

# Allegiance, influence and language: The case of Francophonie and Vietnam

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**Abstract:** *According to a recent report by the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie the number of people who can speak French has reached 200 million and the 70 countries of the OIF (members, associates and observers) account for 11% of the world's population and 12% of its revenue. Even if this number of Francophones is slightly inflated, the evaluation indicates that French remains an important lingua franca for a large part of the world.*

*The French government has traditionally used this massive cultural and linguistic network as a means of exercising greater influence on world politics and has always made a great effort to promote the French language as part of this strategy. This paper examines the Francophone movement in Vietnam in 2007 and evaluates some of the initiatives and policies aimed at creating a base for Francophonie in South East Asia and promoting French/Francophone influence.*

**Key words:** *Francophonie, OIF, language policy, French international influence, Vietnam*

**Résumé :** *D'après le dernier rapport de l'Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, le nombre de locuteurs de français a atteint 200 millions et les 70 pays de l'OIF (membres, membres associés et observateurs) représentent 11 % de la population mondiale et produisent 12% de ses richesses. Même si ce nombre de francophones paraît légèrement exagéré, cette estimation indique que le français reste une lingua franca importante dans une grande partie du monde.*

*Le gouvernement français se sert traditionnellement de ce réseau culturel et politique immense pour exercer une influence plus grande sur le plan de la politique internationale, et il a toujours fait un grand effort pour promouvoir la langue française comme faisant partie de cette stratégie. Cet article analyse le mouvement francophone au Vietnam en 2007 et évalue certaines des initiatives et politiques visant à créer une base pour la Francophonie en Asie du Sud-Est ainsi qu'à promouvoir l'influence française/francophone.*

**Mots-clés :** *Francophonie, OIF, politique linguistique, influence internationale française, Vietnam*

## Francophonie - a language club?

Francophonie is an association of 68<sup>1</sup> countries that see themselves as “sharing” French (*ayant le français en partage*). The reasons for the link thus appear on first impression to be the French language. Those who instituted the organisation, Senghor from Senegal, Diiori from Niger et Bourguiba from Tunisia, were linked by the cultural and linguistic capital that they shared, the legacy of their French medium education.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the discussions which led to the foundation of the first francophone institution, the *Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique* in 1969-1970, France itself was not involved. De Gaulle kept France slightly aloof and apart. France was dealing with decolonisation and for a number of complex reasons he saw no benefit to the French in such an association. It was only when Mitterrand came to power that the French government began to play a leading role in the movement. In 1984 Mitterrand founded the *Haut Conseil de la Francophonie*, assuming the presidency of it himself.<sup>3</sup> In 1986 the first full Francophone summit (*Conférence des chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement ayant en commun l'usage de la langue française*) took place in Paris. Welcoming delegates to this meeting, President Mitterrand stressed the linguistic basis of their alliance:

Nous sommes là autour d'une langue.....

C'est un lien si fort qu'il nous a valu de vous avoir ici....

Parce que nous parlons la même langue, nous avons quelques chances de mieux nous comprendre (Mitterrand 1986).

However, when one reviews the status of French in the member states and examines the statistics concerning speakers of French, one finds that the grounds for claiming that these 68 countries have the French language in common are slight. In one participating state, French is the official language of the state and used by the totality of citizens. This is France, itself. In a small group of states, French is co-official with another language and used by citizens in a region of that state. This is the case in Belgium, Canada and Switzerland. In a third category, French is the official language, used in government and elite circles, but not spoken by the majority of the population. This is the case in many former colonies of France where French has been retained as the language of government, administration and education (e.g. Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso). In the fourth category come the states (e.g. Vietnam, Romania, Macedonia TFYR) where there is actually very little use of French either among the general population or among elites, and whose inclusion challenges the idea that Francophonie is a club for those who speak French.

The reasons for this global association are indeed more complex and less to do with language than Mitterrand's speech allows. There is, nonetheless, a language dimension. The OIF may not be a language club in the simple sense that its members speak French, but it can be seen as a language club in that it promotes French. The French are at the forefront of such promotion. From 1986 summit on, the French have tended to emphasise the cultural and linguistic mission of the association, in contrast to other leaders, who have held human

rights and economic aid to be greater priorities (Ager, 1996).

Hubert Védérine, the French *Ministre des Affaires étrangères* from 1997 to 2002, gives a very clear exposition of the French position; Francophonie provides a forum where French can be used as an international language, and is thus a bulwark against the spread of English:

Si on parle francophonie, on parle langue. Cela veut dire qu'on ne veut pas que dans le monde de demain, il n'y ait plus que l'anglais, lequel s'est imposé comme langue économique internationale. (Védérine, 2006 : 39)

Védérine argues that a French world view needs Francophones if it is to have the best chance of taking root and spreading. A government intent on influencing must have channels of communication. Winning on the international stage relies on impressing, convincing and seducing as much as on strength and force:

(Avoir) de l'influence, c'est toujours avoir des moyens pour intimider, pour impressionner, pour convaincre, pour séduire, toute la gamme en somme. (Védérine, 2006 : 35)

The first reason for French involvement in the OIF thus seem reasonably evident. The organisation is a vehicle for defence and promotion of the French as a *lingua franca*, which the Francophone political class holds as a major policy aim.

