

SPECIALISM

AND

THE LIBERAL ARTS

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I propose to discuss in this paper one of the crucial issues of university education in our time. The issue involves the question whether the various cultural heritages that for centuries have been the foundation of university education still play their traditional role, and if not, whether the efforts to keep them alive, perhaps in a modified form, would be worth the cost. Or could it be taken for granted that in this age of rapid changes brought about by scientific and technological achievements any cultural tradition is related to ways of life and social institution which man has definitely left behind? Is such a cling to the cultural past perhaps even a positive obstacle to progress? This much debated question directly concerns the goals of education. Then the controversial issue I propose to bring up is: Should universities provide, and if so, in what form and to what extent, for education and training in cultural, non-professional, non-scientific, non-technical disciplines?

There is no doubt that the purpose of all education is to help students live their own lives. Until recently there was no dispute in the West that the purpose of education was to train the educated citizen and this was to be accomplished by liberal education. The student's logical powers were to be formed by mathematics, his taste by the Greek and Latin classics, his speech by rhetoric, and his ideals by Christian ethics. But now this enviable certainty both of goal and means have largely disappeared. The trend of many universities in the West has been the concentration mainly on the training of students for their future professions. The education and training in cultural disciplines have been replaced by professional, scientific and technical training.

This trend of a large number of Western universities in shifting from liberal to special education was largely the effect of scientific and technological progress. The

world is living in an age of specialization. We are increasingly dependent upon the advice and services of specialists: doctors, lawyers, radio repairmen, plumbers and so on. The socio-economic demand for the competent professional, the technician, and the scientific expert has placed a premium on specialised training in these fields. Specialism has become the means for achievement in the mobile technological societies.

The avenue to success in making a good living for the student lies in his choice of a specialised career, whether a lawyer, or a doctor, or a chemist, or an engineer, or a specialist in some form of business or of technical or manual skill. The growing importance assigned to scientific and technical disciplines and the swelling numbers of high school graduates who enter universities in the hope of acquiring some specific professional competence as quickly as possible, are creating urgent demand for specialised courses of study. The technical knowledge and experience required in specific fields has increased and is increasing so much in scope that, in acquiring it, the student is left with less and less time for other pursuits. All this has brought about the decline of the "*liberal arts*", since they now appear to have no utility or practical value. As a result in universities where the liberal arts are still to be found in the curricula, these have become optional subjects of study, on the assumption that they are important only for a small number of students who wish to continue their studies by specialising in literature, philosophy or history or by preparing for certain academic or ecclesiastical professions for which these subjects are a pre-requisite.

Apart from socio-economic factors, which have brought about the decline of liberal education, or general education as is sometime used synonymously, there has also been odium attached to liberal education. This is so because the concept of liberal education was formed in a slave society, like Athens, in which the community was divided sharply into two classes, freemen and slaves. The training of the slaves was exclusively vocational, because they carried on specialised occupations of menial work. The freemen were not only the ruling but also the leisure class, so their education was purely in the liberal arts, which has no utilitarian value. Their education was cultural, unspecialised and unvocational; its aim was to develop a mature, well-integrated, and cultured person with a full understanding of himself and his place in society. With

leisure and such education, the freemen were able to engage themselves in the reflective pursuit of good life. Thus to some of us now, liberal education suggests slavery and parasitic aristocracy. To these people, the liberal arts as a type of education is useless and burdened with antiquated contents. This invidium which attaches to liberal education has added to the trend of specialism brought about by the socio-economic factors.

However, the trend of specialism in modern universities has worried educators and philosophers increasingly and has brought sharp criticism from many of them. It has been said that modern universities are no longer real universities, because specialisation prevents them from doing so. Some have warned that through concentrated specialisation, the world is approaching a new barbarian age, dominated by the uneducated specialists, in which more and more people know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Even scientists themselves have warned that there is real danger of putting increasingly powerful instruments in the hands of technicians whose specialised and narrow trainings make it difficult for them to have a well-reasoned and critical sense of values to guide them in the use of these instruments and their specialised knowledge. It has even been said that over-specialisation has led to the production of "*scientific robots*". As evidence of the results of over-specialisation, example was given of the unprecedented medical experiments on prisoners in concentration camps during the last war.

