

How to Cite:

Tram, P. N. (2025). Issues in the development of the economy, culture, and society in connection with ensuring national defense and security in the Southeast Region today. *Macrolinguistics and Microlinguistics*, 6(2), 85–94.
<https://doi.org/10.21744/mami.v6n2.41>

Issues in the Development of the Economy, Culture, and Society in Connection with Ensuring National Defense and Security in the Southeast Region Today

Pham Ngoc Tram

Thu Dau Mot University, Vietnam

Abstract---The development of the economy, culture, and society serves as the foundation for ensuring national defense and security in the Southeast region. It provides both the material and spiritual prerequisites for maintaining defense and security, thereby preserving a peaceful and stable environment for rapid and sustainable development. This study outlines the current landscape of economic, cultural, and social development in connection with ensuring national defense and security in the Southeast region. It analyzes and assesses emerging issues that need to be addressed, such as the unsustainable nature of industrialization and modernization; security concerns in the Southeast sea and island areas affecting Vietnam's maritime exploitation activities; environmental pollution; and limitations in transportation infrastructure and social issues resulting from the urbanization process.

Keywords---Economic development, Social development, Defense-security synergy, Southeast region of Vietnam.

Introduction

The development of the socio-economic system in connection with ensuring national defense and security in the Southeast region is an urgent requirement in the context of the new phase of renovation and international integration, as the entire Party, military, and people strive to implement the national strategy for building and safeguarding the Fatherland.

Resolution No. 24-NQ/TW dated October 7, 2022, of the Politburo on “socio-economic development and ensuring national defense and security in the Southeast region by 2030, with a vision to 2045” defines the goal: “To build the Southeast region into a civilized, modern, and internationally integrated area... Develop the economy, culture, and society in connection with ensuring national defense and security, maintaining political stability, social order and safety, and expanding foreign relations and international cooperation” (Politburo, 2022).

The orientation of linking economic, cultural, and social development with national defense and security in the Southeast region, as outlined in Resolution 24 of the Politburo, is a crucial part of the Party’s strategy for national development. It aims to successfully realize the two strategic tasks: building socialism and firmly defending the socialist Vietnamese Fatherland.

Methodology

In the context of profound and rapid global transformations, marked by increasing complexity and unpredictability, nations such as Vietnam face a dual reality of emerging opportunities and persistent challenges. These dynamics necessitate adaptive governance strategies that effectively reconcile development goals with national security imperatives. Historically, Vietnam has demonstrated the capacity to integrate economic and defense objectives. The feudal-era policy of “*ngũ binh u nông*” which combined military readiness with agricultural production, serves as a foundational model of civil-military integration. In the modern period, this philosophy evolved through the Party’s consistent emphasis on harmonizing the dual objectives of “resistance” and “nation-building,” encapsulated in the symbolic notion of “holding both the gun and the plow.” This metaphor reflects a holistic national strategy that leverages the synergy between economic strength and defense capacity, underpinned by political will, cultural identity, and social cohesion.

Contemporary policy directions reaffirm this integrated approach. Resolution No. 24 of the Politburo positions the Southeast region as a strategic growth pole tasked with pioneering the transformation of Vietnam’s growth model. The region is envisioned not only as an economic hub but also as a leader in cultural, social, educational, and healthcare advancements while serving as a critical gateway for international and

regional integration. Achieving this vision requires a firm commitment to safeguarding national defense, political stability, and social order thereby un from a theoretical perspective, this alignment reflects the dual-task model in development theory, which posits that economic and social progress must be pursued in tandem with security assurance, especially in strategic regions. In this context, economic, cultural, and social development constitute the essential foundation for maintaining defense and security in the Southeast region. These domains provide the material infrastructure and socio-cultural resilience necessary to sustain peace, ensure stability, and promote sustain.

