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**CZECH CULTURAL STANDARDS FROM
VIETNAMESE PERSPECTIVE IN STUDY AND WORK
ENVIRONMENT
BACHELOR THESIS**

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis entitled “Czech Cultural Standards from the Vietnamese Perspective in Work and Study Environments.” I duly marked out all quotations. The used literature and sources are stated in the attached list of references.

In Prague on

Signature.....

Nguyen Ba Nguyen

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List of Abbreviations

The CR – Czech Republic

CSR – Czechoslovakia

DVR – Democratic Vietnamese Republic

HRE – Holy Roman Empire

VAT – Value Added Tax

Introduction

The Vietnamese people in the Czech Republic represent the largest immigrant community in the country. Not only that, they are also the third largest ethnic minority, after the Slovaks and Romanies. According to the 2011 census, their number is listed as 83,000. For a quick comparison, this number in the year 2003 was 17,700.

Nowadays Vietnamese people have more or less assimilated themselves into the Czech society. The older generation can be seen maintaining their own restaurants, convenience, food or clothing stores. The young generation goes to school along with their Czech peers, with the vast majority of them harboring the hope to obtain at least a bachelor's degree. The relationships between these two vastly different cultures can be amiable at times and strenuous on occasions. The negative interactions are a result arising from complex factors, ranging from cultural misunderstanding, language barrier, the inability to assimilate, and many more.

The goal of this thesis is to identify the Czech cultural standards from the Vietnamese perspective in work and study environments. Because the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Czech Republic are essentially almost half the world away, there are bound to be plenty of cultural differences that can become obstacles for the citizens of each nation as they try to express their ideas and feeling with one another. Each nation has its own history, culture, social norms, ethics and moral standards, and it is important for a Vietnamese person to be able to overcome those challenges if he is to understand his Czech partner, be it whether at school or at work.

To approach the goal, these following research questions were asked:

- How do the Czech-Vietnamese cultural standards differ in work and study environments?
- Which aspects of work environment do the Vietnamese perceive as the most different?
- Which aspects of study environment do the Vietnamese perceive as the most different?

This thesis is written based on the author's experiences in studying and working in both Czech and Vietnamese environments. He came to the Czech Republic to study for the first time at the age of ten. He finished his elementary school studies and moved to France to study further. Eventually he returned to the Czech Republic 10 years later, at 20, to study at the University of Economics. Thanks to these opportunities, he has accumulated a richer view towards the Czech culture and even European ones as a whole. At 22 he started working for a Vietnamese owner of a casino, and it was there that I began to experience all the differences of opinions expressed by the Vietnamese customers regarding their Czech friends, schoolmates, partners, and acquaintances.

The older generation would sometimes express their negative opinions regarding the Czech people, but these opinions are largely based on their own inability to communicate properly in

the Czech language, their lack of understanding on Czech customs and norms, and eventually their closed presumptions. The main goal of this thesis is to provide a deeper view into the Vietnamese culture living in the Czech Republic. How they see the country in which they are living, how they deal with leaving their families and homes behind, and lastly, how they think and regard their acquaintances and friends, either at work or school.

This thesis is divided into theoretical and practical parts. In the Theoretical Part these following definitions shall be introduced: Culture and its underlying spheres, Cultural Standards according to Alexander Thomas, Cultural Dimensions according to Geert Hofstede and Fons Trompenaars, Intercultural Communication and its possible problems and solutions. In the Practical Part there were selected 24 Vietnamese candidates, 12 from school and 12 from work environments, to conduct qualitative interviews, in which they were asked questions closely related to the aforementioned cultural dimensions. The results shall be interpreted and afterwards, the author shall provide a list of recommendations in order to help the Vietnamese people interact better with their Czech peers at work and school.

THEORETICAL PART

1 Culture

Edward Brunet Taylor in his book *Primitive Culture* defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society.”¹ The Cambridge Dictionary defines culture as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.”²

According to the words of Geert Hofstede in *Culture and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, no group can escape culture.³ Hofstede states that a person carries within himself or herself patterns of thinking, feeling. And acting that were learnt from his or her lifetime. In order to learn something different, they must unlearn what they have learnt during their childhood; and unlearning things is more difficult than learning things for the first time.⁴

1.1 Elements of Culture⁵

Culture is defined by the symbols, languages, beliefs, norms, and values that are part of any society. Those are divided into 2 major groups: non-material and material. Non-material culture can be values, beliefs, symbols. Material culture can be clothing choices, tools, and technology.

It can be argued that the most important element of culture is language. It is crucial to communication, without which cultures would not be able to exist. Humans as a species possess a deeper capacity for language than any animals, and this is the key for us to develop a more complex culture. Ideas, speeches, and expressions must be spread and exchanged between the participants within a particular culture, and this can only be done with a common language.

Cultures also differ in norms, or standards and expectations in the ways one should behave. Norms can be classified as formal and informal. Formal norms are any rules that a society considers the most important, often in the forms of laws. Examples include traffic laws, criminal codes. Informal norms, also called folkways or customs, refer to standard behaviors that are considered less important, but nevertheless influences the way people behave. Examples: table manners or everyday greetings.

¹ Tylor, E.B. *Primitive culture: researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art, and custom*. New York: Gordon Press. ISBN 978-0-87968-091-6

² *Meaning of “culture”*. Cambridge English Dictionary. Online. Available at: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture?a=british>

³ Hofstede, Geert. *Cultures and organizations : Software of the Mind*. London: McGraw-Hill, 2010, pp. 11-12. ISBN 9780077074746

⁴ Based on: Hofstede, Geert. *Cultures and organizations : Software of the Mind*. London: McGraw-Hill, 2010, pp. 4-5. ISBN 9780077074746

⁵ Based on: E. Barkan, Steven. *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the World: Brief Edition v. 1.0*. Chapter 2.2, Elements of Culture. Available at: http://catalog.flatworldknowledge.com/bookhub/2?e=barkbrief-ch02_s02

1.2 Cultural Standards According to Alexander Thomas

Alexander Thomas looks at intercultural issues from a different perspective than the predominant approach of cultural dimensions in the literature. Thomas' goal is to identify cultural standards, ie. the ways of perceiving, thinking, judging, and acting that the majority of individuals of any given culture considers normal for themselves and the rest.⁶

In general, Thomas states that the most practical way to identify cultural differences and characteristics that come into play during intercultural encounters is to conduct interviews from a large pool of candidates with experience in diverse situations. Thomas believes that in order to successfully identify standards, it is necessary to compare the norms of one culture against the other. By looking at a pairing of two cultures, we can produce the clearest method to define the characteristics of a given culture.⁷

In the end of the chapter Cultural Standards, Thomas concludes that an international encounter is influenced by "the intent to initiate and maintain an interpersonal cooperation based on respectfulness and esteem for cultural diversity".⁸ This allows both parties to deal with any differences they might have in a productive manner, one that does not result in lasting damage to the relationship.

1.3 Cultural Dimensions According to Geert Hofstede⁹

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory provides a frame-work for cross-cultural communication. The dimensions of national cultures are being described as follows:

- 1.1.1 Power distance index
- 1.1.2 Individualism vs collectivism
- 1.1.3 Uncertainty avoidance index
- 1.1.4 Masculinity vs femininity
- 1.1.5 Long term orientation vs short term
- 1.1.6 Indulgence vs restraint

The research Geert Hofstede conducted on IBM employees between the years 1967-1973 consisted of questions from 4 dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity and Uncertainty Avoidance.

⁶ Fink, Gerhard and Kolling, Marcus and Neyer, Anne-Katrin . The Cultural Standard Method, Working Papers. Europainstitut, WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Vienna, 2005.

⁷ Thomas, Alexander. The Handbook of Intercultural Communication and Cooperation, 2010, Van de Hoeck&Ruprecht, pp. 23-26. ISBN 978-3-525-40327-3

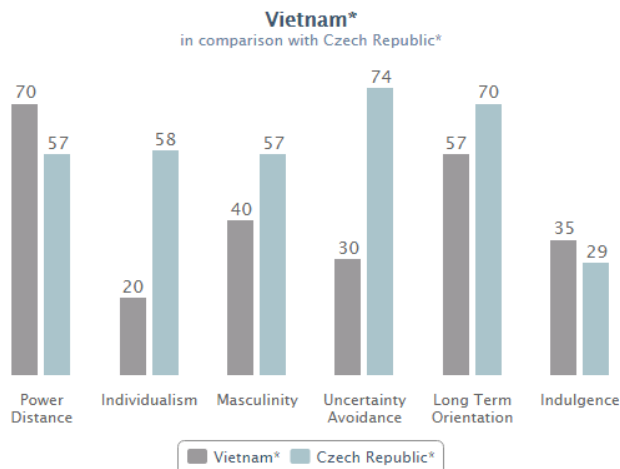
⁸ Thomas, Alexander. The Handbook of Intercultural Communication and Cooperation, 2010, Van de Hoeck&Ruprecht, p. 27. ISBN 978-3-525-40327-3

⁹ Based on: Hofstede, Geert. Cultures and organizations : Software of the Mind. London: McGraw-Hill, 2010. ISBN 9780077074746

In the year 1991 he added the fifth dimension, called Short-term orientation. This was based on the research of Michael Harris Bond, which he conducted amongst students from 23 countries, with the help of surveys developed by Chinese managers.

Lastly, Michael Minkov's World Values Survey, an analysis of representatives from 93 countries, led Hofstede to add the sixth dimension called Indulgence vs. Restraint in 2010.

Figure 1: Czech and Vietnamese Cultural Dimensions¹⁰



Source: Vietnam, Czech Republic. Geert Hofstede [Online]. 2015. Available from: <http://geert-hofstede.com/vietnam.html>

Power Distance

Vietnam scores rather high on the Power Distance Index, which means people accept that there is a hierarchy in the society. Vietnamese subordinates and students are often being told what to do by their superiors, and they are expected to obey those commands.

Czech Republic is close to Vietnam in terms of hierarchy. From this we can conclude that both societies value a clear division of power, where the boss expects his subordinates to obey his instructions.

Individualism

We can see a great contrast here. Vietnam scores very low on this scale, suggesting that the Vietnamese society leans heavily on the collectivistic side. This implicates that the Vietnamese society values a strong connection between its members, and each member is expected to contribute to the society.

¹⁰ Based on: Hofstede, Geert [Online]. Available at: <http://geert-hofstede.com/czech-republic.html>

Czech Republic is considered an individualistic society. Employee-employer contract is based on mutual advantage and promotions are handed over based on merits, not connections. Czech individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their close families only.

Masculinity

With a score of 40, Vietnam is considered a feminine society. Such a society would “work in order to live” and people value equality. Conflicts are resolved by compromises.

Czech Republic, on the other hand, is a masculine society, where competitions, successes, and achievements are encouraged at an early age.

Uncertainty avoidance

Vietnam has a low preference for avoiding uncertainty (30). This means deviance from the norm is easily accepted. The Vietnamese believe there should not be unnecessary rules which hamper daily lives.

Czech people have a high preference for avoiding uncertainty (84). Such a society is expected to show little tolerance towards unorthodox behaviors and ideas. Rules and codes are needed in order for the society to function.

Long term Orientation

Scoring at 57 on the Long term Orientation scale, Vietnam is perceived as a pragmatic society. There is a strong preference towards savings and investing, as they plan a few years ahead, instead of months.

Czech Republic is considered even more Long-term Oriented than Vietnam, at 70.

Indulgence

At 35, the Vietnamese culture considered Restrained. This means they restrain themselves from life's enjoyments as they believe such activities are a distraction from the goals ahead.

Like the Vietnamese, Czechs are not indulged.

1.4 Cultural Dimensions According to Fons Trompenaars

Trompenaars' Model of Cultural Differences was developed by two authors in 1997: Fons Trompenaars and Charles-Hampden Turner.¹¹ The authors used a survey conducting from 8841 managers and employees from 43 countries.

¹¹ Trompenaars, Fons; Hampden-Turner, Charles. Riding the Waves of Culture, McGraw Hill, 1997. ISBN 0786311258

1. Universalism vs. Particularism¹²

Universalism: belief that ideas and practices do not need to be modified in order to be applicable everywhere. Rationality, professionalism, and senses of business are valued.

Particularism: ideas and practices are being dictated by circumstances. Relationships have higher emphasis here than in countries with high Universalism.

2. Individualism vs. Communitarianism

This is similar to the pairing of Individualism vs. Collectivism in the model of Geert Hofstede. Individualism refers to those who think of themselves as individuals. Communitarianism refers to people who regard themselves as part of something greater.

3. Neutral vs. Emotional

A neutral culture prefers to keep emotions and feelings in check. In emotional culture, people smile, laugh, and express their emotions more openly and often; greetings are done with more enthusiasm. People from neutral cultures when conducting business with partners from emotional cultures should be ready to respond warm greetings in a similar manner.¹³

4. Specific vs. Diffuse

A specific culture is the one where its members guard their private space against strangers; this space is only shared with close family members and loved ones. A diffuse culture is one where public and private spaces are similar, and members of such culture would guard both spaces carefully, because entry to one space would also mean entry to the other.

5. Achievement vs. Ascription

People in achievement culture earn their status based on how well they perform at work or school. An ascription culture rewards a person based on who that person is, or where he comes from, or whose father he has etc.¹⁴

¹² Luthans, Fred; Doh, Jonathan P. International management : culture, strategy, and behavior. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012. pp. 123–125. ISBN 978-0-07-811257-7

¹³ Luthans, Fred; Doh, Jonathan P. International management : culture, strategy, and behavior. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012. pp. 126. ISBN 978-0-07-811257-7

¹⁴ Luthans, Fred; Doh, Jonathan P. International management : culture, strategy, and behavior. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012. pp. 127. ISBN 978-0-07-811257-7

2 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural Communication is vital if one wishes to maintain a stable working relationships with his/her partners from a different culture. Each nation has its own culture and customs, morals and ethics, and it is always a wise to avoid misunderstandings arising from those.

