniquely useful thing from my uncle [who is her father's elder brother]. He said that I have to pick happy things out of my life to live with them and try to eliminate all the sadness and obstacles. (Thu)

The participants' comments indicated that there were not mentoring programs of any type, official or unofficial, or professional development centers at their institutions like those at many universities and colleges in the United States (Tolar, 2012). Along the same lines, there were

very few powerful women at the top level who served as role models, significantly influencing the women's professional choices and stimulating their professional ambitions. Consequently, the majority of the women had to learn from the successful experiences of an array of male role models who were often their superiors, colleagues, and family members:

I do not have a fixed role model, but there are many good points in different people that I want to set as examples for my development. For instance, I want to be as clever and tactful in communication and problem solving as Mr. Huy Huynh [a former vice rector]. From Dr. Cong Truong [the current rector], his boldness to try new things is worthy of my learning.... From Mr. Cuong Bui [the current vice rector], his cleverness in treating people is what I can learn from; although he is sometimes displeased at something, he does not let anybody know. I think that is also what I should learn because it does not mean that we are dishonest, but for some people, we should not let them know how we really feel. I believe that hiding our genuine feelings is sometimes good for us.... I do not take any person as my official role model, but by picking things up from this and that person, I form a model that I can follow. (Vy)

Mr. Huy, Dr. Cong, and Mr. Cuong were all top men leaders of Sugar Cane University (SCU), whose professional behaviors, Vy assumed, were useful for her to learn from. Seven other participants expressed the same ideas of role modeling as Vy, meaning viewing their male superiors as their role models. Nevertheless, three participants were strongly influenced by their grandfather, uncle, and father. Dao (CCC) said that her father and father-in-law, who were high-ranking government officials, were her role models, commenting,

I like them in that they solve their work problems very smoothly.... Moreover, I highly value their self-discipline, daily routine, excellent roles in the family, and ways of treating relatives, friends, and children, all of which are good models for me to follow. (Dao)

Interestingly, only one participant stated that she highly admired the excellent professional knowledge and administrative skills of some other mid-level women leaders at her university.

By and large, mentoring and role modeling were not professional activities that were well-structured and officially implemented at the four institutions selected for this study. Therefore, the participants had to seek advice, encouragement, and guidelines for their career

advancement not only from professionals inside and outside of their institutions but also from their family members, and they learned from observing professional and real-life behaviors of these two groups of people.

Balancing multiple responsibilities. The biggest challenge that all married participants had to address was to balance work and family responsibilities. In addition, their challenge was double or triple if they simultaneously pursued their graduate degree programs or took care of their parents or parents-in-law. Almost all the participants (14 out of 16), both married and single, admitted that, although living in modern times, women still have to fulfill their “innate” responsibilities of childbearing, childrearing, tidying their houses, and doing the cooking if they want to preserve their “family happiness” and “togetherness.” Diem argued,

If a woman wants her family to be happy, the oven in her home must always be warm.... Even though you are a modern woman, and your husband and children can buy their own meals for the convenience of your work, you have to sustain your family dinners. It is necessary that you manage your time in whatever possible ways to gather everybody in your family for dinner. (Diem)

However, Diem commented that women’s hard efforts to carry out their domestic duties to protect their family happiness are not only their “strength” but also their “weakness,” which hinders their professional advancement. This is because “many times we try to take our time from work to go to the market [to buy groceries] to prepare good meals for our family, and I see that [adversely] affects our advancement” (Diem). Moreover, Thanh pointed out,

Men can feel safe to hand all household chores such as child care, meal preparations, housekeeping, and so forth over to their wives and can come back home after midnight. Women cannot usually do like that; only once in a while is acceptable.... Consequently, their social communications are confined. Particularly, whenever we go far away from home for our business, we are frequently worried about things happening at home. (Thanh)

Thanh implied that women do not have as much freedom as their male counterparts in participating in social and professional activities, and they themselves are not confident enough

in handing family responsibilities over to their husbands when having to be absent from home.

Thanh's implications are clarified by Dao's reflections on her dilemma created by women's gender role:

I think that my existing difficulty is only my family, only the influence of my family. This means that women frequently confront difficulties because they have to take good care of their families. We cannot control our time as much as men.... While at work, men can concentrate more of their heart and their mind. Women are more influenced [distracted] by child care and housekeeping things. (Dao)

Dao's freedom and time to participate in her professional activities were further constrained because, together with her husband and two small children, she was living with her parents-in-law. As she identified, "Usually, living in a family in which we are daughters-in-laws, we cannot frequently take our business trips far away from home. Our conditions are more limited than men's." And she shared Thanh's ideas that women are usually more concerned about their family well-being than their own development:

When there are training courses, we know for sure that they will help upgrade our knowledge, but we have to think first of our family and to double check whether the training dates are appropriate for us to leave our family. (Dao)

Despite not living with her parents-in-law like Dao, Bich (OCC) still faced substantial challenges because she was pursuing her master's degree program in Ho Chi Minh (HCM) City, located about 150 kilometers away from her hometown, and working as a full-time administrator. She compared her current and previous jobs and identified the effects of her job change:

My [existing] work in the institution influenced my family a lot because as an instructor, formerly I did not have to be obliged to the work hours, meaning that when I did not have classes, I could stay home. During the time I was home, I could take care of my family, tidy my house, and cook for my husband and daughter. But since I shifted to administration, I have had to do a lot of administrative work and to be tied to the eight-hour workday, so my family life has been heavily affected. (Bich)

Bich's challenges were triple when her classes were scheduled three even or odd days a week; therefore, she also had to travel back and forth between her hometown and HCM City three times a week so that she could still take charge of her work at her college. She said, "When I complete my study [in the morning], I go home in the afternoon and spend the day after working at my institution. Then, I go back to HCM City after midnight or the day after."

Many other women (69%) faced similar challenges to Bich while they were working, leading, and earning their advanced degrees. In other words, to move up their career ladder, the women participants had to balance not simply two responsibilities, work and family, but also some additional obligations such as learning for a higher degree, leading, and taking care of old parents or parents-in-law. In other words, at the same time they had to play multiple roles, namely as a leader, an instructor, a mother, a wife, a daughter, and a daughter-in-law, and their work pressure often "adversely affects our health and family. There is always something heavy in our head, so our behaviors towards our children are not gentle enough" (Mai). Interestingly, Mai's opinions about the adverse effect of women's heavy workloads on their families was enhanced by some other women's (25%) reflections that "it is impossible for women to be successful in both career and family. Most high-achieving women are divorced" (Diem). Ngoc also commented,

Women can only choose one between the two [family or career]; it is impossible for them to be good at both their work and their family. I think that is extremely difficult unless they have their spousal support. If their husbands and children do not support them, they can only achieve one. (Ngoc)

By "only achieve one," Ngoc meant that women, without their family support, can have only one option, which is either moving forward in their careers and ignoring their family happiness or living with their families happily and giving up their career mobility.

To sum up, balancing multiple responsibilities and roles seems overwhelming for most women academics in the MD as they strive to advance in their careers, especially if they do not receive their family and spousal support. The next section delves into institutional barriers to women's development and advancement, which create additional roadblocks on their career paths.

Institutional challenges. There are numerous obstacles emerging from women's relationships with people on their campuses and the character of their existing work. Even though it is quite possible for them to overcome these barriers, doing so takes them a lot time and energy.

Colleagues' jealousy. Nearly half of the participants (44%) noted that during their promotion and work processes, they figured out that some of their colleagues did not support them. Diem recalled that thanks to the approval ballots of the majority of her colleagues, she was promoted to vice dean of her college. Nevertheless, the approval from two thirds of the voters showed that "there are still a number of people who were not pleased with me.... Sometimes these people criticize me very harshly, and some other times they speak very unacceptable sentences behind my back" (Diem). Interestingly, Diem as well as two other participants believed that "people hate me because they cannot be as good as me." Likewise, a few other participants argued that some of their colleagues disliked them because of their sex coupled with their success, and the latter's resentment and jealousy led to their uncooperativeness when both parties worked together.

Subordinates' disrespect. In addition, challenge also emerged as the women leaders were young and newly-appointed, which caused a number of their colleagues and subordinates, especially those who were older, not to show adequate respect to them:

Human beings are often difficult to manage. My human resource management is facing difficulty because there are many generations of staff working in this library.... The

young staff members usually take all my assignments. But for the “big” ladies and sisters, since I was a staff member before assuming this position, they sometimes do not respect me sufficiently. (Ngoc)

Although Chuong’s subordinates highly respected her because of her talents and good manners, the staff and faculty members from other departments and colleges within her institution were from time to time unwilling to collaborate with her due to her age:

Now, when the faculty and staff from outside look at my Department of Personnel Administration, they think that there must be senior, experienced, and bright officials working here. If this were true [we were older], they would show more respect to us and collaborate with us better. However, I am at the same age and in the same generation as they. Although I am quite capable of performing my current job [effectively], and the staff members in my department accept that, it is inevitable that people from outside [other departments and colleges] try to “beat me up” during our work interactions. (Chuong)

The message Chuong wanted to convey in this comment is that people frequently caused trouble for her because of her age and the senior position she was holding. She tried to explain further that “people may not be happy with my work style,” but she thoroughly understood that “this is quite normal in the workplace.” In most of the institutions under study (3 out of 4), being young and inexperienced was a big obstacle to the women leaders. And in order to overcome it, they noted that they had to be extremely patient and flexible in communicating with the faculty and staff, particularly those who were older, both in and out of their divisions.

Superiors’ challenging behaviors. As presented earlier, the majority of the participants said that their superiors were very supportive. However, when answering some probing questions about their superiors, nearly half of the participants reported that either the support was not given or was given but not in time, and some superiors only supported the people in their network.

Bich gave a specific example of her superior’s refusal of her application for her master’s studies:

For example, even in my studies, I am not sure whether because there were not sufficient staff to carry out all the activities of my department or because nobody was able to replace me in my position, my application for a [temporary] leave to pursue my graduate

program three years ago was not approved. And I do not think that the reasons given at that time were appropriate. Yet the fact that my application was not approved then has hindered my advancement. (Bich)

Without a graduate degree, it was certainly hard for Bich to further advance in her career since one of the leading criteria for appointing a faculty or staff member to a mid- and high-level leadership position in a college is his or her master's degree. Hong shared Bich's negative experience with her superior and recalled, "I wanted to attend a training course on government administration.... But she did not allow me to attend the course with the reason that it was not necessary for instructors like me." In fact, although Hong was an English instructor and Chairperson of the Department of Foreign Languages in the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, she was also Director of the Center for Foreign Languages and Information Technology. As a result, the course on government administration was quite suitable for her.

Moreover, some women noted that because of the centralized administrative system of their institution, they needed their rector's or vice rector's guidelines and approvals before they could implement an important activity or solve a big problem. Nonetheless, both of them were not on campus at that critical time, so the problem became worse when they came back to the campus, and the mid-level leaders had to delay or cancel the activity.

Another challenge that some superiors generated was to support only the people in their network, and to cause trouble for those who were not the network members. This issue is best reflected in Diem's experience:

For example, among the three top-level leaders, only two of them support me, and the other person does not fully support. He even did not want me to be a leader. Rather, he wanted to promote the people in his network. You know that people like him do not have authentic capability, but when they hold top positions, they usually form and maintain their own network. (Diem)

The network Diem mentioned usually consisted of an incapable but powerful leader and incompetent, sheep, and yes-subordinates (DePree, 1998; Kelley, 1998), who were often flatterers and opportunists. “These bad leaders” and their networks usually hindered the progress of “really capable people” around them, but “it is fortunate that there are not many of such leaders at my institution” (Diem).

Overall, belated support or lack of support from superiors also brings difficulty to the women’s accomplishment of their work responsibilities and hinders their advancement as well. Nevertheless, less than half of the participants experienced these challenges.

Obtaining appointments outside of expertise or experience level. Finally, approximately half of the participants (44%) reflected that their administration and leadership faced substantial challenges when the board of rectors along with the Party committee appointed them as directors of support departments or service centers whose functions their professional knowledge and skills did not fit. This is because the overwhelming majority of participants were simply instructors or faculty members and department chairs, and they were not trained to be managers or leaders prior to their promotions to senior leadership roles. Following are illustrations of some participants’ comments regarding challenges to their new job assignments:

Since I came to the Department of Personnel Administration, I have faced millions of difficulties. First, the job is completely new because teaching and administering people are different, quite different from each other. Thus, I have to learn while I am performing my job and learn as a beginner; then, I draw lessons for myself. It is apparent that when I worked at my [specialized] department formerly, I had never been scolded [by the rector], but since moving to this department, I am scolded every day. (Chuong, SCU)

Prior to my appointment to this post [Director of the Center for Foreign Languages], I was just a normal instructor. Therefore, my current job is a big challenge for me.... My former teaching job is completely different from administration and administration of human beings; now I have to make a plan, implement it, and monitor it. I mean that during the administrative process, I find challenges everywhere, but I do not have relevant knowledge. Consequently, for example, when I want to simply make a plan, I do not

know what a plan needs to have, what items I should include in it. So I have to go around and ask for help with these things. (Dinh, RU)

Sugar Cane University (SCU) and Rice University (RU) are young higher education institutions established as a community college and a teacher training college, respectively. Therefore, there is a shortage of appropriately trained administrators and staff to serve as leaders in most support departments and service centers. To temporarily address this problem, the top leaders of these two universities, as well as those of the two young community colleges in this study, tended to appoint competent faculty members with some or without prior administrative experiences to fill these vacancies. However, those appointed usually encountered the challenges Chuong and Dinh described above. Five other women in this study faced similar administrative difficulties because they “were not supplied with new skills and knowledge before assuming a certain administrative role” with which they were not familiar (My). The women argued that this was a weakness in the administration of their home institution but through it their “new personality traits [as managers and leaders] will be formed and fostered.” However, dealing with new job tasks beyond their prior training and experiences consumed a lot of their time and energy, so this limited the time they could spend on upgrading their professional knowledge and skills and studying for a higher degree.

Conventional obstacles. In addition to the institutional challenges, there are various conventional or ordinary obstacles that frequently confine women’s social roles and participation in academic activities. The obstacles, namely sex-role stereotypes, gender prejudices, cultural expectations, and women’s perceptions of their responsibilities, are interwoven and exist not only in Viet Nam but also in other countries where males are dominant.

Sex-role stereotypes and gender prejudices. More than half of the participants (56%) commented that the public, men, and even women themselves did not think that women can be

as capable top leaders as men, nor that women should hold the highest position in an organization. Many participants believed that women at the top encountered many risks associated with their family. As one participant observed,

When we perform well in the society, our domestic responsibilities will be somewhat [badly] influenced. For instance, if we are highly committed to our work and are always away from home, we will not be able to spend sufficient time with our children supervising their studies. In some cases, the children are spoilt when they cut their classes, stay home, and play video games. (Hong)

Some participants thought that women should not assume top leadership roles because the ways they solve problems and treat their subordinates are often emotionally oriented. They assumed that men were better leaders since they used their minds, not their hearts, in these affairs. In addition, some other participants indicated that it is hard for women to rise to the top because of the “institutional culture” which is closely associated with the “perceptions of women’s maximum level of commitment to their work,” which cannot be comparable to men’s. “Elsewhere on campus, there is the distinction between men’s work and women’s work” (Mai), and comments like “women are primary caregivers and homemakers and so cannot work as well as men” were popular (Dinh). Finally, “because of their sex, women’s ideas are not usually as well listened [to] as those of their male counterparts” (Thuy). Thuy clarified her claim:

I don’t know what happened in other countries, but I see that in our country and in my college women’s ideas are not taken into account properly.... Normally, the biggest challenge or difficulty is that our ideas must be highly convincing and we have to repeat them many times so as to make the leaders absorb them and think about them. We need to do so because it seems that the leaders do not fully believe what we have suggested may be feasible as we are women. (Thuy)

The prejudices and stereotypes described above closely link with some typical Vietnamese cultural expectations of how women should behave in society and at home. The section that follows briefly discusses these expectations and academic women’s responses to them, which, according to the participants, were barriers to their progress.

Cultural expectations and women's perceptions of their responsibilities. The Vietnamese people in general and men in particular expect women to be “appropriate” females, meaning that the latter have to uphold the feminine virtues or characteristics defined by Confucian ideals (Rydstrøm & Drummond, 2004). In this regard, it is inappropriate for them to drink and behave freely like men at party tables. Rather, they need to be “reserved” and to watch both their bodily and verbal behaviors at drinking parties which they cannot refuse to attend owing to the requirements of their work (Hong). The image of “a woman holding a glass of wine, hitting her glass with those of many men, and drinking until her face turns red and her body shakes from left to right and vice versa goes beyond the acceptable limit” (Hoa). Consequently, some participants reported that to “preserve” their images as appropriate and reasonable women, wives, and mothers, they tried their best to minimize or avoid participating in drinking parties after work hours and taking business trips far away from home, which usually require them to interact with potential partners at drinking parties. As a result, they could hardly establish their own network or join men's network.

“Appropriate” women are expected to be committed to their family's well-being as well as the development of their spouses and children (Ha, 2001). In so doing, they frequently have to sacrifice their own development, including giving up unique opportunities to advance in their careers. However, most of the participants said that it is completely worthwhile for them to behave in such a way. Ngoc explained,

As women, we should choose our family [rather than our career] because eventually to whom can we dedicate our achievements? To our children, to our spouses. Providing that we have achieved a very high level of education but have to live alone finally, that will be very sad. (Ngoc)

Ngoc wanted to refer to women's attainment of a doctorate as “a very high level of education.” Her concern is very common among various women, not only married but also single. Married women

are usually worried that if they pursue their doctoral studies, especially in a foreign country, and leave their family behind for years, their marriage will end in a break-up, and they may live alone for the rest of their life. For single women, in case they study at “a very high level,” no men will dare marry them, and they may also live a single life. Generally, the public tends to expect women to preserve traditional feminine virtues, and so women’s manlike behaviors and thinking are hard or impossible to be accepted. This social expectation in turn usually lowers women’s career aspirations since for women, family and family happiness are always more important.

Other conspicuous obstacles. My data analysis shows that there are still a variety of challenges and obstacles to academic women’s professional development and advancement, some of which are closely associated with the Vietnamese culture. These will be presented in more detail in the section discussing cultural influences. The following paragraphs outline two other outstanding obstacles impeding women’s professional progress and reducing their career aspirations when they are at the peak of their occupations.

