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Can developing countries help to build a political economy and sociology of labour?: Some answers from an Asian perspective*

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Introduction: The Great Transformation

The construction of a political economy and sociology of labour has to go back to the Great Transformation of the Western seventeenth century whose paramount meaning is the advent of wage labour. Numerous authors, both old and recent, have understood that the fundamental novelty of wage labour is the definitive separation (through various and conflicting historical paths) of the person from her means of existence which is in turn mirrored by the separation of the worker from his/her labour power. From the first industrial revolutions in Europe in the seventeenth century onwards and up to the last industrialisations in Asian and Latin American Newly Industrialised Countries (the term “emerging” being used today instead of NIC), this Great Transformation has had the power to subordinate the labour power, and therefore its bearer in the person of the worker, to the Self-Regulating Market as it has been simultaneously the case for land and money. From then on, each and every labour issue, whether individual or social, stems from *the singularity of this form of*

In fact, wage labour, which is dependent but free (freedom to breach the labour contract), has always been combined with forms of labour where this duality does not exist, be they forms of non-free dependent labour (slavery, contracted and indenture labour), and of old (peasants and craftsmen) and new (professionals) forms of independent work. These combinations are complex, varied and conflicting, and they include the triumphal march of wage labour, the resistance of independent labour to it, and the reciprocal and interactive influence one has on the other. I shall focus here only on the specific forms of work that result

** This paper was invited to delivered in May 4th 2006 at St. Petersburg, Russia on work. The effects of this duality of the wage social relationship are so pervasive in the life of people, that they have concealed its articulation with other forms of work that give country-specific forms to work relationships.¹⁶*

¹⁶ Concerning vocabulary. In this paper I do not distinguish between labour and work and will use alternatively both words with the same meaning. Equally, I use the terms developed, salaried, industrialized, rich and northern countries as equivalent and as opposed to developing, non salaried, newly industrialized

from the articulation between wage labour and independent labour by starting the analysis through a rough synopsis showing on the one hand the main issues that are going to be tackled very briefly in this paper and the different answers and solutions that both forms of work give to these issues¹⁷.

What is important to note at this stage are the meaning of the relationships (fourth column) between wage labour and independent work. Whether through economic, social, political or cultural vectors, the reciprocal influence of one form of work on the other for each labour issue is different for one hand and asymmetrical on the other hand, and eventually varies through historical times. The historical trend is the expansion of wage labour to the detriment of independent labour¹⁸ with the expansion of capitalism worldwide, or more precisely, the domination that the wage form of work exerts over independent labour. This asymmetrical influence tends to “transmit” the traits of wage work to independent work; it is expressed by the term “transmission”. However the resistance of independent work is much more important than generally stated, not so much because it is not disappearing, but at least for two main reasons. On the one hand, it gives through a feedback to the wage form its distinctive traits, and on the other hand and more importantly it plays the role of a golden age ,or utopia, that shapes wage work, industrial relations, labour conflicts and even public policies. This paradoxical influence is termed “reversal” *as if* the history of labour could be reversible.

Table 1 Relationship between wage work and independent work

Labour issues	Wage work 1	Independent work 2	Relationships between 1 and 2
1. Form of work	duality	unicity	Transmission and reversal
2. Form of employment	Flexibility	Security responsibility	Transmission and reversal
3. The work process	Hierarchy to execute	Responsibility to decide	Transmission and reversal
4. Skills	Qualification of the job	Qualification of the worker	Transmission and reversal
5. Education	skills	Self achievement	Transmission and reversal
6. Income	external Precariousness	Internal Security	Transmission and reversal
7. Social values and regulation	Dionysiac face and markets	Apollonian face and status	Transmission and reversal

Given the general flavour of today’s endless publications about labour, we can say that their main and recurrent flaws are threefold:

1. They focus only on wage labour. When they do analyse other forms of work and in particular independent work (which is uncommon), they do it only from a wage labour perspective.

(emerging), poor and southern countries. Those terms should be defined in more details in a approach of development economics. However these simplistic equivalences and oppositions are enough for my present analytical purpose.

¹⁷ In order to ease the reading of this paper, I give not any bibliographical references. The reader will recognize however the intensive use I make of and the debt I owe to many past and present authors.

¹⁸ We will criticise below the theses according to which independent work would currently be on the rise.

2. On the basis of a correct assertion that the economy is global but work is local and national, they focus mainly on developed countries forgetting about their interdependence with developing countries. By tradition of the thought on development, this flaw is just a little less apparent when they focus on labour in developing countries as exemplified by the theories of social duality.

3. They underestimate the interest of analysing economic growth regimes and of taking into account the international division of labour.

History has a meaning and scenarios of the future can be drawn only if these flaws are overcome. In the limited framework, the third flaw that stems from omitting the relation between economic growth and work is not analysed. However this should be done for achieving a complete elaboration of a political economic and sociology of labour.

For interpreting the past, understanding the present and sounding out the future, the problematic of the direction of the relation between work and life seems to be particularly heuristic. The precise question is “which commands which?” which is often translated into “who commands who?”. Although it is not the only way to carry out our common exploration of the meanings of the history of labour, it is the path I have selected here and that I am using for addressing the major labour issues mentioned in the table above.

1. Forms of work

During the three last decades, and except during short term crises, as it has been the case particularly in Latin-American and African countries in the 1990ies, wage labour has continued its long term expansion everywhere on the globe at a close pace with capitalism. It represents over 80% of the working population in developed countries, called for that reason “salaried societies”, and comes close to 50% in most developing countries.

The “good bye” to the working class in salaried countries, in any case, means neither the decline of the population of wage earners nor more fundamentally the disappearance of the intrinsic duality of labour.

In salaried societies, three major factors are at play in shaping forms of work. First there is the substitution of labour for capital by which labour productivity is improved and salaried employment taken away from production (if no compensatory creation of jobs is found, whether in low productivity activities or/and in new activities). From this “cybernetic” perspective the end of work is not for tomorrow. A second factor is the deepening of the social division of labour, in particular through this same creation of new sectors (the new economy for example), the increase of subcontracting practices, and the diversification of services provided to manufacturing and more generally industrial enterprises. The other one is the “delegation” of producing manufactured goods to developing countries (whether through direct investment or not). Altogether these factors have given way to different variants of the same melody that are the famous theses such as the

“desindustrialisation “of salaried societies, the post-industrial society, and more recently the knowledge society, not to mention the post-modern society.

All these dramatic transformations generally interpreted from the viewpoint of the problematic future of developed countries mean economic development from the viewpoint of developing countries. From this last perspective, the good bye to the working class in the salaried societies is a sort of “hello, welcome” to the working class in developing countries. Both phenomena are being reflected by changes in the international division of labour, and in particular by the production of consumer goods in developing countries exchanged in the international market against capital goods and technologies produced in developed countries. This generates a concatenation of forms of work within and between countries. Thus, the still dominant independent work in developing countries contributes to shaping the patterns of wage labour domestically and internationally.

Independent work plays domestically a paradoxical role both in Northern and Southern countries. It is the dreamed of form of work in which the person of the worker is not separated from his/her labour power and where work is life-driven and not profit-driven. This dream nevertheless is born in the precise moment when independent labour is entirely shaken by the expansion of wage labour through harsh competition leading to its decline, and through its subordination by means of numerous devices among them subcontracting, putting out systems, journeymen or daily contracted labour, part-time farming and pluri-activity, and of course markets and prices. Independent work is then dreamt of as a lost paradise, or a past golden age, to be reinstalled as a refuge against undesirable effects of wage labour expansion and encroachment of new activities. This is a form of romanticism that can be found today in numerous developing countries, probably because it does not seem out of reach, as witnessed by a great number of wage earners who declare that they accepted wage labour just to gather capital for setting up their own business. It is also a dream of perfection that puts forward independent work as a model for shaping the wage earner model as meant by “reversal” in the table above. In short, it is a dream that influences strongly the shaping of wage labour by opposing its recurrent and actual regulation by the market through its commoditization to a form of work regulated by a status (see § 7 below). This opposition is in fact the one between work commanding life and life commanding work; this dilemma has structured most labour struggles, social movement, and industrial and public policy disputes on all labour issues.

The invention of the concepts of employment and unemployment has come from the social consequences of the extension of wage labour. For more than three decades now the main object of labour economics, and more recently of labour sociology, has been the analysis of unemployment, particularly in European countries. This analysis has been exclusively carried out from a wage labour perspective within the neoclassical and neo-Keynesian frameworks and has led to fierce theoretical and political controversies. When

a historical perspective is brought into the picture, it suggests that the concept of employment and its twin – unemployment – are actually born during the 1929 depression. Massive unemployment was a wide demonstration of the devastating effects on workers' life of the separation of the person from her means of existence and of her deprivation from any social protection¹⁹. Explanations of underemployment in developing countries provided by the pioneers of development economics (unlimited labour supply, vent for surplus, etc.) have not been updated for analysing wage labour, probably because they addressed, in a context of extension of markets of agricultural products, the question of labour absorption in economic activities and of incomes of independent labour. Today a new contrast emerges between developing countries where full employment may prevail in buoyant growing economies and developed countries where massive unemployment prevail. Actual employment situations evolve rapidly, and in a given time around the world they are very different from one country to another. Nevertheless and whatever the employment situation, similar features of forms of work are shared by all countries. The convergence between developing countries and developed countries, which have all along nurtured development economics, is taking place but not in the expected direction: it is not a one way catching up of the latter by the former, but it is also the other way “catching down” of the former by the latter.

2. Forms of employment

Current forms of employment can be characterised by two parameters: the degree of precariousness of the worker and the hours of work. Today whatever the situations of employment, those parameters evolve in the same direction, that of an enlarged encroachment of work on life conditions.

In a nutshell, as opposed to the “fordist period” where jobs were abundant, stable, and fulltime and workers were protected, precariousness has become the brave new world of work. Precariousness is underpinned by the “segmentation” of work, whatever the general situation of employment. Involuntary part-time work, working for different employers, temporary work, more and more lax conditions of dismissing employees are current trends inscribed in the reform of labour laws or their non-observance. Workers and their family are becoming unable to make “life projects” because they do not know where the search for work will oblige them to move, and because their income has become irregular. They never know what tomorrow will be made of. Stress arises from the impossibility of overcoming daily uncertainty. Workers adopt strategies for conciliating their plans with this unstable context, but on the one hand they are not equally endowed to face abrupt and unexpected changes and on the other hand the general situation of employment or unemployment changes the deal considerably. Precariousness is at the central stage of labour debates and conflicts in many countries. It draws its roots from changes in the work process and of the dismantling, more or less rapidly, of

¹⁹ The social consciousness of these devastating effects of wage labour is contemporary to its expansion. In the nineteenth century it was pointed out by the term “the social question”, term used by Marxists, Anarchists and Catholics alike. But the concepts of employment and unemployment were not yet elaborated.

social protection systems. The adverse effects of these forms of employment are exacerbated when massive unemployment prevails, in a vicious spiral where segmented work and massive unemployment debilitate trade unions and the collective capacity of workers to defend themselves, ease the employers' adoption of more segmented and flexible work processes, and harm badly social protection systems. We will return to these phenomena below. The effects of wage labour on independent labour are transmitted through a shrunk and irregular demand for their products and services, but they are largely softened and less dramatic. The uncertainty in the fields rooted in the rhythms of seasons appears to be certainty in comparison with precariousness of jobs and incomes under the roofs of factories and offices. To such a point – and this is the reverse effect - that independent labour is becoming in some circumstances a way of protecting wage earners from their deprivation of stability and protection.

The second evolution of the forms of employment is a general increase of work duration. From the nineteenth century onwards, the long trend of work duration of wage labour is a steady decrease, accelerated in welfare states. This decrease of working times as a proportion of a life span took place through the increase of compulsory schooling and the general increase of the duration of studies, the increase of the length of retirement, and the decrease of the annual and weekly working hours. For two decades or so, however, this trend has stopped everywhere and working hours have resumed increasing for those who work, particularly through increases of overtime, weekly and annual duration, as well as through the older age of retirement through the reform of superannuation systems. The length of studies is the only life segment that increases steadily but with the compensation, as we will see below, to be anchored more and more tightly to work. Further encroachment of work on life times is the general trend accelerated by increasing related times such as training or commuting between work and home. Increasingly no dedicated time (free time) or its cousin the civilisation of leisure are fading away like mirages. We will see below that stopping to distribute labour productivity gains through decreasing working hours is part of the mechanisms by which a new distribution of income favouring profit at the expenses of wages has been obtained. All over the world there are very few exceptions to this overwhelming trend.

It is well documented that in the same way as wage earners, independent workers (like farmers) work longer. This stems from efforts to compensate the decline of relative farm prices, and is made possible by relaxing the constraints of land and seasons through technological changes. In some countries, the lack of collective infrastructure in rural areas increases related working hours, such as water or wood fetching, buying and selling goods and services in remote markets, etc. Moreover, solidarity within households leads elder people to work as helpers until disability or death.

