

# 越南高等教育管理結構 革新的轉折

范氏麗 \*

## 摘要

儘管越南國內生產總值大量分配於教育，但越南高等教育仍然落後於世界。探究其中，是否治理結構的缺失為主要原因？若其為主要原因，是否越南應該借鏡被受稱讚的美國教育？或者因兩國之間的文化差異，美國教育模式應調整為適合越南的教育模式？抑或極大化美國教育之益處？上述問題將於本文分成三部分：首先，探討越南高等教育失敗之原因，如廢弛的教育體制、政策之不可行、不明確的教育目的。再者，簡述美國教育體制的優點，如自主權、分權治理、行政管理及責任。最後，透過修正美國教育模式進而提供越南高等教育缺失之暫時性建議。

**關鍵詞：**美國教育體系、越南高等教育、高等教育治理結構、教育政策

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\* 范氏麗，（胡志明市）越南國家大學人才發展中心副主任

電子郵件：lypham63@gmail.com

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# Innovation of University Governance Structure: Vietnam Higher Education at the Crossroads

Ly Thi Pham\*

## Abstract

Despite a substantial amount of the GDP allocated for education, Vietnam's higher education is still lagging far behind in the world. Is the defect of governance structure its main cause? If so then whether Vietnam should take the American education in toto, a system quite successful and widely appreciated by the world – to be a model to learn from? Or due to a certain cultural difference between these two countries, should the American model be modified to suit Vietnam and to maximize benefits for it? All these questions are the subjects for a discussion here in this paper. This paper consists of three parts: the first part searches for the causes of problems of Vietnam higher education such as its obsolete and ineffective governance structure, its policy unpracticability, and its unclarity with regard to higher education purposes; the second part briefly presents the strength of American education system such as its autonomy, its rational division of governance, administration and management, and its transparency and accountability; the final part is my tentative suggestion of a system, modified from the U.S. model, to deal effectively with the defects of Vietnam higher education.

**Keywords:** American education system, higher education in Vietnam, university governance structure, education policy

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\* Ly Thi Pham, Deputy Director, Centre for Human Resource Development, Vietnam National University at Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

E-mail: lypham63@gmail.com

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## **I. Remarks on Leadership and Governance Innovation in Vietnam**

### ***A. Innovation, Leadership and Governance***

The backwardness of Vietnam higher education is, perhaps, caused by the disfunction of a system that no longer properly works in a global and competitive world. It is an outdated and inert organization that could hardly function in another totally different “flat world,” which requires innovation and competition for survival and progress (Wikipedia, 2011a). As a closed, one-linear and one-dimensional body, discouraged to creative work, critical thinking and autonomy, how could Vietnam higher education innovate and compete? Competition was once a strange word in such a self-closing, self-satisfying and self-feeding body, just as innovation is a dangerous concept in any monolithic and mono-logical society, in which all activities were ideologically planned and whimsically executed. One might have needed a miracle, or another revolution, to wake oneself up from this “dogmatic slumber” (Locke, 1690). It happened indeed in the late 1980s. The monolithic socialist countries suddenly realized that the world is marching not towards a terrestrial paradise reigned by the proletariat but rather towards a post-modern world in the sense of post-industrial, intellectual industry and informative age (Lyotard, 1984). It is, more than ever, becoming “flat” (Friedman) and “open” (Popper, 1951). In such a world, all players are competing in an equal basis and with equal rules. But in order to compete and to win one has to absorb the rules of the postmodern game, i.e. the conditions of the age such as communication, participation, feedback, criticism, experiment, adventure, reform, etc. Moreover, one has to invent new games, to say with Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) (Wittgenstein, 1969). And that is possible with innovation

only. Innovation is the necessary conditions for the growth of knowledge and the progress of society. It is the imperative of our age (Clayton, 2002; Luecke & Katz, 2005, Wikipedia, 2011b). The new dictum “innovation or death” is now replacing Kant’s famous motto of “sapere aude” (Kant, 1784/1963),<sup>1</sup> becoming the *Zeitsgeist* of Hegel (1770-1831), i.e. the spirit of our age (Hegel, 1807/1977). It is now verified by the dynamic of market, consumerism and pragmatism. To run against such currents is like to shoot in one’s own foot.

Innovation is nurtured by good leadership. And good leadership cannot be possible without a deep understanding of collaborators, a true respect for them, a fair knowledge of the issues, a right decision, a better organization and planning, etc. However, in a closed society, leadership relies rather on power, i.e. the authority from “above.” Leadership is restricted in a function of maintaining the *status quo*, keeping order, controlling and awarding or punishing. Leader has to perform the orders of his superiors, to follow the policy of his party, and to render his service to his government. In Vietnam, some university leaders show themselves the best practitioners of such kind of leadership. In contrast, in an open, democratic, diverse and global society, leadership is an art of consensus-achieving, and effectively dealing with all possible factors and problems of the past, the present, and the future. So, the problems of Vietnam higher education is seen in the defects of its governance structure or in the faults of its current leadership practice which is spirited and shaped by the arch-conservative Confucianism (Kim Dinh, 1967).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), “Eine Antwort an der Frage: Was ist die Aufklaerung?” Trans. “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (1784). Trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), p. 3: “Sapere aude [dare to know] “Have courage to use your own understanding!” – that is the motto of enlightenment.”

<sup>2</sup> “Arch-conservative” Confucianism is referred to the ideological Confucianism since Han dynasty. To Kim Dinh, a pionier of Viet-Confucianism, and his followers, the original Confucianism is more open, sensible to humanity. It reflects faithfully the aesthetic dimension, people’s interests and needs, as seen in *The Book of Odes and Mencius*. See Kim Dinh (1967).

## ***B. Leadership and Education***

Since effective leadership is generally considered as a key factor for the success of any organization, its development becomes a focus of our education. Great leaders are fully aware of the importance of human resources on which the success and profits of any organization depend. Hence they know how to unleash the know-how, imagination, creativity, initiative, and proactivity of their people to generate intellectual capital, and to compete fairly, wisely and successfully. That means the art of leadership is one of the main factors deciding the success of governance. In this sense, governance structure is a structure or system faithfully reflects the art of leadership. But leadership is not by birth but rather by “Bildung” (Wilhelm Humboldt, 1767-1835), i.e. cultural education. It is shaped, criticized and upgraded by human experiences (Erlebnisses) in dealing with human needs, social organization, socio-political conflicts; and it is motivated by human hope, desire and interests. That means, leadership is formed, reformed, and changed with the ages and with human needs. It is decided rarely by geniuses but more commonly by trained or cultivated talents. Leaders are those who are learning and know how to deal most effectively with human problems. And here is the role of higher education which is concerned with human resource, knowledge and leadership. Human resource is tacitly considered as the most important capital, in the sense that it generates all other capitals. Similarly, knowledge is not only the most important product for the so-called intellectual market, but more than that, it decides the existence of human race. In this sense, leadership is inseparable from higher education.

