



FROM THE STORY OF “UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY” POLICY IN TAIWAN: A LOOK AT CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Currently, universities in Taiwan are almost no longer affiliated with the government's management, promoting the "University Autonomy" policy as the main reason. The article provides some recommendations for development "University Autonomy" policy in Vietnam by analyzing the success story of Taiwan's. Specifically: Collaborative Governance; new financial policy planning; establishment of quality departmental accreditation; the school is active in the development of departmental accreditation system and students become the subject of education.

Keywords: university autonomy, higher education reform, Taiwan, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

According to a research report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), it states that current “globalization” trend has placed countries in the world under the pressure to actively promote the modernization of the state, especially in education sector. This has contributed to promoting the development of academic exchange and study among neighboring countries (OECD, 2004). In the meanwhile, the remarkably rapid development of Internet and science & technology has made “globalization” trend become a very powerful wave in the 21st century. This trend has made “globalization” become the key element in education reform process of many countries in the world. According to statistics in the 2012 report by OECD, the number of international students from international countries increased from 800,000 in 1975 to 4.1 million in 2010 and this increase still continues on annual basis (OECD, 2012).

Together with that trend, since 1987, led by Mr. Pham Minh Hac, former Minister of Education, Vietnam has promoted the “education reform” policy with the motto: “Persist, Strengthen, Stabilize, and Develop Education”. During 1985-1990 period, the Ministry of Education of Vietnam set the policy to educate in association with knowledge update, focusing on fostering students' skills and learning attitudes (Bich Lan, 2017). This policy is now still maintained in the nationwide educational system. This was also the first step of post-war reformation of Vietnamese education. Since the independence in 1975, national educational system of Vietnam has shifted from 10-year to 12-year education to adapt to

advanced education standards in the world. After more than 30 years of education reform, Vietnam has succeeded in improving the rate of children going to school and partially in spreading high school education. Education methods also become more diversified which motivates children of minority groups to go to school (free/reduced tuition, point bonus, scholarship grant) and promotes the investment in improving teaching and learning facilities, etc. Many educational achievements have been made. In addition, Vietnamese education has gradually shifted from focusing primarily on the development of public schools in the past to focusing more on developing the quality of private schools. It also applies new forms of study such as open university, remote-studying university, parallel course, and student exchange camps, and even offers the opportunities for foreign universities to set up their branches in Vietnam, which further enhances the competitiveness of Vietnamese education.

Though having achieved a lot of success, Vietnamese education, especially higher education, is still less developed than other neighboring Asian countries. 30 years ago, Taiwanese education undergone the same development like Vietnam is doing. But after only 15 years of reformation, its education sector has reached a new transformation acknowledged by the whole world.

“University Autonomy” has been widely discussed in recent years in rapidly developing economies in Southeast Asia such as Malaysia, Thailand. To integrate into the “globalization” trend in the world, especially in field of talent education and development, it is necessary that Vietnam should learn from successful experiences of other countries, especially those with cultural backgrounds that are similar to Vietnam such as Taiwan.

Taiwan ranks among top 10 most successful countries in the world in term of elementary education. For secondary education, Taiwan ranks among top 5 (4th position) in PISA (2013). For higher education, there are currently 96% of post-secondary students to go to universities. Despite having a relatively small scale (in both terms of area and population), under THES and QS ranking tables, Taiwan still ranks among top 100 world-leading universities, in which National Taiwan University (N

TU) frequently ranks among top 51-70 and there are nearly 20 universities ranking among top 500 world-leading universities (QS, 2018). One of key reason to this success is that Taiwan positively promotes its “university autonomy” policy.

2. What is “University autonomy”?

2.1. Definitions of “University Autonomy”

There are many different definitions of university autonomy in the world depending on the perception of the role of the State in higher education. In European countries, university autonomy is understood from two main aspects: escape from the control and restraint imposed by state management agencies, labor market, service providers, political

influences, and freedom of decision on the method of organizing an activity as well as the goals and mission of a university (Estermann T., Nokkala T. (2009).

According to Don Anderson and Richard Johnson in their report on university autonomy in 20 countries in the world (University Autonomy in Twenty Countries, 1998), university autonomy is defined as “the freedom of an institution to run its own affairs without direction or influence from any level of government.”

Although there are different viewpoints, university autonomy may still be generalized as the activeness and self-determination of the university in certain areas or aspects of its activities.