Through the vehicle of the market of goods and labour situations, the wage earner conditions of precariousness and increased working hours are to some extent transmitted to independent workers. A reverse

effect may also take place when independent workers help wage earners to face precariousness and long working hours; it is the case for example when the family of origin of the wage earner provides the place for rest, holidays, physical and mental recuperation. For wage earners those are short but happy breaks in a working life.

3. The work process

Both technology and labour organisation - designed for extracting the maximum labour power from the person of the worker by controlling his/her behaviour - are in the process of reshaping deeply the work process. In fact, there is an ongoing dramatic transformation that drives the control of the labour power within the work process from the body to the mind of the worker.

The design of work processes for controlling the body of the worker as the only source of labour power is associated with taylorism. In fact, taylorism is the outcome of a long social process of controlling the body which began in the seventeenth century Europe with the "great confinement" of the military in barracks, of vagabonds and thieves in jail, of beggars and the lazy in workhouses, and of craftsmen in the "assembled" manufacture which prefigures the confinement of workers in the modern factory. The work process of wage labour puts upside down the work process of independent labour, since the technological principles of independent labour is to design tools and machinery as the extension of the hand and the body of the worker. By way of contrast, in wage labour the hand and the body of the worker are extension of the machines. Manufactures and factories are schools for learning anew daily habits, for disciplining the body away from natural postures and for fitting and subordinating lived work to mechanical processes. For that purpose the person of the worker has to be cleansed of any thought or feeling, so that the labour power can be rid of any trace of its human origin, something described so sensitively by Simone Weil and so ironically by Charlie Chaplin. In the taylorist factory, the dictatorship of the chronometer, the bureau of methods and the fordist assembly line intended to perfect the mechanical work of workers by eliminating any idle time, any physical trouble or weakness and any personal feeling and capacity of judgement, assessment and initiative of workers.

Labour management methods complete the technological apparatus by borrowing from the military its organisation of the chain of command with its rules of engagement and sanctions²⁰. The hierarchical system within the enterprise organises the cascade of orders and compliances and signals and procedures for avoiding any physical violence, revolt, or passive resistance from workers. When this control cannot yield the expected results, and when entrepreneurs begin to feel the fear of the dangerous labour class, subcontracting and

²⁰ Which, in both cases, military and industrial, consist of the disappearance of the live body from the scene.

technology which substitutes capital for labour are called to the rescue in order to reduce the frightening concentration of workers.

The mechanical world of machines and human bodies has nurtured utopias of its auto-elimination or reflexive disappearance. The old cybernetic dream of the best of the worlds extrapolated this trend and foresaw somehow an end of mechanical work by using automatic machinery and robots that would complete the final removing of live labour from the work process. Freeing live labour from mechanical and alienating tasks is celebrated, whether as the threshold of a civilisation of free time and leisure, or as the threshold of the reign of what is most human in the human beings: the reign of the mind and of its capacity of invention and creation. The cybernetic dream has resurfaced in northern countries in the precise moment where mechanical work is declining, and the application of computerised technology seems to make technologically possible entirely robotized factories. In fact, when live work is removed from work processes it is not so much by the grace, the strength and the precision of robots, but through the transfer of labour-using work processes to southern countries where the workforce is more abundant and less exacting. Over there, in this new frontier, the submission of the body of the worker to mechanical work processes resumes its long and dramatic march and might be the condition of the salvation of the mind in developed countries.

In northern countries, the shift of the lever for controlling the worker from the body to the mind is the outcome of convergent phenomena. The ongoing transformation of the work process from body to mind has often been referred to as the "information revolution" on the technological side and as the "managerial revolution" on the labour organisational side. It has also been stamped ironically as the "new spirit of capitalism".

A first factor is the evolution of social norms concerning work. The vision of unacceptable conditions of work when the body is put at the service of the machine is exacerbated by the fact that machines can be adapted to the body of the worker instead of the other way round, as proved by ergonomics. Robotics, which seem to be the logic final step of this evolution is more problematic, because on the one hand it appears wishful for saving workers from dumb and degrading work, and on the other hand it appears to threaten their jobs. Another important phenomenon which contributes to changing social norms is the change of human relationships in the society driven by education and by the secular search for further individual autonomy. This evolution has made socially undesirable the taylorist labour organisation and its hierarchical chain of command underpinned by a nowadays rejected concept of heteronomy of social relations that dwarfs and infantilises workers. Social movements in developed countries at the end of the nineteen sixties expressed explicitly this change and struggled to accelerate it. Strengthened by these evolutions of social norms, workers actually were emboldened to claim a new organisation of the work process that would appeal to their intelligence instead of their physical strength and to their capacity of decision, judgment and responsibility instead of a passive

obedience. These evolutions have been strong factors both of exhausting the delivery of the labour power by the control of the body and of socially legitimating new methods of labour management designed for the control of the mind. In this regard, the introduction of the computer in the monitoring of productive processes has been a kind of breakthrough.

A second factor in the shift of work processes from a body-driven to a mind-driven process is more economic in nature. It comes from the strategies of enterprises to erase the labour productivity cycle underpinned on a fixed volume of their labour force while demand fluctuates, and more even when the States retreats from its role of economic regulation. Those strategies consist of thinking “inside-out” the work process. Before them, fixed productive factors (installed productive capacities as it were) led to a given amount of output with stockpiling and destocking according to ups and downs of the demand. The Japanese “just in time” method leads to adjustments as far as possible in the variation of the amount of productive factors to the variation of the demand, including raising quality standards. The quantitative adjustment of staff to the fluctuation of the demand to the enterprises has been obtained by labour flexibility, both internal to the factory (working hours, moves of workers inside the factory from a workshop to another) and external to the factory by using temporary work and extensive subcontracting (what has been termed “downsizing”). As we will see below, the limitation to flexibility is that it impedes the formation of skills and the codification of the knowledge of workers.

All these events led to the integration of the social critic by new labour organisation and management methods. Employers and labour management gurus have discovered all of a sudden that the person of the worker had not only a body but also a mind, as well as feelings and emotions. To celebrate this breakthrough, they have invented new semantics and rhetoric, resorting to the dictionary of human senses and spirit. Today, employers and their gurus call upon the mind for mobilising more completely the labour power in the work process. They proposed to “humanize” work by showing their concern for the integrity of the worker’s body by enforcing strong hygiene and security measures and ambitious targets (zero accident, zero hazard), by reducing the “layers” of the hierarchy and giving more responsibility to workers of all level, by paying more attention to their motivation at work (as mirrored by studies on job satisfaction). Presented as the humanisation of labour management, as the recognition that workers are, after all, thinking and sensitive human beings, the managerial revolution is helped by cognitive sciences to improve the control of the labour power through the control of the mind which is the new discipline mill. The humanisation of work that nobody can refuse is ultimately aimed at improving performances at work. More sophisticated psychological devices are put in place, as for example, emulating workers by enhancing competition between them on the principle of sport races, mobilising their sense of pride and self esteem through their evaluation by and comparison with their peers, appealing to their desire of “distinction” by having recourse to fake promotion to higher positions

without changing tasks and pay, granting them more autonomy by creating work teams and team projects through a network-like labour organisation (“hub and peripheral” workers), requesting their loyalty to the enterprise in exchange for respect and consideration. The meaning of all these new management methods is to request from the whole person of the worker a complete commitment to the enterprise that involves and subordinates his/her most intimate character. As a consequence, the fatigue in the work process is less physical than mental pain and is conducive to mental harassment from superiors and stress for inferiors along the hierarchical ladder. The shift from an hours-based labour contract to an outcomes-based contract leads to never finished tasks and encroaches constantly on non-work time, which make mental work so exploitative.

By controlling only the body, mechanical work was erasing human features of the person of the worker, in particular by cleansing any thought from the brain and by impeding any emotion. Labour law was elaborated accordingly. Protecting the encroachment of work on the life of the worker was protecting the body of the worker through legal provisions regulating duration of work, security and hygiene, and rest and recuperation according to hardness of the job. The shift to “mental work” has improved physical working conditions for a lot of workers but at the expense of mental conditions. The legal framework has not followed and been adjusted to these transformations. Few legal provisions regulate this wear of this “human” dimension of the person; therefore only case law can deal with it. Legal cases related to mental harassment and mental prejudice are on the rise and mirror these transformations of the work process.

The shift from the body to the mind management has also an interesting impact for transnational corporations, expressed by multicultural management. Apparently, neither a machine has a culture (although it bears traits from its origins) nor live work subordinated to it. Cognitivists who have influenced greatly labour management theorists have shown that, contrary to what rationalists have claimed, human nature cannot be detached from human culture, that is from socially constructed and shared systems of symbols and representations. Incorporating the mind into the labour power leads to consideration of cultural aspects of the workforce in labour management methods. Migrations between culturally distinctive countries of enterprises, of managers and of workers have shown that the paramount trait of human mind which is culture cannot be neglected in efficient labour management methods. Practically, foreign enterprises try to solve the problem by hiring local labour managers culturally better endowed to deal with the local workforce. Practically the problem is more difficult to deal with as far as foreign workers are concerned; a precarious legal status help to discipline foreign workers and to ask them to abandon their own culture by “integration” and “melting”. This social issue is being raised in political agendas of governments and social organisations all over the world.

The discourse of the managerial revolution, that spreads out all over the world, takes one step ahead in elaborating its new semantics and rhetoric. It claims, on alleged scientific grounds, that the only factor of corporate success is nowadays the mind because enterprises have become “learning or knowledge

organisations”, implying that only educated people can pretend to be employed. The analysis of skills highlights the real meanings of this discourse when it is confronted with facts.

4. Skills and competencies

Skills are an extraordinary revealer of the relation between work and life. They are at the centre stage between the work and the character of the person according to the forms of work; they are a cornerstone of industrial relations; they nowadays command the relationship between education and life. Let us consider briefly the two aspects.

In independent labour, that of crafts, guilds and trade-unions, the skills of the worker are displayed in the output of the work process. Arts and crafts share the fact that the ability of the worker is crystallised and displayed in his/her “works” (werke, opus, oeuvre, obra). The consecration of the skills of the worker, acknowledged by its masters and peers, is the “*chef d’oeuvre*”, the proof that s/he masters the state of the art and the know-how of the craft. The same applies for contemporary professionals where services they provided to their customers embody and display their skills in their craft. In other words, skills are an intimate trait of the person of the worker which reveals the qualities –both innate and acquired– of his/her hand and mind. In wage labour, the separation of the worker from the labour power changes completely the deal. In the work process where there is a technical division of work, the output cannot be attributed to the skills of one singular worker but to collective skills that emanate from the collective worker. The oeuvres or works disappear behind the commodity and standardisation of products which conceal the singular work process where the commodity comes from²¹. The individual skills of the worker have to be denied, while the only skills that can be acknowledged are those of the labour power, that is to say those circumscribed to a particular job and particular tasks. This metamorphosis has been realised by the method of the classification of occupations (explicit or implicit) which is a hierarchical grid where each compartment describes very concretely the “job design” and in detail the tasks to be performed. The set of tasks described in the job design is defined as “skills”. The hierarchy or ordinal arrangement of jobs is equated to the hierarchy of skills in the classification. The main criterion used to establish this hierarchy is based on ordering skills from the bottom to the top of the hierarchical ladder according to the intrinsic impact of the job on corporate results. In other words, the hierarchy of skills is based on the expected results of performing the job on apparent gains of productivity with an associated scale of wages and salaries²². The stakes of defining skills are therefore both the expected

²¹ To some extent only, because collective skills are recognised by the quality of the products on which the fame of enterprises is underpinned, as exemplified by German and Japanese car-makers.

²² This equivalence of skills, the level of wages and expected productivity of performing a job made by the classification of occupation provokes two “optical illusions”. The first one is that labour productivity is determined by skills, and the second one is that the level of wages is determined (paid) by the marginal

increase of productivity and the corresponding wage bill. So that the stake of skills so defined are the levels of labour costs and of profits. That is why the definition of skills is the centre stage of industrial relations.

Thus, the definition of skills in wage labour is a social, contradictory and therefore conflicting process between employers and employees. Historically, borrowing from the conception of skills in independent labour, skills of the worker and skills of the job were confused, giving a real and large power to the craftsmen (or skilled workers) over the work process and wage bargaining. This power was viewed as a stronghold from where skilled workers could defend themselves and that entrepreneurs have always besieged and eventually step by step destroyed. The provisional end of the fight by the victory of employers led to define skills from the sole job perspective as an attribute of the labour power, and not from the worker perspective as an attribute of the person. Thus, what was acknowledged, measured and paid were the skills of the labour power and not the skills of the worker. However, this victory seemed to have been short-lived when it has been put into question with the transformation of the work process and the metamorphosis of labour management from body to mind. The claim of workers that their personal skills – including their initial education, training and accumulated work experience- be acknowledged instead of that of the job has been heard by employers and integrated into labour management methods as a way of perfecting the subordination of the entire person of the worker to work by the submission of body *and* mind. From then on, collective agreements reorganising the work process have included, as a key provision, the recognition of “competencies” of workers. These competencies cover a large range of abilities as diverse as ability to operate special tools or machines or to speak a foreign language. More often they are defined as the abilities to take initiative, to be responsible and to work in a team. The latter are actually qualities required by the downsized hierarchy in the workplace and by labour flexibility. Therefore, the shift of terms from skills (or qualifications) to competencies is celebrated on both sides as a victory. It is worth to observe at this stage that when developing countries adopt the discourse of competencies and put the problem of skills at the top of their economic and educational agenda, they want somehow to show off by displaying their catching up with developed countries. The reality lags far behind. Actually, wage labour is still considered in most work processes as delivering the labour power of the body. In developing countries, taylorist labour organisation not only prevails but will last for some more decades.

