

Original article. Historical science

UDC 327(597)

DOI: 10.31696/2072-8271-2026-2-2-71-175-187

VIETNAM AND THE RCEP: A DIGITAL PERSPECTIVE

Evgeny A. KANAEV ¹, Anna A. BEREZHNYAYA ²

^{1,2} HSE University, Moscow, Russia

¹ ekanaev@hse.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7988-4210>

² aaberezhnaya_2@edu.hse.ru, <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0893-5291>

Abstract: The article examines the significance and the place of the digital tools developed by the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in the priorities of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). On tracing the RCEP's origins, evolution, and interim outcomes obtained to date, the article proceeds with assessing the efficiency of the RCEP's digital tools to finally turn to scrutinizing the degree of their significance for Vietnam. The authors argue that although the RCEP is a potentially promising direction of ASEAN's policy, its shortcomings in comparison with ASEAN+1 FTAs and other Asia-Pacific initiatives of economic regionalism, mostly, the CPTTP, matter all the stronger in the priorities of the RCEP's countries. Notwithstanding this, the RCEP offers Vietnam a possibility for maintaining an optimum balance between the economic feedback and national security considerations, which best serves its interest. The research findings contribute to assessing the RCEP's digital tools vis-à-vis other multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements across the Asia-Pacific region in the policy planning of the RCEP's countries. Although extant studies have explored various aspects of the RCEP, including its digital provisions, there is still a dearth of academic research on the extent to which the RCEP fits into the priorities of its participants. Consequently, the paper has obvious academic novelty and political relevance, as well as theoretical and practical significance.

Keywords: *RCEP, evolution, digital provisions, electronic commerce, Vietnam, digital projects and initiatives, prospects for synergy*

For citation: Kanaev E.A., Berezhnaya A.A. Vietnam and the RCEP: A Digital Perspective. *Yugo-Vostochnaya Aziya: aktual'nyye problemy razvitiya*, 2026, Vol. 2, № 2 (71). Pp. 175–187. DOI: 10.31696/2072-8271-2026-2-2-71-175-187

Научная статья. Исторические науки

ВЬЕТНАМ И ВРЭП: ЦИФРОВОЕ ИЗМЕРЕНИЕ

Евгений Александрович КАНАЕВ¹, Анна Алексеевна БЕРЕЖНАЯ²

^{1,2} НИУ ВШЭ, Москва, Россия

¹ ekanaev@hse.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7988-4210>

² aaberezhnaya_2@edu.hse.ru, <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0893-5291>

Аннотация: В статье проанализированы значимость и место цифровых инструментов, разрабатываемых участниками Всеобъемлющего регионального экономического партнерства (ВРЭП), в приоритетах Социалистической Республики Вьетнам (СРВ). Рассмотрев истоки, эволюцию и промежуточные итоги деятельности ВРЭП, достигнутые к настоящему времени, статья дает оценку эффективности цифровых инструментов ВРЭП, и далее – степень их значимости для Вьетнама. С точки зрения авторов, хотя ВРЭП является потенциально многообещающим направлением политики АСЕАН, значимость его недостатков в сравнении с ЗСТ АСЕАН+1 и другими азиатско-тихоокеанскими инициативами экономического регионализма, главным образом – ВПТПП, имеет тенденцию к усилению в восприятии стран-участниц ВРЭП. Несмотря на это, ВРЭП предоставляет Вьетнаму возможность достичь оптимального баланса между экономической отдачей и соображениями национальной безопасности, наилучшим образом отвечая его интересам. Результаты проведенного исследования позволяют уточнить оценку цифровых инструментов ВРЭП по сравнению с другими многосторонними и двусторонними соглашениями о свободной торговле на азиатско-тихоокеанском пространстве в политическом планировании стран-участниц ВРЭП. Хотя подготовлено множество работ по различным сторонам ВРЭП, включая его положения о цифровом сотрудничестве, исследований того, в какой мере цифровые инструменты ВРЭП отвечает приоритетам ее участников, не проводилось. Соответственно, настоящая работа имеет бесспорную научную новизну и политическую актуальность, равно как теоретическую и практическую значимость.

