



# Exploring the Application of Socio-Economic Morphology Theory for Building a Prosperous and Happy Country: Some Current Challenges

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Abstract	Original Research Article
<p>The theory of socio-economic morphology is recognized as one of the three major foundational contributions of Marxism, providing a critical theoretical and methodological framework for the process of building socialism, particularly in Vietnam. Over decades of historical practice, it has become evident that the success or failure in constructing a prosperous and happy nation is fundamentally influenced by the correct application of this theory. Misinterpretations or misapplications often lead to setbacks, while a rigorous and context-sensitive approach fosters sustainable development and social well-being. This article focuses on examining how the theory of socio-economic morphology has been applied in Vietnam's efforts to achieve national prosperity. It highlights the dynamic interplay between socio-economic structures and development policies, emphasizing how these theoretical principles guide practical decision-making in the Vietnamese context. Moreover, the article identifies several current challenges Vietnam faces amid rapid globalization, technological advancement, and socio-political changes, which complicate the straightforward implementation of traditional Marxist frameworks. In response to these challenges, the article proposes methodological solutions designed to adapt and refine the application of socio-economic morphology theory. These include integrating innovative development models, promoting inclusive growth, and enhancing the adaptability of socialist construction strategies to contemporary realities. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of a flexible yet principled approach to applying socio-economic morphology theory as Vietnam continues its path toward building a prosperous, equitable, and happy society.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Socio-Economic, Happy Country, Some Current Challenges, Vietnam.</p>	

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## INTRODUCTION

The theory of socio-economic formations provides a scientific and revolutionary framework for understanding historical development. It constitutes a fundamental theoretical foundation for constructing the communist socio-economic formation, with socialism as its initial stage an objective currently pursued by Vietnam. Since its establishment, the Communist Party of Vietnam has embraced Marxism-Leninism as its guiding ideology. Under this ideological leadership, the Party has successfully led the Vietnamese people to achieve national independence and freedom. In the ongoing process of socialist nation-building, the 13th National Congress of the

Communist Party of Vietnam emphasized that after 35 years of renovation, 10 years of implementing the Platform for National Development in the Transition to Socialism (updated in 2011), and the 2011–2020 Socio-Economic Development Strategy, Vietnam has attained remarkable and historically significant achievements. As noted by the Party, "Never before has our country had such stature, potential, position, and international prestige as it does today" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 25). These accomplishments reaffirm the enduring relevance and value of Marx's theory of socio-economic formations.

However, Vietnam now faces an era of heightened international integration amid rapid, complex, and unpredictable global and regional changes. The 13th Party

Congress cautioned that the economy confronts various risks and challenges, including the threat of falling into the middle-income trap and the possibility of further economic lag. Additionally, Vietnam's high degree of economic openness makes it more vulnerable to global economic fluctuations (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 30). These factors underscore the urgent need for Vietnam to identify the appropriate path and method to creatively apply the theory of socio-economic formations, thereby "awakening the aspiration for a prosperous and happy nation" and successfully advancing socialist construction.

Therefore, in-depth research on both theoretical and practical issues arising in Vietnam's current socialist construction process is essential. Such research not only enriches theoretical understanding but also informs methodological solutions to guide the country's sustainable development in the future.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in the Marxist theory of socio-economic formations, which provides a comprehensive and scientific lens to analyze historical and social development processes. According to Marxism, societies progress through distinct socio-economic stages, each defined by specific modes of production and class relations. The transition from one formation to another is driven by internal contradictions and the dialectical relationship between the productive forces and production relations. Within this theoretical framework, socialism represents the initial phase of the communist socio-economic formation, characterized by collective ownership of the means of production and the pursuit of equitable social development.

Vietnam's socialist construction process is directly informed by this theory, serving as a guiding principle for its development strategies and policy formulations. The Communist Party of Vietnam has continuously emphasized the significance of applying Marx's socio-economic formation theory to its national development agenda, recognizing it as a tool to analyze socio-economic realities, identify structural challenges, and formulate effective responses.

The theory of socio-economic formations also underscores the importance of adapting theoretical principles to the specific historical, cultural, and economic conditions of each society. This adaptive approach is critical in the context of Vietnam's current integration into the global economy, where external factors such as globalization, economic openness, and global market fluctuations introduce new complexities and risks. The theory thus provides a methodological basis for understanding and navigating these challenges while maintaining the core objectives of socialist construction.