Daniele Trevisani, a communication researcher, pointed a clear distinction between intercultural communication and cross-cultural communication. According to him, Intercultural Communication refers to the *interaction* between people from different cultures, whereas Cross-cultural Communication refers to the *comparison* of how people from different cultures communicate. To put it simply, Intercultural Communication represents a “dynamic pattern of interactions”; it studies what happens when two or more people from different cultures meet and interact, and what kind of conflicts can arise from this interactions, eg. understanding vs misunderstanding, conflict vs. cooperation, agreement vs disagreement and so on. Cross-cultural Communication, on the other hand, studies the “static differential image”, depicting differences in communication patterns over the globe.¹⁵

2.1 Problems in Intercultural Communication

Jakob Luring, a professor of intercultural communication of Aarhus University, stated in his article “*Intercultural Organizational Communication*” thusly: Many people in intercultural business communication argue that culture determines how individuals encode messages, what kind of medium they choose to deliver them and how those messages are interpreted.¹⁶

In an article written for ICL Books (Intercultural Learning), Milana Miladinovic classified six problems in Intercultural Communication.¹⁷

1. **Assumption of Similarities:** Misunderstanding occurs when people around the world assume that certain similarities exist even outside their own country/culture. They presume that people ought to behave in a similar manner because we are all humans. This leads to all sorts of mistakes, such as misreading signs and wrongly judging behaviours.
2. **Language Differences:** Slangs, idioms, and dialects have the potential to cause confusion and difficulty in understanding people from different places. Even simple words like “Yes” or “No” can result in misunderstandings in certain countries. Being aware of these differences can be helpful in overcoming the challenges of intercultural communication.

¹⁵ Trevisani, Daniele. *Negoziatore interculturale. Comunicare oltre le barriere culturali*. Translated title: Intercultural Negotiation: Communication Beyond Cultural Barriers. Milan, Franco Angeli, 2005. ISBN 9788846466006

¹⁶ Luring, Jakob. *Intercultural Organizational Communication: the Social Organizing of Interaction in International Encounters*. Journal of Business and Communication. 2001. Available at: <http://job.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/05/06/0021943611406500.abstract>

¹⁷ Miladinovic, Milana. Overcoming Obstacles in Intercultural communication. ICL Books, 2014. Online article available at: <http://www.afs.org/blog/icl/?p=4881>

3. **Nonverbal Misinterpretation:** In this scenario, the barrier to intercultural communication is composed of observable nonverbal signs such as: gestures, postures, facial expressions, and body movements. Ms Miladinovic recommends that rather than taking offense at the mistakes of others, it is better to share your own cultural norms and learn about the opposite party's so that both sides can cope with each other's nonverbal styles.
4. **Tendency to Quickly Evaluate:** Another listed obstacle is the tendency to immediately evaluate and judge someone's actions. Such judgments are often done through the lenses of our own cultural norms, which we perceived as right and normal, rather than try to be in the other person's shoe. This obstacle can be easily overcome by not immediately jumping to conclusions and instead, we should pause, listen, and observe before making any hasty (and costly) judgment.
5. **High Anxiety:** Facing new and challenging situations ought to cause stress and tension. These feelings, if they are moderate, can provide us with the needed energy to overcome said situations. However, if the stress level is too high, we have a tendency to activate our defense mechanism in the form of withdrawal or hostility. Anxious feelings may exist in both parties of an intercultural exchange. The national host may feel uncomfortable when talking to a foreigner because he or she is unable to maintain a proper verbal interaction (this might be the result of the host's inability to speak a second language). The sojourner may feel even more threatened, as they are now in a completely different environment, where their actions are being perceived as inappropriate, thus their self-esteem also deteriorates.

2.2 Solving Intercultural Conflicts

Conflicts, misunderstanding, prejudices occurring from unfamiliarity of cultural differences often become irreconcilable. It is better to avoid such misunderstanding if possible by investing time to study on the partner's cultural backgrounds. This is a useful tool in negotiation, management, and daily communication.

Jonathan H. Turner defines intercultural conflict as a conflict caused by "differences in cultural values and beliefs that place people at odds with one another".¹⁸ Such a conflict is difficult to resolve, as each party has its own belief and ideals. Cultural conflicts often intensify when those differences are reflected at a macro level, for example in politics.¹⁹

Andrea Williams, in an article named "Resolving Conflicts in a Multicultural Environment", suggested three ways to solving an intercultural conflict.²⁰

¹⁸ Turner, Jonathan. *Sociology*. Prentice Hall, 2005. p. 87. ISBN 978-0-13-113496-6

¹⁹ Turner, Jonathan. *Sociology*. Prentice Hall, 2005. p. 83. ISBN 978-0-13-113496-6

²⁰ Williams, Andrea. *Resolving Conflict in a Multicultural Environment*. MCS Conciliation Quarterly. Summer, 1994. Pp. 2-6. Online article. Available at: <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/example/will5746.htm>

1. *Probing the cultural dimension*: The resolution should start when both parties acknowledge that their conflict contains a cultural dimension. The next step requires both parties to willingly deal with all conflicts, including the cultural one. Third, a systematic approach on the conflict is needed. Williams identified four phases: (a) the parties make a list of what they find offensive in each other's behavior; (b) they get an understanding on the opposite side's cultural perception; (c) they learn how the problems will be solved in the opponent's culture; (d) a resolution to the conflict is made.
2. *Learning about other cultures*: People can prevent misunderstandings by investing time to study about the cultures they come in contact with. This knowledge can be obtained through various means, often by general reading, training programs, talking to people from said culture, and learning from past experiences.
3. *Altering organizational practices and procedures*: An organizational structure may reflect the norms of just one culture and this could become a liability in intercultural exchanges, where such a structure comes into conflict with that of another organization. In such cases, it is recommended to modify the system so that it becomes more sensitive to different cultural norms and other people.

2.3 Intercultural Competences

A communication is considered competent when it achieves the objective in the manner that is appropriate to the relationship. In an interaction with people from different cultures, an intellectually competent person is the one who recognizes that the concepts of thinking, perception, feeling, and acting vary from culture to culture. Intercultural communication should strive to bridge the dichotomy of effectiveness and appropriateness

Appropriateness: rules, norms, and expectation of the relationship are not violated significantly.

Effectiveness: results, goals, and rewards are accomplished, as long as they appear more attractive to the cost and alternatives.

In the words of Lustig, author of the book “Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures”, a competent communication is a conversation with an achievable goal that is used at an appropriate time and location.²¹

2.3.1 Basic Tools for Improving Intercultural Competence²²

In Chapter 3 of the book Intercultural Competence, Lustig and Koester describe a list of basic tools for improving intercultural competence. These tools are known as BASICs of Intercultural

²¹ Lustig, M. W., & Koester, J. *Intercultural competence*, 7th Edition. Pearson, 2012. ISBN 978-0205211241

²² Based on: Lustig, M. W., & Koester, J. *Intercultural competence*, 7th Edition. Pearson, 2012. ISBN 978-0205211241

competence, and it stands for Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Competence. BASIC includes:

Display of respect: Showing respect and positive regard for the partner. The idea of respect is crucial in a society. It is the cornerstone for any positive conversation. Without respect, a conversation will break down very fast to the point of irreconcilable.

Orientation to knowledge: How the partner describes himself and how he views the world. The key is to say what you mean. We ought to remember that not everyone speaks the same way we do, thus it's better to be straightforward to avoid unnecessary confusion.

Empathy: A commitment to try to understand others. If you are being perceived as empathic, or at least others can perceive your efforts to try to understand their feelings, the conversation will flow much smoother.

Interaction management: Regulating conversations; general conversation skills. An interculturally competent person should be able to hold conversations in an engaging manner, and must know when to end conversations with verbal and nonverbal messages.

Task role behaviour: Initiate ideas that encourage problem solving activities. Humans cannot avoid interacting with one another. Usually such interactions involve group settings of some kinds. One should be able to discuss ideas and gain new knowledge without alienating other members. In order to determine what course of action will be best for the group to undertake, one must understand the group dynamics and the strengths and weaknesses of its members.

Relational role behaviour: Interpersonal harmony and mediation. This incorporates empathy at a group level. One should support group members, solve conflicts, and compromise. We cannot expect to get along with all group members, but we can direct the group towards its goals through active listening.

Tolerance for ambiguity: The ability face risks and comfortable going into the unknown. Life is full of uncertainties, and no matter how well we plan, things sometimes may not go the way we expect them to. The best way to react is to remain calm, and be open to the new challenges, rather than react in hostile manners.

Interaction posture: Responding in non-judgmental ways. This is a great way to create a comfortable atmosphere amongst group members. People will be more open to work with us if we do not disparage them for having different values, beliefs, and attitudes.

3 Know Thy Enemy: Vietnam

It does not matter whether you consider Vietnam your daily enemy or friend. Either way, you will have to understand it. Sun Tzu's teachings are as true today as it were two thousand years ago: Know your enemy and know yourself, and you shall face a hundred battles undefeated.²³

On a more serious note, it is always beneficial to study your counterparts in any environment. School, business, social circles, it matters little. One should know one's friends, and this statement sounds even truer in the case of adversaries, for friends will easily forgive our mistakes, but our adversaries will not.

3.1 History: The Legends²⁴

You have probably heard of a similar beginning before. Once upon a time there was a big river carrying a lot of sediment. The first homo sapiens settled there because they found out things would grow faster there. Vietnam is not an exception. The first Vietnamese civilization flourished upon the Red River Delta, which traced its source back to China. The Red River valley provided the earliest settlers with every necessities of life. Rice fields flourished; trade routes opened; and a civilization was born. The first Vietnamese states was formed in approximately 2800-300 B.C. as the need to fight off invaders, trade exchange, and general cooperation arose.²⁵

According to the country's most famous legend, the Vietnamese people are the result of a union between a dragon-lord from the seas and a fairy queen of the mountains.²⁶ Even to this day, this legend is often quoted whenever the Vietnamese have a reason to be proud about their race, usually at a sport competition, or at an international contest of intellect, talents, or skills. Then they would quote that they are the proud descendants of *fairies and dragons*.

The regions north of modern-day Vietnam are a network of rivers which originate from southern China and drain into Vietnam through various valleys. As a result, the country has always been vulnerable from a northern attack. Many legends from this region are about patriotism, specifically about defending the lands against invaders from the north.²⁷

One of the most well-known legends is the tale about Thanh Giong (Thanh means Saint in Vietnamese). Thanh Giong was a three year old boy who suddenly began to devour a great amount of food during such an invasion, and miraculously grew into a colossus. He then swept

²³ Tzu, Sun. Art of War, last verse, chapter 3. 5th Century B.C. [English translation: Giles, Lionel. Thrifty Books, 2009. ISBN 978-1604598933]

²⁴ Based on: Zhao, Young. *The Handbook of Asian Education: A cultural Perspective*. Routledge, 2010. ISBN 978-0805864441

²⁵ Zhao, Young. *The Handbook of Asian Education: A cultural Perspective*. Routledge, 2010, p. 95. ISBN 978-0805864441

²⁶ Taylor, Keith Weller. *The Birth of Vietnam*. University of California Press, 1983, pp. 1-2. ISBN 0-520-07417-3

²⁷ Taylor, Keith Weller. *The Birth of Vietnam*. University of California Press, 1983, pp. 4. ISBN 0-520-07417-3

all enemy soldiers with ease, and once they were dealt with, he flew into the heavens.²⁸ Thanh Giong has been interpreted as a reincarnation of the dragon-lord mentioned above. This is usually the first fairy-tale Vietnamese children are told by their parents, and can be seen as a demonstration of their resolve to protect their country from any subjugation.

3.2 History: The Dynasties

With a dragon for father and a fairy queen for mother, one would expect the story of Vietnam to be full of glory, riches, and awe-inspiring endeavors. The parents must have been sleeping because the country was marred by wars and catastrophe. Vietnam was always under the constant threat of a northern invasion. And “north” means whichever dynasty was ruling the Great Plains of China at that time.

From 111 BC to 938 AD, for a thousand years, it was under the dominion of the Han Chinese.²⁹ During that time, there had been a few uprisings, but none succeeded. The Chinese introduced their writing system, extorted taxes and ruled over the lands for such a long period of time that it is not surprising to find Chinese influences in almost every aspects of the Vietnamese culture.

In 938, after the Battle of Bach Dang River, Vietnam gained autonomy and began to rule without Chinese authority.³⁰ This battle is often cited as a source of pride amongst the Vietnamese, especially amongst those older generations. It demonstrated an excellence use of guerilla tactics and improvised weapons, utilizing treacherous environments to utterly annihilate a vastly stronger, better-trained and equipped imperial Chinese fleet. This kind of tactics and thinking would then be used to devastating effects in several more conflicts in the future, namely during the Mongol invasion in 1288 (at the very same river!), the Vietnam War in 1960s, and the Sino-Vietnamese Border War in 1978.³¹

In the 13th century, China fell to the Mongols. The Yuan dynasty was established. After conquering China, the Mongol Empire cast its gaze southward, and it saw Vietnam. Thrice their armies came, and thrice the Vietnamese thwarted their attacks. Both sides suffered heavy casualties, but it was the Vietnamese who appeased to the Mongols to avoid further conflicts. They accepted the nominal supremacy of the Mongol Empire and agreed to pay tributes each year. The centuries onwards were similar to the ones that had come before: a constant struggle with a powerful northern neighbor. No matter what year it was, the reason was the same. In the eyes of the Chinese, Vietnam was a strategically important landmass. A landmass ruled by barbarians who were in dire need of Imperial civilization.

²⁸ Taylor, Keith Weller. *The Birth of Vietnam*. University of California Press, 1983, pp. 5-6. ISBN 0-520-07417-3

²⁹ Taylor, Keith Weller. *The Birth of Vietnam*. University of California Press, 1983, p. 45. ISBN 0-520-07417-3

³⁰ Le Van Huu, Ngo Si Lien, Phan Phu Tien,... *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* [Translated title: Complete Annals of the History of Dai Viet]. 1697. Translator: The Vietnamese Institute of Social Studies. Khoa hoc Xa hoi, Hanoi, 1993, pp. 53-54.