2.2. Contents of “University Autonomy”

Currently, there are many research works on the contents of university autonomy such as the works by Anderson, D. and Johnson, R. (1998); Neave, G. & van Vught (1994), F.A. and Richardson, G. & Fielden, J (1997). These studies have different interpretations of the meaning of University Autonomy in different positions. This article is based on Taiwan’s “University autonomy” policy contents and Vietnam’s higher education environment, mainly focus on 3 key implications of university autonomy, including:

(1) *Academic autonomy*: Means the autonomy in training, recruitment, scientific research, cooperation, diploma and quality assurance certificate operations.

(2) *Financial autonomy*: Means the autonomy in ensuring resources to serve the activities of the university. Universities have the right to decide and actively seek for financial resources, method of utilizing available financial resources and assets, invest in future assets, balance financial income and expenses to make sure the financial system is transparent, compliant with law, and not for personal interest.

(3) *Organization and management autonomy*: the autonomy in the method to manage internal resources of the university in order to achieve its development goals. Universities have the self-determination and activeness in developing its organizational structure, analyzing and establishing its subsidiaries, recruiting, appointing, and compensating talents, and establishing a development strategy with clear vision and orientations.

3. University autonomy in public universities in Taiwan

In early 1980s, Taiwan's Nationalist Party Kuomintang (KMT) still maintained a very strict control over the system of universities in Taiwan; all of decisions, from establishment, personnel, and finance to curriculum, etc., had to be subject to state's approval; principals and deans were easily dismissed without reason; in addition, the state maintained strict surveillance over academic activities and students were forced to study politic subjects (such as Three Principles of the People by Sun Yat-sen). Since 1990s, after the reform and democratization, Taiwanese society has become much more open and freer, and universities also gained more autonomy in their regulations. The revised Law on

Higher Education states that autonomous university and academic freedom are establishments that need to be protected.

Although the purpose of education may not be separated from political, economic, or religious revolutions, it is no longer identified as such; also, the purpose of education is different from the purpose of politics, religion, or economy. Thus, education mode does not necessarily match those of other revolutions.

Taiwan is aware of this difference as it differentiates education from politics and organizes it in such a manner that educational institutions may be independent of (national and local) government control. Education law, teacher law, and related laws are meant to protect this independence.

In response to the demand for reformation of the nation, Taiwanese government institutionalized the rule of law on the issue of granting the autonomy to universities. Three main laws, including Higher Education Law, Teacher Law, and Private Education Law, as amended, supplemented and spread in 1990s, aimed at regulating the relationship between the Ministry of Education and the university boards and faculties. The new Higher Education Law provides universities with autonomy in term of finance, personnel and teaching material, etc. The other two laws are designed to provide both educators and learners with more powers so that they can become more autonomous in all matters.

This mechanism is introduced to make university management become more diversified as their faculties are given more autonomy. For example, in institutional level, at both public and private universities, faculty members publicly vote to elect 2-3 candidates among them for dean or principal positions. Though the final approval decision is made by the Ministry of Education (or principal at university level), voting result at faculty level is highly recognized and serves as an important reference. Transparent election has brought about positive effects, increasing the legitimacy of university leadership. Previously, all of decisions, from election, appointment to dismissal (principals or faculty members) in both public and private universities, were governed by the Ministry of Education and education institutions.

To be elected as a dean or principal, an applicant must hold a specific campaign based on his/her ability, experience and vision. He/she also has to answer questions raised by the faculty, faculty members and students, etc. In addition, the state also provides professors and public employees with the right to negotiate wage level and working conditions with the universities before signing a labor contract. Under Higher Education Law, faculties also have the right to recruit, appoint and dismiss teachers.

Educational revolution begins with the re-establishment of the purpose of education itself. It is human factor, or learners to be more precisely, that is the true purpose of education. A person learns for himself or herself but not for another. If he or she learns for his or her family, state, a political party or religious sect, that is no longer his main

purpose. Similarly, an educator, or the person that communicates knowledge to a learner, is now a collaborator but no longer holds the key role as may be seen in today's education sector in Vietnam. Only when the purpose is identified, education may aim at clarifying a specific mode, and on that basis, method and technique may be developed to reach the main purpose. In other words, mode, method, and technique are just instrumental purposes that are more about strategy.