By applying this theoretical framework, this study aims to critically examine how Vietnam can creatively interpret and implement socio-economic formation theory to foster sustainable development, avoid economic pitfalls such as the middle-income trap, and realize the vision of building a prosperous and happy nation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Enduring Value of the Theory of Socio-Economic Formations in the Pursuit of a Prosperous and Happy Nation

Within the theoretical framework of Marxism-Leninism, the theory of socio-economic formations occupies a particularly important position. It is not only the core of the historical materialist worldview but also serves as a solid scientific foundation for all social sciences.

In Vietnam's pursuit of building socialism, this theory has demonstrated lasting value across various dimensions. Many of its principles have been and are being effectively applied in the process of building a prosperous and happy nation. These can be summarized into five key points, of which the following two are most central:

The theory identifies socio-economic formations as a fundamental category of historical materialism. Each formation represents a specific stage in history, characterized by a particular mode of production in which the productive forces (PF), the relations of production (RP), and the superstructure (SS) are interrelated. Marx approached society as a living organism, where the PF determine the RP, and the RP form the basis for building the corresponding SS. This holistic view requires that the building of socialism must ensure synchronized and comprehensive development across all aspects of social life. Accordingly, Vietnam must promote coordinated development among regions, sectors, economic components, and forms of production and business, based on the strengths and potentials of each locality, thereby fostering integrated and sustainable national growth.

The theory asserts the dialectical relationship between the productive forces and the relations of production. Marxism holds that the RP must conform to the nature and level of development of the PF — a fundamental economic law present in all socio-economic formations. While the PF play a decisive role in transforming the mode of production, the RP also possess relative autonomy and can either foster or hinder the development of the PF depending on their alignment. Applying this principle, the Communist Party of Vietnam has established the socialist-oriented market economy as the general model for national development. This model seeks to harmonize economic growth with social progress and justice, emphasizing human development and placing the people at the center. Culture is considered both the spiritual foundation and a driving force of development. Under this orientation, public ownership is fundamentally established, thereby creating favorable conditions for unleashing productive forces and promoting sustainable socio-economic development.

**The Dialectical Relationship between the Economic Base and the Superstructure:** Marx's theory of socio-economic formations emphasizes that the economic base determines the superstructure, while the superstructure, in turn, exerts a reciprocal influence on the economic base. This relationship represents the connection between the economic and political spheres. Within this relationship, the economy plays a determining role in politics, whereas politics is the concentrated expression of the economy. Therefore, to promote

social development, one must begin with objective economic laws while simultaneously recognizing the vital role of politics and the creative dynamism of political leadership.

Applying this principle, the Communist Party of Vietnam has renewed the content and methods of leadership, affirming that "building and perfecting the socialist rule-of-law state of the people, by the people, and for the people under the leadership of the Party is a central task in the reform of the political system. Improving the capacity, effectiveness, and efficiency of the State's operations is essential to enhancing State management of the economy, fostering social consensus, and expanding socialist democracy. This, in turn, ensures socio-political stability an indispensable prerequisite for addressing ownership issues and advancing the cause of national development toward prosperity and happiness.

**The Development of Socio-Economic Formations as a Historical and Natural Process:** According to Marx, socio-economic formations evolve in correspondence with specific economic and technological conditions within each mode of production, following a historical trajectory from lower to higher stages. This process is both historical and natural. However, as Marx pointed out, even upon discovering the natural laws governing this process, one cannot arbitrarily skip over its stages or abolish them by decree one can only shorten or ease the "birth pangs" of transformation.

Applying this reasoning, the Vietnamese revolution chose to bypass capitalism and advance toward socialism. This "bypassing" entails a historical shortening, which still acknowledges the use or even encouragement of certain existing or emerging capitalist elements within the framework of socialism. As such, the Communist Party of Vietnam advocates accelerating industrialization and modernization; focusing on infrastructure construction and urban development; fostering rural economic growth in conjunction with building new-style rural areas; and prioritizing resource allocation for infrastructure in mountainous and ethnic minority areas" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 115–116). This "shortened" path combines sequential progress with strategic leaps, aiming to build an advanced Vietnamese culture rich in national identity. Culture and the Vietnamese people are thus nurtured to become endogenous strengths and key drivers for national development and defense, making culture both a goal, an outcome, and a driving force of socio-economic advancement.

**Human Beings as the Fundamental Driving Force of Historical Development:** Marx's theory of socio-economic formations affirms that, within the productive forces, the worker is the most crucial element. Humans have invented and continuously improved tools of labor the most dynamic and revolutionary component of the productive forces thus playing a decisive role in the development of social history.

