

EXPANDING COOPERATIVE RELATIONS AMONGST EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES - ONE OF THE MAJOR PRIORITIES OF VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, HANOI (VNU)

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After four years of implementing the cooperative activities, the meeting jointly organized by the four major East Asian universities (Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU), Beijing University (BU), University of Tokyo (UOT) and University of Seoul (UOS) in Seoul, South Korea, is a significant event. This is a good chance for us to review the achievements, draw useful experiences, and discuss further plans of action.

As far as VNU, Hanoi is concerned, it is possible to affirm that it is very useful to establish a network of four major East Asian universities, organize annual meetings, exchanges and conferences in each member country.

Not only has the role of East Asian values been mentioned, but the importance and impact of the values on social life also have been discussed for a long time. Their values are not only limited to the East Asian cultural space, but they are also known and recognized to the rest of the world. What seems to be new in our activities over the past time is that administrators and scholars from the leading

training and research centres in the East Asian countries have been offered an opportunity to exchange their experience and research results in order to understand better their own values, and more importantly, to look for new directions to bring into full play positive aspects of these values in the process of their national development. At the same time, through direct exchanges and contacts, the relations among the four universities will be closer and expanded.

The biggest outcome we have gained after the exchanges is that we understand more deeply East Asian values which are not only as a category that the social sciences and humanities are concerned with, but also as an invisible and existing factor influencing all the activities of the peoples in East Asian societies. As a result, it is not easy to understand fully and correctly its East Asian values.

East Asia is a regional notion whose geographical location is not difficult to define, but its culturally condensed values created by inhabitants of this region over the long historical processes of thousands of years, pervasive sphere and influence on the

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development process in each location have still been a mystery.

Culture includes all that are created by human beings to maintain and develop their lives. In their turn, human beings are under the influence of natural conditions, ecological environment and historical situations. In a sense, culture is regarded as the result of the process of creative adaptation and behavior made by mankind towards the nature and environment. Therefore, in addition to the shared values in the East Asian region, it is necessary to realize the multiform and diversity of East Asian culture.

From the geographical-cultural angle, Vietnam is located at the crossroad of Southeast Asia. It is the bridge connecting two major civilizations: the Chinese and the Indian, and contacting different cultural currents. Due to historical conditions, Vietnam has been in close contact with East Asian cultures. The East Asian values in Vietnam, therefore, should be considered as an amalgam of Southeast Asian characteristics and East-Asian cultural norms. This characteristic explains why Vietnam is seen as the bridge between East Asia and South East Asia.

In Vietnam, we are always aware of the fact that humans beings are the decisive factor. We also understand that the strong and weak points of a community are determined by its cultural features. Therefore, the study of culture to promote strong points, reduce weak points, and to facilitate the creative capacity of

the people is an important direction of Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU).

In comparison with other East Asian countries, Vietnam has come later to economic development, therefore learning advanced experiences of the countries which have come before and receiving modern scientific and technological achievements are of strategic significance. To do this, the best choice is to give top priorities to education and the development of science and technology. That is why the Vietnamese Government regards education and the development of science and technology as the first priority in its national policy. The Vietnamese Government's focus on investments in and construction of VNU in the past few years is a vivid example of that national policy.

Within the framework of East Asian values, fondness of and respect for learning have a very crucial meaning. It is possible to claim that every Vietnamese family hopes to send their children to school and attend higher education. Sociological survey statistics reveal that of 700 interviewed farmers (who have very low educational background) 45% wish their children could go to university and 30% wish their children could earn a doctoral degree [1]. This is an advantage of Vietnam in the process of education development. Japan, South Korea have had highly valuable experiences in bringing into play this advantage during the course of national development, these are really useful for Vietnam.

In the current complicated circumstances in the world, if we want to develop, we must maintain stability. We have found in East Asian values many factors that contribute to strengthening family connection, social stability, and humanness in various relations through personality education based on the traditional culture norms. The common wish of mankind is to head for the values of humanism and it is obvious that East Asian values have already contained this profound philosophy.

However, not all that is contained in East Asian cultural heritage is superior. Thanks to the exchanges, we have understood the limitations and shortcomings of “East Asian nature” which need to be adjusted to integrate into the world. In the irreversible process of globalization which contains in itself many paradoxes, how to turn what we have into advantages for development is one of the research directions of VNU, Hanoi.

Like the University of Tokyo, Beijing University and University of Seoul, one of the big advantages that VNU, Hanoi possesses is that it has a multisectoral and multidisciplinary structure which includes natural sciences, technology, social sciences and humanities, economics, law, business administration, pedagogy etc. As a leading training and research center, we are able to bring into full play these advantages.

In many recent years, we have paid much attention to developing interdisciplinary sciences, adding them to the specialized science structure which is the traditional

strength of VNU, Hanoi. Heading to that intended direction and realizing the importance of Oriental Culture, the College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH-VNU) has established the Department of Oriental Studies in 1994, where Japanese, Chinese and Korean studies are offered. CSSH – VNU, Hanoi can be said to be the first institution in Vietnam to train these majors with the top level of attainment.

Apart from the interdisciplinary programs at the Department of Oriental Studies, other disciplines of East Asian countries such as history, literature, and philosophy are also offered to students with basic knowledge, so as to help them to carry out in-depth research in these areas of knowledge.

Successful experience gained from the reality of development in East Asian countries are highly appreciated at member institutions of VNU, Hanoi. At the School of Economics, The School of Law, and the Hanoi School of Business, many research projects have been carried out in order to apply experiences of these countries to Vietnam’s situations in which special attention are paid to the promotion of East Asian values.