The separation operated by wage labour between the worker and his/her work or oeuvre modifies strongly the conception of skills to a point that has paramount consequence on the problem of the formation of skills. In independent labour, mind and body, spirit and hand, knowledge, scholarship and senses, taste and know-how are altogether called upon in the work process. There is unity in the conception of skills and unity in their formation; this unity is given by the command of life over work. In wage labour, this unity is breached

labour productivity, as asserted by the neoclassical theory of income distribution. This scaffolding of semi truths gives to skills a paramount importance in current economic debates which unfolds up to education in the theory of human capital. See below § 5

into three main dimensions of skills what I have termed earlier as cognitive skills (related to knowledge), behavioural skills (related to the specific labour organisation in the work process) and technical skills (related to the specific technology in use in the work process). This understanding of the content of skills reveals a historical paradox of wage labour. When the body is the only one called upon for controlling the delivery of the labour power in the work process cognitive skills do not matter, except for some executives and managers. What determines labour productivity are behavioural and technical skills, both attached to the body of the worker to the extent that the required behavioural skills are the adaptation of the worker to mechanical work and the obedience to and execution of orders. Skills are formed by learning these required abilities in the job hic and nunc; skills are formed on the particular job by learning by doing and this process takes time and requires a certain stability of the workforce. For that same reason of being job-specific, skills are not really portable, because they become partly obsolete when the worker moves from a job to another and they have to be learned anew in the new job. That is why enterprises have once developed internal labour markets and why the increasing instability of labour provoked by their strategy of an increasing labour flexibility has a strong setback by hindering the formation of skills by learning by doing. When entering into the temple of manufacturing which is Toyota, one can see a series of boards, placards, posters, bills and graphs monitoring a complex “just in time” work process but also consigning targeted and realised performances for each post of work, as well as meeting points where the way of improving performances can be discussed and found. Here, the knowledge and know-how accumulated by workers is made explicit so that it can be accumulated for further enhancement. Saving time and space, being on time and sticking to the quality required by the customer are the mantra of labour management. These mantra are part of the culture of the enterprise and define the expected skills from workers. Toyota is one of the first enterprise to have acknowledged that skills are formed by learning by doing, and which has organised it in a systematic and explicit way, so that progression of skills of the collective worker can be improved in a seamless development. However the third cognitive dimension of skills starts to play an increasing role in this enterprise as in others.

On the one hand, the requirement for obedient minds in the work process as well as the increasing flexibility of labour lead to the incorporation of cognitive skills into the formation of productive skills. On the other hand, a trend is to externalise the formation of skills by giving the baton to educational and training institutions or even – what has been legitimised by the “theory” of employability - to give the baton to the worker him/herself. More specifically the contemporary incorporation of cognitive skills into the formation of productive skills leads to an external formation of skills in the educational system as far as cognitive skills are concerned and of an internal formation of skills as far as behavioural and technical skills are concerned. As a transmission effect of wage labour, this happens also in independent work. Professionals, in medicine, law or farming, have to display the diplomas that ascertain that they master the scholarship related to their craft.

Actually, as for wage labour, their behavioural skills and technical skills cannot be perfect but on the job; the customer is the one who checks for good or for bad the relevance of their productive skills. However as we will see, cognitive skills are more and more narrowly defined from a labour perspective.

5. Education and work²³

Thus, if this evolution of skill contents gives more importance to education than before, it twists actually the character of education towards a “vocationalist” bias, where education is subordinated to work. This twist anchors a very important moment of life – education- to mere work concerns and requirements. In a nutshell, throughout history, education has progressively imposed itself on work. Today, work imposes itself on education, although somehow this process is concealed by the rhetoric of a so called knowledge society.

Historically, education has been at the service of socialising the individual. When this socialisation is underpinned by heteronomy and obeys not to the will of the individual but to external forces such as religion or the community, education is mainly organised by the church. In the middle-ages, universities and schools were Catholic, Protestant or Muslim. Theology and humanities were the main subject matters. With the development of the nation-state in the 18th century, universities and schools are designed for preparing the elite of the nation in administrative, military and economic affairs, while the bulk of the populace was still educated in religious institutions or not at all. The modern project of education was to develop the autonomy of the individual. The modern project of education was adopted in the 19th century in Europe and the United States under the influence of the 18th century philosophy of Enlightenment, of the development of democratic political regimes and of romanticism’s conception of national culture (the “Bildung” in Germany or the corresponding “honnête homme” in France). The autonomy of the individual is obtained from individual educational achievements that develop the personal character and the humanity of the individual by enlarging his/her individual knowledge and his/her scholarship of sciences and of national and human culture. Education is viewed as enhancing individual talents and potentialities, and individual capacities to reason, judge and decide. As modern society and democracy proceed from the free will of autonomous individuals, the quality of education is mirrored by the quality of the society and by the strength of democracy.

This modern project of education leads to the disconnection of education from the society. In order to protect education from the encroachment of daily needs, of vested interests, of families and of the world of work, as well as from corporatism and from fragmented local cultures, educational systems have been granted autonomy from the society. Autonomy of education has been granted by a social contract by which society requests the educational system to class individuals in a ranked order for distributing them between jobs and social positions. It is socially agreed that the major criteria used for this classification of individuals would be

²³ This section is based on a ongoing research programme carried in the Centre for Education and Labour Studies (CELS) from Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

their educational achievements reflected in diplomas. Before, society proceeded from a heteronymous construct - where rules of reproduction were inherited from exogenous entities as from gods, ancestors or the ruling class. The purpose of modern education is to transform the society into an autonomous and chosen construct as proceeding from autonomous (because educated) individuals. In order to preserve this educational project and to form autonomous, conscious and active citizens, the educational system has not only to be independent from vested interests but also has to give individuals the same opportunity to study at the maximum of their possibilities. These two strong requirements of the modern project of education – autonomy and equality- have been obliged to extract education from the singular contexts of learning (a particular family, a particular job, a particular culture attached to a given place), and to deliver the same education whatever the place of learning. Schools have to be “*decontextualised*”. Free and public national educational systems have been set for preventing education from social encroachment and as a means of decontextualizing education²⁴. Educating is delegated to a public body of professionals specially trained for this purpose and for teaching according to cognitive principles. Those principles are based on didactics which are a scientific and experimental way of teaching and learning. In fact didactics organise the relationships between the learner, the knowledge and the teacher along a purely educational logic demanded by the cognitive process itself. Thus, by carrying individuals to the maximum of their cognitive potentialities, the educational system can assume a vocational function by filling each position and job of the social hierarchy with the right persons (from there the idea of education as a social uplifter and the idea of democracy as “meritocracy”). When the educational system is given by the society the power to educate its children according to their cognitive potentialities and is granted autonomy for delivering the best quality of education possible, the society is instituting an “educational logic of education”. By using the criteria of educational achievements for positioning individuals in the social hierarchy of jobs the society is instituting a “vocational logic of education” which is subordinated to its educational logic. The best expression of this social contract which articulates the educational and vocational logics of education has been given by the *progressivist* philosophy of education and its leader John Dewey.

Moreover the social contract that gives autonomy to educational systems and institutes for that purpose a free and public education was considering that the whole person would benefit from education, enjoying life by a better understanding of the social and physical environment, and by an enlarged vision and sharing of the national culture that is of the social system of symbols and presentations. The contemporary

²⁴ The necessity of decontextualising cognitive processes for the sake of developing or transmitting knowledge has been theorized, so to speak, by the principles adopted for setting up the University of Berlin in 1810 for the service of scientific research. Those principles can be summarised in one word: autonomy.

It is worth pointing out also that the main body of sociology of education deals with the analysis of the obstacles and failures to decontextualise in practice education.

cognitivist psychology acknowledges the fact that education is about the abilities of individuals to understand and to give meanings by using the adequate systems of symbols and presentations. Education is not about learning how to do things. In other terms, when the educational system is given autonomy for being able to bring individuals to the maximum of their cognitive potentialities, and when its vocational logic is subordinated to its educational logic, modern societies are subordinating work to life, to such a point that education has been viewed as a protection of childhood and also to some extent of adulthood from the encroachment of work. This is also why welfare systems have given so much importance to education and allocated so many public resources to educational systems.

Today, this time is almost past. Step by step, things are subverted. The vocational logic of education tends to impose itself to the educational logic. Education is put more narrowly than ever at the service of economic concerns and corporate interests. The relationship between education and work is reverted. Education is not understood any longer as individual blossoming and autonomy. Education is now understood as the device for matching the needs of firms for skills and as delivering skills for getting well paid jobs. Education is reduced to its sole vocational dimensions at the detriment of its cognitive mission. This evolution has been advocated in particular by the theory of human capital – extended today by the notion of “employability” - which surreptitiously reduces the human person to its sole economic dimension. This advocacy is based on the beliefs that the only concern of education is delivering skills, and that investing in education is not a public but a private matter and a private responsibility. This evolution reveals strong and convergent attempts to “recontextualise” education. This trend takes place mainly through the privatisation of education and decentralisation of educational systems with the retreat of the Welfare State from economic regulations and

welfare policies. Today, the social contract that once granted autonomy to educational systems is denounced and actually smashed to pieces.

Not to mention private education, public educational institutions are *recontextualising* education by choosing a “professional-driven” system in which learning processes based on cognitive skills are bartered against learning processes based on behavioural and technical skills (see above §4), in particular through apprenticeship-like schemes. As schools and universities cannot be the real and specific contexts where those skills can be delivered, they are performing poorly in this field. Conversely, as they are on the point of giving up the formation of cognitive skills that correspond to their educational mission, they are more and more offering discounted quality of education. At the end of the day, universities and schools may not be needed any more and should disappear, as advocated by the more radical postmodernist philosophers of education. Or, in a softer advocacy, they should be transformed into mere training institutions in parallel with enterprises which are allegedly becoming “knowledge- or learning organisations”. Education would end by being entirely subjugated to work.

The main device for the recontextualisation of education is its metamorphosis into a commodity sold in an educational market which mirrors the world of work. From now on, an increasing number of educational institutions, private and public as well, put themselves at the sole service of disciplining the labour power to the detriment of the person of the worker. The knowledge-content and quality of diplomas, meant before to assert them, do not matter any more. What matters is the face value of diplomas in the market, that is in fact the incomes that their holders expect from trading them against jobs nationally or internationally. In this evolution there are however two paradoxes.

The first paradox stems from a wrong conception of skills. We have seen above at least in Northern countries that labour flexibility has led enterprises to mobilise the mind of workers and therefore their cognitive skills within the work process. Educational institutions and policies infer wrongly from this fact that their new role is to deliver the skills needed by the economy. Clever managers deplore as counterproductive the current trend where educational institutions on the one hand neglect their previous role of delivering cognitive skills and on the other hand encroach upon the role of enterprises for delivering behavioural and technical skills. They state that behavioural and technical skills cannot but be workplace specific and therefore cannot be formed in the educational system. They deplore in fact that the previous social contract between the society and education is falling apart. This claim of conscious entrepreneurs can be observed both in developed and developing countries. In fact everywhere, ongoing educational reforms which promote a profit-driven education should be relinquished.

The second paradox is that the poor are given less opportunity to study and to succeed, so that social inequalities, and in particular the increasing unequal distribution of incomes, are more than before reproduced by educational systems. Work commands life by circumscribing education to its borders and by transmitting to it its social configurations.

6. Labour incomes

The problem of labour incomes is quite different in wage and independent labour. In both forms of work however it is a twofold problem related on the one hand to the formation of direct incomes, that is coming from the work itself, and on the other hand to the formation of indirect incomes, coming from institutional mechanisms of income redistribution. In the formation of labour incomes effects of transmission and of reversal between the two forms of work are intensively at play.

n. Direct incomes

As far as wage labour is concerned, a social question arises from the separation of the labour power from the person who delivers it, because this separation entails the separation of the person of the worker from his/her means of existence. As wages remunerate the labour power according to market mechanisms, there is no guarantee that the wage meet the means of existence needed by the worker and his/her dependents. There may be a lack of balance between direct labour incomes and the required means of existence determined by basic needs, or more generally and accurately, by social norms of consumption. When wages are inferior to these needs, there are working poor. When the labour contract is suspended (in case of sickness, pregnancy, training, rest and recuperation, etc.) or when it is breached (in case of dismissal, unemployment or retirement) it may happen that the workers cannot get any means of existence; there is absolute poverty. When, on the other hand, wages are superior to social norms of consumption, there may be an increase of social norms of consumption or an increase of savings or even claims to reduce working hours.

