

YOUNG SCIENTIFIC INTELLECTUALS IN VIETNAM AT PRESENT: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

TRAN CAO SON *

Abstract: The paper presents formation and development of the young scientific intellectual circle in the present context. A lot of research and higher-educational institutions are now encountering a gap of intellectual generations. The formation of the young scientific intellectual circle has been closely attached with a lot of opportunities and challenges as well. The opportunities and challenges are the very objective reality that should be dealt with. To promote the role of young scientific intellectuals, it is necessary to create a favorable social environment so that they can advance themselves to meet requirements of the present age. At the same time, every intellectuals need to realize clearly their responsibilities and incessantly strive for mastery in order to reach scientific achievements required by the country.

Key words: Intellectual, science, young scientific intellectuals.

1. What are Specific Traits of Intellectuals?

Since “Tri”⁽¹⁾ (*intelligence*) is viewed as the ability to understand, the energetic resource of information, and brainpower, an intellectual will be understood as a person, who has profound knowledge and ability to realize the nature of things, phenomena, and socio-natural law. “Thuc” (*awakening*) is understood as rational, effective operation and expression of intelligence into life; i.e. it means the same as “Giac” (*sense of awakening*). According to Sutra of Buddhism, it is necessary to awake not only ourselves, but also others. At that time, the sense of awakening can be perfect and we can accomplish things completely and undoubtedly. Thus, an intellectual is a person, who has great intelligence, great ability and can overcome all restraints.

Some people have intelligence, but have no sense of awakening. On the contrary, some have the sense of awakening, but they

do not have enough intelligence. Lacking one of the two things, a person cannot be considered an intellectual. Many people have obtained a certificate of high education or a high academic title, but they cannot be seen as intellectuals, if they have no sense of awakening. In the other hand, some practitioners or high - ranking officials cannot be seen as intellectuals either, if they lack intelligence, although they want to express the awakening to society. All sensory, passive, dogmatic and extreme activities cannot be considered intellectual. Misunderstanding or false understanding of the conception “intellectual” still remains a common disease of society.

True intellectuals always have really

(*) Assoc. Prof, Ph.D., Institute of Sociology.

(1) Intellectual means “Trí thức” in Vietnamese. The author explains about the meaning of two parts of this compound including “trí” and “thức”, aiming at clarifying the meaning of “intellectual”.

remarkable characteristics that they do not overindulge themselves in motley, time-serving things. They know how and for whom they should make use of talent and knowledge and they are aware of when it is appropriate with man and nature.

According to the Resolution of the 7th Meeting of the 10th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, "*Intellectuals are the laborers, who have brainpower, high educational standards in specific fields, ability to make independent thinking, and creative mind as well as know how to disseminate and enrich knowledge, creating products of high material and spiritual value for society*". This can be seen as a sound definition of intellectuals.

2. Young Scientific Intellectuals

According to the above-mentioned basic characteristics of intellectuals, we can identify who scientific intellectuals are; i.e. intellectuals in the scientific research sector. Young scientific intellectuals are the scientific intellectuals, who are young at age and junior at profession. Based on the average level of people's knowledge and that of the entire circle of intellectuals generally and scientific intellectuals specifically, university graduates, who are now working for a research or high education training institutions (including basic and applied research institutes, universities and colleges) can be considered scientific intellectuals.

Doing scientific research is a hard job that requires a lot of time and experience. In reality, most of professors and associate professors in the past four decades were conferred with the titles at the age of 50 and above, after a long period of hard working.

At this point, they really had sufficient capacity to do research and provide high-qualified training.

Intellectuals, who work for scientific research institutes or universities/colleges after graduation from university, need to spend several decades studying and cultivating knowledge as well as skills. For previous generations, intellectuals became really experienced in their work, only when they were already 35 to 40 years old. We, therefore, can view intellectuals aged less than 40 at scientific research institutes and universities/colleges as young scientific intellectuals.

3. An Interruption in the Line of Scientific Intellectual Generations

The fact that too few intellectuals were recruited to basic scientific research institutes, especially in social sciences and humanities in the 1990s has resulted in an interruption of generations. This situation has taken place not only in one institute or university, but also in a lot of institutions. Previous generations of scientific intellectuals (they are roughly understood to be born before the mid 1950s) were trained at many different institutions, even at French universities during colonial period and Vietnam's universities later. After Northern Vietnam was completely liberated, a significant number of intellectuals was sent abroad to get training at universities in China, Soviet Union, and other Eastern European countries. They constituted a generation of scientific intellectuals, who took formal training in the State-owned educational system from primary school through university.