Apart from the accusations against specialism which I have cited, there are, needless to say, also cogent and well-reasoned arguments in support of the case against the trend of specialism in university education.

The advocates of liberal education do not, by any means, overlook the necessity of specialisation in the contemporary world; what they are against is the system of education in which specialised courses of study are provided to the exclusion of the general courses. They admit that special education is necessary but argue against specialism when it becomes synonymous with compartmentalisation. They hold the view that the specialist must be also a responsible citizen and must know how to live the cultured and good life of an educated person.

Modern democratic life has been made possible by the advance of science and technology, but there is a danger that exclusive scientific and technical education will destroy democracy. Democracy is possible only when every one governs his own life and shares also in the responsibility for governing his community life. This being the case, it follows that all citizens stand in need of more than the special training for their future work: all human beings should be given an ample and rounded education.

In fact, the very prevalence of the socio-economic demand for special training makes clear the need for a concurrent, balancing force in education. As modern economic factors breed a great diversity of specialised occupations, it may be said that specialism increases the centrifugal forces in society. A given specialist does not speak the language of other specialists. A person must be more than an expert in his vocation; he must also be versed in the general art of the free man and the citizen. Specialism is clearly inadequate.

Special education looks to the student's competence in some occupation; it does not seek to create the ability of effective thinking, communication, making of relevant judgements, and discrimination of values. Specialism itself has its peculiar limitations from the point of view of economic success. Specialising in a vocation makes for inflexibility in a world of fluid possibilities. Business demands minds capable of adjusting themselves to varying situations and of managing complex human institutions. All these inadequacies of specialism to meet the need of man to live his own life and to live in society with his fellow members have led educators to undertake the most serious and systematic study of liberal education, of its nature, subject-matter and aims, conceived not only in terms of tradition but also in the light of present actual conditions and needs.

Thus it may be said that in Western countries with their highly developed technological societies, there has been a growing concern to re-emphasize the importance of liberal education as distinguished from special education.

However, in developing countries of Asia, Africa and other parts of the world, where there is a great demand for competent professionals, scientific experts and

technicians, concern is today concentrated on the development adequate scientific and technical education. Since these countries are trying to catch up as quickly as possible with Western countries, the urge to produce the specialists and technicians calls for intensive specialised training. The aim of university education is to prepare the students for future professions and the function of the university is to train the specialists. Thus while in the highly developed countries the current trend is towards liberalism, in the developing countries the trend is towards strong specialism.

Supposing a mistake has been made in the West having become specialistic in education, can it be avoided in countries that are now set on the course of economic development? If it can be avoided, is it to be made only at a cost and is it justifiable?

These questions must have worried Asian educators as they have had worried me.

In my country, there has been a trend of strong specialism. Even the two-year pre-university programme is divided into the arts field and the science field. In my own university, students in Law, Economics, Political Science, Commerce, Business Administration and Accountancy take no other courses apart from those in their particular fields of specialisation. Moreover these specialised courses are compulsory and there are no electives. Specialism anywhere amounts to vocationalism. In my university where rigidity reigns, it is exactly so. One of the arguments for specialisation is that a student who is admitted to a university has already had the necessary general education. I think this should not be taken for granted anywhere. At any rate, courses in general education in the universities, where there are such courses, are at a higher level than those in the high schools. As far as general education in high schools in my country is concerned, the assumption that a student who is admitted to a university has already had the necessary general education is a false one, not only because the general education given to high school students is inadequate, but also because all of our universities admit graduates from vocational schools along with those from high schools. From the point of view of liberalism, this state of affairs is most deplorable.

There seems, however, to be a start in the process of liberalising university education in Thailand. For instance, the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Arts of Chulalongkorn University have recently initiated a system whereby students have to take subjects bearing on general education. A second year Arts student is required to take a course in general science and a science student has a wide choice of subjects of general studies, such as French, German, Geography, History and Psychology.

