

INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN VIETNAM HIGHER EDUCATION UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: FROM POLICY TO ACTION KNOWLEDGE

TRAN MAI UOC

HO CHI MINH UNIVERSITY OF BANKING, VIETNAM, EMAIL: uocm@hub.edu.vn; Orcid id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4659-7661>

Abstract:

In the context of transition to a knowledge economy and innovative society, Vietnamese higher education is playing a central role in forming and spreading national creative capacity. This article approaches the issue of innovation and entrepreneurship in higher education institutions from the perspective of social philosophy and political philosophy, thereby analyzing the nature of knowledge, academic freedom, and the social significance of public policy in creating an autonomous knowledge environment. Based on the theoretical foundation of social philosophy (Habermas, Foucault, Durkheim) and modern political philosophy (Rawls, Sen, Nussbaum), the article examines the relationship between university autonomy - creative freedom - social responsibility as a philosophical triangle for sustainable development. The research method used is policy discourse analysis combined with hermeneutic interpretation in the Vietnamese context, based on the directions of Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025) and national policies on entrepreneurship and innovation. The results show that entrepreneurship policy in higher education is not only an administrative tool but also a philosophical expression of intellectual freedom, where knowledge becomes a liberating social capacity. From there, the article proposes philosophical and political implications to reposition the role of universities in modern Vietnamese society: not only as a place to train human resources, but as a space for intellectual justice and creative responsibility.

Keywords: Social philosophy, political philosophy, innovation, entrepreneurship, higher education, academic autonomy, knowledge in action.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and digital transformation, innovation and entrepreneurship have become central driving forces of economic growth and social progress. In Vietnam, promoting the spirit of innovation in higher education is not only a management requirement or policy goal, but also reflects a profound philosophical transformation in the perception of knowledge and people. The university is no longer just a place to impart knowledge, but becomes an agent in creating a knowledge society - a "sociological entity" with the power to shape the creative capacity, critical thinking and intellectual freedom of citizens. From a social philosophical perspective, the development of modern society is associated with the transformation from a material production society to a knowledge production society (Habermas, 1984; Drucker, 1993). In this process, university is a space where knowledge is not only accumulated but also socialized, becoming the common capacity of the community. From the perspective of political philosophy, this means that knowledge must be liberated from the limits of administrative power and centralized management mechanisms - towards academic freedom and university autonomy as conditions for creativity to flourish (Kant, 1784; Rawls, 1971; Sen, 1999). However, in Vietnamese reality, the relationship between innovation policy and entrepreneurship in higher education is still in the stage of restructuring thinking, when the State plays both the role of "development creator" and "knowledge coordinator" in the university environment. Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025) has opened a new direction for Vietnamese higher education, with the goal of transforming universities into centers of creativity, innovation and knowledge transfer associated with national development needs. But the philosophical question is: "Can innovation policy in universities become a self-driving force of knowledge - or is it still just a tool of economic management?" To answer, the article chooses the perspective of social philosophy - political philosophy as the analytical foundation. There, innovation is not just a technical or economic process, but a social and ethical behavior, demonstrating the level of human openness in the knowledge space. University - as a "miniature society" - is both a place to produce knowledge and a political and ethical model for a democratic, creative and fair society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social philosophy of knowledge, people and creativity

Social philosophy, in the tradition from Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim to Jürgen Habermas, views society not only as the sum of material relations but also as a space of meaningful action. In it, knowledge is not simply a product of reason, but the power that structures society, shaping the way people interact, create and reproduce life. Habermas (1984) pointed out that modern society is organized on two systems: the system of strategic action (system world) - where instrumental logic dominates, and the life world (lifeworld) - where knowledge, language and communication create common understanding. When "system" overwhelms "life", knowledge is instrumentalized, but when "life" is awakened, knowledge returns to its role of liberating people. It is at that intersection that innovation is no longer a technical activity but a social behavior, expressing people's desire for freedom and their capacity for self-actualization. From Marx's perspective, creativity is the essence of human labor: humans are beings with the capacity to produce new things - not only creating material things but also creating themselves in the creative process. When labor is alienated, creativity loses its humane meaning and becomes a tool of capital. Therefore, restoring the spirit of creativity in higher education is not just an economic policy but a philosophical action to reaffirm human value as the subject of knowledge. Durkheim (1912) approached from the perspective of social ethics: knowledge is collective, the product of "collective consciousness". University, therefore, is the space where intellectual values and social ethics are formed, reinforced and transmitted. Creativity in university cannot be separated from the academic ethical environment - where individuals are recognized, dialogued and collaborated. From the above concepts, innovation in higher education can be understood as a specific expression of the capacity to socialize knowledge. Knowledge is not an individual's private property or a market tool, but a public good, contributing to the creation of a "knowledge society". Therefore, all policies to encourage entrepreneurship in universities need to be seen as a liberating social action, instead of just an economic indicator or administrative efficiency.