Results and Discussion

Development Situation of the Southeast Region

The Southeast region includes Ho Chi Minh City and five provinces: Tay Ninh, Binh Phuoc, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, and Ba Ria-Vung Tau. It covers an area of 23,551.5 km², accounting for 7.1% of the country's total area (General Statistics Office). Geographically, the Southeast region is the central hub of the ASEAN area. It borders the East Sea and is favorably located for the development of international transshipment deep-water ports, connecting to some of the world's busiest international maritime routes linking the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The region benefits from convenient domestic and international connectivity through all five modes of transport. It also serves as a connection point between the Mekong Delta, Central Highlands, and South Central Coastal regions.

The Southeast boasts numerous historical, cultural, and revolutionary relics, along with architecturally significant archaeological structures. Culturally, the region represents a convergence of various cultural zones, mountainous and coastal, highlands and hills, orchard and river-based cultures, and ancient and newly formed alluvial soils. It is characterized by a diverse population structure and rich cultural traditions. Among the ethnic groups residing here, the Vietnamese account for more than 90%, followed by Chinese, Nung, Cho Ro, Tay, Muong, Khmer, Cham, Ma, and S'tieng, among others. The preservation of various customs and rich religious and spiritual traditions has contributed to a distinctive cultural identity in the most densely populated region of the country.

The region has an abundant labor force, with around 10.16 million workers as of 2022, the highest labor growth rate in the country. The quality of labor here surpasses that of many other regions, especially in terms of highly skilled science and technology personnel. The Southeast also possesses rich human resources, a proud revolutionary tradition, and a spirit of resilience and heroism. People in this region are industrious, innovative, and highly entrepreneurial (Terluin, 2003).

In 2022, the region's population reached 18.8 million (18.9% of the national population), an increase of 4.23 million compared to 2010 (General Statistics Office). The region's average annual population growth rate from 2011 to 2022 was 2.15%, higher than the national average (1.12%) and the highest among the six socio-economic regions.

However, population distribution in the Southeast is uneven. Nearly 50% of the region's population resides in Ho Chi Minh City (9.4 million, accounting for 49.92% of the region's total population). Approximately 17.3% are in Dong Nai (3.3 million, or 17.31%). The remainder is distributed among Binh Duong (14.69%), Tay Ninh (6.32%), Ba Ria - Vung Tau (6.27%), and Binh Phuoc (5.5%). The Southeast is an attractive destination for migrant labor, with the highest net migration rate in the country during the 2011–2022 period. In 2022, the region's net migration rate was 7.89‰ (compared to 19.9‰ in 2010).

Economically, the scale of the Southeast's economy has continued to expand. In 2020, the region's GRDP reached 2,576,517 billion VND (approximately 109 billion USD); by 2022, it had increased to 2,953,351 billion VND (around 125.7 billion USD), contributing 30.9% to the national GDP, the highest contribution among all regions in Vietnam.

Observations and Policy Recommendations

Although the Southeast region has experienced considerable growth, it still falls short of its potential. The region's process of economic, cultural, and social development in conjunction with national defense and security assurance is currently facing several issues that need to be addressed.

First, development lacks sustainability numerous issues are impacting social order and safety. The Southeast region is home to the most developed urban areas in the country, associated with industrial and commercial-service growth, with the highest urbanization rate nationwide (over 66%). The region has been constructing increasingly modern urban centers with interconnected development, creating momentum for broader regional development. This forms an economically favorable space for the growth of industry, and services, and the improvement of people's living standards.

However, the region has not mobilized sufficient resources in line with development demands. Its industrial sector mainly focuses on processing and assembly with low added value, and its contribution remains disproportionate to available resources such as land and investment incentives. The industrialization process has not gone hand in hand with modernization, and many key products still lack competitiveness and high quality. Science and technology have yet to significantly contribute to the innovation of growth models in localities across the region (Corsi et al., 2020).

Human resource quality, especially high-quality labor, does not meet the requirements of national and international integration. The transportation system is overloaded, congested, and deteriorating particularly national highways inner-city roads, and maritime port connections. There is a lack of synchronization among transportation methods and between transportation infrastructure and seaports, logistics centers, and the infrastructure of localities within the region.