The promotion of French and the French medium world as an alternative to English and the Anglo-Saxons has a long history. This “third way” discourse can be traced back to de Gaulle and his attempt to position France as an alternative leader in the Cold War. In present day Francophonie, the “third way” is positioned between another set of extremes: the brutal market forces of American led globalisation; the fundamentalist patriarchy of radical Islam. Stélio Farandjis claims Francophonie provides a solution to this clash of civilisations:

Si elle soulève des enthousiasmes, la francophonie suscite aussi des résistances, voire de franches oppositions, parce qu'elle s'oppose radicalement aux deux tendances extrêmes qui prétendent régenter la civilisation planétaire dont nous participons aujourd'hui. La première, c'est la prétention à l'uniformisation de la planète, c'est l'écrasement de toutes les identités au profit de l'unité dans la conformité, c'est l'anéantissement de la diversité dans la civilisation du << tout Coca-Cola >> ; la seconde c'est la tentation de la revendication identitaire agressive, de l'enfermement dans la forteresse d'une singularité mythique, c'est la jungle des altérités exclusives les unes des autres, c'est le risque du << tout ayatollah >>. (Farandjis, 2008 : 49).

Although there is perhaps more rhetoric than substance in Farandjis' claim that Francophonie is an alternative to the US and Islam, the French government does see Francophonie as a tool for French influence at the global level. This may not, ultimately, be realistic and the current francophone project under the umbrella of the *Agence de la Francophonie* may not actually be “able to challenge the new world order set by the United States” (Bousquet, 2002:437). However, there are clear French ambitions to consolidate a global political and economic network and the importance of Francophonie is reflected in

“the high level at which government is closely involved” (Adamson, 2007: 74) and the budget available for cooperation with Francophone countries and for Francophone agencies’ initiatives.

In some domains, Francophonie has given the French a chance to punch above their political and economic weight in international negotiations. The Francophone group has had some successes by working together, notably acceptance of the idea of « exception culturelle » in some international trade agreements and the adoption of the Convention on the Promotion and Diversity of Cultural Expression by UNESCO (20/10/2005).

In relations with Vietnam, it is easy to see particular instances of these general points. The hope that Vietnam would provide part of the bulwark against the spread of US led globalisation was made clear in the summit held in Hanoi in 1997:

French leaders wished to use the conference to reclaim France’s importance to its former colonies and to affirm French centrality in the Francophone Community....This was not a matter of colonial nostalgia on the part of France. Rather the French sought to use historical, linguistic and cultural ties as a way to challenge the expansion of anglophone global culture, which France sees as a threat to its own international power and influence. (Bousquet, 2002:421)

### **The third way - an attractive proposition for an isolated Vietnam**

The French government’s use of Francophonie for its own agenda might make us wonder how the other 55 member states accepted this. Clearly if Francophonie had come to be only a means to allow the French international influence, then states would have left and others would not have joined (Ager, 1996). In the case of Vietnam, it is most unlikely that its government would have any interest in helping their former colonial masters retain influence. The motives of the Vietnamese government must thus lie elsewhere.

Vietnamese membership of the OIF seems to stem in part from the isolation and poverty in which they found themselves in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were prime candidates to join a “third way” group that did not include current or recent enemies. A brief history of Vietnam will explain this.

Vietnam had been a colony of France from 1887. After World War II, the Vietnamese, led by Ho Chi Minh, rejected the re-imposition of the French colonial system. The ensuing war between the Vietnamese and the French ended in 1954, with the defeat of the French army at Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam was divided at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel in the Geneva Peace Accords. The northern half of the country under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh became communist. The southern half was governed by Ngo Dinh Diem. The communists did not accept the partition and hostilities continued. In the climate of the Cold War and influenced by the prevailing domino theory regarding the spread of communism, the US intervened in the conflict from the mid 1960s, supporting the South. A decade of bitter conflict followed. In 1975 the Communists invaded the South and toppled the South Vietnamese regime. Vietnam was then reunited. Firmly

in the Communist bloc, Vietnam was allied closely to the People's Republic of China, the USSR and the Warsaw Pact countries, all of which had given some support during the war.<sup>4</sup>

It was, however, not long before relations with the Chinese broke down. The two countries went to war in 1979 over Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia in December 1978. Vietnam was increasingly isolated. In the 1980s, the worsening economic situation in the USSR and Eastern Europe meant that there was little economic support from this direction.<sup>5</sup> When communism foundered in these states, they became philosophically suspect to the Vietnamese as well as of no practical economic help. The Vietnamese thus had few political allies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The French were among the small number of countries with whom the Vietnamese had maintained any diplomatic contact. Paris had played host to the negotiations to bring the American war to an end, and the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January 1973.<sup>6</sup> France had acknowledged the status of the two Vietnams, recognising the North on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1973 and the South on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1973. After the 1975 invasion the French had remained in contact with Hanoi. As a result Paris was also host to the 1991 peace talks to bring the Cambodian war to a conclusion. The French government thus differentiated itself from others in the West and had some access to Vietnam.