³¹ J. Hood, Steven. *Dragons Entangled: Indochina and the China-Vietnam War*. M.E. Sharpe Inc., Armonk, New York, 1992, p. 3. ISBN 0-87332-862-0

One particular important century to note is the 17th century, where the first Portuguese traders arrived to establish a connection between Vietnam and the Western powers at that time. A French Jesuit priest named Alexandre de Rhodes (1591-1660) developed a romanized Vietnamese alphabet called “Quoc Ngu” or “National Language” in the book *Dictionarium Annamiticum Lusitanum et Latinum*.³² This is an extremely important mark in the history of Vietnam, as it presented the Vietnamese people an opportunity to easily study other European languages. The adaptation of the Latin alphabet and consequently the abolition of the Chinese characters presented a foundation to establish an easier form of communication between European traders and Vietnamese citizens.

The intercultural exchanges did not limit to merely European traders. The kingdom of Vietnam (or Annam as it was called back then) maintained a steady relationships with its non-Chinese neighbors, namely the Champa Kingdom (present-day South Vietnam), the Khmer Empire (Cambodia), the Siamese Kingdom (Thailand), and even India.³³ In fact, one can argue that by interacting with these neighboring countries, Vietnam has enriched its culture and history by a great measure. Buddhism was introduced here as early as the 3rd or 2nd century BC, either from South Asia or China.³⁴ Today, Buddhism is the largest religion in Vietnam with approximately 10-11 million followers (or 12,2 % of the total population).³⁵

3.3 How History Shaped Culture³⁶

The Vietnamese culture evolves hand-in-hand with its history. It is shaped by thousands of years of fighting for self-determination and independence. It is a culture where nationalism runs deep and strong. Influenced by Confucianism, the culture of Vietnam places a strong emphasis on the roles of men in both society and family. Women are expected to obey the ethics of ‘three obediences, four virtues’, which originated in the feudal ages. Three obediences here refer to: obedience to father, to husband, and to son(s) in widowhood. Four virtues refer to diligence, good manner, proper speech and morality.

Today, however, the view of male superiority over female is weakening as different measures have been undertaken to abolish this obsolete custom. The rights of women and gender equality are being steadily enforced by both the people and the government. Even though gender

³² Davidson, Jeremy H. C. S.; H. L. Shorto. *Austroasiatic Languages: Essays in Honour of H.L. Shorto*. School of Oriental Studies, University of London, p. 95. ISBN 0728601834

³³ Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, Geoff Wade. *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-cultural Exchange*. ISEAS Publishing, 2011, pp. 3-15. ISBN 9814345105

³⁴ Cuong Tu Nguyen. *Zen in Medieval Vietnam: A Study of the Thiền Uyển Tập Anh*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997, pp. 9.

³⁵ Bielefeldt, Heinar. *Press statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*. United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner. Online article. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E>

³⁶ Based on: Culture and Society. Embassy of the Vietnamese Socialist Republic in the United States of America, 2016. Online article. Available at: <http://vietnamembassy-usa.org/vietnam/culture>

inequality is slowly fading, there are a few honored traditions that will unlikely perish. For instance, the Vietnamese society has and always will reserve respect for the elderly, much more so than the Western countries. For a Vietnamese person, age means experience, knowledge and higher social status. Thus, children are taught at an early age to respect the elderly. The Vietnamese do not consider this an inequality issue, but rather something as natural as life itself.

After the reunification in 1975, North and South Vietnam came under one rule of the Communist Party.³⁷ Between the years of 1975 and 1990, foreign influences were shunned, while media from Socialist countries such as Cuba, China and Soviet Union enjoyed a stronger emphasis. Since 1990s, Vietnam has seen a greater opening towards European and American culture. Nowadays with the advent of the internet, it is no longer an issue for each Vietnamese households to enjoy a wide range of media broadcasting from all over the world.

The four most important symbols of the Vietnamese cultures are dragons, turtles, lotuses and bamboos. Why the Vietnamese revere dragons came as no surprise, because their origin myth stated that they were descendants of a dragon and a fairy. Dragons represent the emperor – a symbol of authority and power; dragons bring rain, which was essential for life; dragon statues can be found guarding temples; and according to feng shui rules, it is crucial to locate the most harmonious spot to erect a building – those spots are called ‘dragon’s heads’.

The lotus is the national flower of Vietnam.³⁸ It can be found etched on the tail of all aircraft belonging to Vietnam Airlines. It is a symbol of divine beauty, often associated with Buddha himself. It is a flower that grows in muddy, stinking water, yet despite all that, manages to rise above the rest and blooms with remarkable beauty. Like the lotus flowers, the Vietnamese culture has a strong affinity with water. Vietnamese farmers and fishermen made their livelihood on the Red River Delta thousands of years ago, and from their labor a civilization was born.

The turtle is another interesting symbol heavily associated with fending off foreign invaders. According to the legends, Vietnam in the year 1418 faced an invasion from Ming China. The Vietnamese king at that time was Le Loi and he was granted a mythical sword named Thuan Thien (trans. Heaven’s Will). The sword granted him the power to defeat the invaders and defend his country. Once the task was done, a golden turtle emerged from a lake and demanded the magical sword back, because it belonged to the Dragon King. Le Loi returned the sword, and the lake was renamed to Hoan Kiem Lake, or the lake of the Returned Sword. Indeed, up until January 2016, Hoan Kiem Lake in Hanoi was home to a giant turtle, who was respectfully

³⁷ *Is it Liberation Day or Defeat Day in Saigon?* Los Angeles Times, 2015. Online article. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Saigon#cite_note-1

³⁸ *National Symbols of Vietnam*. Vietnamtravel. Online article. Available at: <http://www.vietnamtravel.com/symbol-of-vietnam-i164.html>

referred to by the Hanoians as ‘Lord Turtle’. The death of Lord Turtle in January 2016 caused a devastating blow to the hearts of the Vietnamese people.³⁹

3.4 Geography⁴⁰

Vietnam is located on the eastern flank of the Indochinese Peninsula. It occupies an area of 331,000 km square, and shares borders with China to the north, and with Laos and Cambodia to the West. The country is further divided into 58 provinces and 5 municipalities (centrally-directed cities) existing as the same level as provinces.

Vietnam’s terrain consists of tropical lowlands and densely forested highlands. Two of its most important agricultural hubs circle around the Red River Delta to the north and the Mekong Delta to the south. The Mekong Delta (Vietnamese: Nine Dragons River) lies immediately west of Ho Chi Minh City. It consists of flat lands, dense waterways and fertile soil suitable for farming. It is by far Vietnam’s most productive region in agriculture and aquaculture. Rice output in 2011 was 23,100,000 tons, or 54 % of Vietnam’s total output. Almost half of Vietnam’s total offshore fishing vessels are anchored in this region, providing an output of 3,100,000 tons, or 58 % of the country’s total.⁴¹ The Red River Delta, on the other hand, is considerably smaller in size, measuring at about 15,000 km square, or about a third of the Mekong Delta. It is more densely populated than its counterpart in the south. As it is home to the capital Hanoi, it also has a bigger role in the industrial sector, and enjoys a better inflow of capital through foreign direct investments.

Climate wise the northern provinces of Vietnam have a subtropical humid climate, with an average humidity of 84 % per year. On rare occasions in winter times, snowfall may occur in the northernmost mountain areas. Southern regions, especially those around Ho Chi Minh City is classified as tropical savannah climate, with a distinct wet and dry season. Annual rainfall vary from 1,200 to 3,000 millimeters throughout the year. Nearly 90 % of all rains occur in summer. People from North, Central, and South Vietnam experience different climates. The North is colder because of its closer position to the Tropic of Cancer. Central Vietnam is dry and hot, a result from foehn winds blowing over the Annamite Range and losing all moisture in the process. South Vietnam remains warm and humid throughout the year.

3.4.1 Demography

As of 2016, the population of Vietnam is 94 million, making it the 14th most populous country in the world. 33 % of Vietnamese live in urban areas, with the most densely populated cities being Ho Chi Minh City (Sai Gon) and Ha Noi. 54 ethnics group are recognized by the Vietnamese

³⁹ Nga Pham. Cu Rua: Vietnam mourns revered Hanoi turtle. BBC News, Bangkok, 2016. Online article. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35358979.html>

⁴⁰ Based on: Whitfield, D. *Historical and Cultural Dictionary of Vietnam*. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1976.

⁴¹ General Statistics Office (2012): *Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam 2011*. Statistical Publishing House, Hanoi

government. Ethnic Vietnamese, or Kinh people, account for 84 % of the country's population. According to an estimate made by Pew Research Center in 2010, about 45 % of the Vietnamese people practice folk religions and 30 % identified themselves as non-religious.⁴² Officially, however, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is an atheist state as declared by the government.

Important ethnic groups include Khmer and Chinese, with each group being estimated at 1 million people. Vietnamese of Chinese ancestry have been active throughout the history of Vietnam. Their activities include rice trading, real estate and banking in South Vietnam, and mining, shop-keeping in North Vietnam. After the year 1975, where the relations between Vietnam and China worsened due to border issues, the Vietnamese-Chinese community suffered persecutions from the government police force.

The official language of Vietnam is Vietnamese, which belongs to the family of Austroasiatic language. It is a tonal, monosyllabic, phonetic language. It was somewhat influenced by Chinese due to the fact that Vietnam was occupied by China for almost a thousand years; a small part of Vietnamese vocabulary is also Chinese. The Romanized script was officially adopted in the early decades of the 20th century, thus abolishing the use of Chinese characters.⁴³ In the Czech Republic, Vietnamese has been recognized as one of the 14 minority languages. This status grants the Czech citizens from the Vietnamese community the rights to use Vietnamese with the authorities and at any court.⁴⁴

Political System

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam follows a single-party socialist republic doctrine. The President of Vietnam is the head of state, while the Prime Minister is the head of government. The Communist Party represents leadership of the entire country. Executive power is held in the hands of the government and the President. Legislative power is vested in the National Assembly. Judiciary power is independent. The National Assembly is a unicameral legislative body consisting of 500 members elected by popular votes for 4 year terms. According to the constitution, it is the highest organ of the state.

The Communist Party of Vietnam follows a mixture of ideologies stemming from Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought. According to its teachings, the Communist Party leads the people in 'carrying out the country's renovation, modernization and industrialization'. The Party's statute, amended in the 9th National Congress in 2001, states that the Communist Party of Vietnam was 'established and trained by Ho Chi Minh to defeat foreign invaders, to abolish the colonial and feudal regime, to liberate and reunify the country, and then to carry out the cause of

⁴² Global Religious Landscape, 2010. The Pew Forum. Available at: <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/12/globalReligion-tables.pdf>

⁴³ Dương, Quảng-Hàm. *Việt-nam văn-học sử-yếu* [Outline history of Vietnamese literature]. Saigon: Bộ Quốc gia Giáo dục, 1941.

⁴⁴ Government Council for National Minorities. Statut: Rady vlády pro národní menšiny. Available at: http://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rnm/130703_statut_usneseni_530.pdf

renovation and socialist construction and defend national independence.’⁴⁵ The Party’s highest organ is the National Congress, which is held every fifth year, where the direction of the government and the party is decided.⁴⁶

The Vietnamese legal system is based on Socialist legality. The highest court is the Supreme People’s Court. Underneath the Supreme People’s Court are three lesser levels: superior courts, provincial courts and district courts. There are military tribunals established at various provinces for the Vietnam People’s Army. The Chief Justice heads the Supreme People’s Court and is elected by the National Assembly. Death penalty is often imposed for corruption, drug trafficking and murder. In January 2014, a court in northern Vietnam sentenced 30 people to death after they had been found guilty of heroin smuggling – the highest number of defendants receiving capital punishment in the country’s history. This decision sparked numerous criticisms from international organizations, such as the World Coalition Against Death Penalty.⁴⁷

3.5 Economy

The economy of Vietnam is a mixture of planned and market economy. Since the mid-1980s, the Doi Moi (Renewal) program has shifted Vietnam from a centralized planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy. Over the period of 1990s – 2000, the country has experienced a rapid economic growth. Nearly all of enterprises in the country are small and medium enterprises. In 2014, the nominal GDP reached 180 billion US dollars.⁴⁸ The GDP of Vietnam has the potential to reach 430 billion US dollars by 2020.⁴⁹ Pricewaterhouse Coopers, a multinational professional services network, forecasted in 2008 that Vietnam could become one of the fastest growing emerging economies by 2020, with an annual growth of nearly ten per cent in real terms.⁵⁰

After the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, Vietnam’s economic policy was a cautious one, focusing on stability rather than growth. During this period, the country shifted towards a market-oriented economy; however, the government still held a tight control over sectors such as

⁴⁵ *Political system*. Government of Vietnam. Online article. Available at: <http://www.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/English/TheSocialistRepublicOfVietnam/AboutVietnam/AboutVietnamDetail?categoryId=10000103&articleId=10001578>

⁴⁶ Ashwill, Mark; Thai, Ngoc Diep. *Vietnam Today: A Guide To A Nation At A Crossroads*. Intercultural Press, 2005. p. 47. ISBN 978193930093

⁴⁷ *UN urged to act on Vietnam over Death Penalty*. Dailymail. Online article. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2557323/UN-urged-act-Vietnam-death-penalty.html>

⁴⁸ *Report for Selected Countries and Markets*. International Monetary Fund. Available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2014/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?pr.x=63&pr.y=8&sy=2012&ey=2019&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&c=582&s=NGDPD%2CNGDPDPC%2CPPPGDP%2CPPPPC&grp=0&a=>