4. A look at "University Autonomy" issue in Vietnam

"University Autonomy" has been officially addressed by Vietnamese government in a number of government's documents, most of which acknowledge that: "Universities have the autonomy for planning for development, educational and training activities, scientific and technological activities, finance, foreign relationship, organization and personnel" (Law on Higher Education 2012). Vietnam also highly emphasizes the importance of improving the policies on higher education with focus on ensuring the autonomy and social responsibility of higher education institutions, State management and the supervision and evaluation role of the society to higher education. Accordingly, to reform the management system, it is necessary to switch public higher education institutions to autonomy regime so that they have the rights to decide and take responsibilities for training activities, research, organization, personnel, and finance.

Law on Higher Education 2012 continues affirming that university autonomy is one of three key areas of the law. Accordingly, the autonomy of higher education institutions is specified in Article 32 of the Law on Higher Education 2012 as follows: "Higher education institutions are independent in the primary activities such as organization, personnel, finance, property, training, science and technology, international cooperation, assuring the higher education quality. Higher education institutions shall enjoy greater autonomy depending on the capability, the rankings and the education quality assessment results" (Law on Higher Education 2012).

As of September 2017, there are 23 public universities under the Ministries and central government that have been approved by the Prime Minister for pilot transformation of its operating mode (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017). According to the report on "Summary conference on pilot transformation of operating mode of public higher education institutions" (2017) of the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, it indicates that autonomy has resulted in positive changes in universities. Many universities have actively opened new majors, developed their training programs to meet social needs, applied advanced teaching curriculum and materials, and approached international standards. While the scale of formal/mass training tends to decrease, the quality of advanced, higher quality programs is rapidly increasing.

Nevertheless, there are still many limitations in the process of implementing university autonomy in Vietnam: for example, the role of university board is not

adequately important as the right to appoint the principal is still vested in line agencies; university board has less power than the principal does; universities still must comply with the law on public employees regarding the recruitment, appointment, and management of officers and lecturers.

5. Recommendations of the directions for development of “University Autonomy” policy

5.1. Collaborative governance

In theoretical term, in “Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice” by Ansell and Gash (2007), the authors systematically collected a total of 137 typical cases from scientific journals in public sanitation and hygiene, education, social welfare, international relations for their analysis. The authors drew out conclusion on the implications of collaborative governance, including:

(1) Starting Conditions: i.e. either promoting or preventing the elements of cooperation between the involved parties. Includes Power/Resource Imbalances; Prehistory of Antagonism and Cooperation, Incentives to Participate (Ansell & Gash, 2007, p. 550-553).

(2) Facilitative Leadership: refers to the parties' participation in the cooperative process with the least involvement in management, to promote the formulation of the framework policy, voluntary cooperation, and amplification of common interests. In this process of collaborative management, through specific actions by Facilitative Leadership, it is beneficial for involved parties to listen and discuss, and if they are unable to establish a common formula, Facilitative Leadership must act as an impartial reconciler to propose a solution based on specific situation. Resolution of conflicts between the parties (Ansell & Gash, 2007, p. 554-555).

(3) Institutional Design means that, only in the process of collaborative management, involved parties must establish a system of basic legal rules. This is to make sure that parties involved in cooperative management shall have the same opportunities and powers, and that cooperative process shall be transparent and allow the parties to believe and respect each other. Finally, in that process, it is also necessary to pay attention to time factor to make sure that the parties understand the benefits of a cooperative process that can be estimated over a period of time (Ansell & Gash, 2007, p. 556-557).

(4) Collaborative Process is a non-linear, recurring process. It involves Face-to-Face Dialogue, Trust Building, Commitment to the Process, Shared Understanding, Intermediate Outcomes (Ansell & Gash, 2007, p. 558-561).

In Taiwan, the research of Chen (2015) adopts discourse-oriented research approach to collect and analyze related data related to National University Governance and Autonomy Pilot Program; furthermore, it also understands and monitors relevant policy discourse and interactive results of various discourse coalitions when promoting National University Governance and Autonomy Pilot Program through four dimensions of collaborative governance which initial conditions are: institutional design, leading type, and the collaborative process. Therefore, Chen believes that it is able to inspect related

issues with regard to the promotion of National University Governance and Autonomy Pilot Program from collaborative governance perspective. However, the research also found that from the perspective of Collaborative governance, in Taiwan because of inconsistent initial conditions for different interests of the alliance, cognitive disparity in policy leadership, institutional design transparency and procedural justice etc., leading to various stakeholders did not form a cooperative relationship. Therefore, if this policy can be piloted in Vietnam, It requires the unity and centripetal force of all stakeholders to achieve the best results.