Building on this, the Communist Party of Vietnam has asserted that human beings are both the goal and the driving force of development, as well as its central subject. Therefore, ensuring happiness for every person and every household has been elevated as a top priority and considered a central mission.

In the process of building a prosperous and happy nation, the development of human beings for a well-off, free, and happy life has received special attention from the Party and the State. As stated in the 2021 documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam: "Maximize the human factor; people are the center, the subject, the main resource, and the ultimate goal of development" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 107).

### **Some Practical Challenges to the Aspiration of Building a Prosperous and Happy Nation in the Current Context**

When discussing the key issues confronting the process of socialist construction in Vietnam, we refer to the contradictions between the present reality and the dynamic movement of that reality to the theoretical framework of socio-economic formations. These challenges may arise from the current level of development in certain fields, or from various obstacles and limitations that must be recognized, overcome, and transformed to creatively apply Marxist theory and successfully build socialism.

In the context of rapid, complex, and unpredictable global transformations, the following key challenges for Vietnam can be identified:

#### ***The Development of Productive Forces to Drive Rapid Economic Growth and Avoid the Risk of Economic Backwardness***

According to historical materialism, the ultimate decisive factor for the success of any new social order is the economic factor. However, Vietnam's current economic development remains unsustainable, with significant limitations and weaknesses, and is facing new difficulties and challenges (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). This reality indicates a high risk of economic stagnation and the so-called "middle-income trap" if we fail to identify and implement pathways and solutions for rapid, sustained, and inclusive economic growth.

To promote the development of productive forces and foster economic growth, the Communist Party of Vietnam and the entire Vietnamese people have resolutely launched and implemented the strategy of industrialization and modernization. However, this is no simple task. Several critical issues remain unresolved, including: What should be the scale, form, and trajectory of Vietnam's industrialization and modernization in the coming years, especially in the context of the ongoing and complex COVID-19 pandemic, which has triggered a severe global recession and economic crisis? How can science and technology truly become the main driver of industrialization and modernization in particular, and of the national economy in general? What strategies can ensure the success of Vietnam's industrialization in an era of intense international competition and rapid scientific and technological advancement, while internal economic weaknesses remain unresolved, digital economy integration is still limited, and foundational factors such as institutions, infrastructure, high-quality human resources, and technology are not yet sufficient to meet the requirements for becoming a modern industrialized nation?



In this situation, and amid the global shift toward a rapidly advancing knowledge-based economy, the risk of economic lagging behind other countries in the region and the world is significant. If Vietnam's current economic condition is not swiftly improved and modernized, it could lead to consequences that may deviate the country from the socialist path it has chosen.

### ***Constructing New Production Relations and Developing a Multi-sector Economy Oriented Toward Socialism to Avoid the Risk of Deviation***

The objective laws of historical development and the practical experiences of socialist construction, both globally and in Vietnam, have demonstrated that under conditions where the productive forces are still underdeveloped and uneven, it is not feasible to immediately establish a single, uniform set of socialist production relations. Recognizing the necessity of aligning production relations with the level of productive forces, Vietnam has, over the past 35 years of implementing the renovation policy, pursued the development of a multi-sector economy, in which the state sector, while only one component, holds a leading role.

However, it should be objectively noted that maintaining a multi-sector economy operating under market mechanisms is not unique to countries in the transitional period toward socialism. Rather, it is common for all nations to transition from small-scale production, regardless of their political orientation. Moreover, socialist orientation in a market economy cannot and should not rely solely on the guidelines and policies of the Party and the State. The orientation toward socialism in Vietnam's market economy still faces many obstacles and inconsistencies. Institutional capacity remains limited, and the quality of laws and policies in several areas is still low. Therefore, it is necessary to mobilize economic forces themselves to guide the development of the entire economy toward socialist goals and thereby build new socialist production relations.

In the current context, many issues must be addressed in constructing new production relations. These include determining the appropriate scope, methods, and limits of socialist production relations in a way that both promotes the development of productive forces and prevents deviation from the socialist path. A key issue is identifying the central focus of building new production relations in the current international and domestic context. Another pressing question is how to ensure that the state-owned economy can genuinely maintain its leading role. These are fundamental challenges that require clear answers during Vietnam's transitional period toward socialism.

### ***Upholding the Leadership of the Communist Party, Building a Socialist Rule-of-Law State, Promoting Popular Democracy, and Preventing Political Deviation***

Maintaining the socialist orientation in the political domain first requires affirming the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam and building a strong socialist rule-of-law state that is of the people, by the people, and for the people. This necessity arises from the objective dialectical relationship

between the economic base and the superstructure in any socio-economic formation.

