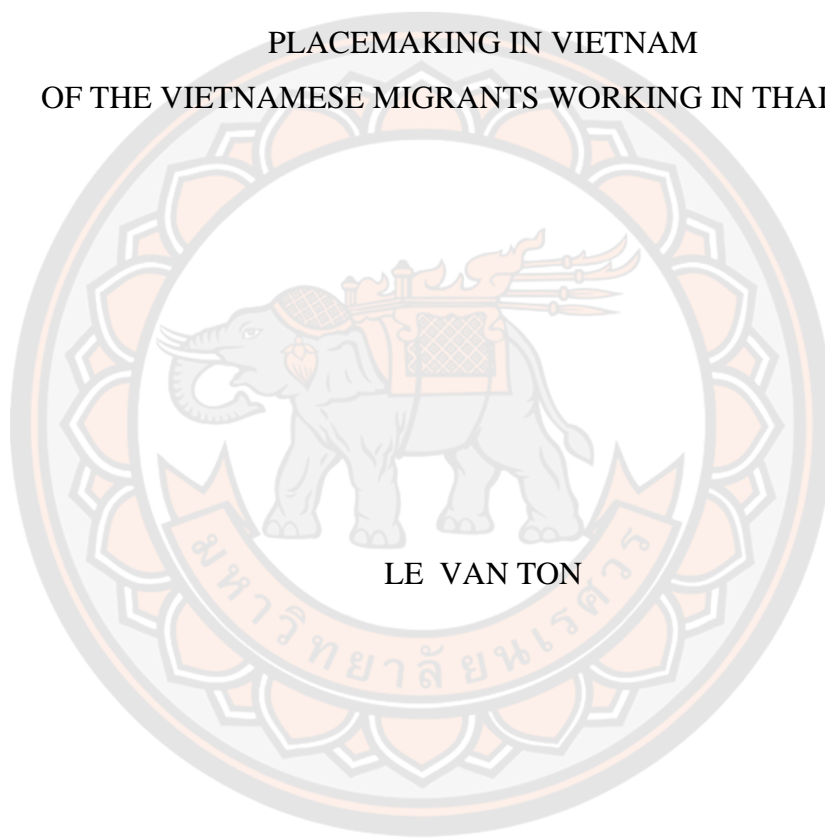




HYBRIDIZING CULTURES AND CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES:
PLACEMAKING IN VIETNAM
OF THE VIETNAMESE MIGRANTS WORKING IN THAILAND



LE VAN TON

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Naresuan University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy in ASEAN Studies - (Type 2.1)

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Vietnam
of the Vietnamese Migrants Working in Thailand "

By Le Van Ton

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for the Doctor of Philosophy in ASEAN Studies - (Type 2.1) of Naresuan University

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes a place called *Làng Thái Lan* (Thailand village) by focusing on the practices of four groups of people in a place: 1) Voluntary repatriated Vietnamese, known as "Việt Kiều hồi hương" (VKHH), who were from Thailand and Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand; 2) Their descendants; 3) New Vietnamese comers; and 4) Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand. This place is distinctive and outstanding compared to nearby areas. The study elaborates on this phenomenon using the concept of a "hybrid place" to pave the way for further exploration of this issue. The research emphasizes the people's practice in relation to the Vietnamese government policy of resettlement VKHH, the policy so-called "Đổi mới" (economic renovation) but still in the regime of socialism, and Thailand's policy of "turning the battlefield to the trading field in the region". The research also examines the geography and social settings of such people and places to identify preliminary issues that centered around "place-making", "hybrid place" and "new ethnic identity". This project utilizes interactionism and particular and constructionism paradigms. To construct the knowledge, the research uses theories and concepts that are relevant to the research issues, context-specific, and research paradigms. These include place-making, hybridization, and identity politics to elaborate the process of cultural

hybridization and the identity construction of Vietnamese who used to live and/or work in Thailand and their pertaining issues.

This research closely examines transnational lives and everyday local practices in specific places to analyze four research objectives. First, to understand the place that Vietnamese migrants, in relation to the three other groups, make in *Làng Thái Lan* (Thailand village), Vietnam. Second, to explore the issues working with migrant community interpretation of their new value related to place-making that the unstable boundaries generated. Third, to analyze the process of capital accumulation, transformation, and conversion of Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand that are involved in place-making in Vietnam. And fourth, to analyze cultural hybridization and identity construction in the place-making process as well as analyze the pertaining issues. This research contributes five main arguments: 1) *Làng Thái Lan* serves as a negotiating space for identity and value for VKHH and Vietnamese migrants in their ancestral country; 2) Dual lives shape the place-making process; 3) The place cultivates a "culture of migration and mobility" through everyday practices and the roles of the actors; 4) The process of placemaking through cultural hybridization can contribute to the development of ASEAN communities from below; 5) Pertaining to the cultural remittance and hybridization of Confucian practice in placemaking.