Women’s retirement age by law. According to the Vietnamese labor law, women officers in all governmental agencies have to retire at the age of 55, while men’s official retirement age is 60. In this respect, academic women over 50 years old are not promoted to any leadership positions, since a term is five years long. If they are still physically and mentally healthy after 55, they can sign a contract with their institution and work for at most five more years. However, during this extra period, they are not officially employed and do not receive any professional promotions and appointments. In this study, several highly capable and proactive women deans and associate deans who were between 51 and 54 lost all hopes of attaining higher positions. Further, the women noted that when they reached the age of 40 and over, all the opportunities to earn higher degrees were closed to them because the majority of international, governmental, and

institutional scholarship and fellowship programs only allowed women below 40 to apply. Le reflected in a very sad voice that she also wanted to pursue her doctoral studies by applying for a fellowship from the Mekong 1,000 project,²⁶ but the top leaders of her college stated that ‘oh my God! You are already 48 years old. You study for what?’ Facing this dilemma, Le said that she tried not to compare herself with any of her younger colleagues but to train herself to be “immune from sadness and sorrow.” Similarly, Thu had to stop her advanced studies at the master’s level despite her burning desire to earn a Ph.D.:

The only thing that I have regretted in my life is not to be able to study at a more advanced level, although deep in my heart I really want to do that. After I had successfully defended my master’s thesis in 1999, my advisor told me that if I wanted to pursue my Ph.D. studies, he would assist me. However, the People’s Committee of my province then had a regulation that only those born after 1960 could study at this level; therefore, I had to stop. (Thu)

Thu was born in 1958, so she was 41 in 1999. At that time, as a faculty member of a teacher training college which received funding from the provincial people’s committee, her further studies, as well as those of any other faculty and staff, had to be approved by the committee in order to get financial aid.

Furthermore, one of the gatekeepers in this study, Dr. Cong Truong, Rector of Sugar Cane University (SCU), who had been a member of the Vietnamese National Assembly for two terms, stated that he, along with many other National Assembly members, were quite aware of the barriers to women’s professional progress and advancement because of their obligatory retirement age. Hence, they recommended this highest law-making body amend the article in the

²⁶ The Mekong 1,000 project is currently the biggest national scholarship project in the Mekong Delta. Its goal is to train 1,000 plus masters and doctoral students in all types of disciplines for 12 provinces and one city in this region throughout the period of 2005-2015. A number of participants in this project have been sent to Michigan State University and other prestigious universities in the U.S., and many others to various well-known postsecondary institutions in Asia, Australia, and Europe, for their master’s and Ph.D. degrees.

labor law regarding women's age of retirement. Nevertheless, Rector Cong stated that no change had been made.

Women's health conditions. Although most of the participants were not happy with their retirement age regulated by law, six of them who were between 40 and 48 years old confessed that their health was degrading, and they could not work as well as before. At the time of my in-depth interview with her, Bich was 45 years old. When asked whether she faced any other challenges that were hard to overcome, Bich replied,

One current challenge is my health. This means that when I am getting older, my health is not as good as before. When I was younger, I could work at any time, meaning that I worked according to my health. But the older I get, the worse my health becomes; my sharpness at work was not the same as before. Although my experience is richer when I am older, I am not healthy and my sharpness is also lost. (Bich)

A smaller number of the women even believed that the labor law should not be amended to lengthen women's working time, pointing out that in comparison with their male counterparts at the same age, their physical health could not be comparable. Further, they reported that numerous women at their institutions who were above the age of 40 complained that their health was not stable, and they did not want to wait until they were 55 to retire. Thuy compared women's and men's health in the workplace:

Anyhow, we are not as healthy as men. For example, when performing jobs which require a lot travel and continuous hard work, women do not usually do as well as men. Therefore, women have one obvious limitation which is we do not have health. (Thuy)

In her last sentence, Thuy wanted to say that women's health is not suitable for traveling jobs and hard work. Her comment was strengthened by My's opinion that "I think there is one more big obstacle to women's career advancement that is our health condition," and this was further clarified by Thanh's reflections on her personal health in relation to her work:

My health is my first personal challenge.... I am actually concerned that the older I am, the more degrading my health is. I am really worried that if my workloads are not

reduced, I will collapse. Sometimes I worked so hard that I wondered, “Oh, God. Is it possible that I collapse right on my office desk and lose my life?” It was so stressful.... When finishing up my work, I felt exhausted and powerless. (Thanh)

Consequently, although health was not a dominant obstacle to the career advancement of all the participants, it was an issue of concern to the women who were over 40 years old. The heavy workloads that institutional leaders often have to carry seemed overwhelming to them.

Comments on challenges and obstacles to women’s career advancement. Overall, the challenges and obstacles facing the development and advancement of women academics in the MD are quite diverse. Many of them originate from the gender inequality practices within Vietnamese society, many others from the academic structure and human resources, and others from the women themselves, either their perceptions of their feminine roles or their health status. In addition, the labor law on women’s age of retirement also impedes women’s professional progress and aspirations. In addition to the limited opportunities but innumerable challenges encountered by the women, what impacts, either positive or negative, the traditional Vietnamese culture exerts on their professional progress and upward mobility is the theme of the next section.

Influences of Traditional Vietnamese Culture

A report by the Viet Nam Women’s Union (2005) stated that there had been a number of gender achievements which significantly improved women’s status and their lives, thanks to the implementation of the gender equality law in Viet Nam. Nevertheless, gender gaps still exist in various fields due to the traditional ideology of men’s and women’s roles. This conclusion is consistent with the finding of this study on the influences of Vietnamese culture on the women participants’ experiences. The data show that the impact of Confucian norms and values on men’s and women’s perceptions of women’s social roles and behaviors is still pervasive. The following sections describe in detail how this impact hinders academic women’s career

aspirations and advancement.

In this study, nine women were born in the 1950s—1960s, and seven in the 1970s—1980s. Though the understandings of these two groups of women of Confucian ideology are different, the ideology's influences on their professional perceptions, behaviors, and interactions with men are very similar.

The 1950s—1960s Group

The participants in this group, who were in their late 40s and early 50s, had a thorough understanding of Confucianism because Confucian norms and values, particularly the four feminine virtues (*cong, dung, ngon, hanh*) and three types of obedience,²⁷ were widely spread in their families, schools, and living environment. Accordingly, Confucianism had a strong impact on their perceptions of their roles, behaviors, speech, and interactions with men. This idea is best illustrated by the comments of two participants, one of whom said,

The influences are quite a lot. Generally speaking, my thinking is not as liberal as the others'. This means that when I behave, I have to be cautious and to maintain a certain limit, because I am first a woman, and second a teacher. Therefore, I cannot have intimate relationships [with men] like some persons. I see that some people have such relationships that make me feel uncomfortable. For example, I often have business interactions, which are not simply to interact during work but also to sit together at a party table, particularly with guests. When sitting at the same table, I also maintain my limits. However, I have seen various women interacting with men rather intimately, such as holding each other's hands and forcing each other to drink, and the like.... I felt very uncomfortable about these. (Bich)

Along the same lines, the second woman reported,

I am a woman and an Asian or Eastern woman. Because I grew up in the countryside, not in a modern city, the moral standards and the Eastern ways in which people view women have deeply penetrated into my head. For example, in my interactions, thoughts, and speeches, I always try to think twice and find polite words to say. Although my

²⁷ Please refer to Chapter 2 for more details on the four feminine virtues and three types of obedience.

relationships with some men and women are pretty close, I still keep my own regulations. For instance, when talking with them, both men and women, I am always selective in my word usage in order not to make my speeches rude. In addition, the ways I behave, speak, walk, and so on are in fact based on Confucian norms, meaning that they are not similar to those of modern women. (Thuy)

Another participant recalled that her mother, who was a Confucius follower, always requested and reminded her “to put the chair on which I sat back to its previous position when I stand up and leave, and not to laugh loudly because I am a girl.” Despite the fact that some other women born during this period did not fully approve of all conservative Confucian norms, they believed that women had to set limits on their behaviors towards men, especially at party tables, and to uphold the three types of obedience and four virtues in modern times (Ngo, 2004; Rydstrøm & Drummond, 2004). For example, one participant commented at length:

Concerning the three forms of obedience and four [feminine] virtues, I think that the feudal times ended a long time ago. Now comes the modern times, so modern people have gone over what is called “women impossible,” which means that women should have known only sewing and cooking, while social activities are for men. As you have known, today’s women have gotten rid of what is so-called man’s work and woman’s work. However, there is still a barrier, but I think that women should not pass this barrier, meaning that they should not pass permissible women limits... Although nobody forces them to maintain this barrier, they themselves have to realize that this is a [valuable] feminine virtue. This means when we interact with men, we have to uphold our image of appropriate females, to behave properly, and to keep a distance. In a party, for example, a woman holding a glass of wine, hitting her glass with many men’s glasses, and drinking until her face turns red and her body shakes from left to right and vice versa really passes the permissible limit. This doesn’t mean that women are not allowed to drink. We can drink, but we should be moderate in our actions and should not let the bad news about our inappropriate behaviors sadden our husbands. I think that women’s three forms of obedience and four virtues are still in our blood. (Hoa)

The quotes presented above also show that Confucianism influenced not only women’s perceptions of themselves and their relationships with their male counterparts but also the ways they viewed other women, along with women’s social behaviors and interactions. Compared to what women are allowed to do under the law, these perceptions are highly conservative and may

hinder women's career advancement. Some participants also admitted that because their thoughts were still within the framework of Confucianism, they could not be as successful in their careers as the women whose social communications were broader and whose interactions with men were more liberal. They further indicated that many successful work negotiations are usually done at bars and drinking parties, and it is easier for people to support each other later in their work if they establish good relationships at these places.

Furthermore, some participants argued that regardless of the fact that the gender equality law aims to remove all remnants of Confucian or feudal ideology, which primarily values men and disparages women, this ideology is still deep-rooted in the mindset of the Vietnamese people. In most families, women, by custom, still have to obey their husbands and are the main persons responsible for household chores, although they and their husbands are both employed full-time. The participants also indicated that reproduction remains an important women's role, and thus childbearing and childrearing are considered women's "natural responsibilities." From these gender practices, they argued that Confucian ideology is still perpetuated, and there is not yet gender equality in reality. In other words, the influence of Confucianism in society seems to be an insurmountable obstacle to equal professional progress and advancement of most women.

The 1970s—1980s Group

The seven younger participants, born in the 1970s and 1980s, did not have as good an understanding of Confucian ideology as the women described in the previous section. Hence, in most of my interviews, I had to remind them of the basic concepts of Confucianism, including the four feminine virtues and three types of obedience. As soon as these terms were mentioned, my questions about the impact of Confucianism made sense to them, and their responses were quite thorough and interesting.

Although these younger participants did not have similar conservative perspectives on women's social interactions with and professional behaviors towards men, they still highly valued the four feminine virtues. They stated that their parents and the older people around them usually talked about these virtues and used them as the standards to evaluate women's conduct. For example, one participant recalled, "My mother taught me that as a woman, I have to be beautiful from inside my house to outside, on the street. 'Beautiful' here means tidy, neat, and elegant" (Chuong). Therefore, like the women of the older group, these women believed that women in general should spend their time out of work taking care of their family and should not go to bars nor drink freely with men at parties, despite their purpose of establishing professional networks with their male counterparts.

When asked whether the Confucian norms impacted their work and behaviors and whether they impeded their career advancement, six of the seven women of this age group said yes. Following are illustrations of participants' comments regarding the influences of Confucianism on their life, work, and professional decisions:

I think that I am a little feudal-oriented.... Although I do not have the thinking of "*valuing men and disparaging women*," I believe that as a woman, "*cong, dung, ngon, hanh*" [the four feminine virtues] are really necessary for me because of their popularity and wide influence. For example, there were some very capable candidates for a vacant position at my department, but when realizing that their conduct was not good because of their [improper] interactions with men, I did not admit them, regardless of our pressing need for human resources at that time. (Vy)

Another participant commented,

I think there are still influences of Confucianism today. Despite being in a modern age, women are still affected by Confucian norms, because it is true that women need to have *cong, dung, ngon, hanh* no matter what age they are living in. No matter what jobs we [women] are doing, we need to be gentle, clever, and tactful. For example, in our social interactions, we should be aware of our limits. As women leaders, if we drink freely with men, people will look at us very strangely. Or it is unacceptable if we are as drunk as

men. Thus, I think that we must set some limits so that we can still keep our ego [self-esteem] and our *cong, dung, ngon, hanh*. (Ngoc)

Vy further reflected that since she operated professionally like a man, travelling a lot and interacting with numerous men, no men dared love her and marry her. In the same vein, Hong believed that

As women, we are still influenced by Confucian norms in our professional interactions. We have to be gentle, elegant, and so on..., and we are not allowed to drink a lot of beer and wine or to hit our glasses with men's.

Moreover, not only did the women of this age group but also those of the older group believe that for women families are more important than careers. As a result, they sometimes gave up their opportunities to pursue doctoral degree programs because their husbands had not yet earned a doctorate. Similarly, several young women decided to postpone their more advanced studies until after they had their first child. Further, three women of this group stated that leadership and high positions were more appropriate for men, so they always felt more confident when the rector of their institution was a man, adding that if they had to select between an equally qualified man and woman for the rector post, they would vote for the man. This perception of women's appropriate social role also made them devalue themselves and other women leaders. For instance, one participant commented,

I am not sure whether this is true or not, and it may be only my personal perception. For example, if a man holds the post of director [like her current post], this post seems stronger and more authoritative. In contrast, if a woman holds this post, I have a feeling that when she travels around, people may say, "That is a woman. How can she be comparable to a man?" (Hong)

Overall, regardless of the fact that the majority of women of the younger generation did not understand Confucian ideology or its norms and values as clearly as those of the older generation, some remnants of this ideology, particularly the four female virtues, still heavily influenced their view of life and proper behaviors. Some of them clearly indicated that

Confucian norms confine women's roles and their participation in a variety of social and professional activities. As a result, they cannot advance as far and high as men in their careers.

Professional Interactions and Relationships With Male Colleagues and Supervisors

While the participants said that they had to maintain some limits and keep a certain distance while interacting with men at drinking parties, all of them commented that despite their smaller number on campus, they did not feel uncomfortable communicating with their male colleagues in the workplace. Rather, they indicated that their professional relationships with men were good, normal, and equal. For example, My said, "Generally speaking, my relationships with men at my university are very good and normal. I also feel very comfortable and confident in interacting with them. I am not shy and reserved because I am a woman." Likewise, some other women said, "In my work, there is almost no distinction between men and women" (Mai), and "My frequent interactions with men are normal; my daily communications with them are fun and harmonious, and there are no problems at all" (Dao). Along the same lines, Linh described her regular communications and relations with the staff and administrators of multiple units of which she was a leader and member:

As you have already known, my relations here [in her college] are with the Party Committee, the support departments, and the Labor Union. In general, I have very good relationships with men in my college. When working together, they and I are very straightforward in our discussions and problem solving. There are many issues that we need to discuss and come to a common decision about to achieve our ultimate goal of bringing the most effectiveness to the college. And the advantage that we have had is the very good relationship between male and female colleagues. (Linh)

As presented in chapter 4, Linh currently holds several powerful positions at her college: (1) Director of the Department of Finance and Physical Facilities, (2) Secretary of the Party Committee of her department, (3) Associate Chairperson of the Labor Union, and (4) Head of the Women's Tasks Board. Assuming these positions, she has to interact with a large number of men, and as she

commented, the effectiveness or common good of her institution makes her and her male colleagues work together collaboratively and productively.

Moreover, the majority of participants stated that many men in their departments or colleges were their subordinates and younger than they. According to the mid- and late-career women, most of the men in their divisions and institutions were even at the age of their brothers, sons, or nephews, so their relationships and interactions with them were very friendly, comfortable, and relaxing. One observed,

For example, after a workshop, a seminar, or a contest, or while concentrating on doing something challenging, and in order to relax or change the stressful atmosphere a little, we ask each other to go out to have some coffee, eat something, and sing karaoke for a while. But usually, in my college there are very few men at my age; most of them are younger and are at the age of my brothers, sons, and nephews. Therefore, we are very close to each other... (Thu)

Similarly, another participant stated,

I came to work at this college in 1987, so most of the men I usually interact with here are about my age, a little older, and a few years younger. And our relationships are very friendly and close, just like siblings in a family.... For other men, I deal with them appropriately, mainly at work. (Le)

In Le's comment, there were some male colleagues with whom she did not have informal relationships, and for these men, she primarily interacted with them through work and on campus. Further, Thanh indicated that as a senior administrator, she spoke and communicated informally and comfortably with all younger faculty and staff at her university, except the two men in the Board of Rectors, whom she only met because of her work. The four male gatekeepers interviewed for this study also stated that they interacted with women leaders in their institutions mostly at institutional meetings, meetings with individual colleges and support departments, campus celebrations, and some women's holidays. Thus, their interactions were usually formal.

On the one hand, the participants' interactions with their male colleagues were described as normal, equal, and comfortable; on the other hand, many participants said that they had to maintain some limits and to watch their words, especially while speaking to males who were older. For example, one of the participants reported that although her older colleagues and she were in similar positions, or their positions and hers were at the same level,

I have to respect them because that is the proper behavior etiquette in our culture.... In our culture, when we are younger, we have a big disadvantage that we cannot raise our voice in critical situations [when there is the presence of older people]. Particularly, in situations which are not related to my expertise, if I am not humble and speak in the same ways as my older male colleagues do, I will be regarded as insolent. (Dinh)

In addition, a few participants noted that it was more common for them to make jokes when they conversed with other women; in contrast, while talking with male colleagues, they usually limited their jokes. Also, a few other women tried to set a barrier while interacting with men at work so as to minimize other people's and colleagues' misunderstandings of their relationships. Chuong best conveyed this idea when she said,

And for instance, when contacting men, I will set limits in order to clearly show [to everybody] this is a work relationship. I do not allow myself to speak and behave improperly; everything should apparently indicate a limit which cannot be stepped over. When, generally, working with married men, for example, I will reduce the misunderstandings to the minimum. (Chuong)

Two other participants were similar to Chuong in their communications with men. They even tried to minimize the opportunities to sit with men at drinking parties, which they sometimes only joined when their husbands accompanied them or when "the participants are members of the same branch of the Labor Union or the same Party committee" (Thu). Interestingly, when asked what caused them to behave in such a way, these women said that it was all "innate" in them, or it was what their mothers required them to do.