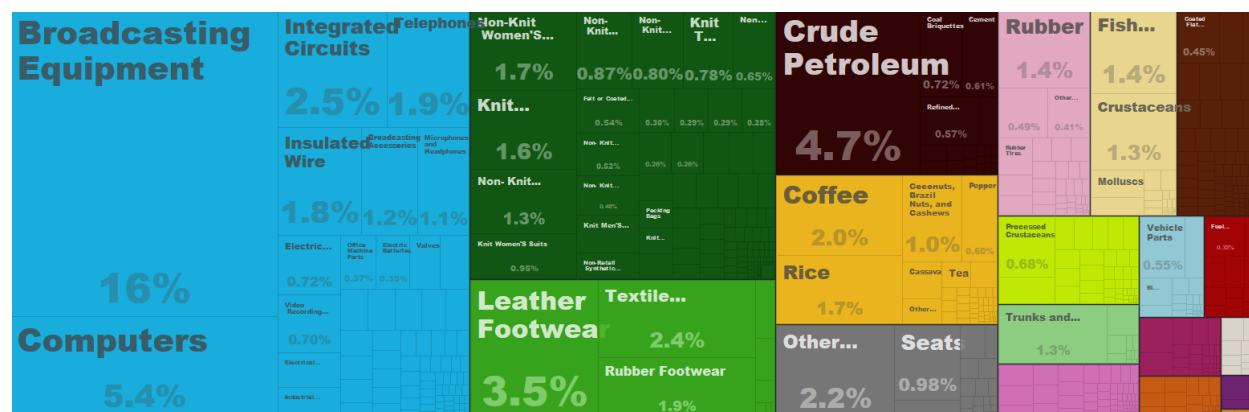
⁴⁹ S. Karmel, Roberta. *The Vietnamese Stock Market*. Available at: http://www.fwa.org/pdf/Vietnam_posttrip_article.pdf

⁵⁰ *China May Overtake US by 2025, but Vietnam is the fastest growing of emerging economies*. Pricewaterhouse Coopers. 2008. Online article. Available at: http://pwc.blogs.com/press_room/2008/03/china-to-overtake-us-by-2025-but-vietnam-may-be-fastest-growing-of-emerging-economies.html

banking, state-owned enterprises (airlines, airports, railways) and foreign trades.⁵¹ The signing of the Bilateral Trade Agreement between Vietnam and the USA on July 2000 was a significant step. This agreement provided goods from Vietnam the status of ‘normal trade relations’ in the U.S. market. The expectation from BTA was that it would transform Vietnam into a manufacturing-based and export-focused economy. Growth then increased from 6 per cent to 7 per cent between 2000 and 2002, despite the world being in a global recession. This made Vietnam the second fastest growing economy in that period.⁵² In the year 2005, the GDP growth was 8,4 per cent, making it the second fastest growing economy in Asia, second only to China’s. On January 2007, Vietnam officially became the 150th member of the World Trade Organization, after more than a decade of preparation and eight years of negotiation.⁵³

According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity’s data, the Vietnamese export in the year 2013 was valued at roughly 145 billion USD.⁵⁴ Recently, the leading product of export is broadcasting equipment, followed by computer chips and parts; together they represent 22 % of the total export. Footwear and textile products account for 8 %, while crude oil claims another 4.5 % of the share. The top destinations of these exports are the United States of America (24.5 billion), China (14.3 billion), and Japan (13.8 billion).

Figure 2: Vietnam’s exports



Source: *Vietnam profile*. Observatory for Economic Complexity. Online. [cit. 25.04.2016]
Available at: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/vnm/>

⁵¹ Based on: Vuong, Quan-Hoang. *Financial Markets in Vietnam's Transition Economy: Facts, Insights, Implications*. VDM Verlag, 2010. ISBN 9783639233834.

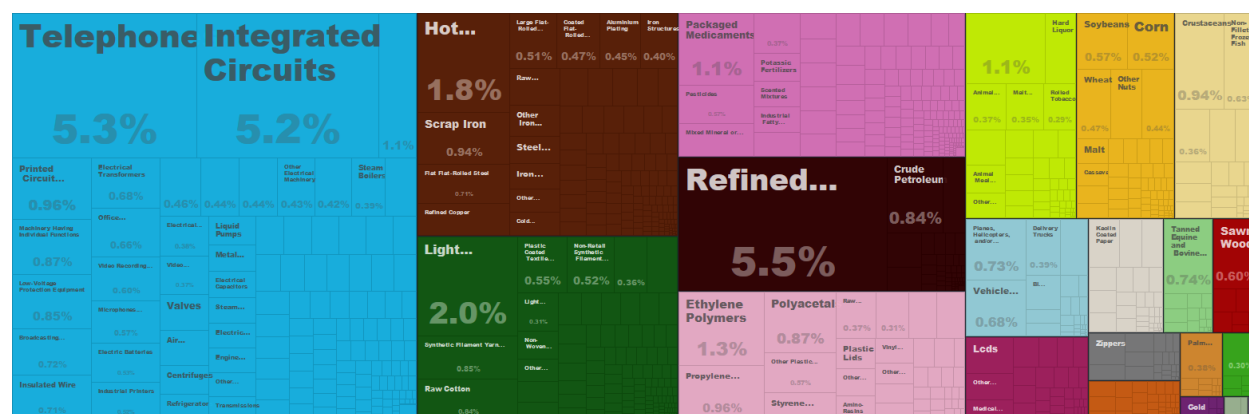
⁵² Based on: Martin, F. Michael. *US-Vietnam Economic and Trade Relations*. Congressional Research Service. Online article. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40755.pdf>

⁵³ *Accession: Vietnam*. World Trade Organization. Online article. Available at: https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/a1_vietnam_e.htm

⁵⁴ Based on: Vietnam. Observatory for Economic Complexity. Online. Available at: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/vnm/>

In 2013, Vietnam imported 125 billion USD worth of goods. These included telephone (5.3%), integrated circuit (5.2%) and refined petroleum (5.5%). Major import partners of Vietnam are China (36.4 billion), South Korea (20.2 billion), and Japan (10.7 billion).

Figure 3: Vietnam's import



Source: *Vietnam profile*. Observatory for Economic Complexity. Online. [cit. 25.04.2016]
Available at: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/vnm/>

4 Know Thy Enemy: Czech Republic

To many Vietnamese people, Czech Republic represented a developed nation in the heart of Europe, where plenty opportunities can be found. The first Vietnamese generation arriving to the CR consisted mostly of workers enlisted in an exchange program between the communist Czechoslovakia and Vietnam at that time. After the Velvet Revolution, the majority of these workers switched their careers, earning their living through various means. More often than not, however, they have very little interest in learning about the culture in which they live: their Czech remained broken even after twenty years of use, and their knowledge of Czech history is barely better than a fourth grader's. This is understandable, as it is not uncommon for the Vietnamese shopkeepers and restaurant owners to work seven days a week, day in, day out; thus any motivation for learning about another country has been smothered by other pressures.

4.1 History: the Legends⁵⁵

The myths stated that a group of Slavic people once set off to the west from the region between the Vistula River and Carpathian Mountains to find fertile lands. They were led by Forefather Čech and his brother, Lech. Forefather Čech ascended Říp Mountain and observed the land stretching before him, saying. "Oh, comrades, you have endured hardships along with me, when we wandered in impassable woods; now at last we've arrived to our homeland. This is a great country, predestined for you. You shan't miss anything here, and you shall find pleasure

⁵⁵ Based on: Jirásek, Alois. *Staré pověsti české*. Albatros. ISBN 978-80-00-01213-1

permanent safety. Now that this plentiful land is within your reach, think of a suitable name for it.” The Slavs then named this land after their forefather: Čechy. Some people from the group left with Lech and settled in Poland.

In the story of O Libuši, the readers are introduced to Libuše and Přemysl. Libuše was a wise judge who rode on a white horse to a nearby hamlet where a young man, Přemysl, lived. One day, two men came to Libušín (the seat of Libuše) bringing a dispute. They had some disagreements about setting the border line between each other’s fields. Libuše dispensed her judgement, but the loser was not happy about her decision. “Why must we have a female judge?” He exclaimed. “Nations should be governed by men. Long hair means short reason!” Libuše listened to their protest; in the end, she agreed to look for a suitable husband. She then instructed them to take her white horse to ride forth and find a man, who ‘ploughed with two oxen and ate from an iron table’. The white horse rode for three days, not stopping to graze on the grass, looking neither left nor right. It stopped in front of Přemysl, who was ploughing with two oxen. To welcome the delegation, he served bread and salt on the iron part of his plough. They brought Přemysl back, who happily married Libuše. It is said that, during her marriage, Libuše had a vision of the future capital Prague, a ‘city whose glory touched the stars.’

The Maidens’ War began shortly after Libuše’s death. Přemysl ruled in her stead, and he began to promote male rights. The female population suffered because of the sudden inequality. Vlasta, Libuše’s chambermaid, rebelled against Přemysl. Bohemian women rose up to answer the call to arms; men and women waged a war against each other. The men, at first, laughed at the women’s effort. Vlasta sent her most beautiful warriors and spies to infiltrate the men’s castle. This seduction strategy paid off, and led the women from the castle Devin to a few victories. One popular tale from this period spoke of a figure named Ctirad, who was tricked by Šárka, a noblewoman from Okořina. Šárka captured Ctirad and tortured him to death. The valley where all this happened is now called Divoká Šárka (or Wild Šárka). The women then gathered their forces to storm the men’s castle, named Vyšehrad. A bloody siege ensued. The women were beaten and the men emerged victorious. Vlasta was killed in this battle. Šárka, tortured by her conscience, leapt to her death from the highest cliff of Divoká Šárka, now called Divčí skok (Maiden’s Leap). Devin was burned to the ground and afterwards, men ruled the Czech lands.

4.2 History: the Dynasties

What is now known as the Czech Lands has a diverse history behind it. Throughout the centuries, these lands have changed names as often as they have changed rulers. Up until the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after WW I, this country was referred to as the Bohemian Crown. With the Přemyslid dynasty on the throne, Bohemia rose from the remnant of its predecessor, the Great Moravian Empire. The Přemyslids secured their power with relative ease as Great Moravia had been weakened by years of internal conflict and constant harassment from Magyar tribes. They submitted to becoming semi-vassals to Frankish kings by converting

to Christianity in the 9th Century. Bohemia kept a close relationship with the East Frankish Empire, which would eventually become the Holy Roman Empire in 962.⁵⁶

The first rulers to use the title 'King of Bohemia' were Vratislav (1085) and Vladislav II (1158) of the Premyslid Dynasty, though this tradition did not last long, as their heirs would later return to the title of dukes. Kingship would become hereditary under the rule of Ottokar I and his grandson Ottokar II. The Bohemian Crown flourished immensely under Ottokar II's reign; he conquered an empire spanning from Austria to Slovenia – the first and only time Czechs had access to the Adriatic Sea as an independent state. It is no surprise that such a king would be considered one of the greatest Bohemian rulers of all time. He was dubbed the Iron and Golden King (Král železný a zlatý): iron for his military prowess and gold for his vast wealth. He was a strong proponent of trade, law, and order, and thus he signed an open immigration policy so that skilled craftsmen could freely settle in his domains. The East Prussian city of Königsberg was named after his honour for his support of the Teutonic Order headquartered there.

As stated above, Ottokar II was considered one of the greatest kings to grace these Bohemian lands. Who are the others, then? To many Czech minds, the answer is simple: *Karel IV*. And rightly so, for Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia, had left an astonishing legacy before he died. He was the first Bohemian king to claim the Imperial crown from Rome.⁵⁷ Thus, the Bohemian lands enjoyed a period that is now remembered as the Golden Age. Prague became the capital of the HRE. Arts and culture prospered. Many edifices still bear the name of their patron till this day: Charles Bridge, Charles University, Charles Square, and Karlstejn Castle, just to name a few. The impressive Prague Castle and Saint Vitus Cathedral were also constructed under his patronage. In present day CR, Charles IV is still honoured as 'Otec vlasti', or the Father of the Country.

In the early 17th Century, the Bohemian Crown was plunged into a dark age as the Thirty Years War ravaged Europe. Emperor Matthias had died, and his successor and cousin, Ferdinand, was fiercely Catholic. Bohemian Protestants feared for their religious freedoms; Ferdinand in turn, wanted to purge these heretics from his domains. The Battle of the White Mountain was the result of such conflicts. The Imperial forces won a decisive victory there, and this led to the collapse of the newly-formed Protestant revolt. The Thirty Years War dealt a crippling blow to the Czech lands: the population declined by one third by expulsion and execution of Protestants, as well as other factors such as disease, famine, and war.⁵⁸ For three centuries onwards, the Czech lands became a state within the sprawling Habsburg Empire. Many Czechs do not remember of this period with much fondness, for much of Czech culture vanished under the Habsburgs' rule. The Bohemian Crown lost its political and economic powers, becoming no more than a province in the Habsburg Empire; foreign troops devastated the countryside;

⁵⁶ Cantor, Norman, F. *Civilizations of the Middle Ages*. Harper Perennial, 1994. pp. 213-215. ISBN. 9780060925536

⁵⁷ Speváček, Jiří. *Karel IV. Život a dílo (1316-1378)*. Praha, Svoboda, 1980, p. 242

⁵⁸ Krejčí, Oskar. Styan, Martin. *Geopolitics of the Central European Region: the view from Prague and Bratislava*. Ústav politických věd SAV, 2005, p. 293. ISBN 8022408522

Germanization meant the decline of Czech language; and the early religious reform, pioneered by Jan Hus, was violently suppressed.

In the mid-18th century, the country experienced a relative period of prosperity under Maria Theresa's enlightened absolutism. Inspired by Enlightenment philosophers, Maria Theresa and her son, Joseph II, administered the lands of the Bohemian Crown with more efficiency and better results than their predecessors. One of the most influential acts implemented by Maria Theresa was the education reform in 1775.⁵⁹ Children of either gender from six to twelve had to attend school, though this idea was met with hostilities in many villages. The Empress dealt with the opposition by arresting the dissidents. The enlightened rule of the Habsburg Monarchy whittled down the last remaining trace of the former Bohemian Crown. German now dominated the country as the main language used in governmental institutions. This would eventually become the catalyst for the Czech national revival in the next century, with the advent of nationalists such as the poets Karel Jaromir Erben, Karel Hynek Macha, and Karel Havlicek Borovsky.

