

NORTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES IN TEXTBOOKS IN VIETNAM

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Among the countries in the world presented in high school textbooks and university coursebooks in Vietnam, the Northeast Asian countries always play an important part. From the first lessons on history and geography of the sixth form program, the basic knowledge of history, geography, culture of such countries as China, Japan, and Korea is integrated into the general lessons. In the following years, the lessons that scrutinize every single country are gradually brought into the curriculum, providing students with more systematic knowledge.

On the basis of surveying and qualitative analysis some sets of high school textbook and university coursebook (chiefly in the branch of social sciences and humanity), this article concentrates on learning about the outlines in terms of amount of time and contents to present the Northeast Asian countries. Nevertheless, due to the fact that general education in Vietnam includes 12 forms, each of which has a range of textbooks and references, at the same time, it is also for the knowledge structure of each subject, and we are therefore only concerned with the main kinds of book, i.e. History, then Geography and Literature. Similarly, the objects of our survey for the university, college, and technical secondary system also cover those kinds of textbook, coursebook associated with history, culture, group of people... Since the range of object and study is considerably large, we shall therefore combine the surveying, describing and qualitative methods together in order to provide the fundamental knowledge about the Northeast Asian countries as it is being presented in the system of standard textbooks and coursebooks in Vietnam today.

1. Knowledge about the Northeast Asian countries in general education textbooks

There remain two points worth noticing before going into detail. First, due to the peculiarities in terms of knowledge of each subject, in the system of general education textbook in Vietnam today, presentations of Northeast Asian countries

are mainly in those books belonging to the social sciences area, specifically, i.e. the three academic subjects: History, Geography and Literature. Second,

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because of the need to conform with age group and awareness, though the general education system includes 12 forms, knowledge about the Northeast Asian countries is only introduced from the sixth form (pupils at the age of 12). Thus, for the general education textbooks, our attention is only paid to those objects falling within the Lower Secondary School (the sixth - ninth forms) and Upper Secondary School (the tenth- twelfth forms).

The System of Textbooks on History

Before doing History as an independent subject as from the sixth form, students have familiarized themselves with History and Geography since their fourth and fifth forms. However, the contents of this subject are highly summarized, aiming to relate some of the typical historical events. As from the lower secondary school level, presentation and teaching of history in general and world history and the Northeast Asian region history in particular begin to be systematic: the sixth form deals with ancient times, the seventh form with the Middle Ages, the eighth form with sub-modern and modern, and the ninth form continues with the modern times. Apart from that, the system of lesson structure is fairly broad and concise. During each period, besides the general matters, there are also lessons or chapters, sections that go deeper into each typical state or territory. In such a manner, evolution of the Northeast Asian countries' history is basically presented, even though discontinuously due to time limit of the subject. Among the three Northeast Asian countries, China is the one that is most presented and in the most systematic way; Japan, in sub-modern and modern times, is also presented in separate chapters and

writings; while the peninsular of Korea in general and South Korea in particular are not presented independently.

One feature easily noticeable when comparing the contents of History learned at the lower secondary and upper secondary levels is the repetition of the program structure. This repetition is so clear that sometimes it creates the feeling that upper secondary students do the whole history program of the lower secondary level. For example, the Middle Ages of the Orient of the seventh form with lessons on "China in Feudal Times", "India in Feudal Times", etc. The history program of the eighth and ninth forms is the same, with lessons on China, India, South East Asian, African, Latin American countries... between the 19th and 20th. Until the program of the last forms of the level, i.e. the ninth and tenth forms, the history content structure, as it can be said, is totally repeated, from division of historical periods to the contents of each chapter (See the Table of Comparison 1).

From Table 1, it can be easily noticed that the contents presented in the world history in the ninth and twelfth forms are much the same. It is not only the repetition in the headline of chapter/lesson in every chapter or the main part of each lesson is almost identical. For example, in the third chapter/lesson on the United States, Japan, and Western Europe from 1945/after the World War Two, the contents presented in the twelfth form History almost repeats the whole lesson structure as presented in the ninth form History. Other chapters/lessons also reflect the same repetition.