Vietnam was one of the poorest countries in the world in the mid 1980s. A period of collectivisation, which lasted officially from 1959 to 1988, had been an abject failure (Yvon-Tran, 2002), and its leaders were desperate to develop economically. To this end, the Vietnamese Communist Party endorsed *Doi Moi*, a liberalisation of the economic system on the pattern of the PRC (i.e. without dismantling the political ideology of communism) in its 6th Congress in 1986. The party officially urged that "all people in society and all party members should strive to amass wealth for themselves and for the nation as a whole" (Kolko, 1997: 102). There were, however, major impediments to this strategy. Leaving aside the brake on development caused by the dismantling of the welfare state and the adverse effects this had on the poorest groups in Vietnamese society (Kolko, 1997), there were also the limitations imposed by the American led embargo, in place since 1975. Vietnam was severely restricted in its ability to trade. Vietnam's remaining socialist ally and trading partner, Cuba, was in a similar situation and in no position to support Vietnam.

Given previous history, it was not surprising that it was France and Francophonie that stepped into the gap politically. They welcomed Vietnam to the OIF.<sup>7</sup> Membership of the OIF was Vietnam's "first membership in a non-socialist organisation" (Bousquet, 2002: 421). Alain Decaux, minister of Francophonie, was one of the first official political visitors from the West, coming in 1989. The foreign minister, Roland Dumas, followed in 1990 and 1991. President Mitterrand made a state visit in 1993. The *Agence française de développement* was given permission to work in Vietnam from 1993.

Nor was it a surprise that they also plugged the economic gap. The French had always kept a trading relationship with Vietnam. Before 1975, the French had continued to be a business presence in Ngo Dinh Diem's Southern Vietnam. After

1975, despite the fact that any inward investment was seen by the Vietnamese as « survivances de l'époque coloniale » (Tertrais, 2000: 50) and by the Americans as in contravention of the trade embargo, a handful of French companies had managed to maintain some links, including the pharmaceutical giants, Roussel, Uclaf and Rhône-Poulenc (Wong 2006). From the early 1990s economic exchange increased, building on these limited relations. In 1990, 17 French-Vietnamese joint ventures were in place and 26 French companies trading in Vietnam (Daniel, 1992). The French championed EU trade and cooperation agreements with Vietnam, which were signed in 1995, the same year Vietnam joined ASEAN, but before AFTA (1996) and APEC (1998). Thus French overtures towards the Socialist Republic of Vietnam long predate the US government's decision to re-establish diplomatic links (1995) and drop the trade embargo (1994).

The OIF played a role in Vietnam's return to global networks (Do Hien, 2003). In 1994 the ACCT set up its Asian headquarters in Hanoi. The choice of Hanoi as host for the 1997 summit of the OIF was a signal of Francophone support for the full recognition of a state which had hitherto been denied legitimacy by the Western world. The Vietnamese had good reason to host it; they were negotiating their relationships with international organizations for the first time in decades (Bousquet, 2002). The Francophone summit which brought 49 heads of state and government to Hanoi marked their return to the world stage.

In this case, the French and Francophonie did indeed provide the “third way” in international trade and diplomacy that Farandjis claims. In the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Vietnam had found itself a “pariah state” (Wong, 2006) and the Francophone route was a way out of this diplomatic impasse.

## Aid

The fundamental aims of the *Organisation internationale de la francophonie* are billed as

- Paix, démocratie et droits de l'Homme
- Diversité culturelle et dialogue des cultures
- Développement durable
- Accès à la formation et à l'information

The last two aims mean in essence the opportunity to gain aid and assistance for economic development and access to knowledge and know-how. This aspect of the OIF has certainly attracted poor states to membership. With sixteen Francophone states in the high Human Development Index category (out of a world total of 71) and thirteen Francophone states in the low Human Development Index category (out of a world total of 21)<sup>8</sup>, the OIF has become a logical channel for aid distribution. In the first summits (Paris 1986, Quebec 1987, Dakar 1989, Paris 1991, Mauritius 1993) the richer Francophone states addressed the issue of poverty among their members and some debt was cancelled<sup>9</sup> and the agencies of the OIF ensured some redistribution of wealth.<sup>10</sup> It is hoped that solidarity will cement the OIF. There is a tacit deal here; poorer OIF members accept that they will get financial, political and possibly military support in return for supporting French/Francophone policies in the international arena.