Political philosophy of freedom, justice and autonomy

Political philosophy, especially through Kant, Rawls, Sen, and Nussbaum, lays the foundation for understanding innovation as a form of free practice. Immanuel Kant (1784) in "Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?" believes that people are only truly enlightened when they dare to use their own reason without being guided by outside power. Academic freedom in universities, according to Kant's spirit, is the basic condition for knowledge to develop - because only in the space of intellectual freedom can people create new things and reflect on the existing. John Rawls (1971) in *A Theory of Justice* introduced the concept of justice as fairness, in which all individuals have equal rights to access opportunities to develop knowledge and creativity. From there, university autonomy is not the privilege of a group of scholars or managers, but a political mechanism to ensure intellectual equality, so that everyone - students, lecturers, researchers - can contribute to the common creative space. Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2011) continue this tradition through the capacity theory (capability approach), viewing development not only as economic growth but as expanding human capacity and freedom. In the context of higher education, that means that entrepreneurship policies must aim at empowering knowledge - creating conditions for learners to not only "know how to do" but also "know how to choose and create". It is this capacity for freedom that is the foundation for a fair creative society, where knowledge becomes the right and obligation of all citizens. Habermas (1996) in *Between Facts and Norms* brings the concept of communicative action into the political space - where citizens participate in dialogue to jointly establish common norms. Universities, as "spaces of intellectual justice", need to operate according to a similar logic: dialogue, criticism, and cooperation between knowledge actors to establish responsible creative direction. From here it can be seen that university autonomy is not just an administrative policy, but the political foundation of creative freedom. It allows knowledge to develop as a free entity - unrestricted by administrative control mechanisms, and at the same time associated with moral responsibility: freedom is inseparable from justice, and creativity is inseparable from social responsibility.

Applying the theoretical framework to the context of Vietnamese higher education

In the Vietnamese context, innovation in higher education is taking place in conditions of dual transformation: both modernizing the governance system and reshaping the philosophy of human development. State policy in recent years - typically Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025) - affirms the goal of "building universities into centers of innovation and entrepreneurship", reflecting a transition from human resource training education to knowledge creation education. However, from the perspective of social philosophy and political philosophy, there is still a significant gap between policy thinking and the philosophy of knowledge development. Policies often focus on output targets (number of start-ups, inventions, commercialized projects), while creative philosophy focuses on the quality of human liberation, that is, the ability of people to think for themselves, criticize and create for the common good.

Therefore, the article's theoretical framework proposes a three-tiered approach:

Social layer – views innovation as a process of socialization of knowledge, requiring an ethical academic environment and community connections.

Political layer – considers university autonomy as the political foundation for intellectual justice and academic freedom.

Humanistic philosophical layer – puts humans at the center of the innovation process, emphasizing self-actualization as the ultimate goal.

On that foundation, promoting entrepreneurship in higher education needs to be understood not only as encouraging the production of new things, but as building people capable of creating new meaning - where knowledge becomes conscious social action and moral values.

METHODOLOGY

The article is based on the methodology of modern social philosophy and political philosophy, in which knowledge is not only an object of cognition but also a social reality constructed through action, language and power. Therefore, the research method does not stop at describing policies, but focuses on decoding the philosophical structure behind policy discourses. In that direction, the article uses policy discourse analysis and philosophical hermeneutics to clarify the relationship between ideology, power and knowledge in the process of planning and implementing innovation and entrepreneurship policies in higher education. This approach allows shifting policy research from the administrative model to the philosophical-sociological model, in which policy is not just an administrative document but a meaningful message (meaningful text) reflecting the concept of people, knowledge and society.