Table 1. Comparing the presentation of world History in the ninth form History and the twelfth form textbooks (1)

The ninth form history textbook	The twelfth form textbook
Chapter I. <i>The Soviet Union and East European Countries after World War Two</i>	Lesson 1. <i>The Soviet Union and East European Countries after World War Two</i>
Chapter II. <i>Asian, African, Latin American Countries from 1945 until Present</i>	Lesson 2. <i>Asian, African, Latin American Countries the World War Two</i>
Chapter III. <i>The United States, Japan, Western Europe from 1945 until Present</i>	Lesson 3. <i>The United States, Japan, Western Europe the World War Two</i>
Chapter IV. <i>International Relations from 1945 until Present</i>	Lesson 4. <i>International Relations after the World War Two</i>
Chapter V. <i>The Science - Technique Revolution from 1945 until Present</i>	Lesson5. <i>The Development of Science - Technique after the World War Two</i>

Anyway, it should be confirmed that though there is a repetition in the chapter/section structure, the depth of knowledge presented as well as the requirement for knowledge of lower secondary schoolchildren are considerably improved in the history program of the upper secondary level. However, as observed and analyzed by us, the

compilers of upper secondary textbooks have integrated more history information and data. Particularly, the style and ways of presenting also reflect the depth, with lots of scientific arguments, so the logic of the lessons is higher; the questions for revision also display greater depths so as to stimulate the students' creative thinking.

Table 2: The number of periods on the Northeast Asian History in the lower secondary and upper secondary History subject (1, 2)

	Total Number of Periods on History		World History		Orient History		Northeast Asian History		Remarks
	Periods	%	Periods	%	Periods	%	Periods	%	
The Sixth Form	30	100	5	16.6	1	3.3	0	0	Ancient
The Seventh Form	71	100	9	12.6	2	2.8	2 ^(a)	2.8	Middle Ages
The Eighth Form	47	100	34	72.3	7	14.8	3 ^(b)	6.3	Sub-Modern, Modern
The Ninth Form	46	100	14	30.4	6	13	1 ^(c)	2.1	Modern
The tenth	47	100	31	65.9	6	12.7	2 ^(d)	4.2	Ancient -

Form									Sub-Modern
The Eleventh Form	30	100	22	73.3	_(e)	-	2 ^(f)	6.6	Sub-Modern, Modern
The Twelfth Form	59	100	19	32.2	7	11.8	1 ^(g)	1.6	Modern

Another point is the textbook compilers' intention in distributing the volume of world history in general among the school years. It is shown in Table 2 that the eighth and eleventh *schoolchildren are equipped with a considerable volume of world history (the eighth form: 72.3%; the eleventh: 73.3% of the time limit for History) meanwhile in the remaining years, this rate just fluctuates between 12% and 32%. This intention chiefly derives from the practical need to prepare the knowledge for both graduation exams of the ninth and twelfth form students and university, college, technical secondary entrance exams. Since the exam contents are mainly focused on the part of modern history (of the world and of Vietnam as well), the part of ancient-Middle Ages-submodern history is thus compressed into the learning contents of the three forms sixth, seventh and eighth and the two forms tenth, eleventh.

* (a): About China history in the Middle Ages

(b): 02 periods on Japan (19th-20th centuries, period 1918-1939), 01 period on China during 19th- 20th centuries.

(c): 01 period on Japan after 1945

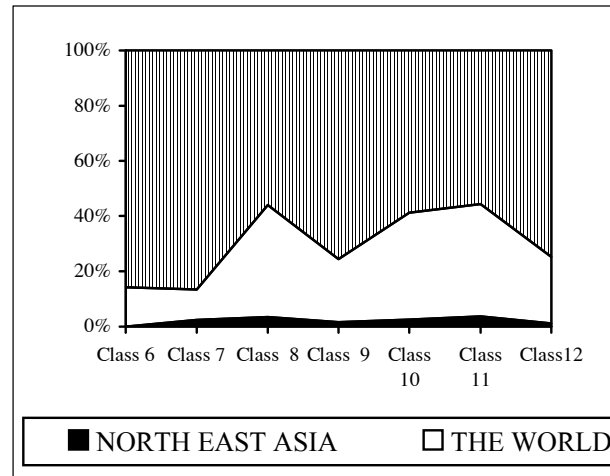
(d): The feudal China

(e): Textbook not divided into periods

(f): We estimate that about 01 period on China and 01 period on Japan

(g): Japan after the World War Two.