Sound leadership and appropriate governance structure would be decisive in fostering talents, in generating and developing knowledge, in innovating technique, in making business smoothly running, and in shaping a good ethics of co-living, co-working and creating. The lack of true leadership is reflected by the lack of ethical codes, trust, energy,

creativity and efficiency; while passivity, idleness, rampant plagiarism, irresponsibility, environment deterioration, etc. are the logical results of bad leadership. Therefore, any true reform of higher education should start with a reform of governance structure. Here is the main purpose of my criticism of the actual governance structure of Vietnam higher education, and my suggestion for a form of leadership, modified from the American model of education.

## II. Governance Structure of Higher Education

### A. Governance - A new concept for Vietnam

A clarification about governance is to be made here. The concept of governance is relatively new to Vietnam educational world. No clear-cut distinction between governance, administration and management has been made so far. There is only a single term *quan ly* that encompasses all these three distinct but relating concepts.<sup>3</sup> But this term is too vague, unprecise, and overlapping... so that it is often misunderstood and then misused, and misapplied, especially in the field of education. *Quan ly* is habitually taken as a measure to control, to oversee, to restrict and to punish. And that is the current way practiced by educators and bureaucrats, police, and even business people in Vietnam. This vagueness leads to the problem of why governance has been misunderstood and mis-implicated in this newly developing country. Only much recently after the so-

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<sup>3</sup> *Quan ly*, originally from the Chinese 管理, consists of two functions: control, oversee (*quan / kuan*) and manage, handle (*ly*). In the feudal society, and especially in a “closed” society (“not open” in the sense of Karl Popper’s *Open Society and Its Enemies*, 1945), *quan ly* is basically understood as a certain kind of management by means of control, restriction, and rigid supervision, including punishment. See Popper (1971).

called Renovation (“Doi Moi”, 1986), Nguyen Van Linh’s version of M. Gorbachev’s political glasnost and economic *perestroika* (Wikipedia, 2011c),<sup>4</sup> Vietnamese scholars have tried to pinpoint the exact meaning of the “capitalist concepts” of administration, management and governance, and to demarcate the border among them. They incline towards the typical American governance which they would prescribe as a learning model.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Vietnamese Dictionary*, Hoang Phe (1996) refers to administration as the activity of directing “all sectors and common procedures” to management as “to organize and direct, or supervise activities based on certain criteria;” and to governance as “to management and to direct the day-to-day activities.” Of course, Hoang Phe’s definitions are taken from Western recent literatures but in a less condensed manner, and as such they are still unprecise, often overlapping, and, consequently, unable to show different but relating functions of governing, administrating and managing in practice. This vagueness and unpreciseness cause a seemingly chaotic understanding and implication of *quan ly*, making it ineffective, overlapping and energy wasting. But more problematic is the careless and bad-intentional misuse of *quan ly* leads to the rampant abuse of power, etc.<sup>6</sup> Administration, or more exactly, bureaucracy (*hanh chinh* 行政) — a rational system intended to facilitate, simplify the process

<sup>4</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Secretary General of the already defunct Soviet Union, had desperately launched a program of reform with two strategies: openness and renovation or rebuilding, restructuring (glasnost and perestroika) to save his communist party from its immanent death. Nguyen Van Linh, the then Secretary General of the Vietnamese Communist Party followed Gorbachev with a similar plan of *Doi Moi* (renovation) in 1986 (Wikipedia, 2011c; <http://wikipedia.org/wiki/doimoi>). Ironically, the Soviet Union Communist Party died faster with such policy. This forced Deng Xiao Ping (鄧小平) of China and Vietnamese leaders to adopt a new approach (cai liang/ cai luong/ 改良), the so-called “socialist oriented market economy.”

<sup>5</sup> Their voices are expressed in many websites on education such as: <http://www.vietnamnet.vn>; <http://www.lypham.net> (the website of Pham Thi Ly); <http://www.nguyenvantuan.net> (the website of Nguyen Van Tuan), <http://giapvanblogspot> (blog of Giap Van Duong) and others.

<sup>6</sup> <http://vietnamnet.net/hanhchinh> or <http://chungta.com/hanhchinh>

of working and to make it more effective — becomes what Vietnamese sarcastically describe as the bad habit of “taking torture (lay *hanh*) to be the main purpose (lam *chinh*).” Bureaucracy becomes the nightmare for Vietnamese citizens and even foreigners who have to work with administrators. Similarly, without any understanding of modernization as a process of implicating scientific methods, rational means of production, etc., to develop society, one distorts it as a short-cut and easy way to get rich (di tat don duong). In my view, in order to point out the defects of university governance structure of Vietnam, one has to set the record straight, by pointing out the incorrect understanding of governance, administration and management among Vietnamese officials.

Here, I would opt for the definition of these terms in the now widely accepted *Wikipedia* and by others authors such as Gayle, Bhoendradatt (ERICdigests.org/2004-4), Swansson, Mow, and Bartos (2005).<sup>7</sup> Governance means a set of rules and systems to manage and control organizations’ activities. More specifically, governance is the means by which the leading authority sets and guides the goals and values and then monitors the process of execution of its organization through policy and procedures. Actually, the word “governance” is etymologically derived from the Greek verb κυβερναω (kubernao), and later from the Latin origin *gubernare* that suggests the notion of “steering.”<sup>8</sup> Today it simply refers to the method or system by which an institution is run.

Similarly, the term “administration” is used to refer to the “day-to-day activities of implementing policies by means of a combination

<sup>7</sup> Gayle Dennis John, Tewarie, Bhoendradatt, White, A. Quinton, Jr “Governance in the Twenty-First-Century University: Approaches to Effective Leadership and Strategic Management.” Source: ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education. Source: <http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-4/governance.htm>; James A. Swansson, Karen E Mow & Stephen Bartos, ed., *Good university governance in Australia* (The University of Canberra: National Institute for Governance, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Plato was the first philosopher who used the term *kubernao* in a metaphorical sense (Wikipedia, 2011d). Quoted from *Document on etymology* prepared by the European Commission at Corinne (n.d.).



of resources.” In the academic institutions, administration is a branch “responsible for the maintenance and the supervision of the institution.” (Wikipedia, 2011e) So, the administrator is often identified as the manager in a certain sense. Actually, administration requires more than just management. The administrator assumes a greater function and takes more responsibility.<sup>9</sup> He has to “direct people towards the accomplishment of certain goal,” to safeguard, supervise, foresee, make policy and execute it and to search for human resources and financial resources. In short, he is the last one responsible for the survival and progress of the institution.