Environmental pollution is worsening (pollution of water sources, air, plastic waste, medical waste, and solid waste...), becoming an urgent issue in the region that remains unresolved. This is further complicated by negative consequences for social order and security due to the region's status as an attractive destination for migrant workers it had the highest migration rate in the country from 2011 to 2022, ranging from 10–20% (General Statistics Office). The control and treatment of environmental pollution is also a burden on relevant authorities.

Second, security in the Southeast region's maritime areas affects Vietnam's marine exploitation activities. The Southeast region possesses abundant marine resources, which are extremely favorable for the development of the marine economy: oil and gas are vital national resources; it has rich fishery resources forming one of the four key national fishing grounds; and the region's coastal and island tourism resources provide a foundation for developing the tourism sector.

However, the area is fraught with potential instability, directly threatening national territorial sovereignty. In 2023 and 2024 alone, a series of territorial disputes occurred here. For instance, China intensified its deployment of survey and research vessels in the territorial waters of countries bordering the South China Sea, including the Southeast region of Vietnam. In some cases, these vessels were accompanied by fishing boats and coast guard ships. Notably, certain Chinese vessels operated within Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone, such as the Haiyang Dizhi 4 in March 2023 and Xiang Yang Hong 10 in May 2023 (Cuong, 2023). Furthermore, China's coast guard ships repeatedly took aggressive actions against Vietnam, including multiple instances of intercepting Vietnamese coast guard vessels (Powell, 2023).

Besides survey and coast guard ships, China also stepped up marine exploitation and fishing operations in Vietnam's maritime areas, including the Southeast Sea and islands. The number of Chinese fishing boats has risen sharply in recent years, often appearing in clusters in large numbers. Many of these vessels fly no national flag and operate for extended periods close to Vietnam's coast.

These issues have directly affected Vietnam's ability to exploit the Southeast's sea and islands, creating significant challenges to economic, cultural, and social development aligned with national defense and security in the region. This situation partly explains the decline in the oil and gas industry, seafood exploitation, and the underutilization of

seaports and logistics infrastructure. According to the Ministry of Planning and Investment's report: "The Southeast region's mining industry accounted for more than 64% of the national mining GDP, yet this sector experienced a negative growth rate of -2.35% annually from 2011 to 2022, resulting in a -0.23 percentage point contribution to overall growth. The decline in the mining sector's GDP growth was mainly due to falling crude oil output from 15.0 million tons in 2010 to 8.98 million tons in 2022" (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2024).

Oil and gas output peaked in 2004 at 18.8 million tons, then fell to 8.7 million tons in 2010, 7.7 million tons in 2015, and 4.2 million tons in 2022. Policy Suggestions: Develop the economy and improve the living standards of coastal communities in the Southeast region. Promote the process of marine economic integration. Strengthen the development of the coast guard and maritime self-defense forces.

Thirdly, the process of economic, cultural, and social development in the Southeast region has left behind "residual impacts" on environmental protection, directly affecting security and the lives of local people. In recent years, intersectoral and interregional environmental issues have initially received attention and joint resolution from the Dong Nai River Basin Environmental Protection Committee and the People's Committees of relevant provinces and cities. Activities such as waste source investigation and management, pollution control, discharge zoning and planning, environmental assessment, and permitting have been increasingly regulated and implemented effectively by local environmental management agencies. Inspection, supervision, and legal enforcement related to environmental protection and monitoring of major discharge sources in the river basin have also received considerable attention.

Ho Chi Minh City and other localities in the Southeast region have actively implemented tasks and solutions to cope with climate change, launched various flood prevention projects, and collaborated with international experts to research and deploy flood control solutions for urban areas with underdeveloped drainage infrastructure. The percentage of industrial zones and clusters with centralized wastewater treatment systems meeting environmental standards was the highest in the country (Industrial zones: 98% vs. the national average of 91%; Industrial clusters: 40% vs. the national average of 17.2%). The rate of collection and treatment of municipal solid waste reached 91% (higher than the national average of 84.11%, the highest among all regions); in urban areas, the rate reached 99% (compared to the national average of 96.28%).