I personally believe that special education and liberal education must go together. I hold that it is the function of the university to train the students to be competent in some occupation of their choice as well as to educate him to be a mature, well-integrated and cultured person. I even think it would be wrong to resort to specialism with the idea to restore the balance between specialism and liberal studies after the society has got over immediate urgencies. I hold the view that the two sides of training the students are not entirely separable and it would be false to imagine education for the one as quite distinct from education for the other.

It is gratifying to me that my university will soon have an education system whereby specialism will be balanced by liberal studies. According to my Liberal Arts proposal, which has been adopted by the Thammasat University Council, all students for the first two years, regardless of their intended fields of specialisation, will be required to take general courses in the Humanities, Social Studies, and Natural Sciences. I believe that these general courses in the Liberal Arts should provide not only an adequate groundwork for the choice of a speciality, but also a milieu in which the speciality can develop its fullest potentialities. The substance of what is taught in these general courses may and can be forgotten by the students soon after, but what will remain years to come and perhaps for the rest of their lives are the attitudes and habits of mind which these general courses have helped to inculcate. The student who undergoes this combined general and special training will, I imagine, be adequately competent in his profession and will at the same time be the useful man, the good man and the responsible citizen in society.

เรื่องย่อ

บทความนี้แสดงถึงประเด็นขัดแย้งในเชิงความเห็นเกี่ยวกับการจัดการศึกษาชั้นมหาวิทยาลัย ในข้อที่ว่า วัฒนธรรมต่าง ๆ ที่เรารับเป็นมรดกตกทอดมานับศตวรรษ ๆ และยึดถือเป็นพื้นฐานการศึกษาชั้นมหาวิทยาลัยนั้น จะเห็นดังที่ควรยอมรับปฏิบัติกันต่อไปอีกหรือไม่ ในเมื่อสภาพของสังคมปัจจุบันได้เปลี่ยนแปลงไปมาก บทความนี้จึงมุ่งอธิบายถึงจุดหมายของการศึกษาในสังคมสมัยใหม่ว่า มหาวิทยาลัยควรจะจัดการศึกษาอบรมในด้านวัฒนธรรมซึ่งไม่เกี่ยวกับอาชีพ หรือวิชาการเฉพาะแขนงในรูปใด และภายในขอบเขตกว้างขวางเพียงใด

ความก้าวหน้าอย่างรวดเร็วทางวิทยาศาสตร์และวิชาการด้านเทคนิคต่าง ๆ ทำให้ความต้องการทางเศรษฐกิจและสังคมของประเทศเปลี่ยนแปลงไป ความเชี่ยวชาญเฉพาะแขนงวิชาชีพ (Specialization) เป็นสิ่งที่ใฝ่ใฝ่ปัจจุบันต้องการ เพื่อให้ทันกับความต้องการมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศตะวันตกส่วนมาก จึงได้เปลี่ยนแนวการศึกษาเสียใหม่ โดยมุ่งที่จะให้ความรู้ความชำนาญเฉพาะแขนงวิชาชีพแก่ผู้ศึกษาโดยเร็วที่สุดเท่าที่จะสามารถ ด้วยเหตุนี้จึงทำให้การให้ความรู้ในแขนงวิชาทั่วไป (Liberal Arts) ของมหาวิทยาลัยจำเป็นต้องลดน้อยลงไปกว่าเดิม โดยเห็นได้ว่าวิชาประเภทหลังนี้ไม่มีคุณค่าในทางปฏิบัติ หรือหากว่าวิชาประเภทนี้จะปรากฏอยู่ในหลักสูตรของมหาวิทยาลัยบ้าง ก็จะถูกจัดอยู่ในจำพวกวิชาเลือกเท่านั้น เหตุผลข้ออย่างหนึ่งที่ทำให้วิชาทางลิเบอรัลอาร์ตส์ หายอนความสำคัญลงไปก็คือ วิชาเหล่านี้มักจะถือว่าเป็นวิชาของพวกชนชั้นปกครองในสังคมสมัยก่อน