Ключевые слова: ВРЭП, эволюция, положения о сотрудничестве в цифровом пространстве, электронная коммерция, Вьетнам, цифровые проекты и инициативы, перспективы координации

Для цитирования: Канаев Е.А., Бережная А.А. Вьетнам и ВРЭП: цифровое измерение // Юго-Восточная Азия: актуальные проблемы развития, 2026, Том 2, № 2 (71). С. 175–187. DOI: 10.31696/2072-8271-2026-2-2-71-175-187

It has become commonplace to argue that the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a multilateral trade initiative with considerable potential. Remarkably, the RCEP is the only Asia-Pacific trade format that includes the countries of Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. At the same time, practice has demonstrated that initial expectations about the RCEP do not fully respond to the results obtained to date.

Notably, the RCEP aims to keep abreast with the ever-increasing digital transformation. Because of this, the RCEP's agenda attaches profound significance to digital tools to support its activity. Since all the RCEP participants are undergoing digital transformation, the RCEP's digital agenda is taken into consideration by their policy-planning agencies and corporate sector.

Currently, the RCEP remains an attractive policy direction for many of its member countries. Among the latter, Vietnam that implements large-scale national digital programs and aims to expand its global footprint is of special note. In light of this, to explore the RCEP's digital tools in Vietnam's priorities and policy is a timely and relevant exercise.

The RCEP: Evolution and Interim Results

The launch of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership was a product of geopolitical competition across the Asia-Pacific region, which influenced upon ASEAN's policy, but simultaneously fit into its prospective plans. In the former regard, it was evidenced by deepening controversy between China and Japan after the East Asia Summit was established. More to the point, the association felt increasing pressure from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, as four of ASEAN countries joined it. In the latter, the association had announced its plans to establish the ASEAN Community, with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) as its central pillar, and aimed to develop a pan-regional ASEAN-friendly economic ecosystem as an external contour that would support the AEC.

The RCEP idea was floated in November 2011 as a compromise between the Chinese proposal East Asia Free Trade Area (EAFTA) and the Japanese counter-idea Comprehensive Economic Partnership in East Asia (CEPEA). Instrumentally, it aimed to unify ASEAN+1 FTAs between the association and its partners of the East Asia Summit. The negotiations on the RCEP establishment started in 2012. Although initially they were expected to be finalized in 2015, the RCEP agreement was signed only in November 2020. Practically, it demonstrated that ASEAN, as the RCEP coordinator, remained committed to trade liberalization (which was especially important, as the RCEP inauguration took place amid the COVID-19 pandemic). No

less notably, the RCEP has become an economic background of the ASEAN-led cooperative security system in the Asia-Pacific region that includes the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). Additionally, China expanded its trade policy tools across the RCEP area, while the US possibilities diminished. In this context, trade frictions between the US and China with a ripple effect on the region, as well as on the world at large, were among the major drivers of the RCEP negotiations and a reason behind their finalization¹. Notably, India had left the RCEP talks owing to “significant outstanding issues that remain unresolved²”, which somewhat decreased the RCEP’s potential as a driver of global economic development.

But even without India, the RCEP is an economically and commercially promising multilateral format. It has good chances to contribute to intensifying trade, investment and technological exchanges across its geographic domain. Additionally, it is a crucial rule-setter in international trade and a driver of the GVC development. The fact that the RCEP embraces countries with both advanced and relatively modest economic possibilities means that the RCEP contributes to levelling the playing field across its area and, by extension, bridging the intra-regional development gaps.