The rate of hazardous waste treatment meeting environmental standards reached 100%, the highest compared to other regions and above the national average of 85%. Many important natural ecosystems with high biodiversity value in the Southeast have been protected and zoned within nature reserves such as Bu Gia Map Nature Reserve,

Lo Go - Xa Mat National Park in Tay Ninh; Cat Tien National Park, Can Gio and Nhon Trach mangrove forests in Ho Chi Minh City and Dong Nai. Tasks outlined in resolutions related to land use planning and the protection of forest and rice cultivation land have been initially fulfilled.

However, air pollution remains an ongoing issue in major cities such as inner Ho Chi Minh City, Bien Hoa, and Thu Dau Mot. The rate of urban areas with centralized wastewater treatment systems remains low (approximately 18%); wastewater from industrial clusters continues to grow while infrastructure for collection and treatment fails to meet demand. Waste treatment in residential areas remains ineffective, with the majority of waste still being directly buried. Natural ecosystems are being reduced in size due to land-use conversion, and incidents of forest fires and deforestation are on the rise.

Although the environmental protection plan for the Dong Nai River basin has been implemented for many years, it has yet to resolve the issue of water pollution, especially in the region's urban areas. The mechanisms for coordination and resolution of intersectoral, interregional, and interprovincial environmental and resource protection issues remain inadequate.

Policy Suggestions: Educate, raise awareness, and promote the biodiversity activities and achievements of the Southeast region; Establish mechanisms and policies to address intersectoral, interregional, and interprovincial environmental protection issues; Build a strong and professional environmental protection police force. *Fourth*, addressing the limitations in transportation and social evils caused by the (rapid) urbanization process. The Southeast region has the highest rate and speed of urbanization in the country, ranking among the leading urbanized regions in both Southeast Asia and the world. The urbanization rate in the region increased from 57.3% in 2010 to 62.5% in 2015 and reached 66.5% in 2022 the highest among all regions in Vietnam. In 2022, Binh Duong had the highest urbanization rate in the region at 84.2%, ranking second nationwide (after Da Nang), while Ho Chi Minh City reached 79%, ranking third nationwide.

The expansion and development of urban areas have been closely associated with the formation and growth of large-scale industrial zones in the Southeast region. Industrial development serves as a significant driver for urban growth, while urban areas provide support infrastructure for the development of industrial zones. The formation and concentration of industrial production areas have created job opportunities with attractive incomes, leading to intra-regional and inter-regional labor migration, increased service sector activities, and a strong influence on the expansion and development of urban areas in surrounding regions.

The urban system in the Southeast region is distributed in a network model, with Ho Chi Minh City as the central urban hub surrounded by satellite cities such as Vung Tau, Thu Dau Mot, Bien Hoa, Tay Ninh, etc., following the trend of forming urban clusters. This system is interconnected by highways, ring roads, national highways, and major transportation corridors such as the Moc Bai – Ho Chi Minh City – Vung Tau corridor; the corridor along National Highway 13 from Ho Chi Minh City – Binh Duong – Binh Phuoc; the corridor along National Highways 22 and 22B from Ho Chi Minh City – Tay Ninh; the Ho Chi Minh City – Long Thanh – Dau Giay expressway; and the Ho Chi Minh Road. These routes have significantly contributed to promoting economic exchange, tourism development, and enhancing the effectiveness of investment and regional growth.

However, alongside its positive aspects, the urbanization process in the Southeast region also presents several shortcomings and challenges. The connectivity within the urban structure remains incomplete, irrational, and slowly implemented. Most regional infrastructure focuses on axes connecting to the central core of Ho Chi Minh City through the expansion of existing roads, which worsens congestion. In contrast, ring roads and high-speed transportation routes which are critical for adjusting the flow of goods and people have been slowly deployed and fail to meet intra-regional and inter-regional connectivity needs.

With a rapidly growing population, major urban centers in the Southeast region face challenges such as unregulated development, lack of synchronization between spatial expansion and urban quality, and overloaded social and technical infrastructure that lag behind demographic growth. Issues like traffic congestion, environmental pollution, waste management, flooding, access to clean water, and inadequate public services and utilities as well as social problems such as inequality and income disparity exert heavy pressure on infrastructure systems, housing supply, and public services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare.