At the end of WW I, the Habsburg Monarchy collapsed, paving way for a new nation to emerge from its ashes. The foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 was the result of a marriage of two culturally and linguistically similar countries: Czech lands and Slovakia.⁶⁰ The First Republic lasted from 1918 until 1938. This young state was afflicted with plenty of issues: racial diversity, differing religious and traditional norms, and income, economic and industrial differences. However, Czechoslovakia quickly overcame these obstacles, and by 1938, it had become the 10th largest industrial power in the world.⁶¹ The happy ascension of the Czech and Slovak people was short-lived. Nazi Germany annexed the Sudetenland, the border regions of Czechoslovakia in the west and north, under terms agreed by the Munich Agreement. On 16 March 1939, the Wehrmacht advanced into Prague and proclaimed the Czech lands as 'Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia'. This occupation lasted until German surrender in 1945. After the defeat of Nazi Germany, Czech people quickly learnt that they had simply exchanged one unpleasant master for another equally so. The Soviets and the Allied Powers agreed to divide Europe into two halves, with the Iron Curtain acting as an imaginary border. Unfortunately, Czechoslovakia fell onto the wrong side of the fence, and was dominated by a communist dictatorship for another 41 years, from 1948 till 1989. This was a period of economic stagnation and cultural censorships. Like everywhere else within the Soviet sphere of influence, the economy was centrally planned in a five year basis. Efforts were made to escape the communist constraints. Prague Spring was a promising start, where Alexander Dubcek, after his election as First Secretary of the Communist Party of CSR, attempted to grant additional rights to his citizens as the first step towards

⁵⁹ Morkes, František. *Tereziánska reforma v českém školství*. Online Article. Available at: <http://clanky.rvp.cz/clanek/c/Z/827/terezianska-reforma-v-ceskem-skolstvi.html/>

⁶⁰ Sword, Keith. *"Times" Guide to Eastern Europe*. Times Book. 1990, p. 53. ISBN 072300348

⁶¹ Rybák, Pavel. *Ekonomika CSSR v letech padesátých a sedesátých*. Britské listy. Online Article. Available at: <http://www.blisty.cz/art/59458.html>

democratization. His reform was quickly crushed on 21 August when the Soviet Union and member states of the Warsaw Pact invaded the country to put an end to the new movement.⁶²

The Velvet Revolution, or Gentle Revolution, started in 1989. It was a non-violent uprising that transitioned Czechoslovakia into a democratic state, more specifically a parliamentary republic. The Communist Party, having lost its support from the collapsed Warsaw Pact governments, peacefully resigned under pressures from street protests. The first democratic election was held in Czechoslovakia in June 1990, the first since 1946. Two years after, Czechoslovakia was divorced, and two new nations came into existence: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This Velvet Divorce also ended bloodless, with both states attaining recognition from the USA and other European states. As of now, the Czech Republic and Slovakia maintain a friendly foreign relationship towards each other, though no movement to re-unite the two countries has emerged.

4.3 Czech Culture, Education and Economy

The official state symbols of the Czech Republic are the national anthem, flag and coat of arms. The standard of the president bears the slogan “Truth Prevails”, or “Pravda vítězí”. The national anthem, *Kde domov můj*, was written by the playwright Josef Kajetán Tyl as a musical piece for the comedy *Fidlovačka, aneb Žádný hněv a žádná rvačka*. It soon gained popularity amongst Czech people, and was informally adopted as the anthem of a nation seeking its own identity within the Habsburg Empire. The first verse of the anthem praised the beauty of the Bohemian land, while the second verse praised the nobility of its people. The coat of arms of the Czech Republic consists of a double-tailed lion rampant on a red field, first and fourth gules (symbolizing Bohemia); a checkered eagle on azure (for Moravia); and a black eagle on yellow (for Silesia).⁶³

Czech people celebrate Christmas on 24 December every year. Traditionally a Christmas dinner includes carp or schnitzel with potato salad. Gifts are not believed to be brought by Santa Claus, but by Baby Jesus, who receive wish letters from Czech children a few weeks before Christmas. Easter, or Velikonoce, is a very cheerful holiday for Czech people. Families decorate and paint Easter eggs together to celebrate the arrival of spring. Willow twigs are braided together to form *pomlázka*, which young boys use to whip the bottoms of young girls and women. The girls then would have to give painted eggs to their ‘assailants’.

The history of education in the Czech Republic began with the arrival of Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia in 863. These two men were Byzantine Christian theologians and were credited with the invention of the oldest known Slavic alphabet, named Glagolitic alphabet. This writing system was created in order to introduce and spread Christianity throughout the Bohemian

⁶² Ouimet, Matthew. *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 2003, pp. 31-35. ISBN 978-0-8078-5411-2

⁶³ *O státních symbolech České republiky*. Portal.gov.cz. Online article. Available at: <https://portal.gov.cz/app/zakony/zakon.jsp?page=0&nr=3~2F1993&rpp=15#seznam>

lands.⁶⁴ The second great step was made by Charles IV in 1348, when he opened the first university in Central Europe. The second university, Palácký University, was established in 1573 in Olomouc by the Jesuit Order to counter the Protestant-influenced Prague University.⁶⁵

Nowadays education in the Czech Republic is free and compulsory. Children from 6 to 15 have to attend school. The elementary school (základní škola) consists of nine grades. The first level is composed of five years of education, where pupils usually learn Czech, Mathematics, Arts, Music, Basics of History and Geography, and Handworks. The second level is from the sixth to ninth grade, where the compulsory education ends. Students face a wide variety of choices once they finish their elementary education. They can continue with gymnasium schools, where they can pursue further education similar to the one they already know in the previous grades, albeit at a higher level. They can study at professional schools that come in many branches, such as industry-oriented (construction, chemistry, engineering), agriculture, IT, health, and economy. Should they prefer a mixture of gymnasium and professional schools, they can apply to lyceums. After four years of studying, students must pass the Maturita exams to graduate. Obligatory subjects are Czech (grammar, writing, and oral literature exam) and a secondary language. Additionally, students must take two or three more subjects according to their specialization.⁶⁶

Higher education (universities) in the Czech Republic consists of private, public and state institutes. Public universities are without tuition fee (for those studying in Czech language). Foreign students have the option to study in Czech for free, or pay for English courses at prices ranging from 1500-6000 euros per semester for bachelor and master studies. Amongst the most well-known universities in the Czech Republic include Charles University in Prague, Czech Technical University in Prague (founded in 1707 by the Bohemian nobility), University of Economics Prague (currently the largest university in the fields of economics and business in the CR), Masaryk University in Brno (named after the first president of the Czechoslovakia), and Mendel University in Brno (named after the ‘Father of Genetics’, Gregor Mendel).

Amongst countries within Central and Eastern Europe, Czech Republic’s economic system is the most industrialized. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the CR has become the most prosperous country of the post-Communist states in Europe. The principal industries are steel, chemical, and machine production, crystals and glass, brewing, electronics and pharmaceuticals. Main agricultural products are wheat, hops, potatoes, and sugar beets. The largest export and import partner of the Czech Republic is Germany by far, covering 30-31% of CR’s total export and import, easily dwarfing the second places: Slovakia (9% import) and Poland (8,1% export).⁶⁷ The Financial Crisis of 2008-2010 caused the CR’s economy to

⁶⁴ Franklin, Simon. *Writing, Society and Culture in Early Rus, 950–1300*. Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 93

⁶⁵ Sadler, John Edwards. J. A. Comenius and the Concept of universal education. Barnes & Noble. 1966.

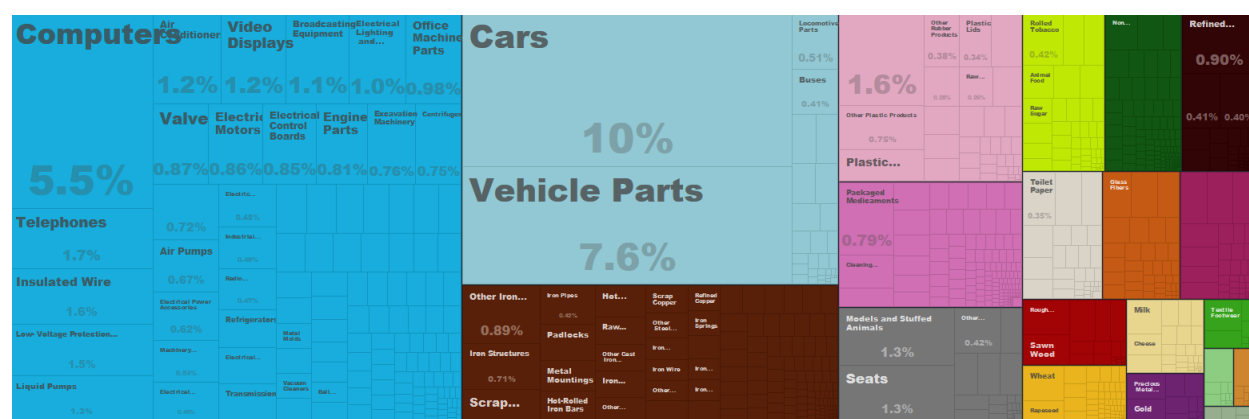
⁶⁶ Based on: Education GPS. Country profile: Czech Republic. OECD. Online article. Available at: <http://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=CZE>

⁶⁷ Based on: Czech Republic. CIA World Factbook 2015. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ez.html>

experience a period of stagnation. In 2012, Czech government increased the value of VAT from 20% to 21% in 2013 for basic VAT, and from 14% to 15% for reduced VAT. Another problem the CR faced was foreign trade: it is considered an export-oriented economy, and with foreign trade declining, it saw a number of problems, including state budget deficit.

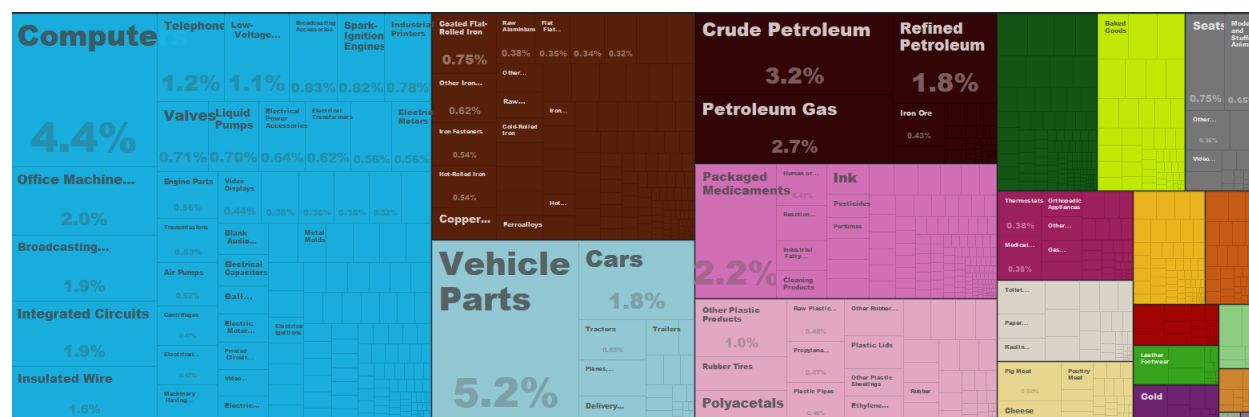
Amongst the most valued Czech brands in the international market are Škoda-Auto and Škoda Investment (automotive industry and investment, respectively), Baťa Shoes (footwear, leather products), AVG Technologies (antivirus software), Tatra (heavy transport vehicles), Kofola (soft drink producer), Plzeňský Prazdroj (brewery), and Moser Glassworks (Bohemian crystals).

Figure 4: Czech export



Source: *Czech Republic profile*. Observatory for Economic Complexity. [Cit. 25.04.2016]. Online. Available at: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/cze/>

Figure 5: Czech import



Source: *Czech Republic profile*. Observatory for Economic Complexity. [Cit. 25.04.2016]. Online. Available at: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/cze/>

The CR is reducing its dependency on fossil fuel as a source of energy in order to keep pollution in check. Nuclear power currently generates about 35% of the CR's total electricity output,⁶⁸ and this share should increase with the expansion of new nuclear power plants (Blahutovice and Tetov are under consideration). Natural gas is procured through Russia via the Friendship pipeline (roughly three-fourth of the consumption); the remaining one-fourth comes from Norway via Germany. South Moravia also has small oil and gas deposits, which only cover a very small fraction of Czech demand (253 million m³ of natural gas production vs. 8 477 million m³ consumption).⁶⁹

4.4 Geography

The Czech Republic contains 13 regions and one capital city with regional status. Traditionally it consists of three historical regions: Bohemia to the west, Moravia to the east and a part of Silesia to the north-east. The Moravians are as equally proud of their vineyards and wine-related products as Bohemians are of their famous beers and breweries. The capital city Prague dominates the Czech lands politically and culturally. It bears the poetic name of 'the City of a Hundred Spires' and it does live up to its moniker, having captivated countless musicians, poets and writers alike.

The Czech Republic perhaps one of the very few landlocked countries that can be recognized from satellite images without drawn borderlines. This is due to the fact that the country itself is surrounded by several mountain ranges acting as natural borders. The highest peak in the Czech Republic is Sněžka, at 1602 meters. Most of the country's terrain is relatively flat, dominated by rolling plains, forested areas and occasionally sloping hills. The longest river is Elbe, though Vltava is considered the national river, having its name immortalized by Bedřich Smetana in his collection of symphonic poem *Má vlast*.