Diagram 1: *Distribution of Teaching Time for Northeast Asia in Lower Secondary and Upper Secondary History Textbook (Source: The same as Table 2)*



Being part of the world history program, the part about the Northeast Asian countries is also presented alternately through the periods. Nevertheless, not to mention the part indirectly regarding the Northeast Asian region in the summing-up writings, then the time limit for specialized teaching of Northeast Asian countries is rather modest. Diagram indicates a fact that, until the textbook program for 2007, the average time limit for teaching history of Northeast Asian countries just accounts for 3.3% on average. For the eighth and eleventh - the two forms with significantly long time limit for world history learning - time limit for the Northeast Asian countries only accounts for 6.3% and 6.6%

respectively. In addition, it should be stressed that of the total number of periods on history of the Northeast Asian countries, the time limit is mainly for the Chinese history from ancient till modern times (about 65%), the remainder is for the Japanese history, submodern and modern (about 35% of the time limit). If calculating in detail the frequency of appearance in world history books of the three years in lower secondary system, then China and Japan are only presented twice. While China is introduced from the ancient until modern times, the history of Japan is chiefly represented from the submodern until present times, with the focus on the two subjects of *Minh Tri Duy tan and the role played by Japan in the development of science and technique during the 20th century*. The Northeast Asian history program of the upper secondary system has the same happenings. According to our survey, the general history textbook program in Vietnam at present does not have any particular writing about the history of South Korea. Those that touch upon Korea in general and South Korea in

particular are usually indirect, appearing alternately in summarized presentations, for instance, about Orient in the Middle Ages or the achievements of science and technique of the world in the 20th century...

If comparing the present set of upper secondary history textbooks to that before reform (specifically the one published in 1986 by Education Publishing House), the time limit for the Northeast Asian history is not increased but even decreased a bit against the total time limit for presentation of the History subject. The figures in Table 3 show that the upper secondary history program at that time (by then it was referred to as upper secondary or senior high school) spared 4.9% of time on average for presenting history of the Northeast Asian countries (specifically: textbooks published in the North spared 6.3%, textbooks published in the South: 3.5%) (see Table 3). Meanwhile, the upper secondary textbooks nowadays only spare 4.13% of time on average for presenting history of the Northeast Asian countries (see Table 2).

Table 3: *Number of Lessons on the Northeast Asian History in the Upper Secondary History in 1986 (when Education Reform was not yet under way)* ^(*)

	Total Number of Periods on History		World History		Orient History		Northeast Asian History		Remarks
	Periods	%	Periods	%	Periods	%	Periods	%	
The Tenth Form - South	29	100	29	100	7	24.1	2 ^(a)	6.8	Ancient - Modern
The Tenth Form - North	33	100	33	100	8	24.2	5 ^(b)	15.1	Ancient - Modern
The Eleventh Form - South	27	100	11	40.7	2	7.4	1 ^(c)	3.7	Modern

The Eleventh Form - North	25	100	9	36.0	2	8.0	1 ^(d)	4.0	Modern
The Twelfth Form - South	30	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	
The Twelfth Form - North	32	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	

South: Textbooks published in the South; North: Textbooks published in the North of Vietnam.

It is noteworthy that the comparative figures of the upper secondary Northeast Asian history program before and after education reform can serve as reference only for such data itself cannot reflect much of the contents to present the history of the countries in the region through different periods. There is a fact that needs to be pointed out, namely, in general, the number of subjects learned at the upper secondary level nowadays is much greater than before, especially in the pre-reform period, the prolongation of time limit for the subjects thus needs to be taken into careful consideration, not to mention the question of distributing time among major and minor subjects. Additionally, in respect of the curriculum contents, the contents of the lessons in the existing History textbooks contain more

information and research results are more frequently updated. For that reason, though the number of periods on history in general and on the Northeast Asian history in particular has increased not much compared with the pre-reform program, the teaching quality has been significantly improved.

