

Chapter 1

The debates and the long-awaited reform

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Economic reforms and growth in Vietnam

With a *per capita* GDP of USD2,343 in 2017, Vietnam has since become a lower-middle-income country (LMIC). Official statistics for 2018 indicate that Vietnam's nominal GDP expanded at an on-year rate of 7.08% to hit USD240.5 billion (VND5,555 trillion), putting its *per capita* income at USD2,587 (Vuong, 2019b). The strong and continuous growth of the economy over the past 33 years has brought the country's poverty rate down to just 5.8% out of its population of 96.5 million. This economic reality alone represents a spectacular development, especially considering the fact that merely two decades prior, in 1993, the economy produced as little as USD36 billion (Vuong, 2019a).

The rapid economic development of Vietnam implies profound changes for the public and the government, as well as the nation's academics. On the one hand, just as a well-known Vietnamese proverb goes, "*có thực mới vực được đạo*" (lit., only with food can one achieve enlightenment), improved socioeconomic conditions have enabled more people to move beyond the day-to-day concerns to pursue scientific and intellectual careers. On the other hand, such pursuits, while laudable, have not yielded many remarkable results at the international level. The field of social sciences and humanities (SSH) in Vietnam, in particular, presents multiple issues that require systemic and comprehensive reforms.

Scientific standards: Vietnamese versus international

One of the biggest debates when it comes to academic publishing in Vietnam is the adoption of international scientific standards (Vuong, 2019c). Many social scientists are reluctant to embrace publishing their articles in international journals because of the language barrier, the lack of knowledge about international publishing practices, and most importantly, the absence of proper incentive, whether that be financial or professional promotions.

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