Consequently, this circle of intellectuals was equipped with scientific research manner through training models, despite of the country economic difficulties at that time. When they studied at university, they already drilled themselves to become scientist afterwards. Seminars took place regularly, even on Sunday or late evening. Scientific conferences, presentations of theses and study tours were held, enabling them to practice research work, which was completely indispensable for them. After university graduation, they had obtained knowledge of how to design and carry out research work. Afterwards, such knowledge was rarely provided at universities, especially private ones that have been established recently. After they moved to research

institutes and universities, they could work immediately as real intellectuals of high qualification.

By the early 21st century, especially in the second decade of this century, almost all those intellectuals have retired. The rest ones make up a very little proportion and, moreover, they are about to retire as well.

4. Formation of the Young Scientific Intellectual Workforce

There have been obvious and great changes in the educational system of Vietnam, due to the renovation and open policy. After just a decade, the number of students has increased rapidly in all types of universities and all kinds of disciplines. It is also about time to do recruitment for institutes and universities/ colleges (See Table 1).

Table 1: Quantity of University Students for the Period 1990 - 2006⁽²⁾

(Unit: student)

School year	Number of students	Of which	
		Long-term regular	In-service and other types of training
1990-1991	114,495	94,447	50,048
1996-1997	448,090	197,581	290,590
1997-1998	671,120	369,596	301,524
1998-1999	798,900	469,686	329,214
1999-2000	893,800	509,637	384,117
2000-2001	969,403	552,461	365,767
2001-2002	794,119	579,197	394,922
2005-2006	1,387,107	752,421	634,686

Formation of a generation of young scientific intellectuals in this period is a landmark in development, since there are many favorable conditions such as the booming of the most wonderful technology of the mankind (Information technology), the implementation of open policy and

international integration, and the tendency of knowledge - based economy. Current

⁽²⁾ Data of the State-level project “Policy renovation for intellectuals in sciences and technology in the industrialization and modernization process in Vietnam”. Final report of the State-level independent project code DTDL-2003/27, Project Head: Prof.Dr. Nguyen Huu Tang, Hanoi, 2007.

young intellectuals have far greater advantages than previous generations in 5 aspects as enumerated below: *Firstly*, they have better material facilities to meet requirements of work. The emergence of information technology with global connection makes it convenient for them to get information and quick communication. Almost 100% of young intellectuals can use proficiently a computer for research. To use a computer for editing documents, communicating with others, and getting information from websites is surely hundreds times more effective than referring to books and taking notes by a pen or a pencil. In the past, scientists could get in touch with overseas scholars rarely through international conferences, in which they might have an opportunity to exchange ideas in English for just few minutes. On the contrary, the young generation now has a lot of chances to contact, exchange ideas, and work frequently in English. *Secondly*, exchange of scientific contents has been diversified, strengthening the research linkage and developing research approaches. *Thirdly*, information sharing has been simpler and more important than ever before. *Fourthly*, cooperation with international organizations has much developed. And, *fifthly*, a lot of young intellectuals have so good English that they can work directly with international scientists.

According to the survey on 30 young scientific intellectuals, 22 ones of them reveal that they can use English but at different levels; 7 ones of them can use English fluently in all activities, including

communication, exchange and paper writing.

In many institutions, a lot of young scientific intellectuals took formal training and graduated from universities in developed countries such as USA, England, Australia, Japan, and France etc...

In terms of living conditions among scientific intellectuals of previous generations, most of newcomers at research institutes in Hanoi had no house to live (except for those, whose family had been living in Hanoi). Many of them had to stay at the workplace, sleeping on tables at the office. Their health status was not good, as meals did not provide them with enough nutrition; they were therefore often ill; certainly, it was not easy for them to concentrate mind on sciences, when they were encountering economic difficulties.

Data on housing conditions collected from the above-mentioned survey on 30 intellectuals (of which 27 ones came from other provinces to Hanoi) shows that all of them have a house to live in Hanoi and they do not have to sleep overnight on tables at the office. Regarding to the house, 10 of them bought it by themselves; 5 others got it from their family; and the rest 15 ones live in houses or rooms for rent. All the 30 interviewees answered that they had a place to rest, after work; in addition, they could work at home as well. The houses, where they are staying, certainly satisfy the criteria of a "living house". What the young scientific intellectuals are facing, however, is the mechanism of usage, in order to get sustainable existence.

5. Challenges to the Young Scientific Intellectual Workforce

5.1. Loose Linkages between Scientific Research and High Level Education - training

The system of scientific research and high level education-training in our country is not similar to those in advanced countries in the world.