The term “management” is even more specific. It refers directly to the implementation process, that is, to direct or carry on business. Management means to handle (the manual act of running) business, as seen from its etymology: “The verb *manage* comes from the Italian *maneggiare* (to handle) which in turn is derived from the Latin *manus* (hand)” (Wikipedia, 2011f). Management consists of different but relating activities which are oriented to the same goal, such as planning, organizing, staffing, leading, controlling, researching and even supervising (Wikipedia, 2011f). But not all managers are trusted with all of these functions. More than often one adopts a clear division of workloads and responsibility among managers, administrators and governors. In the academic institutions, for example, manager is more than often the one who directs other people to implement a given plan, a study program or a research project, making them smoothly running. Planning is more than often given to administrators while policy setting and deciding are the rights of governors. What distinguishes governance from administrative decisions is that governance tends to be more active at the beginning of the leadership process and in the establishment of policies, while much of what happens later is the administration’s business. Evidently, governance

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<sup>9</sup> According to *Wikipedia* (management), op. cit., there are levels of managers: top-level managers, middle-level managers and first-level managers. Chief administrator (governor, president) is the top-level manager of an institution.

assumes the most important role. If the steering goes wrong, no matter how well made or attractive the vehicle is, it won't be able to get to its destination.

## ***B. The Current Model of Governance Structures in Vietnamese Universities***

The current model of Vietnamese universities' governance structures has been shaped and executed since the 1950's and implemented in the 1960's. Despite heavy criticism, it remains fundamentally unchanged until most recently. Even at the height of renovation period (in the late 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s), the change of governance structure seems to be rather superficial. The basic structure, i.e. its centralized power, remains stubbornly as unchanged. And that contrasts sharply to the rapid change of the infrastructure of Vietnam. But such resistance is a desperate fight in a losing battle. Vietnam is in change, and that is an irreversible course.

Let us return back to the problem of governance in Vietnam. If governance refers to decision-making, then the questions of "who decides and how to decide" should be of a particular importance. These questions seem to be as strange as superfluous to the academia so far. With limited autonomy, and dictated by the authorities Vietnam higher education institutions function with serious difficulties. Ministry of Education and Training, takes a special role, perhaps, one that has far greater powers than those of the board of trustees. It provides funds, dictates policies, nominates and selects presidents (rectors). It used to directly takes part in administrating, decision making and finalizing. During last decades, it might put its hands in every activities, academic as well as non-academic, such as controlling curriculum, deciding tuition rates, setting the rules for admission, planning and setting the quota of enrollments for each year, supervising student activities, labor unions, punishing, and so on. Academic leaders are *de facto* its delegates. And so is the board

of trustees. They must follow several guidelines set by MOET such as format of certificates, annual admission quota, faculty's salary scale or even curriculum. However, this situation has been changes significantly in recent years.

To be fair, the centralized model might be seen as appropriate in the beginning stage of a newly independent state where the economically centralized apparatus was run by the *apparatchik*.<sup>10</sup> In such a stage and in such a system, there was no competition, no need for innovation. The *numerus clausus* system was dictated at the whim of the state. Only a small percentage of students were permitted to have access to higher education. Higher education was regarded as a reward for those who have had some merit, and whose parents and brothers have made some contribution during the Vietnam War. Only with a small number of institutions, and with a not too complicated system of socio-economics, as well as a minimal demand for university and college education, and in a self-closed world, this centralized model might be met with no protest. And that was the case.

Now, however, with the high birth rate, and with an irresistible globalization, more problems are emerging. Consequently, one has to face stronger competition in order to survive. One realizes that centralized strict control and excessive enrollment would result in a low education quality. It would hurt economic growth. It would reduce the chance for success.

In fact, the socio-economic conditions of Vietnam today are far different from those in the 1950s or 1960s. Globalization and international competition put Vietnam in a state of "to be or not to be" (Shakespeare), especially after Vietnam's admittance into the World Trade Organization (WTO), and its acceptance of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Facing the world, Vietnam realizes that its higher education is lagging far behind other countries, even behind its close rivals in the

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<sup>10</sup> A Russian term referring to the bureaucrats in a centralized bureaucracy system under the severe control of the Communist Party prior to M. Gorbachev's perestroika.

Southeast Asia.<sup>11</sup> Its education system is unable to produce competent talents to deal with its backwardness, and to compete with the world. Without competent human resources, Vietnam is helpless to transform itself. Its economy would be stagnant, unable to feed its hungry people, not to mention, to compete with the world. Vietnam painfully realizes that the most basic issue now must be the question of how to reform education. Any healthy and lasting economics must rely on human resources.<sup>12</sup> And that is the “open” secrecy behind the success of the “Asian dragons” like Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea.

### ***C. The New Ideology***

That is true that the rulers have taken education as the corner-stone for reform. They begun the reform with a new but rather complicated and almost incomprehensible policy, the so-called “socialist oriented market economy”. That is an attempt of introducing the market dynamic to socialism and enforcing socialism on the market. By replacing the socialist mode of production with the capitalist one, the rulers believe that such policy would produce a kind of miracle transforming Vietnam into a new dragon. Apparently, they might be right in short run. China and Vietnam were able to keep themselves from the tragic downfall that the former Soviet Union and its satellites had suffered, and seem to jump forwards with a great leap in economic growth. However, the sad fact is, no miracle happens so far. With many problems in education and socio-economy, “socialist oriented market economy” are seriously in question. The right answer to the problem of higher education lies deeply in the problem of governance structure that has been affected significantly by the ecosystem around the universities. Hence, any correct and effective answer to the

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<sup>11</sup> Nguyen, Van Tuan & Pham, Tuan, Nguyen Van & Ly, Pham Thi (2011).

<sup>12</sup> Lee Kwan-yeo, former primer minister of Singapore, once advised Vietnamese government to take education as the best means for the building of nation. [Http://vietnamnet.net/lee\\_kwan\\_yeo](http://vietnamnet.net/lee_kwan_yeo)

question demands first an answer to the question about the obsolescence of the current higher education that is logically linked to the problem of governance structure.