At a national level, matching social norms of consumption for the entire population requires a given national income per capita, that is a given level of apparent labour productivity²⁵. This required level of labour

²⁵

We define ns as the "social number" that is as the ratio between the total available time of a population and the annual working time of this population (the difference being the non working time of the population), n as the rate of growth of the population, l as the rate of variation of the working population (measured in hours for example), y as the rate of variation of GDP, and e as the rate of variation of the apparent productivity of labour. The required growth rate of labour productivity e^* that can meet the needs of the entire population (social norms of consumption expressed by the rate of variation of the quantity $(y-n)^*$) is given by the following equation of definition:

$$e^* = (y - n)^* + ns \quad \text{where } ns = n - l$$

It is interesting to note that demographic factors and duration of work that determine a great part of the social number have a strong influence on the required labour productivity. Where the targeted labour productivity e^* cannot be obtained, social norms of consumption cannot be achieved and poverty may expand. When the social number is decreasing and small, what corresponds to a certain phase of demographic transitions in developing countries, the realised labour productivity can be higher than the targeted one e^* and may nurture (under a condition of fair and unchanged income distribution) an increase of living

productivity is a necessary condition for meeting the needs of the population. But this is not a sufficient condition because national income is distributed between wages and profits, and because within the wage bill increases of wages may not be distributed equally between wage earners. Thus, contrary to what the neoclassical theory of income distribution claims, the marginal productivity of productive factors does not determine wages and profits. Distribution of incomes between wages and profits and within the wage bill are conflicting processes involving industrial and social relations where relative powers of bargaining are at play. All over the world during the last two decades and a half, profits have increased more rapidly than wages as measured by the decline of the share of labour incomes in the national income. Similarly, income inequality between wage earners has increased as well.

At the micro-level of the enterprise, most analyses believe that wages appear to be largely dependent on workers' individual behaviour, and in particular on their initial investment in education and the formation of skills, on their own bargaining skills for their positioning on the ladder of the classification of occupations, on their own management of carrier path, and of course on their performances on the job (compliance, overtime, and increased individual productivity rewarded by bonuses, etc). More and more, the level of income of a particular worker is considered as his/her own and sole responsibility²⁶, while this level is largely a function of labour management in the enterprise and of the general context of employment. In particular, the general trend of downsizing internal labour markets stemming from labour flexibility has limited the opportunity of internal promotion within the enterprise. Wage efficiency strategies which once fed increases of wage rates have been replaced by more subtle psychological devices that do not rely on monetary rewards (see §3 above).

As a result in developed countries, wages lag behind social norms of consumption. Workers try to fill the gap by compensating working hours, by two- or more wage earners households (what decreases the social number of the household), and of pluri-activity. Labour law instituting the provision of a legal minimum wage has in fact put a limit to the gap between wages and norms of consumption, a limit which releases somehow the pressure on increasing working hours. The same happens in developing countries where social norms of consumption are increasing, mainly through a process of social mimicry, and drives people to work harder when they have this opportunity for meeting their needs. In both cases, the race between social norms of consumption and wages leads to a more extensive subordination of life to work, and in particular, by fixing the minimum wage to lower and then inoperative levels.

standards. This effect of a temporarily decreasing social number coincides somehow with what demographers have called the economic "bonus" of demographic transitions.

²⁶ By the same token, the notion of "employability" attributes to the worker him/herself the responsibility of being unemployed.

Theoretically, in the form of work of independent labour, workers are not separated from their means of existence. The paradox is that living standards of wage earners, and in particular poverty, affect independent workers by a transmission effect. For independent workers, labour incomes are the difference (cash flow) between the turnover of their small business and the related production costs and provisions. Thus, labour incomes depend on labour productivity on the one hand and on the relative prices between outputs and inputs on the other hand. For most of independent workers, and in particular for farmers, relative prices decline with the process of industrialisation, so that improvements of labour productivity or/and increases of work duration are the only way out. Independent workers are obliged for this purpose to introduce new technologies that imply the purchase of more inputs and submit them to a vicious circle of increases in production costs and of declining relative prices²⁷. In developing countries where independent labour is important in relation with wage labour, there is a secondary conflict of income distribution with wage sectors, conflict which is most of the time solved at the expense of independent workers. As the level of nominal wages can be low when prices of wage goods produced by the independent sector (in particular food) are low because independent workers accept low incomes, the distribution of productivity gains in the wage sectors is made in favour of profits at the expense of independent labour²⁸. As a consequence, developing countries, where the presence of independent work is still important, get a competitive advantage in the world trade competition over developed countries where imports from developing countries serve to weaken the position of wage earners, to reduce the increase of their wages at the benefit of profits.

Using the metaphor that the ratio between labour incomes and profits is a quantitative indicator, a sort of mirror, of the relationship between life and work, and as this ratio is declining all over the world, one can assert that work is taking the lead over life. The same can be said even more firmly for indirect incomes.

7. Indirect incomes

Indirect incomes are a redistribution of direct incomes through complex and varied mechanisms. Two major indirect incomes supplement (or reduce) direct labour incomes. One is related with public goods or collective consumption and the other one with social protection. Indirect incomes stems from solidarity links between the members of the society, whether at a local and family level or/and at a national level through fiscal and welfare systems.

²⁷ Ending in general by the decline of the population employed in the particular craft, as it is everywhere the case for the farming population.

²⁸ Theories of economic crisis have stressed that the deployment of economic depressions where the fall of profit provokes unemployment, a correlative fall of real wages and a reduction of effective demand is somehow slowed down or even stopped by the demand of non salaried sectors. As in the 1929 crisis, the depression was far less pronounced in countries where independent labour was still dominant as in France for example compared to the United States, England or Germany. The rapid rebound from the 1997 crisis in Thailand can also be attributed to the amortization effect of non wage sectors.

For a long period of time, public goods such as infrastructures (electricity, transport, water, waste disposal, etc.) and social public expenses such as food, education and health were prevented from becoming commodities and their acquisition did not depend on the market. Although they have been usually geographically unequally distributed throughout the national territory in favour of urban areas and wage labour, the trend was until recently to equip rural areas, often under considerations of fairness and of geo-strategy concerns. Paid from taxes, collective consumption and public goods have somehow compensated direct income inequalities, depending of course on the fairness of the fiscal system. Today, the general trend is to privatise public goods and to make users pay for their usage. Public goods are becoming commodities sold and bought on a market, so that access to them depends more than before from direct incomes and therefore from work. Income inequalities are sharpened by this evolution. The same is happening for social protection.

In early processes of industrialisation, social protection of workers were underpinned on vivid family links between wage earners and independent workers and based on communal traditions. In these situations, indirect incomes in both forms of work are socially understood along a general and traditional principle of gift and counter-gift, as stressed by anthropologists. In the first phases of industrialisation, independent work has taken in charge a part of the consumption of wage earners kind (food, child rearing, accommodation, for example) or through undervalued prices of consumer goods. Reciprocal flows take place when wages are higher than independent labour incomes (as for the remittances of emigrants). Solidarity links are maintained according to circumstances and social structures. In particular, when the wage contract is suspended (rest, holidays, sickness) or breached (dismissal, unemployment, retirement) wage earners may benefit from family solidarity. Finally, the two way and malleable solidarity between wage and non wage sectors slows down or even impedes the construction of a social protection system of wage labour. With the decline of independent work, wage earners find themselves in more precarious conditions and claim and struggle for the building of national systems of social protection. In that regard they have been helped in the last four decades or so, by the policy of ILO to extend to developing countries social protection systems and welfare provisions of the kind enforced in welfare states. However all over the world, those systems, when they exist, are suffering drastic transformations. Everywhere, globalisation is the pretext to advocate the abandon of welfare systems.

When the development of wage labour has disconnected the persons from their means of existence and reduced the strength of independent forms of work to a point where indirect incomes for wage earners cannot stem from them any longer, the society has to take in charge those who cannot work. This is the case of the handicapped and the sick and, for wage earners, of periods of suspension and breach of the labour contract. Capitalist societies have always tried to define as restrictively as possible those who cannot work, and to tight as much as possible the benefits of social protection and welfare to previous or future work. Through public policies according to historical circumstances and social struggles, labour protection and welfare provisions

have been developed particularly in Europe (under the Bismarck system in Germany at the end of the 19th century and the Beveridge System in Great Britain after WWII). These systems deliver indirect incomes when the labour contract is suspended or breached, and in particular social security for sickness, dole for unemployment, paid holidays and leave for rest and training, as well as pensions for retired people. The philosophy inspiring these provisions is that life circumstances oblige sometimes to derogate to the general principle that labour income can only derive from work. In this view, and except for retirement, the uncoupling of income and work operated by protection and welfare systems can only be temporary and can provide only temporary incomes. Thus, too generous welfare systems provoke a lasting uncoupling of income and work and consequently transform the exception into the rule. They are assessed as having too many adverse effects and as being therefore socially unbearable. People who do not work - unemployed and inactive- while they are able to work are denounced by governments and neo-liberal political parties as the result of voluntary individual decisions, or even as people cheating the society by receiving undue benefits, and as the main source of too high labour costs. Actually, when we are looking at the other face of the same coin, people may stay “voluntarily” out of work when social benefits allow meeting better the needs of the households than declining real wages or when the lack of jobs give them no other recourse.

Nevertheless, the contemporary discipline mill does not consider increasing real wages to solve the problem of high welfare expenses. On the opposite, it has opted for reducing social benefits and dismantling welfare systems in order to compel people without other alternative to search for jobs. For that purpose the protection of workers by law is being reformed and welfare systems are receiving the same treatment as public goods, that is the privatisation of public systems of welfare and social protection. Workers are urged to buy private health insurance and to pay for their pension to pension funds. The end of this evolution is that indirect incomes are reduced to almost nothing, and labour incomes are then only formed by direct incomes, that is to say in salaried societies by wages. Hence, the needs of the person have to be adjusted and tuned on the income level of the labour power and not the way round as before where indirect incomes were able to adjust total labour income on the needs of the person and his/her dependents. Thus, the means of existence of the person are determined by the market and not the way round when the market is regulated in order to give to each worker decent means of existence for a decent work. The “theory of transitional labour markets” tries to take a new path for designing social protection. As a starting point, it assumes (or takes for granted) that from now on jobs are not stable and labour mobility is high, implying a seamless process of moves and transitions between non work and work situations in a lifespan. Consequently, social protection cannot be attached to work so tightly as before; it must be conceived as a citizen right. In view of the current evolution where governments attempt constantly to reduce social expenses, the recommendation of this theory may remain on

the shelves, so much so that globalisation and international competition may oppose insuperable obstacles to this project.

Moreover, today the funding of social protection benefits served to non working persons in developed countries is taken partly in charge by the workers of developing countries, as private insurance and pension funds invest a great part of their capital abroad, and in particular in emerging countries where expected returns are high. It is beyond doubt that this withdrawal of productivity gains contribute to slow down the building of social protection systems in developing countries. All over the world and in spite of social struggles, indirect labour incomes are reduced to a bare living and direct labour incomes regulated by the market are becoming everywhere the only source for making a living; work is commanding life more than ever.

7. Work and life: status versus market.

In modern Western countries, representations of work have the two Janus' faces: apollonian and dionysiac. Work is alternatively or simultaneously a blessing and a curse. At the end of the fifteenth century, and by returning to the meaning of Genesis, Pic de la Mirandole proposed a concept of modernity based on an undefined ontology of man in which freedom and necessity are twin pillars of humanity. Once finished creating the universe, God created human beings to admire the beauty of his works. But because he forgot the necessity of admirers and did not foresee their creation, he found himself short of resources for giving them a defined place and a precise function in the universe. In order to be forgiven God gave human beings the liberty to arrange the world at their convenience and at their own will so that they could repair his omission. The promethean dream of repairing God's distraction and of perfecting the world to arrange a place for human beings has lead them to working and labouring. Liberty of mankind has to be acquired by labouring; since the beginnings, work is the dionysiac means of an apollonian end.

In modern Western societies, work comes with dependent labour relationships that forge ambiguous social values regarding work: on the one hand class consciousness of oppression and exploitation and on the other hand a sense of belonging, of membership and of social usefulness. This double feeling appears clearly in situations of lasting unemployment. Today, as already emphasised above, most adults spend most of their active time in work-related activities. Although the increase of work-related hours has been widely documented, there is a strand of thinking which argues that labour matters less and less in individual concerns whether because work does not dominate life anymore (ceding this role to leisure, consumption and knowledge), or because work is a series of short term tasks and life episodes which prevent people from being committed to it and from building on it the meanings of their existence and of their essence. Partisans of these different stances put forward their arguments with sadness or with joy and celebration according to the apollonian or the dionysiac face of work they are looking at.