The idyllic beauty of Czech natural landscapes; well-preserved national parks; abundance of mineral springs have attracted legions of foreign tourists over the years. Major tourist attractions in the CR include Prague and its historical center, Kutná Hora and the Cathedral of St. Barbara, Český Krumlov, the Palace of Lednice-Valtice, and various famous castles such as Karlstejn, Hluboká nad Vltavou, Křivoklát, Konopiště etc. Not only do Germans contribute the most to the CR's exports and imports, they also make up the largest portion of visiting tourists every year, numbering at apx. 1,559,000 (out of 8,126,000 total visitors) according to 2014's statistics. The second largest group is Russians, at apx. 695,000.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Nuclear power in Czech Republic. World nuclear.org. Available at: <http://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-a-f/czech-republic.aspx>

⁶⁹ Czech Republic. CIA World Factbook 2015.

⁷⁰ Český statistický úřad. Available at: https://www.czso.cz/documents/11350/20545491/cru020915_5.xlsx/5eab5ea2-2fa8-4388-8a42-c49ca30283c7?version=1.0

5 Czech-Vietnamese Relations⁷¹

According to the Czech Embassy in Hanoi, diplomatic relations between the then Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Czechoslovakia began on February 2, 1950. Czechoslovakia was the fourth country to open diplomatic channels with communist Vietnam at that time, after China, Mongol and the Soviet Union. CSR opened its first embassy in December 30, 1954 and in 1955, Vietnam opened its embassy in Prague.

The relationship of the two countries between the years 1950-1959 can best be described as a beginning of an attempt to co-operate in the fields of economy and industry.⁷² One of the most important acts was the signing of the first agreement on economic and technical support, selling goods on debit, and exchanging goods between the CSR and DRV. This agreement was concluded in Hanoi 1955, allowing Czech Republic to showcase its products in the capital city of Vietnam for the first time. Certain goods such as construction cranes, transport vehicles, scientific equipment, electric cables, textile garments, and medicines were delivered free of charge. In return, the Vietnamese exports to the CSR contained tea, wolfram, tin, soya, rattan, and buffalo leather. The Czechoslovakian government also accepted the very first large group of Vietnamese citizens in the same year. These were relocated to permanent residence in Chrastavě u Liberce.

Since 1993, Czech Republic has made many visits to Vietnam and vice versa. These visits were meant to promote and strengthen the relationships between the two countries, to encourage trade, and to discuss work and study exchanges. These include high-level visits such as the one made by Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet in 1997, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in 2007, Prime Minister M. Zeman in 1999, and President Vaclav Klaus in 2006. As of now, Vietnam's main imports from Czech Republic are machinery and equipment, glass and medicine. Its exports to Czech Republic include agriculture products and garments. According to the Vietnamese Embassy in CR, however, the trade turnover remains 'rather low as compared to the potentials of the two countries'. Investment into Vietnam from Czech Republic has increased to 35 million USD. These ventures are mostly in the form of glass-production, brewery, kaolin and construction materials. Czech Republic has provided humanitarian aids for Vietnamese regions devastated by natural disasters. Former president Klaus, during a visit to Vietnam, decided to give 100.000 USD to help a province in Central Vietnam recover from a hurricane. In 2002, when a huge storm caused havoc in Prague, Vietnamese overseas and enterprises were active in providing relief efforts.⁷³

⁷¹ Based on: *Bilateral Relations with Vietnam*. Czech Embassy in Hanoi. Online Article. Available at: http://www.mzv.cz/hanoi/en/bilateral_relations_with_vietnam/index.html

⁷² Martinkova, Sarka. *Pocátky cesko-vietnamských vztahů (1950-1959)*. Klub Hanoi. 2007. Online Article. Available at: <http://klubhanoi.cz/view.php?cisloclanku=2007041601>

⁷³ Vietnam and the Czech Republic Relations. Vietnam Embassy in the Czech Republic. Online article. Available at: <http://www.vietnamembassy->

PRACTICAL PART

6 Research

This section is dedicated to the Czech cultural standards from the point of view of Vietnamese workers and students. The process of interviews, research methodology, profiles of respondents shall be described here. Afterwards the results shall be interpreted, and the author shall provide recommendations for the Vietnamese so that they can improve their contacts with Czech counterparts.

6.1 Profiles of the Respondents

Vietnamese students in the Czech Republic

In order for the students to provide sufficient insight towards their interaction with their Czech peers, I have selected these following criteria. One, they must at least be studying in grammar schools or universities. Two, they must have been interacting with Czech peers on a daily basis for at least three years. 12 students were selected for interviewing.

Vietnamese workers in the Czech Republic

The Vietnamese workers were selected in a wide variety of businesses and jobs so as to provide a broader pool of opinions. Although the majority of Vietnamese workers in the CR are independent entrepreneurs, this sample will also include Vietnamese white-collar workers. Like with the students, I have selected 12 candidates for interviewing, bringing the total number of respondents to 24.

6.2 Interview methods

24 respondents were selected in order to provide a sufficient sample. These 24 respondents live and work in Prague and its nearby suburbs. The interviews happened between March 20 until April 20, 2016, and they all were personal and face-to-face. The author recorded the entire interview sessions so that they can be further analyzed later.

The interviews were designed to last between 45-60 minutes per person. 26 core questions were asked. These questions were catalogued into three categories. The first category consisted of opening questions to warm up the respondents: *How long have you worked with Czech culture? How often do you work with it? In what environment?* We then go into the open questions in the second category with: *What surprised you the most when interacting with Czech culture? What offended you? What shocked you? What do you find yourself unable to adapt to even now?* And lastly we approach the third category, where we derive our questions from the theoretical part.

These include Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Fons Trompenaars' Model of Cultural Differences: *What are the relationships between teachers and students? How do Czech bosses interact with their workers?* (We are asking about Hofstede's Power Distance) *Are rules and law more respected, or are human relationships more important?* (We are asking about Trompenaars' Universalism vs. Particularism). Interviewees were encouraged to share some little memorable stories that they can recall and describe in details. These stories should revolve around events that they somehow feel important to the discussion.

In the *Working Paper: Cultural Standards Method* written for Vienna University of Economics and Business, the authors recommend that 'if the interviewer comes from the same culture as the interviewee, then he or she will be perceived as more sympathetic'. Once the interviewer makes a good impression, the interviewee will be more inclined to share his/her story. It can also happen that clashes between understanding of direct and indirect communication may occur due to interviewer and interviewee belonging to different cultures. These forms of bias can be easily avoided if both interviewer and interviewee come from the same culture.⁷⁴ Thus, in order to provide a comfortable setting for the interviewees selected for the research purpose of this paper, I shall communicate in whichever language is more comfortable for my partners (largely Vietnamese to those who were born in Vietnam, and Czech to those who were born in the Czech Republic). The results shall be translated into English as truthfully as possible in order to avoid 'losses in translation'.

6.3 Interview Result and Interpretation

Based on the interviews, 6 cultural standards were identified in the school environment and 5 were identified in the working environment. For the sake of comparison, the standards from school environments were pegged against Hofstede cultural dimensions, while standards from work environments were pegged against Trompenaars' dimensions.

Vietnamese students in the Czech Republic

6.3.1 Rules and authority in school

The Vietnamese students perceive Czech school settings as less autocratic than Vietnamese's. Czech schools have less strict rules, and even so, the risk of breaking school rules is quite low since the enforcement of said rules remains weak compared to Vietnamese schools. The relationship between teachers and students are not so distant. The hierarchical structure of a classroom seems to be less complicated as well, as a Vietnamese first grade classroom usually consists of a teacher, and below him, a class' representative (usually a pro-active, role-model student), then a vice-representative, then four to five group representatives (representing groups

⁷⁴ Fink, Gerhard; Kolling, Marcus; Neyer, Anne-Katrin. *The Cultural Standard Method: Working Paper*. Europainstitut. WU Vienna University of Economics and Business. 2005, pp. 13-14. Available at: <http://epub.wu.ac.at/450/1/document.pdf>

of ten students each), then there are still these titles: vice-representative of studies, vice-representative of labor, vice-representative of conducts and et cetera. And this is just for the first grade of six year olds. A Czech classroom seemed too simple compared to this pseudo-political structure of a Vietnamese class.

Tran Tin, age 19, Business Academy: *"I remember when I went to the Czech seventh grade. I was maybe 12 or 13. Kids at that time liked to make pranks and jokes, especially to a foreigner like me. You know, teenagers used to do and say plenty of stupid things. So we exchanged insults. I got into conflicts with them. One day it got pretty bad. Instead of insults we exchanged punches. The matter didn't end there, as our fight was interrupted by the bell signaling the end of the break. So we agreed to meet after class to resume our brawl. A crowd gathered to watch, resulting in quite a commotion. The teacher of our class stepped in just right when I was whipping a belt at my opponent's head. Needless to say the crowd had already dispersed at that point. We stopped fighting and I walked away, mumbling something to the teacher. The fascinating thing was that neither I nor my opponent was disciplined. Nothing happened to us. No parental complaints. No scolding from the headmaster. I was told that if I were in a Vietnamese setting, I would have earned a much, much more severe punishment. Possibly even in the form of direct scolding and humiliation in front of the entire school by the headmaster."*

Hong Lan, age 22, Charles University: *"What I notice the most when I first came to a Czech school was that everybody was equal. It seems to ironic that the Vietnamese system of education wants to remove the inequality gap by forcing us to wear uniforms, yet also creates a complex hierarchical structure within a classroom. You have all these representatives and vice-representatives and prefects and whatnot. It's like a political system! There is nothing like that here. Even the task of washing blackboards and arranging tables is evenly divided each week, whereas in Vietnam you will have a vice-representative of labor in charge of that."*

Duong Hung, age 23, Metropolitan University: *"I can attest that the Vietnamese schools are much stricter. The school I went to in Ha Noi employed plenty of security methods to make sure its students behaved. First of all there was the warden, a teacher specializing in maintaining school discipline. His authority is second only to the headmistress. Oh, I remember how my heart always skipped a beat whenever I saw him, as I wasn't exactly a role-model myself (laughs). But that's not the end of it. Then you have a group of selected students who, instead of spending their 30 minutes break time relaxing like the rest of us, would observe school activities to catch misbehaving schoolmates and report them to the warden. Those were called 'red-stars', and their task included writing down the names of students who arrived late, visiting other classes to make sure everything was in order, and even checking on others' uniforms. Each month a class is allocated 100 points. The red-stars can deduce those points if your classmates had been fighting, littering, swearing and so on. The action of one can affect the whole collective, and this worked like some sort of psychological tactic. Even the teachers and the parents were anxious of those red-stars. Can you imagine that? Here in Czech schools you can arrive as late as you wish. At most all you need to do is apologize to the teacher."*

6.3.2 Distance between teachers and students

The majority of Vietnamese respondents consider the distance between teachers and students in the CR to be smaller. This is due to the fact that the Vietnamese culture places high emphasis on respecting the elders and teachers. Vietnamese students learn from early ages that they must revere those who teach them. They are exposed to proverbs and idioms such as: ‘A teacher is he who taught you even half a word’, and ‘One day a teacher, an entire life a father’. Thus, teachers in Vietnamese schools command the kind of respect that cannot be found anywhere in the Czech Republic, or the whole Europe for that matter. One curious thing that the respondents mentioned is that while Vietnamese teachers keep a high power distance towards their pupils, they are also more eager to help.

Yen Vi, age 19, Gymnasium. *“I think the relationship between a teacher and his/her students feels a bit distant here in the Czech Republic. Maybe it’s because I come from a different culture so it might be harder to connect with my Czech teachers. But based on my observations, Vietnamese students tend to arrange more activities together with their teachers. On November 20 (Vietnamese Teachers’ Day), we would collectively buy rose bouquets as gifts for our teachers, and he/she would sometimes invite us to their homes. I know March 28 is Teachers’ Day in the CR, but based on my observations, Czech students do not celebrate it with the same passion as the ones in Vietnam.”*

Thanh Nhan, age 22, Czech Institute of Technology. *“Vietnamese teachers have more authority in a class than Czech teachers. I don’t know how’s the situation now, but when I went to elementary schools in Vietnam, my teacher had the rights to physical hit you if you misbehaved. Most parents supported this. They believed we should be taught at early ages, and the best way to teach is through physical punishments. Czech teachers can’t do that here. If they do that, they risk being fired. I definitely feel like this authority also creates a gap between students and teachers in Vietnam. I joked freely with my Czech teachers, but never with my Vietnamese teachers.”*

6.3.3 Preference to think for one’s self

To Vietnamese students’ eyes, Czech peers are less dependent on their family structures. Czech students learn to find part-time jobs at much earlier ages, and they move out to live on their own by the time they reach mid-twenties. Conversely, it is not uncommon to find Vietnamese in their late twenties and early thirties living under the same roof as their parents and even grandparents. This also applies to relationships. Vietnamese students often enjoy a larger group of friends, whereas Czechs would rather keep their circle small, consisting of few closest friends.

Thao Hien, age 17, Business Academy: *“My Czech classmates enjoy much more freedom than me. Czech parents in general are not as controlling as Vietnamese parents. I would say Czechs learn to be independent at earlier ages than Vietnamese. It is very common for Czechs to go on road trips with friends for a few days or a week. But my parents would not let me go with my*

friends anywhere longer than 24 hours. They can be overprotective at times, and I know they aren't the only ones. My Vietnamese friend's parents act like this as well. I don't think it's a good idea. Sometimes I'm quite jealous of my Czech classmates because their parents allow them to walk on their own feet and learn from their mistakes. If you're looking for the reason why Western teens seem more independent than Asian teens, look no further than this."

Thanh Nhan, age 22, Czech Institute of Technology: *"Czechs prefer to move out on their own once they find stable jobs. I know some of my Vietnamese cousins who are around 27, 28 years old and they still live in the same house as their parents, even when they were married. The whole family, father, mother, son, and his wife, all together. This might have been the norm in the CR once, a few centuries ago, but I think most of my Czech friends would find it absurd. I think they would suffocate in such a household. In Vietnam, if you're a woman and you marry a man, you're supposed to love your man, obviously, but also his whole family. Here in the CR it's not so important. You love your boyfriend, you move in together, that's it."*

6.3.4. Overestimation of improvisation skills

Vietnamese students often remark that their Czech classmates think they are good at improvisations, but this is not the case. It's true that Czech students pride themselves over their abilities to improvise in classes (this includes, but not limited to: learning a day, or mere hours before a test; making excuses to teachers when arriving late or not arriving at all; and cheating during tests), however, this does not mean they are good at it. The Vietnamese students all agree that if their Czech friends ever have to study in a Vietnamese school setting, their improvisations will fail. They believe Czechs still have much to learn in this department.