The RCEP entered into force in January 2022. Since then, its implementation has been taking place in specific circumstances. Specifically, China aims to synergize the RCEP with the tools of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with an emphasis on trans-boundary infrastructure construction³. More specifically, the US-China disagreements have intensified and acquired a new dimension. While some time ago, their contradictions centered on the US bans to use the equipment and technologies produced in the PRC, now Washington aims to reorganize East Asian global value chains (GVC) to its best advantage of its national and corporate interests. Trying to hedge potential risks, as well as diversify commercial possibilities, extra-regional companies operating in Southeast Asia adopted the strategies “China Plus One” or “China Plus Many” to relocate their production networks to other regions, including Southeast Asia. Notably, Chinese companies are part of this process. For instance, SAIC-GM-Wuling Haier, CATL, Wuxi Biologics, as well as many others, build their comprehensive commercial ecosystems in Southeast Asia⁴.

Notwithstanding this, expectations about the RCEP’s potential and prospects have sobered. Although the RCEP initially was expected to diminish or, ideally, cancel out the spaghetti bowl effect of regional FTAs, the progress has stalled, as existing FTAs are more attractive across many criteria. Specifically, while the RCEP aims to remove duties on 92% of tariffs

within a period of twenty years⁵, the bilateral arrangements offer better terms. The RCEP's conservative tariff reduction schedule, as well as numerous exceptions and exemptions matter strongly, because of which the corporate sector prefers ASEAN+1 FTAs. More specifically, the RCEP's provisions on trade in services are not as attractive as those offered by the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in terms of market access due to the CPTPP's "negative list" approach. These shortcomings cannot be eliminated quickly due to ASEAN's modality of cooperation. Lastly, East Timor's accession to ASEAN raises the question of the extent to which the country can integrate into ASEAN-led projects and initiatives, including the RCEP. To substantiate, East Timor's share in ASEAN's total merchandise trade stood at negligible 0.03 in 2024⁶. In these circumstances, the corporate sector of the RCEP's participants prefers the existing bilateral FTAs rather than the RCEP. This factor undermines the foundations upon which this multilateral initiative is premised.

Article 20.8 of the RCEP stipulates that a review is to be made five years after the date of entry into force⁷. Among the issues that demand close attention, experts distinguish the tariff reduction schedule and the establishment of the utilization-monitoring mechanism. Additionally, an update of product-specific rules would be timely and relevant⁸. In a rapidly evolving contemporary world, this procedural check-up is necessary, as it allows the initiative to keep abreast with the actual practice. Lastly, the establishment of a fully-fledged RCEP Secretariat as a body that would do all the paperwork and coordinate the RCEP's activity at all levels, from sharing ideas and best practices on trade issues to coordinating prospective plans of the RCEP's participants, would be an appropriate step.

In sum, although the RCEP is a resourceful initiative with a considerable economic and commercial potential, it needs to be strengthened both substantially and institutionally. To what extent the digital dimension responds to this priority and offers its participants effective and powerful tools is an important issue to explore.

The Digital Dimension of the RCEP

The participants of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership attach profound importance to the need to adapt to the ever-increasing digital transformation. Specifically, digital provisions are found in the RCEP's Chapter 3 (Rules of Origin) Chapter 8 (Trade in Services), Chapter 10 (Investment) and Chapter 19 (Dispute Settlement). Most importantly, however, Chapter 12 (Electronic Commerce) completely focuses upon

transactions in the digital field. Addressing these chapters, several points are noteworthy.

Chapter 3 outlines the RCEP's rules of origin regime and establishes procedures aimed at facilitating trade through greater administrative efficiency and upgrading customs administration practices. The chapter specifies the usage of electronic tools and supports the simplification of origin-related procedures. While Chapter 3 is not exclusively digital, its provisions indirectly contribute to intensification of digital trade by reducing paperwork, lowering transaction costs, and enabling more efficient cross-border commercial operations. The facilitation of electronic documentation turnover, as well as customs modernization measures, aims to strengthen regional GVC across the RCEP area and support a transition toward digitally enabled trade processes⁹. Notwithstanding this, differences in product-specific rules and compliance requirements may increase administrative and verification costs for companies, especially for MSME. More restrictive origin requirements can reduce incentives of the corporate sector to utilize preferential tariffs because the costs of proving origin may exceed expected trade benefits¹⁰.