The main data sources of the study include: National policy documents such as Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025), Higher Education Development Strategy 2021–2030, reports of the Ministry of Education and Training on entrepreneurship - innovation. Theoretical philosophical and sociological works of Marx, Habermas, Rawls, Sen, Nussbaum, along with recent research on knowledge society, academic autonomy, innovation ecosystem. Practical data from Vietnamese universities (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang) through reports and entrepreneurship - innovation programs for the period 2018–2024. The scope of the research focuses on analyzing the level of ideology and policy discourse, without delving into quantitative measurement or economic efficiency assessment, to ensure the philosophical - sociological depth of the issue.

DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

Innovation and entrepreneurship policy in Vietnamese higher education: Discourse and practice

From 2016 until now, Vietnam has continuously implemented national programs on entrepreneurship and innovation, in which higher education is considered a "source of intellectual vitality" for the national creative ecosystem. Important documents such as Project 1665/QĐ-TTg (2017), Higher Education Development Strategy 2021–2030, and especially Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025) have affirmed the task of "building higher education institutions into centers of research, innovation and entrepreneurship". However, if viewed from a social philosophical perspective, these policies reflect the tension between two development logics: On one side is the management-instrumental logic: considering innovation as an economic indicator, emphasizing productivity and commercialization of knowledge products. On the other side is the liberal-social logic: viewing creativity as a natural expression of human ability and the foundation for a knowledge society. The shift between these two logics is the process of redefining the role of universities. Universities are no longer just human resource training institutions, but are becoming social actors - a place to form a sense of civic creativity and responsible intellectual action. According to Habermas (1984), when knowledge is instrumentalized in the system, it loses its liberating capacity. On the contrary, when knowledge is placed in a space of dialogue, it becomes a source of social energy. That is why in the Vietnamese context, developing a "creative culture" in universities is as important as building a "creative policy". Policy is only truly effective when it fosters an environment of free intellectual communication, where students, lecturers and businesses dialogue as equal subjects in the creative community.

University autonomy and academic freedom: Philosophical basis of creativity

One of the basic conditions for innovation is academic freedom and university autonomy. From the perspective of political philosophy, this is a manifestation of positive freedom - the ability to self-determine based on reason, as Kant (1784) once asserted: "Human beings are free when they act according to the rules that their own reason sets." In the university environment, academic freedom is not only the right to research or teach independently, but also the ethical foundation of knowledge. A teacher or student is only truly creative when they are free to question, be skeptical, and challenge existing stereotypes. University autonomy, at the institutional level, is the political form of that freedom - allowing the school to govern, finance and academically independently, while at the same time being responsible to society for creative results. In reality, the process of university autonomy in Vietnam (according to the 2018 amended Law on Higher Education and Decree 99/2019/ND-CP) has opened up many opportunities but also posed many challenges. Many university institutions are still subject to administrative constraints and old financial mechanisms, causing autonomy to be understood as "self-care" rather than "freedom". From a philosophical perspective, this is a manifestation of "formal freedom" - when the institution is empowered but does not have the capacity to use that right according to creative reason. As Hegel (1821) emphasized: "Freedom is not just a right, but the capacity to practice reason in reality.". For autonomy to become a true creative force, Vietnamese universities need to redefine academic freedom as a moral and political value, not just a management mechanism. The goal is not to escape the State, but to establish an equal dialogical relationship between the State and knowledge – what Habermas (1996) calls "the public sphere of knowledge".