In advanced countries, universities make up a complete and comprehensive system that consists of basic research, applied research and training. Research institutes are located within the system of universities. Scientific research and high level education-training are the two major functions undertaken by universities. However, the system of research institutes, especially basic research ones with hundreds specialized institutes and thousands researchers of high qualifications, is separated from system of universities in Vietnam; whereas, there is a serious shortage of human resource of high-qualifications at universities. A range of universities (including the State-owned, Semi-State owned, and private ones) have been established for recent years. Lecturers at universities consist of different types: some have been already at the retirement age, but they still have ability and desire to give teaching; some have been moved from colleges; some have just graduated from university; assistant and visiting lecturers have been recruited without being screened. In the meanwhile, a lot of scientists of high qualifications at research institutes of two big academies haven't been appropriately used yet.

The workforce of young scientific

intellectuals in the high level education-training system (universities) and that in the scientific research system (institutes) haven't yet collaborated sufficiently with each other in order to share responsibilities and experience in in-depth research and training. Those, who have experience in teaching and training, lack favorable conditions to do research. Whereas, those, who do in-depth research, lack favorable conditions to give research experience and findings through training.

5.2. Lack of a Creative Environment

Some negative outstanding characteristics of the scientific intellectual circle in Vietnam can be enumerated as below: it is not proportional; cooperation hasn't been effective yet; potentials of individual creativeness haven't been promoted much; intellectuals still remain egoistic and unconfident. We have a wide range of scientists in all disciplines, but we have done neither great scientific work nor scientific invention at the international level. It is not difficult to get a large population-based quantity of those, who have certain certificates of education-training. The importance is what the quality of those people is and how they will be used. Looking at the whole history of our country, particularly changes in the past century, we can realize that Vietnam hasn't had a really complete workforce of scientific intellectuals and we haven't had a favorable environment for development of scientific intellectuals, which advanced countries have already had for centuries. Intellectuals have become civil servants.

Universities and institutes have turned administrative-like institutions and they, therefore, have to run according to general standards and regulations applied for all State-owned institutions. The role of a breeding ground for young talents, which is a basic feature of an intelligence valley, hasn't been played yet. When intellectuals become civil servants and work in an administrative-like institution, they cannot develop their creativeness. To make universities and research institutes become "*breeding grounds for talents*", it is necessary to "*cope with risks*", "*accept creative variety*", and "*be fearless of failures*", as the experience drawn by world - famous scientists in achieving their success. Besides, economic living conditions of intellectuals still remain lower than needed as well as lower than the average standards of the whole society. Consequently, their social status is not respected.

In my opinion, following are some relatively accurate comments made by Chu Hao on Vietnamese intellectuals: "*What are particularities of this circle? Apart from some positive particularities, which have been recognized by the Party, the State and a part of society, such as: patriotic and loyal to the Nation, the People, the Party, and the Socialism; laborious; intelligent; creative etc..., they also have extremely typical and undeniable negative particularities, including: (1) Cursory in thinking and unserious in doing research; (2) Time-serving, pragmatic and self-interested in behavior; (3) Craving for achievement recognition and easily accept deceitfulness;*

and (4) lack the sense of cooperation and short on altruism"⁽³⁾.

The actual state that intellectuals have to face in Vietnam has caused considerable impacts on development of young scientific intellectuals at present. They have been affected much by backward mechanisms, so it is difficult for them to find out a new way for themselves. Current young scientific intellectuals will remain in stagnancy and we will not have a powerful workforce of intellectuals, which is needed for every advanced society, if we do not realize correctly this issue and do not have appropriate measures to improve it.

5.3. Difficulties in Living Conditions and Income

Living conditions of young people have been much better now, compared with those of previous generations. They do not have to stand in line to buy rice and other food according to allocated coupons; they do not have to stay overnight and sleep on chairs or tables at the office. Now, they all have living places, workplaces, and material facilities to work. In reality, however, they still have to cope with a lot of challenges. The material facilities they have had now are really temporary and unstable. According to the scale of monthly salaries, the average income of young scientific intellectuals ranges from 3 to 4 million VND a month. As the income is too low, it cannot be enough to cover expenses of basic needs, such as: food (at a minimum level), rent (at

⁽³⁾ Chu Hao, "Democracy and Intellectuals" (report of the special subject in the Project KX.03.11/06-10.

the lowest level), communication, medical examination/treatment and medicines, travel cost, service bills (electricity, tap water, television, hygienic etc...), and countless potential expenses. For those, who have young children especially, the income is not enough to cover all expenses for a child, when they send him or her to kindergarten. In the meanwhile, most of the young scientific intellectuals have children at the preschool age. To make it possible for them to do research at their institute, there are two options: one is to get supports from their family; the other is to take part actively in projects that provide a high honorarium, but they also become dependent on the project arrangements. Without these two options, they have no choice but to take leave of the research work in order to get another appropriate job. In reality, all these three possibilities have happened to young scientific intellectuals.

