



# Innovations of Higher Education in the Republic of Korea\*

윤 형 원 | 한국교육학회장

\*This paper prepared to present in the one of serial lecture named as "The Problems of University Reform and Its Implication to the Innovation Program of the National University in Korea" among many demonstration program titled in "new millennium - will it be the Asian century" which is planned by the Office of International Program of the South Dakota State University(at Thursday, September 12, 2002, South Dakota Art Museum Auditorium; 12:05~12:50).

## Introduction

The third wave of change heralds an untaunting march of civilization toward the age of automation, information, high-tech society which is so called as knowledge based society recently. The evolving social context gives rise to new roles that the universities should play: there is an inexorable dictum that the universities rise to the call of a new era that sees the rapidly advancing frontiers of science and technology. Viewed in a macro-perspective, the economic and financial crisis(IMF crisis)that aggrieves Korea cannot be viewed in other way than the result of failure to effect the fundamental change of social structure and to activate the new role of the universities at this crucial hinge of social transformation into the post-industrial society. The impact of the university's failure to play the required role is far-reaching, causing a chain of reactions in all spheres of life, namely, economy, politics, social welfare, education and culture. Whether we can overcome this crisis hinges on the institutional preparedness of the university to assess new needs and make self-directed innovations in a way that attunes themselves to the new demand for quality education and new disciplines to sharpen the nation's high technological edge.

---

Against this backdrop, this paper purports to make critical analysis of the educational reforms that have been made by the Korean universities and suggest remedial actions to correct the course of reform, if anything goes astray.

## Re-examination of University Functions

Are the Korean universities prepared for new demands of higher education brought by social change? This question is not likely to bring an affirmative answer. The Korean universities have followed an amorphous process of aggrandizement, hardly given a breathing spell to dwell on whether they were moving in a desirable direction. The situation drifted into worse and gives an eloquent voice for the university to see if they have departed from what they ought to be like before attempting to assess whether it is prepared for new roles.<sup>1)</sup> The *raison d'être* of the university is found in an idealistic combination of education, research, social service and the realization of democracy.<sup>2)</sup> Failure to perform any of these roles leads to its dysfunction detrimental to social health, let alone its role in spearheading social development. The genesis of the university is found in free corporation which brought together learners and teachers into a carefree, two-way interaction, whether it was in Greek academy, Bologna, Salerno and Paris University. Its growth was a tortuous path fraught with hopes, depressions, stunted by monarchical or popish interventions. Despite the thorny path of its growth, universities in the advanced countries have attained an autonomous status that is enshrined in the University Charter. Starting with a simple process of teaching, the faculty found new roles in research and dissemination of their findings, and it was through this process that their applicability to social problems were magnified. "College of arts and science" which reflects the medieval legacy lingers on as the back bone of university and its research function gained impetus from the influence of Humboldtian Revolution. The research function of the university may well be viewed as the legacy of German universities. An idealistic combination of the two was realized by Harvard University, as President Charles Eliot inaugurated the research-exclusive faculty of its first kind.

---

1) Chung Bum-mo, "Direction of University Development Towards the 21st Century", a paper presented to the 27th seminar on the development of higher education (Seoul: the Korean Association of Universities, 1990), p.3.

2) James A. Perkins, *The University in Transition* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1966): p.9 ~10.

---

The accumulation of research burdens the university with a new role in serving society. The initial form of simple social service is found in the Scottish universities which made their teachings in disciplines of practical use - such as accounting and politics - available to lay people.<sup>3)</sup> It was after the Morrill Wade Act that social service was substantiated toward the meaning of the inventional contribution in terms of the land-grant universities in the United States. Mechanical engineering applied for the mass agricultural production and the diffusion of high quality fertilizer by universities, for instance, made tangible contribution to accelerating the modernization of the U. S. agriculture. The so-called professional school came into being with its function cut for enhancing the professionalism of mid-career workers as this mission.<sup>4)</sup> Social service also finds its niche in the urban-grant college which tailors its program to resolution of a range of problems relating to traffic, crime, poverty, pollution, moral depravity, etc.