In short, the participants often had much more comfort and confidence in interacting with

male subordinates and male colleagues who were younger than they. For older colleagues, regardless of their similar levels of administration, the women had to be more humble in their speech and behavior to show appropriate respect to the former, according to Vietnamese culture. For male superiors and the people to whom the women did not feel close at their institutions, their relationships were primarily built on work, and their interactions mainly took place through activities on campus. To a certain extent, the women commented, because there are still certain cultural constraints on their professional and social interactions, especially with men, their professional development and advancement have encountered many disadvantages.

Section Summary

Confucian ideology, particularly the four feminine virtues, still has a strong influence on both younger and older participants' perceptions of themselves as women leaders as well as their views of women's roles and responsibilities in family and society. Confucianism and the gender equality law have had competing effects on women's career aspirations and advancement, as shown in this and previous sections. Significantly, Confucian ideology remained most influential in the participants' interactions and relationships with men in public places (e.g., bars, restaurants, cafés, etc.), which caused multiple disadvantages to the women's networking with male colleagues and to gaining their support in the workplace. Moreover, while the participants' interactions with their younger male colleagues and subordinates inside and outside of campus were basically good, friendly, and equal, their interactions with their superiors and older men, even at the same administrative levels, were rather formal and primarily work-based. By and large, the traditional Vietnamese culture does not work in favor of the academic women leaders in this study. To put it another way, the remnants of Confucianism remain as significant roadblocks on their career paths.

Despite knowing with certainty that removing the cultural roadblocks is extremely hard, the women leaders still recommended a number of strategies for improving their capabilities, enhancing their career advancement, and increasing the number of women academics holding positions of influence and power. These strategies are presented as the last finding of this chapter.

Participants' Recommendations

Although the women participants did recommend strategies to improve their status and to facilitate their career mobility, there was not much consensus in their recommendations or suggestions. Instead, their recommendations were rather diverse, and there was not high commonality or a common thread going through them. Moreover, only 10 of the 16 participants responded to my last questions, "Is there anything else that I have not asked but you want to add? And what else should be done to help more and more women advance into key positions of leadership?" It was not clear why these six participants did not have any specific responses to these questions; but I did observe that they seemed to be in a hurry to conclude the interviews, which had already been about two hours long, and to get back work or to go back home. Also, the cell phones of two of them rang a few times during the interviews, and I had to pause so that they could answer the phones quickly.

Three of the 10 participants who answered my questions made only minor suggestions. This means that their responses were brief, not well-developed, and not quite pertinent to my questions. Instead, they suggested additional things I should do for this study, or what I should investigate in my next studies. For example, one of them said, "I think in your next study, you should investigate how women can both attain family happiness and succeed in their careers" (Diem). The remaining seven participants gave substantive responses to my questions, although there was not a recurrent theme emerging from their responses. By *substantive*, I mean that they seemed very thoughtful on the topic

I raised at the end of my interviews and expressed their ideas fully for several minutes. The highest commonality was in the recommendations of three participants who noted that it is essential to change the mindset not only of men but also women about women as leaders. They argued that “women should support really capable women” (Vy), and “if a woman is really capable and sufficiently qualified for a certain leadership position, she should be promoted without any hesitation” (Hoa), adding that “people should not take into account the factor of sex in promotion” (Hoa), because if they do, they will “not delegate important tasks to women [appoint them senior positions]” (Hoa and Dao). In addition, there was a suggestion from three of these seven participants that in order to move up the career ladder, women must receive empathy and support from their spouses for issues regarding social interactions and domestic responsibilities. Finally, only a small number of these participants suggested that there should be support services for “women with infants and spoiled children,” as well as counseling services for women leaders to make them “emotionally stronger, particularly in front of their male colleagues, counterparts, and superiors.” This is because, as a few participants indicated, some women leaders cried when taking part in stressful arguments with their male counterparts and superiors and when they were not being well listened to.

In short, my last questions regarding the final theme of this study, which were outlined above, were not addressed fully by the participants. Some of them were not in the mood to answer them and so they ignored them. Some others did not give the questions sufficient thought and thus did not answer them thoroughly. Although the seven remaining participants gave substantive responses, the recommendations they made did not follow clear and thorough patterns.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this research was to address questions about the experiences of mid-level women leaders in higher education in the Mekong Delta, and how they advance into positions of influence and power. Data were collected from in-depth, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews with 16 mid-level women leaders and five gatekeepers at the four higher education institutions under study; from the analysis of the gender equality law, national documents on gender equity, and institutional documents on leadership promotion procedures; and from participant observation of key weekly and monthly meetings between the women leaders under study and their male and female colleagues, counterparts, and superiors. One finding of this study is that there has not yet been implementation of gender equality at the two selected interdisciplinary universities and two community colleges in the MD as well as in Vietnamese society at large, although women and men are equal in all fields by law. Gender inequality on campus has caused women to have inferior status, has impeded their professional advancement, and has lowered their career aspirations and self-confidence.

Regardless of this gender inequality practice, a number of academic women in the MD have made use of their unique strengths, have taken advantage of their limited opportunities and facilitating factors, and have overcome numerous challenges and obstacles to move up their career ladder and to be competitive with men. The data in this study show that women occupied 22% - 31% of senior leadership positions in the four institutions under study, although the overwhelming majority of their positions were in the middle level of the leadership hierarchy. Most of the opportunities in the women's professions came from their institutions, which tried to enforce the gender equality law in the education sector. Significantly, the support of the women's families, spouses, colleagues, and subordinates considerably enhanced their professional progress and advancement. Likewise, it is important to include women's personal efforts to continuously

improve their expertise and their high commitment to the development of their divisions as key factors of their advancement into leadership positions. In fact, these factors helped them gain the trust and respect of their superiors, colleagues, and subordinates and caused these people to support them in the promotion process.

Nevertheless, the challenges and obstacles confronting academic women's career advancement are numerous. Another finding of this study reveals that there were neither structured mentoring programs nor role models that provided professional advice, encouragement, and orientation for women in academia in the MD. Additionally, there were many barriers originating from the institutional culture and structure, from the women's self-perceptions of their roles and responsibilities, and from the Vietnamese culture and its long-established tradition of gender inequality. Similarly, Confucianism, particularly its conservative norms regarding women's social roles and domestic responsibilities, such as the four feminine virtues (*cong, dung, ngon, hanh*), substantially hindered women's career advancement and equality with men in higher education as well as in various other spheres of life. Consequently, the 16 selected women leaders, whose ages and career stages were rather diverse, set a very good example of overcoming the majority of these challenges and entering the highly patriarchal leadership world in contemporary Viet Nam (Drummond & Rydstrøm, 2004). Yet it was extremely hard for the majority of them to rise to the top because they personally believed that top positions were more appropriate for males, and the Vietnamese labor law currently requires all women to retire at the age of 55, when plenty of them may still be at the peak of their careers and talents.

The women's attainment of leadership roles was generally unplanned since all of the women participants, except one, did not have ambitions to hold leadership positions and develop

strategies and techniques for their career advancement. However, their excellent expertise, advanced academic degrees (mainly master's), leadership talents, and long-term service in academia, along with many positive factors related to their personal traits, moral conduct, and interpersonal skills, placed them in their current positions of power and influence. In this respect, they did not have any prior preparation or training to be senior managers and leaders. Regardless of the fact that some of them did not work in education or higher education from the beginning, they all began their careers as employees, faculty members, or staff members. As a result, the overwhelming majority experienced a hard time, especially when first assuming their leadership roles. Additionally, being women leaders in a highly patriarchal society that has been heavily influenced by Confucian ideology, the women had to confront many more challenges and difficulties inside and outside of their campuses than their male counterparts. Similarly, another finding of this study indicates that the women's management and leadership styles substantively reflected their feminine characteristics and virtues, which were obviously shaped and nurtured in this male-dominated and male-oriented society. The majority of them were collaborative, considerate, caring, inclusive, consultative, participative, and self-sacrificing in their leadership.

Finally, as four of the five gatekeepers noted, women leaders, on the one hand, were harder-working, more committed to the common work, and closer to subordinates than their male counterparts. On the other hand, they were usually indecisive and shy and, importantly, did not venture to make full use of their legal rights to equality with men. Therefore, according to the gatekeepers, if women are cleverer in taking advantage of their own strengths and the support of the gender equality law as well as of a variety of government bodies and social organizations, they will certainly advance much further in their careers.

The following final chapter first analyzes and interprets the major findings, providing deeper insights into women's invisible obstacles to their career advancement. Then, the study's limitations and implications for policies, practices, and future research are presented.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This study addressed why and how only a limited number of women in academia in the Mekong Delta (MD) in southern Viet Nam advance into positions of leadership, although their population is as large as that of male academics, and a variety of local, national, and international policies on gender equality have been adopted and are in the process of being implemented. The Vietnamese literature reviewed for this study shows that Viet Nam remains a highly patriarchal society in which the Confucian norm of “valuing men and disparaging women” still prevails (T. Nguyen, 2012; To, 2007; M. D. T. Tran, 2006; Vuong, 2012), because it is deeply rooted in people’s minds (Ha, 2001; Q. T. Le, 1996). Facing that gender inequality reality, very few women attain key leadership positions in government administration, economics, politics, information and culture, and science and technology (H. D. Nguyen, 2007; M. D. T. Tran, 2006; V. A. T. Tran, 2000). Moreover, of those interviewed for this study, most expressed that they did not desire high leadership positions. In the same vein, the status of women in higher education in Viet Nam in general, and in the MD in particular, is not any better. Accordingly, this study sought to understand the nature of the lived experiences of the limited number of mid-level women leaders in higher education in the MD, and the ways they advanced into positions of influence and power, even when they did not espouse a desire for those positions. It was hoped that better understandings of (1) opportunities for and challenges to academic women leaders in their career advancement, (2) their pathways to powerful positions, and (3) the traditional culture would provide insights into women’s underrepresentation in key positions of leadership in Vietnamese higher education. It was also hoped that this understanding would help national and institutional policy and decision makers in Viet Nam to adjust and modify existing law and policies regarding women in general, and

academic women in particular, so that more women could advance to leadership roles and contribute their talents to the development of the country.

The data used for this study were collected during semi-structured, in-depth face-to-face interviews with 20 mid-level women leaders from two multidisciplinary universities and two community colleges located in four different provinces in the MD; from the analysis of national and institutional documents related to gender equality and promotion procedures; and during participant observation of key institutional meetings between male and female leaders. However, only 16 interview transcripts were selected for data analysis and report because of the quality and consistency of the information obtained in each of them. In addition, five gatekeepers, four males and one female, who were rectors and vice rectors of the four sampled institutions, were interviewed so that their insights on women leaders' strengths and weaknesses and related information about promotion and appointment of faculty and staff members to leadership positions could be analyzed.

The major findings show that women in academia, on the one hand, are supported by the gender equality law and policies, along with numerous national action plans and strategies which have made substantial efforts to ensure gender equality in society at large. On the other hand, the traditional culture does not work in their favor and has posed a variety of challenges to their career advancement. Moving up their career ladder in such an unfavorable environment, the overwhelming majority of women academics do not develop any career advancement strategies and plans, or have any ambitions and aspirations to become leaders in their professional life. Instead, they become leaders, mostly at the middle level, unexpectedly or, to a certain extent, unintentionally. Therefore, the study's main finding is that women's experiences of leadership and their development as leaders are heavily influenced by "the culture of gender" (Cheung &

Halpern, 2010, p. 190). This culture results in their unexpected or unintended positions of leadership rather than in efforts on their part to attain leadership roles. The culture of gender, as Cheung and Halpern pointed out, consists of gender norms prescribing the roles and behaviors which distinguish the experiences of men and women in every society, including Viet Nam.

In the following sections, the main finding mentioned above is analyzed, explained, and interpreted in light of the data, the pertinent literature, and the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. In addition, the analysis and interpretations are compared and contrasted with findings of previous empirical research on gender equality and women leaders in Viet Nam, the United States, and some Asian countries. Finally, implications for policies, practice, and future research on women in academia and women's leadership development in Viet Nam are presented.

Discussion

The Culture of Gender and Women's Unexpected Positions of Leadership

The issues analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized below represent the most significant findings of this study. They are also the connective threads among the professional advancement experiences of the women leaders participating in this study.

The current study investigated the lived experiences of women in academia in the MD, and particularly the ways a very limited number of them attained leadership positions in a highly patriarchal society, where the impact of conservative Confucian ideology remains pervasive and is a substantial obstacle to women's progress. Growing up and working in this society, very few Vietnamese women, if any, have any ambitions or aspirations to become leaders in their professional life. All the women participants began their careers as teachers in elementary schools, as faculty and staff in colleges and universities, or as employees in government organizations and private companies. The overwhelming majority clearly said that they did not

develop any strategies and techniques to move up the hierarchical administrative structure in their institutions. Consequently, they believe that becoming leaders in their workplaces was primarily because of their good luck. However, the data show that their promotion to leadership roles depended largely on their personal talent as well as on the recommendation and support of their superiors and colleagues. Further, whether these people supported and voted for the women in their promotion process or not hinged on the latter's relationship and connection with the former. Therefore, the women's interpersonal and networking skills played an important role in winning the support of their superiors and colleagues and in placing them in their current positions of power and leadership.

The above finding is partially consistent with N. B. T. Nguyen's (2000) finding that "women in the academic profession are often dependent on good recommendations from men" (p. 105). The academic women in this study, in fact, depended not only on male colleagues and superiors, but also on female colleagues for their nominations and approval ballots in order to be appointed to leadership positions. Nguyen's research is somewhat similar to this research in that it focused on gender equality in higher education of Viet Nam, and her data were collected at the Vietnam National University in Ha Noi. Along the same lines, in her study of women in academia in Thailand, Luke (2001) found that "when they started their first teaching posts, none had given much thought about career planning, and none had ambitions to attain senior administrative or executive management positions" (p. 139). For these women, their advancement to leadership positions "just happened" when they performed their work well, earned higher graduate degrees, or gained the support of their superiors (Luke, 2001, p. 139). Luke's finding shows that although Thai culture is not the same as Vietnamese, Thai women's careers paths are very similar to those of Vietnamese women. Likewise, Singaporean women

academics move into middle and senior administrative positions without any prior planning and expectation (Luke, 2001). Therefore, despite living in different decades and societies, these women academics in Southeast Asia experienced similar ways of developing themselves as leaders in higher education.

As mentioned earlier, the women participants in my study did not intentionally plan to become leaders in their careers. Rather, it was their superiors and colleagues, male and female, who encouraged and decided on their professional promotion and appointment, basically based on the promising candidates' moral conduct and talent. However, they hardly ever refused the opportunities to attain leadership positions which their superiors and colleagues brought to them. There may be several reasons for the women's passive acceptance of their advancement opportunities. First, it appears that they have subtle desires to hold some powerful positions, but the Vietnamese culture does not allow them to reveal their ambitions like Western culture does. Thus, they simply hold their career desires at the bottom of their hearts, and whenever promotion opportunities come to them, they seize them. As Diem and many other participants indicated, they usually tried to excel in their expertise and specialized fields so that they could be well recognized by their colleagues and superiors. Second, reality shows that not only women but also men who reveal their career ambitions are not highly valued by their colleagues, superiors, and almost all other people in Vietnamese society, and so those who show ambition are usually not nominated or voted for. This is because Confucianism always asks people to overcome individualism and to promote collectivism (K. Vu, 1997). Third, women may realize that only with power and authority in their hands could they bring their talents into full use and serve their institutions and communities more effectively. Accordingly, they usually do not refuse the opportunities to be leaders, particularly at the middle level. The findings in this study show that

once the women assume their leadership roles, they fulfill their duties and responsibilities to the best of their abilities, which benefits their subordinates, divisions, and institutions. This means that although the traditional Vietnamese culture does not work in their favor, they still seem to have some subtle desires to serve their community most effectively. Seizing or making good use of the opportunities to be leaders is strong evidence that these desires really exist, and it is one of the ways that makes their tacit desires explicit.

The following sections present deeper analysis and interpretation of the main findings, based on the literature review and the theoretical framework of this study, including (1) the difference between gender equality policies and gender reality in Viet Nam, (2) consequences of the Vietnamese cultural contexts, and (3) the culture of gender embedded in Cheung and Halpern's (2010) model of leadership development.

The Difference Between Policies and Practices With Respect to Gender Equality in Viet Nam

One important finding reveals that there is a disparity between gender equality policies and gender equality practices, in both Vietnamese society and higher education. This disparity is mainly caused by the competing effects, or the disconnect, between policies and traditional culture. In fact, gender equality policies challenge conservative cultural norms which value men but slight women and their social roles. Further, these norms have existed for thousands of years in Viet Nam, so it certainly takes a long time to change them. Although the policies require equality between the two sexes in all spheres of life, the negative influences of the norms perpetuate gender prejudices against and stereotypes of women in society. It is apparent that these norms have caused a wide range of women to lack confidence in themselves and in other women, and thus have substantially impeded their progress and the process of bridging gender

gaps in Viet Nam. To change women's perceptions and behaviors, as well as to improve gender practice in Viet Nam, is obviously a very long or very time-consuming process.

The following sections discuss the disconnect between gender policies and practices at the national, institutional, and individual levels. One of the main goals of the discussion is to illuminate the three key themes of inquiry that run throughout this study: (1) gender inequality, (2) academic women's leadership development, and (3) challenges facing their career advancement.

At the national level. With the comprehensive *doi moi* (renovation) implemented since 1986, along with the gender equality law enacted in 2006, Viet Nam has made great efforts to close the gender gaps and put more women in leadership positions at various levels in all spheres of life. Along the same lines, a wide range of socioeconomic policies have aimed to create favorable conditions for women to participate equally in and to benefit from all social activities (G. H. Tran, 2004; Viet Nam Women's Union, 2005). However, women seem not to gain much from these national policies, and they still lag far behind men in terms of income, educational levels, status, and positions, both in society and in the family. Multiple gender scholars and researchers (Chau, 2011; Luong, 2008; Pham, 2006; G. H. Tran, 2004) have identified these gender gaps and have tried to give reasonable explanations as well as to recommend solutions to improve these gender outcomes. Also, more and more members of the National Assembly have suggested changes in existing socioeconomic and political policies to improve women's status. Nevertheless, women in contemporary Viet Nam still move up their career ladder and the organizational hierarchy very slowly, and sexism remains popular in various workplaces. Facing this gender inequality, the majority of participants and gatekeepers asserted that equality between men and women in society does not exist (nor should it).