The Vietnamese have always seen aid and assistance as a fundamental reason for their association with France and Francophonie. At the macro level it is easy to evaluate how much French and Francophone aid has meant to the Vietnamese. It was a French bank that organised the bridging loan that repaid Vietnam's IMF debt in 1993. It was French and Canadian funds that injected cash into the ailing Vietnamese education system in the mid 1990s. Vietnam is one of the highest priority targets for French international aid and has continued to receive substantial aid from France, even at times when the French cut their Overseas Development Assistance budget (Wong, 2006).

At the micro level there are numerous testimonies that show that allegiance to Francophonie is dependent on such aid. In an interview in the early 1990s, Cu Huy Can, President of the Arts and Humanities Council, made it quite clear that the Vietnamese were interested in Francophonie because of the economic support it could bring: « La Francophonie pour la francophonie ça ne'intéresse personne » (Daniel, 1992: 77). Daniel records the motivation of teachers attending training courses run by various OIF agencies. She recounts one session in 1990 when many more teachers arrived than the number invited. When the unofficial attendees found they were not to be paid for their attendance, they left. « Les animateurs leur avaient cependant proposé de rester mais, sans rémunération, le stage perdait tout sens » (Daniel, 1992 : 82). Moreover, the official attendees appeared to have the same motivation : « Dès le premier jour, les discussions les plus vives ont porté sur la demande d'une avance sur prestations. » (Daniel 1992, : 82). The fact that the Vietnamese teachers saw France as a cash cow is not difficult to understand when one remembers that in 1990 these teachers were earning salaries that could not even cover their daily nutrition requirements.

In conclusion, one can argue that Vietnamese participation in the OIF has an economic dimension. The Vietnamese lobby for “economic solidarity” among the OIF countries (see, for example, Vice President Truong My Hoa's address to the OIF 6/11/2004) and solicit aid from richer francophone countries to support economic development in Vietnam. Such aid allowed the Francophones to gain a foothold in south-east Asia, a region considered to be under Anglophone influence. Generous aid gave the OIF countries reason to hope for privileged treatment when Vietnam's economy took off. This hope has been partially realised. At the time of the Hanoi Summit, Chirac signed 4,000,000 Francs worth of contracts and Vietnamese-French relations have continued. As Vietnam started recording 7% per annum growth<sup>11</sup>, France maintained a high position in all the tables of economic contact (*Vietnam Economic Times* December 2006).

However, on the level of economic philosophy and attitudes towards globalisation, there may have been some misunderstanding and ambiguity. Francophone attitudes towards the unfettered capitalism of the emerging Tiger economies have traditionally been somewhat negative, seeing the region as too much under the influence of American models. Vietnam was felt to be in a different mould. However, this may be a perception not rooted in evidence. Kolko (1997: 51) contends that actually Vietnam has liberalized more quickly and thoroughly than most states “that have explicitly abandoned socialism”.

## Democracy

In the summits in Cotonou 1995, Hanoi 1997, Moncton 1999, Beirut 2002, Ougadougou 2004, Bucarest 2006, the promotion of *paix, démocratie et droits de l'Homme* became an increasing focus of interest. At the 1990 meeting of the French-African summit at La Baule, Mitterrand had explicitly linked economic assistance to commitment to democratic practice and institutions. At the Bamako Symposium 2000, the Francophone countries made an explicit association between peace and democracy and a declaration that committed them to work for both. The peace and democracy objective is likely to be a long haul. In the recent past, the influence of the OIF in this area has been undermined by complex and questionable political relationships among member countries<sup>12</sup>. The *quid pro quo* of Francophonie may be at work here; member governments align their attitude in international policies with those of France and thus strengthen France's position as a leading world power. In return they are rewarded with French protection, generous aid and military support. Critics attack this political strategy which seems to cause the donor state to turn a blind eye to malpractice.

This cynical Realpolitik may explain the mismatch between the high moral tone of the Summit declarations on good governance and Francophonie's general tardiness in condemning violations. For example, the Francophone movement did not immediately condemn the massacres in Rwanda in 1994 nor move swiftly to persuade the Rwandan government to stop the interethnic violence.<sup>13</sup> These contradictions and omissions have tarnished the reputation of the organisation as a channel for positive political pressure.<sup>14</sup>

A mismatch between rhetoric and reality is as true in Vietnam as in Africa. The *Service de coopération et d'action culturelle* at the French Embassy to Vietnam says it assumes "responsibility for and direction of the cross-cutting priorities of French cooperation". The first of these are "good governance and strengthening the rule of law". However, there is little to substantiate this claim that the French are influencing Vietnam in the field of human rights.