The fourth function of the university is well captured by its commitment to "creation of an idealistic democratic society".<sup>5)</sup> Growing interest in this function is based on the notion that the university itself is a simulacrum of democratic society. University should be structured and its functions oriented so as to facilitate the realization of social justice and meet the aspirations of its constituents for democratic modes of operation. Democracy is a normative value that guides the management of university as a ideal system. As such, the university is a system of perplexing complexity committed to multi-functions. The functional diversity of university reflects a variety of social or cultural climates it is placed in. For all its complexity, university functions and its structure for supporting the performance of the functions are brought into clear focus by articulating, to begin with, the inherent goal of education that a university seeks to achieve. Evolving from this is a map of ways to achieve the goal, which, in turn, determines the nature of organizational structure. The goal of education in Korea is manifested in the Fundamental Law of Education and the Higher Education Law in a standardized form that leaves no room for tolerance or flexibility to fit situational diversity. More serious is the detachment of the defined goals

---

3) Donald W. Lecht, Jr. "The Academic Career", *Dialog*, Vol.6 (1973), pp.34~35: The social service of university has its unique concept different from those of other social services.

4) The professional schools here are different from the Korean junior colleges (pronounced the same in Korean) whose programs are given vocational orientation to produce job-specific professionals. The law and medical schools are the legacy of German education focussed on graduate studies, while agriculture and engineering are the legacy of land-grant universities focussed on undergraduate studies.

5) James A. Perkins, ed. *The University as a Organization* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973), p.8.

---

from the educational ideal which each university vows to realize. Standard procedures for the basic process of teaching and research are lacking. All of these point to the unpreparedness of Korean universities to perform new roles that emerge into the fore in the post-industrial society.

Coming into the 1990s, universities were inundated with new terms such as "knowledge-based economy", "profession-specific education", "practical research and development", "just-in-time program", and "business minded management". These new terms points to a trend toward the secularization of higher education toward practical orientation. The ivory tower lost its identity in the emerging of "technology tower" or "intelligence tower". In my judgment, these terms have been coined to emphasize the functional efficiency of university management to make the system viable in the emerging exigency of social transformation. They should not be taken for meaning that the university should abjure its commitment to the inherent goals of education. Knowledge-based economy, for instance, was widely used in the 1960s, as economists stressed the importance of education viewing it as resonant with the fourth element of production through the residual approach.<sup>6)</sup> What is implicated by these terms has some built-in elements incompatible with the inherent goals of education. They may assert themselves as relevant to applied sciences but should be regarded as liable to tarnish approach to pure science. In the post-industrial society, university function in laying the sub-structure for an unceasing stream of research and development cannot be over-emphasized.<sup>7)</sup> Its social service and commitment to the realization of democracy are equally important in its effort to become what the university ought to be like.

## Pitfalls to University Innovation

Many educators are confused about what is meant by educational reform. A headline misconception which engaged our attention in the Report on Educational Reforms was "open education society". A cursory look at it brings "flexibility" into relief, which applies to

---

6) Economists in the 1960s were investigating into factors for productivity other than labor, capital and land and found that knowledge and skills acquired through education proved to be equally important factors.

7) Yoo Hyun - sook, Kang Dong - seok and Lee Man - hi, *Prospect for the Development of Higher Education* (Seoul: Korea Educational Development Institute, 1998), p.4.

---

programs and the targeted audience. The plan for educational reforms rarely allowed for discretion in selecting programs. In this sense, open education society commends itself on a breakthrough for problems coming from the rigidity of system. In reality, however, it should be noticed that commercialism pervades the concept of open education society. Dichotomy is the leading concept of educational reform. The juxtaposition of words like specialized vs.non-specialized university, graduate-centered vs. undergraduate-centered education, vocation-oriented vs.liberal art college strikes one as each term is exclusive of the other, allowing no appropriate mix of the two. Efforts are being made to introduce enterprise management theory to university management despite the fact that the output of education defies quantification. The dominance of commercialism tends to emphasize the quantitative growth of education to the virtual exclusion of qualitative improvement. The logic of innovation theory is that any evaluation of education reform should be made in terms of its contribution to the university's performance of its four stated functions.

*Lack of logical sequence:* Educational reform in Korea has been carried out in a re-patch type fashion. It was under the Civilian Regime(leded by President Young Sam Kim) that a comprehensive reform plan was drafted and contained in five reports made to the President. The first report to the President adopted 11 reform agendas and those related to higher education were explained under the headings of "maintain the competitive edge of Korean universities in the world" and "improve the examination system for entrance to universities". The second report highlighted "diversification of higher education system" and "development of a viable entrance examination system". The third report featured "development of a new vocational program" and "enactment of law governing higher education". The fourth and fifth reports envision "the future profile of education in preparation for information society". In this connection, these reports featured the full-fledged treatment of reforms designed to ensure the excellence of higher education, favored support for the development of provincial universities, and the accountability of university that should increase as price for approach to autonomy, free from political or bureaucratic pressure.