### ***D. An Inversed or Perversed Structure***

As I have argued in the opening remarks, the symptom of crisis of governance structure begun with a misunderstanding and misimplication of governance, administration and management. The confusion of these three functions leads to an unclear division of functions and responsibility, and to the abuse of power. Misuse of human capital and resources is a consequence of the abuse of power which is rampant in all organizations and which paralysed innovation in education. Teacher and researcher have to wait for the nodding of their presidents who again ask for the permission from the MOET; and again these MOET bureaucrats wait for decision from a higher rank. That is a long red tape with no responsible one. Consequently, instead of promoting creative teaching and innovation, such system paralyzes motivation and dynamics. Weaknesses in scientific research and industrial application (in comparing to the Southeast Asian countries (ASEAN) like Thailand, Malaysia, etc.) is an obviously bad consequence of the unclear demarcation of different fields, functions, roles and arbitrary power.<sup>13</sup>

Misunderstanding of governance is seen more clearly in the current structure of university. Passivity, inactivity, ignorance, etc. are the best means to protect officials, since to act means to risk. In such a structure, and with such a “defensive” mind among officials, running university means following the order of the leaders. The command of leaders is more important than consensus. University leaders could be selected not on the basis of competency or talents but in some certain, on their “relation,”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Tuan V. Nguyen & Ly, T. Pham (2011).

<sup>14</sup> Vietnamese proverb: “The prince will inherit the throne, while the son of a janitor in a temple will follow his father’s step.” (Literally, “the son of the king will become king / the son of a “little monk “will clean the garden”.

etc. In short, that is a structure built solely on power which is arbitrarily granted. Such structure would distort most functions of a good governance. As such, it does not encourage activity and creativity and does not provide the framework for transparency. It lacks appropriate policies to control the system effectively and, therefore, does not support integrity. In addition, because the decision is made by central governance bodies, this structure excludes the participation of stakeholders, local schools and communities.

The question is how and to what extent can Vietnamese people change their current system? Should Vietnam take the model of American universities—which is constructed on different political and socio-economic backgrounds? And if not an American model then which model? Such question requires further questions concerning the substance, methods, conditions, the subjects and the objects of education as well as the needs of Vietnam and its people. To my purpose, I would like to restrict my discussion in the subject of organization, and more specifically in the governance structure of education.

## **IV. Governance Structure in the U.S. Higher Education**

One of many answers to these questions could be found in the American model of university governance structure. The American model is selected, partly because of its outstanding achievement in the last century and its non-dogmatic and pragmatic nature, partly also because it fits better to the age of globalization and informatic sciences.

### **A. *Why the American Model?***

America, compared to European countries like Italy, Spain, France and Germany, is not a nation of long academic tradition. It was a time

when Germany prided herself on being the cradle of academic tradition. Berlin University (founded in 1812, later renamed after its founder as Humboldt University), had taken research and service as its ends and as such had succeeded in captivating the attention of the world.<sup>15</sup> New values, new ideas, tremendous scientific progress, innovation, creative work, and effectiveness in many fields of human life are the results of Humboldt's fight for the autonomy of university, for science as the end of research and for excellence. Humboldt's success had captivated the intellectual world, and his idea had been taken first by German universities, then by American institutions, and nowadays by the world. But only with top universities<sup>16</sup> that the U.S. high education is able to set a standard,<sup>17</sup> and is deeply affecting the world. Therefore, American university is becoming *de facto* a model for many other countries.<sup>18</sup>

Its secret weapon for great success is the governance structure that is based on the best principles of governance: (1) democracy is the way to achieve consensus; (2) trust, (3) rules of laws are the basic principles

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<sup>15</sup> See Humboldt University Story (Wikipedia, 2011h). Robert Anderson (2010) in his entry "The idea of a University today" (Wikipedia, retrieved 9 Dec. 2010) wrote: "Further, it has been claimed that the 'Humboldtian' university became as model for the rest of Europe." Or: "The structure of German research-intensive university, such as Humboldt, served as the model for institutions like Johns Hopkins University..." <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper.98.html>

<sup>16</sup> The so-called elites or top-institutions, the Ivy-League (Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, Cornell, University of Pennsylvania, Brown, Dartmouth), and others. See *The U.S. News Report*, Special Issue on U.S. Higher Education Ranking.

<sup>17</sup> Universities and Colleges World Ranking of different system like *Times Higher Education Supplements* (THES), *Quacquarelli and Symonds* (QS), and especially the *Ranking of Shanghai Jiao Tong University* (ARWU) all place American universities at the top. Since the establishment, ARWU has always ranked American universities among the top best. Harvard enjoyed an almost absolute dominant place in all rankings.

<sup>18</sup> It is well known that China is among many countries who adopt the US model, and with remarkable success. In a short span of time, China has successfully upgraded its obsolete universities, once lagging far behind international universities, transforming them into world recognized institutions. The story of Beijing Tsinghua University and Peking University would impress even most critical educators (Tông, 2006).

for accreditation and transparency; (4) effectiveness and efficiency serve as the motivation for hard working; (5) participation would stimulate the sense of co-responsibility; while (6) equity and (7) inclusiveness would warrant fairness and the rights for everyone.

Relying on these principles, the U.S. Department of Education delegates more power to schools, gives them more autonomy. Schools have to shoulder full responsibility, and they have to warrant the quality of their own educational programs. In such a system, accrediting organizations are the independent NGOs whose only rules are objective and scientific criteria, transparency and accountability. As such they can preserve their full objective attitude, and deserve trust from the academia. They are assigned with many functions such as determination of qualities, control of academic activities and evaluation. The criteria set by them are usually the result of a consensus based on collective experiences, critiques, experiments, updates, and so on. But these criteria are not absolute and immune from criticism. Debates, discussions, new experiments, or say with Karl Popper, “falsification” and “verification” (Popper, 1963) are taken as the necessary means to ensure the principles of effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, accountability, democracy, consensus, participation, inclusiveness, etc. That means these criteria are not the products of a single individual, or a group, a party, a religious organization or a corporation. They are the intellectual products of generations of educators, parents, students, philosophers and administrators. Thus, American governance structure is not formalistic, abstract, and impracticable. It is the fruit of a certain kind of pragmatism (John Dewey, 1859-1952) (Dewey, 1916). And here is the reason of my option for the American governance structure that would be a good model for Vietnam. An adoption of the American model demands for a more radical change of social, political and economic structure and of the way of thinking and living. It is a difficult task, but worth of learning.



