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Review Report on PhD Thesis of Phan Thi Tuyet Van
entitled
INVESTIGATION INTO EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE CONTEXT OF
VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION

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Ms. Phan Thi Tuyet Van submitted the doctoral dissertation dealing with the question of educational philosophies as related to the domain of higher education in Vietnam. The research problems are developed in the context of pedagogical and philosophical theories of education. Research methods and techniques accompanying the empirical insight into academic teachers view on higher education philosophies are derived from social sciences methodology.

The Author undertakes an important research problem related to the current state of Vietnamese higher education. The problem has been developed in the three following areas:

1. Philosophy of education, where the Author presents and analyses main philosophies of education as related to tradition of Vietnamese education;
2. Socio-historical perspective, where strategies and policies on transforming and reforming Vietnamese education are analysed in the context of historical and political transformation of Vietnamese society;
3. Empirical research oriented towards identifying philosophies of education within a group of Vietnamese academic teachers.

As the main source of motivation that accompany the presented research the Author has indicated the necessity of delivering a clarifying insight into the area of theoretical and conceptual entanglement within the domain of educational philosophies in higher education, which relates to the problem of *chaos of Vietnamese society regarding the questions of finding and regenerating an educational philosophy during the last decade* (p.4). Consequently, the Author indicates her conviction of *the importance of educational philosophy for Vietnamese higher education* (p. 4).

I fully acknowledge the importance of the research theme and the motivations involved, as well as a justified way of addressing research problems to previously mentioned problem areas.

This PhD thesis is, in general, well structured and correctly presented, however some remarks addressing this issue will be mentioned in subsequent parts of this review. The dissertation consists of five main chapters. At the beginning research aims, justification of research significance as well as structure of the dissertation are introduced. Finally – references, lists of tables and charts, and appendices are presented. The thesis is written on 242 pages altogether. The theoretical principles as well as the research part were validated with a substantial number of predominantly valuable references. In the following section of the review I would like to refer to the particular parts of the dissertation.

The content of the introductory chapter involves justification for conducting the study, brief presentation of research aims; expected significance of the study and clear depiction of dissertation structure.

Chapter Two, entitled “A review of relevant literature”, covers numerous and differentiated issues that involve:

- a) discussion on the concept of philosophy of education;
- b) a brief review of traditional and contemporary educational philosophies;
- c) a broader description of these philosophies of education which the Author regards as the most influential in the context of Vietnamese education (i.e. confucianism, herbartianism; pragmatism with its limited reference to John Dewey’s work; Ho Chi Minh’s ideology of education)

- d) History of Vietnamese education with a general overview of political and ideological impacts on its transformations;
- e) An overall description of contemporary Vietnamese education (i.e. after 1975) involving its transformations, ideological background as well as issues related to the question of educational philosophies.

The amount and variety of threads included in the second chapter of the dissertation would suggest that they should rather be organized in several separate chapters. At the same time its titles should refer more closely to its merits. In this respect one may notice a kind of difficulty experienced by the Author, which relates to forming titles of chapters or subchapters. Some of them seem to be formulated in a too general way (as the example of Chapter 2), the other could be regarded as too far detailed and disordered (e.g. the title of subchapter 2.5.2. entitled as follows: *Orientation and main features of Vietnamese education after 1975 and the issue of educational philosophy in Vietnamese education and some related issues resulting from historical facts in the educational system and lack of educational philosophy*).

Discussion on philosophies of education constitutes an essential part of the second chapter of the dissertation. Initially, the Author introduces and analyses different approaches to defining philosophy of education which leads her to construing conceptual base of her research study, where philosophy of education is conceived as covering *all aspects of education such as the goals of education, roles of teachers and students, the relationship between teachers and students, students' learning and teachers' teaching* (p. 14). Herein, the concept of philosophy of education seems to be reduced, simplified and limited to its superficial – ontical – aspects, yet it fully covers the research interests of the Author and delivers – from a purely instrumental perspective – an adequate conceptual framework for empirical research on philosophies of education within Vietnamese teachers.