However, as the Vietnamese revolution enters a new phase, practical realities are posing new challenges to the Party's leadership. Hostile forces continue to intensify their efforts to undermine the Party, the State, and the nation. Meanwhile, serious corruption and bureaucratic behavior among certain officials in the state apparatus have caused public discontent. The legal system still contains overlapping or inconsistent regulations, and many fail to meet the practical demands of governance. Legal compliance remains inadequate in some areas, state discipline is sometimes disregarded, and the enforcement of legal sanctions lacks sufficient deterrent power.

In this context, where adversarial forces are constantly seeking to exploit vulnerabilities to attack the Party and the socialist state, these internal weaknesses threaten the strength and survival of the socialist rule-of-law state and may erode its essential character as a government "of the people, by the people, for the people." Furthermore, implementing democratic mechanisms, raising the overall legal knowledge and civic consciousness of the people, and ensuring their real participation in governance remain complex and difficult tasks.

These issues pose significant challenges to the nation's aspiration of building a prosperous and happy country. If not thoroughly resolved, the risk of political deviation from the socialist orientation will be unavoidable.

### ***Building a Socialist-Oriented Cultural and Social Foundation under the Influence of the Market Economy: Preventing the Risk of Deviation in Cultural and Social Spheres***

Culture, as a domain of social life, forms the spiritual foundation of society. In its broadest sense, culture reflects the crystallization of material and spiritual values within a given society. However, at present, Vietnam's cultural and social spheres are facing various negative impacts from the market economy, raising urgent and complex issues that demand resolution. These include: a significant gap between the rich and the poor; difficult living conditions for segments of the population, especially in ethnic minority areas and regions affected by natural disasters; marked disparities in development among localities and regions; complicated developments in crime and social evils; security concerns in certain areas and sectors, particularly in cyberspace and foreign investment domains; and many factors affecting human security and safety that have not yet been adequately addressed. Additionally, the moral and lifestyle degradation, distortions in ideology, and erosion of ethical standards and traditional values present growing concerns.

To build an advanced culture deeply imbued with national identity and oriented toward socialism, Vietnam must adopt a sound development strategy one that encompasses long-term and short-term objectives, appropriate methodologies, and effective solutions. This requires mobilizing the strength of the entire society to realize that goal. It is a daunting, protracted, and complex task that demands persistence, coordination, and visionary leadership.

## **Awakening the National Aspiration for Prosperity Amidst Globalization**

For Vietnam, a nation with a long-standing tradition of unity, civilization, and resilience the aspiration to develop a prosperous country represents an extraordinary internal force, a wellspring of strength that has shaped numerous historic achievements in the millennia-long process of nation-building and defense. Therefore, in pursuing the goal of transforming Vietnam into a developed, socialist-oriented country by the mid-21st century, one of the strategic priorities emphasized by the Communist Party in the 13th National Congress is to awaken the aspiration for national development and promote the will and strength of great national unity in combination with the power of the times.

However, in today's context, global challenges such as peacekeeping, *human security*, *natural disasters*, *pandemics*, *social and non-traditional security threats (particularly cybersecurity)*, *climate change*, *rising sea levels*, and *environmental pollution* continue to evolve in complex ways. These issues exert considerable pressure on efforts to inspire and nurture the national aspiration for prosperity. Additionally, the ever-present threat to the Party's and regime's survival, driven by *ideological degradation*, *weakened resolve*, *fear of hardship*, *moral decay*, and *manifestations of "self-evolution" and "self-transformation" among some cadres and Party members*, along with serious corruption and wastefulness in certain areas all these contribute to the erosion of public trust in the Party. Furthermore, asserting Vietnam's potential, global standing, and comprehensive prestige has become a critical challenge in affirming the nation's "stature" in the modern world. This is especially true in the context of constructing a *new value system for patriotic socialism* and cultivating revolutionary ideals among younger generations tasks that are increasingly complex. The risk of losing cultural identity is also rising, particularly as Vietnam lacks effective solutions to reverse the serious moral, cultural, and ethical decline occurring in some areas, which has generated widespread social concern.