Chapter 8 stipulates that the parties are to progressively liberalize trade in services and establish transparent, predictable, and non-discriminatory conditions for service suppliers. The chapter has substantial implications for intra-RCEP cooperation in the digital space because many services are delivered electronically across borders. Through commitments related to market access, national treatment, and regulatory transparency, the chapter supports the development of digital service sectors, including online platforms, professional services, information technologies, and telecommunications-enabled activities¹¹.

Chapter 10 focuses on investment liberalization and protection, establishing conditions that aimed at encouraging trans-boundary investment flows and improving investor confidence. In the context of digital transformation, the chapter is especially relevant to investments in digital infrastructure, cloud technologies, innovation ecosystems, telecommunication networks, and technology-intensive sectors. Since digital economic growth crucially depends on infrastructure development and investment in technologies, Chapter 10 serves as an important institutional foundation for the digital transformation of the RCEP's participants¹².

In Chapter 19, issues relevant to dispute settlement are considered. The chapter outlines procedures for consultations and institutional dispute resolution aimed at ensuring legal certainty and improving the implementation of commitments. At the same time, the dispute settlement framework remains relatively flexible and consultation-oriented. A notable limitation

relates to obligations under Chapter 12 (Electronic Commerce) that are excluded from compulsory dispute settlement during the initial implementation period, which weakens enforceability in one of RCEP's most important areas of cooperation in the digital field. This factor evidences a cautious approach adopted by the RCEP's participants toward regulating emerging digital issues¹³.

As stated above, most of the RCEP's digital provisions are outlined in a special chapter, namely, Chapter 12. Although Article 12.2 (Point 2a) states that the objectives of the Chapter are to "... promote electronic commerce among the Parties and the wider use of electronic commerce globally", clarity is missing. In fact, Article 12.1 does not specify what the term "electronic commerce" means, while detailing on "computing facilities", "covered persons", "electronic authentication" and "unsolicited commercial electronic message". Additionally, the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Commerce 1996 and the UN Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts (New York Convention 2005) are mentioned as the documents that are to be taken into account by the RCEP's countries. As these documents were elaborated on long before the current digital transformation, they cannot be used as templates. Overall, experts note that the RCEP's e-commerce provisions are not as attractive to investors as those of the CPTPP across multiple criteria¹⁴.

Summing up major challenges that the RCEP is encountering, some points are noteworthy. Many of the RCEP's provisions, for instance, those regarding personal data protection, are no more than aspirational goals and can be neglected for public security reasons. The rules about data flows and the source code disclosure are vague. Simultaneously, as exemplified by ASEAN-China Free Trade Area 3.0 or the upgraded ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area, trade cooperation between ASEAN and its external partners is progressing regardless the RCEP. This factor undermines expectations to eliminate the "noodle bowl" effect in the regional economic landscape, which was behind the establishment of the RCEP.

Another factor to consider relates to major implications of East Timor's accession to ASEAN for the RCEP and its prospects in the digital field. Arguably, East Timor cannot contribute substantially to the implementation of ASEAN-led both non-digital and digital projects and initiatives. As the RCEP lacks CPTPP-like accession requirements, according to which newcomers are to respond to very high standards of market access, integrating East Timor into the RCEP will be difficult under any scenario.

Lastly, fragmented regulation on data localization and conservative approached to data transfers adopted by many RCEP's participants

undermine trans-boundary cooperation across the RCEP's area. Understandably, this factor discourages both non-digital and platform companies to expand their activity across Southeast Asia on a long-term and sustainable basis.

