A Brief Review of “The Vietnamese Social Sciences at a Fork in the Road”: Chapter 7

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Nguyen, Nguyen, Ho, Ho, and Vuong (2019) have recently published a chapter entitled “Scientific publishing: the point of no return” in the book edited by Vuong and Tran (2019). The work highlights the positive impact of Circular 08 on scientific research and publishing landscape in Vietnam. In particular, Circular 08 imposes more stringent requirements on doctoral qualifications, including having publications in ISI/Scopus-indexed journals or peer-reviewed international conferences. By using empirical data and social observations, the authors show several improvements in scientific research and publishing after the issue of Circular 8 and eventually, provide important projections for the future of scientific publishing in Vietnam.

The authors suggest the passing “the point of no return” in 2016 of Vietnam scientific research and publishing by comparing empirical data before and after the implementation of Circular 08 since 2017. First, the number of authors, compared with 2016, increased considerably in 2017 and 2018 by 42.6% and 81.6%, respectively. This surge was partly driven by the rising number of young researchers as well as research groups. Second, as impressive as the number of researchers, the number of scientific publications also obtained an incredible rise during this period. Remarkably, there was a boom in the number of articles published completely by Vietnamese authors. The number of articles published by Vietnamese authors accounted for about half of total articles in 2017 and 2018, which contrasted with the previous domination of foreign co-authorship. Furthermore, the increasingly powerful role of Vietnamese researchers can be witnessed through the growing number of articles under the leadership of Vietnamese authors. Third, data regarding higher education institutions in Vietnam hints at the inevitably intense competition for improving scientific research output.

However, this remarkable development is not attributable solely to Circular 08, but also the investment in scientific research, financial incentives for international publications, and public interest in international publications. On the national scale, investment in scientific publishing with the establishment of NAFOSTED plays a vital role in stimulating research output. On the institutional scale, generous financial incentives provided for international publications by public and private institutions as well as massive corporations in Vietnam contribute substantially to the increasing number of publications. Also, by checking the media, particularly using Google News, the authors reflect a growing public interest in international publications during the period between 2008 and 2018. In general, the scientific performance

in Vietnam is not only influenced by the policy, scientific actors from the national to the institutional scale, but also affected by the public trust and interest (Vuong, 2018, 2019).

The article also gives some projections on future scientific research and publishing in Vietnam. Although stricter requirements for doctoral qualifications might result in the declining number of graduates, the quality of doctoral training programs will be improved in the long run, which accordingly produces higher quality researchers. Comparing the Circular 08 with “Khoan 10”, an implemented policy in Vietnamese agricultural sector (Vuong, Nhue, Houtte, & Tran, 2011), the authors expect Circular to acquire the potential to revolutionarily transform the scientific research and publishing landscape in Vietnam.

After reading the work, I personally think that it would be better if the authors expand their recommendations upon i) how Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) can be encouraged in Vietnam (Vuong & Napier, 2014); ii) how data policy regarding Social Sciences and Humanities should be implemented (Vuong, Ho, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2019; Vuong, La, et al., 2018); iii) why there is a huge gender disparity among researchers across disciplines (Vuong et al., 2019); and iv) what local behaviors driven by religious beliefs mean for the design of investment schemes (Vuong et al., 2018).

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