

Active Student Scholarship

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1. Introduction

With the generous support of Chuo University's Active Student Scholarship, I had the valuable opportunity to visit Hanoi, Vietnam in March 2025. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for this support. The primary aim of this field research was to directly observe and experience how Vietnamese universities, economic institutions, and civil society are evolving amidst the country's rapid internationalization. I was particularly interested in understanding how young people in Vietnam perceive global engagement and how educational and business exchanges between Japan and Vietnam are developing on the ground. This report is organized into nine sections, each highlighting insights and reflections gained through interviews and on-site observations. I believe these experiences will significantly contribute to my future academic and career development.

2. A Memorable Encounter with a Local Teacher and Students by the Lake – **March 8, 2025**

On the morning of my second day in Hanoi, I went for a walk around the hotel. Amid the heavy traffic and urban noise, I discovered a quiet and beautiful lake. Drawn to its peaceful atmosphere, I walked along the lakeside, where many local residents were enjoying their time. Some were chatting while others were playing card games. As I stopped to take photos, an elderly woman approached me and spoke in English. At first, I was slightly cautious, but I soon learned that she was an English teacher at a nearby school. This allowed me to relax and continue the conversation.

She told me that it was International Women's Day, and that special events were being held around the lake. In Vietnam, this day is traditionally celebrated by men giving flowers to women, and by women wearing traditional clothing. Through her explanation, I gained a better understanding of how Vietnamese society expresses respect for women through cultural practices.

Before we said goodbye, she asked if I could return to the lake at two o'clock in the afternoon. When I asked why, she explained that her students were working on an English assignment that involved interviewing a foreign visitor. She wondered if I would be willing to take part. I was surprised by the request but agreed to help.

When I returned in the afternoon, the teacher was waiting with two elementary school students. With the lake behind us, the interview began. The students asked questions such as "What is your name?", "Where are you from?", and "What do you like?" Although they seemed nervous, they did their best to speak clearly. I answered each question in English and then asked a few questions in return, including "Do you know about Japan?", "Which country would you like to visit?", and "What subjects do you study at school?"

To my surprise, the students were quite familiar with Japan. One of them mentioned that their older brother was currently studying abroad in the Kansai region. They also expressed a strong desire to visit Japan in the future. English was their favorite subject, and they said they were learning from a native-speaking teacher.

This experience was different from sightseeing or academic interviews. It reminded me of the importance of personal connections and helped me reflect on the value of learning languages and engaging with unfamiliar cultures. After the interview, the

students invited me to walk with them toward their school. On the way, they spoke happily about their school life. Although I was not able to enter the building, I waved to some students playing in the courtyard. When I greeted them, they responded with friendly smiles. The encounter was brief but left a deep and lasting impression on me.

3. Visit to the National Economics University (NEU) – March 9, 2025

On March 9, 2025, I had the opportunity to visit the National Economics University (NEU) in Hanoi and conduct an interview with Mr. Long, a professor from the Faculty of International Relations. This marked the first formal academic segment of my research project in Vietnam and provided me with valuable insights into the country's evolving economic role and educational priorities.

1. Vietnam's Position in the "China Plus One" Strategy

When discussing Vietnam's emergence as a key player in the "China Plus One" strategy, Mr. Long emphasized the country's growing importance in global supply chain restructuring. He explained that rising geopolitical uncertainties and demographic shifts in China have prompted many multinational corporations to diversify their manufacturing bases. Vietnam has become an attractive alternative due to its young population, favorable geographic location in Southeast Asia, and comparatively low labor costs. Despite these advantages, Mr. Long noted that Vietnam still faces limitations in labor productivity and technological capabilities. At present, the country is best suited to simpler manufacturing processes, such as garments and basic goods. For Vietnam to sustain long-term competitiveness, further industrial upgrading and investment in technology will be essential.

2. Current Economic Challenges

When asked about Vietnam's main economic challenges, Mr. Long pointed to demographic concerns such as a declining birth rate and the onset of an aging society. He also highlighted Vietnam's heavy dependence on foreign markets and external investment. Strengthening domestic demand and developing internal economic resilience will be crucial for the country's sustainable growth. Mr. Long remarked that these are not merely obstacles but potential turning points. Whether they develop into opportunities or threats

will depend on how Vietnam navigates its future development path. He emphasized the importance of investing in human capital and innovation to ensure continued progress.

3. Emerging Sectors and Youth Career Trends

According to Mr. Long, the most sought-after fields among Vietnamese youth include information technology and the broader tech industry. Additionally, many students still prefer civil service careers for their stability. However, NEU students increasingly demonstrate entrepreneurial spirit and are showing interest in areas such as startups, freelancing, and financial technology.

4. Impact of Wage Increases

Mr. Long also addressed the implications of rising wages. While higher incomes can improve living standards, he cautioned that they must be accompanied by improvements in productivity. Without parallel advancements in workforce skills and efficiency, Vietnam risks being outcompeted by other emerging economies. He highlighted the importance of vocational training and lifelong learning to meet the demands of a changing labor market.