Coming to the fore was the diversification of higher education system by presenting five optional models, namely: autonomous designing of programs split into a broad liberal art and science education, special programs designed to produce professionals in critical areas flaring on all fronts of globalization, technology-oriented programs, and graduate schools

---

specializing in these critical areas. The concomitant proposals were to increase the degree of autonomy by gradually lifting coercive control on the establishment of university and enrollment quota. Encouragement and support were to be given to maintain excellence in education and research by way of accelerating the internalization of higher education. The university's role in spearheading national development was emphasized.

Over-viewing the reform agenda, it is readily noticed that there is no logical sequence of reforms. Earlier reforms were rarely linked to what followed. The people are perplexed by myriads of tasks crammed into a five-year period of implementation which were remodeled by Peoples' Regime(Leaded by President Dae Jung Kim), as if there were no continuation over the educational reforms, once they had been done over. Each reform task was hastily organized without reference to theoretical rationale of the other government.

*Enrollment Quota and Education Reform:* Many educational problems we see today find their roots in the structural inefficiency of the educational system. Another, perhaps more fundamental, cause of the problems is found in the system's failure to contain the torrential stream of popular enthusiasm for education. Blind pursuit of education resulted in the over-supply of educated but unemployable people. Enrollment quota gave the government a powerful leverage to contain the rapid growth of student population and ensure quality education. But the first year student quota(entrance quota) of four-year colleges and universities(including teacher's colleges and industrial colleges) had been increased to around 370,000 and that of junior colleges to nearly 300,000 in the year of 2000. To put these together, total first year student quota of the post-high school education comes close to 670,000, slightly over the yearly batch of high schools graduates(660,000). As the promotion rate to higher education is the ratio of entrant students compared to high school graduates in each year, this percentage rate exceeded 100% in Korea. On the other hand, the enrollment percentage rate(the percentage of higher education attendance compared to age group population) has reached to nearly 70 percent in Korea as comparable to 20 ~ 30 percent in Europe and 45 percent in the United States.

Adjustment of enrollment quota in Korea has been based on two theoretical grounds. One is to base it on social demand for education, that is, to let it float on the rising water of students seeking higher education. Another is to link the number of students to manpower requirement. Korea adopted the former, that is, "the more education the better" approach,

---

rarely applying brake on enrollment quota. The growth of students on tertiary level was most phenomenal. "An island of excellence" has been submerged by seas of mediocre. Every educational reform sidetracked quality education while juggling with numbers.

The Korean universities have reaped criticism for producing unemployable people. "Unemployability" means a mismatch between the kind of education received and what is required in the performance of job. The result is that many ended up landing jobs for which they had not been groomed. Elasticity of labor substitution is nearly 80 percent in Korea, as compared with 20 ~ 30 percent in the advanced countries. Productivity diminishes as elasticity of labor substitution rises. Recent policy to lift ban on enrollment quota for provincial universities, while total of universities in Seoul limited to an annual increase of 1,000 was an additional spur to the growth of students. The absence of quality control resulted in the dead loss of educated people, the dearth of skilled workers in factories, and an ever-widening regional disparity in the quality of education. Massive migration of rural students to Seoul raise another educational problem of high educational competition, while rural universities are blighted for the lack of students. All the problems are rooted in the unbridled growth of student population which has been fueled by both the popular demand for education and ambivalent government policies. In this respects the educational reform in Korea is empty of a serious approach to ensure quality education.

*The Administrative Structure of University:* The degree of autonomy each university has in relation to the government and politics constitutes a significant variable for the initiation and implementation of innovations in various aspects of educational systems. The history of medieval universities tells how the earlier forms of free corporation type university in the name of collegium(dormitory) and universitas(union of professor and student) have evolved into a full-fledged institution of higher learning whose autonomy is eventually guaranteed by the University Charter<sup>9)</sup> in British. Building on the British legacy, the American universities were born with an institutional guarantee for autonomy from their outset. The concept of the University Charter further developed in the United

---

8) Report on Educational Reform asks each university to enact the university charter. But this charter is a kind of declaration of educational ideal that each university seeks to realize, far removed from the University Charter in the form of a memorandum of understanding agreed upon between the government and the universities. The latter is the legacy of Britain and the United States to protect the autonomy of university.