In non western societies, where the sense of belonging comes from the community and/or a hierarchical social order (most of the time of a client-patron type), where a promethean project does not exist²⁹, and where independent work is still dominant in terms of employment and acts as a model as far as labour is concerned, work is an extension of life and life is “marbled” within work. Socialisation of the individual takes place firstly in life, and participation of households’ members in work is an expression of traditional solidarity links and arrangements; it is a phase of the gift and counter-gift flows. In wage labour, the same traditional values and behaviour dominate in a reverse effect; they oblige employers to adapt their methods of recruitment and of labour management to those values and behaviour and to concede to traditional rites and mores. New wage earners accept their new fate reluctantly as a temporary situation and as a part of a plan to go back to self-employment by setting up their own business. Those plans are less and less often realised because of the secular decline of independent forms of work, but at least they make bearable the position of wage earners by giving them a purpose.

Everywhere the hold of work over life expands. In non salaried societies, social structures, values and rites that give each individual a status within the society circumscribe work to the rights and obligations defined by the social status of the individual. In salaried society, welfare states have been the only phases of capitalism that have avoided the grasp of work on the entire life by giving to the person of the worker a status – rights and obligations- which have protected it from the adverse effects of the commoditisation of its labour power. Today by the grace of the global expansion of wage labour, by the dismantling of welfare systems, work status is disappearing and work can be entirely regulated by the market (the self regulating market as Polanyi put it). More accurately, because life is annexed to work and work commands life again, markets regulate most dimensions of life, from education to health, retirement and human works and innovations. One can hope only that social movements and struggles will be again strong enough to eradicate the undesirable effects of work and markets on human life.

²⁹ In Buddhism, the religion which is most widespread in Southeast Asian countries, if people are not satisfied with this world, they do not have to plan to labour to perfect it according to their desires. Rather, they can renounce to it by becoming a monk. The only perfection is an individual one that can be reached only by renouncing to desires as the way to absolute perfection or “illumination”. This tenet that eludes the idea of the transformation of the world by human action and work is reinforced by the fatalism of individual Karma for laymen who prefer to suffer in this world rather than to leave it and to renounce it.

Thai Higher Education towards 2020.

A reappraisal in a historical perspective

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ABSTRACT

The paper stresses that today the role given to education tends to circumscribe higher education to a mere and reduced economic function. Globalisation serves as a legitimisation of this role. At a world level, a growing number of higher education institutions define their goals and criteria of efficiency in this perspective. The paper scrutinises the past and future of Thai higher education in the light of the history of western universities.

The paper contends that the comprehensive educational reform enacted in 1999, may whether improves the quality of public higher education institutions, or confine them within this too narrow and impoverished economic ambition. The paper claims that this danger has to be urgently assessed and action taken in order to keep it at bay.

The paper concludes that, by giving the primacy to microeconomic concerns, that is to individual and corporate interests, universities would let unattended more important social and political concerns. Universities would abandon their historical missions, that of contributing to the improvement of human life by developing human knowledge and that of helping to solve the millenary problem of the relationships between the individual and the society.

บทคัดย่อ

ดูเหมือนว่าอิทธิพลทางเศรษฐกิจจะตีกรอบให้การอุดมศึกษามีไว้เพียงเพื่อจัดการกับปัญหาด้านเศรษฐกิจเป็นหลัก ซึ่งอิทธิพลของโลกาภิวัตน์ได้สร้างความชอบธรรมดังกล่าว ดังนั้นในปัจจุบันสถาบันอุดมศึกษาส่วนใหญ่จึงกำหนดเป้าหมายและมาตรการเพื่อให้บรรลุภารกิจอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ ประเทศไทยเป็นประเทศที่ให้ความสำคัญด้านการศึกษากับบทบาทดังกล่าวจึงได้มีการปฏิรูปการศึกษาขึ้นภายใต้ข้อกำหนดใน พ.ร.บ. การศึกษา พ.ศ. 2542 ให้เกิดการพัฒนาคูณภาพการศึกษาขึ้น แต่ภายใต้ขาดความชัดเจนของบทบาทของสถาบันอุดมศึกษาที่พึงจะเป็นในปี 2020 การปฏิรูปการศึกษาอาจเป็นหนทางนำไปสู่จุดเพียงเพื่อพัฒนาด้านเศรษฐกิจเท่านั้น บทความนี้จึงได้ทบทวน ย้อนไปถึงประวัติศาสตร์ ที่มาที่ไปในบทบาทของสถาบันอุดมศึกษาว่ามีสิ่งทีพึงระลึกมากกว่า เช่น ความสำคัญที่มีต่อสังคมและการเมือง เนื่องจากสถาบันอุดมศึกษาในอดีตจะเน้นการพัฒนาองค์ความรู้และหาวิธีการแก้ปัญหาให้บุคคลและสังคมอยู่ร่วมกันอย่างสันติภาพ

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n. Introduction

In this paper, our standpoint stresses that, compared to preceding periods, the economic role recently given to education dramatically changed. Higher education tends to be given a limited and circumscribed function to respond to economic demands³⁰. In the world, a majority of higher education institutions, whether under social and political pressures or by conviction, are currently defining their goals and criteria along this framework.

In order to understand this recent change, it is necessary to analyse it in a historical perspective. As the history of Thai universities has been deeply shaped by Western models and as its current evolution still borrows from them, a comparative approach of Western and Thai histories is needed that may help to investigate the future of Thai higher education. Thai higher education is now at a crossroad where different paths are still open. The comprehensive educational reform enacted in 1999 did not really choose one of these paths. This lack of a clear-cut choice may let the evolution of higher education spontaneously determined by social forces and restricted to and animated by a narrow and impoverished economic ambition.

In a world historical sequence that stretches from the 12th century to the 21st century, universities, influenced by Western experiences, were successively designed to serve churches, nation states and eventually businesses. They end up in putting unprecedented emphasis on the individual as an ultimate and extreme consequence of rationalism. We contend that, today, by giving the primacy to individual and corporate interests, universities may let unattended more important social and political concerns. In Thailand, Universities, following Western models, could take the same orientations and take the same risks of neglecting and even abandoning their historical mission to serve the society as a whole.

๓. 1. Higher Education and the Nation State in Thailand

Universities in Thailand have a short history that started in a modern form at the beginning of the 20th century. Western models were used to shape their role and organisations.

11 . Higher Education in the West: from church to welfare state, 1150 to 1980

Throughout history, most universities have been organised to fulfil two purposes. One is the collection and development of the knowledge geared to the service of the interests they were

³⁰ In contemporary visions and theories, there is a general ambiguity that education would enhance economic growth through meeting the demand of vested interests. This is nothing but proved if we refer to political economy theories of economic growth. This ambiguity is maintained by recent economic theory, that states that education is an engine of economic growth (Denison 1962 and 1967, OECD 1974, Schultz 1961 and 1970, Becker 1962 and 1964, Lucas 1988, Romer 1990 and 1990). Despite opposite evidences (Fine 2000), this theory exerts an unprecedented influence in international and national spheres and inspires most educational policies (OECD 1998, 2001, World Bank 1998).

supposed to serve, that is a purpose of expertise. The other one is disseminating this knowledge towards a larger population, this is a purpose of teaching.

For drawing very briefly the history of universities in western countries, we mainly borrow from Marcus Ford (forthcoming) quoted by John B Cobb (2002) and from Phillip Brown and alii (1997).

The Paris model : serving the church (1150)

The university of Paris (La Sorbonne) was founded between 1150 and 1170. It is one the earliest of the great universities that were established in Western medieval Europe. During its time, the Paris university exerted a major influence all over Europe.

The university of Paris aimed at serving the society primarily by serving the church. Its purpose was to strengthen Christianity and Christian faith by scholarly means. By collecting and transmitting existing knowledge, by studying its foundations and legitimacy, Christian tenet and faith could be better enounced and articulated. Also, the moral and political authority of ministers of the churches over the people resulted strengthened. The central assumption of the Paris model, as John Cobb says, is that Christian faith and broad learning were mutually supportive.

The curriculum and the organisation of the university in four Faculties reflect its missions. One faculty is the college of liberal arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric, and geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy) that delivers basic knowledge for further development and forge attitudes. This faculty also prepares students to enter one of the other three faculties conceived as graduate professional schools, namely medicine, canon law and theology. Not surprisingly, this latter was given the primacy.

Numerous European universities followed the Paris model. They were whether catholic, such as Bologna in Italy, Salamanca in Spain, whether Lutheran as Freiburg in a German state, or Anglican as Oxford and Cambridge in England. The Paris model still inspired the Harvard college in Boston that was founded in the mid-seventeenth century.

The influence of La Sorbonne in Europe declined with the development of nation-states.

The Halle model : serving the nation-state. (1697)

With the end of the religious wars and the treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the primacy of Christian faith and the churches gave way to the primacy of the nation state. Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican started to call themselves French, Prussian or English.

The rise of the nation-state and of rationalism inherited from the Renaissance gave birth to a new university geared to the service of the nation-state rather than the church. Latin was abandoned and national languages became languages of instructions as levers for building of a national identity.

The new Halle university, established in 1693 in Brandenburg, was designed to prepare people and leaders to the service of the state. The university was built for a practical concern of delivering specific economic, technical and administrative skills fitted to strengthen the nation state, economically, politically and militarily. Law, public administration and military sciences, as well as economics, forestry, agriculture and mechanics constituted the core curriculum.

The Halle model became the major model of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In France, the "great schools" (advanced studies of engineering; national school of administration, military school) established by Napoleon at the turn of the 19th century systematised the Halle model. French Great Schools were exclusively geared to training leaders of the army, public administration and state enterprises. They still exist for that same purpose today. In the United States, the Morrill Land Grant Act 1862 allowed each state to establish a state college, where primacy was given to agricultural, mechanics and military fields of study (they are often known today by their acronym: A&M universities)

The Berlin Model (1810): serving the development of knowledge

Within German speaking countries, appeared strong reactions against turning universities into practical economic and military goals and grounds for political concerns. Many intellectual felt that universities should mainly contribute to research for the development of knowledge. IN their view, as knowledge is a never solved problem, universities should stay at this task. For practical applications of knowledge, universities should give the baton to other institutions.

In 1810, after the Napoleonic wars, the university of Berlin was founded and based on principles of a true research university. The philosophy of Immanuel Kant was influential in shaping this vision. The world can be known by human experience of natural and social phenomena and not by faith or beliefs. Moreover, the world is ordered by human mind and spirit; by the "*geist*". Thus, the inquiry of the world has to be organised into studies belonging to two sets of scientific disciplines: sciences (*naturwissenschaften*) inquiring the Nature, and humanities (*geistwissenschaften*) inquiring the works of human spirit.

The Berlin model was based on accurately defined organisational and scientific principles.

The organisation of the university must deliver the conditions of objectivity of research and of unbiased results. Hence, it must promote and protect an unconditional freedom of researchers. Specifically, researchers have to be intellectually and financially independent from vested interests and from economic and political pressures. They also have to be protected from financial contingencies. Moreover, in a true research university, professors have to be exempted from teaching, except for training future researchers.

Regardless of much of its initial intention of avoiding practical goals for the sake of genuine research, much of research results proved to have practical effects, in particular in the fields of technological, institutional and organisational changes.

The Berlin university exerted a very strong influence all over the world, and still do today. Its followers embraced its vision whether by adhesion to its principles, or by interests motivated by the powerful, positive and practical effects of sciences on the natural and social world. In the 19th century in United States, John Hopkins and Chicago universities were created on the principles of the Berlin model. After WWII in France, academic research has been organised in specific national research institutes, independent from universities in charge of teaching. These national research institutes were and still are an accurate replication of the Berlin model: freedom of researchers, exemption from teaching, and organisation in scientific disciplines.

Since the creation of the university of Berlin, the prestige of universities in the world has been mostly connected to the prestige of their research activity.

The university of the welfare state: the combination of Halle and Berlin models (1945 – 1980).

Actually, economic nationalism (Brown and alii 1997), - that characterised European economies and societies when they undertook their reconstruction after World War II -, imposed the alliance and combination of both Halle and Paris models of universities. The rationale of this alliance is firstly economic and secondarily political.

At an economic level, governments, relying on economic theories, were convinced that the best way to strengthen the nation-state in a peaceful and non communist world was to put into practice three related principles as pillars of the welfare state. These principles were prosperity, solidarity and opportunity. The principle of prosperity meant in practice the acceleration of economic growth through the development of scientific knowledge and technological change. The principle of solidarity assumed that economic growth actually nurtures social progress and economic security for all. Policies and new institutions warranted full employment, fair income distribution, and social protection, what could not be spontaneously achieved by a competitive and unregulated labour market.. The principle of opportunity meant that social positions should be acquired by merit and not by ascription. Social justice was the thread that linked these three principles, as equal opportunity for all to get better positions and income in life supposed economic growth and institutions of social solidarity. In that respect, equal access to education was seen as a crucial lever of efficiency and equity.