5. Essential Skills for International Business Students

Mr. Long identified three critical skill sets for students aspiring to work in international business. First, language proficiency is vital, especially in English, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese. Second, students need strong analytical and critical thinking skills to approach issues from a business-oriented perspective. Third, a broad global outlook is essential, including an understanding of international trends, political developments, and cross-cultural communication. He also underscored that knowledge gained from textbooks must be applied in real-world settings. Practical experience gained through internships, part-time work, or extracurricular activities is invaluable in cultivating adaptability and global competence.

6. Campus Observations and Student Perspectives

By coincidence, my visit took place on the same day as NEU's open campus event for prospective students. The campus was filled with high school students and their families, creating a lively and welcoming atmosphere. I had conversations with several students, all of whom were able to communicate fluently in English. Their motivations for

attending NEU ranged from aspirations to study abroad to a general hope for better opportunities. What impressed me most was the collective enthusiasm for learning and personal development. This experience reaffirmed my belief in the strength of Vietnam's next generation and the country's potential for continued growth on the global stage.

4. Interview on International Exchange at Foreign Trade University (FTU) – March 12, 2025

On March 12, 2025, I visited Foreign Trade University (FTU) in Hanoi to learn firsthand how the university promotes international exchange. I had the opportunity to speak directly with three individuals: Ms. Mai from the Office of International Affairs, Ms. Hung, also from the same office, and Ms. Lee, a third-year student from the Faculty of Economics and International Business. The purpose of this visit was to understand how today's university students engage with international exchange and how the institution supports such efforts through its programs and policies. I was particularly interested in examining the current state of Vietnam, a country in Asia that demonstrates both a high standard of education and a rapidly developing international outlook.

1. Structure of International Exchange Programs

According to Ms. Mai, FTU offers two main types of international exchange programs: long-term and short-term. The long-term programs typically last from six months to one year, during which students attend partner institutions abroad and receive credit transfers upon return. The short-term programs usually span two to four weeks and include academic lectures, company visits, cultural experiences, and sightseeing. In addition, FTU organizes one-day cultural exchange sessions where FTU students and visiting international students interact in languages such as English, Japanese, French, and Chinese.

2. Partnerships with Japanese Universities and Student Interests

FTU maintains partnerships with over 60 Japanese universities, making Japan one of its most active and important exchange destinations. These partnerships go beyond student mobility and include joint research projects, internship opportunities, and international conferences. While many students express strong interest in studying in Europe due to its cultural differences, the largest number of FTU students ultimately study

in Japan, owing to the extensive network of Japanese partner institutions and well-established exchange systems.

3. Motivations for Participation in Exchange Programs

Students are motivated to join exchange programs for a variety of reasons. Some seek personal growth and the chance to explore different cultures, while others consider international experience a valuable asset when entering the job market. In Vietnam, study abroad experience is highly regarded by employers. As such, participation in exchange programs is viewed as an effective way for students to develop global perspectives and transferable skills. Ms. Lee, who is preparing for her exchange semester at Hiroshima University, shared her excitement about the opportunity to experience Japanese culture and education. She emphasized that these programs not only provide academic benefits but also help students grow on a personal level.

4. Challenges and Institutional Support

Students who participate in exchange programs often face challenges such as culture shock, language barriers, and financial difficulties. For those studying abroad for the first time, adapting to a new environment can be overwhelming. To support its students, FTU assists with visa applications and class rescheduling when needed. The university also provides access to facilities such as the campus library and internet services. In addition, FTU encourages participation in programs that offer financial support through tuition waivers from partner institutions.

5. Program Formats and Future Outlook

The discussion also addressed the formats of exchange programs. Although online programs became more popular during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as FTU's 2021 International Summer Program held entirely online, face-to-face programs are still considered more effective for fostering meaningful cross-cultural interaction. FTU also operates a buddy system, in which FTU students are assigned to visiting international students. These local students offer support throughout the program and often develop close friendships with their international peers.

6. Topics of Interest for Cultural Exchange

When asked about popular themes for cultural exchange between Vietnamese and Japanese students, the representatives mentioned that common topics include food, daily lifestyle differences, and environmental practices like waste classification. These accessible topics help facilitate deeper discussions between participants.

5. Vietnam Economic Update at JETRO Hanoi Office – March 13, 2025

On March 13, 2025, I visited the Hanoi office of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) and received a comprehensive briefing titled “Vietnam Economic Update.” The session was led by a staff member from JETRO, using printed materials to explain recent trends in Vietnam’s economy, its ties with Japan, and the current outlook for foreign investment in the country.

The briefing began with an overview of Vietnam’s basic economic data. With a population of over 100 million and an average age of 33, Vietnam is considered to have a strong and youthful labor force. This demographic advantage has made the country a highly attractive destination for foreign investment, particularly in manufacturing and IT sectors. As of 2024, Vietnam’s GDP per capita is approximately USD 4,700, and further economic growth is anticipated.