### **Methodological Solutions for Applying the Theory of Socio-Economic Formations to the Cause of Building a Prosperous and Happy Nation in the Current Period**

The theory of socio-economic formations (SEF) asserts that any society is composed of three fundamental components: productive forces (PF), relations of production (RP), and superstructure (SS). These components exist in a dialectical unity, interacting with and influencing one another. Among them, economic factors ultimately play the decisive role in determining political, ideological, and other aspects of society. However, political, ideological, and social factors also exert a significant influence on economic development. Therefore, applying this theory provides a methodological foundation for identifying key solutions to the construction of a prosperous and happy socialist-oriented nation. These solutions include:

First, maintaining the leadership role of the Communist Party and building a clean, strong Party. The Communist Party of Vietnam is the nucleus of the socialist political system. To

ensure that political leadership effectively directs economic development, it is essential to enhance the Party's leadership capacity. This requires continuous efforts to build and rectify the Party and to construct a clean and strong socialist rule-of-law state and political system. The Party must persistently apply and creatively develop Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought, remain committed to the goals of national independence and socialism and consistently implement the renovation path to firmly defend the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Second, building a strong socialist rule-of-law state of the people, by the people, and for the people. The state plays a central role in the superstructure, influencing all areas of social life. Without a strong state, political stability cannot be maintained, and the regime itself may be at risk. Therefore, building and perfecting the socialist rule-of-law state under the Party's leadership is a crucial task in the reform of the political system. The state must place the legitimate rights and interests of the people and businesses at the center to foster innovation and ensure rapid and sustainable development. It must continue to reform the structure and functions of the National Assembly and Government for greater effectiveness and accountability, build a professional, modern, fair, and law-abiding judiciary, and develop a contingent of public officials with sufficient integrity and capacity to serve the people.

Third, strongly developing the productive forces and promoting fast and sustainable economic growth toward socialism. The movement of a socio-economic formation is ultimately driven by the development of productive forces. Therefore, science and technology must be promoted as the key drivers of PF development, with a focus on the research, transfer, and application of Fourth Industrial Revolution achievements across all sectors. In addition, the development and effective utilization of human resources are essential. This includes training high-quality personnel, attracting and valuing talent, building a progressive culture imbued with national identity, and making culture and people a true endogenous force and driving force for national development and defense.

Fourth, completing the socialist-oriented market economy institution in which the state economy plays a leading role and the collective economy forms a solid foundation. To build socialism, it is necessary to both progressively perfect socialist relations of production and ensure the continuous development of productive forces. This requires a comprehensive and synchronized completion of the socialist-oriented market economy. The focus should be on innovating the growth model, restructuring the economy, and creating a favorable environment to effectively mobilize and allocate resources. It is crucial to unify and raise awareness of the socialist-oriented market economy as a general economic model for the transitional period, where the state economy plays a leading role, the collective and cooperative economies are strengthened, the private sector serves as an important driver, and foreign-invested enterprises are encouraged. Institutional bottlenecks must be addressed, a legal framework that supports development must be established, and an independent and self-reliant economy must be promoted in tandem with enhancing the effectiveness of international economic integration.

Fifth, addressing pressing cultural and social issues, building an advanced culture deeply imbued with national identity, and fostering a democratic, just, and civilized society. The negative aspects of the market economy are increasingly infiltrating all areas of social life. Therefore, in the coming years, efforts should be focused on building an advanced Vietnamese culture rich in national identity so that culture becomes a genuine endogenous force for development and national defense. This includes defining and implementing a national cultural value system, promoting a healthy, civilized moral and cultural environment, ensuring economic growth goes hand-in-hand with social justice, enhancing social and human security, improving labor, employment, income, and welfare policies, and fighting crime and social evils. Special attention must be paid to reversing moral degradation, unethical lifestyles, and social vices to ensure that culture truly becomes a driving force for building a prosperous and happy nation.

## CONCLUSION

The transition to socialism in Vietnam, building a prosperous and happy country is the creative application of socio-economic theories to the specific conditions of Vietnam. It is the choice of a shortened path to bring the Vietnamese people to the goal of a rich people, a strong country, and a democratic, fair, and civilized society of socialism. Affirming that our country's choice of transition to socialism is correct does not mean that implementing that path is simple, easy and completely favorable. There is no movement forward along a straight path without encountering difficulties and obstacles. With the spirit of looking straight at the truth, we admit that to

build a prosperous and happy country, we must overcome shortcomings in terms of productive forces, production relations and market economy. It is not a short process, but a long-term process full of difficulties and challenges, especially at a time when the world is undergoing many changes and paradoxes like the present time. Recognizing the difficulties and challenges allows us to determine a scientific and steadfast attitude in directing practice, avoiding both the wrong tendencies of oversimplification or pessimism and discouragement. Those difficulties and challenges are posing many problems to be solved.

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