At a political level, the concern was to deliver an adequate education to all citizens in view of consolidating democracy. Preserving peace and preventing from totalitarian regimes were at stake. More importantly, by promoting social justice and social stability, and by enhancing individual capacity of judgement and opinion, education was seen as a key device of enhancing democracy.

For Western culture, democracy can be protected by the rule of public law (the "state of rights"), but even more efficiently by individual attachment to freedom. In particular, by forging individual abilities to analyse, judge, criticise and voice, education actually prepare citizens for definitively keeping dictatorship at bay.

In this context, education as a whole and higher education in particular became a major instrument of economic nationalism and of consolidation of the welfare state (Avis and alii 2000). Borrowing from the Halle model, universities were geared to the training of an increasing number of political and public administration leaders required by the management of economic and social institutions of the welfare state. They also had to train an increasing number of teachers mobilised to deliver a longer scientific and democratic education to all children of the nation. Borrowing from the Berlin model, they all developed genuine research for practical concerns of technological improvements geared to stimulating economic growth and related social well being. During this period of rapid economic growth and social transformations, a majority of Universities in the world actually combined these two models.

1.2 . The Halle model in Thailand: building the nation state.

In the light of this rough history of western universities, the recent history of Thai higher education and perspectives for 2020 can be drawn.

At the dawn of 1916, higher educational institutions under the Education Department (Normal school, Medical King' s college sixth form and midwives' school), numbered 11 with about 1600 students (in 1910). Other specific colleges where under the authority of the corresponding ministries (Royal military college, Royal naval college, Royal Survey college, College of agriculture, Civil service college, Post and telegraph school, gendarmerie school). They were necessary to train managers of Royal Administration of the Kingdom.

The first University, Chulalongkorn University, was created in 1916 by King Rama VI, and clearly established along the Halle model. Humanities, law and economics were the core subject matters aiming at preparing dedicated and efficient civil servants. Serving the royal project of consolidating and expanding the nation state, it was orientated at concentrating and improving public higher education.

With the same spirit of strengthening the nation state in the aftermath of the 1932 revolution, four prestigious universities were founded Thammasat in 1933, Kasetsart and Mae Jo in 1933, Mahidol in 1943.

A new and continuous wave of creation of new universities, build under the same Halle model, started in 1960 and lasted until the beginning of the 80ies. During this same period, old and new universities borrow some features of the Berlin model, adding research to their teaching activities. However, Thai universities have not entirely adopted the university model of the welfare

state and rather have applied the Halle model. This probably can be explained by the fact that the development of a welfare state remained embryonic and uncompleted until today. When the State wanted to develop research activities, it set up specific national institutions outside the domain of public universities.

Numerous new public universities were created from 1985 until the end of the 90ies. They were more diverse in their goals. A shift of universities purposes occurred due to the decline of economic nationalism and the rise of globalisation (see below part II).

The number of Thai Higher education institutions doubled nationwide during the period 1985-1999. Under the Ministry of University Affairs, public universities amounted to 11 in 1985, corresponding to a number of 83,148 students. In 1999, public universities were 23, corresponding up to 759,297 students. Private universities also dramatically increased during the same period. We will return to this point below in Part II.

Public universities were mainly focused on delivering knowledge in the fields of social sciences and humanities (SSH) rather than in the field of sciences and technology (S&T). Even if the ratio between SSH and S&T enrolments declined from 2.5 in 1966 to 1.7 in 1971 (see Table 3), SSH remains the dominant fields of higher studies, compelling educational authorities to reverse this trend by a policy of quota of admissions by disciplines (see table 5).

However this evolution cannot be analyzed in the framework of serving the welfare state. The current context is precisely dismantling regulations and institutions of the welfare era, as it is generally believed that competitive markets, and particularly world market, would do better the job. The changing nature of university models is rather explained by the rise of private and individual concerns.

II . The university of globalisation in Thailand

As we stated in the introduction above, Thai universities are at a crossroad, and their foreseeable future relies much on well informed decisions whether by national authorities and university bodies. Ignorance of current trends could reveal to be lethal for balanced societies all over the world. This particularly true in Thailand where traditionally modern education has been deeply influenced by western educational models and by their current evolution towards a market driven higher education. Without a clear conscience of spontaneous trends triggered and fed by social actors, relevant public decisions regarding higher education could not be made. At the end of the day, Thai authorities might discover that the landscape of Thai universities would not fulfil fundamental functions needed by a developed and cohesive Thai society.

2.1 . Old Anglo-Saxon values and private university: the Phoenix model.

A new model of university is spreading out all over the world from an American origin. It is a university that serves individual and corporate interests. Phoenix university, California, is where a complete model of that sort can be found.

This new model takes its roots from two main origins. One is the dramatic economic crisis which started with the decrease of corporate profits at the end of the 1960s, and results in a long depression of Western economies. This depression ended about the end of the 1980s, leading to dismantling welfare states, convicted to be responsible for the crisis. The rationale of these policies actually relies on a deep rooted cultural trait of Anglo-Saxon cultures, that has been inherited from the 17th century English revolution. The State is viewed as encroaching on freedom and responsibility of individuals and businesses. It is hold for a source of economic inefficiency. This conception of freedom inspired political and economic reactions to the crisis, particularly in the United States with Ronald Reagan, and in the United Kingdom with Margaret Thatcher, and more recently in Australia with John Howard. Economic, institutional, and political restructuring has been thought as limiting State powers and actions in the economy and the society. This of course paid the way for rethinking the role of education and of universities.

In this view, as opposed to the era of the nation state and the welfare state, education is not a public matter but a private one. Therefore, market mechanisms fit better than state policies to organise and guide higher education. Individuals and businesses have to take the baton of the defunct welfare State in educational issues. The same could be said concerning labour.

Higher education in the first instance, as the key of educational systems, has to be geared to serve individual and corporate interests through market-like mechanisms.

The Phoenix model offers a quite advanced version of a market driven higher education model, that responds to these ideals.

In this model, the university is a business as any other and has to be organised accordingly. The university is considered and structured as a profit-making private company which core craft is to produce and to sell educational goods.

University customers are its students. Therefore, the kind of educational services offered are determined by the demand of customers. The *learner-centred or student-centred* option solves this problem. Courses, branches and curricula are defined according to the explicit demand of students. Deriving from some once useful insights of the philosophy of education known as progressivism (Dewey 1916), needs and interests of students are what matters. Those needs are measured by the amount of fees students are ready to pay for getting educational services. This leads to a logic where the quality of education is not evaluated in term of acquisition of knowledge. Quality of education is evaluated in term of the quality of the job that acquired credentials allow to obtain, therefore in term of expected income and social positions. The best way to attract rich and

numerous customers is to involve providers of jobs, that is employers, in the definition of curricula, so that employers' labour and skills requirements can be matched .

Human resources management reflects a dramatic change in the conception of professors. These are employees that can be hired on a temporary basis in order to adjust the skills of the university labour force to the fluctuations of the demand for changing curricula. Their fitness to the job of teaching is no more assessed by objective criteria of their academic knowledge and their pedagogical skills. It is now assessed by the degree of satisfaction of customers, that is by *an evaluation of professors by students*. As practical knowledge and know-how acquired on the job by engineers and managers of private companies tend to fit better to the practical curricula in demand than academic knowledge of professors, the university has to have the freedom of hiring business specialists and professionals instead of academics.

Research activities are undertaken less for the advancement of universal knowledge than for responding to immediate interests of existing businesses that fund it. In United States, academics' expectations of setting a start up have also been a widespread motivation for research activities.

On this basis, knowledge produced and acquired at the university is more and more of a practical kind, close to training, and determined by practical concerns of businesses and individuals. It borrows more from the Halle model than from the Paris or the Berlin ones, as it is quite easy to shift from serving the nation state economy to serving private businesses' and individuals' economic concerns

2.2 . Toward the Phoenix model in Thailand? A rapid appraisal.

Higher education in Thailand is borrowing more and more features of the Phoenix model. This appeared more as a spontaneously trend than as a real political will of Thai society. In any case, our contention is that this evolution can be prejudicial for the Thai nation.

A first indicator, - the ratio of enrolment in public and private higher education institutions -, shows a rapid change in favour of private education. This ratio was 1.95 in 1985, indicating that enrolment in public higher education is about twice the enrolment in private higher education. It declines down to 1.3 in 1999 indicating that private institutions developed more rapidly than public institutions (excluding public universities with unlimited admission).

However, this evolution does not mean that governments did not endeavor for developing public higher education. From table 2, it appears that public budget allocated to higher education increased from about 16000 baht by student in 1980 to 23000 baht in 1991. When setting open universities (unrestricted admission), the average cost by student dropped to 15000 baht in 1992, and rose again up to 20000 baht in year 2000. Apparently this effort has not be enough to face an increasing demand of the population for tertiary education, following previous booms of primary and secondary levels of education

Moreover, higher education institutions have been recently under heavy criticism. They have been accused not preparing students to cope with rapid and permanent changing conditions of life and to enter in the globalization age, where the economy is supposed to produce efficient and equitable societies. The National Education Act 1999 and former National Economic and Social Development Plans (NESDP) have intended to address this question by introducing new orientations and a new organization of higher education, along with a more comprehensive reform of the national educational system. Numerous conferences and public hearings have been held to address this question and to bring their contribution to the elaboration of a new legal educational framework. National debates reached a particular intensity in 1996. The Thai Farmer Bank for example organized a forum on "Thai Education in the Globalization Era: Progress and strengthening the Nation in the next Century". SEAMEO RIHED, SEAMES, UNESCO, PROAP and the Ministry of Education organized an international conference on "Reengineering Higher Education for the 21st Century". The Nation Education Commission organized a forum discussion on "Facing the future of Thai society: higher education role". From this national debate emerged a consensus that higher education should 1) play a leading role in strengthening the competitive edge of Thai economy, of promoting international cooperation and of protecting the natural environment; 2) be opened and accessible for all Thai citizens; 3) provide a curriculum more relevant to national development needs; 4) support democracy ; 5) be a think tank and train agents for improving the efficiency of the national administration and 6) be more autonomous and bureaucracy free (cited in NEC, 2001: 6, 1997: 107-108).

This advocate a very broad role of universities in the society. However, narrower interpretations focus on an mere economic role of universities. For instance, Prachuab Chaiyasarn (1999), by that time Minister of University Affairs, delivered a speech in ASAIHL conference on 23 July, 1999 stating that Thai university should be either a "University for Industry" or a "University with Industry". Kanok Wongtrangarn (1999: 10) stated that "It has become very clear that universities need to adapt themselves to a new role of supporting industry in the near future. Universities need to acquire a comprehensive understanding of business. University personnel should be encouraged to work with industry through incentive schemes which explicitly reward university staff that reach out to meet the needs of industry." These statements could be interpreted in the framework of the Halle- Berlin model, where academic research could contribute to the strengthening of national economy necessary to develop the welfare state. In the actual setting of economic patterns and of higher education ideas and practices, it should rather be interpreted in the framework of the Phoenix model where universities are urged to be at the services not so much of industry but of businesses, industrial or otherwise.

It seems that an increasing number of public schools and universities are adopting the Phoenix model. Reengineering educational institutions is operated by downsizing staffs, adopting a

learner- (or client) centered approach, curricula that satisfy narrowly defined economic concerns, by developing management techniques centered on cost-benefit analysis and on a profit making rationality. In this context, we claim that the privatization of higher education is under way, and that the situation is almost beyond the crossroad where other choices were still possible. Ambiguities of the Educational Reform that did not clearly choose its educational model opened the door for the expansion of the Phoenix model. Our contention is that in 2020, and without a prompt and strong reaction of the State and other conscious social actors; Thai higher education will be dominated by a business logic and a market driven functioning. This could be a very serious problem, if major social issues would be let unattended by higher education institutions.

III. Conclusion: Problems ahead and anticipatory policy.

The evolution of universities in the world towards the Phoenix model tends to give primacy to an individualistic society where individual and businesses matters more than the society itself. Globalisation and its effect on Higher Education purposes are getting to let unattended two major social problems that are emerging quite rapidly in contemporary societies.

The first problem is that of socialisation. The integration of the individual into one or various social groups, which is the form of controlling or eradicating reciprocal violence, is becoming problematic. Democratic regimes tried to solve this problem in their own ways. They are opposed to political forms that subordinate the individual to the society as it is the case of ancient societies and contemporary authoritarian regimes. Democratic regimes on the contrary trust the individual to understand, conceive by themselves and freely accept social concerns and social rules that eradicate reciprocal violence. Hence, democracy has permanently to find the ways of solving this tension between the individual and the society. Today, it seems that democracy are renouncing to handle this tension, by accepting the primacy of the individual over the society. Contemporary societies are dramatically transformed by the rise of individual and corporate selfishness, by the disappearance of principles and institutions of solidarity, and by the dismiss of welfare systems. The result is a dramatic increase of income and social inequalities. By accelerating this evolution, the expansion of the Phoenix model in Thai higher education may threat the viability and stability of our society and democracy³¹ .. It may contribute to an unbearable reciprocal violence, as it can be witnessed in Western countries. This problem will have to be tackled, whatever the principles and institutions of social life that will prevail in the next future, whether local, regional, national or global. Higher education has to be aware that adopting the Phoenix model becomes part of this problem ahead instead of being part of the solution.