The literature on gender issues (Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; the Asia Foundation, 2001; G. H. Tran, 2004; Viet Nam Women's Union, 2005) explains that public understanding of the gender equality law and women's understanding of their rights under Vietnamese law are very limited. What is happening in real life in Viet Nam appears to confirm the explanation that people have not been adequately educated about the gender equality law and policies. This is because there have been very few, if any, education programs at the national level to help the public master the main content of the gender equality law, through which their understanding of the importance of gender equality could be increased. Further, the remnants of feudal ideology and Confucianism, particularly those valuing men and disparaging women, are still deeply rooted in people's minds, as clearly revealed in this study. Even worse, Vietnamese textbooks used for elementary and lower secondary school students also "value men and disparage women" (T. Nguyen, 2012; Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; To, 2007; M. D. T. Tran, 2006; Vuong, 2012). These textbooks make a very clear distinction between men's and women's names, jobs, characteristics, behaviors, social and political status, and so on. For instance, Vuong clearly indicated that

Men's names are usually linked to something positive, moving, active, huge, and strong, such as big trees (Tùng [pine trees], Bách [cypresses]...); good personalities and dignity (Tuấn [handsome], Minh [bright], Dũng [courageous], Trung [loyal], Nhân [humane]...); occupational desires and aspirations (Thành [success], Thịnh [prosperity], Quang [clearness]...); and huge things or events in the nature (Sơn [mountain], Vũ [rain], Hải [sea]...). Conversely, women's names are usually associated with something negative, quiet, passive, soft, and gentle, such as flowers (Mai [apricot], Lan [orchid], Hoa [flower], Huệ [lily]...); fruits (Na [custard apple], Lê [pear], Mận [plum]...); seasons (Xuân [spring], Hạ [summer], Thu [fall], and Đông [winter]); birds (Yên [canary], Anh [oriole], Nhạn [swallow]...); fairies (Nga [the moon lady]); and rivers (Hà [river]).

Moreover, in the textbooks men usually do jobs that need high-level skills and expertise (e.g., doctor, scientist, architect, engineer, artist, etc.), or jobs that require a lot of strength and physical health (e.g., soldier, policeman, construction worker, truck driver, etc.) (T. Nguyen, 2012;

Vuong, 2012). Women, on the other hand, are more suitable for teaching, caring, and housekeeping jobs, such as teacher, nurse, shop assistant, homemaker, and housewife (T. Nguyen, 2012; To, 2007; Vuong, 2012).

Overall, gender prejudice and sex-role stereotypes still have potent and wide impacts on the social life and thinking of innumerable Vietnamese people. It is ironic that rather than educating people about gender equality from the time they are young, textbooks perpetuate gender prejudice and stereotypes. Furthermore, patriarchy seems to remain a dominant social structure in Viet Nam in that the society is markedly male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered, as Johnson (1997) indicated in his theory of patriarchy. As a result, it is extremely hard to create gender equality in Vietnamese society, irrespective of the continuous efforts of the government and various social organizations to close gender gaps.

The next section further explains the disparity between gender equality policies and practices in Viet Nam by describing and interpreting gender practices in higher education.

At the institutional level. The findings reveal that the difference between gender equality policies and practices is shown through women's underrepresentation in senior positions of leadership and through the disparity between men's and women's authority at institutional meetings.

Women's underrepresentation in senior leadership positions. The data of this study show that the official promotion standards and criteria applied to men and women at their institutions, as well as in Vietnamese higher education, were the same. However, the number of women leaders was still much lower than that of men, and the positions they held were often inferior to their male counterparts. It is noteworthy that the overwhelming majority of women seemed to get stuck in mid-level roles; academic women were still noticeably absent from top-level positions of leadership.

There was only one female vice rector among the four institutions under study, and no women served as rectors of universities and colleges all over the MD. This finding is relatively consistent with Cheung and Halpern's (2010), Glazer-Raymo's (1999), and Perrakis and Martinez' (2012) findings that very few women in China and Hong Kong, as well as in industrialized Western nations, including the United States, have made it to the top leadership positions. Perrakis and Martinez observed that fewer tenured women than tenured men in US higher education institutions ascend to positions of dean or higher. Glazer-Raymo explained that obstacles that impede women's progress are organizational cultures, conventional organizational structures, patriarchal organizational contexts, gender bias in the workplace, gender stereotypes, and sex discrimination. Even though the obstacles that Glazer-Raymo listed may be slowly changing in U.S. higher education today, given that 38% of CAOs and 23% of presidents, a large number of whom were from community colleges and women's colleges, were women in 2009 (AAC&U, 2012), many of the obstacles appear to be consistent with the current context of Vietnamese higher education. According to Cheung and Halpern, the culture of gender, in which gender norms prescribe men's and women's roles and behaviors, holds women back. These two authors stated that women across cultures are exposed to similar stereotypes and "sexist prejudice" (p. 191), and the women in this study also encountered an array of sex-role stereotypes and gender prejudices. Critically enough, not only were they underrepresented in positions of influence and leadership, but those who were holding these positions appeared to have less authority than their male counterparts.

Institutional meetings and the disparity between men's and women's authority. In this study, the disparity in authority or power in action between men and women leaders was also observed through their interactions at key institutional weekly and monthly meetings. So far, there have not been any empirical studies in Viet Nam doing such observations. Likewise, the

literature reviewed for this study did not show any similar observations. Accordingly, the findings resulting from these observations cannot be compared and contrasted with those of other research on women leaders or gender equality. However, it is worth explaining why women leaders in the MD are less likely to speak and more likely to isolate themselves from men at these meetings.

As presented in Chapter 2, MacKinnon (1989) asserted that if there is sex equality, women will have their own voice, power, privacy, respect, and more resources. This study revealed that there has not yet been sex equality at the national and institutional levels. The majority of women participants seemed not to have their own voice and power because of their much smaller numbers on their campuses, and because of the overarching social structure of patriarchy in Viet Nam. Further, at two of the four institutions under study, where men were dominant and held most of the power, the meeting atmosphere was not friendly and welcoming to women. Consequently, they often sat together and tended not to talk over the course of the meetings. At the two other institutions, although men were still predominant, the atmosphere was friendlier and more welcoming to women, so they tended to be more involved in the meetings and to express their ideas more freely. It can be argued that these women were not very effective in their leadership roles in terms of speaking in front of multiple people. However, living in a long-established patriarchal society, which is no different from what Johnson (1997) described as *male-dominated*, *male-identified*, and *male-centered*, Vietnamese women nowadays still have subservient status and roles, both in the family and in society (Bélanger, 2004; To, 2007). As a result, the women participants became less vocal or even silent in the presence of various powerful men, especially those who were not friendly to women and did not listen well to their opinions.

According to MacKinnon (1989), sex inequality is “treating likes alike and unlikes unlike” (p. 216), and “inequality because of sex defines and situates women as women” (p. 215).

In this regard, gender and equality are regarded as issues of sameness and difference. In addition, she proposed that sex is a difference, and it is a difference that creates dominance. The current study shows that because of their different sex, the women participants were treated differently in that most of them could only network with men who were their subordinates or were younger than they were, but not with those of the same age, older, or more senior in administrative ranks. Similarly, the ideas they raised at key institutional meetings were sometimes not well listened to or were not supported by their male counterparts and superiors. This part of the findings is consistent with MacKinnon's claim that sex difference results in disparate treatment of women by men.

Furthermore, another finding of this study supports MacKinnon's (1989) argument that the hierarchy of power or unequal power between men and women creates both real and perceived sex differences. Inequality of power in this context means nothing else but male dominance. As presented in Chapter 2, MacKinnon asserted that in addition to the issue of difference, gender is also a question of power, of male supremacy and female subordination. It is this unequal power that generates not only authentic but also perceived, and thus potentially biased, epistemological differences between the two sexes, which reinforce, if not create, their inequalities. Therefore, sex difference, male dominance, and sex inequality have reciprocal cause and effect relationships, like components in a vicious circle. In Vietnamese society, the root or the underlying cause of the disparate treatment of women is male dominance. It is the persistent male dominance over women in Viet Nam that creates the constant difference in male treatment of and behavior towards women. In fact, Vietnamese history over the last 2,000 years has witnessed male supremacy and female subordination in all spheres of life, and women have frequently been relegated to subservient status and roles in the family and society (To, 2007). In addition, society has favored and

advantaged the conception, naissance, existence, position, and power of men (T. H. T. Nguyen, 2008; To, 2007; Vuong, 2012). Therefore, it can be argued that in Viet Nam male dominance produces tremendous differences in social treatment and power of the two sexes. Men tend to use their dominance in terms of power and status to treat women differently from those of their own sex. In the same vein, a finding of this study shows that women in academia in the MD as well as women in Viet Nam generally were underrepresented in key leadership positions, and those holding these positions were not as powerful as their male counterparts. In short, the finding that male dominance results in the disparate treatment and inferior status of women in Viet Nam is consistent with MacKinnon's theory of difference and dominance, because she claims that male dominance, particularly through the unequal distribution of power, creates differences which are also inequalities between men and women.

Nevertheless, MacKinnon (1989) did not delve into what differences actually or truly exist, as this study did in Chapter 5. For example, the findings of this study reveal that the traditional Vietnamese culture has valued men and disparaged women, causing men to believe that they should be leaders in the family and society. Conversely, this cultural norm makes women assume that they are more appropriate for nurturing and caring roles, and so most of them do not have aspirations to become leaders in their lives. Further, it is unacceptable for Vietnamese women to drink and behave like men at drinking parties. These are some of the conspicuous differences that this study identified. Along the same lines, MacKinnon did not suggest how sex differences and inequalities should be addressed in a community and in a society. Yet the current study addresses these issues in the next section about implications for policies and practice.

At the individual level. What makes Vietnamese women in academia underrepresented in mid-level positions of power and those holding leadership positions less powerful than their

male counterparts? And what prevents them from rising to the top of their professions, regardless of the support of national and institutional policies on gender equality? This study shows that a big challenge to gender equality at the institutional and national levels originates from the women themselves.

First, the women participants, particularly their perceptions of their roles, might be the main reason. Women sometimes do not want to hold high-level positions, even though they are highly recommended to ensure the quota of women leaders in an institution as required by the law. This is because, as many participants indicated, they are more concerned about their family responsibilities and happiness. As a result, if they are committed to demanding leadership work, they cannot fulfill the duties of reasonable or appropriate wives and mothers (Rydström & Drummond, 2004), and their marriage life coupled with the well-being of their families and children may be adversely affected (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). Professor Le Thi (1997), a leading Vietnamese researcher in the field of gender equality, claimed that for the Vietnamese people in general, and women in particular, marriage and family are still the most important parts of their lives. Unin (2010) found a similar view in her study of experiences of Malay women leaders in Malaysian higher education. Her study revealed that Malay women also are very concerned that assuming senior positions of leadership, such as dean, is a risk to their status as wives.

Second, institutional policies usually encourage and create favorable conditions for women to advance in their careers. However, women tend not to take advantage of and make full use of these conditions for many reasons (e.g., their lack of awareness or insufficient understanding of the policies, their competing concerns about family responsibilities and career advancement, etc.). Further, during the nomination and election processes, they are usually reluctant to vote for their female colleagues, since they seem not to trust women leaders and their

leadership capabilities. Some participants argued that in terms of leadership, women cannot be as good as men because their capacities cannot be comparable to men's, and as mothers and wives, their time for work is more restricted. This study supports findings from previous research on gender and gender issues in Viet Nam (e.g., H. D. Nguyen, 2007; V. A. T. Tran, 2000; M. D. T. Tran, 2006), that taking care of families is seen to be women's "innate" responsibility, and women by nature are weak, dependent, indecisive, shallow, and gullible. As a result, many believe, it is impossible to have them assume important tasks in society.

Third, a number of male leaders are more likely to prefer men to women for senior leadership positions, although they may be quite aware of the gender equality law applied at the institutional level. As one participant (Vy) reported, the vice-rector of her university decided to appoint a man to a dean's position rather than a woman, although the woman had acted as interim dean in the previous term and received more approval ballots from the faculty and staff of their college. Similarly, most Vietnamese men do not like women to be their leaders, because promoting women to leadership roles not only contradicts but also threatens their masculine role as head of their household. Also, many recent articles about gender issues in Viet Nam (T. Nguyen, 2012; To, 2007; Vuong, 2012) have asserted that patriarchal ideology has been in the blood of Vietnamese men, so they enjoy showing off their masculine power and making decisions, despite the fact that there are multiple issues which are beyond their decision-making capacity. As a result of those subjective factors associated with women's and men's perceptions of their gender roles, both men and women do not usually vote for women to officially approve women's leadership status, as required by institutional rules.

Furthermore, N. B. T. Nguyen (2000) revealed that the Vietnamese people still cannot get rid of the traditional thought that men should be "one head" higher than women (p. 104), and

they are more likely to devalue women's intellectual capacity, saying that women's thinking is very superficial. Hence, according to the majority of Vietnamese people, including well-educated ones in higher education, women are not appropriate to be leaders. Similarly, Luke (2001) found that Thai culture and public prejudice against women are big obstacles to advancing to powerful positions of influence by Thai women in academia. The participants in her study observed, "In most of the universities, women do not yet go to the very top rank; probably it's a bit of the custom or tradition of the people. They think that in the high-ranking positions, male is better than female" (p. 134), and "Oh, it's a lady, ah, we don't want her, she's emotional, talkative. Women are not good for executive positions" (p. 134). Moreover, Unin's (2010) dissertation research revealed that a large number of Malay men in academia do not support women as their leaders because they prefer their dominant status, as they have it in the family and society.

Vietnamese views on women as leaders seem to parallel those of other Asian cultures.

Finally, what hinders Vietnamese women's professional progress is that their educational levels are usually lower than men's. Some findings presented in Chapter 4 of this dissertation show that the numbers of women holding master's and Ph.D. degrees or pursuing doctoral and master's programs were lower than those of their male counterparts. As indicated in Chapter 5, women often face obstacles in attaining the advanced degrees they wish to pursue. Without a doctorate, a woman cannot be promoted to rector or dean of a college in a university. Similarly, without a master's degree, she is not qualified as dean of a faculty unit in a college, or as director of a support department or a service center in a university. These findings are fully supported by the research of a number of educational scholars in Viet Nam (Luong, 2008; Pham, 2006; B. T. T. Vu, 2008) who have observed that fewer women than men hold doctoral degrees and titles such as

associate professor and professor, and thus their administrative positions are usually lower than those of their male counterparts.

The next section especially focuses on analyzing and interpreting the influences of traditional Vietnamese culture on the interactions and relationships of women leaders with men and its roles in their professional development, life, and work.

Impact of the Cultural Contexts of Viet Nam

One finding of this study shows that traditional Vietnamese culture, which is still heavily influenced by Confucianism, does not work in favor of women. The remnants of Confucianism, particularly the four feminine virtues – *cong* (*industry*), *dung* (*proper appearance*), *ngon* (*proper speech*), *hanh* (*right conduct*) – and the norm of *valuing men and disparaging women*, considerably confine women's social interactions and behaviors, hinder their progress, and tie them tightly to traditional feminine roles and responsibilities. As mentioned previously, while the gender equality law and related policies have strived to create the most favorable conditions for women to participate equally in all spheres of life, cultural traditions have held them back. Specifically, the stereotype that women cannot be good leaders still widely exists in many people's minds and causes women to be marginalized in the leadership world in Viet Nam. The findings demonstrate that culture, coupled with its numerous gender prejudices against and sex-role stereotypes of women (T. H. T. Nguyen, 2008; Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; To, 2007; H. D. Tran, 1991), makes women lose their self-esteem, underestimate other women's leadership capabilities, and overvalue their male counterparts. Moreover, the strong influence of culture results in women's self-imposed constraints on their interactions and relationships with men inside and outside of the work setting, as well as their negative personal perceptions of their sex roles and responsibilities. Consequently, almost all of them do not have

high career aspirations, and ambitions to rise to the top of their occupations seem not to exist at any stages in their professional life.

The sections that follow further discuss and clarify the important role of the cultural context in the life and work of Vietnamese women in higher education. Particularly, their experiences are compared and contrasted with those of other academic women and women at large in Viet Nam as well as in a number of Asian and Western countries.

Tension associated with maintaining proper relationships with male colleagues.

There is an extreme paucity of Vietnamese literature and research on women's professional interactions and relationships with men. Accordingly, the explanations and interpretations of this theme are primarily based on cultural perspectives.

It is a big challenge for women to maintain proper relationships with their male colleagues and with male visitors to their institutions. On the one hand, the former recognize the importance of establishing and maintaining good relationships and connections with the latter if the former want to advance in their careers. On the other hand, professional networks in Viet Nam are usually built up through a variety of drinking parties or hangouts at drinking restaurants or karaoke bars with men. In so doing, women run a high risk of destroying their images as appropriate females, ideal instructors, and good mothers and wives. Further, since women are supposed to lead exemplary lives themselves so that they can influence their husbands and children to behave well and thus can create harmony in the family (Schuler et al., 2006), close interactions with men and male colleagues, particularly outside of the workplace, even for professional networking purposes, may cause women to fail these tasks. As a result of this risk, many women, especially married ones, try their best to avoid these parties and hangouts, or to strictly control their actions and drinking, although they know for sure that by doing so, they are

less likely to gain their male colleagues' and superiors' full support, and thus they cannot advance at the speed they wish in their careers. Along the same lines, single women in this study were very reluctant to interact with male colleagues and male guests at drinking parties and other public places (e.g., cafés, drinking restaurants, karaoke bars, etc.), because they were concerned that the interactions would destroy their image as appropriate women, and no men would want to marry them. Hence, they also strived to limit their appearances at these places, and they accepted missing convenient opportunities to network with the men who frequently played a decisive role in recommending and promoting them to positions of power and influence.

Why do women tend to choose family happiness and the appropriateness of an ideal or virtuous woman rather than professional career advancement? In order to answer this question adequately, it is necessary to refer back to Confucian ideology and norms, which both groups of women in this study, those born in the 1950s – 1960s and the 1970s – 1980s, grew up with and were educated about. The findings show that despite being born at different times, both the older and the younger women highly valued the four feminine Confucian virtues because they believed that these virtues represent the moral conduct of ideal women. In this respect, when women become leaders, they have gone against the Confucian doctrine in Vietnamese society and how they are expected to behave as females. Research on gender issues in Viet Nam at different chronological periods (Marr, 1981; Ngo, 2004; Rydstrøm, 1998; H. D. Tran, 1991) has reported that girls are, to a certain extent, brought up with Confucian ideals, which regulate how they should behave themselves verbally and bodily in order to become reasonable or appropriate women. In other words, the notion of an appropriate female in accordance with Confucianism has been engraved in their minds since they were little. Consequently, it is extremely hard for them to act against this notion, regardless of its disadvantages to their occupational mobility.