อย่างไรก็ดี การเน้นการศึกษาหนักไปในทางความรู้ความชำนาญเฉพาะแขนงวิชาชีพก็มีข้อเสียอยู่หลายประการเช่น ทำให้คนขาดความรู้สึกรักหรือความซาบซึ้งในสิ่งที่มีคุณค่าจากผลกระทบกระเทือนต่อระบอบการปกครองแบบประชาธิปไตย ก่อให้เกิดความแตกแยกในสังคมอันเนื่องมาจากความเข้าใจที่ต่างพรรคันะ ไม่ส่งเสริมความสามารถในการคิดสร้างสรรค์ ขาดความเข้าใจซึ่งกันและกัน ขาดความสามารถในการตัดสินใจปัญหาซึ่งมีปัจจัยต่างๆ เกี่ยวข้อง ขาดความสามารถในการจำแนกคุณค่า และก่อให้เกิดความยากลำบากในการปรับปรุงตัวให้เข้ากับสถานการณ์ที่เปลี่ยนแปลง

เมื่อเห็นผลเสียต่าง ๆ ดังกล่าว มหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศตะวันตกจึงได้เริ่มจัดให้มีการศึกษาเกี่ยวกับความรู้ในแขนงวิชาทั่วไปอีก แนวโน้มนี้ต่างกับมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศที่กำลังพัฒนาในภาคพื้นเอเชียซึ่งมุ่งให้การศึกษามุ่งเน้นหนักไปทางวิชาชีพเฉพาะแขนง เพื่อให้ทันกับความต้องการทางเศรษฐกิจและสังคมของประเทศเหล่านั้น

ผู้เขียนได้ยกตัวอย่างว่าในมหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์ วิชาชีพเฉพาะแขนงถือเป็นวิชาบังคับในหลักสูตรการศึกษาโดยไม่มีวิชาประเภทความรู้ทั่วไปให้เลือกเลย การปฏิบัติเช่นนี้เนื่องมาจากความคิดที่ว่า ก่อนที่จะเข้ามหาวิทยาลัย นักศึกษาควรจะได้รับความรู้ในแขนงวิชาทั่วไปมาพอเพียงแล้วจากการศึกษาชั้นมัธยม ซึ่งสอดคล้องกระแสนิยมตรงตามความจริงนัก เหตุผลอีกอย่างหนึ่งก็คือนักศึกษาของมหาวิทยาลัยนี้ไม่จำเป็นต้องผ่านมัธยมศึกษามาก่อน แต่อาจจะเป็นผู้ผ่านการศึกษามาจากโรงเรียนอาชีวศึกษาได้ และในโรงเรียนอาชีวศึกษาเกี่ยวกับวิชาความรู้ทั่วไปย่อมจะไม่มีหรือมีไม่พอเพียง อย่างไรก็ตาม ผู้เขียนได้ยกตัวอย่างต่อไปว่า ปัจจุบันนี้ได้มีแนวโน้มเกี่ยวกับการให้ความรู้ในแขนงวิชาทั่วไปขึ้นบ้างแล้วในเมืองไทย เช่นที่ปฏิบัติกันอยู่ในจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย เป็นต้น

ในตอนท้าย ผู้เขียนได้เห็นว่า การศึกษาที่สมบูรณ์นั้นย่อมจะต้องประกอบด้วยวิชาชีพเฉพาะแขนง และวิชาประเภทความรู้ทั่วไป ดังนั้น มหาวิทยาลัยควรจะให้ความรู้ทั้งในด้านที่จะทำให้ นักศึกษามีความสามารถในแขนงอาชีพของตน เพื่อให้เป็นกำลังที่มีประโยชน์ของประเทศชาติ และในขณะเดียวกันก็ควรจะให้ความรู้ในวิชาประเภทความรู้ทั่วไป เพื่อฝึกฝนให้เป็นพลเมืองที่มีความรับผิดชอบต่อไป.