³¹ It is easy to observe a rapid development of reciprocal violence in a majority of democratic countries. As showed by J. Galbraith (2000), economic inequalities are responsible for social unrest, crimes and social violence.

The second problem left unattended by universities adopting the Phoenix model are the public and common goods of humanity. Problems ahead and impending catastrophes regarding strategic domains such as food, energy, water, poverty created by inequalities, technological and environmental risks have to be addressed and solved by leaders trained for that purpose by universities (John Cobb 2002).

Higher education would bear a great responsibility if it could not fulfil higher ideals than making money. The defence of peace and the well being of human beings should lead to more ambitious university models. These models will have to share, develop and transmit a common and universal scientific knowledge. They have to acknowledge and teach that the wealth of the planet is not its economic uniformity, - more akin with death-, but its diversity made of diverse, numerous, alive and valuable languages and cultures³².

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³² Assertion proposed by the French philosopher Michel Serres: "*L'humanisme universel qui revient*" ("Universal humanism is coming back"), in *Entretiens du XXI siècle*, UNESCO, Paris, 21^e séance, 18 juin 2002, Paris. Published in *Le Monde* 13 juillet 2002.

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“Does Enhancing Employment for Higher Education Graduates Benefit Sustainable Development?”

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บทคัดย่อ

อุดมศึกษาไทยถูกมองว่าเป็นตัวขับเคลื่อนด้านวิชาการ เศรษฐกิจและการเมืองของประเทศ จึงทำให้เชื่อว่าการอุดมศึกษาจะเป็นตัวพัฒนาเทคโนโลยี พัฒนาให้มีทักษะเพื่อเข้าสู่ตลาดแรงงานสามารถแข่งขันเชิงเศรษฐกิจและก่อให้เกิดการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนได้ ความเชื่อดังกล่าวมีส่วนถูกต้อง แต่นับเป็นการมองที่ข้ามหลักการ บทบาทหน้าที่ที่สำคัญของอุดมศึกษาไป จากประสบการณ์การเก็บข้อมูลภาคสนามในงานวิจัยหลายชิ้นเพื่อสัมภาษณ์ความคิดเห็นของนายจ้างผู้ใช้แรงงานที่สำเร็จการศึกษาทั้งในระดับอาชีวศึกษาและระดับอุดมศึกษา ในที่นี้รวมถึงงานวิจัยการติดตามความคิดเห็นของผู้ใช้บัณฑิตมหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่ในช่วงที่ผ่านมาพบว่าทักษะเชิงเทคนิค (Technical skills) และพฤติกรรมเชิงนิสัย (Behavior skills) ที่จัดหรือพัฒนาในสถาบันการศึกษาไม่สัมพันธ์กับสภาพที่เป็นจริงในตลาดแรงงานที่มีความแตกต่างและเปลี่ยนแปลงอย่างรวดเร็วได้ ยกเว้นด้านวิชาการความรู้ (Cognitive skill) เท่านั้นที่สถาบันการศึกษาจะสามารถดำเนินการได้เป็นอย่างดี ผลการวิจัยพบข้อสรุปว่าอุดมศึกษาควรเลิกมองรูปแบบการผลิตเพื่อส่งมอบตลาดแรงงานระยะใกล้ที่มุ่งเน้นการผลิตด้านอาชีวะ (Vocational) แต่ควรใส่ใจบทบาท คุณภาพการศึกษาที่เน้นระบบการให้ได้มาซึ่งองค์ความรู้ (Educational system) ที่แท้จริง การดำเนินการตามบทบาทที่แท้จริงของการอุดมศึกษาดังกล่าวจะนำไปสู่การพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจและสังคมได้มากกว่าการจัดการศึกษาที่มุ่งเน้นเพียงด้านอาชีวะ บทความนี้ได้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าการจัดการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาด้วยวิธีการมองและดำเนินการให้ได้มาซึ่งองค์ความรู้ (Educational logic) เท่านั้นที่จะทำให้มีการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนได้

Abstract

In today's Thailand, a majority of decision makers in academic, economic and political arenas advocate an economy-driven higher education. Such a stance postulates that higher education is a major instance for promoting technological change and enhancing skills of the workforce, both being considered as two major conditions of international competitiveness of the national economy and a sustainable development. This is true but too simplistic a view which overlooks the major role of higher education. Based on a field survey looking at the integration of Chiang Mai University graduates into the world of work, the communication shows that skills delivered by higher education cannot be but cognitive skills and not technical and behavioural skills as generally stated. This finding underpins the advocacy of a higher education freed from too narrow and short-sighted vocational concerns and dedicated to its outstanding role in any modern society which is to preserve and enhance the quality of education through the entire educational system. This dedication to an educational ambition will eventually make higher education more

beneficial for the economy and the society than a mere vocational endeavour. The article shows that enhancing the educational logic of education is the only way to make higher education contributing to sustainable development.

Introduction

Sustainable development is a complex notion that has various meanings. All these meanings however have something to do with preparing a better future for next generations. A widespread meaning is related with natural resources and environmental problems. A lack of care of these problems arising from economic development itself may give the baton to coming generations and may jeopardise economic development in the long term. The consequent recommendations are whether to slow down economic growth rhythms or to find resource-saving models of development in particular through technologies designed for this purpose and through an adequate system of relative prices. A second and more confidential meaning is to enhance resource-saving economic growth through investment in immaterial factors of production such as knowledge and skills embodied in labour. This second perspective is adopted by an array of economic theories linking a sustainable development with increasing returns (theories of human capital and of endogenous growth). It is clear, at least for economists, that increasing returns in particular in the use of fixed capital and raw material, would be resource-saving and supporting of sustainable development. From this second perspective, education appears to be a key factor of sustainable development and has to be enhanced as such, because education is a device for enhancing skills and labour productivity. This second perspective is discussed in the present paper.

Believing that higher education in particular produces the high skills in demand in the labour market and that those skills are of paramount importance for increasing total productivity, a current trend is to subordinate more tightly educational systems to economic concerns. Thus, enhancing employment of higher education graduates is a major concern of higher education institutions. This concern is claimed as a legitimated and decisive contribution of higher education to sustainable development, although it reveals a greater concern for its own economic performances and incomes. It is assumed that offering to their students perspectives of getting high and well paid social positions through their didactical orientations and through their social connections and fame, universities would attract more students and more students willing to invest high tuition fees in their education in regard to high expectations of return. Our contention is that in the long term this service to the economy harms dramatically on the one hand higher education itself and indirectly the whole education system and the economy and society. It is necessary to emphasise that in taking this direction, higher education institutions are underpinning their strategy on a short term and wrong vision of their relationships with the economy in general and with the world of work in

particular. Hence, it would be paradoxical and very unfortunate to organise the derailment of higher institutions from their social mission and role on the basis of a complete misunderstanding of the needs of the society and in particular of the ways of promoting sustainable development. The present paper examines some key dimensions of this paradox in Thailand.

In this context commanded by economic concerns, universities have been eager to stick to employers' expectations in order to supply their graduates with the abilities that allegedly fit to these expectations. For that purpose, universities have developed studies regarding the performances of their graduates in the world of work. In a first part we examine such studies which most of the time use a "competency approach". A first paradox stems from the fact that this approach turns a deaf ear to real employers' concerns. Actually, employers' concerns may well be congruent with the major role of higher education which is to preserve and enhance the quality of education of the educational system across the board. Our contention is that by measuring their performances with criteria related with their educational role, higher education institutions would serve much better a sound economic growth and social welfare and not only the enhancement of the graduates employment. This second paradox is examined in a second part.

1 . The paradox of a competency approach

In Thailand numerous studies have been carried out for assessing the performances of higher education institutions through what we stamp a "competency approach" (NESDB 1998; Chatsuda Chattong 1998; Boosong Nilkaew 1999; Sanpattiroop 2002). Some others, more scattered, focus on a psychological approach trying to find in psychological characteristics of students the foundation of their educational performances (Terdsak Dettong 2002; Faculty of education of Chulalongkorn University 2002). By the end of the 8th National Education Development Plan, Chiang Mai University has decided to evaluate its educational outcomes by assessing their adequacy to the labour market over the five year period 1997-2001. In 2002, the university assigned a team and a monitoring committee to address this issue in order to seize what graduates from the university have become in the world of work. Three major issues has been investigated: access of graduates to jobs, adequacy of fields of studies and degree of satisfaction of employers of graduates from the university³³

The investigation has considered the population of alumni graduated between 1997 and 2001. They represented a total population of 21671 alumni. Questionnaires were administered into two parts: the first set is to fill up by alumni on the commencement exercise and the other set is to send to cover 5000 alumni through 3000 employers. Among those 3000, a small sample of

³³ This team was led by the author Dr. Phasina Tangchuang. The completed study has been presented to the authorities of Chiang Mai University. It can be consulted at the Faculty of Education and in CELS under the title Employers' expectation from Higher Education.

employers was selected to conduct in depth and face-to-face further interviews. The major results of this survey are presented here in a nutshell.

Assessing Chiang Mai graduates competencies

Regarding access to jobs, it appears that over the whole period about 72% of graduates have gotten a job after three months of their graduation. It is interesting to note that this percentage was just over 66% in 1997 - which is the year of the economic slump - and increased to over 75% with the recovery from 1999 onwards. In the recent years, almost 100% of graduates have found a job less than six months after their graduation. These figures are remarkable and express a situation of full employment in the labour market where the demand for a workforce with higher education degrees is buoyant. This sole fact would induce economists to say that there is no mismatch between the supply and the demand of skills in the labour market. The access of graduates from the University to jobs is supposed to measure the match of outflows of graduates from the university with the needs of the labour market and is supposed somehow to indicate the reputation of the University. From this perspective, the results of the survey would let University authorities be satisfied with this situation. The two other dimensions of our investigation do not lead to so optimistic conclusions.

The correspondence between the fields of studies and the specialities of the jobs performed by the graduates is meant to assess the match of supply and demand of graduates on the labour market in its qualitative aspects. Here our survey displays mitigate results. About 50% of graduates estimate that both fields are related; conversely 50% estimate that both fields are not. These figures are of course not very accurate because they rely on a subjective assessing of the matter. A lot of frustrations in the job in relation with expectations of graduates may lead to think that whether educational curricula are not accurately designed for available jobs or that employers do not care enough for putting the right graduate in the right place. Significant differences between fields can be observed. For example, more than 50% of graduates from economic studies report that field of studies and work are not related, whereas this figure decreases to 3% in the case of graduates from health sciences. This dimension of our study should be explored more deeply and extensively because it is well known that the cost-effectiveness of any university depends largely on the accuracy of orientation of students between the fields of studies - that is on the accuracy of the information that the university provides to students regarding studies and jobs. On the one hand, good information improves educational performances of students because it orients them better towards the fields of study in accord to their tastes, talents and expectations what enhances their motivations for study and consequently their performances. On the other hand and consequently, a better orientation of students reduces early drop out and the length of studies for each level of

graduation. From this change, the efficiency of the university, for a given cost of operating, is significantly improved.

The third aspect of the survey regarding the degree of satisfaction of employers that borrows from a “competency approach” brings fundamental interrogations about the role of higher education and more importantly about the role that the university defines for itself. The closed questionnaire used in a first instance in the survey was divided into 9 clusters of questions³⁴. Each cluster is meant to correspond to “competencies” or “skills” of graduates supposedly expected by employers. The degree of satisfaction of employers regarding the work of ex CMU students has been reported by competencies and by disciplines. The results have been interpreted in the theoretical framework elaborated by Alain Mounier (2001) and further by John Buchanan (2004). In this framework, skills are made of three dynamic and combined dimensions which follow a “technical” logic, a “behavioural” logic and a “cognitive” logic. These authors suggest that the cognitive logic is mainly forged in the educational system and relates with the knowledge-content of studies, while the behavioural logic is a complex result of culture, education, individual experience and personal character, and while the technical logic is mainly forged on the job by a process of learning by doing. The skills envisaged in the competency approach of the survey are mainly competencies related to the cognitive logic of skills (for example academic knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving capacity, English proficiency, and computer-use abilities) and to behavioural skills (for example leadership, responsibility, sense of initiative and creativity, and curiosity and propensity to learn), while technical skills related to professional knowledge and know-how are mixed up with academic knowledge.

There is some inconsistency in asking employers to assess the cognitive abilities of graduates with the aim of orienting scholarship towards the production of skills. Assessing cognitive abilities should be the only prerogative of experts in this matter: academics.

