Anatomy of history as a launch for the future

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With their new book ***Kinh tế Việt Nam: Thăng trầm và Đột phá*** published by the National Political Publishing House, Phạm Minh Chính and Vương Quân Hoàng remind me that history is the preparation for the future. Truly a classic of Vietnam's economic history research, the book takes us back to a period of unprecedented vibrant development of the Vietnamese economy – the *Doi Moi*, when Vietnam transitioned from a centrally planned economy to a market one. For being such a unique and important milestone in Vietnam history, this period has been the subject of many detailed and insightful analysis of not only Vietnamese scholars but also international ones.

Although the authors, Phạm Minh Chính and Vương Quân Hoàng, share the same research topic and objectives with many other works on the economic history of Vietnam – the transformation of an economic system, they offer a unique and distinctive perspective on many aspects.

First, the book analyses Vietnamese economic history's most revolutionary period with a modern approach and tools. It is a macroeconomics book on the history of the market economy (to be more exact, an economy in transition to the market one). Therefore it is inherently different from how Vietnamese scholars traditionally analyzed

economic history, focusing on the economic sectors. The authors provide an analysis based on knowledge, theory, and tools of modern economics.

Second, the relatively short historical period of the national economy is put in relation to the world economy and the long-term history, without interfering with the continuity of time and space. With unprecedented respect for history's periodical and spatial characteristics, the book offers a detailed interpretation of specific events, with strong and sharp arguments.

Third, Vietnam's economic history is updated with new events, accompanied by the country's ups and downs. The authors do not treat history as a fixed timeline but one being open to its past and future, especially to the latter. I felt that the authors would still ask to add some events that just happened if they found them worthy of being discussed, even when the book is already in the middle of the printing process.

By connecting the past with the present and treating the present as the past-to-be, this book spontaneously refers to the current most debated issues of the Vietnamese economy during the years being a new WTO member and being severely hurt by what we would only experience once in a lifetime, the global economic-financial crisis in 2007-2008. From this perspective, the book by Phạm Minh Chính and Vương Quân Hoàng is not just a work on history but also one on contemporary issues. Such an approach validates its practical value, future research suggestion, and policy contribution.

Fourth, recording history is never an easy job. The authors did not only give us a chronicle or an objective glance at our past. Their critical comments and viewpoints show how much they want to fulfill their responsibility as historians, and they successfully did. The book is so distinctive, with its critical voice and what it chooses to analyze. Therefore, we can look back to an unprecedented historical period, which is usually regarded as a spectacular success or majestic breakthrough, but also a turbulent era with the challenges, weaknesses, and bad political choices when implementing development policies.

In my critical review for this book, apart from its highly appreciated research content and methodology, there is still more room for this book to be of higher quality. For example, it should highlight the historical value of the transition, from traditional to the modern path for development, to Vietnamese people, especially in the context of "turbulence era" and "breakthrough." And it should clarify the role of multiple forces in this transition process and so on.

Indeed, demands are endless because perspectives vary from readers to readers.

The final point: this book demonstrates the need for new approaches, tools, and knowledge systems for historical analysis. In my opinion, the book is a kick-off, hence earned a respectable status in that process. Accelerating this process is a way of international integration and integration of science and a way to promote development in the integration of our economy. For these reasons, ***Kinh tế Việt Nam: Thăng trầm và Đột phá*** should be read, and more importantly, needs to be read.

References

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