The Vietnamese government has been particularly swift to repel any incursion on what it considers its sovereign powers. It has explicitly distanced itself from the Western model of human rights, signing the 1993 Bangkok Declaration which stated that "national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds, justify ... Vietnam's exception to the universal rule" (Vo Van Ai, 2000: 93).

The Vietnamese government argues that improving economic development, conquering hunger, combating illiteracy and ignorance etc are the democratic advances that the people demand and that it has delivered in this domain. « La question de la démocratie ne peut pas être traitée détachée de la réalité socio-économique et du développement » (Nguyen Ngoc Tran, 2001 : 100).

The French have tried to pressurize on a number of issues of freedom of speech, freedom of worship or recognition of minority rights. The Vietnamese deny the

existence of political detainees, maintaining that they are held on criminal charges. Mitterrand and Dumas both used their 1992/3 visits to lobby on aspects of civil liberties. However, since Chirac and Sarkozy have held the presidency the direct approach has been dropped (Wong, 2006). Chirac argued that contact and exchange would lead to harmonisation on human rights and that France did not need to lecture Vietnam (*Le Monde* 14/11/1997). This may be expediency or awareness of the school of thought that holds that the Vietnamese actually do follow “rule of law” principles, even if in their own way:

Imported precepts are understood in a dialogical context that constructs social truths in different ways from democratic liberal discourse. Behind the socialist facade, the legal discourse may eventually include communitarian and even democratic liberal civil rights in forms that are not easily recognisable to foreign observers (Gillespie, 2004: 172).

Groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and various Vietnamese diaspora groups disagreed profoundly and continued to call for pressure on the Vietnamese government (for discussion see Wong, 2006).

Wherever the truth lies in this dispute, one thing is clear. The Vietnamese are not looking to the French for leadership in this area. Mention of the French wish to promote good governance provoked a polite but dismissive reaction during my interviews with civil servants (Vietnam Education Ministry, December 2007). It is perhaps understandable that the Vietnamese would not welcome guidance from a former colonial power. It is clear from histories of the colonial period<sup>15</sup> and the museums dedicated to the patriotic war of liberation that they do not see themselves in need of lessons in good governance from the French.<sup>16</sup> To the Vietnamese, French colonial rule which “placed law above morality and promoted universal solutions over situation validity seemed inflexible and immoral” (Gillespie, 2007: 141). Gillespie argues that they are not drawn to “immutable legal ideals” or “overarching theoretical explanations” (Gillespie, 2004: 172). It is understandable that French universalist values are not prized.

There is recognition of this at grass roots level and Francophones in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are mostly aware of the weight of history and policy and are not aggressive in promoting any ideology.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, they are much less likely to campaign for human rights in Vietnam compared with other aid donors from the EU. The French claim that they understand Vietnam and are practising the quiet diplomacy that works best. However NGOs and others have criticised what they see as condoning human rights violations (Wong, 2006).

The French position is thus sensitive. On the one hand they can be accused of accepting Vietnam’s poor record on human rights and on the other they can be accused of neo-colonial attitudes. It is interesting in this respect how the aims in the embassy’s mission statement for Vietnam are limited to the promotion of good governance and strengthening the rule of law. In deference to Vietnam’s position on democracy, all mention of it has been dropped in this document.<sup>18</sup> The Bamako Declaration’s preamble that « Francophonie et démocratie sont indissociables »<sup>19</sup> seems to have been quietly shelved in the case of Vietnam.

## Language, culture and education

The intention of the Francophone movement is that political and economic relationships will be strengthened and supported by linguistic and cultural networks. So, have the Vietnamese learnt French in large numbers and is there a linguistic and cultural elite that looks towards Francophonie?

As the country started to rejoin transnational networks in the mid 1990s the Vietnamese government was aware that it would be necessary to reverse previous policies on foreign language education. From the mid 1970s, very few young Vietnamese had learnt any other foreign language except Russian. The teaching of foreign languages such as French and English had been highly restricted for political reasons (Wright 2003). In order to increase the percentage of the population able to work with international groups, the Vietnamese government was pleased to accept outside help. Francophone funding for language education was available from the early 1990s. A French course for cadres developed by Besançon University was used with managers and officials from 1990. In 1992, the AUF helped the education ministry set up *classes bilingues* in some primary and secondary schools. In 1994, there was a large injection of finance from the Francophone world (principally France) and the classes became *filières bilingues*. From 1996 to July 2006, when the funding ceased, 17,000 Vietnamese were educated through French<sup>20</sup>. More than 10% of this group went on to study in France. In this period there were also scholarships for young Vietnamese outside the scheme to study abroad to improve language skills. This funding from OIF members (principally French and Canadian) was withdrawn when it became clear that the scheme was not acting as pump priming (Interviews Idecaf and AUF, HCMC 2007). When funding ceased, French medium education and French classes declined. The Vietnamese appear to be acting in a highly pragmatic way, choosing the international lingua franca that gives them the most return on the effort. Unless there were grants and scholarships attached to French, the more profitable choice for foreign language learning was generally accepted as English (Interview Education Ministry, Hanoi 1999). The Education Ministry takes a very instrumental view and has made English the first foreign language: "One international language is enough for our needs. We have to prioritise health, technology, agriculture." (Interview Education Ministry, HCMC 2007)