The role of Vietnamese culture in the women leaders' lives and careers. The findings show that women's emotions and perceptions of their roles and responsibilities had strong but negative influences on their behaviors and decisions regarding their personal life and professional career development and advancement. As presented previously, their emotions, behaviors, and perceptions were shaped when they grew up and were educated in a highly patriarchal society, and in a culture which perpetuates Confucian ideology and shows contempt for women, both in the family and in society (Frenier & Mancini, 1996; Ha, 2001; Hodgkin, 1981; N. Phan, 2004; Rydstrøm & Drummond, 2004). The majority of women in this study believed that it is impossible for women to be successful in both their professions and their married life, so they had to select one of them to be committed to during their life course. Diem observed that beside a woman's outstanding professional accomplishments is her imperfect family. Similarly, Ngoc did not think that women's career development and advancement could be comparable with men, and women should not compete with men in attaining senior leadership positions, explaining that

Our [women's] hindrance is our families.... If I am promoted to a position in the Board of Rectors, I will not accept it. Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with myself right now. A higher leadership position..., I will not assume it since I think that I will be more tired with it, and I will not have time for my family then. (Ngoc)

Furthermore, most of the women in this study reported that they were primarily in charge of doing or supervising (if they could afford hired help) housework and performing domestic responsibilities, although they and their husbands spent the same amount of time at work. Also, the women with young children did not feel secure enough to leave their children at home with their husbands, siblings, or in-laws in order to go to conferences or training workshops, which take a few days or weeks. In this regard, it is extremely hard for women, both with and without children, to find time for their professional development and advancement, let alone to

participate in social activities to diversify their experiences and make people in the community know them better. It is the traditional culture, which has been heavily influenced by Confucian values, that causes Vietnamese women to believe that they should be more responsible for household chores and family well-being. These findings are consistent with most of the studies of gender and gender equality issues in Viet Nam, which were presented in the literature review of this study (Ha, 2001; Hoang, 1996; Non-Governmental Organizations in Viet Nam, 2006; Schuler et al., 2006; M. D. T. Tran, 2006; V. A. T. Tran, 2000).

By and large, women in academia as well as women in Viet Nam in general seem to find their life more meaningful and worthwhile when they have happy, harmonious families, devoting themselves to their husbands' and children's successes and accomplishments; family is the most important thing in their life. Therefore, a large number of women do not commit themselves to their work and career advancement until their husbands have been fruitful in their jobs, and their children have been able to make their own living. However, when women can fully dedicate themselves to their professions, they usually do not have many years left to move up their career ladder, since Vietnamese labor law requires them to retire at the age of 55, which may be the peak in the careers of many of them.

The findings above are somewhat consistent with Luke's (2001) and Unin's (2010) empirical studies of women in academia in Asia. They found that in Hong Kong (Luke, 2001) and Malaysia (Unin, 2010), cultural and ideological values circumscribe women's ideal roles as caring mothers, wives, and daughters, and these values do not place any emphasis or importance on their leadership roles. Further, Luke stated that Hong Kong women acknowledge these cultural values rather than fight against them. This supports the finding of this study that being a good wife and mother is an important, taken-for-granted cultural value in the mindset of Vietnamese women in general, and

women in higher education in particular, although it is a big impediment to their career mobility. However, the two authors did not deeply explore the cultural aspects which influence women's leadership development. Unin's research mainly focused on the process by which Malay women in academia learn to lead, and Luke's did not go beyond simply identifying that Hong Kong women's "cultural mindset" is the biggest obstacle to their professional advancement. Luke did not delve into investigating how their mindset is formed, and how it influences their leadership development process, as this study does in the next section.

Moreover, most of the research on gender equality and women's leadership in Viet Nam (N. B. T. Nguyen, 2000; T. H. T. Nguyen, 2008) has not specifically looked at the roles and impacts of traditional cultures on women's lives and professional career advancement. For example, N. B. T. Nguyen's study examined the gender aspects of higher education in relation to Vietnamese "norms, beliefs, values, behaviors, and social structures" (p. 2), and T. H. T. Nguyen primarily explored the effects of gender prejudices on women leaders at ward²⁸ and district levels in Viet Nam. Although these two researchers grounded their studies in the cultural context and linked a variety of their findings to Confucian ideology, they did not clearly and thoroughly describe how the ideology and its remnants influence academic women's professional decisions and behaviors along with their leadership development. The section that follows describes and discusses how the "culture of gender" (Cheung & Halpern, 2010, p. 190), coupled with the traditional Vietnamese culture, adversely affects women's leadership development. This means that Vietnamese women's distinct pathways to positions of leadership in higher education in Viet Nam are looked at through the integrated lenses of Vietnamese culture and the culture of gender.

²⁸ A ward is an administrative unit in Viet Nam, which is smaller than a district.

This may be a worthwhile contribution of this study to empirical research on women in academia in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia.

The Interplay Between the Culture of Gender and Women's Leadership Development

The above sections have broadly discussed the potent impacts of Vietnamese culture on academic women's life and work. This section analyzes, explains, and interprets the influences of the culture of gender (Cheung & Halpern, 2010), within which Vietnamese culture is embedded, on the leadership development of women in academia in the MD. Through this section, the main finding that women in academia in the MD lack the inspiration and ambition to become leaders in their professional careers is further clarified and interpreted.

Definition and key characteristics of the culture of gender. "The culture of gender" is defined as cross-cultural gender norms creating opportunities and constraints for all women leaders, despite their cultural differences (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). In other words, women leaders across national boundaries share these norms and are exposed to similar gender stereotypes and sexist prejudices in organizations. As mentioned earlier, gender norms define women's and men's roles and behaviors, which in turn make their experiences different (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). Further, women from diverse cultures frequently encounter restrictions in their roles, which make it quite challenging for them to succeed at high levels in their occupations. Cheung and Halpern observed that top women leaders in not only China but also the United States ideally integrate and harmonize, rather than separate, their work and family roles on their paths to the top. Instead of considering their dual roles negative, they find ways to benefit from implementing them both. Moreover, their study showed that unlike Western men, both Chinese and American women embrace the multifaceted roles of being women, and they do not conform to the roles and behaviors of men so as to become leaders, thanks to their increasing

confidence in their own identities. In short, studying the culture of gender allows us to increase our understanding of women's leadership, one of the important factors of which is the process of harmoniously combining work and family roles as two major domains in their life (Cheung & Halpern, 2010), although there is considerable research countering Cheung and Halpern's claim.

Consistency and inconsistency of the culture of gender with the findings of this research. As presented throughout this chapter, the women participants in my study did not “intentionally” plan to be leaders in their careers. Rather, they preferred to be good, considerate mothers, wives, and daughters, as the traditional belief systems expect from all Vietnamese women. Indeed, the majority of people, including well-educated men and women in higher education, react negatively to ambitious women and those behaving in competitive ways. The reality in Viet Nam, as well as the findings of this study, shows that it has been a substantial challenge for women to overcome these cultural and social constraints in order to move forward in their careers and to be equal with men in society, as the Government and many national and international organizations in Viet Nam have required. Although living in different cultures and societies, women all over the world have similar roles as mother, wife, daughter, and employee (if they work outside the home). Research and literature in the East (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Luke, 2001; N. B. T. Nguyen, 2000; T. H. T. Nguyen, 2008; Unin, 2010) as well as in the West (Babcock & Laschever, 2007; Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012) reveal that women's multiple roles often result in their conflicting commitments or competing personal and professional goals. Accordingly, far fewer women who are equally professionally qualified with their male counterparts ascend administrative ranks to positions of influence and leadership.

Cheung and Halpern (2010) claimed that “culture defines the expectations for women's and men's roles in society and sets the norms and values in social behavior” (p. 184). This claim

completely fits the Vietnamese culture and the findings of this study that men should be leaders and do “big things” in family and society, while women should be caregivers, wives, and mothers. These roles have been defined for men and women in Viet Nam for thousands of years throughout the nation’s history, particularly when Confucianism was brought into Viet Nam by Chinese invaders in the late 3rd century BC and became the official ideology of the Vietnamese feudal regime and educational system in the 11th century AD (Bergman, 1975; Buttinger, 1968; L. T. Nguyen, 1995; K. Vu, 1997). Confucianism, as well as Neo-Confucianism, has nurtured the spirit of “valuing men and disparaging women” and the oppression of women for thousands of years, and at the same time has tied women tightly to family responsibilities and kitchen work. During this long period of time, men were given the privilege to access education and to participate in all types of socioeconomic, political, and cultural activities, and thus they eliminated women from these activities and monopolized the right to do big things, such as “ruling the country, conquering the world” (L. T. Nguyen, 1995; K. Vu, 1997).

In sum, the culture and the long-lasting reality of sexism in Viet Nam have caused Vietnamese women in general, and women in academia in particular, to believe that positions of power and leadership are for men, not for themselves. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of women do not develop any strategies and techniques to attain these positions, because they may thoroughly understand that competing with men in a highly patriarchal society like Viet Nam is similar to the action of “throwing an egg onto a stone plate,” as Vietnamese people commonly say. This explains why almost all the women participants did not plan to be leaders in their professional careers and appeared to wait passively for the recognition of their capabilities and recommendation for promotion from their colleagues and superiors.

Moreover, as mentioned above, Cheung and Halpern (2010) described that women across cultures have to confront constraints of cultural sexism and organizational sexism, so they have to embrace the multiple roles of being women as they pursue career advancement. In fact, the women in these authors' model of leadership development incorporated three important factors in order to rise to the top, including (1) parental encouragement, (2) self-efficacy and motivation, and (3) organizational and family support. The findings of this study suggest that Cheung and Halpern's model is not a perfect fit with the experiences of the women leaders. In other words, there are both similarities and differences between the women leaders in their research and those in this study.

Generally, women in Viet Nam as well as those in other Asian and European countries usually have to balance work and family responsibilities on their career paths, and they often encounter more challenges on their ways to the top than their male counterparts. Cheung and Halpern (2010) also commented that women leaders across cultures "are exposed to similar stereotypes that form sexist prejudice in organizations" (p. 191). This is quite consistent with the finding that both the women leaders and gatekeepers I studied did not think that women could perform well if they held high positions of leadership.

On the one hand, the three factors that Cheung and Halpern (2010) listed in their leadership development model presented earlier are essential to all the women in this study. On the other hand, there are many elements in their model that the participants lacked, primarily because the Vietnamese people's conservative thinking about women's subordinate roles in the family and society remains largely unchanged. First, all of the women are leaders at the middle level rather than the top level. Additionally, as mentioned previously, there was only one woman vice rector among the four institutions under study, and over the more than 30 universities and

colleges in the MD, only two or three more women were holding positions as vice rectors; there were no women rectors in this area. Second, unlike the women in Cheung and Halpern's study, the mid-level women leaders did not think that they performed both family responsibilities and work roles effectively, even though they actually did very well in these two areas when they had already advanced into the leadership roles at this level. The majority of them stated that their husbands were supportive and willing to take charge of family responsibilities while they are away, but the former did not feel safe enough to rely entirely on the latter. Some even felt guilty when they had to take business trips away from home for several days or more. Consequently, they frequently avoided or refused these trips, although they knew with certainty that doing so did not help them gain credit for their career advancement. Apparently, women's own perception of their domestic roles is sometimes the biggest obstacle to their professional mobility; as one participant reflected,

If women want to perform their social work well, then they have to spend less time for their families. In so doing, responsible women feel very uncomfortable. For example, they feel that they have not fulfilled their [domestic or home-life] duties. Generally speaking, it is women themselves, particularly their personal thinking and responsibilities, that create pressure for them in their advancement process. (Vy)

Third, while the women in Cheung and Halpern's (2010) study received parental encouragement to move forward in their professions until they reached the top, the women's parents in this study were more likely to ask them to pay special attention to their roles as appropriate women and good wives and mothers. As a result, they grew up with a predetermined image of women's non-leadership roles in their minds, which heavily influenced their professional choices, decisions, and behaviors. Last but not least, almost all of them did not receive mentoring from their male and female superiors or senior staff and faculty. Similarly, learning from female role models was rare since there were very few women at the top rank, so

many of them had to learn skills for leadership and career advancement from top-level male leaders. Overall, there are a few differences in the culture of gender that Cheung and Halpern described and the culture that the participants in this study have experienced. It is these differences that make their leadership development process quite distinct from that of Chinese and American top-level women leaders, as the two authors depicted.

Summary of the Discussion and Further Contributions of This Study

Summary of key points. The above discussion section summarized, explained, and interpreted the major findings of this study. It focused on making sense of why and how a limited number of mid-level women leaders in higher education in the MD attained their positions of power without any prior planning and intention. In summary, the section described and interpreted (1) the disparity between gender equality policies and gender practices at the national, institutional, and individual levels in Viet Nam; (2) the impact of the cultural contexts of Viet Nam on women's professional and personal lives; and (3) the influences of the culture of gender on their leadership development process. Especially, elaboration was on the environment and the culture in which the women have lived, worked, and communicated with their male colleagues and superiors, as well as on the ways their life views were shaped. In addition, an important part of the discussion described the fundamental characteristics of the culture of gender and the leadership development model developed by Cheung and Halpern (2010). Then, these characteristics were compared and contrasted with the major findings in order to highlight the contributions of the current study.

Further elaboration and contributions. The major findings suggest that from the beginning of their careers, the women did not overtly nurture any aspirations or ambitions to become leaders. However, over time they excelled in their expertise, captured the recognition of

their superiors and colleagues, and developed subtle desires to be appointed to some positions of influence and power, primarily at the middle level. As presented earlier, all of them accepted recommendations for promotion and performed their leadership tasks to the best of their abilities.

Regardless of investigating similar topics, most of the research on women leaders and women in academia Viet Nam and Asia (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Luke, 2001; N. B. T. Nguyen, 2000; T. H. T. Nguyen, 2008; Unin, 2010) does not focus on their subtle professional desires and feelings. This study, in fact, did not focus on these issues either, but the women's subtle desires to become mid-level leaders showed up as a subordinate but surprising finding. Luke's (2001) empirical study of women in academia in Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia showed that women are reluctant to promote their own achievements and capabilities. Their reluctance makes them invisible and underrepresented in managerial positions on their campuses. On the contrary, the women in this study made themselves institutionally visible through their excellent specialized knowledge, high educational degrees, and innate leadership capacities. These were also the key factors making their colleagues and superiors recognize them well and promote them to leadership positions. Furthermore, unlike the women leaders in Unin's study, the majority of participants in this study did not have strong parental influence which nurtured their "passion for social activism" and leadership potential (p. 69). Instead, the participants' parents, especially mothers, asked them to develop and uphold the four feminine virtues prescribed by Confucianism. Therefore, their subtle leadership inspiration mainly emerged during their employment period, particularly when they had excelled in their specialized fields.

The findings suggest that as female leaders in a male-identified society, where the core cultural values are associated with male values and masculinity (Johnson, 1997), as well as in male-

identified higher education institutions, the women in this study still conformed to most of the characteristics that their society and institutions impose on women. These characteristics are quite similar to what Johnson described in his theory of patriarchy (please refer back to Chapter 2 for more detail). They were also not sufficiently bold in order to sustain themselves in the leadership world and were not willing to resolve the conflict between their culturally based identity as women and their male-identified positions. In fact, after holding positions of power for one or two terms, they did not want to ascend to higher levels of their administrative ranks, because of a variety of challenges presented in Chapter 5. Overall, the women valued the vision that the society put on them, as well as on all other Vietnamese women, so they chose not to confront the reality that leadership, both in academia and in society at large, remains a male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered world. Likewise, they did not do their best to fit into and to thrive in this world because of the cost they might pay. These practices resulted in their absence from the top leadership positions. In this respect, this finding is different from what Johnson described about women leaders who could sustain and grow in a male-identified environment. Following is an elaboration of some of the most prominent challenges or reasons for their choice not to advance to more senior positions.

First, the women believed that high-level positions were more suitable for men. Second, they felt that it was more worthwhile spending their time and energy taking better care of their families, rather than devoting themselves to the more demanding leadership work. Moreover, the traditional culture and the public's view of women and their success also hindered their professional progress. In her case study of women faculty at the Viet Nam National University, Ha Noi, N. B. T. Nguyen (2000) also found that traditional prejudices against women still persist in the Vietnamese people's mindset, which is enhanced and perpetuated by rigid patriarchal

social structures. Thus, women constantly confront conservative social beliefs that define their ultimate roles as mother and caretaker of the household. Additionally, T. H. T. Nguyen's (2008) research on gender prejudices against women leaders in the North of Viet Nam revealed that when evaluating a woman, people primarily focus on the achievements of her husband and children, along with the harmony and happiness of her family, rather than on her own accomplishments. In the same vein, this researcher pointed out,

As a Vietnamese woman, you need to demonstrate the traditional virtues of your sex, such as gracefulness, gentleness, industriousness, self-sacrifice, having mutual love and affection for all people in the community.... Even though you are a leader or a common person, your dignity is first and foremost evaluated based on your feminine roles and characteristics. (Nguyen, 2008)

The participants also showed a lot of concern about these roles and virtues over the course of their interviews. Generally speaking, the women's mixed desire to hold powerful positions at the middle level but not to move up to the top level of their careers is an interesting finding of this study. However, this issue needs to be investigated more deeply and thoroughly in future research, so that academic women's underlying needs can be specifically described and accommodated.

Implications for Policies and Practice

The focus of this study – learning how academic women in the MD understand their experiences and pathways to leadership – informs policy and decision makers as well as practitioners in higher education, in the MD in particular and in Viet Nam in general, of women's needs for and obstacles to their career advancement. The big question emerging from the findings and data analysis is, “What should be done at the national, institutional, and individual levels to improve academic women's leadership status?”

