

Chapter 6

The question of quality

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Previous chapters in this book have discussed the quantity aspect of research on social sciences and humanities (SSH) in Vietnam. We have touched on the national productivity, the rise of scientific publications, and the ways Vietnamese researchers adapt to the changes. This chapter now turns to the quality aspect of research publications. In order to achieve the outcome of high-quality publications, there has to be a synthesis of at least three elements: (i) an institutional push, whether that be professional or financial incentives, state or non-state resources, (ii) the application of international standards, such as indexed peer-reviewed journals, replicable and reproducible data and research projects, and openly accessible, and (iii) adherence to research ethics. The framework in Figure 6.1 is used to examine the issue of quality in Vietnam's SSH research.



Figure 6.1. Three fundamental elements for producing quality publications

The institutional factor

In this chapter, we have discussed criteria for quality control in research regarding impact factor, the big names, and the global movements that improve the transparency and reliability of science. The question remains: what would be qualified as quality science? At the moment, Web of Science, Scopus and their scores are being used as first-hand measures of the excellence of research. An WoS/Scopus-indexed journal is supposedly better than a non-indexed one, and within the indexed journals, the higher the scores, the better the quality. Then there are the big names in academia, which constitute various characteristics considered as gold standards. However, sole reliance on the name of a journal and its impact factor or CiteScore is not the ultimate way to define the quality of science. Publications in good journals, great journals, even big-name journals, are not exempted from retraction, nor from failing to have the reported results replicated. Thus, the scientific community is pushing towards a new age of transparency with open science. Preregistration, data repository, open access and open peer review all share the same goal: secure the finest quality of scientific research. In Vietnam, WoS/Scopus standards are widely used to set the bar for scientists, and slowly, the standards are becoming the norms. However, in order to foster a vibrant and sustainable academic ecosystem that yields authentically high-quality outputs, measures for quality control must be developed on the basis of good understanding and knowledge of science from all stakeholders, including the general public and policy makers. Effective communication of science is, therefore, fundamental to the future prospect of the Vietnamese science community.

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