The debate that forces Vietnam social sciences and humanities to change

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On the way to achieve sustainable and strong development, the Vietnamese government gained great accomplishments in 2018: nominal GDP growth rate was 7.08%; GDP was \$240.5 billion; the poverty rate was reduced to 5.8%. These achievements are remarkable for a country with only \$36 billion of GDP in 1993 and attributable to the openness to trade and globalization. However, Vietnam's academics have yet been internationalized and grown at the same speed as its economic growth, which raised a question on the possibility to reach sustainable growth and Vietnam's competency at a global scale. The concern about the substandard integration of Vietnam's science into the international scientific research and publishing is discussed in "Chapter 1: The debate and the long-awaited reform", contributed by Tran, Trinh, Vuong, & Pham (2019) to the book entitled *The Vietnamese Social Sciences at a Fork in the Road* (Vuong & Tran, 2019)

At the beginning of the chapter, the authors noted the shortage of Vietnamese journals recognized by prestigious international databases such as ISI and Scopus. To underline this matter, they also used a smaller and less impactful regional standard established within ASEAN countries - the ACI, in which only 12 Vietnamese journals are qualified. The lack of qualified journals of Vietnamese academic community in well-known international scientific databases is not the only problem. Another issue hindering the adaptation of international scientific standard in Vietnam is the traditional practice within the scientific community, which is heavily influenced by traditional Confucianism (Vuong et al., 2018). The current promotion mechanism, which is focused on seniority, age, and institutional status over scientific contribution, is an unambiguous barrier. The "local typical" opposition against reformations to embrace international standards and the absence of the peer-review process are coward and closed-minded acts that show resistance to innovation and improvement. The pervasion of "unprofessional" scientists in Vietnamese academia is another barrier. With a fierce and straightforward tone, in this chapter, the authors successfully named the current challenges for Vietnam's scientific development, which need prompt solutions to achieve a purer academics environment.

Having acknowledged this problem, the Vietnamese government has taken a major reformation to raise both quantity and quality in scientific research and publishing across all disciplines. By establishing NAFOSTED - the National Foundation of Science and Technology, the government provides financial support and promote Vietnamese scientists to participate in international publishing. This first movement obtained a remarkable result with over 4,000 articles published in ISI-indexed journals. Although NAFOSTED initially favored the field of natural science and technology, the foundation has gradually paid more attention to social science and

humanities disciplines from 2015. The chapter also noted a positive response of Vietnamese researchers toward this policy because it made them more aware of improving the quality of their intellectual works.

As raising quantity and quality is the target for Vietnamese scientists in the last decade, a proper and standardized instrument to measure scientific productivity is inevitable. Tran et al. (2019) filled in the literature gap which has received little interest in Vietnam so far, and showed 3 common findings:

- Compared to other ASEAN countries, Vietnam has lower scientific productivity.
- For the last 5 years, there has been a steady growth in scientific productivity.
- The percentage of international collaboration in Vietnam's scientific production is relatively high.

Yet, the authors pointed out some flaws of these results, rooted in their databases - ISI and Scopus. They argued that these two databases were not able to show us the true picture of Vietnamese productivity in research. The picture might become more transparent employing the data about Vietnamese authors in Social Science and Humanities from SSHPA database. Results from the SSHPA database not only draw the same conclusion about the international collaboration trend but also indicate some interesting points:

- Some leading authors formed a research team with less influential ones. Though it is a good sign, this type of team is not popular in the community.
- More than 90% of researchers collaborated with both domestic and foreign scientists in the last decade (Vuong et al., 2017)
- There is gender disparity in scientific productivity, in contrary to regional differences.
- The number of publications with Vietnamese first-author is low.
- Applying 'sequence-determines-credit' method to estimate the 'contribution point'¹, (Vuong, Nguyen, Ho, Ho, & Vuong, 2017) shows that 88% of Vietnamese researchers score less than 5. Age also plays an important role here (Vuong et al., 2019). Older researchers are found to be more productive than young ones. And for ten years, the annual average productivity is 0.3.

From this chapter, we have learnt almost all the things about the general situation of Vietnamese researchers' productivity. However, the chapter missed one point. Journals' quality is an important factor to determine productivity, so categorising publications according to the journals' reputation will help us see the impact as well as the productivity of Vietnamese researchers on the international academic community. This additional information will contribute to the public trust and interest in scientific research in Vietnam (Vuong, 2018, 2019). Moreover, considering the impact of SSHPA database, I think there should be data policies and similar databases of natural sciences in Vietnam to promote scientific development (Vuong, 2016; Vuong et al., 2018, 2018; Vuong & Nguyen, 2016; Nguyen, Ho, Nguyen, & Vuong, 2019; Ho et al., 2019).

¹ Relative productivity equals to the sum of 1 over author's position in the author list.

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