Vietnamese teachers and principals agree that there is little evidence that students or their parents choose between French and English on any other basis than the purely instrumental. There is, reportedly, no element of allegiance to one rather than another, nor any deep rooted prejudice. This claim is perhaps surprising, since both French and English are languages of countries with whom the Vietnamese have been at war in living memory. However both insiders and observers expressed the view to me that the Vietnamese prefer to turn the page and not dwell on the past. This allows co-operation with former enemies, but the attitude also works against emotional commitment (Interviews French manufacturer HCM City 2007; Vietnamese principal, Hanoi 1999; Bousquet, 2002). In summary, the effect of twelve years of substantial funding for French medium secondary education to produce a French-speaking elite that would be in a good position to work with OIF countries did not produce the hoped for results.

In 2007, the Francophones were working through Valofrase, a programme that supports the secondary curriculum and promotes bilateral agreements between francophone universities and Vietnam HE. In secondary education, OIF agencies were proposing a reduced programme, “responding to demand” and “supporting Vietnamese reforms” (Interviews AUF, HCMC December 2007). The funding is modest compared to the past and amounts to limited support for innovation in French teaching in secondary education. There is resignation that English is the main foreign language in the education system and agreement that « il n’y a pas beaucoup de place pour deux langues étrangères » (Interview Idécaf December 2007).

In HE, the Valofrase initiative builds on and extends bilateral agreements between French and Vietnamese universities. In 2007, the Bureau Asie-Pacifique could report that there were 9 pôles universitaires in the region supported by Francophone funding, with 38 filières in Vietnam, 7 in Cambodia and 3 in Laos. 4600 Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian students were studying in these streams. The education was intended to be French medium:

L’enseignement du français dispensé tout au long du cursus, les cours scientifiques en français à partir du second cycle d’études, sont principalement assurés par un corps d’enseignants universitaires issus des universités de la Région, formés en francophonie<sup>21</sup> (Bureau Asie-Pacifique 2007)

The French government was at the heart of this redirection of funding towards higher education. In a state visit to Vietnam in 2004, President Chirac announced the creation of French funded and Francophone university courses:

La France a la volonté de rester un pôle de référence pour la formation des élites vietnamiennes. Nous allons ainsi créer à Hanoi et Ho Chi Minh Ville des pôles universitaires français au sein de l’université internationale du Vietnam (Chirac, 2004)

However, this policy may be producing as little fruit, in language terms, as the seed funding in the secondary system. Some courses have had to be delivered in English in order to recruit the best students. For example, the IT students in the pôle universitaire français (PUF) at HCMC are being taught through English and although they do have French classes, students cannot maintain a conversation in French (Interviews students at HCMC National University, December 2007). Tellingly, the PUF brochure for prospective students was only available in its English version at the time of my research visits.

A further example of how Francophone initiatives may be contributing to elite training and scientific networks, but not the spread of French was provided by the EU sponsored higher education fair held 12/12/2007 in HCMC. A high proportion of member states were represented but French universities constituted by far the largest group. However, studying in France did not necessarily imply studying through French; a number of courses on offer, (e.g. postgraduate courses at HEC, ESCP-EAP, N+ i network, etc.) were either taught in English, provided bilingual support in English for French medium courses, and/or allowed students to ask questions and get help in English). There was an acceptance that candidates

would come to postgraduate work without sufficient French to study through the language.

French state scholarships to study in France (now directed principally at Masters and PhD students), on the other hand, do stipulate that the students learn some French. However, it is clear that there is no expectation that language skills will be in place before application for the award. The presentation introducing these scholarships did not presume that applicants necessarily spoke French at the point of application, since it was interpreted into Vietnamese<sup>22</sup>. And the central admissions procedure does not depend on French language competence. Students are « choisi sur dossier. Les connaissances linguistiques n'entrent pas dans la décision de préférer un étudiant à un autre » (Campus France, AUF interviews December 2007).

Thus, while it is clear that the French are important contributors to elite training, this may not equate to the promotion of the French language. It is hard to conclude from observation that the aim to “promote Francophonie” is being achieved in Vietnam. French has not become a widespread teaching medium in programmes. On the other hand, provision of elite training and promotion of research are taking place. The Francophone, principally French, universities that have formal agreements with Vietnamese HE are sponsoring elite training and creating elite networks, no matter what language these activities actually take place in.