---

States as a breakwater against interventions from without. It was within this built-in bound of autonomy that each university was able to enhance professionalism. Governing Council including the board of regent(or trustee) represents the supreme decision-making body regarding basic issues such as the appointment of president, investment, ownership of property, and development plan. President stands at the apex of administrative hierarchy, responsible for enacting rules or regulations that govern academic and administrative affairs, drawing on the consultative service of the Faculty Senate and the House of Students, and for implementing the decisions. The continental type of university features the government substituting the governing council. This fact is attributed to the legacy that saw a university organized around a king or Pope-designated faculty. This opened the door for the central authorities to plea justice of intervention. In 1806, Napoleon declaration tightened the central government's grip on the governance of universities through the Ministry of Education and Chancellors of Academies. The 1968 reform of higher education led to the enactment of Higher Education Act which provided for university autonomy and transferred the presidential authority to University Council.<sup>9)</sup> Due to research orientation characteristic of the German universities, they were able to ensure autonomy from the outset. With the mounting outcry of constituents for participation in affairs that would affect the fate of university, General Framework for University Law was enacted in 1975 and this led to the advent of Bund-Lander Kommission fur Bildungs Planung which feeds guidance to institutional commitment to reform.

The Korean universities were born in the absence of legal foundation. The concept of distinction between rights and duties has not reached the consensus of its constituents. Appointed by the President of national government, the president of national university is a high ranking government officials performs his duties in compliance with the Higher Education Law and the concerned administrative laws and authorities: he has been attuned to obey rather than fighting for his own rights. The administration of private universities is governed by both the Higher Education Law and Private School Law according to which the rules and regulation enacted to take effect within the concerned university. The laws empowers the board of trustees to have such trivial affairs as

---

9) Those affairs under the authority of the Ministry of Education were transferred to the Conference of Presidents and the Council for Higher Education and Research: Asa S. Knowles, ed., *The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education*, Vol.4. D-F (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977), pp.1775~1777.



---

appointing faculty and controlling important academic affairs. It seems that the board of trustees in Korean private university combines the power of both governing council and administration. The national university does without the governing council, whereas the private university has its administrative system enfeebled by the lack of professionalism under a strong board of trustees.

**High Tech Dominance:** New concepts such as "first-rate research" and "excellence of education" are the derivatives of increasingly intensified competition between nations inherent in the process of globalization. Exclusive reliance on the universities for playing crucial role in maintaining the nation's competitive edge brought high technology and its related disciplines into the fore of university curricula. Graduate-centered university and functionally specified university received a new lime light as an organizational response to catapult the nation into technological leadership. The problem is that the educational reform which gives heavier weight to a particular set of disciplines scorns what education is all about. All disciplines are vertically and horizontally related to each other. Interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches have been hailed as verified emphasis on a network of disciplines: approach to a simple problem is no longer restricted to a single discipline. But over-emphasis on a particular set of disciplines is destructive of the balanced network of disciplines necessary to achieve the inherent total goals of education.

In this connection, debate is warming up over whether the university equips an individual with potential for further growth in whole rounded performance or produces a man catered to a specific job performance. This begs another debate on the proportions of pure science and applied science. Any research in applied science encounters limits to furthering development, unless it draws on pure science. The inter-complimentary relationship between the two gives clue as to what university education ought to be like. Neil Rudenstine, President of Harvard University, was a timely reminder of the secularization of higher education into vocational orientation in tone. "The university is not the place for offering vocational program. It is the responsibility of the university to help art students understand science and science students appreciate art works. Prime concern for the visible and productive aspects of research denigrated education aimed to equip individuals with citizenship qualities and cultural awareness. It should be noticed that new discoveries such as laser, semiconductor, satellite, fiber cable, etc. were the products of

---

search for theories of pure science which seemingly had no practical value".<sup>10)</sup>

In view of the history of university, education and research are not separable. Granting that both are mutually complimentary, functional differentiation of university may well be left to evolutionary process where the fittest survives. In the post-industrialized society which accords importance to the vocational aspect of education, it is worth reminding that a quality vocational program is possible when it is built on a broad-based liberal art and basic science education. From the viewpoint of the government, high tech research and development may offer a short cut to the third wave of change. It was in this context that the graduate-centered university was conceptualized to lead high tech research and development. To be critical of this approach, reference is made to the so-called BK 21 (Brain Korea in 21st Century). This plan was hastily drafted and poured money into a few selected universities for conducting high tech research in the absence of infra-structure. Annual investment into research amounted to \$150 million, as compared with \$10 billion in the United States. The selection of research universities was arbitrary. A 1987 survey conducted by Carnegie Higher Education Foundation against 3,000 universities revealed that no university was research-centered in the sense that it excluded other functions.<sup>11)</sup> The surveyed universities were performing all the functions aforementioned with various mix of the four basic functions. Focus on a particular function was the result of having lived in a competitive world where the fittest survives. The selection of a few universities in Seoul for some high tech research stultified the earlier reforms which had selected some provincial universities to be developed into frontier universities in research. The concentration of a few research universities in the capital city runs counter to the constitutional provision of equal education opportunity (Article 31). Earlier reform programs aimed to reduce regional disparity were counter-weighted by the BK 21 which added a new layer to the hierarchical structure of universities. Any institutional change brought by means other than evolutionary process is vulnerable to the resilience of the existent system. A sudden spurt of support will catapult the selected universities into forerunners of high tech research. With the support withdrawn, they will just as quickly disappear and come back to where they were. In order to make them viable, it is essential that any reform plan take into account the financial stability and accountability of the