In the recent years, along with providing modern knowledge on economics and business administration in cooperation with European and American scholars, the Hanoi School of Business - VNU, Hanoi has organized seminars on *Culture and Business Administration*. These have attracted the participation of not only scholars but also business managers.

The contents of seminars on *Ching Studies*, *Applying Taoist Strategies in Business Administration*, *The Trust in Business Activities of Japanese People*, *The Braveness in Doing Business of Korean People* etc. have always been actively discussed and many businessmen have found these seminars interesting and useful for their practices. That is why such seminars are always warmly welcomed by businessmen and entrepreneurs.

At the institutions specialized in training and research on natural sciences and technology, East Asian values are explored in a way so as to educate personality, encourage traditional fondness of learning, “*Teachers are venerated, learning is respected*” tradition, gentleman’s honesty and braveness in scientific activities. This direction, to a certain degree, has resulted in many positive outcomes in learning and in research.

Apart from the research and teaching institutions, the graduates from all majors in VNU, Hanoi have been involved in different commitments at many central agencies, steering operations at the central and local levels, so East Asian values still have their own meaning and can expand their influence and impact on a larger scale.

From the activity of the network of the four East Asian metropolitan universities in recent years, we think that we should concentrate on the following directions in the time to come:

1) Study in-depth each variety of the East Asian cultures to supplement the general views

and perceptions gained. To achieve this gone, East Asian countries should strengthen their research on each other’s history and culture. Within the framework of the four East Asian leading universities, there are already disciplines and research institutions intended for that direction. If we have a close cooperation, the Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese Studies available in each country will be much more effective. At VNU, Hanoi, the disciplines which are related to the East Asian countries are still new, so it needs much help and assistance from its counterparts. VNU, Hanoi is doing its best to develop Vietnamese Studies, considering it as an intersectoral branch of science that makes a positive contribution to the process of perception. Meanwhile, through expanding the cooperation, VNU, Hanoi may also contribute to pushing up the course of Vietnamese Studies in other East Asian countries. Promoting the studies of the culture of each other in the region has a great meaning in making the current East Asian values better in each country.

2) Along with the strengthening and promoting activities of the network of the four major East Asian universities, supporting and creating favorable conditions for setting up bilateral relations should be seen as one of our research direction

At the moment, the University of Tokyo and VNU, Hanoi have reached a cooperative agreement, on the basis of which the former has opened its liaison office in Hanoi. Within

the framework of the Cooperation Program, their two members as the CSSH-VNU, Hanoi and the College of Culture - UOT have signed an agreement to exchange their students. In order to promote this programme, it is very important to promote and expand bilateral relations

Expanding cooperative relations with East Asian countries is one of the priorities of VNU, Hanoi. We hope that the Cooperation Program between us and Beijing University and the University of Seoul will be more effective in the future.

3) As a result of the meetings between the leaders and scholars, we think that promoting exchanges and exchanging experiences play an extremely important part, especially for researchers and students of the four countries. East Asian values should be understood as both shared values with cultural similarities of East Asian countries, and its vitality should be seen in particular cultural contexts. Cultural exchanges will promote mutual understanding amongst East Asian countries. This has an important meaning for the students, who are the future generation of these countries, and the force leading the countries to integrating into the world in the era of globalization. For this generation, what they bring along on the way to integration is national and cultural traditions, and East Asian values, which should be regarded as invaluable properties. They need and deserve to enjoy favorable conditions to broaden their knowledge. That is why we propose that each of the universities look for all

possible opportunities for our students to be able to visit, contact, and exchange their opinions.

4) In the field of scientific research, due attention should be paid to developing cooperative research.

Although some achievements have been gained concerning the content and impact of cultural values on the society in the past, at present, and in the future, these are still topical for investigation. How to develop research topics which involve the participation of scholars and administrators of the four universities is a question which deserves special attention.

In the historical process as well as for the time being, cultural and economic exchanges, and multilateral and bilateral relations among East Asian countries are the big issues that need an international cooperation. As far as we know, in recent time, Professor Furuta Motoo from the University of Tokyo has cooperated with Chinese and Vietnamese researchers to implement a meaningful research project on *Cross-Border Trade Relations Between Vietnam and China*. This project, in our view, is not just of pure economic benefit, but it contains in itself other contents which are concerned with the issues we are interested in, namely East Asian values. It can be said that this is a good model of cooperation that should be taken into consideration.

As far as Vietnamese Studies is concerned, there are also many topics for us to carry out cooperative research. For example,

Vietnamese scholars take special interest in the issues of traditional villages-communes. In history, all East Asian countries belong to agricultural cultures where wet rice is popular, so villages-communes are also one of the issues which were once extensively studied. Developing a topic and turning it into a theme for an international conference on traditional villages-communes within East Asia would certainly attract attention from many scholars.

From the proposals above, we would like to make the following suggestions:

Expanding cooperative relations among East Asian countries, on top of that, among

members of the four leading East Asian universities in our network, is a useful means for understanding cultural values which are, in essence, rich and diversified. At the same time, it is the best way to preserve and bring into full play East Asian values.

Fully realizing the important role of the East Asian values in the past, at present, and in the future, as well as respecting cooperative relations with other countries in East Asia, VNU, Hanoi regards the expansion of cooperative relations with the communities of East Asian universities as one of the prioritized directions in its development strategies. We hope to receive your consensus and support.

REFERENCES

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