## Conclusion

The Francophones, particularly the French, have played a major role in Vietnam, supporting trade and political exchange in the 1980s and 1990s when Vietnam was isolated. The Francophones, particularly the French, have maintained generous aid packages to Vietnam, even during periods when the overall aid budget fell. The OIF have not pressed Vietnam unduly on what many consider a poor human rights record. The Francophones have funded education in and through French in order to cement relations and provide access to knowledge and know-how. In exchange, have the Vietnamese committed themselves wholeheartedly to the OIF and do they play the role that the Francophones, particularly the French hoped for, providing a bridgehead for the Francophone “third way” in Asia?

The first point to note is that the Francophones are no longer exceptional in maintaining relations with Vietnam. The Vietnamese have broken out of their isolation and are currently in a position where they are being offered (and are accepting) relations with many different groups. This is difficult to catalogue since initiatives are being adopted daily, but by taking just one issue, education and training, reported on just one day in 2007 we can note the diversity of states and institutions now active in Vietnam. On Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2007 the *Vietnam News* reported a number of new initiatives including management training with the Japanese, health worker education with the Swedes, cooperation with MIT for software in Vietnamese, a Unilever grant for education for girls and minority groups, and funding from South Korea to support a new library. This

clutch of news stories is not exceptional. There is no longer a Francophone bias in aid to Vietnam. The Francophone world cannot hope for preferential treatment as it might have done in the 1990s. The links between Vietnam and France/Francophonie are still strong, but they are no longer exceptional. At the moment France remains high in the league table of Western investors, but the Asians and Pacific Rim countries are leading. Wong (2006) argues that it is the French who talk of “special relationships” and that it is harder to find similar discourse on the Vietnamese side. As the Vietnamese have shown themselves to be a highly pragmatic group that accepts help from diverse sources and that does not dwell on the past<sup>23</sup>, it seems likely that the Francophones cannot hope for solidarity simply because of past assistance.

This may be particularly true of economic philosophy. The Vietnamese did back OIF initiatives to have the *exception culturelle* enshrined as a UNESCO declaration but, generally, there is little evidence to show widespread Vietnamese support for the promotion of the anti-American, anti-globalisation world view expressed in some OIF documents. It is difficult to find any evidence of sympathy for Farandjis’ call to reject Coca-Cola globalisation among Vietnamese elites. The impression is rather that they are striving to be part of the South-East Asian phase of globalisation and are not likely to support any movement that is intellectually disdainful of global market capitalism.

There is also little evidence to show that the OIF/Francophone leader countries have had any influence in the political domain, particularly in the area of democracy and rights. The Vietnamese have hardly moved on rights issues. An open door foreign policy has not led to obvious unrest as the population has come into contact with those with contrasting ideologies.

Finally, what success for the cultural and linguistic policies of the OIF? Has the French hope that « les pays francophones d’Asie » would provide « des points d’accès naturels pour les acteurs français désireux de s’implanter en Asie du Sud-Est » (Védrine, 1997) borne fruit? Do the Vietnamese provide a francophone foothold in South-East Asia where it is easier for those without English in their repertoire to do business? The answer has to be that this idea that Vietnam is francophone is a fiction. In 1997, there had to be an immense amount of window dressing to bring French into the public space for the Francophone summit (Bousquet, 2002). The same would hold today, even though there has been substantial funding to promote French. It seems that the linguistic market rules in Vietnam. When there is funding for French as a foreign language it is learnt; when there is not, the Vietnamese learn other languages seen as having wider use in the circles which the Vietnamese to access. And this pragmatism seems set to continue. The teachers that I interviewed in 2007 believed that the Vietnamese would move to Mandarin if that proved the more profitable linguistic choice. It would certainly be an easier FL for them. They reported that the offer (and take up) of courses in Chinese was already on the increase in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi.

Francophonie has a number of functions: it provides a framework for cooperation in the domains of culture, science, economy, justice, and peace among a group which see themselves as having common ground; it provides a channel for aid and know-how between the richest and poorest nations in the world; it provides a world-wide association to serve as a network for the promotion of the francophone world view expressed through French, and seen by some Francophones to be a necessary counterweight to American and Anglophone dominated globalisation. It is interesting to see how the Vietnamese have cherry picked from among these aims, to suit themselves. It would be interesting to see if the resignation to this state of affairs evident among OIF agency staff in Vietnam is echoed in Paris and Quebec. Clearly, the return on investment in terms of the promotion of French has been judged to be poor and the investment reduced. It would be interesting to know OIF and French evaluation of the outcomes of less tangible policy. Has the creation of networks led to certain spheres of influence and will these strengthen or weaken as Vietnam integrates ever more fully with the region and the world? As the situation develops there is clearly scope for further research on OIF policy in this area.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 53 full members, 2 associate members and 13 states with observer status in 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Léopold Senghor, in particular was steeped in the French language. He gained his doctorate (*agrégation*) in the French language, had critical success with his poetry and was the first black writer to be elected to the *Académie française*.