As demonstrated by the afore-discussed developments, the RCEP aims to respond to the ever-intensifying digital transformation and develops its digital tools. Notwithstanding these plans, many obstacles hinder their effective implementation due to a compromise wording of the RCEP provisions and differences between its participants over the crucial aspects of cooperation in the digital field.

The Vietnam Connection

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) pays close attention to enhancing its digital competitiveness. From a visionary perspective, the SRV's government expects that the digital economy will account for 30% of the country's GDP by 2030¹⁵. For comparison, this indicator stood at 12.87% in 2021¹⁶. As planned, the contribution will come mainly from agriculture, tourism, garment and textiles, logistics, and processing-manufacturing. Importantly, the country sees the development of digital infrastructure, mostly, the construction and maintenance of data centers, as a high priority¹⁷. Apart from it, 99% of the population is planned to be covered by 5G internet services by 2030¹⁸.

In 2020, the country published National Digital Transformation Program to 2025, with Orientation to 2030. Its objectives focus on developing digital government (in order to improve the quality of public services), digital economy (to foster innovation, creativity and business growth) and digital society (to raise living standards and expand access to technology)¹⁹. It is synergized with the SRV's plans to make Vietnam an upper-middle income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2045²⁰. Taken together, these priorities evidence that Vietnam is serious about both its vision of the digital transformation and is ready to substantiate its plans with practical actions.

The country undertakes niche-orientated initiatives as supportive measures. Among them, the National E-Government Architecture Framework and the National Public Service portal, focusing upon interoperability among government agencies and access to online public services, deserve mentioning.

Additionally, the SRV pays close attention to the institutions tasked to monitor and shape the digital transformation. Specifically, the Vietnam National Committee on Digital Transformation, a cross-ministerial committee chaired by the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of

Information and Communications, was established in 2021. Three years later, this body identified key directions of the digital transformation of the SRV's economy, namely, the IT industry, industrial digitization, digital administration, and digital data. Apart from it, the development of Vietnam's digital economy falls within the responsibilities of the Ministry of Information and Communications, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, and the Ministry of Public Security²¹.

A point to make individually relates to Vietnam's intention to use digital tools for combating corruption and other illegal or semi-legal practices. This is especially important, as the country harbors ambitions to become a regional economic powerhouse, as well as a safe and attractive investment destination.

A notable part of the SRV's efforts relates to the development of the national Artificial Intelligence (AI) ecosystem. These efforts started 2021 when the Decision No. 127/QĐ-TTg 2021 the national strategy for artificial intelligence research through 2030 was adopted. It was followed by other documents, not necessarily focusing upon AI, but acting as its supportive tools, like Decree No. 13/2023/ND-CP on Personal Data Protection (effective since July 2023) or Law on Electronic Transactions (effective since July 2024), which culminated in Law on Artificial Intelligence 2025 (effective since March 2026). The latter is a comprehensive legal framework with a broad regulatory scope that sets AI governance principles, as well as balances innovations, security, and ethical standards²². Collectively, these efforts evidence that the Vietnamese government realizes the importance of AI tools as a crucial factor of national development and competitiveness.

In line with these policy steps, Vietnam develops its AI tools. Examples include, but are not limited to, ViGPT (often referred to as Vietnamese ChatGPT), PhoGPT and FPT GenAI. As Vietnam's approach to AI aims to balance security and development, national large language models fit into this task. To substantiate, ViGPT focuses specifically on Vietnamese history, law, regional characteristics, etc.²³ A strengthening focus on the national AI tools minimizes, at least theoretically, external influence on the SRV's development.

Lastly, the SRV fosters the activity of local AI startups and their transboundary expansion. Promising examples include Trusting Social (virtual assistants for doing business), Elsa (an app for learning English), Engarm Agritech (smart farming solutions) and some others. Overall, Vietnamese startups expand the usage AI tools in their grass-root activity. Remarkably, the number of Vietnamese startups operating in the AI and machine learning field is second only to Singapore among the ASEAN member states²⁴.