At the National Level

First, all the women participants were high achievers in their institutions. However, approximately one-fourth of them were about to reach the retirement age of 55, according to Vietnamese labor law, while at the peak of their professional careers. Therefore, the National Assembly of Viet Nam (the top legislature) ought to consider this issue and raise the mandatory retirement age, at least for women who are doing mental work. For women doing manual work, they may still want to retire at the age of 55 because of the heavier labor and their “more limited physical health,” compared with that of their male counterparts, as many participants stated based primarily on their own health conditions. In this regard, increasing the number of women serving in the National Assembly is a pressing need. Over the last decade, women serving in this most powerful political body have accounted for less than 25% (Chau, 2011). Consequently, issues regarding women and gender equality can hardly be thoroughly identified, approved, and improved, because male assembly members may not be conscious of or sensitive to these issues.

Second, although the gender equality law and policies, along with the national action plan for the advancement of women in Viet Nam, have been implemented for more than a half decade, they have not yet brought about authentic equality and development for women. Evidence reveals that implementation has not been strictly monitored, nor has progress been promptly evaluated. As a result, adjustment of the weaknesses or deficiencies and correction of the faults have not been properly addressed. It is essential for the Vietnamese Government and Party to pay closer attention to the enforcement of the gender equality law and policies. In so doing, they need to guide national and local authorities to monitor and evaluate the implementation and impacts of these statutes in order to come up with timely and proper adjustments and corrections. There should be accountability, and perhaps negative consequences, for institutions not complying with this national law.

Third and simultaneously, appropriate solutions to close the gaps between the law and policies and people's understanding and implementation of them ought to be developed. In this respect, it is important to change the ways that textbooks at all educational levels characterize the personalities, behaviors, and careers of men and women. Likewise, education programs of gender equality should be provided for common people and officials working for government and private organizations and companies. To this end it is essential that the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), along with a variety of departments of education at provincial and district levels, carry out these activities persistently and comprehensively, because changing the Vietnamese people's perspectives on women and their roles seems to be the most challenging national task. Because women account for more than 50% of the Vietnamese population, if they do not make progress, it will be very difficult for the country to develop and to be able to compete with other countries in Southeast Asia and worldwide. Last but not least, women's unions or committees for the advancement of women in cities, provinces, universities, colleges, and government agencies in Viet Nam should develop and implement leadership training programs for women with leadership potential, including on-the-job mentoring programs, to help place them in key positions of leadership. In addition, these associations should utilize high-achieving women's experiences of life and work to educate young boys and girls as well as the next generation of leaders in Viet Nam.

At the Institutional Level

Today the Vietnamese government, through the MOET, has given universities and colleges more autonomy to develop themselves. Therefore, a wide range of activities can and should be done at this level to help more women advance in their careers and contribute their talent to the development of their institutions and society at large. Given the challenges and obstacles to academic women's career advancement that the women leaders in this study identified, senior leaders in higher

education might consider the following recommendations to help women negotiate many responsibilities in their life and work:

1. Reinforce the gender equality law and policies on campus through practical rules, regulations, action plans, and activities to help women develop their leadership capabilities and network with male colleagues, including assisting them to attain higher graduate degrees.

Women's leadership capabilities may be best developed through leadership development programs, including mentoring, which can also help them confidently carry out their leadership roles once they are in power. All women with leadership potential, irrespective of age and professional background, should be offered opportunities to attend these programs. To ensure their attendance, it is necessary for them to be set free from their household chores and other family responsibilities. Providing them with support services, such as child care and teaching support programs, is important and desirable. For instance, institutions can provide free or low-cost babysitting and child care services during the time they attend a leadership training course for several days. At the same time, women faculty who have the potential to be promoted to dean or vice dean positions should be released from their instructional duties while attending the training courses. In this respect, there ought to be other faculty members or teaching assistants to substitute for them during their absence.

2. Develop promotion procedures and professional development standards and criteria on the basis of gender equality.

The findings of this study show that the overwhelming majority of senior academic leaders are men. Therefore, promotion procedures as well as professional development criteria are more likely built on their perspectives rather than on women's, because men are usually the policy and decision makers on their campuses. This certainly does not benefit women and their development needs. To change this practice and also to enhance equal promotion and professional development opportunities for women, more women should be included in the processes of developing these procedures and criteria, although they may not hold the highest positions in their institutions. With more supportive promotion and professional development criteria, women will have many more opportunities to obtain higher academic degrees and to develop their professions inside and outside of the country, which will in turn increase their numbers in leadership roles. Selection processes should specifically target the inclusion of women, with a representative of the selection body charged with monitoring the inclusion of women in the pool of individuals under consideration. Reports on efforts to promote women should be made for each search as well as institutional annual reports to assist in monitoring progress.

3. Treat women equally to men. Like men, women should be trusted and delegated with important tasks and responsibilities so that they can make full use of and contribute their unique talents and capacities to the common good of their institutions.

My observations of the institutional meetings and my in-depth interviews with the gatekeepers suggest that senior male leaders do not really trust or highly value the capacities of women and women leaders in their institutions. The former tend to promote the latter to leadership positions because of the quota to ensure that about 30 % of leaders

in their institutions are women, but not because of the women's authentic talents.

However, women do have their own capabilities that need to be trusted and brought into use; otherwise it will be a waste of human resources, and institutional development will be unbalanced, since women usually occupy at least half of the academic population.

4. Have mid-level women leaders, along with top-level women leaders, serve as trainers and mentors of future women leaders.

Although the gender equality law and policies in Viet Nam, which run up against cultural norms, have not been able fully to change the people's views about women and their roles yet, the 20 women leaders selected for this study represent a sign of progress with regard to gender equity in Vietnamese society. Therefore, they, as well as other mid and top-level women leaders in Vietnamese higher education, should be provided with favorable means and conditions so that they can train and mentor women with leadership potential and talent, especially early-career women, to prepare them for key academic leadership roles. Significantly, since this study shows that most Vietnamese women do not have ambitions and overt desires to become leaders in their careers, the mid-level women leaders should collaborate with top-level leaders, both male and female, in their institutions to identify and encourage women with leadership abilities to participate in the mentoring programs and the leadership development programs described above.

5. Deliver a program of women's studies in academic courses to undergraduate and graduate students.

It is important to educate both undergraduate and graduate students about gender issues and gender equality in the family and society, because they are the forces that are able to change the public's perspectives on women and their traditional roles. In addition,

the preparation and approval processes of such courses may involve various faculty, staff, and administrators at different levels who will have a better chance to know more about the visible and the invisible barriers facing women and their development. As a result, these constituents can act as change agents to help improve women's status on campus.

These are the key issues that need to be addressed as soon as possible to ensure academic women's progress equal with their male counterparts. Nonetheless, changes at the national and institutional are not sufficient and sustainable unless women change themselves as well. In other words, there must also be changes at the individual level.

At the Individual Level

It is necessary for women to learn to increase their self-esteem and self-confidence and to overcome sex-role stereotypes of and gender prejudices against them and their leadership. A finding of this study, together with the findings of other research on women in academia and gender prejudices in Viet Nam (N. B. T. Nguyen, 2000; T. H. T. Nguyen, 2008), reveals that women do not trust and highly value their own and their female colleagues' leadership capabilities. This is primarily because of the impact of pervasive Confucian ideology, which perpetuates gender stereotypes and prejudices against women in Viet Nam. Consequently, in order to move up their career ladder and make as much progress as men, women need to find ways to prove that the stereotypes and prejudices against them are misleading and wrong. Upgrading their professional expertise and educational levels is one way to help them become stronger and more confident in themselves. Further, they themselves have to be proactive in finding opportunities to develop their professional qualifications and to obtain higher degrees, rather than wait for their superiors to provide them with these opportunities. In so doing, their self-esteem and self-confidence will also be enhanced.

Moreover, Vietnamese women in general, and those in higher education in the MD in particular, should learn to balance family and work responsibilities better, including sharing household chores with their spouses more equally. The findings suggest that the women's spouses were quite supportive of their leadership work and were willing to share family care responsibilities, yet women did not feel safe when having to leave home on business trips for several days and to hand child care and housework over to their husbands. Likewise, they usually did a larger part of household chores; otherwise they would feel guilty for not fulfilling the appropriate duties of a woman. In this regard, their time and energy devoted to their career development were substantially limited.

To a certain extent, the challenges described above can be considered women's personal or self-created obstacles. Thus, if they want to rise to the top of the administrative ranks, they should take this work-life problem seriously and delineate feasible solutions to the obstacles. First, attending leadership training courses inside and outside of the country and learning from the experiences of high-achieving women in Viet Nam and other countries may help Vietnamese women, including those in academia, change their perspectives on their domestic and social roles. Second, it is important for them to form mutual support groups which can help strengthen their professional and leadership skills and knowledge. Also, these groups can offer assistance, advice, and consultation as women progress in their careers or as they work to achieve leadership positions at different levels. Such groups can be established at the department, college or faculty, institutional, and inter-institutional levels, and not only women but also men leaders should be invited to act as mentors and advisors.

It is significant to state that the above implications for policies and practices are drawn from the context of this study. There may be many other implications and recommendations that

are beyond the scope of the current study or that I, as the primary and only researcher, may not be aware of.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

There are several limitations associated with this research that future studies of similar topics should consider and address. First, despite my great attempts to keep the sample size as large as possible, I could only select and conduct my study on 20 mid-level women leaders (but only 16 interview transcripts were qualified for analysis) and five gatekeepers at four higher education institutions in southern Viet Nam. The main reason for this limitation was the time and financial constraints I encountered. The small sample size certainly limits the generalizability or external validity of this study (Creswell, 2003; Glesne, 2006; Holloway, 1997; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Accordingly, future empirical studies of Vietnamese women in academia and academic leadership should enlarge the sample size to include more women and universities and colleges, from not only the southern part but also the central and northern parts of Viet Nam. In addition, researchers should conduct longitudinal qualitative and quantitative research, which may enable them to see changes in academic women's career advancement and leadership styles, after an array of professional training courses, for example.

Second, this study primarily focused on the experiences of academic women leaders and ignored those of their male counterparts. Hence, it is impossible for the former to compare and contrast what they and their male colleagues have experienced on their career paths and in their leadership development processes, through which women could deepen their understanding of their own experiences. The findings show that women in academia in the MD encountered numerous challenges in their career advancement, mainly engendered by the traditional culture. Men in academia may have their own career barriers that need to be examined. In order to help academic

women get a full picture of and benefit more from their experiences, future researchers should also include men in the samples and explore their experiences.

Third, because of the very limited number of women holding high-level leadership positions in higher education in the MD, I could not investigate the lived experiences of this group of women. Given that the experiences of women at the top may be different from and more instructive than those of the mid-level women leaders in the current study, what the former have undergone in their work and life may bring more inspiration to potential women leaders. Therefore, future researchers should address this gap by locating and studying top-level women leaders, perhaps from not only the MD but also other geographical areas in Viet Nam. Finally, international and comparative studies of women in academia and women in academic leadership ought to be conducted, so that women in higher education from different regions of the world can learn from one another.

Furthermore, the findings of this study point to several topics for future investigations:

- ✓ How do academic women balance multiple roles to advance in their careers?
- ✓ What hinders women from rising to the top? How do they feel about not being at the top?
- ✓ How can academic women both be successful in their careers and have happy families?
- ✓ What needs to be done to help more and more women attain senior leadership roles?

It is hoped that the limitations and implications outlined above will contribute to ongoing conversations about gender equality and women in academia among researchers, practitioners, and policy makers in higher education in Viet Nam and other patriarchal countries. Likewise, I hope that this study will enrich the scholarship on women in higher education leadership in the Mekong Delta, where no similar studies have been conducted.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Mid-Level Women Leader Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I would like to talk with you about your experiences in your advancement to institutional leadership position(s). Through this research study, I would like to develop a deeper understanding of your experiences on your career paths. The information you provide here will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law. Only I, my advisor, and the MSU IRB (Institutional Review Board) will have access to the material you provide. The research data will be kept on the campus of Michigan State University (MSU) in a locked file cabinet and/or password protected computer for 3 years after the close of the research. Your name will never appear in any material from this study, and I will disguise the names of others you use that might identify their positions.

This interview will take about ninety minutes to two hours. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. Your participation in this study may contribute to the understanding of opportunities and barriers confronting women in higher education. With your permission, I would like to audio record this interview. This research interview is voluntary. You may ask me to stop the recorder at any time you wish. Just tell me to stop the recording. You may also ask me to stop the interview at any time, with no questions asked. You may decline to answer any question and any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact me, Ngoc Lan Thi Dang, at:

911 Marigold Avenue, Apt 18
East Lansing, MI 48823
The U.S.A.
E-mail: dangngoc@msu.edu
Phone number: 1-517-755 6065

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824, the U.S.A.

Do you voluntarily agree to participate in this research? Yes / No

Do you have any questions before I begin? Yes / No

Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself:

- Name
- Age
- Current position
- Department/College
- Years of service
- Educational level
- Professional title (associate professor/professor), if any
- Communist Party member: Yes/No
- Ethnicity

2. I would like to know a little bit more about your background.

- Where did you grow up?
- What is your marital status?
- Describe your educational background, from your undergraduate program up.
- Tell me about your parents. What did they do before and after the American War (1975)?

3. Describe your current job.

- Please describe your current responsibilities.
- Please walk me through your typical work day.

4. Tell me about how you came to be in the position that you are in now.

- Did you apply for it? If not, how?

5. How did you prepare yourself for the position you have now?

- What role did others play in this preparation? How/In what ways did others help you to prepare for this position? Who were they?

6. Think about your day to day activities. Reflect on why you make choices to engage in particular behaviors or make particular decisions.

- Now, take a longer view of your career. What major factors or forces led you to choose academic administration for your career?
- As you consider the choices you make day to day and over the longer term, do you see patterns in your behaviors or decisions? How do they reflect your management style?

7. I notice that in your work as a manager that you interact and work with a lot of men. Can you tell me about your relationships and your interactions with these men in the workplace? What are your interactions with them like on a regular basis?

- Well, I notice that in my own work and my own life that Confucian ideology and norms seem to influence me a lot. Can you tell me the extent to which Confucianism has any influence on what you do in your professional life?

8. What do you think were some of the important influences on your professional career development?

- What do they mean to you?
- In what ways has your family background influenced your promotion and advancement in higher education?

- How about Communist Party affiliation and ethnicity?

- How have your family background, Communist Party affiliation (if any), and ethnicity influenced your professional career advancement?

(Questions 8 & 9 may come up naturally after question 2. So they, along with all their sub-questions, may be used as follow-ups to question 2.)

9. What opportunities have you encountered on your career path?

- What do these opportunities mean to you?

10. What challenges have you faced on your career path?

- What do these challenges mean to you?

- Why do you think you faced these types of challenges?

- To what extent are the challenges typical of the challenges facing aspiring women in their career paths?

- How would you think about these opportunities and challenges for other women? To what extent are these opportunities and challenges characteristics of career path of advancement for other women as well?

11. What particular strategies and techniques have you used to help you succeed and advance in your career?

- Do you think that senior people should encourage promising junior/younger persons to consider career moves into academic administration? How might they encourage such career choices?

- In what ways are you helping women who are younger than you or more junior than you to develop and to succeed in their academic careers?

12. As I explain earlier, I am interested in issues around gender in higher education and women in academic leadership. I also notice in my work that the issues of gender are addressed in a number of our laws and policies at both the national and local levels. How do these laws and policies manifest themselves in your work within your institution?

- What is your perception of the approximate proportion/percentage of male and female leaders in the middle and top levels in your institution, respectively?

- What differences are there in the ways in which men and women are promoted to leadership positions in your institution? Have you noticed any differences in your past promotion?

- What sorts of support did you receive from your institution as you advanced into your current leadership position? As a women leader, do you receive any further institutional support, especially for your further advancement, if any?

- Are there actions your superiors could take to assist you in your career advancement that they have not taken? Is there any type of support program to advance women in academic administration at your institution?

- What opportunities and enhancing factors have the Gender Equity Law and the policies on gender equality brought to you, if any?

- Have these policies hindered you in any way?

13. What are your future plans for advancement or career change?

14. Is there anything else that I have not asked but you want to add?

Thank you for talking with me today. If you wish, I will send you a copy of the report/article I write on my research that includes the information you have provided for me.

Questions Related to Participant Observation

1. How often do you attend this meeting? What do you see to be the purpose of this meeting? What do you see going on in the meeting that you and I attended?

2. Asking about more specific things:

I noticed that you did such and such. Can you tell me about that? Or I noticed that you did not do such and such. You and the rest of the women didn't say very much, can you tell me more about that?

APPENDIX B
Mid-Level Women Leader Interview Protocol (Vietnamese)
Bảng Câu Hỏi Dành Cho Các Nữ Lãnh Đạo

Giới thiệu

Cám ơn cô đã cho phép em có dịp nói chuyện với cô hôm nay. Em xin được trò chuyện với cô về những kinh nghiệm trong quá trình cô được đề bạt lên vị trí hiện nay. Qua nghiên cứu này, em muốn có được những hiểu biết sâu sắc hơn về những kinh nghiệm trên con đường sự nghiệp của cô. Những thông tin cô trao đổi với em sẽ hoàn toàn được bảo mật (theo quy định của luật pháp Mỹ). Chỉ có em, giáo sư cố vấn học tập của em, và Hội đồng Xét duyệt Đề tài Nghiên cứu của Đại học Michigan State có thể tiếp cận với những thông tin này. Các số liệu nghiên cứu của em sẽ được lưu trong một tủ có ngăn kéo được khóa kín và/hoặc trong một máy tính có cài mật mã được lưu trữ tại Trường Đại học Michigan State trong vòng 3 năm kể từ sau khi nghiên cứu kết thúc. Tên thật của cô sẽ không bao giờ xuất hiện trong bất kỳ tài liệu nào liên quan đến nghiên cứu này, và em cũng sẽ dùng tên giả để thay thế cho tên của những người cô đề cập trong cuộc phỏng vấn này, để vị trí của họ không bị phát hiện.

Buổi phỏng vấn này sẽ kéo dài khoảng 90 phút đến 2 giờ. Sẽ không có bất kỳ nguy hiểm nào đối với cô khi cô tham gia nghiên cứu này của em. Sự tham gia của cô sẽ đóng góp rất nhiều vào việc nâng cao hiểu biết về những cơ hội và rào cản đối với phụ nữ trong giáo dục đại học. Nếu cô cho phép, em xin được ghi âm lại nội dung cuộc phỏng vấn. Cuộc phỏng vấn này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Cô có thể bảo em ngưng ghi âm bất kỳ lúc nào. Cô cũng có thể bảo em ngưng cuộc phỏng vấn bất kỳ lúc nào, mà em sẽ không hề thắc mắc tại sao. Cô cũng có thể từ chối trả lời bất kỳ câu hỏi nào của em vào bất kỳ thời điểm nào, mà cô sẽ không hề bị phạt hay mất mát bất kỳ quyền lợi nào.