---

10) "Advice from Harvard President", *Dong Ah Daily Press* (Seoul: June 20, 1998). p.23.

11) Research Universities (1), Research Universities (2), Doctorate Granting Universities (1), Doctorate Granting Universities (2), Comprehensive Universities and Colleges (1), Comprehensive Universities and Colleges (2), Liberal Art Colleges (1), Liberal Art Colleges (2)

---

university in question. In this respect, the national universities in Korea may deserve consideration as favored candidates for graduate-centered universities. When it comes to private universities, however, the financial standing of the university—in terms of how they put up matching funds—comes to be a crucial factor, since it determines the viability of the reform.

*More Than Functional Efficiency:* Overview of earlier educational reforms shows a consistent trend to de-scale the size of educational systems in order to raise the functional efficiency of the university. An attempt to change the existing structure brings a range of issues into a new focus. The proposed reforms centered around the reorganization of administrative structure that directs attention to the optimal number of colleges and departments, broad classification of disciplines for the undergraduates, single major vs double major, convertibility of colleges into departments and vice versa, linkage between the undergraduate and post-graduate studies, and an optimal size of administrative staff. The problem is that a reform plan was drafted clandestinely by the government in great detail, and the result was a standardized reform which defies the functional efficiency which varies with the size and functional specialization of university.

Considering that educational reform aims at improving the system's performance of its functions, any planning for reform in Korea should begin with the articulation of goals, task analysis, search for a viable alternative to structural change that maximizes functional efficiency. There is also a need for a blue print which weaves the necessary, the desirable and the possible. More often, educational reform in Korea was performed without reference to the blue print. In any event, it is essential that each university have its own mechanism of planning staffed with professionals, since reform is an on-going process that parallels the operation of a system. In view of their crucial role in maintaining the nation's technological leadership, it is imperative that a set of university conditions in Korea be standardized to encourage and support high tech research and effect an improved operation of curriculum. Automation and scientific processing of administrative works, coupled with staff development, will open the path to the development of infra-structure. Legislative actions should be taken to provide legal protection of the university president's right to make decisions on "who fits the bill" within the system.<sup>12)</sup> A paradigm of future-oriented

---

12) John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy. *Higher Education in Transition* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Harper and RDow Pub., 1997), p.399.

---

curriculum should be developed together with a variety of instruction models that draw on cyber technology, multi-media, computer-assisted learning, etc. In this connection, a self-directed learning model needs to be developed, accompanied by the development of evaluation tools that fit a variety of instructional models. As instruction transcends the bound of classroom, evaluation does not have to be the responsibility of a professor responsible for instruction: A third person may be invited to conduct evaluation. Evaluation by an outsider may open up the path to the objective evaluation of student achievement.

## Map for Structural Reform of University

*The premise of organizational reform:* Earlier reforms, as we see, are not so much a structural change of educational systems as remedial or re-patch type designed to effect partial change, hopefully leading to the improvement of functional efficiency of the university system. In this sense, the reform we have seen is educational innovation distinguished from educational reform. The educational reform that we envision is such a complicated process that begins with the definition of educational ideal into system's goals, leading to the identification and assessment of alternative means to achieving the defined goal, model development and dissemination. In other words, educational reform in Korea should be seen as a strategical layout of paths to the achievement of the defined goal. It is strategical in the sense that alternatives are established in a priority hierarchy, with assesment made of the viability of each alternative. Managerial concepts such as cost-benefit analysis, utility-oriented research, and in-time program are familiar grounds for many educators, which assert their applicability to educational systems. These concepts may be a useful guide to the management of educational systems, particularly from the viewpoint of raising efficiency manifested in a timely response of a system to new merging needs. However, an educational innovation based on the renewal of managerial practices alone does not provide a long-term perspective of educational development. Planners must take the task of reducing, often very gradually, the difference between reality (what the system is doing) and the goal(what the state would like to do) with a perspective that sees through the past, the present and the future.