The afore-presented overview of Vietnam's efforts to foster the national digital transformation would be incomplete without discussing major challenges that the country is encountering. A conservative approach to data localization strongly matters due to a high place of national security considerations in Vietnam's order of priority²⁵. Digital infrastructure deficiencies in rural areas deserve mentioning. Micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) mostly ignore digital tools. Remarkably, Vietnam's MSME were ahead only those of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar according to the criterion "Productivity, technology and innovation" in the SME Policy Index ASEAN 2024²⁶. Lastly, the skill gap factor is a case in point. While currently few Vietnamese employees possess necessary AI skills, demand for them is expected to increase 74% between 2025 and 2030²⁷.

Theoretically, cooperation within the RCEP framework is of profound significance to the SRV. In 2020-2035, according to the World Bank data, Vietnam's export growth will be higher than that of its RCEP partners, accounting for 11.4%²⁸. Coupled with promising opportunities to cooperate in the digital field that the RCEP offers, this interest is easy to explain.

Practice, however, reveals Vietnam's relatively modest activity towards the RCEP. Examples of the initiatives offered and implemented by the SRV are few. Among them, "Promoting the utilization of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), especially in the field of digital trade, with the participation of the private sector and stakeholders", with a focus on raising awareness and capacity-building, deserves mentioning²⁹. Additionally, the "Go Global" format that aims to support market entry strategies of Vietnamese enterprises, including by means of the RCEP's digital tools is a case in point. Against this background, Vietnamese specialists regard the RCEP as a tool to foster the trans-boundary MSME activity by reducing tariffs, simplifying customs procedures, and utilizing the possibilities of global value chains, to mention selected advantages³⁰.

In sum, cooperation within the RCEP framework, including in the digital field, holds promise to the SRV. The country implements numerous projects and initiatives aimed at raising its digital competitiveness, because of which it can coordinate its plans with cooperation in the RCEP format. Contrary to expectations, however, Vietnam has adopted a relatively passive approach to exploring the RCEP's digital opportunities.

Conclusion

The analysis of how Vietnam uses the digital component of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership as a tool to raise its competitiveness leads to several assessments.

Due to its economic and commercial potential, the RCEP is a powerful tool for ASEAN to strengthen its international positions. Notwithstanding this, ample evidence suggests that expectations about the RCEP's feedback will be diluted by ASEAN+1 FTAs, as the latter offer better market entry opportunities with fewer obstacles. The initial euphoria about the RCEP seems to have shifted to more realistic appraisals.

Cooperation in the RCEP format is advantageous to Vietnam, as the latter regards integration into regional and global economic processes as a high priority. In light of this, the RCEP fits into the SRV's prospective plans, including those in the digital field. Although to overestimate the RCEP's significance would hardly be expedient, as alternatives are available, nevertheless, the RCEP's broad range of digital tools and flexibility are exactly what the SRV needs, since the country aims to maintain a balance between commercial feedback and national security considerations.

In sum, the assessment that Hanoi regards the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership as a reliable safety mechanism that allows hedging risks and diversifying possibilities seems to be objective and balanced. Realistically, this approach is likely to prevail in the policy planning of the SRV's leadership in the years to come.

ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРАХ

КАНАЕВ Евгений Александрович, доктор исторических наук, профессор НИУ ВШЭ, Москва, Россия

БЕРЕЖНАЯ Анна Алексеевна, студентка магистерской образовательной программы «Международная торговая политика» НИУ ВШЭ, Москва, Россия

Вклад авторов: все авторы сделали эквивалентный вклад в подготовку публикации. Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Статья поступила в редакцию 15.05.2026; одобрена после рецензирования 29.05.2026; принята к публикации 30.05.2026.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Evgeny A. KANAEV, DSc (History), Professor, HSE University, Moscow, Russia

Anna A. BEREZHNYAYA, Student, Master's Programme "International Trade Policy", HSE University, Moscow, Russia

Contributions of the authors: the authors contributed equality to this article. The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

The article was submitted 15.05.2026; approved 29.05.2026; accepted to publication 30.05.2026.