Modern public transportation systems such as high-quality buses, urban railways, and subways are still underdeveloped and weak. Traffic congestion remains complex, continuing to increase input costs for production, limit inter-regional development linkage, and reduce the region's ability to leverage its internal resources. Flooding of major roads after heavy rain and tidal surges is becoming increasingly severe. The inter-urban transport infrastructure (including roadways, railways, and inland waterways) remains insufficient, weak, and lacks synchronized investment.

Regarding the urban environment, waste management continues to face significant challenges. Solid waste is increasing rapidly by about 6–10% per year in Ho Chi Minh City and about 5–7% in other urban areas in the region. However, waste management methods, technologies, and treatment equipment are still outdated. Waste separation at the source remains ineffective.

Therefore, current urban development in the Southeast region must be closely tied to ensuring security, protecting the environment, and improving the quality of life for the people. In addition to addressing limitations and negative impacts on infrastructure and controlling population growth, it is necessary to strengthen management forces to address traffic, environmental pollution, and social issues.

Conclusion

Economic, cultural, and social development associated with national defense and security assurance in the Southeast region is a fundamental issue in Vietnam's national development strategy. Economic, cultural, and social development forms the foundation for ensuring defense and security in the Southeast, providing both material and spiritual conditions to maintain a peaceful and stable environment for fast and sustainable development. The documents of the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam affirmed: "Closely integrating economic, cultural, and social development with national defense and security and vice versa in each development strategy, master plan, and socio-economic development plan, with particular focus on remote, border, and maritime/island areas" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016). Therefore, it is essential to strengthen communication and education on the close integration of economic, cultural, and social development with national defense and security; to maximize the combined power of all resources (both human and material) of the country and the Southeast region; and to continue innovating in thinking about building all-people national defense and people's security in the context of a socialist-oriented market economy and high-tech warfare.

References

- Communist Party of Vietnam. (2016). *Documents of the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam*. Central Office of the Communist Party.
- Corsi, A., Pagani, R. N., Kovaleski, J. L., & da Silva, V. L. (2020). Technology transfer for sustainable development: Social impacts depicted and some other answers to a few questions. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 245, 118522. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.118522>
- Cuong, H. (2023, June 1). Vietnam closely monitors China's Xiang Yang Hong 10 vessel. *VOV.VN*. <https://vov.vn/chinh-tri/viet-nam-dang-theo-doi-sat-tau-huong-duong-hong-10-cua-trung-quoc-post1023857.vov>
- General Statistics Office of Vietnam. (n.d.). *Population and labor data*. Retrieved from <https://www.gso.gov.vn/dan-so/> and <https://www.gso.gov.vn/px-web-2/?pxid=V0201&theme=D%C3%A2n%20s%E1%BB%91%20v%C3%A0%20lao%20%C4%91%E1%BB%99ng>
- Ministry of Planning and Investment. (2024). *Summary report on the planning of the Southeast region for the period 2021–2030, with a vision to 2050*. Hanoi.

- National Environmental Report. (n.d.). *National environmental status report for the period 2016–2020*.
- Politburo. (2022). *Resolution No. 24-NQ/TW dated October 7, 2022, on the socio-economic development and ensuring national defense and security in the Southeast region to 2030, with a vision to 2045*. Hanoi.
- Powell, R. (2023). 11 May between 12:45–1:30 pm Local Time, While #China's Coast Guard and Maritime Militia Moved Eastward through #Vietnam's Oil & Gas Fields in the #SouthChinaSea, China Coast Guard Vessel 4303 Twice Abruptly Cut off Vietnam Coast Guard Ship CSB 7011. Hat Tip to @SCS_news For... [Tweet]. *X (formerly Twitter)*.
<https://twitter.com/GordianKnotRay/status/1656684637748592642>
- Terluin, I. J. (2003). Differences in economic development in rural regions of advanced countries: an overview and critical analysis of theories. *Journal of rural studies*, 19(3), 327–344. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167\(02\)00071-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167(02)00071-2)