The autonomy of university in Korea is the precondition for effecting educational reform, since it allows flexibility and diversity to be built into the process of reform so that each university meets the reform in its own term. When a defined goal commands a wide

---

following of its constituents, they will rouse themselves to more enthusiastic commitment to the reform. Autonomy not only means a status free from external interventions but a spontaneous response of a system to call for change and readiness to establish the rule of law to support its performance of functions. Given the framework of an educational reform by the government, each university should be able to draft its own plan that sees the remote future and marshal resources. The law that holds the government responsible for the planning of reform to inordinate length should be revised so as to encourage institutional commitment to reform.

A set of principles needs to be established to guide the reform of the national university in Korea.

- a. It is urgent to provide legal stipulation of functional division between the Governing Council and the administrative system represented by the president of university. In the western societies and the United States, the university charter or the university law stipulates functional division between the two. The absence of its equivalent in Korea exposes the president to the danger of losing his turf.<sup>13)</sup>
- b. The structural arrangement and operational mode of university should be renewed so as to perform its avowed functions. It is necessary to add the offices of research and social service in addition to the existing system that comprises academic affairs, student affairs, planning, and administration. The evolving environment gives urgency to strengthening the university's role in public relation, alumni networking, innovation, information system and regional development.
- c. The administrative system of university is hierarchical, liable to be -clouding the clarity of message while it comes down through different layers. In order to facilitate communication between the two extremes of administrative layers, it is desirable to have consultative bodies inhabit various layers of the hierarchy. Faculty Senate,

---

13) The equivalent of Governing Council in the private university is the Board of Trustees in the sense that it is powerful to inordinate extent. The private university is cushioned by a strong board of trustees against external pressure. The absence of this function exposes the national university vulnerable to external pressures.

---

Administrative Council and the House of Student are familiar grounds, to which the president take a recourse in making informed decisions.

- d. The Office of Academic Affairs is the nucleus of the university's administrative system, which deserves priority in authority to administer its affairs and the allocation of resources. There should be legal manifestation of subordination of all other offices in support of academic affairs. The Office of Administration in particular should play its role as a supporter of academic affairs, since it has no direct role in the achievement of the university goal.
- e. The Office of Administrative Affairs deals with organization maintenance, administrative support service, public relations, work proficiency improvement, installation and facilities support, business and financial affairs.

*Organizational Streamlining* : In the name of organizational streamlining, efforts are being made to downsize the administrative system of the national university, with the exception of Seoul National University, under a standard plan drafted by the Ministry of Education. This standard plan scorns the unique need of each university, and the imposed uniformity of criteria resulted in the under-staffing of its administrative system. Any plan to redress this organizational streamlining should consider the following:

- a. The national vs. private Universities: The roles of the national universities are codified into the Constitution and the relevant laws. First, the national university is commissioned to lead the other universities in performing its educational functions. Second, it furthers the advance of frontier disciplines while effecting a balanced development of education in overall disciplines, and leads national development. Third, it offers education to those who had difficult access to learning for socioeconomic reasons (Article 31-1 of the Constitution). Fourth, it promotes regional balance in the process of economic and social development. The legal stipulation of what the national universities ought to do holds the government responsible for supporting their efforts to become the first-rate universities. Despite its avowed support, the Korean government is going to reduce per capita cost of education of the national university down the level of the private university. The remuneration of the national university faculty is 70 percent of that of the private university.

---

Per capita cost of education of the Korean national university is 10 percent of that of the advanced countries. Tuition fees account for 55 percent of the total revenue. In the case of the United Kingdom, room and board are covered by the national university, while students are excluded from the payment in other European countries. The average revenue of a state university in the United States consists of alumni contribution (20%), personal donations (20%), the state grant(40%) and tuition fees (20%). In national university of Japan, the students' share of the total revenue is 20 percent. The government share of the total revenue in Korea is negligible in comparison with those of the advanced countries. For all the fact that the remuneration of the national university faculty is 70 percent of that of the private university, the government continued to support private universities in the form of subsidy. When the remuneration of the national university faculty is brought up to par with that of the private university or when the government has the surplus of its resources after meeting the minimal financial requirement of the national university, it may plea justice of supporting the private universities. In the case of the private university, the government support may also be justified when the founder's property in its entirety is registered as belonging to the university foundation.