## ***B. The Governance Structure of American Universities***

Despite the diversity of the U.S. higher education system, its governance structure and principles are strikingly similar, simply because all institutions are rationally constructed. If the primary goal of governance is to enable educational entity to fully realize its stated mission and objectives, and to assist it in securing benefits in the most effective way then its structure should be arranged in full compatibility with missions, and its methods or its means should be built to achieve them. In a certain sense, a rational structure functions like an organ, or a body with all its relating parts.

There is a governing body in each university with different names such as board of trustees, governors or regents. All these terms are translated into Vietnamese as “hội đồng quản trị,” the council of governors. Whatever it is called, the governing body has the ultimate responsibility for academic quality and integrity, the university’s assets and its fiscal and financial health. However, the governing body is not expected to be involved in the daily operations of the university, simply because it has more to do with policies. The governing body must be the first advocate and the final defender of institution. It is responsible for the institution’s integrity and quality.<sup>19</sup>

Generally, the role of the governing body is to oversee at policy level the quality of teaching and learning, to approve degree programs, and to establish personnel-related policies and procedures. Financially, the governing body has to ensure strong financial management and to stabilize financial health by holding the chief executive officer responsible and accountable for internal operations, resource generation and fund-raising.

Members of the governing body, regardless of how they are appointed, are expected to be consistent with institutional mission, to

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<sup>19</sup> Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2009).

represent different points of view, interests, and experiences; as well as to represent a diversity of characteristics such as age, race, ethnicity, and gender.

Board members normally are independent and not interest-bound. Of course, donors may be chosen to be members, but they have to respect the mission of school, and the decision of the Board. In the case where remuneration of board members or contractual relationships exists, interests should not outweigh duties. Academic autonomy and fiscal integrity must be respected. As seen in most cases, remuneration is not provided for governing body services, but reasonable compensation may be deemed appropriate to those who provide service and expertise beyond their required duty as a member of the Board. Another character of the U.S. institution is their financial structures. Due to the laws of education until the beginning of 20th century, which gave private institutions the rights of running higher education, private schools are, in general, strong in quality and more attractive to Americans. It is worth to say that most of them are non-profit institutions, even if they had the right to register as either non-profit or profit. For profit institutions, they are not exempt from tax, and the profit after taxes deduction is listed in the category of income. For tax-free non-profit institutions, all profits must be used for schools and students and others closely related subjects such as scholarships, research grants, infrastructural improvement, etc.

The selection and appointment of the members of the board are variant, depending on each institution's history and culture. In general, state universities regents are appointed by the governor of the state, while private institutions trustees are elected in accordance with their own constitutions. They normally are persons of professional or good reputation, and wealthy donors. Board members are also the ones who will help with fundraising and are of no financial interests as far as school business is concerned. In private schools, the initial boards are composed of founders and invitees who then select or elect other members as

required by education laws.

As noted above, board members, appointed or elected, usually are wealthy, well esteemed, successful people. No requirement about their educational background or their profession, but they are more than often concerned with education. And it would be ideal if the board of trustees is composed of (not more than 20) members of diverse expertise. A more comprehensive and balanced view would be best for schools.

### ***C. The Role of Liberal Arts Education***

The strength of the U.S. higher education is seen in its focus on liberal arts education. Usually almost all freshmen and women, and somophores are requited to take courses on humanities, social sciences and arts. University of Chicago, for example, a cradle for Nobel laureates in economics, requires all students to be well versed in Plato's *Republic*, a philosophical and political work. Harvard University is famous with lectures of grand masters, which are attended by thousand of students and teachers. World famous philosophers (John Rawls, Willard Van Orman Quine, Michael Sandel, and others) are given a special place at Harvard. They are a part of Harvard's history. And so are Princeton, Yale, Columbia, Cornell, Stanford, UC Berkeley, Notre Dame, Georgetown, etc. Their alumni have been benefited from this kind of education. Harvard and Yale have produced almost one third of the U.S Presidents, including Barck Obama, the current US President. Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson; Jack F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jimmy Carter, and most recently B. Clinton... are now remembered as the most ardent defenders of humanity and human rights.

Why then liberal arts education? Unlike technique training, liberal arts offer the learner fundamental knowledge and intellectual growth. If technology education, i.e. professional training, aims at training specific ability to deal with specific technical problems, liberal arts education promotes human capacity of thinking, problem-discovering and solution-

finding. That means, liberal arts reflect most truthfully and enrich human cultures, morals, and aesthetics. It has been proven in practice that most successful people are equipped with high motivation, far-reaching ideals, ardent desire for knowledge, and a sense of meaningful life.

Liberal arts also stimulates the sense of humanity and, foremost solidarity. The U.S.A realized that its independence, its growth, and its power were closely related to the power of education, as W.E.B. DuBois observed in 1903: “Education and work are the levers to lift up a people. Education makes the promise of America a reality.”<sup>20</sup>

Liberal arts education and its ideals are behind the success, but also behind generosity. That explains why the board members selfishlessly engage themselves in education, why American billionaires are willing to donate most of their wealth for charitable and educational projects and organizations. One Warren Buffet, one Bill Gates and his wife are in fact the best known among innumerable unknown philanthrope. They display the spirit of liberal arts education. In general, American people are willing to shoulder the cost of education, making sure that all American citizens are getting the kind of education they wish. Donation for education purpose or educational institutions is perhaps a specific characteristic of the U.S. people. There are very few countries where excellent universities do not rely on state funding, or on tuition fees and services. The U.S. education institutions get the needed money from different sources, and foremost from donors. Endowment (donated by wealthy industrialists, business people, and ex-alumni) is widely practiced in the U.S.A. Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Notre Dame, etc. are well known for their big endowment. Harvard, for example, stocks more than 37 billion U.S. dollars in 2007 (Christies, 2007). Americans obviously greatly appreciate the role of education and contribute to education development. Being a

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Drew Faust, in her inaugural address as Harvard University’s president: “Installation address.” Source: <http://harvardmagazine.com/breaking-news/installation-address>.

member of the governing body of a university is a great honor, who earns respect from the community. Contribution to education means contribution to society and country.