Nếu cô có quan tâm hay thắc mắc gì về nghiên cứu này, chẳng hạn như các vấn đề về khoa học, cách thực hiện bất kỳ phần nào của nghiên cứu, hay báo cáo bất kỳ một thương tổn nào, xin hãy liên lạc với em, Đặng Thị Ngọc Lan, theo địa chỉ:

911 Marigold Avenue, Apartment 18
East Lansing, MI 48823
Hoa Kỳ,
E-mail dangngoc@msu.edu
Điện thoại: 1-517-755 6065.

Nếu cô có quan tâm hay thắc mắc gì về vai trò và quyền lợi của cô với tư cách là một người tham gia nghiên cứu hoặc nếu cô muốn nhận được thông tin hay có ý kiến, than phiền gì về nghiên cứu này, cô có thể liên lạc, mà không cần nêu tên, với Chương trình Bảo vệ Nghiên cứu về Con người của Trường Đại học Michigan State theo số điện thoại 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, e-mail irb@msu.edu, hoặc gửi thư thông thường qua địa chỉ 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824, Hoa Kỳ.

Vậy cô vẫn muốn tham gia vào nghiên cứu của em một cách tự nguyện phải không à? Có/Không

Cô có câu hỏi nào trước khi em bắt đầu không? Có/Không

Câu hỏi

1. Hãy cho em biết một tí về cô:

- Tên
- Tuổi
- Vị trí công tác hiện tại
- Bộ môn/Khoa cô đang công tác
- Số năm công tác
- Trình độ văn hóa
- Học hàm (phó giáo sư/giáo sư) nếu có
- Đảng viên: Có/Không
- Dân tộc

2. Em muốn tìm hiểu thêm một tí về gia đình của cô?

- Cô lớn lên ở đâu?
- Cô đã có gia đình hay còn độc thân?
- Cô hãy cho em biết về quá trình học tập của cô, từ đại học trở lên.
- Còn về Cha Mẹ của cô. Trước và sau năm 1975, ông bà làm gì?

3. Hãy miêu tả công việc hiện tại của cô.

- Cô hãy cho biết trách nhiệm hiện tại của cô là gì.
- Một ngày làm việc bình thường của cô như thế nào?

4. Xin cô cho em biết cô đến với vị trí hiện nay hay cô có được vị trí hiện nay như thế nào?

- Có phải qua quá trình nộp đơn xin hay không? Nếu không phải như thế thì như thế nào?

5. Cô đã có những chuẩn bị cá nhân nào cho vị trí hiện nay?

- Những người xung quanh cô có vai trò gì trong sự chuẩn bị này? Những người này đã giúp cô như thế nào trong quá trình chuẩn bị cho vị trí này? Họ là những ai?

6. Bây giờ cô hãy liên tưởng đến những hoạt động thường ngày của cô. Cô hãy cho biết cô nghĩ gì hay lý do khi cô chọn lựa một cách hành động nào đó cho mình hay đi đến một quyết định nào đó.

- Bây giờ cô hãy nhìn xa hơn một chút, hãy nghĩ về sự nghiệp của mình. Những yếu tố hay sự tác động nào đã khiến cô chọn quản lý đại học/cao đẳng làm nghề nghiệp của mình?

- Khi cô nhìn lại những sự chọn lựa mà cô đã thực hiện hàng ngày hoặc trong một khoảng thời gian dài, cô có thấy khuôn mẫu hay nguyên tắc nào xuất hiện trong hành động, suy nghĩ và quyết định của cô hay không? Cô nghĩ gì về cách quản lý của mình?

7. Em có để ý thấy trong công tác quản lý của cô, cô giao tiếp và làm việc với rất nhiều nam giới. Cô có thể cho em biết về các mối quan hệ và giao tiếp với các đồng nghiệp nam này trong công việc được không? Những giao tiếp thường xuyên của cô với họ được thể hiện như thế nào?

- À, em có để ý thấy rằng trong cuộc sống và công việc của chính em hệ tư tưởng và những chuẩn mực của Nho giáo dường như ảnh hưởng đến em rất nhiều. Cô có thể cho em biết Nho giáo đã ảnh hưởng đến công việc của cô ở mức độ nào được không? Nó có những hạn chế gì đối với cô không?

8. Theo cô những ảnh hưởng hay tác động quan trọng đối với sự phát triển nghề nghiệp của cô là gì? Những ảnh hưởng này có ý nghĩa gì đối với cô?

- Xuất thân gia đình của cô đã ảnh hưởng đến sự đề bạt và thăng tiến trong sự nghiệp của cô như thế nào?

- Còn vấn đề Đảng viên và dân tộc có ảnh hưởng gì đến cô không?

- Xuất thân gia đình của cô, Đảng viên (nếu có) và dân tộc đã ảnh hưởng đến sự thăng tiến trong nghề nghiệp của cô như thế nào?

(Câu hỏi số 8 và 9 có thể xuất hiện một cách tự nhiên sau câu hỏi số 2. Vì thế những câu hỏi này và những câu hỏi phụ trong đó có thể được sử dụng làm những câu hỏi tiếp theo câu hỏi số 2).

9. Cô đã có được những cơ hội nào trên con đường sự nghiệp của cô?

- Những cơ hội này có ý nghĩa như thế nào đối với cô?

10. Cô đã gặp những thách thức nào trên con đường sự nghiệp của cô?

- Những thách thức này có ý nghĩa như thế nào đối với cô?

- Cô nghĩ xem tại sao cô phải đương đầu với những thách thức này?

- Ở chừng mực nào những thách thức này tiêu biểu cho những thách mà các phụ nữ có tiềm năng hay năng lực gặp phải trên con đường sự nghiệp của họ?

- Cô nghĩ như thế nào về những cơ hội và thách thức đối với những phụ nữ khác? Ở chừng mực nào thì những cơ hội và thách thức này cũng là đặc tính của quá trình thăng tiến trong sự nghiệp của những phụ nữ khác?

11. Cô có áp dụng những chiến lược hoặc cách thức gì để thành đạt và để thăng tiến trong nghề nghiệp của cô không?

- Cô có nghĩ rằng những người thâm niên hơn trong nghề nên khuyến khích những người trẻ hơn và có triển vọng xem xét việc chọn công tác quản lý đại học/cao đẳng làm nghề nghiệp của mình? Họ có thể khuyến khích việc chọn lựa nghề nghiệp này như thế nào?

- Cô đã giúp đỡ những phụ nữ nhỏ tuổi hoặc ít thâm niên hơn cô để họ phát triển và thành đạt trong nghề nghiệp của họ trong môi trường đại học/cao đẳng như thế nào?

12. Như em có đề cập ở trên, em rất quan tâm đến những vấn đề xung quanh giới và nữ lãnh đạo trong giáo dục đại học. Em cũng có đề ý thấy rằng những vấn đề về giới đã được một số luật và chính sách ở cấp quốc gia và địa phương quan tâm giải quyết. Vậy những luật lệ và chính sách này được thể hiện như thế nào trong công việc ở trường của cô?

- Xin cô cho em biết tỷ lệ hoặc tỷ lệ phần trăm ước lượng về số nữ và nam lãnh đạo ở cấp trung và cấp cao ở trường cô?

- Những khác biệt trong cách nam và nữ ở trường cô được đề bạt lên các chức vụ lãnh đạo là gì? Cô có đề ý thấy những khác biệt được thể hiện trong lần cô được đề bạt vừa qua không?

- Cô đã nhận được những hỗ trợ nào trong quá trình thăng tiến của cô lên vị trí lãnh đạo hiện nay? Là một nữ lãnh đạo, cô có được hỗ trợ nào thêm từ trường của cô không, đặc biệt là cho sự thăng tiến tiếp theo của cô, nếu có?

- Có những việc mà xếp của cô có thể làm để giúp đỡ cô nhưng họ đã không làm không? Ở trường cô có chương trình nào hỗ trợ phụ nữ để họ có thể thăng tiến hay được bổ nhiệm vào các vị trí quản lý/lãnh đạo không?

- Luật Bình đẳng giới và các chính sách về bình đẳng giới đã mang lại cho cô những cơ hội và yếu tố thuận lợi nào, nếu có?

- Những chính sách này có gây trở ngại gì cho cô không?

13. Kế hoạch tương lai cho việc thăng tiến, phát triển hay thay đổi trong nghề nghiệp của cô là gì?

14. Có vấn đề gì khác em chưa hỏi nhưng cô muốn bổ sung ở đây không?

Cảm ơn cô đã dành thời gian nói chuyện với em hôm nay. Nếu cô cần thì em sẽ gửi cho cô một bản sao kết quả nghiên cứu của em trong đó có những thông tin cô đã cung cấp cho em nãy giờ.

Những Câu Hỏi Liên Quan Đến Việc Quan Sát Các Buổi Họp

1. Cô thường tham dự buổi họp này như thế nào, bao nhiêu lần một tuần hay bao nhiêu lần một tháng? Theo cô mục đích của buổi họp này là gì? Cô thấy những gì đã diễn ra trong buổi họp mà cô và em đã tham dự?

2. Hỏi về những việc cụ thể hơn:

Em có để ý thấy cô làm thế này, thế này. Cô có thể cho em biết về việc này không? Hoặc là em có để ý thấy rằng cô không làm thế này, thế này. Cô và các cô khác không nói nhiều, cô có thể cho em biết thêm về việc này không?

APPENDIX C
Gatekeeper Interview Protocol
(Rectors and Vice Rectors)

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I would like to talk with you about the promotion process and procedures for men and women in your university/college. Through this study, I would like to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of female faculty and staff, particularly mid-level women leaders. The information you provide here will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law. Only I, my advisor, and the MSU IRB (Institutional Review Board) will have access to the material you provide here. Your name will never appear in any material from this study, and I will disguise the names of others you use that might identify their positions.

This interview will take about sixty to ninety minutes. With your permission, I would like to audio record this interview. You may ask me to stop the recorder at any time you wish. Just tell me to stop the recording. You may also ask me to stop the interview at any time, with no questions asked. You may decline to answer any question.

Do you have any questions before I begin?

Questions

1. Demographic information

- Name of interviewee
- Position in his/her institution:
- How did you come to be the rector/vice-rector of this college/university?
- Number of years/terms served
- Where were you born, and where did you grow up?

2. Tell me a little bit about what you do within your role at the university/college.

- What are your responsibilities and obligations within your role as a rector/a vice-rector of your college/university?
- In what way does the work that you do in your position involve interactions, communications, or other forms of work with women in positions of leadership or administration?

3. Please tell me about the activities in your university/college that are intended to help women administrators in their work.

- Are there any women's clubs and associations? What are the overall goals or purposes of these clubs or associations?
- What activities do they offer women? What are the overall goals or purposes of these activities?
- What support can women receive from them?

4. How do people get promoted at your university/college?

- What do you contribute to the activities that are designed to help people get promoted?
- Now I would like to ask a more specific question: In what ways are the activities that help people get promoted similar for men and women? In what ways are these activities different for men and women?
- Are there any different qualifications for promotion applied to men and women?
- What do you see as women's common strengths and weaknesses when you review and promote them? How are they similar to or different from those of men?

5. I would like to know a little bit more about the women leaders at your university/college.

- Of all the top and mid-level administrative positions, what is the approximate percentage/proportion of women in these positions?
- What was required of them to gain their promotions? In what ways are these requirements similar to those required of men? In what ways are they different from those required of men?
- What type of support do women receive from the institution to foster and develop their leadership capabilities?
- What challenges have the women experienced in their professional advancement? How do their experiences compare to men's?

6. What policies on gender equity have been adopted and implemented at your university/college?

- How long have they been implemented?
- What have been the effects or consequences for women?

- How many women have been promoted as a result? (get data of pre and post policy)

7. What plans and/or programs does the university/college have to help develop the potential of emerging women leaders?

- What are the outcomes of the programs?

8. As the rector/vice rector of the university/college, to what extent are the development of women's leadership and the advancement of them to senior leadership positions part of your overall vision and action plan within the institution?

- If yes, please tell me more about them. What have you done?

9. Is there anything else that I have not asked but you would like to add?

Thank you for talking with me today.

APPENDIX D
Gatekeeper Interview Protocol (Vietnamese)
Bảng Câu Hỏi Dành Cho Những Người Tuyển Chọn Lãnh Đạo
(Hiệu Trưởng và Phó Hiệu Trưởng)

Giới thiệu

Cám ơn thầy/cô đã đồng ý dành thời gian nói chuyện với em hôm nay. Em muốn nói với thầy/cô về quá trình và các thủ tục đề bạt nam và nữ lãnh đạo ở trường của thầy/cô. Qua nghiên cứu này, em muốn có được những hiểu biết sâu sắc hơn về kinh nghiệm của các nữ quản lý và cán bộ giảng dạy, đặc biệt là các nữ lãnh đạo ở cấp trung. Những thông tin thầy/cô trao đổi với em sẽ hoàn toàn được bảo mật theo quy định của luật pháp ở Mỹ. Chỉ có em, giáo sư cố vấn học tập của em, và Hội đồng Xét duyệt Đề tài Nghiên cứu của Trường Đại học Michigan State có thể tiếp cận với những thông tin do thầy/cô cung cấp ở đây. Các số liệu nghiên cứu của em sẽ được lưu trong một tủ có ngăn kéo được khóa kín và/hoặc trong một máy tính có cài mật mã được lưu trữ tại Trường Đại học Michigan State trong vòng 3 năm kể từ sau khi nghiên cứu kết thúc. Tên thật của thầy/cô sẽ không bao giờ xuất hiện trong bất kỳ tài liệu nào liên quan đến nghiên cứu này, và em cũng sẽ dùng tên giả để thay thế cho tên của những người thầy/cô đề cập đến trong cuộc phỏng vấn này, để vị trí của họ không bị phát hiện.

Buổi phỏng vấn này sẽ kéo dài khoảng 60 đến 90 phút. Sẽ không có bất kỳ nguy hiểm nào đối với thầy/cô khi cô tham gia nghiên cứu này của em. Sự tham gia của thầy/cô sẽ đóng góp rất nhiều vào việc nâng cao hiểu biết về những cơ hội và rào cản đối với phụ nữ trong giáo dục đại học. Nếu được thầy/cô cho phép, em xin được ghi âm lại nội dung cuộc phỏng vấn. Cuộc phỏng vấn này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Thầy/cô có thể bảo em ngưng ghi âm bất kỳ lúc nào. Thầy/cô cũng có thể bảo em ngưng cuộc phỏng vấn bất kỳ lúc nào, mà em sẽ không hề thắc mắc tại sao. Thầy/cô cũng có thể từ chối trả lời bất kỳ câu hỏi nào vào bất kỳ thời điểm nào, mà sẽ không hề bị mất bất kỳ quyền lợi nào.

Vậy thầy/cô vẫn muốn tham gia vào nghiên cứu của em một cách tự nguyện phải không à?
Có/Không

Cô có câu hỏi nào trước khi em bắt đầu không? Có/Không

Câu hỏi

1. Về thông tin cá nhân

- Tên:
- Vị trí trong trường:
- Thầy/cô được bổ nhiệm vào chức vụ hiệu trưởng/hiệu phó của Trường như thế nào?
- Số năm/nhiệm kỳ công tác:

- Thầy/cô sinh ra và lớn lên ở đâu?

2. Xin cho em biết một ít về vai trò của thầy/cô trong trường.

- Ở cương vị hiệu trưởng/hiệu phó của Trường, trách nhiệm và bổn phận của thầy/cô là gì?

- Bằng cách nào những công việc mà thầy/cô đang thực hiện ở cương vị của mình bao hàm những ảnh hưởng lẫn nhau, giao tiếp, và các hình thức hoạt động khác với phụ nữ ở các vị trí lãnh đạo hay quản lý?

3. Hãy cho em biết về các hoạt động nhằm hỗ trợ các nữ lãnh đạo, quản lý trong công việc của họ ở trường của thầy/cô.

- Có các câu lạc bộ hay các tổ chức dành cho nữ không? Mục tiêu hay mục đích tổng quát của những câu lạc bộ hay tổ chức này là gì?

- Những câu lạc bộ hay tổ chức này có những hoạt động gì cho phụ nữ? Mục tiêu hay mục đích tổng quát của những hoạt động này là gì?

- Phụ nữ nhận được những hỗ trợ gì từ những hoạt động này?

4. Cán bộ được đề bạt như thế nào ở trường của thầy/cô?

- Thầy/cô giữ vai trò gì hay có những đóng góp gì cho các hoạt động được vạch ra nhằm giúp cán bộ trường được đề bạt?

- Bây giờ em muốn đặt một câu hỏi cụ thể hơn: Các hoạt động được vạch ra nhằm giúp cán bộ được đề bạt giống nhau như thế nào đối với nam và nữ? Những hoạt động này khác nhau như thế nào đối với nam và nữ?

- Có những tiêu chuẩn nào khác nhau đặt ra cho nam và nữ không?

- Khi thầy/cô xem xét hồ sơ đề bạt nữ, thầy/cô thấy điểm mạnh và điểm yếu của họ là gì? Những điểm mạnh và điểm yếu này có gì khác hoặc giống với nam?

5. Em muốn tìm hiểu thêm một tí nữa về các lãnh đạo nữ ở trường của thầy/cô.

- Khoảng bao nhiêu phần trăm cán bộ nữ giữ các vị trí lãnh đạo hay quản lý ở cấp trung và cấp cao?

- Để được đề bạt họ cần phải đạt những tiêu chuẩn gì? Những tiêu chuẩn hay yêu cầu này giống như thế nào so với những tiêu chuẩn hay yêu cầu đối với nam? Và khác như thế nào so với những tiêu chuẩn hay yêu cầu đối với nam?

- Cán bộ nữ đã nhận được những sự hỗ trợ nào từ trường nhằm thúc đẩy và phát triển năng lực lãnh đạo của họ?

- Cán bộ nữ đã gặp phải những thách thức nào trong quá trình thăng tiến, phát triển nghề nghiệp của họ? So với nam thì kinh nghiệm của họ như thế nào?

6. Những chính sách về bình đẳng giới nào đã được đưa vào áp dụng ở trường của thầy/cô?

- Những chính sách này đã được thực thi trong bao lâu?