- b. Not merely organizational change: The government-led reform is aimed to raise administrative efficiency at lower spending by trimming the fatten system of administration. The problem, however, is that the reform resulted in the loss of the necessary part at the same time of preserving unnecessary parts of the system. Under the Civilian Regime, the national university had each of its colleges deprived of Sections of Academic and Student affairs to be replaced by Section of Administrative Affairs. The administrative function of college was paralyzed by the policy of "keeping it lean". The succeeding People's Government dealt a critical blow to the administration of the national university by eliminating Deputy Dean which had been a provisional entity responsible for administrative affairs in lieu of the two dissolved sections. Further, the People's Government reduced the division-level offices under the president, while maintaining sections in the same number. Ironically, the administrative reform brought lower efficiency at higher cost. This policy had its effect felt in all national universities in the same manner that deprived the president of discretion as to which section should go out.
- c. Legal stipulation of organizational innovation: The national universities in Korea are

---

often considered the equivalent of state universities in the United States. This view may be taken for equating the provinces of Korea with the states in the latter and this cannot but be a theoretical leap far removed from the fact. Province in Korea is not comparable in size to the state in U.S.A. However, it is called "larger autonomous administrative district" governed by the provincial administrative bodies which are far from being financially self-sufficient without grants from the central government. The financial dependence of the national universities on the central government accounts for their marginal link with the provincial governments. Should the provincial government is self-sufficient enough to finance the national university, it goes logical to start with public schools rather than universities.<sup>14)</sup> In light of the financial status of the provincial governments, it is inconceivable to detach the national universities from the central government.

The national universities in Korea were born without legal foundation for their establishment. Seoul National University is distinguished from the other national universities by having its foundation rooted in the Decree on the Establishment of Seoul National University. The other national universities find legal foundation for their establishment in the Decree for the Establishment of National Schools. The absence of legal foundation explains the difficulty of ensuring the administrative autonomy of the national universities. A viable way to ensure the autonomy is to enact a law that provides for differentiation between the governing council and administration. It would be desirable to have an associated board of trustees to be chaired by the government President or the Minister of Education. The Decree for the Establishment of Seoul National University distinguishes this university from the other national universities and such a discriminative policy runs counter to Article 11 of the Constitution which provides for equal opportunity to receive education and concedes no special class. The discriminative legal treatment of national universities also violates Article 31 of the Constitution which stipulates the right to receive equal education in accordance with one's ability and the legal protection of the university

---

14) Education cost of the United States is a joint responsibility of local governments (42%), the state government (50%) and the Federal Government (8%). In Korea, local governments are not responsible at all. Local autonomy has been in place but the financial status of their governments are from self-sufficiency. The provincial governments are not in a position to finance the national universities.



---

autonomy. It was in 1975 that the Decree for the Establishment of Seoul National University was enacted to support the University for a limited time period to help it bail out of the financial crisis associated with the creation of a new campus. It should be borne in mind, however, that all national universities, including Seoul National University, had enjoyed smooth sailing in the absence of the decree from 1953 to 1975. Owing to the government's preferential treatment, the per capita cost of education at Seoul National University was twice as much as that of the other national universities.

The University Charter in the United Kingdom and the United States set an example of the legal foundation for the establishment and autonomy of university. Its equivalent is found in the Higher Education Act in France and General Framework for University Law in Germany. In Japan, the Act for the Establishment of National School was enacted in 1949 to govern the organization and operation of national schools, including Tokyo University.

d. National university as a pace-setter for educational development: Regional disparity in education quality has been the most persistent problem of education in Korea. Aware of this problem, it behooves that all efforts for educational reform have been concentrated on the elimination of regional imbalance in educational development. Nonetheless, we have recently seen a series of the government-led educational reforms which have run counter to what earlier reforms had been endeavoring to eliminate. BK 21 program was originally designed to use nationwide national universities as the outpost of enhancing research standard based on the notion that a few model research-specific national universities will have the effect of dragging the other universities up to higher standard of research. But this program reaped a whirlwind of criticism applying minister's personal discretion more influential to the selection criteria. Superficial emphasis on high tech research brought a preferential treatment of a few related disciplines over myriads of disciplines. Advocates of liberal education in particular were hyper-critical of this program, deploring the relegation of humanity studies into marginal existence. Another critical view is that BK 21 builds an artificial tower of excellence over the sacrifice of many. Again, the concept of regional balance that earlier reforms had vigorously sought to realize was at stake, as the "first-rate fever" is raising its ugly head. For all the discriminative treatment, the

---

national universities have shown resilience through its strong commitment to quality education and research. On average, they excel private universities in faculty quality, as evidenced by a foreign evaluation agency.<sup>15)</sup> Unless a way is explored to dramatize the potential of provincial national universities for spearheading innovations, the reform of higher education will be a disastrous failure.