#### ***D. The Board of Trustees***

The board of trustees functions as a legislative body dealing mainly with questions of policy governing school. So, it delegates many powers to administrators (the president and his staff) for day-to-day-operations. For the sake of brevity, I would like to mention a few functions of the board as follows:

First, the governing body (hereafter as the board, or the trustees) is responsible to ensure that money is properly invested and that university assets and resources are properly used. Second, the board is responsible for the policies, reform, etc. It has the rights to review on a periodic basis important matters such as salary, benefits, subsidies, investment, development, personnel, students' rights, and so on. It has also the rights to select, dismiss, or reprimand important personnel. But daily operation is giving to administrators. Third, the trustees have the rights of approving budgets, grants, investment, etc. presented to them by administrators. Concerned administrators have to report to the board about the university's financial conditions. Fourth, the trustees have the say in deciding tuition, land acquisition, construction projects. They have also the rights to establish new revenue operations and other significant financial transactions. Fifth, the trustees are not directly involved in matter of personels and procurement activity, with exception of the president (or chancellor). They would respect the decision of administrators. Despite this policy, the board has the vote on tenure and may have a say in selecting endowed professor and distinguished professor. Sixth, the board shares great responsibility, along with the president, on matters of strategy, tactics, and mission. As such, the board provides broad vision on academic policy and student affairs. The trustees would be blamed or forced to be

changed if they fail to protect school mission, to secure finance, to make school running, and in the global age, to compete and to make progress. That means, the board enacts rather as a supervisor and as the last judge in all activities of school. It would not and should not poke their nose into every corner. An overzealous board would ruin instead of helping, academic life. Seventh, the board has also the rights to intervene in matters of morals (academic and social), in order to protect the integrity of school. Disciplinary action against the offender would be recommended by the board in accordance with laws and morals.

### ***E. Assessment of the U.S. Governance Structure***

In a certain sense, the relation between the board of trustees and administrators is similar to the one between the legislative and executive branches prescribed in the U.S. constitution. If every citizen has the rights to display his or her own interest in national affairs, then all concerned people (students, teachers, administrators, students' parents, the board members, donors) would enjoy the same rights. Therefore, discussions or debates or views exchange about governance are a common matter that should be encouraged. Governance is not reserved to a few, but open for all involved persons. Authority and responsibilities should be shared equally, and decisions should be made public. Strong public interests would help to create a lay governing board, transforming the inclusive, selective and privilege board into a decentralized system in which power and responsibility are shared, and in which the academic institution could preserve its autonomy. And that is in full accordance with the spirit of our age, the age of democracy based on consensus and shared interests. That is what we mean by *shared governance*. The strength of this kind of governance is its accountability, its strong sense of responsibility and participation, and its commitment to the mission or ideals of school. It would be effective in fighting arbitrariness, power-abuse, corruption, and moreover, the tendency of commercialize education. These are the crucial

factors behind the success of American universities.

## **VI. Governance Structure Reform and the Chance for Vietnamese Universities**

Only at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after decades of socialist education, Vietnamese government begun to realize the strength of the U.S. education system that could be suggestive model for Vietnam higher education reform, and the reform would help Vietnam to be able to compete with the world. With Premier Phan Van Khai, education renovation was taken to be an important strategy for the development of Vietnam. His fact-finding trip to the U.S. in 2005, and especially his Harvard visit (June, 24) gave him a more convincing view of the superiority of American universities.<sup>21</sup> His final decision in favor of the U.S. education reflected the general expectation from his people.

### ***A. Laws, Decrees and Policy about the reforms***

Old rules are amended and new rules are made to reduce the burdens of heavy bureaucracy, ideology, and to facilitate reform. As a result, board of trustees are to be established in universities. However, such reform has not truly realized in reality. Only in a few state institutions board of trustees has been established. Private institutions are forced to have a so-called board of trustees that is more analogous to the board of chambers in the business world. Education to some of them is just a business, and university might becomes a kind of business of high profit and prestige. In fact, the board member by laws are investors in the strictest sense.

The question of Vietnam's inability to learn from the American model

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<sup>21</sup> *Harvard University Gazettes* (July 21, 2005). Source: <http://harvard.edu/gazette/2005/07.21-khai.html>

is a thorn in the neck. Their policy of education follows the same pattern of “socialist oriented market economy” mixing authoritative measures with people’s interests, and with no far-reaching ideals.

Let us take a look at this policy. In the guidelines for the establishment of the board of trustees (Article 53, Education Law 2005), one finds a huge distance between the American model and the Vietnamese one (Article 1, and part of article 2). Here, MOET is still holding the old power: All important decisions with regard to the mission, policy, strategy, financial resources, tuition, student affairs, and even personels, etc. of university must be approved.<sup>22</sup> In brief, the board members are strictly designated, selected, approved and controlled by MOET. In most cases, MOET claims its rights in nominating and deciding the power members of the board and administrative body.<sup>23</sup>

## ***B. One-dimensional Structure***

As noted, the board of trustees of American universities is a legally constituted body which composes diverse members of the community serving public interests. In contrast, the composition of the Vietnamese

<sup>22</sup> Education Law, 2005, Article 53. This article states as follows: (1) The Board of Regents (Hội đồng Trường) in state universities, and the Board of Trustees (Hội đồng Quản trị) in private universities, (hereafter collectively referred to as the Board of Regents), is the governing body of the university. This body is responsible for setting policies for the school, raising and supervising the administration of resources, connecting the school with society and community, and thus ensuring that the school achieves its educational goals; (2) The Board of Regents has the responsibility for making decisions regarding the school’s goals, strategies and development planning, and for making decisions regarding the school’s charter or its modifications so that the schools can submit them to the MOET for approval. Board of Regents oversees decisions regarding the use of the school’s financial and other resources, and supervises the implementation of policies and the principles of democracy in the school’s activities; and (3) The establishment of procedures, organizational structure and composition, authority and accountabilities of the Board of Regents are set in the University Statutes.

<sup>23</sup> It is quite strange to see that the University Statutes were issued by decree in 2003, long before the promulgation of the Education Law (2005). However the decree was revised in 2009.



board of regents is of “one-dimensional,” exclusive and privilege character. Almost of its members are employed by university and on its payroll. That means the board member and administrator are in a person. The question is how one could check, supervise and punish administrators in the case of violation of laws, constitution or mission of schools, if the board members themselves are administrators. A conflict of interests is inevitable, especially as seen in the state schools. In short, the so-called Board of Trustees indicated in Vietnamese Education Law is something much different than the notion of this body as widely perceived around the world.

### ***C. Unclear Mission and Motivation***

The situation is quite different in private universities which are obliged to have a board of trustees. But as I have said, such a board looks like a board of directors of a business corporation or, sadly enough, the board of investors. Private universities are established by private individuals who, by laws, are seen investors in education.<sup>24</sup> Since a large investment is needed for the construction of university, investors would become de facto members without election. Furthermore, since donation for education is still strange to the Vietnamese nouveau-riches, one can say for sure that the board is filled with investors.