¹ For more detail, see: Simizu K. The ASEAN Economic Community and the RCEP in the World Economy // Journal of Contemporary East Asian Studies. 2021. Vol. 10. № 1. P. 1-23.

² Pattanayak B. RCEP Remains Distant Dream: India's Return to Thins Free Trade Agreement Not Imminent. Financial Express. November 18, 2019. URL: <https://www.bilaterals.org/?rcep-remains-distant-dream-india-s>

³ How Can RCEP and the BRI Be Mutually Reinforcing? Our China Story. February 29, 2024. URL: <https://www.ourchinastory.com/en/11645/Belt&Road%EF%BD%9CHow-can-RCEP-and-the-BRI-be-mutually-reinforcing?>

⁴ See: Why Chinese Companies Miss When Expanding Supply Chains into Southeast Asia. ARC Group Insights. December 3, 2025. URL: <https://arc-group.com/chinese-companies-expanding-supply-chains-southeast-asia/>; Yeow C. Chinese Enterprise Expansion into Southeast Asia. HRnetOne. April 17, 2026. URL: <https://www.hrnetone.com/chinese-enterprise-expansion-southeast-asia/>

⁵ Customs Amendment (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement Implementation) Bill 2021 [and] Customs Tariff Amendment (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement Implementation) Bill 2021. Parliament of Australia. October 18, 2021. URL: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd2122a/22bd024

⁶ Figure 2.2.2. Merchandise Trade Share and Growth Rate (%) by ASEAN Member State, 2024. ASEAN Key Figures. Jakarta: the ASEAN Secretariat, 2025. P. 42. URL: https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/AKF-2025_v3_202601151314.pdf

⁷ Article 20.8: General Review. Chapter 20. Final Provision. RCEP Text. URL: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/rcep-chapter-20.pdf>

⁸ Banh Thi Hang. Strengthening ASEAN's Economic Resilience through RCEP's 2027 Review. The Business Times. April 21, 2026. URL: <https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/opinion-features/strengthening-aseans-economic-resilience-through-rceps-2027-review>

⁹ Chapter 3. Rules of Origin. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement [n.d.]. URL: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Regional-Comprehensive-Economic-Partnership-RCEP-Agreement-Full-Text.pdf>

¹⁰ Kohpaiboon A., Jongwanich J. (2022) "Restrictiveness of RCEP Rules of Origin: Implications for Global Value Chains in East Asia" URL: <https://ideas.repec.org/h/era/chaptr/2022-rcep2-3.html?utm>

¹¹ Parliament of Australia. Report 196: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement – Trade in Services. Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. August 2021. URL: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Treaties/RCEP/Report_196/section?id=committees%2Freportjnt%2F024720%2F76919&

¹² Chapter 10 (Investment). Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement [n.d.] URL: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Regional-Comprehensive-Economic-Partnership-RCEP-Agreement-Full-Text.pdf>

¹³ Lando M. Enhancing Conflict Resolution "ASEAN Way": the Dispute Settlement System of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership // Journal of International Dispute Settlement. 2022. Vol. 13. Issue 1. P. 98-120, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jnlids/idac001>

¹⁴ Kisley J. Opportunities and Challenges for ASEAN and East Asia from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership on E-Commerce. ERIA Discussion Paper Series No 443. September 2022. URL: <https://www.eria.org/uploads/media/discussion-papers/FY22/Opportunities-and-Challenges-for-ASEAN-and-East-Asia-from-the-RCEP-on-E-Commerce.pdf>

¹⁵ Digital Economy Helps Power Breakthrough Growth. Vietnam Pictorial. February 6, 2026. URL: <https://vietnam.vnanet.vn/english/tin-tuc/digital-economy-helps-power-breakthrough-growth-427613.html>

