

SOME THOUGHTS ON FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES IN VIETNAM

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So far, Scientology or theory of science and scientific research has still been nascent for much scientific knowledge stems from researches and projects done by foreign scholars. However, there needs wider consensus on some understandings and conceptions involving the disciplinary, including the concept of "fundamental research".

1. The concept of "fundamental research" and fundamental research in social sciences and humanities

Scientific research is a specialized area of study that contains creativity and novelty and focuses on finding the scientifically unknown, which is either to identify the essence of matters, promote cognitive growth or invent new ways and methods and advanced technology to transform the world to human purposes.

Scientific research can be divided into two areas: fundamental and applied. The later can be regarded as the application of the former's results to interpreting the nature of matters and phenomena, or the invention of new methods for applying the results into practice. Applied research, therefore, functions as an agent in translating

theoretical findings into practical activities. Subsequent findings of fundamental research then impact to a smaller degree on aspects of science and technology, and will be used in resolving certain problems under certain circumstances. Fundamental research, by contrast, involves exploring properties, structures, movements, internal interactions of matters and their interactions with others. In other words, it covers all theoretical or experimental research activities with a view to generating fresh understandings on roots of observed phenomena and events without forcibly conducting any specialized research. Seen from the point of view of the above definition, a research will be referred to as fundamental if it aims to either reflex the nature (in the broadest sense in social sciences and humanities and natural sciences) or identify new areas of study without immediate practical purposes. The findings yielded by fundamental research can be presented in the form of theorems, theories or universal principles, and possibly influence a greater scientific dimension.

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With regard to social sciences and humanities, scientific research is considered the combination of overall systematic and creative activities with a view to promoting and completing human, cultural and social understandings and their involvement in resolving social and human issues.

From the above concepts, "A handbook of scientific and technological research" published by UNESCO has provided some examples of fundamental research in social science and humanities. They include:

-Market economy in relation to social class changes

-The role of family in traditional and modern societies

-International issues and their impact on national economic development

-Development and growth of languages

-Sources of historical archives

It is obvious that there exists a close link between fundamental and applied research. They are complementary and supplementary. The former is to serve human life and this is realized not by direct but indirect means of applied research. On the contrary, applied research supports fundamental research. In fact fundamental research never proposes discretionary and arbitrary but practical and feasible projects resulting from applied research.

However, the separation between applied and fundamental research is

fairly relative and the two fields tend to be mutually supportive.

2. Fundamental research in social sciences and humanities in Vietnam: a state of art

Fundamental research is developing in research institutes and colleges and institutions of higher education. Scientific research activities in universities, along with undergraduate and postgraduate training, are considered major academic tasks that should be fulfilled by individual teacher. It is believed in most universities that improved academic performance and training quality requires well-organized scientific research. In fact, any lecturer who pays due attention to this task and benefit from it will perform better.

As already mentioned, scientific research is varied in forms under which fundamental research counts as most significant in universities, particularly in those institutions which offer basic sciences. Fundamental research aims not only to update and improve academic knowledge but also to lay groundwork for compiling text books, lectures, and reference data, all for improved training quality.

This argument never means applied research is neglected in universities. In fact, over decades, applied research achievements in social sciences and humanities conducted by Hanoi University (currently Vietnam National University, Hanoi) and University of Technology, University of Agriculture

No1, Hanoi Pedagogical University in terms of de-mining, seeds, microbiology, geology, historical traditions and cultures, communal rules and regulations, have been introduced into life and production with a view to enhancing the socio-economic development of the country.

As compared to applied research, fundamental research should be put first and paid due attention to and should be prioritized in terms of allocating scientific and financial resources for universities, particularly those of basic sciences.

However, over the past decade, while much attention has been paid to natural sciences in terms of programming and funding (mounting to multi-million VND), the reversed case has occurred in social sciences and humanities. Besides some independent state-level projects or sub-programs of scientific research programs administered by the Central Council of Theory, fundamental research has just been developed in some research institutes and relevant universities in the forms of sub-projects with limited funding.

In the Hanoi College of Social Sciences and Humanities, as of 2001, under the support of Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (currently Ministry of Science and Technology), Vietnam National University, Hanoi has allowed for developing on pilot basis a new type of scientific research: Fundamental research. After one year,

48 projects have been approved with one-year tenure and 20 million VND for each.

It is generally recognized that research topics are still fragmented and scattered in content and purposes. Furthermore, blurred criteria of assessment among research establishments and inadequate funding have discouraged academic staff in universities. It is therefore necessary to review common understandings and concepts and make sound solutions to promote growth of fundamental research in social sciences and humanities.

3. Recommendations

With a view to facilitating fundamental research activities and that in social sciences and humanities, it is essential that Ministry of Science and Technology as a supreme body governing scientific dimension consult scientists and scientific administrators in order to take the following measures:

3.1. It is imperative that understandings and conceptions among scientists and administrators of the position, importance and characteristics of fundamental research in social sciences and humanities should be strengthened; at the same time, work out criteria of assessment and approval to maintain the scientific objectiveness and clarify the nature and scientific merits of fundamental research projects. In our opinion, fundamental research in social sciences and humanities should focus on:

-Theoretical and methodological research of social sciences and humanities

-Groundwork research for writing textbooks and materials

-Compiling dictionaries, workbooks and reference facilities

-Research (including translation studies) to compile specialized materials (history, Han-Nam, Sinology study, Japanese study, and Korean study)

3.2. It is necessary that a *National Fundamental Research Fund* be established for social sciences and humanities. The fund should operate independently of the state science and technology management body. Sources of funding will come from: state budget, businesses, donors, or from research contracts. Experience has shown that the fund be administered not only by the board of directors but also by the secretariat and scientific research councils advising the processing application and approval.

3.3. While awaiting the fund to come, it is advisable that the state represented by Ministry of Science and Technology should allow for the establishment of Fundamental Research Project in social sciences and humanities independent of those administered by the Central Council of Theories (most of the projects

in this program go to research establishments of National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh Political Academy and Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of Defense). This fundamental research program should first be developed in universities of basic sciences and relevant research establishments and training institutes. There should also be *Scientific Fund*, besides state funding, to support research projects, particularly fundamental research. In assessing and approving research projects, there should be greater focus on not only newly-emerged disciplinary, required update of theoretical and methodological knowledge but also on assigning research tasks to competent young staff. Only in so doing can problems of insufficient academic staff in universities be solved.

To this end, there should be further and stronger improvements in the management of scientific research activities, including fundamental research on the basis of selective utilization of the experience overseas. At the same time, it is vital that multi-leveled flexibility, creativity and synergy of scientific research management apparatus should be brought into full play.

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