How employers understand cognitive skills

An underlying postulate of the survey was that supplying competencies needed by employers in the labour market is a major role of higher education. However the results of our study may lead to another conclusion. The in depth interviews of employers conducted with open questions that do not prejudice their answers, yield more subtle results than the data obtained from the closed questionnaire.

³⁴ Clusters of questions used in the questionnaire were the following: 1) academic and professional knowledge, 2) critical thinking, 3) problem-solving, 4) capacity English proficiency, 5) computer-use abilities, 6) leadership, 7) responsibility, 8) sense of initiative and 9) creativity curiosity and propensity to learn.

The in depth interviews of employers reveal the interesting part of the study. A significant number of employers do not expect graduates to have the required and already made skills to perform their job immediately after their graduation. This stance is twofold.

On the one hand, employers complain that education is useless for work and does not provide the skills needed by their workforce. However, contrary to what most experts of labour market understand from employers' claim and to what in their turn they assert with a misplaced confidence, employers do not imply by this complain that the education system should provide those skills. On the contrary, employers claim that training their employees is their own prerogative and cannot be delegated to any other institution. In their view, the right skills employees have to acquire to perform the jobs cannot be delivered outside the work process itself. On the contrary, they can be formed and acquired only through in-house training and on-the-job learning. In other words, the skills that are useful and used in the workplace are those acquired by learning by doing in the real and singular conditions of the job. Precise specifications of the jobs, enterprise management styles and secrets of the crafts are some of the reasons why employers adopt this stance. When employers say that the formation of skills is their own business and cannot be the task of educational institutions, they are expecting little from education. However, from another perspective they are expecting much more from education.

Indeed, on the other hand, they assert that graduates learn better and faster the skills on the job all the more they have received a good scholar education. Employers say that they have always experienced that people able to think and prompt to understand and decide are those who acquire more easily and rapidly behavioural and technical skills needed on their job. These individual abilities may depend on innate talents and characters of workers. However, they depend also - and employers acknowledge this fact - that the quality of education is of paramount importance for employees to get the relevant cognitive skills as to underpin the acquisition of behavioural and technical skills in the workplace. By acknowledging this fact, employers admit the idea that the vocational abilities of graduates are underpinned on their educational abilities. This important result can be summarised by saying that a major role of higher education is not to deliver productive skills, but to provide students with a "solid cognitive ability", that is with an accurate and comprehensive knowledge in their disciplinary field³⁵ and beyond and with the capacity to enhance their reason and sensitivity that they will use in their work and life.

These results of the survey are comforted and confirmed by the results of another qualitative survey of employers of wage earners regarding the formation of skills and carried out in

³⁵ The terms "accurate" and "comprehensive" include the idea that scholarship and knowledge are the capacity to relate theoretical frameworks with real situations and problems, and conversely. Criticism of "scholarly knowledge" that cannot deal with concrete social and technological issues is legitimate when this capacity is defaulting.

a CELS research programme on the Thai labour regime³⁶. It is clear that a majority of employers do not expect higher education to provide graduates they employ with the competencies listed in the questionnaire of the competency survey. What they are expecting are graduates with solid educational backgrounds, with a good mastering of the knowledge of their disciplines that prepare them to reason in a correct way, and that make them able to learn by themselves and to understand a situation in order to act on it. In other words, open-minded entrepreneurs request from higher education to fulfil as fully as possible its educational role.

II. The educational logic of Higher Education

In the past decades until today, a predicament of Thai higher education has consisted in the low quality of education across the board. This has been largely documented (ONEC 1999a ; Tan 1999 ; World Bank 1999; CELS 2006) . The competency approach examined above is based on the postulate that this low quality is due to a disconnection of education in general and higher education in particular from the world of work. A closer look however may lead to the assumption that the main flaws of Thai higher education are related with its educational performances.

Vocational and educational logics of education

Historically, national educational systems have always been shaped by two main logics. The first one is a “vocational logic”. It deals with the utilisation of education for social and economic purposes and in general it is shaped by the relationships between education and the society. The second logic is an “educational logic”. It deals with the internal functioning of educational systems which serves the purpose of producing and transmitting knowledge. We define the notion of “logic” as institutional forms and structures, rules of functioning and social interactions that find their rationale and origin in a social purpose whether vocational or educational. These two are fundamental logics providing the cornerstones of modern education, and it is the loss of an understanding of their necessary complementarities that deflect debates. Any assessment of the quality of education has to rely on a deep understanding of the required articulation of the two logics. Moreover, as we will show below, the relative autonomy of education from vested interests is required for preserving a good articulation of both logics. Today, educational debates tend to ignore its importance in achieving a good quality of the education delivered by national educational systems. Advocating the development of the vocational logic of education at the expense of its educational logic is putting at risk the mere capacity of the society to educate the new generations. This is however the path borrowed by universities’ strategies when they intend to answer the

³⁶ This three year research programme is under way and due at the end of 2006. It is carried by CELS research team under the leadership of the author, and is supported by the National Research Council of Thailand.

question of the quality of education under the constraint of their own corporate interests and of the needs of employers they pretend to know by assessing them.

The vocational logic of education

The education system is based on a hierarchical organisation - somehow reflecting the social organisation and hierarchy of social positions - where levels and streams of education play the role of sorting out the best fitted individual for each social position. This is very roughly the vocational logic of education. It is a socially made correspondence between the levels of studies in the education system and the scale of vocations and social positions in the society.

Studies, and exams which sanction educational attainments, are designed with the purpose of measurement and display of innate and acquired abilities of students. Thus, studies and exams are organised so as to play the role of a stack of filters that effects the selection of abilities within the coming generation by discriminating between individuals according to "educational criteria" as we will see below. Students who fail to pass through these filters have to quit their studies and look for a job, while those who succeed can continue their studies with a view to accessing to higher social positions. Thus, on the basis of their educational achievements (studies and exams), young people – newcomers to adult life- are distributed among the whole range of occupations - from the bottom of the social hierarchy (unskilled labourers), to the top of the social ladder occupied by highly ranked politicians, state administrators, military officers, business managers and the like.

This procedure of selection generates a syllogism which underpins the widespread belief that education delivers skills. 1) Education delivers the credentials for social positions; thus because credentialing achieves the selection of individuals, the longer a person studies the higher the social position s/he may occupy 2) The hierarchy of social positions is socially legitimized in terms of skills and incomes, 3) Consequently, skills and incomes are determined by the length of studies. The theory of human capital has tried to give this "reasoning" a justification. In our view however, education delivers just one component of skills – the cognitive component - while technical and behavioural components of skills are forged only with the experience of work (Mounier 2001). This is on the basis of this belief that the competency approach has been adopted for assessing the performances of higher education.

When universities want to assess their own quality by a "competency approach" as shown above, they tend to emphasise their sole vocational role and to neglect their paramount education role. Moreover, they fail to understand that the quality of their graduates assessed in a vocational perspective depends on the quality of lower levels of education which in turn is underpinned on the fulfilling of higher education educational role. Let us turn now to this crucial aspect and key role of higher education.

Educational logic of education and the role of higher education

The education system is based on a hierarchical organisation - somehow reflecting the social organisation and hierarchy of social positions - where levels and streams of education play the role of sorting out the best fitted individual for each social position. Educational systems are expected to provide a system of regulation required by the vocational logic of education that is by its function of selecting young people for social positions according to their different capacities to acquire knowledge. For each student, educational performance is supposed to indicate this capacity. This system of regulation is the educational logic of education. The educational logic enables educational systems to choose the scope of knowledge to be transmitted, to shape it into relevant forms, to elaborate methods and devices for transmitting it and to organise the evaluation of learners' performances in acquiring it.

The method of transmitting knowledge which implies a progression of studies from simple to complex knowledge has been crystallised in an institutional arrangement of education in levels and streams of studies and in rules and devices of progression and orientation of students. Within educational systems, the hierarchy of levels of education is largely based on this progression of studies, so that the quality of education in each stratum of an educational system depends on the accumulation (and assimilation) of knowledge acquired in all previous levels. For example, in this bottom-up chain of dependency of educational levels, the quality of higher education depends ultimately on the knowledge that has been transmitted and acquired in previous levels, namely primary and secondary levels. The institutional problem is to assess the knowledge accumulated by students at each level of education that determines their future orientations: whether their cognitive abilities enable them to climb to the next stratum of education or to go to work. Systems of evaluating the knowledge accumulated at one level - in general exams- constitute the gates between levels. From the perspective of the quality of education they are crucial. Those gates are checking points of the knowledge acquired during the studies in one level of education where passports (diplomas) are delivered in order to certify the knowledge qualifications of the individual. The passport permits its student-holder into the next level of education because it proves that s/he has the requisite knowledge to reach a more complex knowledge. Therefore the quality of education is dependent on the quality of teaching during a level of education and also on the seriousness of exams. A too rigid assessment (narrow gates of selection) may be inefficient (early dropping out of school or/and too great a duplication of studies and longer studies); similarly too lax an assessment is counterproductive because in that case students can continue their studies even with inadequate cognitive bases for the next step. The efficacy of assessing knowledge proficiency - which is the very object of exams - is therefore an important factor of the quality of education throughout the whole educational system.

It is useful to underline at that point that this problem has not been addressed properly in Thailand. The political objectives of the democratisation of education have been superficially implemented: no serious selection of students between levels has been undertaken in the attempt to reach more rapidly the target of 100% enrolment for each age cohort. The performances of the educational system are assessed only in the quantitative terms of rates of enrolment. An adequate test of quality would require assessing continuously the knowledge- content of diplomas and the cognitive capacity of students³⁷. Quantitative achievements can be welcomed, but they may be opposed to a real democratisation of education in that the continuing enrolment of students is not determined by their educational achievements but by their families' capacity to afford studying beyond compulsory school. By not requiring knowledge assessment at each gate, educational systems not only undermine the capacity of diplomas to certify the cognitive abilities of their holders but accentuate social inequalities in education. Hence educational efficiency and equity concerns require accurately standardised diplomas that warrant the knowledge-content of studies leading up to them. In Thailand, the loose selection of students and an "inflation" of diplomas, in the sense that the knowledge-content to which they can attest is decreasing, weaken the educational logic of education and consequently hamper the quality of education.

We have stated that there is a bottom-up "chain" of dependency of levels of education. We have now to consider a top-down "chain". The whole educational system is crowned by higher education which determines not only the outcomes required for itself but for lower levels, namely primary and secondary levels. Higher education is meant to produce and to select the major part of stylised knowledge to be taught at all levels of education, including the level of higher education itself. Moreover, higher education is meant to produce a great part of all teaching material and to transmit to teachers and professors of all levels of education, including its own body of professors, the knowledge they will have to teach and methods and skills of teaching. In that respect higher education plays a leading part in determining the quality of education in its educational component.

The existence of two "chains" of dependency between levels of education implies that the quality of the whole system of education is dependent upon the quality of each level of education. The educational logic of education is basically underpinned on the two-chain of dependency between levels of education. That is why the quality of education is so difficult an issue to address and to act upon. Educational systems can be trapped in a low quality education because every deficiency and flaw nurtures further deficiency and flaw. This is probably the situation in which Thai education finds itself. Certainly it is just this kind of complex issue which is insufficiently addressed by the Educational Reform of 1999.

³⁷ The more or less lax selection of students throughout educational systems makes dubious the methods of international comparisons of educational achievements. The length of studies does not indicate the knowledge-content of studies and international tests are too partial to give any valid comparison.

Conclusion

When higher education fulfils its educational role correctly and takes care of improving all levels of education, it improves the quality of education in lower levels of education and through this improvement will receive in return, as a feedback, better students in its faculties. This role is by far more important than its direct vocational role, because by improving all levels of education and the knowledge- content of studies, higher education will also contribute significantly to provide the entire society – and not only its higher ranked social positions - with well educated manpower and higher labour productivity. By the same token, by receiving better students from lower levels and by improving the knowledge of its own graduates, higher education would expand its research capacities and would prepare graduates able to face challenges ahead. In that regard, higher education would contribute much better to the design and implementation of resource saving-technologies. It would contribute to sustainable development more than could do any subordination to alleged employers' needs.

In this context, higher education is misled and wrong when it pretends to be guided by the results of a competency approach and to reduce its role to the production of competencies in demand in the labour market. Universities should assess more carefully, intensively and deeply their educational performances than their vocational performances. This would lead them to improve their performances in the domain of their major mission: their educational role. This is the major contribution they can have to sustainable development. Studies designed to assess their educational performances should probably consider the links between research and teaching, the seriousness and implications of entrance exams for students, the quality of exams during their higher studies, the quality of didactics used in the faculties, the commitments and success of universities in selecting the knowledge to be taught at all levels of education, the contribution of universities to the production of didactics and material, and to the quality of the formation of teachers for lower level of education and for itself. This could be a comprehensive definition of quality assurance which assessment would imply to measure also the efficiency of higher education in its effects on primary and secondary schools. From these assessments, universities would certainly change dramatically their strategies for the benefit of the entire society and of its sustainable development.

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