¹⁶ Anh Nhi. Digital Economy Contributes 14.02% to Vietnam's GDP. VnEconomy. January 7, 2026. URL: <https://en.vneconomy.vn/digital-economy-contributes-1402-to-vietnams-gdp.htm>

¹⁷ Vietnam Country Commercial Guide. US International Trade Administration. September 20, 2024. URL: <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/vietnam-digital-economy>

¹⁸ Thuy Dung. Gov't Approves Digital Infrastructure Strategy. Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Government News. October 10, 2024. URL: <https://en.baochinhphu.vn/govt-approves-digital-infrastructure-strategy-11124101010505598.htm>

- ¹⁹ Vietnam Accelerates Digital Transformation: from Policy to Real Actions. Mekong Link. October 23, 2025. URL: <https://mekonglink.asia/vietnam-accelerates-digital-transformation/>
- ²⁰ Gov't Approves Digital Economy Development Strategy. Ministry of Science and Technology. April 4, 2022. URL: <https://english.mst.gov.vn/govt-approves-digital-economy-development-strategy-197153303.htm>
- ²¹ Vietnam Country Commercial Guide. US International Trade Administration. September 20, 2024. URL: <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/vietnam-digital-economy>
- ²² Formalizing Artificial Intelligence Governance: Vietnam's First AI Law. Vietnam Briefing. December 24, 2025. URL: <https://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/vietnams-ai-law-regulatory-milestone-business-implications.html/>
- ²³ Vu Ha Van. ViGPT Proves Vietnam's High-Technology Mastery. Vietnamnet Global. January 4, 2024. URL: <https://vietnamnet.vn/en/vigpt-proves-vietnam-s-high-technology-mastery-2234468.html>
- ²⁴ Vietnam AI Landscape 2025: Government Policy, Key Players and Startup Ecosystem. B&Company. December 22, 2025. URL: <https://b-company.jp/vietnam-ai-landscape-2025-government-policy-key-players-and-startup-ecosystem/>
- ²⁵ Kanaev E.A. The Approaches of ASEAN Countries to Data Localization: Implications for ASEAN Integration // Yugo-Vostochnaya Aziya: Aktual'nyye Problemy Razvitiya. 2024. Vol. 3. № 3 (64). P. 11–23. URL: <https://sea.ivran.ru/f/sea2024n364p11-23.pdf>
- ²⁶ Khov Ea Hai, Narjoko D., Bohmer A. SME Policy Index. ASEAN 2024. Enabling Sustainable Growth and Digitalization. ASEAN, ERIA and OECD, 2024. P. 10. URL: https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Brochure_ASEAN-SME-Policy-Index-2024_20-Sept-2024.pdf
- ²⁷ Dieu Anh Nguen. Why Vietnam Is Becoming Southeast Asia's AI Development Hub: Talent, Cost, and Quality Analysis. SmartDev. November 15, 2025. URL: <https://smartdev.com/why-vietnam-is-becoming-southeast-asia-ai-development-hub/>
- ²⁸ RCEP Creates New Momentum for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises to Integrate Internationally. ASEM Connect. December 10, 2025. URL: <https://asemconnectvietnam.gov.vn/default.aspx?ZID1=8&ID1=2&ID8=145950>
- ²⁹ Launching a Project to Promote the Utilization of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement. Vietnam National Trade Repository. March 24, 2026. URL: <https://vntr.moit.gov.vn/news/launching-a-project-to-promote-the-utilization-of-the-regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership-rcep-agreement>
- ³⁰ The RCEP Agreement Continues to Drive Growth for Vietnam's Small and Medium Enterprises. Vietnam National Trade Repository. October 16, 2025. URL: <https://vntr.moit.gov.vn/news/the-rcep-agreement-continues-to-drive-growth-for-vietnams-small-and-medium-enterprises>