This research has several implications: Firstly, it contributes to the discourse on ASEAN community building by emphasizing the importance of the ASEAN-from-below perspective. Secondly, to further develop the concept of building the ASEAN Community from below, it is crucial to elaborate on the idea of cultural networks. Thirdly, the interplay between transcultural flows and local power dynamics exerts a profound influence on place-based movements and cultural identities. Finally, through the use of multi-sited ethnography, which links various localities in two countries (Vietnam and Thailand) plus one (Laos) and examines social, cultural, and economic practices in international networks and progressive places, the researchers suggest that multi-sited ethnography should be used to follow people, goods, policy, discourse, ideas, specific problems, and so on across national borders when developing the idea of ASEAN from-below.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and significance of the study

Human existence is inextricably linked to the concept of place. Individuals inhabit and interact with environments imbued with significance, shaping their identities and experiences. As Relph (1976, p.1) aptly states, “*to be human is to live in the world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place.*” This dissertation will analyze the place called *Làng Thái Lan* (Thailand Village), officially known as *Làng Vĩnh Long* (Vĩnh Long Village) as a unique settlement located in Bến Sung Town, Như Thanh District, Thanh Hóa Province, Vietnam. This place is primarily hybrid and inhabited by voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese and Vietnamese migrants, resulting in a distinct cultural fusion and place identity. Throughout Southeast Asia, hybridity has often fostered the emergence of distinctive places where cultures converge with territory, giving rise to novel cultural expressions and place-based identities. *Làng Thái Lan* exemplifies this phenomenon, as its inhabitants have developed innovative products, such as a special brick, buffalo carts, dresses, and unique wines, along with a blend of Thai-Vietnamese cuisine, language, dialect, dance, dress, housing style, and lifestyle. These elements distinguish them from native Vietnamese and have earned them the recognition of *Làng Văn Minh Sáng Tạo* (creatively modern village).

The cultural hybridization in *Làng Thái Lan* emerged six decades ago during the resettlement of voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese from Thailand, known as *Việt Kiều hồi hương* (VKHH). This process led to the creation of a hybrid community, characterized by the fusion of Vietnamese and Thai cultures. Prior to the 1990s, the inhabitants of *Làng Thái Lan* were a blend of VKHH and native Vietnamese, whose cultural hybridity and hybrid identities originated from social interactions, the articulation of cultural differences, and intermarriage. However, the Vietnamese state's policies of *nếp sống mới* (a new way of life) and *xây dựng các vùng kinh tế mới* (building new economic zones), as well as its

efforts to construct a national identity, posed challenges for hybrid places like *Làng Thái Lan*, opening up the space for negotiation.

Furthermore, since the period of market transition under the policy known as *Đổi mới* (economic renovation) initiated in the late 1986, the villagers have engaged in transnational migration to improve their livelihoods. Consequently, this place has become culturally interconnected with other locations. Notably, *Làng Thái Lan* has prospered under these new policies and has adopted a new identity, leading to a transformation in the identity of this hybrid place. Subsequently, the processes of cultural hybridization and identity construction originating from *Làng Thái Lan* have extended to neighboring areas within the Như Thanh district, making Như Thanh a distinctive place. However, this place has continued to face new and complex challenges.

Since the 1990s, *Làng Thái Lan* has become a place of origin for a significant number of migrants working in Thailand. Their economic, social, and cultural remittances to *Làng Thái Lan*, or Như Thanh in general, have contributed to changing the meaning of place through the practices of hybridizing cultures and constructing identities. This process demonstrates the construction of place rather than an essentialist notion of place (Escobar, 2001, p. 143). Due to continuous and dynamic hybridization, the meaning of place has evolved. Based on local perceptions, this place has been referred to as *nơi Việt Kiều Thái Lan hồi hương* (the place of VKHH from Thailand), "*Làng Văn Minh Sáng Tạo*" (creatively modern village), "*Làng Lao Động Thái Lan*" (village of the migrant workers in Thailand), and currently "*Làng Thái Lan*" (Thailand village).

In addition, in reestablishing a sense of place, VKHH tend to reconnect with what they have left behind in the past in Thailand. Therefore, both places and cultures must inevitably coexist with both the external and the local. As Escobar (2001) argued, global forces articulate with local power and knowledge, and they will be converted to be localized forces. Cultural hybridity and identity construction are the conditions that allow us to preserve local characteristics seen through the placemaking process.

To provide a deeper understanding, it is necessary to elaborate on the brief background and dynamics of this place. Located in the upland of Thanh Hóa Province, it

is situated approximately 40 kilometers from the lowland Thanh Hóa City. Prior to 1963, this place known as *Làng Thái Lan* was a community forest belonging to the Tai ethnic minority of Vĩnh Lợi Village. However, in 1911, during the colonial period, this vast forest was occupied and exploited by French colonizers. Approximately 30 years later, due to excessive exploitation of both natural resources and unpaid labor (coolies), the local people resisted the French lords, leading to uprisings.