Nguyen Anh, age 18, Gymnasium. *"It's funny how my Czech classmates keep postponing their studies. They're not very good at thinking long-term. Somehow they're proud of themselves because they can 'think on their toes'. I must say they're pretty creative at finding ways to pass a test without studying too much (laughs). I think they deal with risks quite well. This includes switching seats so they can copy from another classmate who studied, writing notes or math formulas on their palms and finer nails, faking illness and asking for the questions from classmates next day, and so on. What they don't realize is that sometimes an observant teacher can figure out these tricks and they get caught red-handed. The most sophisticated cheating methods actually come from some of my fellow Vietnamese students. They've never been caught!"*

6.3.5 The desire of gratify

One thing that most Vietnamese students find difficult to adapt to is how Czech students seem to not have any restraints regarding alcohol, cigarettes, and even light drugs. They familiarize themselves with these substances extremely early, sometimes even as young as during eighth and ninth grades. In a Vietnamese secondary school, students can be immediately expelled from their studies if they are caught using alcohol or even smoking a cigarette. When gathered together,

Czechs find it awkward to talk to each other without at least some sort of alcoholic beverages between them. Their usual hang-outs would be bars, dance clubs, or pubs. A group of Vietnamese students would be perfectly happy in a neat café or at a BBQ street stand.

Duc Long, age 19, University of West Bohemia. *“Czech students know how to enjoy life more than us Vietnamese. They get familiar with pubs, bars and discos way earlier. They know how to have fun. It’s not that us Vietnamese don’t know how to have fun, we just prefer to call it quit when it’s time to quit. Not the Czechs. The Czechs like to party late, sometimes into the morning. If they wake up late tomorrow, they’ll just skip class.”*

Thu Huong, age 20, University of New York. *“I’ve been to Vietnamese bars and Czech bars. The Czech ones are better. The Vietnamese are always worried about something. They get stressed easily, but they don’t know how to vent it all out. The Czechs are more care-free, I think. They have fun more often. Maybe this is why they all seem so nonchalant about everything, like nothing can worry them.”*

6.3.6 Panics before tests

The majority of Czech students do not study on a daily basis. They usually wait until the last moment to study, about two days before a test. The Vietnamese call this ‘jumping when the flood reaches your ankle’. Admittedly, five out of twelve Vietnamese respondents were guilty of this as well. When questioned why, they answered that this was how their classmates behaved, and slowly it became the norms for them. The remaining, those who had experienced Vietnamese education beforehand, agreed that their home schools constantly drilled them with compulsory homework and repetitions daily; thus they spent less time stressing about cramming in knowledge before a test.

Tuyet Nhung, age 21, Czech Institute of Technology. *“This is 50-50. Some Czechs I know like to study a few days before a test. They say they work better under stress, or something like that. The others study on a daily basis. I know a few Czech students who studied sparingly yet always manage to get good marks. Not perfect marks, but you know, really impressive considering how little they study. I think this comes down to the fact that they pay attention to class, or they digest new information quite well.”*

Tien Vu, age 23, Charles University. *“The majority of Czech students I know don’t study on a daily basis. There are exceptions of course. But most of them don’t feel the need to go through presentations every week. Some of them perform pretty well with this way of studying. The downside is that the day before the test, they have to stay awake late to study, sometimes until four or five in the morning. Personally I prefer to take it at a steady pace. Both methods are OK. Depends on your style, I’d say.”*

Vietnamese Workers in the Czech Republic

6.3.7 Taking one thing at a time

Vietnamese workers living here in the Czech Republic mentioned that their Czech business partners tend to do things based on an order. Some even linked this behaviour to ‘machine-like’, where everything must be done according to a pre-set structure, leaving little room for adaptation and changes. This can be explained with an example: Czechs, when moving from A to D, will first start with A, then move towards B, then C, and then D. Whereas Vietnamese would just take whatever is the easiest and fastest to deal with; they could start with D right off the bat, then B, then A, then C, and finally piece all four together. Such a difference in working methods often results in Czechs getting irritated at Vietnamese and vice versa.

Thanh Kim, age 46, shop-owner: *“This happens very often when I tried file in some papers for my residency permits. The entire process is very length. I go there three or four times before it’s done. The government workers there demanded many papers from me. On one occasion I had to provide proofs of my residency in Prague. They told me it’s OK to bring the housing contract with me. But in the end they were not happy with just that. They said there’s a problem that the landlord, who provided me with the rental contract, was not listed as the owner of the building where I stay. That owner was her husband. I tried to explain that they’re a family anyway. But no, the government workers insisted that I must also bring a contract confirming that the owner of the building (the husband) allowed the owner of the pension (the wife) to use his building. So I had to spend another week trying to get those papers. It sounds extremely clunky to me.”*

Nguyen Hung, age 55, independent entrepreneur: *“The most difficult people to deal with business-wise are those who graduated from an economics university. The ones with the PhD are especially difficult. They really like to apply what they learnt from their lectures into any live situations. It doesn’t matter what kind of problem it is, they always apply their text-book methods as soon as possible. I’m not saying that you shouldn’t apply your knowledge, but I think it’d be more helpful if you take a step back and try to think outside of the box. There’s no need to be so rigid. Flexibility. Like bamboo trees. That’s the Vietnamese way. We bend so we don’t break. If I’m to be totally objective, I’d say that the Czech way has more discipline. That’s what makes the Germans so efficient. Even though I know that Czechs like to complain that Germans are even more rigid! I can understand why both of these countries might view our Vietnamese working method as chaotic and unorganized.”*

6.3.8 Rewarding merits, not age

While the Vietnamese have an innate respect for the elderly, education, or even social standing, the Czechs act more rational in this matter, ie. they hand out rewards based on an individual actual performance. This means in the Czech society, a person must prove himself with his own merits in order to be recognized in his working environment. For instance, a person’s university is more like a place where knowledge is attained, not so much as a badge of honor. This is not the case in the Vietnamese society, because many biases still exist to this day: a person with

strong connections can find better jobs, in fact, connections play a vital role in a Vietnamese workplace; a person's education is also considered important, based on how prestigious his alma mater is.

Thuy Lien, age 35, importer: *"Czech workplaces are more fair, in my opinion. If you perform well, you'll have opportunities to climb higher. Certain ceilings may exist, sure, but not that terrible compared to Vietnam. Here it doesn't matter how old you are, you must prove your skills with your own hands. It's nice to graduate from a famous university, but if you slack, you'll be replaced by another. You don't get special treatments. In Vietnam, many companies keep graduates from respected schools like assets, even though those graduates underperform compared to other candidates."*

Quoc Anh, age 27, intern: *"My parents often tell me that it's not uncommon for Vietnamese people to pay some outrageous sum of money, like about 10.000 USD or more, to find jobs for their freshly graduated children. Those jobs aren't even great! They're some kind of governmental work at a provincial townhouse. The salary is about 150 USD per month. That's a terrible investment, yet it's the way it is in Vietnam. You need connections and a bit of 'favor' to land job. It was no easy task for me to find work here, but it's nothing compared to Vietnam. Czech corporate culture do recognizes merits. Czech bosses don't care whose son or daughter or how old you are, or what social circle you come from. What's more important is whether or not you can do your job."*

6.3.9 Restraining feelings

Foreigners often attribute the words 'unemotional' and 'cold' when describing Czech people. The Vietnamese candidates agree that they find this to be true. Czechs seem to like to keep their emotions in check. They do not use hand gestures broadly, nor do they talk loudly on the phone. At workplaces, they do not talk about family matters as often as the Vietnamese do. In fact, a Czech person will go to work and act perfectly normal around his colleagues, despite not feeling well inside. This can be explained that Czechs do not express their feelings around acquaintances or people they barely know. They reserve that act to closest friends and relatives only. In contrast, a Vietnamese person will likely pour out his/her feelings if asked as a form of relieving stress. Czechs keep their private lives and working lives apart from one another, whereas Vietnamese often mix those two together.

Van Nhan, age 35, Exxon Mobil employee: *"Most of my Czech colleagues tend to be more impersonal than my Vietnamese colleagues I knew in the past. The Czechs can be polite to you, even act friendly, but it will take longer time before they open themselves to you. Vietnamese colleagues would often hang out together, go on trips, or even invite each other to house parties. Such things happen rarely here. At most they would go to some pubs or bars. They also don't talk much about their families. Such topics are reserved to closer friends, not workplace colleagues. The Vietnamese are more open when it comes to such issues."*

Xuan Dong, age 39, CZC employee: *“It takes time for a Czech person to open himself up to you. They don’t visit each other’s houses as often as us Vietnamese do. I feel such visits are also more formal, as you must announce beforehand, bring gifts and so on. House visits in Vietnam seem simpler to me. When I worked in Vietnam I tend to interact with my colleagues at a deeper level. I would ask them about their days, how their sons and daughters were doing, how their dates yesterday went and so on. I’ve worked in the Czech Republic for ten years now, and I realize that I’ve stopped doing that, or at least not as often as I used to. I think it’s the environment. Czechs don’t really talk about themselves as much as Vietnamese do. They just prefer to be with their close friends, rather than having broad connections. I think they don’t like to mix working lives and personal lives together. Those two should stay separate.”*

6.3.10 No beliefs in higher powers

The Czech Republic has been described as one of the most atheistic countries in the world.⁷⁵ According to Czech Statistical Office in 2001, 60% of Czechs described themselves as irreligious, and only 32% identified themselves as religious. Thus, in the eyes of Vietnamese workers, their Czech colleagues seem to strongly believe that their fates should be determined by their own hands. The majority of Czechs do not pray to a higher power, and views churches, cathedrals and other places of worships as cultural and historical sites, rather than where they can ask for help. In contrast, a great number of Vietnamese workers still visit temples and shrines every year to ask for good fortunes from various deities. These people might not identify themselves as religious, but they still perform such activities because they firmly believe they reap better luck for the future. This includes bringing expensive and donating money to the temples where they want their prayers to be heard. While Czechs do believe in luck, they also accept that it is a concept beyond their control and they cannot change it with simple prayers. Thus they prefer to work on themselves.

Thanh Hang, age 44, shopkeeper: *“From my experience, the New Years were especially hectic as people from everywhere pour to monasteries, temples and shrines to pray for good luck and health. It can get bizarre sometimes. Unlike Christianity, the Vietnamese folk beliefs aren’t governed by any book. Traditions vary from place to place and people like to pray in their own ways. They’re very serious about it. They spend a lot of money buying sacrifices in forms of animals, money, clothes, charity etc. I don’t notice anything like that here. Some people do go to churches, but that’s a small minority. For Czechs, Christmas time is more about family gatherings, while New Year’s Eve is about friends and neighbors. To most Vietnamese, New Years are about worshipping ancestors and praying for luck and health.”*

Yen Nhu, age 40, restaurant owner: *“My relatives from Ha Noi like to ask for favors from temples during big festivals. A great number of Vietnamese do believe that their lives are being governed by something greater than themselves. They can be superstitious sometimes. The*

⁷⁵ W. Smith, Tom. Belief about God across Time and Countries. University of Chicago. 2012. Online article. Available at: http://www.norc.org/PDFs/Beliefs_about_God_Report.pdf

Czechs seem not to care too much about these things. They aren't as religious and they're more ready to take matters into their own hands."

Do Ly, age 45, shopkeeper: *"In our family, it's customary to have an altar where we place the pictures of our grandfathers and grandmothers. In a sense, we believe they still watch over us from the Heaven. During big occasions, like New Year's Eve and Lunar Festivals, we would light up incenses and place delicacies such as fruits, chocolates and meat on the altar. We pray for their spirits to come back to have the first taste of our meal, and we hope that they continue to keep us out of harm's way. Ninety-five percent of Vietnamese households keep this tradition, even abroad. We don't see such things here in the Czech Republic. The Czechs sometimes go to the graves with flowers, sure, but they do it because they want to respect the dead. They don't believe that the spirits can hear their prayers."*

6.3.11 Relationships above rules

Even though the respondents listed a long list of differences between Czech and Vietnamese cultures, in the end they concluded that both cultures behave similar in one way: relationships should have precedence over rules. This result should not be a surprise in the case of Vietnam as it is a collectivistic country, and much of its customs revolve around building relationships with other people. As for the case of Czech Republic, the respondents cited some examples from their experience where they felt that Czech people demonstrated tendencies to overlook rules to maintain relationships.

Quoc Anh, age 40, shop-owner: *"From what I've observed, Czech people always favor those they know over those they don't, even in a governmental setting where everything is supposed to be neutral. Maybe it's not as strong as in Vietnam, but the tendency to maintain relationships is still there. They're more forgiving when their friends make mistakes, but will lash out at strangers. Even in governmental settings they do play favorites occasionally, not as blatant as back home, but it's still visible, at least based on what I've seen."*

Bao Hoai, age 29, Alza employee: *"I think most people will value friendships over rules when push comes to shove. I've heard stories of Vietnamese parents protecting their sons from the law even though they'd made serious mistakes. The extreme cases would be parents remaining silent despite knowing their son had killed a person, for example. You hear those stories in the Vietnamese news from time to time. I don't hear such things as often in the Czech Republic. I think they value their relationships with other people. The point is not whether the Czechs value relationships more than the Vietnamese or not. The point is that the Czechs tend to obey the laws more than Vietnamese do."*

6.4 Comparing Results with previously mentioned Theories

As the interviews are based on the cultural standards method, it is not possible to compare the outcomes directly to those of Fons Trompenaars and Geert Hofstede cultural dimension

researches. This subchapter focuses on comparing the results to see whether or not there are differences between the results found by those mentioned authors and the opinions of the Vietnamese respondents.