From this point of view, the process of achieving the autonomy can be done through “collaborative management” as an intermediate stage, and ultimately to reach complete autonomy.

5.2. *New financial policy planning*

Current tuition fee in Taiwan is rather low compared to its average income per capita. A very important aspect in the development of higher education in Taiwan is that from the very beginning of the reform, Taiwan invested 2% of its GDP in higher education (2008: 1.93%), and that investment was equally distributed to all students. Tuition fee of private universities is higher than that in public universities, but the difference is not considerable. In addition to a subsidy of 2,000-4,000 USD granted to each student, Taiwanese government also offers tuition loan plans. Excellent students or those that have poor background or are children of public employees, soldiers, teachers, postal officers, etc. are all provided with scholarships. There are also a variety of scholarship plans, including both governmental scholarships and private enterprise scholarships. This is funded by tax paid by the people, so everyone has the right to be equally distributed. For this reason, the absolute clear majority of post-secondary students choose to go to the universities or post-graduate programs. And this is also one reason to Taiwan's success in talent training efforts.

Current tuition fee in Vietnam is not very high compared to that in other regional countries, but considering existing GDP per capita, this presents a significant pressure upon students. There are only a few scholarship plans offered by Vietnamese universities and most of them fail to meet the demand for financial aid from most students, especially those coming from rural, mountainous areas or people of minority groups.

In addition to investing in students and lecturer resources, university professors also play a crucial role. In early 1980s, before the reform, corruption and bribery were very common in higher education system in Taiwan, especially related to lecturer payroll system. At that time, professors preferred to take over management tasks rather than academic ones. Currently, monthly basic salary of Taiwanese professors is as follows: NTD 80,000 (about USD 2,700) for an assistant professor, NTD 100,000 (USD 3,300) for an associate professor; and NTD 120,000 (USD 4,000) for a full professor. Professors,

principals, or distinguished professors will receive a higher salary (about NTD 200,000, nearly USD 7,000), and may even demand for their own compensation (Lo William Y. W., 2010). In 1994, Prof. Li Yuan Zhe, a Nobel Prize in Chemist, was invited to lead Academia Sinica, who had to renounce US citizenship and receive a higher salary than the President. In 2005, Taiwan's National Assembly approved a budget of NTD50 billion (USD 1.7 billion) to support National Taiwan University and National Chengdu University for five years. Currently, National Taiwan University receives subsidies of hundreds of millions of dollars each year from the National Assembly. Taiwan annually spends at least 15% of its budget on education, not including the programs sponsored for scientific research, culture, sports, etc., which are guaranteed by the constitution (Lo William Y. W., 2010).

5.3. Development of departmental accreditation system

In the past, the Ministry of Education held full control over academic quality and diplomas of universities, as well as appointment and promotion decisions. This was essentially a government's tool for controlling and eliminating academic activities that were not beneficial to Kuomintang's leadership. Since 1991, the Ministry of Education has gradually begun to grant the right of self-accreditation to universities; as of 1996-1997 school year, 15 universities have been granted this statute.

To qualify for self-accreditation, universities must undergo three rounds of review. First, they must meet the minimum standards set by the Ministry of Education regarding the percentage of academic publications mad by their faculties within the last 04 years (70% for faculties with over 50 members, and 90% for faculties with less than 20 members). In second round, the Ministry will set up an independent committee to evaluate whether the process of self-accreditation at universities meets those standards. This committee will investigate whether the scientific councils are established in faculties and institutions and function properly. If universities pass two rounds of review, their records will be submitted for third round review - universities that are temporarily permitted for self-accreditation (usually after 3 years). At the end of third round, they must pass a final review and, if passed, will be given full self-accreditation. However, even if this is achieved, self-accreditation result must still be submitted to the Ministry for retention, and published academic publications must also be submitted to the Ministry for re-evaluation.

5.4. Universities are active in preparing their curriculum

Taiwanese state removed previous taboos with subjects related to religion, arts or sport - which KMT viewed as potentially affecting their leadership position and exclusively granted to public universities. In the past, some private-funded universities, such as Fujen Catholic University or Chungyuan Christian University, were not allowed to offer such courses as theology or religion. It was not until 1997 that the new Private Education Law allowed private individuals, organizations, and civil unions... to set up universities of all kinds, except for military and police. Under the law, pedagogical training

is also expanded. Previously, the mission of training teachers (primary and secondary) was only performed by public universities (3 universities and 9 colleges). This monopoly was broken when Teacher Training Law was introduced in 1994. Accordingly, universities that did not specialize in and have specific faculty for this major will be allowed to offer this course. In the academic year of 1995-1996, a total of 2,190 educational institutions participated in the pilot program, including 22 universities and colleges (such as National Tsinghua University and Taiwan Institute of Technology). After appraising and reviewing, the Ministry of Education granted permissions to 07 public higher education institutions and 03 private universities to have the opportunity to offer pedagogic majors starting from 1997-1998 school year.