Knowledge, justice and entrepreneurship: A social philosophical perspective

Entrepreneurship in university is, in essence, a form of realizing knowledge. But that knowledge does not exist in a vacuum – it reflects the social structure of opportunity. According to Rawls (1971), social justice requires institutions to ensure for all individuals "equal opportunities to develop capabilities and access resources". In the context of higher education, this means that every student must be given equal conditions to learn, innovate and start a business, regardless of background, gender or region. From a social philosophical perspective, university entrepreneurship only truly has humanistic meaning when it expands human creative capacity, not just creating economic value. Amartya Sen (1999) calls it "development as freedom": development is not a means, but the destination of people living according to their own abilities and values. In reality in Vietnam, many startup programs in universities are still movements, focusing on "business ideas" without a foundation of scientific and social knowledge. This makes entrepreneurship a technical act, instead of a socio-philosophical act. To overcome this, it is necessary to look at entrepreneurship as a means of liberal education, helping students learn how to think, criticize and create new values. According to Nussbaum (2011), humanities education is the core of a creative democratic society – where knowledge not only serves profit but also nurtures empathy, imagination and social responsibility. If a startup in a Vietnamese university only aims to commercialize products without a humanistic foundation, then it is not true innovation.

University as "space of intellectual justice"

From the perspective of political philosophy, the university can be seen as a special justice institution - where epistemic justice is implemented through dialogue, cooperation and creativity. The concept of "epistemic justice" was developed by philosopher Miranda Fricker (2007), pointing out that epistemic injustice occurs when the voice of a group or individual is overlooked in the process of knowledge creation. In the university environment, intellectual justice requires that all subjects – lecturers, students, researchers – have the right to participate in the knowledge process equally. Placed in the Vietnamese context, this has profound meaning. Startup and innovation policies are only truly effective when they create a fair environment of intellectual voices, encouraging the participation of all classes - especially students and young people who are forming social creative capacity. In other words, innovation is not just a product of knowledge, but a social action for intellectual justice. Habermas (1996) believes that the public sphere is where communicative reason is freely practiced, thereby forming a social consensus based on reason. University, in this role, is not only a place to impart knowledge, but a forum of justice, where ideas are debated, criticized and tested. When a university practices intellectual justice, it not only trains skilled people, but also nurtures intellectual citizens – people who know how to use reason to serve the community.

Innovation as ethical and social action

If viewed from the perspective of ethical philosophy, innovation is not only a cognitive action, but also an ethical action. Max Weber (1919) distinguished between the "ethic of conviction" and the "ethic of responsibility". An effective innovation policy must harmonize both: fostering belief in the value of knowledge and establishing social responsibility for the use of that knowledge. In the Vietnamese university context, entrepreneurship and innovation need to be redefined as "creative responsibility" - that is, the act of creating new value associated with the common good. This is the deepest content of political philosophy on development: people not only have the right to create, but also the obligation to create with responsibility to the community. The success of innovation policy in Vietnamese higher education therefore cannot be measured by the number of projects or investment funds, but must be evaluated by the level of intellectual liberation, academic freedom and creative ethics that the education system brings.

From the above analysis, it can be affirmed that: Innovation and entrepreneurship policy in Vietnamese higher education is gradually shifting from the model of "knowledge management policy" to "knowledge liberalization policy". However, to achieve that, a philosophical development is needed - that is, shifting awareness from "knowledge as a tool" to "knowledge as social and ethical action". The article proposes the concept of "knowledge-in-action" - that is, knowledge realized through creative behavior, social responsibility and personal freedom. At that time, innovation in universities is no longer a movement or short-term program, but becomes a social - political - ethical process capable of shaping the identity of national development. Thus, innovation and entrepreneurship in Vietnamese higher education, from the perspective of social and political philosophy, is not only an economic-educational policy, but a journey to liberate knowledge, towards a fair, autonomous and humane society. University, in that role, becomes the living philosophical foundation of modern Vietnamese knowledge society.

Philosophical and Policy Implications

First, from knowledge to human liberation

The analysis in the previous sections shows that innovation in higher education cannot be understood purely as a technical or administrative process, but must be approached as a socio-philosophical process, where people - as creative subjects - assert their ability to exist through knowledge.