<sup>3</sup> Since 2002 under the authority of the *secrétaire général de la francophonie*

<sup>4</sup> Soviet military aid began in 1964. Large scale aid from China started in 1960.

<sup>5</sup> 'Préoccupé par l'éclatement de l'empire et par le bas niveau de l'économie, Moscou a déjà procédé à une réduction massive de son aide' (Daniel, 1992 : 128)

<sup>6</sup> Césari points out that the choice of Paris was in response to French calls for an end to hostilities and a negotiated settlement but was no more than 'une marque de politesse, car les parties en présence ne consultèrent guère la France quant au contenu des négociations. (Césari, 2000 : 36)

<sup>7</sup> Vietnam did not actually need to join the OIF at this juncture, because the southern government had been one of founding members of *Agence de coopération culturelle et technique* in 1970. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam (re)joined officially in 1986.

<sup>8</sup> (2007/2008 Human Development Index rankings) Twenty-two Francophone states are in the medium HDI category (out of a world total of 85). There is thus a wide disparity in economic strength with Francophone countries bunching at both ends of the index. Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg and Switzerland are among the richest in the world. At the other end of the spectrum, Francophone Africa is over-represented in the group of the poorest countries in the world.

<sup>9</sup> Mulroney cancelled the Canadian debts of the African countries present at the 1987 summit, Mitterrand the French debts of 35 Francophone countries at the 1989 summit.

<sup>10</sup> There is a further dimension to consider here. These aid relations are not unentailed. France has very strong economic interests in many OIF countries. For example, French interests represent 33% of foreign investments in Ivory Coast and 30% of its gross domestic product (Diop, 2005). Four French companies, Saur, Electricité de France, Orange and Bouygues, control transport, water, electricity and communications; and three others, Société Générale, BNP Paribas and Crédit Lyonnais, dominate banking in Ivory Coast. When President Gbagbo tried to open markets to international competition (2004) pressure from France prevented him from doing so (Diop, 2005)

<sup>11</sup> GDP Growth in Vietnam has been 6.79% (2000), 6.89% (2001), 7.08% (2002), 7.26% (2003), 7.7% (2004) 8.43% (2005) *Vietnam Economic Times*, December 2006, appendix.

<sup>12</sup> For example, the socio-economic and strategic interests that France still has in its former colonial possessions in Africa have caused the French to be involved in more than 50 military interventions on that continent since 1960. These economic considerations also seem to have encouraged the French to tolerate the installation of one party states, the tendency of leaders to declare themselves presidents for life, regime change by coup and a high level of corruption.

<sup>13</sup> France, Belgium and Egypt were supplying arms to the Hutu government in the run up to the massacres.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Brown (2004) for a discussion of events in Cote d'Ivoire and the row at the 2004 meeting in Ougadougou.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, *Ho Chi Minh: Selected Writings*. Hanoi FLP 1977, Bui Tin *Following Ho Chi Minh: Memoirs of a North-Vietnamese colonel*. University of Hawai'i Press 1995.

<sup>16</sup> The National Museum in Hanoi takes a very clear stand on French government of the country prior to 1954, finding it exploitative and unjust.

<sup>17</sup> « L'idée postcoloniale est finie » (Interview Idécaf December 2007)

<sup>18</sup> The only concrete trace of any attempt to influence in this area is the Programme de perfectionnement de journalistes vietnamiens which could be considered as pressure for the development of a free press.

<sup>19</sup> The Vietnamese signed a reduced version of the Bamako Declaration, refusing to commit themselves to the whole multi-party liberal democratic package. They do claim that their system is 'democratic' in the sense that the people are invoked as the source of legitimacy, in the traditional Marxist-Leninist manner (See, for example, Nguyen Ngoc Tran, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> This is actually more per annum than in the days when France was the colonial power in the country (Wright 2003).

<sup>21</sup> In 2007-2008 1300 students in the filières universitaires francophones du Vietnam (FUF) took the diplôme d'études en langue française (DELF). The levels equated to A2 and B1 of the European framework, so below the level at which one could study through French with confidence. See [http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Source/Framework\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf) for descriptors.

<sup>22</sup> In contrast, most presentations from other EU member states were given in English without interpretation and with the presupposition that applicants at postgraduate level would have enough English to follow.

<sup>23</sup> Vietnamese pragmatism, a concern for the here and now, has attenuated any overt hostility towards the French, their former colonial masters and opponents in a bitter war. But, at the same time, this attitude attenuates hostility towards the US as well.

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