- e. Support for the national universities: At the end of 1997, the National Assembly withheld the passage of the government-initiated bill called "National University Special Account" (draft). The bill was the result of a collaborative attempt of the Ministry of Education and Economic Planning Board to ensure the financial stability and autonomy of the national universities. It highlighted a substantial increase in the government grant to cover remuneration and facilities in a way that reduces the non-grant portion of revenue (tuition fees and self-earned income) to 55 percent. The presentation of this bill was ill-timed for the economic downturn leading to what is known as the IMF crisis. Aware of a groundswell of criticism for imposing a crushing burden on the government, the bill was modified so as to stress the responsibility of the universities for tapping new sources of revenue other than the government grant. Hard efforts of the universities to increase the share of other revenues resulted in a significant shrinkage of the government grant, as reflected in the bill. However, this bill is still in the process of modification based on a broad-base assessment of public opinions. Transfer from the general account which had been fixed at 50 percent of the self-earned revenue has been tied up to physical facilities. As things stand, the bill at its present status has been far removed from the earlier intentions of the concerned government agencies.

Reference is made to our neighboring countries, Japan and China. The National School Special Account was enacted in 1964 which has gone a long way toward the stabilization of financial status of the national universities. The Chinese government encourages the national universities to engage in high tech and venture business with the legal stipulation of direct transfer of the self-earned revenue to the university

---

15) Asia Week dated April, 1999 announced 80 prestigious universities in Asia, including Seoul National University, Chung Nam National University, Chon Nam National University, Pusan National University and Kyung Buk National University.

---

account. The law in Korea prohibits private profit activities to the national universities.

## Conclusion

Some of the educational reforms that have been implemented are commended for their contribution to resolving many problems besetting Korean education. On the other hand, there are others which have been blamed for detachment from realistic needs, since the process of decision-making was closed to scholarly and popular opinions. In consideration of the preponderant role of education in determining the future of our youngsters, an attempt to change its system should reflect the consensus of all the people concerned through a broad based participation. In the absence of a comprehensive scheme which reveals all strands of education in a single purview, many reform programs have gone astray, stuck in a vicious circle of institutional inertia. Now that we have seen numerous educational reforms implemented, it behooves that we review them in terms of what is left to be desired rather than repeating the exercise of planning for reform.

Any reform plan drafted by the government may well be regarded as the basic frame of reference to branch off into numerous offshoots reaching down to the scene of education. There is a long distance to be traversed to make the plan feasible and viable. The reform plan remains a blue dream, unless efforts are made to this effect. The educational reform drafted under the Peoples' Regime presented 100 tasks which narrow down to effect higher student achievement, reduce spending on private tutoring, enhance administrative efficiency, increase the employability of educated people, and raise the competency of teachers. However, none of these made a deep dent in the problems that aggrieve Korean education, largely because of the lack of follow-up efforts to provide an effective linkage between conceptualization and implementation and between the ideal and the feasible.

Of all, the reform of higher education is the most daunting task. Since what is taught at university is inextricably bound up with the nation's development goals. On the other hand, there are inherent goals of higher education which appear to be incompatible, by any standards, with the nation's development goals. An ideal reform of higher education is a compromise in the end between the idealistic and realistic goals. Starting with its lofty goal of creating knowledge and theories, reform should traverse a long distance to enable the

---

university to become an effective linkage to what is needed in the scene of work. The distance is fraught with many pitfalls which dilute the higher goal of the reform. The Korean universities have not reached the stage of autonomy as implicated by its true sense, largely due to the absence of legal stipulation which blurs distinction between the governing system and administrative system. There is a structural weakness which exposes the Korean universities vulnerable to bureaucratic and political interventions. It requires an institutional counter-weight to such interventions in order to keep it free and perceptive in identifying needs and charting a path to viability.

High tech studies and research are of crucial importance as the leading factor for the nation's competitiveness in the international arena. But these disciplines are not of such that spurs us into rushing pell-mell into organizational or functional change in the presence of the other disciplines that remains as a counter-weight for the balancing scale. The academic structure of the university is the result of evolutionary change and deliberate attempt at structural change will shatter against the system whose resilience increases with the passage of time. Genetic theory asserts itself as applicable to the world of universities where survival becomes a matter of life and death. Education in modern society comes to dwell on its role in creating an ethnic identity of genetic superiority, the people who are better fit to survive the world of competition. ☞