From the perspective of social philosophy, three fundamental implications can be drawn: **First**, knowledge is a liberating social action. Knowledge is not only the result of the research process, but a form of realization of human free capacity. According to Kant (1784), "enlightenment" is the process in which people escape the state of "intellectual adolescence" by daring to use their own reason. In the modern university, innovation is the collective expression of that enlightenment. Each research project, each startup project is an effort to reaffirm human dignity - the subject of creative freedom. **Second**, knowledge has a social and dialogical nature. As

Habermas (1984) pointed out, understanding is only valuable when it is formed in communication – in relationships between equal subjects. Therefore, innovation cannot just be the product of individual genius, but is the result of collaboration, debate and knowledge co-creation. Universities, as "spaces of intellectual justice", need to ensure an environment of academic dialogue, where all voices are heard and respected. **Third**, knowledge must be accompanied by moral responsibility and intellectual justice. Foucault (1980) once warned that knowledge is always associated with power. When power takes over knowledge, science can become a tool of oppression rather than liberation. Therefore, modern political philosophy - from Rawls to Nussbaum - emphasizes the role of epistemic justice: ensuring everyone has the right to participate, use and benefit from knowledge. In Vietnamese higher education, this means expanding access and creative opportunities for all students, especially in disadvantaged groups, remote areas, or areas with little investment. The above implications show that innovation in higher education is not only a development policy but also a humanistic project: a project to liberate people through knowledge, affirming human dignity as free and creative subjects.

Second, create creative liberal universities

From that philosophical foundation, it is possible to draw a number of key policy directions for promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in Vietnamese higher education. **First**, build a "culture of autonomous knowledge" in universities. Autonomy is not just the right to manage, but an intellectual culture - where lecturers and students are aware of their responsibility for freedom. The state needs to change its role from "management" to "knowledge enabler": creating a legal corridor for schools to make their own decisions in research, recruitment, and finance, while encouraging the spirit of openness, creativity, and academic criticism. The ultimate goal is to form a self-functioning intellectual environment, where academic values and professional ethics are valued over formality or achievement. **Second**, redefine entrepreneurship as liberal education. Instead of considering entrepreneurship as a job creation tool, it should be seen as a liberal education method - helping learners develop creative thinking, problem-solving capacity and a sense of social responsibility. Entrepreneurship programs in universities should be integrated into the training process as part of intellectual citizenship competencies, not separate from the humanistic philosophy of education. This requires changing teaching methods: moving from "teaching to know" to "teaching to create", from "training doers" to "training thinkers".

Proposing an action model "From policy to actionable knowledge"

Level	Content	How to transform
Policy	Building a legal framework to encourage autonomy, entrepreneurship and innovation in universities	The state's role changes from "management" to "knowledge enabler".
University strategy	Designing innovation centers, startup funds, and public knowledge forums	Focus on human capabilities – not just economic output
Intellectual action	Innovative practices in research, teaching and community service	"Knowledge in action" - where theory is expressed through creativity, criticism and social contribution

Source: Author's own compilation and recommendation

Third, ensure knowledge equity and open access. Startup and innovation policies need to aim at reducing knowledge inequality, through: Expanding research and innovation support programs for students in disadvantaged schools; building data sharing networks, open laboratories, and digital knowledge warehouses for the entire population; Promote community-university-enterprise cooperation projects so that knowledge can be spread and applied in practice. Thus, the "startup ecosystem" does not only include investment funds or incubation centers, but also includes a knowledge community that shares and learns from each other - the foundation for forming a sustainable creative society.

Fourth, develop creative ethics and social responsibility. Innovation cannot be separated from ethics. Policies need to encourage students and lecturers to realize that creativity is a social commitment, associated with responsibility to the community, environment and culture. Content on research ethics, philosophy of science and social responsibility should be included in university training programs. This not only helps limit the phenomenon of "extreme commercialization of knowledge", but also nurtures the spirit of humanistic creativity - towards people and for people. On the other hand, it is also necessary to shape universities as "social-knowledge institutions". It is necessary to recognize universities not only as educational institutions but as intellectual and social institutions, playing an intermediary role between the State, businesses and the community. In the spirit of Habermas (1996), universities need to become a public sphere - where knowledge is created, discussed and publicly criticized, contributing to the formation of social consensus on national development orientation. In that vision, the State should view universities as philosophical partners of public policy, where policy is reflected, tested in intellectual practice, and transformed into social action.

