The VIETNAMESE SOCIAL SCIENCES *at a* **FORK** *in the* **ROAD**

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Quan-Hoang Vuong, Trung Tran

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The Vietnamese Social Sciences and Humanities at a Fork in the Road

The *Vietnamese Social Sciences and Humanities at a Fork in the Road*, utilizing an object-oriented structured database on the productivity of Vietnamese researchers, seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the development of Social Sciences and Humanities in Vietnam from 2008 to 2018.

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Preface

The book has been in our preparation for about two years, emerging from our research project on the research productivity of Vietnamese scholars in the social sciences and humanities (SSH), the first of its kind in Vietnam. The project continues to involve a dozen research workers taking on different responsibilities, from collecting data and structuring our exclusive, in-house developed database – Social Sciences and Humanities Peer Awards (SSHPA), to writing script and programming the tools to manipulate such data, to performing statistical investigations and writing research papers based thereon.

Analyzing the increasingly larger database and datasets extracted therefrom, we will be presenting the main insights in eight chapters, with the following considerations in mind.

Our first consideration is the intense demand for changes we have witnessed with respect to the national social sciences and humanities. Over the past five years, the public, the Vietnamese SSH's community itself, and several government agencies have been involved in a heated discussion on how to reform Vietnam's SSH and integrate it into the world's dialogue. Many high-quality media reports, as well as research papers, have pointed out the lack of international publications among many leading research institutions and universities. Politicians, researchers, and education managers have engaged in a heated discussion over how SSH in Vietnam should be reformed: timeline, subject areas, process, etc. To address the situation, the government finally issued Circular 08 on April 04, 2017, which makes it mandatory for Ph.D. supervisors to have at least two peer-reviewed articles in Scopus-indexed or Web-of-Science-index journals/book chapters, among other things. Clearly lifting the humble position of the social sciences and humanities, especially compared to the natural sciences and technology, remains a challenging task ahead. On the one hand, the Vietnamese SSH community must overcome barriers such as the complexity of organizational structures of Vietnamese institutions, the lack of incentives, and the absence of research culture. On the other hand, it is important to be cautioned

against the “inferiority by default” mindset, which seems to have made a majority of scholars in SSH content with their mediocre performance.

Second, the rising importance of, and hence the emphasis on, SSH is inevitable, following the growing complexities and interaction of different, but integral parts, of the emerging economy of Vietnam. More often a long-standing impasse creates persistent pessimism among the public, industry leaders, or even policymakers. This is unfortunate and unnecessary since life has its own upbeat sentiment, even right when one is most pessimistic. Therefore, the book will make the case for our built-in hope and optimism even though Vietnam’s SSH performance has thus far been lagging.

Our final consideration is the bigger game out there to participate. Research productivity has become a major weapon in the upcoming competition – or, dare we even say, battle – between economic rivals. The developing world suddenly realized, in 2016, that they might have some chance –no matter how slim it is—of seeing China’s research output exceeding that of the United States for the first time in its entire history. Our general conception of knowledge and the scholarly world, our epistemology and our vision toward an actionable program of changes, based on improved productivity, has since been transformed.

The book, thus, seeks to present a vibrant and changing picture of international publishing in Vietnam’s SSH in the 2008-2018 period. In Chapter 1, we will touch on some major policy changes that paved the way for increases in both quantity and quality of scientific publishing. Moving forward, Chapter 2 will delve further into the bigger picture, showing a clear growth in the population of SSH researchers as well as an expansion of collaboration networks at home and abroad. In Chapter 3, in breaking down the publication output by year and by field, we zoom in on two fields in SSH—namely Health Care, and Education—that which are among the top 3 in terms of productivity in the ten years period. Chapter 4 dedicates to the Economics field, the most interdisciplinary and productive fields according to the data. The analysis in both chapter 3 and 4 hints at

a rise in interdisciplinary research, an approach that could connect more researchers across disciplines and facilitate the move toward open access in academia. Next, in Chapter 5 we will turn to the profiles of productive researchers in Vietnam SSH during the decade, highlighting some eminent figures, the rising achievements of female researchers, and the expansive collaborative networks of high-output groups. It is indeed astounding that 10 Vietnamese authors produced nearly one-fourth of the articles published in Scopus-indexed journals during the period. The force of a strong individual researcher is to be reckoned with.

Following a review of scientific publishing in Vietnamese SSH in 2008-2018, the next section of the book covers policy implications, the finance of scientific publishing, and the emerging business of science. In particular, Chapter 6 discusses the question of quality and the latest developments in academic publishing, including the open access movement and increased financial funding for scientific research and publishing. In Chapter 7, we examine the impact of Circular 08 of the Ministry of Education and Training on the doctoral research and training programs, a policy that serves as the milestone in pushing international scientific publishing in Vietnam forward. Last but not least, Chapter 8 gives room for an in-depth discussion of the prospects for academic entrepreneurship and the business of science in Vietnam.

Browsing through the chapters, you will see numerous charts, tables, figures, and snippets of our interviews with 28 Vietnamese experts, all about research productivity and how we can move forward. We want to let the data speak, and for that sole reason, this book is more of a data book. And, we believe that eleven years' worth of data should be sufficient for us to attain some substantial level of understanding. This book serves as a thumbnail sketch of an immense artwork painted by at least 1,300 scholars through 2,270 published research items during 2008-2018.

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As part of our research for this book, we have reached out and interviewed 28 Vietnamese researchers in social sciences and humanities. We would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude for the generous support of Bui Thanh Huong, Bui Thi Minh Hong, Giang Thanh Long, Ho Huu Loc, Huynh The Du, Khuat Thu Hong, Le Quan, Le Quang Thanh, Le Van Canh, Nguyen Cao Nam, Luu Trong Tuan, Nguyen Trong Chuan, Nguyen Tai Dong, Nguyen Thi Hien, Nguyen Thi Thuy Minh, Nguyen Thu Thuy, Nguyen Viet Cuong, Pham Si Cong, Pham Van Ha, Tran Dinh Phong, Tran Duc Vien, Tran Huu Tuan, Tran Nam Binh, Tran Quang Tuyen, Tran Tuan Phong, Tran Van Kham, Truong Dinh Thang, Tran Thi Ly.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ADB	The Asian Development Bank
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICOR	Incremental Capital-Output Ratio
ISI	Institute of Scientific Information
JCR	Journal Citation Reports
JIF	Journal Impact Factor (also, IF – Impact Factor)
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
NAFOSTED	National Foundation for Science and Technology Development
OA	Open-Access
OSF	Open Science Framework
SSH	The Social Sciences and Humanities
US\$	The United State dollar
VND	Vietnamese Dong (local currency)
WB	The World Bank
WOS	Web of Science

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