

60 YEARS OF THE VIETNAM ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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60 years ago, on December 2nd, 1953, in Tan Trao – a historic place in Viet Bac (the Northernmost Vietnam base), an organization for social and human science studies under the Central Committee of the Vietnam Labour Party named as the “Department of History, Geography, Literature” was founded, and headed by Professor Tran Huy Lieu, a historian at the time. This organization is the predecessor of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS) today.

1. A brief of history and development

Throughout 60 years, under different names (for example, the *Department of History, Geography, Literature*, the *Institute of Social Sciences*, the *Vietnam Committee for Social Sciences*, the *National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities* to meet different missions and tasks of the cause for national construction, defense and development, since February 22nd, 2013, the name *Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences* has been officially announced, reflecting the best the functions, potentials and intellectual strengths of a research institution for conducting macro, strategic, comprehensive and systematic studies in social and human sciences. This is also happy and encouraging news to and warmly welcomed by the Vietnamese social scientists nationwide.

Having fulfilled the assigned functions and tasks of conducting fundamental

studies, development studies, and training of a high-quality human resource in social sciences, providing policy advice and consultancy, for 60 years, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences has undergone outstanding developments, gained many important scientific achievements, making valuable contributions to the cause of national liberation and unification, renovation and socialist construction, and for national development and national defense.

During 1953 to 1986, the social scientists of VASS focused their studies on national independence, the pathway for national liberation, the trends of socialism in selected countries that had completed and/ or were pursuing their people’s national democratic revolutions. In addition, under the assigned functions and tasks, many other studies on history and culture of the Vietnamese people, on social sciences were carried out, contributing to affirming the role and position of social sciences in the social life, especially in the socio-economic difficulty-driven or crisis-hit periods of the country.

VASS’s scientific achievements in this period had fully promoted the internal strengths of the Vietnamese scientists, on the basis of the cultural and scientific quintessence of the advanced sciences in

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the world at that time. These achievements were the source and factor to encourage and mobilize the whole Party and people to be fully aware of the strength of justice and to sacrifice for national independence and freedom, making important contributions to the victory of the national struggles against French and U.S. invasions for national unification, bringing the country to advance toward socialism.

The period from 1986 to present has witnessed the deep, diversified and relatively comprehensive developments of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences. Inherited from the previous achievements of the earlier periods and new progress of the world social science, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences has been proactive in its scientific activities, well organized for implementation of research projects, focusing on the issues that are fundamental and urgent in theory and in practice for solving a series of socio-economic problems, and other political, security, cultural and human problems of the time.

In practice, all the activities of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences have directly and indirectly contributed to making essential changes, in theory and practice, for national development toward socialism; providing scientific foundations for the making of the Platform, Strategy for socio-economic development in the transitional period to socialism, providing scientific evidence for the making of State and Party's directions and policies.

The cooperation and linkage in research and training between VASS with ministries, lines and provinces in the country have been expanded. The cooperation relations between VASS with social and human science organizations in the world have been more and more developed. The Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences has so far established cooperation relations in research, training and academic exchange with over 50 countries and social science organizations in the world. This trend is developing, along with VASS development.

Till present, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences has had 37 member units, including 30 institutes and centers specializing in social sciences, which can be classified in 4 groups: i) the group of social science institutes; ii) the group of human science institutes; iii) the group of international studies institutes; and iv) the group of institutes for regional studies. There are 5 other units under VASS with special functions (namely the Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, the Vietnam Social Sciences Review, the Social Sciences Publishing House, the Center of Information Technology Application and the Vietnam Museum for Ethnography), plus with 5 management departments as supporting staffs to the President of VASS. The total workforce of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences consisted of 1,912 persons, as of late 2013. Of these, there were 1,688 researchers (representing 88%), 16 professors; 125 associate professors, 5 post doctors, 204 doctors and 509 masters.

In addition, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences has possessed 33 scientific magazines of different areas (monthly, bimonthly and quarterly reviews) which operate under the licenses given by the Ministry of Information and Communications of Vietnam. Of these, 12 are published in both English and Vietnamese. This is the largest system of scientific magazines in social sciences in Vietnam; many of them have been highly appreciated by readers at home and abroad.

In parallel with research activities, the training of social science human resource of high qualifications is also one major function of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences. VASS has been for a long time a well-known address for master and PhD students majored in social sciences in the country. As a result of merging 17 training units located at different research institutes, the Graduate Academy of Social Sciences (GASS) under VASS was born 3 years ago, and has been developed, currently provided with 64 graduate training programs (33 of which are the master programs). At present, there are 3,284 master and doctoral students at the Graduate Academy of Social Sciences (1,240 of them are Ph.D. candidates).

2. Major achievements

For 60 years of industrious and creative works, the outcome of VASS has been thousands of scientific products. Thousands of papers/articles were published in domestic and foreign magazines; and over 7 thousand titles of books were released.

