

# Three Reasons to Open Universities to the Public

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In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world witnessed a revolution in the higher education. The elite education was replaced with the mass education. There

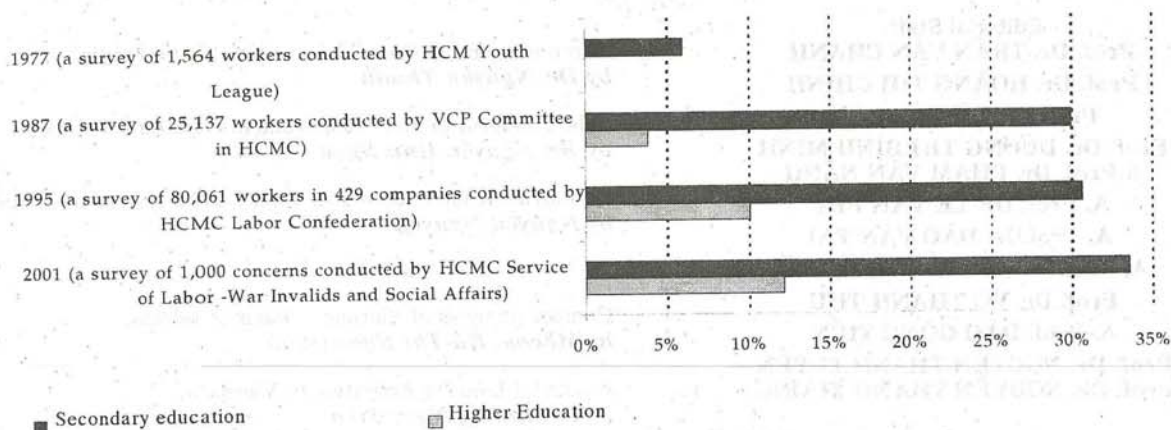
Minh suggested (He said, "A manual labor without knowledge is a hemiplegia suffer." At the Second Congress of Vietnamese Students - Hồ Chí Minh, Complete Works, Vol. 9)

that there were no workers of 1,564 surveyed ones with higher education in 1977 but 10 years after, in 1987, there was 3.83% of the 25,137 workers having attended universities or

higher education has increased in terms of quantity and proportion as well.

## 2. Demand of development

Figure 1: Education and expertise of HCMC workers surveyed during 1997-2001



were real booms in the numbers of universities and colleges and their students. The Vietnamese higher education, regrettably, was still in a backwater. In Vietnam today, opening the higher education to the public is controversial and people are divided in this issue. In my opinion, there are three reasons to open it to the public.

### 1. Meeting the demand for knowledge by the public

First of all, we must affirm that the higher education isn't the key to high positions, and to attend universities must aim at gaining more knowledge needed for one's trade and business. And as Phan Chu Trinh put it, "to make studies to do business and trading," and to avoid being a "hemiplegia" as Hồ Chí



Workers attending universities and colleges to do their jobs better. Data from our various surveys conducted in HCMC show

colleges. This figure kept increasing over years: 10.18% in 1995 and 12.22% in 2001. Thus, the army of workers with

Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the human kind started to move from the industrial economy to the knowledge-based economy that, according to Prof. Chu Hào, include four characteristics:

- Over 70% of the labor force have enough knowledge needed for their jobs,
- Over 70% of assets lie in human resource,
- Over 70% of added value brought about by the grey matter, and
- Over 70% of GDP originated from high-tech industries.

Vietnam mustn't miss this chance. Its strategy to develop the human resource must take into account these characteristics of the new economy where "higher education is considered by communities all over the world as the most effective tool for the development of human resource



and overall social development as well." (SEAMEO report)

At present, the number of university students all over the world has topped the 100-million mark. In some developed countries, over 50% of the 18-22 age bracket is attending universities. The door of universities is really open to the public. In the U.S. whose population is some 284.5 million in 2001, there are over 3,600 colleges and universities providing courses in over 600 fields for some 13.5 million students. This means that there are 474 students out of 10,000 people. Standardized entrance examinations in the U.S. only aim at estimating and checking skills and knowledge needed for success in making studies, not at limiting the input.

To develop the human resource needed for the industrialization and modernization, the Vietnamese education strategy for the years 2001-2010 aims at increasing the ratio of university students to 10,000 people from 118 in 2000-01 to 200 in 2010.

### 3. Limiting negative effects and saving social resources in university entrance examinations

Speaking of the 2003 university entrance examination, Tuổi Trẻ (July 12, 2003) said: "The 2003 university entrance examination could be seen as successful in various aspects (good examination questions, discipline in exam sites, good behavior and work ethics of governmental bodies, etc.) But the exam session also experienced complex events and happenings. In the next exams, the Ministry of Education and Training and all universities must achieve more improvements to come up to expectations of the public."

However, many wrongdoings relating to univer-

sity entrance exams have existed for years: fraud, reduced documents brought into exam rooms, using false ID to take exam for somebody else, etc. Although various improvements in the 2003 exam were made in order to provide examinees with better conditions, social resources were still spent too much on the examination (preparations and organization of the exam, giving marks, publicizing results, etc.)

If the higher education is available for everybody, all doors of universities are wide open in an effort to

### 4. More problems to discuss

- Many people think that the open higher education could produce bad effects on the quality of training process. Their worry seems unreasonable. The opening of universities could produce only favorable effects on the education service. The quality of the higher education service depends on many factors: expertise of teachers, facilities for study and teaching, teaching methods, and so on. And intellectual level of examinees and freshmen is only one of these factors. On the na-

and workers with university degrees, especially in informatics, financial and banking services; and a surplus of incompetent professionals. Real experts, managers and teachers are still lacking, and this situation will be hardly improved in the next decade.

Generally, realizing an open higher education is a step toward "equal opportunity for enjoying the education service" for everybody. In his letter to American Secretary of State dated Nov. 1, 1945 when sending 50 Vietnamese students to make stud-



give equal opportunity to gain the higher education to the public and help them to improve their skills, productivity and employment prospects, and opening the university door is considered as a way to "build a learning society and create favorable conditions for long-term learning" as suggested by the Strategy to Develop the Education Service in 2001-2010, all above-mentioned wrongdoings will disappear and a lot of time, money and energy will be saved and spent on improvements in the education process.

tional scale, the quality of university students isn't determined by the entrance exam, but by the primary and secondary education instead. The higher education, up till now, has been the bottleneck of the whole education service. Vietnam should remove this bottleneck in order to enhance the general intellectual level of the public that proves to be a firm basis for the economic growth.

- Will the open higher education make the shortage of 'workers or doers' and surplus of 'teachers' more serious? In fact, Vietnam is suffering a shortage of well-trained workers

ies in the U.S., Hồ Chí Minh wrote, "On behalf of the Vietnamese Cultural Association, I want to express our need to send some 50 Vietnamese students to make studies in the U.S. in an effort to establish a friendly relation with American students for one thing, and for another, push ahead with researches on technology, agronomy and other fields." His concerns about the development of human resource during the first days of an independent Vietnam makes us moved and forces our generation to try our best to realize his aspiration. ■