Let us take a look at the American institutions. One can say with some certainty that no institution is grounded without specific mission and ideals. Their mission is closely linked to their social, political, economic and religious background, and their ideals are far-reaching. Note that Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Princeton, etc. were foremost built by religious churches, and with certain mission. Harvard for example took truth (veritas) as their goal. Hence truth-discovering, truth-defending... must be its mission. Despite their full independent at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Note that the laws of private institutions are unpredictably changed in the last decade.

century, they still preserve their heritage and are faithful to their mission. And they are affiliated to a certain social class, a certain ideology, and a certain political view (but not political party). Harvard is cherished for its liberalism. Many small but most competitive colleges are well respected for their strict ethics and disciplines. West Point is a case in point. A military academy of the U.S. Army, but it preserves its long cherished tradition of discipline, responsibility and national interests. In general, American universities would closely cooperate with industrial sectors to promote their ideals, and to seek funds for education.

During last decades, all universities in Vietnam seem to have mission statement, but very few teachers and students keep it in their mind. One can see such mission statement seems no convincing and specific enough. Recently, some schools especially private universities like FPT University, Hoa Sen University or the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) have brought in some imported idea of training technicians for industry sectors. But they are still in the category of service. The idea of pure science and humanity remains as “luxurious” as “irrealistic.”

### ***D. Noble Ideals***

As mentioned, elite American institutions were mostly and firstly built by religious Churches of Catholics, Protestants or Anglicans. They were motivated primarily by their noble ideals, and then by their belief. They felt that they are called to render service to humanity, and to glorify God. So, a great number of founders worked voluntarily, with no ambition or interests for themselves. And that is a part of the Christian tradition. In socialist and professed atheist country like Vietnam, voluntary service is as strange as dangerous. The ridiculous argument of “how can he or she be so good to us” leads to a false conclusion that “he or she must have some hidden plan that is not good for us.” Here is a grave defect of our education. We are not educated for the others, but for our own interests. We ignore the fact that a good university must be an establishment with

noble and far-reaching purposes: to serve humanity and to better the world.

Beset by such a strange thinking, there is almost no donation for education, but only lavish spending for luxurious life. Vietnam should learn from the U.S. system of supporting education by offering free tax for donation to education, charitable works, and social service. A mechanism in favor of such system should be encouraged and fixed. Scholarship, fellowship, and grants could be possible thanks to this mechanism. But such mechanism could function only if we have a strong mission with noble ideals. Without ideals, it would be impossible for one to reduce or get rid of the rampant commercialization of our present education.

## **VII. Conclusion: Recommendations**

### ***A. The Lesson from the U.S. Model of Governance Structure***

After having critically reviewed the defects of the governance structure of Vietnamese schools, and carefully discussed the advantage of the American governance structure, it is worthwhile to suggest a model of governance that may suit to Vietnam. If sound governance is characterized by the criteria of participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus-oriented, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency and accountability,<sup>25</sup> then, no doubt, the Vietnam has much to learn. A policy of encouraging participation from teachers, students, parents, and even school administrators must be pushed through. One needs more consensus, and abdication from one-sided decree or order. Transparency, accountability, more equity and no more privileges should be promoted.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp>; See also Wikipedia (2011i).

And finally, one must get rid of inefficient, ambiguous and unpracticable laws.

Reformed educators have cried out demanding for more autonomy,<sup>26</sup> and for a radical reform.<sup>27</sup> In their views, the question needs to be addressed and resolved at an in-depth and more fundamental level, and not just as a cosmetic way. Education is service; but that is a special kind of noble service that exercises deep and universal impact on individuals, community, society, and country. Education should be considered primarily as public good which benefit all children and in all aspects of life. A healthy economy, a strong nation, a good people, a beautiful environment, an agreeable living condition cannot be possible without a strong and sound education as their pillar. The truth is the rich, enjoyable and most habitable countries are those with good and advanced education.

The U.S. education is certainly not unique, but it may best reflect the richest tradition of Western cultures: idealist and pragmatist, progressive and heritage-bound, public and private, fundamentalist and liberal, and so on. Just as Kwan-Chung (管子 / 管仲) and then Confucius (孔子) who saw education as the most important means for humanity,<sup>28</sup> the American people are certainly aware of the necessity of education: "Education makes the promise of America possible."<sup>29</sup> The Fins also know and appreciate this truth. Finland is among a very few countries which excell themselves

<sup>26</sup> Phạm Phú, "Đại học tự chủ mới có cạnh tranh" (Only autonomous university can compete). Source: <http://vietnamnet.vn/giaoduc/2008/10/808337/>.

Much earlier in the 1990s, Viet ex-patriates have had brought the issue of university autonomy to the Viet public. See for example, Tran Van Doan, "Autonomy for University," Bulletins of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Hochiminh City, University of Social Sciences and Humanities), No. 5 (11.2002), (Vietnamese).

<sup>27</sup> Vũ Quốc Phóng, "Bộ GD cần trả lại vị trí HĐQT cho các trường đại học." (MOET should give the rights back to the board of trustees). Source: <http://www.vietnamnet.vn/giaoduc>.

<sup>28</sup> Kwan-Chung is remembered of with his famous saying on education: "One needs ten years to grow a tree, but one needs one hundred years to cultivate a man." (十年樹木百年樹人). Source: <http://zhidao.baidu.com/question/19651557.html>

<sup>29</sup> Drew Faust, Inaugural Address at Harvard University. Source: <http://harvardmagazine.com/breaking-news/installation-address>

by means of an excellent education. A small country with a long history of being under the yoke of Russia and Sweden, but just in a short time, Finland can boot the best record in education, able to preserve its sovereignty, and with a healthy economic growth.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the U.S. education is famous for its focus on effects and with its rational structure. The best effect cannot be possible without experiments. No education is good until it is tested in fire. A rational structure is the one that runs business with big profits in long run, and with responsibility. So a rational division of functions and responsibility, a strict control of quality, a non-stop experiment and revision, a transparent organization, etc. will, without doubt, be the conditions for success. The U.S. governance structure follows exactly this policy and strategy. Strict separation of governance and administration, autonomy from political and financial interests, transparency and accountability, reasonable law system, etc. these measures have successfully reduced power abuse, corruption, bribery, nepotism, upgraded education quality and minimized costs. A more rational structure with clear and ideal mission and objects has stimulated equity, diversity and has motivated the desire for achievement.

