

Review of: "An experience of global higher education and university autonomy in Viet Nam: A case study of Ton Duc Thang University in Ho Chi Minh City"

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Other than some English language usage edits that could be easily done, there are simple structural changes that I have recommended. But more important is the fact that the methodology is missing, so we do not know where the quotes came from or how they were chosen. This leads to a larger problem, which is that the conclusions do not flow from an analysis of the data. This would matter less if the news in the abstract were less cheery and positive. However, the data (the comments presumably from overseas faculty) point to significant problems. This is a disconnect. When there is a disconnect between the abstract (and thus the conclusions in the sense of lessons learned, etc.) and the data, the point of doing the research is lost.

Unfortunately, this is a problem I have seen in a number of Vietnamese research articles. It is my guess that this is a consequence of the hierarchical relationships of the university, which are inimical to academic freedom. The hierarchical relationships enable the impossible workloads, schedules, and deadlines, under threat of job loss. The rush to win rankings also makes this worse. There are incentives to provide “good news” research that flatters the institution and avoids reporting unpleasant or difficult results. Or technical research in hard science fields, etc, where there is a “right” answer as compared to a thoughtful and probing analysis of living data.

I am aware that this very problem is one that is mentioned in the article.

The problems that are mentioned by the overseas faculty who were surveyed are important, and it is praiseworthy that this paper surfaces them. My problem with the paper is that there is no extended discussion of these problems — they are just set out for the reader to contemplate, without comment or analysis.

The future of higher education has to be global, inter-cultural education, of course. For Ton Duc Thang to be attempting it is wonderful. The problems are something that we all should learn from. I believe that they revolve around the question of academic freedom: the necessity for faculty to be able to explore both the core and the boundaries of their fields freely, without interference from the administration. Academic freedom is something that faculty have to be able to exercise not only in the classroom but in governance in the institution, in research, and in the public sphere as experts speaking publicly, without fear of political intimidation.

The situation in the US has a lot of problems right now, of course — maybe more than in the past, although there have

been plenty in the past. The problem of academic freedom is in the news here, with a lot of political interference in what can be taught and who can teach it.