The System of Textbooks on Geography and Literature

One of the salient features of the system of textbooks on geography at the upper secondary level is the fairly high generalization of the common matters of Terrestrial Geography (the sixth form); geographical environments in hot, moderate, cold zones... (the seventh form); nature and people in continents (the seventh and eighth forms). Alternating with the common parts of world geography are the links in terms of nature and socio-economic geography of Vietnam (the eighth and ninth forms). Characterized by the integrated knowledge as mentioned above, the parts of nature and socio-economic geography of the Northeast Asian countries such as China, Japan, South Korea are presented alternately too. For example, the eighth

(*) Notes:

(a): 01 lesson on China history in the ancient times; 01 lesson on the feudal China

(b): 01 lesson on China history in the ancient times; 01 lesson on the feudal China; 01 lesson on China (and India) prior to the Western invasion; 01 lesson on China by the end of the 19th and in the early 20th centuries; 01 lesson on Japan during the Minh Tri Duy tan period

(c): 01 lesson on China during 1919-1960

(d): 01 lesson on China during 1919-1960

form Geography book uses two out of the twenty-one lessons on nature geography and geography of the continents for the presentation of natural features and socioeconomic development situation of the Northeast Asian countries.

The upper secondary Geography program has considerable supplements in respect of the Northeast Asian region. The tenth form Geography textbooks continue to introduce deeper the world natural and social geography in general (maps; universe – consequences of the earth's movement; structure of the earth – spheres of the geographical crust; population geography; economic structure; industrial geography; service geography; the environment and sustainable development). The eleventh form Geography provides students with an overview of the world socioeconomic at the same time further explores geography of some major countries and regions. It is noteworthy that among the seven regions and countries presented, Japan and China have two particular writings. The writing about Japan (three periods) and China (three periods) are relatively in detail, providing students with relatively updated matters concerning nature, population and economic development; economic sectors and economic zones, etc. of the two Northeast Asian powers. South Korea is not presented in a particular writing yet integrated in some generalized lessons. Similarly to the case of History, the Geography textbooks for the last, the ninth and twelfth, forms of this level all concentrate on Vietnam's socioeconomic to cater for graduation exams and university and college entrance exams.

With regard to Literature textbooks, from lower secondary to upper secondary levels, students are all presented with the values of Chinese literature (Tang poetry, modern Chinese literature...). Among the foreign literary works presented in Literature textbooks, Chinese literature not only makes up the majority but also is presented in a relatively systematic manner, which reminds students of a relative course of Chinese literature development. Meanwhile, Japanese literature is presented once only in the additional reading part of the twelfth form with the work "Moonlight in Water" by Kaoabata; and South Korean literature is not yet presented in the current Literature textbook program in Vietnam.

2. The Northeast Asian countries in history coursebooks at university level

While compulsory general education textbooks in the form of standardized textbooks of Ministry of Education and Training are published and used nationwide, History coursebooks used in universities, colleges and technical secondary schools are relatively diverse, depending on the specialized area of each training institution. Until now, even not specializing in history, some institutions also bring history into their curricula as a supplementary subject. Nevertheless, for such institutions, the target of their attention is usually *The Course of Vietnamese History*. In addition, the World Civilization History (with one eighth of the content about the Chinese civilization) is more and more widely taught in universities. The most important among the coursebooks on the world history at present is the World History,

which consists of four volumes, published and continuously reprinted by Education Publishing House since about 1999 until now. By observing the above-mentioned

set of coursebooks, we would like to point out some following (as shown in Table 4 and Diagram 2):

Table 4: Number of Lessons /Chapters on the Northeast Asian History in World History Coursebooks Used at Universities Today (*)

	Total Number of Lessons/Chapters		Orient History		Northeast Asian History	
	Periods	%	Periods	%	Periods	%
Volume 1 (Ancient World History)	7	100	4	57.1	2 ^(a)	14.2
Volume 2 (Middle Ages World History)	17	100	6	35.2	5 ^(b)	23.5
Volume 3 (Submodern World History)	27	100	14	51.8	1 ^(c)	11.1
Volume 4 (Modern World History)	18	100	3	16.6	1 ^(d)	0

Table 4 indicates that though the proportion of the specialized lessons on the Northeast Asian *history in the correlation with the lessons on the Northeast Asian history is not greater, yet compared to the general education history program, the contents of world history in general and of the Northeast Asia in particular at the university level is presented in a more proficient manner. The contents of the chapters on China and Japan through the periods of history are more sufficient. Particularly, for the first time in the submodern history, Korea is brought into the curriculum as an independent chapter. In addition, one

thing should be mentioned hereby, i.e. the frequent touch upon the history and culture of Korea in general and South Korea in particular during the ancient-Middle Ages-modern times in the generalized lessons on the Northeast Asian history.