- Những kết quả hay hiệu quả đạt được đối với nữ là gì?

- Kết quả là bao nhiêu cán bộ nữ đã được đề bạt (trước và sau khi các chính sách này được thực thi)?

7. Trường đã có những kế hoạch và chương trình gì nhằm giúp phát triển năng lực của những cán bộ nữ có tiềm năng?

- Kết quả của những chương trình này là gì?

8. Với vị trí là hiệu trưởng/hiệu phó của Trường, thầy/cô có tầm nhìn và kế hoạch hành động như thế nào nhằm giúp phát triển năng lực lãnh đạo của cán bộ nữ và đưa họ vào các vị trí lãnh đạo nòng cốt trong trường?

- Nếu có, xin thầy/cô cho em biết thêm về tầm nhìn và kế hoạch hành động này. Thầy/cô đã làm những gì?

9. Có điều gì em chưa hỏi nhưng thầy cô muốn chia sẻ thêm với em không?

Cám ơn thầy cô đã trò chuyện với em hôm nay.

APPENDIX E
Advertisement Letter

Michigan State University

February 22, 2011

To: Rector
University/College
Street Address, Ward.....
City....., Province.....
Viet Nam

From: Ngoc Lan Thi Dang, Doctoral Candidate
Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education Program
Department of Educational Administration
College of Education, Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824, the U.S.A.
Tel: (517) 755-6065
Email: dangngoc@msu.edu

Re: Permission for Conducting Doctoral Dissertation Research

Dear Mr. Rector,

I am Ngoc Lan Thi Dang, a fourth year doctoral candidate in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education Program, Dept. of Educational Administration, College of Education, Michigan State University. I am conducting my dissertation research on women and leadership in higher education in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam. The primary goal of my research is to help women administrators in higher education in the Mekong Delta in particular and in Viet Nam in general to be aware of the opportunities and barriers to their career advancement, through which they can make as much progress as their male counterparts. In addition, the research also aims to increase the understanding of higher education leaders and policy makers of existing status and perspectives of women in academia so that they can offer women faculty and staff members better support services that in turn facilitate their career advancement.

If you allow me to conduct this study on your campus, I plan to come to your university between February 28 and April 22, 2011 to interview three or four female mid-level administrators, e.g., a vice-dean, a dean, a support department director or deputy director, or a research center director and deputy director. I also would like to observe two or three of the weekly or monthly meetings between male and female leaders at your institution. The purpose of my observations is to find out the patterns of interaction and communication between these leaders. During the observations, I will act as a pure observer, and so will not disturb your meetings. Finally, I want to interview you or one of your vice-rectors to get to know the policies and programs that your institution has implemented to help women advance in their professional careers. Significantly, the personal information of the participants will be kept confidential, and their participation is

completely voluntary. Interview transcripts will be accessed only by me, as the secondary investigator, my study coordinator, Dr. Roger Baldwin, and the MSU IRB (Institutional Review Board). Moreover, there are no potential risks associated with participation in this study.

If you permit me to conduct this study on your campus, could you please sign the approval section below and give it the official stamp of your institution? Because this document will be submitted to the MSU's IRB as part of my research file, it is important for me to receive your signature and the university stamp before I start my study on your campus.

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, please contact my study coordinator, Dr. Roger Baldwin, at 1-517-355 6452, e-mail rbaldwin@msu.edu, or regular mail at 429 Erickson Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824-1034, the U.S.A., and me at my cell phone 0163 343 6551 (in Viet Nam) and 1-517-755 6065 (in the US), e-mail dangngoc@msu.edu, or regular mail Marigold Apartments, Apt 18, 911 Marigold Ave East Lansing, MI 48823, the U.S.A.

Thank you so much in advance for your kind support to my research. I am looking forward to hearing from you at your convenience.

Best wishes,

Ngoc Lan Thi Dang

Approval of University/College.....

With the signature below, I agree to allow Ms Ngoc Lan Thi Dang—a doctoral candidate from College of Education, Michigan State University—to conduct the above study at my university. I will also offer her all the necessary support so that she can complete her research study within the period mentioned in this letter.

(Sign and seal here)
Rector

APPENDIX F
Advertisement Letter (Vietnamese)
Thư Giới Thiệu Nghiên Cứu

Đại học Michigan State

Ngày 22/02/2011

Kính gửi: Hiệu trưởng
Trường Đại học/Cao đẳng
Số nhà....., Đường....., Phường.....
TP....., Tỉnh.....
Việt Nam

Người gửi: Đặng Thị Ngọc Lan, Nghiên cứu sinh
Chuyên ngành Giáo dục Đại học, Giáo dục Người lớn và Giáo dục Suốt đời
Bộ môn Quản lý Giáo dục
Khoa Sư phạm, Đại học Michigan State
East Lansing, MI 48824, Hoa Kỳ.
ĐT: (517) 755-6065
Email: dangngoc@msu.edu

V/v: Xin phép được đến Trường Đại học/Cao đẳng..... làm nghiên cứu

Kính gửi Thầy Hiệu trưởng:

Em tên Đặng Thị Ngọc Lan, hiện là nghiên cứu sinh năm thứ tư thuộc chương trình Giáo dục Đại học, Giáo dục Người lớn, và Giáo dục Suốt đời, Bộ môn Quản lý Giáo dục, Khoa Sư phạm, Đại học Michigan State, Hoa Kỳ. Em đang thực hiện nghiên cứu cho luận văn tốt nghiệp của em về phụ nữ và công tác lãnh đạo trong giáo dục đại học ở Đồng bằng Sông Cửu Long, Việt Nam. Mục tiêu chính của nghiên cứu của em là nhằm giúp cho các nữ lãnh đạo và quản lý trong ngành giáo dục đại học ở Đồng bằng Sông Cửu Long nói riêng và Việt Nam nói chung hiểu rõ được những cơ hội cũng như những thách thức đối với quá trình phát triển đi lên của họ. Qua sự hiểu biết này, họ có thể tiến bộ và phát triển ngang bằng với các đồng nghiệp nam. Ngoài ra, nghiên cứu của em còn nhằm tăng cường sự hiểu biết về thực trạng và quan điểm của cán bộ nữ cho lãnh đạo và những người hoạch định chính sách trong giáo dục đại học, để từ đó họ có thể có những hỗ trợ tốt hơn cho cán bộ nữ để các cô có thể thăng tiến dễ dàng hơn trong ngành nghề của mình.

Nếu thầy cho phép em thực hiện nghiên cứu này ở trường của thầy, em xin phép được đến làm việc trong khoảng giữa 28/02 và 22/04/2011 để phỏng vấn 3-4 lãnh đạo nữ ở cấp trường, phó khoa, hoặc trưởng, phó phòng, ban, trung tâm. Em cũng xin phép được quan sát hai hoặc ba buổi họp giao ban được tổ chức hàng tuần hoặc hàng tháng giữa các cán bộ nam và nữ ở trường của thầy. Mục đích quan sát của em là tìm hiểu về cách các cô giao tiếp với các đồng nghiệp nam trong buổi họp. Em sẽ chỉ ngồi quan sát và sẽ không làm bất cứ điều gì gây xáo trộn hay chi phối các buổi họp của Trường. Cuối cùng em cũng xin được phỏng vấn thầy hoặc một thầy trong Ban

Giám hiệu để tìm hiểu về những chính sách và chương trình mà trường thầy đã và đang thực hiện nhằm hỗ trợ cho các cô đi lên trong nghề nghiệp của mình. Thông tin em thu được từ tất cả các đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu của em cũng như tất cả các thông tin khác thu được từ trường của thầy sẽ được bảo mật, và sự tham gia của các cô, của thầy và các cá nhân khác là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Chỉ có em, giáo sư hướng dẫn chính của em, và Hội đồng Xét duyệt, Quản lý Nghiên cứu của Đại học Michigan State là được quyền tiếp cận các thông tin em thu thập được. Ngoài ra không có bất kỳ nguy hiểm hay rủi ro nào cho các thành viên tham gia nghiên cứu của em.

Nếu thầy cho phép em thực hiện nghiên cứu này ở trường của thầy, xin thầy ký và đóng dấu vào phần chấp thuận bên dưới. Do em phải nộp thư này cho Hội đồng Xét duyệt, Quản lý Nghiên cứu của Đại học Michigan State và lưu vào hồ sơ nghiên cứu của em nên cần phải có chữ ký của thầy và mộc đỏ của Trường trước khi em bắt tay vào thực hiện nghiên cứu.

Nếu thầy có thắc mắc hay câu hỏi nào liên quan đến nghiên cứu của em, chẳng hạn như các vấn đề liên quan đến tính khoa học của nghiên cứu, xin liên hệ với giáo sư hướng dẫn chính của em, Tiến sỹ Roger Baldwin theo số điện thoại 1-517-355-6452, e-mail rbaldwin@msu.edu, hoặc qua địa chỉ, Phòng 429 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1034, Hoa Kỳ. Thầy cũng có thể liên hệ với em theo số điện thoại 0163 343 6551 (ở Việt Nam) và 1-517-755-6065 (ở Mỹ), e-mail dangngoc@msu.edu, hay địa chỉ: Marigold Apartments, Apt 18, 911 Marigold Ave, East Lansing, MI 48823, Hoa Kỳ.

Cám ơn thầy rất nhiều về những hỗ trợ quý báu cho nghiên cứu của em. Mong sớm nhận được phản hồi của thầy để em có thể sớm bắt tay vào nghiên cứu.

Kính chúc thầy nhiều sức khỏe và thắng lợi!

Đặng Thị Ngọc Lan

Chấp thuận của Trường Đại học/Cao đẳng.....:

Bằng chữ ký dưới đây, tôi chấp thuận cho cô Đặng Thị Ngọc Lan - nghiên cứu sinh thuộc Khoa Sư phạm, Đại học Michigan State - đến thực hiện nghiên cứu nêu trên ở trường tôi. Tôi cũng sẽ có những hỗ trợ cần thiết cho công việc của cô để cô có thể hoàn thành nghiên cứu của mình trong thời gian nêu trên.

(Ký tên và đóng dấu của Trường)
Hiệu trưởng

APPENDIX G

Consent Form

A Research Study of Women and Leadership in Higher Education in Viet Nam
Ngoc Lan Thi Dang
Doctoral Student in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education Program
Department of Educational Administration, Michigan State University
Erickson Hall, MSU
Phone: 517-755-6065
Email: dangngoc@msu.edu

Dear Ms./Mr.....,

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study conducted by Ngoc Lan Thi Dang, a doctoral student from Michigan State University, Dept. of Educational Administration, Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education Program. This study is intended to help women in academia in the Mekong Delta (MD), southern Viet Nam, gain a deeper understanding of the opportunities and barriers confronting their career advancement and to provide policy makers in Viet Nam with more insights into the status and perspective of women in higher education on their efforts to advance in their careers.

The study is about one year long. If you agree to participate, your contribution will be to participate in one or two interviews that would last approximately 60 minutes to two hours, and you also have the right not to answer any particular question in the interview. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. Your decision to participate or not to participate in the interviews will not positively or negatively affect your current work at your institution. If you decide to participate, you may change your mind at any time and withdraw, again with no negative consequences for you in any way.

The interviews will be digitally recorded. Only the MSU IRB (Institutional Review Board), I, as the secondary investigator, and my advisor, who is chairing my dissertation committee, have access to these recordings, which are then transferred to MP3 files. The research data will be kept on the campus of Michigan State University (MSU) in a locked file cabinet and/or password protected computer for 3 years after the close of the research. Only I, my advisor, and the MSU IRB will have access to the material you provide. The information you reveal in the interview will be coded and kept confidential. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. A pseudonym will be used to identify your interview recording and the transcript of that recording.

The potential benefits to you for participating in this study are developing additional insights into your situation or practices or those of academic women in the MD in general, and becoming more self-aware or more informed of these issues. In addition, this study may contribute to increasing the awareness of higher education leaders and policy makers in Viet Nam of the underlying barriers confronting women in academia. Thanks to this increased awareness, they may learn how best to recognize women's talent and leadership capacity and delineate suitable

policies and plans for women's leadership development. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact my advisor, Dr. Roger Baldwin, at 517-355-6452, e-mail rbaldwin@msu.edu, or regular mail at 429 Erickson Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824-1034, the U.S.A., and me at my cell phone 517-755-6065, e-mail dangngoc@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 911 Marigold Avenue, Apt 18, East Lansing, MI 48823, the U.S.A.

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824, the U.S.A.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary participation in this study.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX H
Consent Form (Vietnamese)
Giấy Đồng Ý Tham Gia Nghiên Cứu

Nghiên cứu về Lãnh đạo Nữ trong Giáo dục Đại học Việt Nam
Đặng Thị Ngọc Lan
Nghiên cứu sinh Chương trình Giáo dục Đại học, Giáo dục Người lớn và Giáo dục Suốt đời
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Kính gửi cô/thầy.....,

Cô/thầy được mời tham gia một nghiên cứu có tính chất định tính do Đặng Thị Ngọc Lan, nghiên cứu sinh thuộc Chương trình Giáo dục Đại học, Giáo dục Người lớn và Giáo dục Suốt đời thuộc Bộ môn Quản lý Giáo dục, Đại học Michigan State, thực hiện. Nghiên cứu này nhằm giúp cho phụ nữ trong môi trường đại học và cao đẳng hiểu sâu hơn về những cơ hội và thách thức đối với việc thăng tiến trong sự nghiệp của mình, đồng thời giúp cho những nhà hoạch định chính sách ở Việt Nam hiểu biết sâu sắc hơn về vị trí và quan điểm của nữ giới trong môi trường này và về những cố gắng đi lên trong nghề nghiệp của phụ nữ.

Nghiên cứu này được dự định thực hiện trong một năm. Nếu cô/thầy đồng ý tham gia thì cô/thầy sẽ tham gia một hoặc hai buổi phỏng vấn, mỗi buổi kéo dài từ 60 phút đến 2 tiếng và cô/thầy có quyền không trả lời bất kỳ câu hỏi nào trong lúc phỏng vấn. Sự tham gia của quý cô/thầy là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Cô/thầy có quyền nói không đồng ý tham gia. Quyết định tham gia hay không tham gia nghiên cứu của cô/thầy sẽ không có ảnh hưởng gì đến công việc hiện tại ở trường của cô/thầy. Một khi cô/thầy đã đồng ý tham gia, cô/thầy vẫn có thể thay đổi ý định và rút lui. Quyết định rút lui này cũng sẽ không có bất kỳ ảnh hưởng tiêu cực nào đối với cô/thầy.

Buổi phỏng vấn sẽ được ghi âm lại. Chỉ có Hội đồng Xét duyệt đề tài nghiên cứu của Đại học Michigan State, tôi và giáo sư cố vấn nghiên cứu của tôi, cũng chính là Chủ tịch Hội đồng Hướng dẫn Luận văn của tôi, được phép tiếp cận những bài ghi âm này mà sau đó sẽ được chuyển thành các tập tin MP3. Các số liệu nghiên cứu của tôi sẽ được lưu trong một tủ có ngăn kéo được khóa kín và/hoặc trong một máy tính có cài mật mã được lưu trữ tại Đại học Michigan State trong vòng 3 năm kể từ sau khi nghiên cứu kết thúc. Chỉ có tôi, giáo sư cố vấn nghiên cứu của tôi, và Hội đồng Xét duyệt Đề tài Nghiên cứu của Đại học Michigan State có thể tiếp cận với những thông tin này. Những thông tin mà cô/thầy cung cấp trong cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được mã hóa và bảo mật. Sự bảo mật thông tin của cô/thầy sẽ được đảm bảo ở mức độ tối đa theo quy định của luật pháp. Tên giả sẽ được dùng để nhận dạng bài ghi âm cuộc phỏng vấn của cô/thầy và bản sao lại nội dung cuộc phỏng vấn.

Những lợi ích mà cô/thầy có được khi tham gia nghiên cứu này là gia tăng sự hiểu biết của cô/thầy về bản thân, giúp cô/thầy có những hiểu biết sâu sắc hơn về tình hình và thực trạng của cô/thầy hay của phụ nữ trong giáo dục đại học ở Đồng bằng Sông Cửu Long nói chung. Ngoài ra nghiên cứu này cũng nhằm làm tăng nhận thức của lãnh đạo và những người hoạch định chính

sách trong giáo dục đại học ở Việt Nam, giúp họ nhận ra những rào cản vô hình đối với phụ nữ trong ngành. Khi nhận thức được nâng cao, lãnh đạo và những người hoạch định chính sách này có thể biết được những cách tối ưu để công nhận tài năng và năng lực lãnh đạo của giới nữ để từ đó có thể đề ra những chính sách và kế hoạch phù hợp cho việc phát triển năng lực lãnh đạo của họ. Khi tham gia nghiên cứu này, cô/thầy sẽ không gặp bất kỳ nguy cơ tiềm ẩn nào.

Nếu cô/thầy có bất kỳ câu hỏi nào về nghiên cứu này, xin cô/thầy hãy liên hệ với giáo sư cố vấn nghiên cứu của tôi, Tiến sỹ Roger Baldwin, qua điện thoại số 517-355-6452, e-mail rbaldwin@msu.edu, hoặc thư thường qua địa chỉ 429 Erickson Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824-1034, Hoa Kỳ, và liên hệ với tôi qua số điện thoại di động 517-755-6065, e-mail dangngoc@msu.edu, hoặc thư thường qua địa chỉ 911 Marigold Avenue, Apt 18, East Lansing, MI 48823, Hoa Kỳ.

Nếu cô/thầy có quan tâm hay thắc mắc gì về vai trò và quyền lợi của cô/thầy với tư cách là một người tham gia nghiên cứu, hoặc nếu cô/thầy muốn nhận được thông tin hay có ý kiến, than phiền gì về nghiên cứu này, cô/thầy có thể liên lạc, mà không cần nêu tên, với Chương trình Bảo vệ Nghiên cứu về Con người của Đại học Michigan State theo số điện thoại 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, e-mail irb@msu.edu, hoặc thư thường qua địa chỉ 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824, Hoa Kỳ.

Chữ ký của cô/thầy dưới đây sẽ chứng tỏ rằng cô/thầy đồng ý tham gia nghiên cứu này một cách tự nguyện.

Xin chân thành cảm ơn cô/thầy vì đã dành thời gian quý báu tham gia nghiên cứu của tôi.

Ký tên

Ghi rõ ngày tháng

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