

Professor Ngo Bao Chau: In Vietnam, “Professor” Is a Title that Comes Without Authorities

In Vietnam, the title of Professor is a prestigious honor bestowed by the State, which comes without clear authorities. Professor Ngo Bao Chau, Director of the Institute for Advanced Study, explained this to a meeting of DTU lecturers and students on April 24th. As the first Vietnamese mathematician to be presented with the Fields Medal, the biggest award in Mathematics in the world, he inspired his young audience with his passion for Mathematics and his experiences overcoming difficulties in studying.

Professorships should come with responsibilities

Answering a question from a DTU lecturer on his views of the current definition of Professorships in Vietnam, Professor Chau replied that it was an important issue because the meaning here is quite different to abroad. In Vietnam, Professorships are honorary titles bestowed by the State. Academics with this title enjoy public recognition, but have no specific duties to perform.



Professor Chau and Distinguished Teacher Le Cong Co, DTU President and Provost, at the event

In other countries, a Professorship is a university position with major responsibilities, primarily to advise PhD students and the title is granted by appointment. “Usually, when a Professor retires, the university

must find a replacement by inviting applications,” Professor explained.” “This is quite different in Vietnam, where the State bestows the title, not the university, and the appointment is less significant.”

However, selecting a Professor abroad is more complex. *“Foreign universities do not have such rigid criteria as Vietnam, such as how many ISI papers have been authored and how many PhD students they are responsible for. Here they are measured predominantly on academic prestige. In other countries, if a university Dean is considering a candidate, a selection committee will contact six to ten other Professors and ask them for an assessment. The contacts each document detailed information about the candidate and the significance of their work. After selecting a candidate, the documentation and recommendations are submitted to the Dean. This is the process at foreign universities.”*

Universities should not appoint Professors, they should recruit them

Professor Chau said: *“In Vietnam, because of tradition, we move more slowly,” said Professor Chau. “After hiring, we train the PhDs and then the Associate Professors. We have only a training policy, not an effective hiring strategy to strengthen our universities. Our mentality is one of training staff rather than of recruiting staff.”*

In the coming years of international integration, Vietnam cannot maintain these methods. Today, as soon as 90% of the staff are in place, there is no more mobility, no more competition, no more progress.

In Vietnam, Professorships are just honorary titles. No responsibilities come with the title and anyone who is eligible is nominated. *“I hope to shift from our current model towards one where universities can directly hire professors themselves,” Professor Chau said. “But this kind of recruitment should be carefully implemented. Several universities here are proposing that they would hand out Professorships themselves, instead of the State. This would only create more problems.”*

(Media Center)