These works and publications were

welcomed and highly appreciated by the Party, State and the public. Among them, 20 salient works and groups of works were awarded Ho Chi Minh Prizes; and 24 works and groups of works were awarded State Prizes. Many other research works and groups of works, though were not given prizes, have been the fundamental sources of knowledge, providing and playing the role as vision, methodology, guideline and directions for socio-economic activity of the country, as the theoretical tools and measures for solving the problems arising from the reality, promoting social development for the better, improving public awareness and education, and enriching the spiritual life of the society.

2.1. In the late 1980s, social science was the first start, from which Vietnam successfully shifted from an administrative – subsidy based system to a market-driven system. Market was viewed as a structural component of an economy for socialist construction; from a society of economic integration only to a society of international integration, more comprehensively and actively; from suspicion and preconception of globalization as it was the weapon of hostile forces to recognition and acceptance of globalization as opportunity and challenge at the same time. Accordingly, international integration was visioned as a way for development, and above all, for shifting *from a closed, stereotyped and inefficient model for development to a new, open, dynamic, active and effective one...*

This transition started first and foremost

from the social science.

This can be illustrated through various steps of hardships, difficulties and challenges of the renovation cause. In practice, Vietnam's social science has followed the right way to penetrate into the reality of life in general and into culture and public awareness in particular – a way which was never flat, simple and easy.

From this perspective, according to many social activists, the role of social and human sciences has been assessed more correctly: social sciences are important and decisive in changing a society to a new one with historic development steps.

The first were the changes in the “renovation of thinking” framework. Then, it was the formulation of a system of viewpoints, visions and philosophies of strong theoretical and methodological foundations for renovation. Public education and culture have been expanded toward progress, affirming the true values, forming the new resources and influencing the renovation process. All the things which were considered dogmatic, conservative and sluggish in economy, in thinking and in spiritual life, and in social management have been taken into consideration, revised and adjusted with intention. The social and human sciences, following the renovation spirit, have come out of dogmatic conceptions, promoting the society to change for a dynamic, active and effective development, the centre of which are the people.

The theories on socialism, transition to socialism, on the ruling party, renovation of

the political system were re-assessed fundamentally, on the basis of faithfulness to Marxism - Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thoughts.

Economic theories were reconsidered toward balance, upgradation and modernization. The viewpoints on exploitation, private ownership and capitalism... were acknowledged correctly, laying as the foundation for forming scientific arguments for macro management renovation, and for economic operation in conformity with market mechanism.

Strong and deep changes were made in methodology/ approach to human and culture in social development. Dynamism and positive role of human were reviewed more correctly and applied gradually to create new foundations for social development. The role of knowledge economy, science and education in socio-economic development were also taken into account in the spirit and context of a late comer for overcoming the challenges yet, at the same time, taking the opportunities from globalization and international integration.

The new perceptions of the world academics were received well, though not fully and deeply. Till present, most of the perceptions of the world are present in Vietnam. Many of the famous works, or books written by famous authors were translated and published timely in Vietnam. Many of the translated books were released all most at the same time with the original versions. Many of the authors, who used to be recognized wrongly in the past, have currently been re-evaluated and acknowledged

more correctly and gradually.

Information and knowledge have been distributed by modern and upgrading methods. Most of the valuable documents, academic and modern knowledge sources can be accessed quickly. Geographical distance is no longer a difficulty for social science researchers. Any new inventions/findings in social sciences can be shared quickly among researchers at the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences.

These have created strong impacts on and contributed to changing the people and society of Vietnam in the contemporary era. These are also the functions, missions and image of the social sciences of Vietnam and the science of Vietnam in general, which were implemented and contributed to bringing the country out of backwardness, earning high growth rates for many consecutive years, reaching the group of middle-income countries and gaining many important achievements, creating new status and strengths for further development in Vietnam in the coming years.

2.2. Together with social scientists in the entire country, a new spirit and identity of social sciences have been created by VASS. Noteworthy is, that spirit has been reflected in the documents of the National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam and in the Committee Communist Party of Vietnam. In other words, the products, the findings of Vietnam social science researchers have been received, selected and applied essentially, intellectually and responsibly, contributing to making considerable changes in the

derivative viewpoints on culture and public awareness.

While respecting and following Marxism as the spiritual foundation and affirming the sustainable value of Marxist theory, it is different from the past that in Vietnam's social and human science today, there no longer exist one-sided critiques, attitudes and behaviours of discrimination of other theories.

While respecting and considering Ho Chi Minh's ideology as the flag, the lodestar for all the actions, Vietnam's social and human sciences today are quite ready and eager for doing research, applying and receiving the "nucleus" of the other theories, ideologies and spirits from the great men in the spiritual treasury of humankind.