Third, moving towards a "creative liberal university" - a philosophical model of development

Synthesizing the above philosophical and policy implications, the article proposes the concept of "creative liberal university" - a philosophical model for developing Vietnamese higher education in the new era. This model is based on four main pillars:

- Academic freedom (focus on: Research autonomy, freedom of thought, open critical environment)
- Intellectual equity (policy expression is: Expanding academic access, equal creative opportunities).
- Creative social responsibility (interested in integrating research ethics and community responsibility into education)
- Knowledge dialogue community (policy expression is: Building public knowledge forums, multidisciplinary cooperation, academic internationalization)

The writer's opinion is that the goal of this model is not only to improve competitiveness, but also to create a unique philosophical identity for Vietnamese higher education - an education that is both liberal, linked to community traditions, and open to the world. Thus, innovation and entrepreneurship in Vietnamese higher education, from the perspective of social philosophy and political philosophy, is a humanistic journey - where knowledge becomes a tool to liberate people and create a knowledge-equitable society. Policy in this area needs to be understood not just as administrative design, but as philosophical action, reflecting a vision of people, knowledge and the future.

CONCLUSION

This study, from the perspective of social philosophy and political philosophy, approached the issue of innovation and entrepreneurship in Vietnamese higher education as a structural socio-philosophical phenomenon, reflecting the dialectical relationship between knowledge - people - policy - society. Instead of viewing innovation as just an economic action program, the article establishes a new understanding: innovation is the process of liberating knowledge and self-affirming people in the modern university space. From the perspective of social philosophy, knowledge is seen as a form of social action, where humans are both creative subjects and products of knowledge relationships. The development of modern universities therefore not only reflects the capacity to produce knowledge, but also reflects the humanistic quality of the knowledge society - a society in which creativity is carried out not for instrumental purposes, but for the comprehensive development of people. Promoting entrepreneurship and innovation in universities, therefore, needs to be understood as a process of knowledge socialization, contributing to the formation of a culture of collective creativity and a sense of civic responsibility in the global knowledge world. At the level of political philosophy, the article points out that all policies on innovation in universities reflect a certain concept of freedom, fairness and intellectual power. University autonomy - if properly implemented - is not just an administrative mechanism but the political foundation of academic freedom, where reason is used without being constrained by administrative power. This recalls Kant's (1784) idea of "enlightenment", Rawls's (1971) idea of "equity as justice", and Sen's (1999) idea of "development as freedom". When applied to the Vietnamese context, these principles provide a theoretical basis for building a liberal knowledge policy, in which innovation is not an administrative obligation, but a natural human right to freely think, explore and create new values.

Policy discourse analysis also shows that, although the Vietnamese State has affirmed its orientation to develop higher education in the spirit of innovation, a gap still exists between policy language and intellectual practice. Some policies also place heavy emphasis on commercialization and material efficiency, while the fundamental elements of innovation - such as academic freedom, intellectual justice and research ethics - have not been adequately institutionalized. This leads to the risk of weakening the humanistic depth of innovation, making the university entrepreneurship process easily reduced to a technical movement or administrative goal. Therefore, the article recommends that promoting innovation in higher education must be accompanied by a philosophical transformation in policy thinking, moving from "knowledge development policy" to "knowledge liberation policy". This transformation is expressed through four directions:

- Redefining universities as intellectual-social institutions, playing the role of dialogue subjects with the State and the community;
- Affirming academic freedom as a fundamental value for creativity;
- Implement knowledge equity to expand access and creative participation of all social groups;
- Develop creative ethics and social responsibility as standards of knowledge in the era of globalization.

The research results have contributed to adding a new approach in Vietnamese educational policy philosophy, connecting the modern Western philosophical value system (Kant, Rawls, Sen, Habermas) with the context of contemporary Vietnamese educational development, thereby expanding the space for dialogue between policy, knowledge and people. In short, innovation and entrepreneurship in Vietnamese higher education can only be sustainable when placed on the foundation of liberal philosophy, aiming at comprehensive human development. Knowledge, then, is no longer an economic tool, but becomes the moral and spiritual power of society. University, as a "space of intellectual justice", will be a place where people learn to understand, to act, and to live meaningfully in a world moving by knowledge. That is the highest goal of social philosophy and political philosophy in the field of higher education: building a humanistic, free and creative knowledge base, where each individual has the ability to become a creator of his own future and that of the human community.

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