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Academic Experts In U.S. on Vietnam Almost Nonexistent

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Despite nearly a decade of costly United States involvement with Vietnam and her people, American scholarly expertise on Vietnam, particularly North Vietnam, is almost nonexistent.

There is no scholar in the United States who devotes a major portion of his time to studying current affairs in North Vietnam, a survey by The New York Times discovered. And there is no scholar specializing in Vietnamese studies with a tenured professorship at any American university.

Fewer than 30 students in the country are studying Vietnamese. By comparison, three times that number study Thai and more than 600 graduate students are studying Chinese.

Error in Judgment Seen

Prof. John K. Fairbank, director of Harvard University's East Asian Research Center and the man generally considered the founder of modern Chinese studies in the United States, calls the academic situation a "scandal."

"It is fantastic that with our educational resources and our Government's commitment in Vietnam, we are so backward," he said.

"It has meant misjudgment of the enemy, a very serious problem. If we had known about the Vietnamese the way we knew about Britain, we would have known that a few months of bombing would not make them give up."

Professor Fairbank cites as a major reason for the lack of Vietnamese studies the aca-

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democratic community's distaste for Vietnam because of the war. "Academics are fed up with the whole subject of Vietnam," he said. "They would like to abolish Vietnam if they could. So students are not interested in going and studying about it."

Interviews with university officials tend to confirm this impression. While there have been some instances where students signed petitions demanding programs in Vietnamese studies, as at the University of California at Berkeley, these requests have been few in number and have had little influence.

Despite the student protest last year at Berkeley, for example, the university's Center for South and Southeast Asia

Studies still does not offer instruction in Vietnamese.

The difficulty and time required to master Vietnamese present another obstacle to the development of Vietnamese studies. "It takes at least two or three years to learn to read Vietnamese, and then if you want to really understand Vietnamese you must also learn Chinese," Alexander Woodside, a young Vietnam historian at Harvard, explained.

"Furthermore, most students want to be able to go to the country they are studying about and do research there, and for Vietnam that is largely out of the question."

Mr. Woodside also said that decreasing Government assistance for foreign-area studies and the uncertain state of the economy have made it very difficult to fund new programs in Vietnam studies.

Until last year, when the Agency for International Development made a grant of \$1-million to Southern Illinois University and the Ford Foundation provided \$300,000 to Harvard, no grants specifically earmarked for Vietnamese studies had ever been made.

Harvard is reportedly having difficulty raising the matching

funds required by the terms of the Ford grant, because of lack of interest among university officials and alumni. "There are just too many other subjects that are considered more important," Professor Fairbank said in a recent interview.

Six schools offer courses in the Vietnamese language: Southern Illinois, Yale, Cornell, the University of Hawaii, Johns Hop-

kins, and the American University in Washington, D.C. Cornell's program in Vietnamese language, history and politics, which is widely believed to be the best in the country, has produced only three doctoral degrees since 1960.

Only one school in the country, Yale, offers Cambodian. Last semester two students were enrolled.

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