Vietnamese students

Power Distance: Based on Hofstede's table in chapter 1.3, Vietnam indeed has a larger power distance compared to the Czech Republic (70 vs 57). The respondents agree on this topic as well. Only one respondent voiced her hesitation when asking about the distance between teachers and students in the Czech Republic. The majority agree that Vietnamese teachers command more authority in a classroom. They also cited that a Vietnamese classroom is much more hierarchical in nature, with many ranks dividing the class' population.

Individualism vs Collectivism: Hofstede listed the Czech Republic as a more individualistic country. This is a rather straightforward process as all respondents agree that Czech students learn to behave as individuals as young age, whereas Vietnamese students learn to belong to their collective.

Long-term vs Short-term Orientation: This is where opinions differ. Vietnamese students responded that they felt Czech students are more short-term oriented, citing examples of Czechs panicking before tests. Yet according to Hofstede, this should not be the case. On his graph, the CR scored 70 while Vietnam scored 57, making the CR more long-term oriented.

Uncertainty Avoidance: Vietnamese students praised their Czech peers for their abilities to face risks in a carefree manner. Yet again this is not true according to Hofstede's findings, as he gave the CR a score of 74, making it a country where people do not tolerate risks well. On the other hand, the Vietnamese came up with 30; this supports the Vietnamese students' view on their abilities: they do enjoy facing risks and unknown elements.

Indulgence vs Restraint: Both the CR and Vietnam ended up with similar scores, 29 and 35 respectively. This implies both cultures are restrained. Though based on the opinions of the respondents, Czech students seem to clearly be the more indulgent ones. This is, again, in conflict with Hofstede's research, albeit by a smaller margin than previous two instances.

Vietnamese workers

Universalism vs Particularism: In the book *Riding the Waves of Culture*, Trompenaars' research results showed that the Czech Republic values rules rather than relationships.⁷⁶ This also rang true when the Vietnamese workers voiced their opinions. The Czech culture does value laws and rules, according to both professional researches and the Vietnamese workers.

⁷⁶ Trompenaars, Fons. Hampden-Turner Charles. *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing. 1997, pp. 33-40. ISBN 1857881761. Ebook available at: http://ocan.yasar.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Riding-the-waves_Part-1.pdf

Achievement vs Ascription: Trompenaars' research show that Western nations such as Germany, Canada, and the UK lean stronger towards rewarding those who deserve to be rewarded. South American and Asian countries tend to lean towards favoring people based on their age and social status. Surprisingly the Czech Republic was listed as ascriptive, belonging to the same group as Egypt and South Korea. The respondents, however, feel that the Czech corporate culture is more achievement-oriented, much more so than the Vietnamese one.

Sequential vs Synchronic: In the eyes of the Vietnamese respondents, Czech people work in sequences, meaning they like to move from one point to another based on a planned structure. Although Trompenaars' research did not include Vietnam, the country still shares many characteristics of several East Asian countries mentioned in the results. Thus it is safe to assume that the Vietnamese culture favors a synchronic way of thinking, whereas the Czech culture leans more towards sequential.

Neutral vs emotional: The respondents answered that Czech people tend not to express their emotions freely, or at least not as freely as the Vietnamese. According to Trompenaars' characterization, this places the Czech culture as neutral, less affective.

Internal vs External: An internal culture believes that a person is solely responsible for everything that happens to him/her. An external culture thinks that a person cannot fully control the outcomes of his/her life. The respondents agree that the Czechs believe their lives are theirs to control, whereas the Vietnamese accept that there is a higher power influencing their fates. This result agrees with Trompenaars' research (if we assume that Vietnam and China share similar cultural characteristics).

7 Suggestions for Vietnamese people to deal with Czech counterparts

This last chapter is dedicated to presenting several suggestions to help Vietnamese people deal better with their Czech business partners and schoolmates. As stated in the introduction, Vietnamese and Czech people interact on a daily basis, and whether they like it or not, this is not something either group can avoid. As both groups hail from vastly different cultures, it is natural that conflicts may arise from these interactions. Thus, I hope these suggestions will prove helpful to those who wish to mitigate the damage that such conflicts might cause, and will serve as a small mean to bridge these two cultures together.

1. **Spend time learning the Czech culture and languages:** This cannot be stressed enough. Many Vietnamese people feel frustrated when their voices are not heard by the Czech authority, when the language barrier becomes too large to overcome, when ignorance of Czech laws gets them into troubles, when misunderstandings of Czech culture isolate them from the society they live in. This can be easily remedied by dedicating time and effort to learn more about the Czechs. Even something as simple as

acknowledging Czech beer, hockey players, or cuisine (the sources of Czech pride) can help warm up the initial interaction immediately.

2. **Be polite and humble:** Most Vietnamese people, due to lack of command of the Czech language, ‘forget’ the polite form of Czech speech and therefore present themselves as obnoxious and rude, thus damaging their first impression. This can be avoided by studying the basic polite phrases, such as the magic words ‘Thank you’, ‘Please’, ‘How are you?’ and ‘Good morning’. All Vietnamese learn these phrases on their first days here, yet a large majority does not use them as often as they should. Mastering the etiquettes of saying the magic words immensely improves one’s first impression, and thus it is recommended to learn these basics of basics first.
3. **Be aware of Czech perception towards Vietnamese people:** This relates to the phrase written by Sun Tzu two thousand years ago: Know thy enemy. It is important for the Vietnamese people to be aware that their decades of living here have created some sort of ‘national image’ in the minds of the Czech population. This image can be positive in the heads of some Czechs as well as it can be negative in the heads of others. This simply cannot be changed. Being aware of this fact will help the Vietnamese to better deal with their expectations. This means they can root out those who view them negatively and spend more time on those who view them positively, thus ensuring good interactions for both parties.
4. **Avoid physical confrontations:** While it might seem blunt to include physical violence into an academic work, it is also necessary as it is also a part of the reality. Vietnamese people do get involved in various heated arguments and brawls with the natives and foreigners in the Czech Republic. The Vietnamese might even feel justified in doing so, citing self-defense as the primary reason. However, this is not recommended, no matter whether they are in the right or not. What they tend to forget is that they live in a foreign country, and their actions will be judged more harshly by the natives. Thus, it is much more preferable to resolve a conflict in a diplomatic manner. Physical confrontations should be avoided at all costs as they are lose/lose situations: even if the Vietnamese person wins, the resentment in the Czech opponent will linger, and other Czechs will likely support their own.
5. **Find a common ground:** The Vietnamese culture cited the bamboo as its national symbol. This symbolizes the Vietnamese pride towards their own adaptability, as bamboos bend under strong wind, but do not break. They should apply that mindset when dealing with Czech people more. Many arguments happen because the Vietnamese insist on doing things their own way, forgetting the fact that they are no longer standing on Vietnamese soil. Even when they find themselves unable to fully adapt to the Czech ways, it is better to yield a little bit and try to find something in common with the Czech counterpart. This requires both sides to discuss the matter in a tactful manner so as to avoid pointless arguments. The goal is to asserting the ‘we’ in the discussion, rather than stressing the ‘I’.

6. **Do not generalize:** One of the worst mistakes a Vietnamese can make when interacting with foreigners is that they tend to generalize an entire population after one or a few negative experiences. This generalization prevents the Vietnamese from noticing positive experiences in the future and creates a tunnel vision that forces them to focus on only the negativity they experienced earlier. Any further interaction between Czech and Vietnamese people is thus soured substantially.
7. **Keep an open mind:** The Vietnamese older generation is seen as more conservative, meaning they prefer to stick to their own customs and dislike learning about new ways of doing things. Naturally this creates yet another barrier that prevents them from assimilating into the Czech society. They are quick to criticize Czech traditions, practices, and customs. Even though they do not say it out loud, this kind of mindset limits their chance to co-operate with Czech companies and people. This explains why Vietnamese small entrepreneurs prefer to do business with their own race. Should they wish to broaden their opportunities, they must adopt a more open minded approach towards Czech ways of life.
8. **Don't overestimate your own abilities:** The Vietnamese tend to vastly overestimate the capacity of their country and countrymen. Vietnamese first graders learn from their textbooks that Vietnam is a blessed country, with 'forests of gold and seas of silver'; that they are descendants of dragons and fairies; that their race is hard-working, cunning and adaptable. It is not wrong to be proud of one's own nation, certainly, but too much pride can create a sense of superiority, more importantly, undeserved superiority. This kind of thinking must be eliminated the moment we step foot on a foreign country.
9. **Use humor to lighten the atmosphere:** Compared to their German and Austrian neighbors, Czech people are seen as rather down-to-earth. They appreciate well-placed jokes and witticism no matter whether the setting is formal or informal. More often than not, a good laughter is all it needs to break the ice between two complete strangers. It's true that different cultures have different senses of humor, so in this case, we ought to avoid overly dark jokes and political satires.
10. **Be pro-active:** This is a suggestion aimed at students of highschools and universities. The Vietnamese way of teaching emphasizes on teachers passing down information, while students copy it to their notes. Vietnamese students are not encouraged to think outside the box, nor are they taught to challenge the teacher's opinions. Thus when studying in a Western university, they find themselves struggling with the active teaching styles. Many do not ask when they don't understand, fearing embarrassment, and even when they do know the answer, they would rather remain silent so as to avoid showing off. Vietnamese students should assert themselves in class discussions more, and try to question their teachers when they feel something is wrong. They must get rid of the thinking that answering their teachers equals being a know-it-all.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis is to provide a deeper insight towards the interaction with the natives of the Vietnamese workers and students in the Czech Republic. Eleven cultural standards were identified, of which 6 belonged to the study environment and 5 belonged to the working environment.

The first chapter of Theoretical Part consisted of introducing the readers to the definition of culture and its elements from various perspectives. The following subchapters dealt with cultural standards and dimensions as a tool to characterize cultural differences. The works of three most well-known authors were described here: Alexander Thomas, Fons Trompenaars and Geert Hofstede. The second chapter delves into the spheres of intercultural communication. It lists problems that may arise from such situations and attempts to suggest general ways to solve those conflicts. It also presents a list of competences that help make the process of intercultural exchange smoother for all parties.

The third chapter familiarizes the reader with Vietnam from the perspective of a Vietnamese author. The reader here is presented a condensed picture of Vietnamese history, culture, and customs. The information introduced here should hopefully be enough to explain Vietnamese behaviors – why they do things in certain ways. The fourth chapter focuses on the Czech Republic, again mainly on its history, people, politics and culture. The goal of these twin chapters is to bridge the gap between the two countries and to present a clear picture of the two main subjects in this paper. The last chapter of Theoretical Part is dedicated to the relationship of the two countries over the course of history.

In Practical Part, personal qualitative interviews are used to identify Czech cultural standards from Vietnamese perspective. 24 respondents were selected from both school and work environments. The interview results were dissected and analyzed. Once that process was done, said results were compared with previously mentioned theories from the first chapter. Lastly, based on the respondents' answers, a list of suggestions was made in the seventh chapter, where the reader can find ten proposals that might help a Vietnamese person interact with his/her Czech peers in a more fruitful manner.

The research questions of this thesis were answered in the following way: in response to the first question “How the Czech-Vietnamese cultural standards differ in study and work environment?” the research showed that there are significant differences in Czech-Vietnamese cultural standards in study environment compared to work environment. None of the cultural standards can be found in either groups. The results of the second research question “Which aspects of work environment do the Vietnamese perceive as the most different?” show that the two cultural standards *No belief in higher powers* and *Rewarding merits, not age* were the most outstanding ones. In response to the third research question “Which aspects of study environment do the Vietnamese perceive as the most different?” the cultural standards *Distance between teachers*

and students and *Rules and authorities in school* and *Preference to think for one's self* came out as the most noticeable.

The contents of this thesis may be used by a Vietnamese student or worker who has arrived to the Czech Republic recently and needs help navigating the new environment. It may also be used by a Czech person if he/she wishes to gain deeper insight towards the behavior of the Vietnamese people living in his/her country. As for real application, I believe that during the course of writing this thesis, I have also expanded my knowledge on both Czech and Vietnamese cultures thanks to the research and reading process. Should I ever have a need to advise Vietnamese workers in Czech firms, I will put my newly gained knowledge from writing this thesis to good use.

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ENCLOSED FILE

Questions for Vietnamese respondents:

1. How long have you worked with Czech people/How long have you studied in the CR?
2. How often do you have to interact with your Czech partners or schoolmates?
3. When was the first time you run into problems with them?
4. What differences do you find between Czech and Vietnamese business/school environment?
5. How well would you say you're familiar with Czech culture in general? How well do you know Czech politics, law, history, cuisine and so on?
6. What do you find strange about the way Czechs conduct their business or study?
7. What makes you uncomfortable when dealing with Czech people?
8. What surprised you the most?
9. What shocked you?
10. Is there anything in particular that Czech people do that you find offensive?
11. Is there anything about Czech culture and people that you still can't understand?
12. What is the relationship between the teacher and the student in study environment? What is the relationship in work environment?
13. Do you think that principles and authority are respected here in CR compared to VN? Where are they respected more?
14. What do you think is more valued here? Rules or relationships?
15. What about women at workplace compared to VN? Are they more respected, better paid?
16. Do you think Czech people can plan more than three years ahead? Are they good at planning their work?
17. Do Czech people spend their money on trivialities more than Vietnamese people? According to your observations, do you think they should save money more?
18. Would you classify your Czech partners as risk takers? Or do you think they're too cautious?
19. Do Czechs express their feelings freely? What about the Vietnamese?
20. Do Czechs like to brag about their achievements? Do they like to appear in fancy clothes, cars, accessories etc.?
21. Do Czech individuals prefer to think for themselves, or do they like to contribute to the community?
22. Usually who are the leaders (in a business, class, group), the men (boys), or the women (girls)?
23. Do Czechs like to invite their business partners and friend to their homes as easily as the Vietnamese?
24. Do you think Czechs like blame things on their circumstances?
25. Do Czech people do things step by step, or do they do everything at once?
26. Overall, what good qualities do you find in Czech people? What are the bad ones?