5.5. *Students are the subject of education*

Taiwan transformed itself from a closed, single-party, conservative society... to become an open, pluralistic society in which the people are the real subject. Likewise, Taiwanese education sector also transformed from cognitive science to a self-reliant, creative, open, pluralistic and, above all, more people-focused sector. The transition is relatively successful without creating any insecurity or violence. Like being successful in economics and politics, today's education sector of Taiwan has earned a respectable place in Asia and in the world. Its science and technology have been regarded as important, contributing a very important part to the "stable development" of Taiwan.

At university, students have the right to comment on the marking of lecturers, participate in many activities of the faculties, institutes, universities... including important ones, and raise their voice in choosing the principal, director, staff member, home-room teacher, and so on.

Taiwan reduces pressure on students. Exams are diversified with reduced contents and more admissions, giving universities the right to recruit students themselves. Subjects are closer to life. Native language is encouraged, and state subsidizes universities to offer foreign language courses to native or non-native language students (There are Vietnamese classes in many elementary and secondary schools offered to children of Taiwanese-Vietnamese families).

Vietnam still does not invest properly with students as the subject of education. Especially in student accommodation, learning environment, activity venues, sports facilities, learning resources, curriculum design etc, should be based on student needs to improve service quality. In Taiwan higher education, whole person development, physical education, communication education, art education... are also focused. Universities have their own stadium, swimming pool, gym teacher, art teacher, music... and students may raise their voice on these matters. At university, students have the right to comment on the marking of lecturers, participate in many activities of the faculties, institutes, universities...

including important ones, and raise their voice in choosing the principal, director, staff member, home-room teacher, and so on.

6. Conclusion

Universities are free to compete, offer appropriate courses, and choose their roadway. Finance is more rational and fairer. Every citizen has the right to receive a subsidy. 12 years free tuition is offered to public or private school students. At universities or colleges, public or private students receive a partial tuition fee. The state monitors tuition fees, keeping it at a minimum for every child to have the opportunity to attend the school. Tuition fees in Taiwan are very low (average income per capita compared to Vietnam). For example, NTU, although ranked among top 51-60 universities in the world, applies a tuition fee of only one-twentieth of that in the US, Japan or even Hong Kong.

The success of any education must be judged by the outcome or main goal, i.e. the students themselves. How do students learn their own life skills, ability to communicate, and self-development? From this point of view, Taiwanese education system is multi-faceted, so that each student can make appropriate choices according to their purposes and preferences.

Taiwan's higher education achievements are the vision of Vietnam's higher education. Due to the particularity of politics, history and culture, when Viet Nam need to refer to international education reforms at the same time, also necessary needs to be based on the current social environment and higher education conditions in Vietnam to plan the most appropriate education policy. And this article is just one of the directions for more thinking.

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BẢN VỀ CẢI CÁCH GIÁO DỤC ĐẠI HỌC VIỆT NAM HIỆN NAY TỪ BÀI HỌC KINH NGHIỆM TRONG CHÍNH SÁCH “TỰ CHỦ ĐẠI HỌC” CỦA ĐÀI LOAN

Nguyễn Tấn Hưng

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TÓM TẮT

Các đại học ở Đài Loan hiện nay hầu như thoát khỏi sự lệ thuộc vào chính phủ, điều đó nhờ vào việc tích cực thi hành chính sách “Tự chủ đại học” ở đảo quốc này. Bài viết thông qua việc phân tích kinh nghiệm trên của Đài Loan, từ đó đề xuất một số kiến nghị thích hợp cho việc phát triển chính sách “Tự chủ đại học” hiện nay ở Việt Nam. Bao gồm: Hợp tác quản lý; quy hoạch chính sách tài chính mới; xây dựng hệ thống tự kiểm định chất lượng; nhà trường chủ động trong việc biên soạn chương trình giảng dạy và sinh viên trở thành chủ thể của giáo dục.

Từ khóa: tự chủ đại học, cải cách giáo dục đại học, Đài Loan, Việt Nam.