Vietnam’s recent growth rates were highlighted—8.1% in 2022, followed by a slight slowdown to 5.0% in 2023. However, strong recovery is expected with projected growth of 7.1% in 2024 and an ambitious 8.0% in 2025. All sectors—agriculture, construction, and services—are expected to contribute positively to this trend. The speaker emphasized that Vietnam has signed more than 150 FTAs and actively utilizes these agreements to enhance its international economic presence.

What stood out most to me was the strong economic relationship between Japan and Vietnam. Japan remains one of Vietnam’s most important partners, with over 2,050 Japanese-affiliated companies currently operating in the country. According to a recent survey, more than half of these companies plan to expand their operations in Vietnam within the next one to two years. Among ASEAN countries, Vietnam is one of the most promising destinations for Japanese business expansion, and Japan continues to be a major source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Vietnam.

At the same time, several challenges were also noted. Complex administrative procedures, unclear legal frameworks, and infrastructure concerns were cited as major obstacles for foreign investors. Rising labor costs in urban areas were also mentioned as a growing issue.

This visit provided me with a clearer understanding of Vietnam's economic potential and its strategic importance to Japanese companies. While Vietnam offers significant growth opportunities, it also faces structural and institutional challenges typical of rapidly developing economies. I was also able to recognize the important role JETRO plays in facilitating international economic cooperation. Overall, the experience deepened my appreciation for the dynamism of global economic relations and gave me new insights into the opportunities and risks associated with investment in Vietnam.

6. Observations and Insights from Dong Xuan Market and Hom Market

During my stay in Hanoi, I had the opportunity to visit two of the city's most well-known markets: Dong Xuan Market and Hom Market. Both are located in the old quarter and serve as essential parts of daily life for local residents. At the same time, they offer culturally significant spaces that attract the interest of many tourists.

Dong Xuan Market is a three-story building packed with goods such as clothing, household items, and food. The interior felt somewhat dim, with a distinctive smell and a chaotic yet vibrant atmosphere. It gave the impression of a space where the local economy is actively functioning. On the other hand, Hom Market mainly featured food and daily necessities. I observed that it was often visited by local families and homemakers.

One characteristic shared by both markets was the absence of visible price tags on many products. Prices were communicated through direct conversation with the seller, and purchases were typically made through negotiation. This required buyers to ask about prices, which naturally led to dialogue. It was through this process that I experienced bargaining for the first time. I became aware not only of how prices are set, but also of how personal relationships in business is navigated during commercial interactions.

The sellers were extremely friendly and made great efforts to overcome language barriers. They often used simple phrases in English, Japanese, or Chinese. Sometimes

they even brought out chairs and encouraged me to sit down and take my time. Their attitude conveyed a spirit of hospitality that went beyond mere selling.

Many of the shops were operated by family members, such as grandmothers and grandchildren or siblings working together. This family-oriented business style reflected both flexibility and warmth. It also revealed the strength of the connections between sellers and the sense of community that supported the marketplace.

For visitors unfamiliar with this style of commerce, the lack of price tags may be confusing at first. However, I came to understand that it is rooted in a cultural norm where transactions begin with face-to-face interaction. Rather than focusing solely on efficiency, the process values human exchange and communication as central elements of doing business.

As I walked through the markets, I realized that buying something was not only a financial transaction. It was also a way to build relationships and experience the local culture. Through this visit, I came to see that Vietnamese markets are more than just places to shop. They are spaces where meaningful human connections can be formed.

7. Conclusion

Through this stay, I was able to engage not only in sightseeing or academic learning but also in meaningful interactions with local people and gain deep insights into Vietnamese society. From everyday cultural practices to conversations that sparked unexpected discoveries, and the sincere attitudes of young students toward learning, each experience gave me valuable lessons and inspiration.

After returning, I began to reflect seriously on how I could apply what I learned to give back to society. Currently, I am planning to establish a new volunteer organization that goes beyond the boundaries of my faculty. The aim is to support people outside the university community, especially foreigners living in Japan and members of the broader local society. By drawing on my experience with international exchange, I hope to create opportunities that value human connection while addressing real-world issues. I am committed to contributing to society through hands-on engagement and inclusive activities rooted in mutual understanding.

8. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who supported and assisted me throughout this research project. I am especially grateful to Mr. Long from the National Economics University (NEU), as well as to Ms. Mai, Ms. Hung, and Ms. Lee from Foreign Trade University (FTU) for generously sharing their time and insights.

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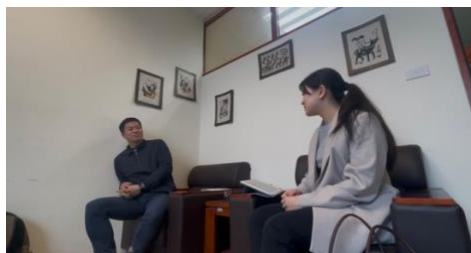
In addition, I am deeply thankful to Professor Asako Iida for her valuable advice and guidance in preparing my presentation for the second round of the Chuo University Active Student Scholarship screening. I also would also like to thank Professor Yukie Saito and Ms. Kakimoto of the GLOMAC Office for their generous assistance in arranging interviews with partner universities.

9. Pictures

Where the old woman belongs



NEU



Landscapes



FTU