While respecting materialism as the fundamental theoretical principle, the essential methodology for all the activities of research, development and application in the reality, in Vietnam's social and human science today, researchers and intelligentsia in general are willingly to talk, discuss with their colleagues at home and abroad, ready to absorb and learn from the other theories, ideologies and points of view that are reasonable and practical.

While admitting dialectical materialism as the fundamental, theoretical and thinking methodology for all the studies, from basic to development studies, in Vietnam's social and human science today, there no longer exist phenomena and/or attitudes of isolation, discrimination or prejudice on other different ideologies or ways of thinking. The different

theories, ideologies, or ways of thinking which used to be considered as idealistic, metaphysical, eclectic and dualistic ones have been reconsidered and assessed with its true values.

While respecting and highlighting dialectical spirits of social life, such as, infrastructure determines superstructure, material life determines spiritual life..., in Vietnam's society today, the viewpoints that highlight the role of consciousness, determination, values and traditions... have been reconsidered and assessed more properly and objectively. Culture has been viewed by the Party as the *"spiritual foundation of the social life, the objective and driving motive for social development"*. The role and status of people in development has been identified by the Party as *"all for the people, for happiness and diversified, free and comprehensive development of the people"*.⁽¹⁾

While criticizing the points of view of pluralism and multiparty in the political life, all the diversities in culture, academics, religions, beliefs and spirits... have been respected and treated equally in practice. At present, the diversified and even complicated activities and phenomena in the cultural, academic and religious life have been taken into account and looked at with more flexible and reasonable eyes. The rigid and incorrect points of view on certain spiritual, religious, individual and exotic phenomena... have been re-adjusted more reasonably and appropriately, in accordance with principles of evolution in the social life.

While keeping consistent with the goals

of national independence and socialism in construction, national development and national defence, in Vietnam today, the policies that State economy plays a leading role; the policies that an equal playing ground and conditions for development of all the economic components are to be created (in which private economy is one of the important motives for development) have been carried out. The results of social and human scientists have contributed to improving social awareness and acceptance of *not only the role of market economy but also considering market economy as a way for development and common progress of the humankind in development*. The market economy with socialist orientation, the socialist rule-of-law State and socialist democracy have become the core contents of development in Vietnam in condition of strengthening national industrialization, modernization and international integration.

The current model for national development of Vietnam today has come from the new conceptions in social sciences: the viewpoints of renovation in thinking, reconsideration and awareness of many theoretical issues have led to innovations and reforms in practice. At present, the model for development of Vietnam has been assessed reasonable, more practical, flexible, standardized and courageous in the world context than it was in the past.

⁽¹⁾ The Communist Party of Vietnam (1998), *Documents of the 5th Meeting of the Central Party Committee, Congress VIII, National Political Publishing House*, pp.55-56.

2.3. However, the social science of Vietnam in general and the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences have still exposed a number of weaknesses and limitations, in research and training quality, in information dissemination and provision, and in policy consultancy. Till present, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences has not yet had many scientific works and/or publications of regional and world standards; not many papers to have been published in well-known magazines in the world. There are not many Vietnamese scientists to have been widely recognized in the region and the world. The work of training, supplying a source of highly qualified researchers has not yet satisfied the increasing demands of the reality; and the gaps between Vietnam's sciences with the world have not yet been narrowed. And last but not least, the sources of foreign information and documents have been, in general, not synchronous, systematic and thoughtful in many aspects.

Having entered the 21st century, social science with its inherent humane character has become an indispensable tool for all the strategies, plans, roadmaps and policies for development. Without social and human science, any socio-economic plans and schedules will not be complete, as they lack necessary evaluations and recommendations in social and human terms. A disregard of social and human evaluations and recommendations in a socio-economic policy, for instance, may easily lead to subjectivism, shortage of foundation and/or evidences, and impracticality and thus, social problems will rise. In addition,

social science today, with its qualitative strength and quantitative capacity, will be a very essential element to formation of all the strategies, plans and policies for development.

Strong and steady in fundamental science, dynamic and practical in applied science, modern and advanced in tools and measures for developing Vietnam's social sciences compatibly with regional and world social sciences in order to serve well the country's socio-economic development, national construction and national defense... are the aspiration and determination of all the social scientists and employees who used to work and are now working at the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences.

60 years is not a long time, compared with the history of development of well-known academies of science in the world. 60 years is, however, not a short time, compared with strong centers for science in the emerging countries around us. Having looked back on the 60-year road of development, we are very proud of the important achievements the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences has gained and contributed to the country, throughout the periods of national struggles for independence and for socialist construction and development, in spite of many difficulties and challenges. We strongly believe that the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences will be further developed, equipped with stronger internal forces for making significant contributions to the cause of socialist construction and national defense, fulfilling the goals of *"a rich people, a strong country, a fair, democratic and civilized society"*.