The review of philosophies of education bases upon analyses conducted by other authors. Firstly, Ms. Phan Thi Tuyet Van refers to reconstruction and classification of philosophies of education developed by G.L. Gutek. Regrettably enough, this classification was supplemented by using a non-academic, strictly didactic resource designed for students (by L. Cohen). Secondly, the Author delivers overall presentation of four previously mentioned philosophies of education. These perspectives on education which belong to work of Confucius, Dewey, and Ho Chi Minh were reconstructed in a coherent and substantive manner. Description of

herbartianism, however, bases on academic resources which present limited, unilateral and apologetic view on Johann Herbart's philosophy of education. At this point I would like to direct the Author's attention to necessity of exploring primary sources as long as they are available. In this case, the most important pieces of work of J.F. Herbart, translated into English, are readily available in open Internet resources.

The second chapter of the dissertation also involves thorough and very interesting – as for a Western reader – analyses of social, political and ideological transformations of Vietnamese education over the centuries as well as it includes important references to its current state of being.

To summarize the theoretical part of this thesis is worth to note that the Author has studied carefully research subject and used appropriate number of bibliography sources, yet minor imperfections could not be avoided. It seems evident that Ms. Phan Thi Tuyet Van deeply understood the theoretical backgrounds of the conducted research.

In Chapter Three Ms. Phan Thi Tuyet Van refers to methodological issues of empirical research design. The Author delivers a well-structured account of the methodological framework of the research, the rationale for the research design and a description of the research techniques and instruments. In general, the description of the research design is rather coherent, however the Author has not avoided serious conceptual mistakes which refer to using inappropriate terminology while describing issues related to research design. Firstly, the concepts of quantitative and qualitative methodologies refer to methodological perspectives or approaches while the Author introduces terms of a “qualitative method” and “quantitative method” instead. Secondly, it remains unclear on which level the methodological strategy of triangulation is engaged. According to the Author, triangulation in her research refers to combining qualitative and quantitative “methods” (e.i. approaches) which applied in the research. Nevertheless, qualitative and quantitative approaches, in respect of their different ontological roots as well as contradictory epistemologies, are not susceptible of triangulation. Thus, the strategy of methodological triangulation, as applied by the Author, obviously should refer to the level of research methods. But what they actually are? According to the Author such “methods” as in-depth interviews and questionnaires were conducted within a cohort of Vietnamese academic teachers. A questionnaire, however, is a

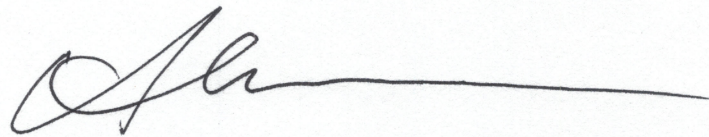
research instrument, not a research method. In conclusion, this point remains unclear and remains additional explication.

This inadequateness of a linguistic and conceptual framework of the research, however important it is, does not disqualify nor invalidate the overall research design nor its results. The data were correctly collected and documented as well as qualitative and quantitative data analyses were conducted. As a result, research objectives were achieved accordingly to Authors' understanding of a research subject as presented in Chapter Two. At the end of the dissertation the general conclusions of the performed research were described and discussed.

As to editorial aspects of the presented dissertation, this thesis is written in generally appropriate and clear manner, however few typing errors occurred (a mistaken way of spelling name Gutek). Another remark which occurred to me refers to credibility of information resources used. On page 12 the Author refers to Wikipedia, which is not considered to be a valid source of knowledge that could be employed in academic research.

Conclusion

In my opinion, the reviewed thesis meets the required standard of a doctoral thesis. The candidate demonstrates suitable abilities in her research field. This thesis is ready to be defended orally, in front of respective committee.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'A' followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.