After working at research institutes for a relatively long time, many young intellectuals, who graduated from formal training at university and had capacity to do research, have left their institute due to different reasons, of which one was the low income. They have, therefore, to do another job, which provides them with a higher income. For the past 10 years, at the Institute of Sociology (under the administration of Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences) alone, about 50 young researchers have left the Institute to look for another job.

It is very common, as no one can live on such a low income. The two former options, however, are just temporary solutions and

they cannot make it favorable for intellectuals to address themselves to creation as desired.

5.4. Pragmatic and Opportunity Missing

Due to incoherent and cursory recruitments, there are relatively great differences in the workforce of State-own institutions.

a. Students of Low Quality

The massive establishment of different universities and unsystematic enrollment of students according to business demands and economically pragmatic purpose have resulted in the fact that a considerable number of school pupils enrolled in university, although their knowledge and quality had been terrible at school. Some of them took university entrance examinations for several times, but the total score of 3 subjects was just 7 or 8; yet, they were still accepted by 2 or 3 universities.

The phenomenon, in which students just need recording in the roll-call instead of studying seriously; or students spend money buying higher scores; or they beg of teachers for scores or ask someone to tell teachers to do it, takes place widely at universities. As a result, students are not qualified enough to meet employment requirements, after graduating from university. Those graduates are, however, recruited to important institutions and even specialized research institutes or universities, thanks to relationships or some favorable conditions; for example, they have an acquaintance or a relative, who can make intervention in the recruitment. Although they are named as young intellectuals, they cannot undertake their own jobs. On the contrary, many excellent graduates are kept away from

opportunities of the jobs. What we are really concerned about is the difference in knowledge and dignity among young scientific intellectuals at present.

b. Lack of Selection

For the past several decades, one of the most serious shortcomings of the recruitment mechanism for those, who get salary from the State budget, is the lack of selection and dismissal. After they get the decision about the job approval, they will be regular personnel for the rest of life. When they are not appropriate with their job in one institution, they will move to another institution, where they still get a salary from the State budget as regular personnel.

This inflexibility of the mechanism makes it favorable for those, who lack both responsibility and ability, to continue to exist at the institutions until the retirement age. The interest that they bring to the country through their work is very little. Regular personnel of the State-owned institutions, who do not work at all or work ineffectively, make up a large proportion. This is a characteristic of the irresponsible or “buckshee” mechanism. The corresponding proportion of those in scientific research institutions and universities is also relatively significant.

c. Pragmatism of the Low - qualified Intellectual Workforce

To avoid doing research on complicated and difficult issues has become an alarming problem, which should be thoroughly dealt with. Many scientific intellectuals choose simple work with a high income to do. They avoid doing research on new issues.

As regular personnel, they do not worry about losing their job; they do not need to do research, but they just do some simple work to ensure living conditions. Many researchers have never done any noticeable research work, although they have worked at a research institute for years. It is very common that a researcher has written just few papers in specialized journals for the entire working life. There are a considerable number of young scientific intellectuals, who follow this negative way of working at present.

To use a computer and English proficiently is another challenge for many young researchers. Opportunities provided in this time are not meaningful to them at all; they have deliberately ignored the opportunities and have accepted to be backward.

5.5. Consequences

Obviously, occupational selection has been a big problem for many years and it has brought about a lot of questions that we need to answer. The more occupations are expanded, the more options ones will have. In the past, basic scientific disciplines were the top-ranking in occupational selection, but they are now replaced by other occupations, which can provide with a high income. Of all basic scientific disciplines, social sciences are the most disadvantageous now. At one time, there were crowded students in the faculties of history and literature, but we cannot get enough students for those faculties at present, since students no longer want to enroll in the disciplines. Let's take sociology for example, which can be then generalized for other disciplines.

In the list of disciplines of social sciences and humanities, sociology still remains a new discipline. Functions and tasks of sociology are, however, completely unfamiliar to those, who submit an application for university enrollment. Decisions about taking entrance examinations into the faculty of sociology may stem from different reasons.