### ***B. A Modified Model for Vietnam***

An ideal model is admirable, but difficult to be implicated in practice. The question of whether one can learn and apply the American model in one's own country with different ideology, tradition, culture, habit, and organization is a crucial and not easy task for Vietnam. Just as in the field of economics, Vietnam has introduced a special model, the so-called "socialist oriented market economy" that fuses the capitalist

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<sup>30</sup> See Simola (2005). It is noted that Taiwan, a country very close to Vietnam both in terms of geography and culture, has achieved a remarkable progress in education. But Taiwan is still not satisfied with this desirable result, it wants to excel itself. The lesson from Finland is widely appreciated by Taiwanese educators. See Tran & Wen (Eds.)(2010).

mode of production and the philosophy of consummation with socialist ideology, this country would make a similar experiment in education. Some believes that a fusion of the U.S. management with its socialist centralized administration would yield good results. It would upgrade the quality of higher education, and would make Vietnamese universities able to compete.

As I have pointed out earlier, such view looks like more an illusion than reality. There is no free lunch, and there is also no “costless” education. Education research needs more efforts and energy. It should be paid with dear price. No test, no experiment, and no critique so far. As such, it could not attract serious buyer. It would not be able to convince serious educators either. No good product and no serious education could be possible without research, innovation, experiment, test, and foremost, without a strong sense of mission and responsibility.

In this section, I would like to bring up some issues and try to tentatively conjecture a modified model of governance structure for Vietnam and in this period of change only.

First, Vietnam could not change its total structure abruptly. Such a change would lead to ruin, or to a vacuum that one may need a long time for recovery. That means, the centralized structure should be modified to fit to people’s needs, and to be healthy, able to compete in the global age. And so is the ideology of higher education.

Second, Vietnam should build an education mechanism based on a strong support of the public and on a more reasonable system of governing. Backed and screened by the public who see in education the means for life, and supported by a government who works for the people’s interests, MOET has to select the most capable men or women would for the board of trustees. With the endorsement of a responsible and law-bound board, administrators could give their best for education.

Third, the composition of the board should be of pluralistic with diverse people of different vision but rationalistic and idealistic. Of

course, Vietnam cannot have a board similar to the American one for many reasons. (a) The lack of wealthy donors, and the long tradition of scholar-administrator, plus the centralized structure would make the idea of American board impracticable. So, it would be wise to select those people of achievement in their own fields and with a deep love for education to be the members of the board of trustees. The diversity of the board with different valuable experiences would make the board wiser in planning policy and deciding strategies. Such board would be more open, tolerant, conscious, and responsible. They could be nominated by NGOs, government, or community due to their achievement, and voted in by the board, or approved by the government in the case of state universities. In the case of private institutions, members could be nominated by NGOs, community or by the board itself, and voted in by the board. The members of the board should work on term basis, or in the case of private institutions, should obey the concerned rules made by the board itself. Replacement or new appointment should be strictly regulated in according with laws. (b) As said, it would be impossible to have a total change. Authorities would not be willing to give up power, but it could be forced to reduce its control and relax its restraints. A representative of MOET in the board is acceptable, but not necessary. That means, the board of state institutions may or may not include the representative of MOET, local government (in the case of local institutions), NGOs and the institution itself. For the private institution then the members would be the representatives of major donors, founders, administrator (the head of school), and other stakeholders like parents, students, senate.

Fourth, Vietnam has to learn from the arts of division or separation of power, responsibility and workload. The head of institution must report to the board, and he or she is the final one accountable to the board. In the best scenario, he or she should not be at the same time the director of the board as seen in many universities in Vietnam today. The board would not mix up with administration, overstepping the border or manipulating

administrators, and especially directing the board for their own interests and ideology.

Fifth, education laws, especially higher education laws should be amended. The scopes of laws of education are on the one hand to prevent power abuse, misapplication and misuse of educational resources, to hinder corruption, and to discourage anti-education acts. However, the main scopes, on the other hand, should be to warrant the citizen rights to get equal access to education, to enhance education, to stimulate the growth of knowledge, to train human resources for national and local interests, and moreover, to foster humanity and to make the country growing. Higher education with its main function of training and research is exactly built for these scopes. Thus, education laws should not be bound by whatever scope that is irrelevant to education.

Sixth, since power is often linked to financial power, it would be better giving institutions more autonomy in matter of fund-raising, spending, tuition-fees-determining, and enrollment quota (Education Law, 2005). Similarly, the power of the members of board should not be distributed on the percentage of his or her investment. An independent audit body should be created to ensure the transparency of financial status, and to make sure that the budget is properly used. In short, by getting rid of the abuse of financial power, by practicing transparency and by respecting accountability, institution would be in proper place.

Seventh, despite a high public spending on education, the return is still low.<sup>31</sup> That shows Vietnam's great interest in education, but it also points out its misspending and ineffectiveness.<sup>32</sup> Hence, the quality of university must be measured by its effectiveness. The success of ex-

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<sup>31</sup> In 2004, Vietnam public spending on education was 4.3% of the total GDP. China was with 2.5%, Philippines 3.2%, Russia 3.8%, and Thailand and South Korea 4.2%. That means, Vietnam's budget for education is among the highest in the world. Note that the public spending on education has increased from 4.2% of GDP in 2000 to 5.6% of GDP in 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Co-authors, "On the Reform of Education of Vietnam." Source: [http://www.vietnamnet.net/De\\_an\\_cai\\_cach-giao\\_duc](http://www.vietnamnet.net/De_an_cai_cach-giao_duc)



alumni, the impact on society, the research-output and quality of faculty, and so on, must be taken into account.

Finally, innovation is a necessary condition for education in general, and not just for science, knowledge, and arts. Innovation is most important in governance structure. Without new idea, revision, change, reform... any structure would be dying out. Thus, besides a mechanism of governing, financing, fund-raising and fund-distributing one may also need a mechanism of innovation. Innovation may cost, but its cost is worth for a long life and in the long run. The new dictum of “innovation or death” is more than ever becoming a truth in the global world. How can Vietnam compete without innovation? And that is the fateful question that Vietnam has to face.

## Concluding Remark

The low quality of Vietnam universities is even deplored by the authorities themselves. Its main problem is still untouched, however. In my view, any reform of higher education must be a total reform. The Vietnamese government is leading a reform titled “Comprehensive and Fundamental Reform”. It should begin with a reform of governance structure. A fusion of Asian traditional values in the American governance structure may be a good solution to the crisis of Vietnam higher education. Innovation cannot be possible without the support of a rational system, and any rational system must be built on solid foundation. That means a sound governance structure must be founded on human values and scientific structure alike.

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