It is noteworthy that apart from the general coursebooks as mentioned above, there also exist some specialized coursebooks on the Northeast Asian history for students specializing in world history; not to mention monographs, reference books, specialized articles or essays by researchers, professors, lecturers of the World History as well as Japan Studies, China Studies, South Korea Studies, Orient Studies disciplines at academies, centres, universities in Hanoi, Huế and Hồ Chí Minh City...

Diagram 2: Distribution of Lessons / Chapters on the Northeast Asia in the World History Coursebooks Used at

(*) Notes:

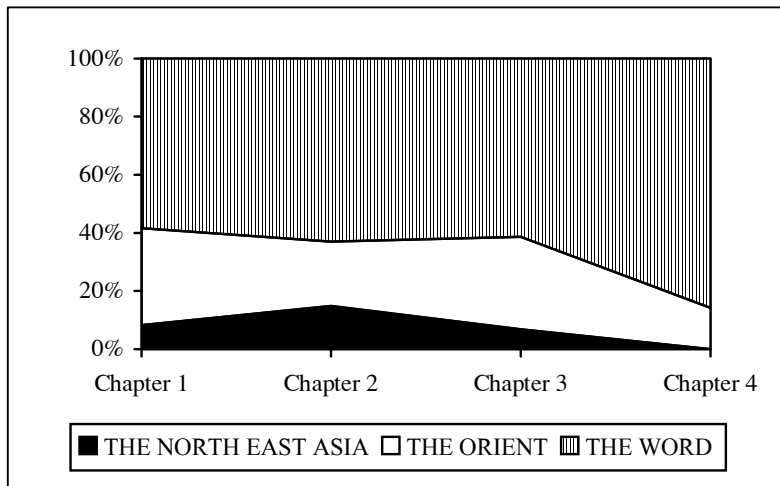
(a): On Chinese ancient history

(b): On Middle Ages history of China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia

(c): On submodern history of China, Japan, Korea

(d): Modern world history presented by the authors as per matter

Universities since 1999 until Now (as Calculated from Table 4)



The presentation of the countries throughout the world in general and those in the Northeast Asian region in particular in the textbook and coursebook system at general education, university and college levels in Vietnam in the last about half of a century has been undergoing so many changes, corrections, and supplements. Although time limit for such contents has increased not much, one thing in common easily noticeable is that compilers today are paying more and more attention to new knowledge updates while presenting the countries in the world, particularly the countries in the Northeast Asian region such as China, Japan, and South Korea – those that are not only geographically close but also share many similarities in terms of culture and literature to, especially the early established relations with Vietnam.

On the way to integration and development of the country, concern for the education of students in history, culture as well as the basic economic, social, diplomatic... aspects of the three countries in the Northeast Asian region as

mentioned above is of profound theoretical and practical significances: China has strong ties with the history of building and safeguarding of the Vietnamese nation, while Japan and South Korea for the time being are the two among the countries that have large investments in Vietnam.

Furthermore, the three countries as mentioned above together with Vietnam are wishing to strive to build up a Northeast Asian community in the tendency towards globalization.

Therefore, in the forthcoming time, while compiling or rectifying the above-mentioned coursebooks, there should be an increase in time limit for history, culture, national and social geography...of the Northeast Asian countries so as to complement knowledge about the countries or states in the region. For instance, lessons on the history, culture of Korea and South Korea may be added to the upper secondary curricula; meanwhile, to the coursebooks on the world history at university level there should be an increase in content and time for the Northeast Asian history. Also, apart from explanations, analyses, there should be diagrams, maps, illustrative pictures to be added to make the presentations more attractive to the students.

In order to implement this effectively, however, there need be frequent exchanges between educational managers,

scientists, particularly the textbook compilers of the Northeast Asian countries on the basis of sharing, cooperation and friendship.

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