According to the survey on occupational selection conducted with 30 young scientific intellectuals at Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, mainly at the Institute of Sociology, 5 of them answered that they “liked to learn and do sociological research a lot”; 4 ones answered that they “didn’t know what discipline they should choose, so they decided to apply for enrollment at the discipline of sociology to see what it would be like”; 5 ones answered that they “were persuaded by an acquaintance, who had studied in the discipline of sociology”; 3 ones answered that their “relatives would take care of their employment, after graduating from the discipline of sociology”; 2 ones answered that “it wouldn’t be hard and leisured to work in sociology, although it would give a low income”; and, the rest 10 ones gave “no idea”.

Although the findings of the survey may not provide a completely accurate illustration for all, we can realize that occupational selection of young intellectuals in the discipline of sociology is not simple at all. Perhaps, this is a common reality for all other disciplines of social sciences and humanities.

6. Policy Recommendations for Young Scientific Intellectuals

The resolution No.27-NQ/TU of the 7th Meeting of the 10th Central Committee of

the Communist Party of Vietnam on “*Building the intellectual workforce in the time of the country industrialization and modernization acceleration*” highlights: “*in all times, knowledge is always a foundation for social progress; the intellectual workforce is, therefore, the cadre of creation and knowledge dissemination. Together with rapid development of modern technology and scientific revolutions at present, the intellectual workforce has become a particularly important resource, creating great power for the country development strategies*”. Intellectuals constitute a particularly significant creative workforce in acceleration of industrialization, modernization and international integration in Vietnam. To build a powerful intellectual workforce is a common task of the whole society and political system, in which the Party and the Government play a decisive role.

Based on above-mentioned assessments, we present here some recommendations on the tasks and measures to build the intellectual workforce for the time of industrialization and modernization acceleration in our country as below:

It is necessary to: (1) set up an appropriate environment and favorable conditions for activities of intellectuals; (2) promulgate and implement policies for intellectual preferential treatment; (3) make basic changes in education and training of intellectuals; (4) heighten intellectuals’ responsibility as well as strengthen and improve quality of intellectual associations’ activities; and, (5) set up reasonable policies and mechanism to mobilize intellectuals, especially leading ones, for training of next generations.

For the workforce of young intellectuals, it is essential to: (1) *build a particular salary scale for scientists that provides a salary many times higher than the current one*; (2) *improve working conditions*; (3) *dignify spiritual values in society*; (4) *set up a formal training strategy for occupational and research capacity building*; (5) *continue providing them with further specialized training relating to the fields of their work*; (6) *improve conditions for international cooperation*; and (7) *promulgate specific policies for personnel assessment, selection and dismissal*.

7. Conclusion

Young scientific intellectuals are an extremely precious resource for the country development. To have appropriate policies for the young intellectual workforce building is, therefore, a key strategy for comprehensive development. Together with all intellectuals of the mankind, young scientific intellectuals are now stepping forward in the process of international integration and development as well as in the access to new knowledge of the world. Achievements, which can be gained by our country in future, partly depend on them.

At present, young intellectuals in basic sciences are encountering a lot of challenges, of which the most obvious ones are low standards of living and the current unfavorable environment for creation.

To meet requirements of industrialization, modernization as well as international integration, cooperation and competition, it is necessary to improve our resources of knowledge, which should be viewed as a key content of our development strategy.

One of the most important requirements is

to set up standards of value to be applied in sciences and for scientists as well. It is essential to make our country become a breeding ground for intelligence and build the image of creative and dedicative intellectuals.

To make our country become a breeding ground for intelligence, everyone has to improve creativeness, self-awareness, and passion for knowledge. The State and mass organizations play the supportive role as “a midwife” in the process of forming, conceiving and realizing creative ideas of individuals and teams, sharing success and failure with them.

References

1. Communist Party of Vietnam, *Documents of the 7th Meeting of the 10th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.
2. Nguyen Dac Hung (2008), *Vietnamese Intellectuals: Stepping Forward with Time*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.
3. Dang Huu (Chief-editor) (2003), *Developing Knowledge Economy: A Shortcut to Industrialization and Modernization*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.
4. Tran Cao Son (2009), "Scientific Intellectuals: Precious Capital and Commodity in the Knowledge Economic Market", *Vietnam Social Sciences Review*.
5. Hoang Tuy (2009), "Expatriation on Defects in Systems", *Journal Tia Sang*, Vol. 2, 3.
6. The Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences (2008), *Learning Experience in Educational and Training Development in Sciences and Technology in Company with Intellectual Workforce Building from Some Other Countries*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.