In 1945, local uprising movements guided by the Communist Party of Vietnam successfully defeated the French colonizers and overthrew their puppet government, establishing control over this area in 1945. During the period of 1963-5, this place was allocated to VKHH who had left various provinces in Thailand. This repatriation was the result of an agreement made on August 14, 1959, between the Thai Red Cross Society and the Red Cross Society of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Numerous Vietnamese migrants in Thailand gradually returned home from January 1960 to August 1965. This repatriation aimed to support President Hồ Chí Minh of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in nation-building and was also motivated by oppressive policies and pressure from the Thai government. However, only approximately 60 percent of the overseas Vietnamese in Thailand returned home. Reasons for not returning included old age, travel inconveniences related to having children, and the perceived high risk of starting a new life in Vietnam. Notably, this repatriation process was halted in August 1964 due to the US empire's invasion of Northeast Vietnam in April 1946. To protect the lives of Việt Kiều from the American empire's threat, the Hanoi government requested that Việt Kiều temporarily cease their repatriation in August 1964. This explains why, out of the total 100,000 Việt Kiều in Thailand who had registered to return to Vietnam at that time, only 54,636 people were able to repatriate, utilizing 75 ships (Poole, 1970).

For the first two ship-trips back to Vietnam, the government designated VKHH to reside in the industrial zones of Hải Phòng and Nam Định Provinces in the North Region. Subsequent ships were directed to the new economic zones (vùng kinh tế mới) in Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh, and Hòa Bình Provinces in the North-Central region. Some VKHH lived alongside local villages, while others established their own communities called "*Làng Thái*" (Thai village) or "*Phố Thái*" (Thai town), particularly

in Hòa Bình province. In Thanh Hóa, three Thailand villages, known as *Làng Thái Lan*, were established. These VKHH settlements are situated in the uplands of Thanh Hóa province, specifically in (1) Bền Sung commune, Như Thanh district, (2) Thành Vân commune, Thạch Thành district, and (3) Ngọc Lặc commune, Ngọc Lặc district.

Despite being liberated from Thai mistreatment upon their return home, VKHH faced significant challenges in overcoming the hardships of resettlement and starvation. They were placed in forested areas with limited infrastructure, cultivation, public healthcare, and education, constituting a basic lack of human security in terms of freedom from want. These conditions resembled those of a harsh new economic zone or even a forest, suggesting a form of neglect towards the VKHH. This placement can be attributed to their decision to flee to Thailand for survival and their perceived lack of patriotism. Additionally, those who had contributed to the communist party by working as activists in Thailand were given preferential treatment and placed in urban centers such as Hanoi and Hải Phòng. In the absence of housing, VKHH in Như Thanh initially resided with Tai people at *Làng Vĩnh Lợi* (Vĩnh Lợi Village), occupying the first floor of stilt houses without walls for two years. By 1965, *Làng Thái Lan* had 62 households with 300 VKHH members, each of whom was allocated 1,500m² of land by the Như Xuân district government. This land was located on a nearby hill, approximately 500m from Vĩnh Lợi Village, and included residential land and garden land along Highway 45. The VKHH constructed their own houses and reclaimed farmland on the allocated land, establishing their own community.

Returning to the situation in Thailand, from 1960 to 1976, the Thai government's policy on communist resistance in collaboration with the United States of America led to a growing antagonistic relationship between Vietnam and Thailand. Thai authorities suspected that overseas Vietnamese (*Việt Kiều*) were spies for the *Việt Minh*, who were engaged in communist resistance with the support of the United States army. This policy fostered a negative perception of *Việt Kiều*, who were accused of being terrorists and subjected to various forms of discrimination. They were prohibited from participating in trade, forcibly relocated to the southern region of Thailand, imprisoned, and their children were denied access to education. Additionally, their property was confiscated, and they were forbidden from teaching

the Vietnamese language or practicing their culture and religion. As a result, *Việt Kiều* faced severe hardships and were compelled to flee their communities in search of alternative places to live, despite the illegality of moving out of their designated areas.

In Vietnam, VKHH were subjected to official surveillance and scrutiny to determine their loyalty to the nation. This was due to the prevailing belief among the government and Vietnamese people that those who had fled abroad during wartime were traitors or collaborators with colonial invaders. Consequently, VKHH were placed in specific locations to facilitate observation and control of their behavior by the socialist state. Some VKHH were considered non-nationals and were not accepted by the local population. The harsh conditions led some VKHH to attempt to flee Vietnam, but they were apprehended and punished by the authorities.

Following the economic renovation to a market-driven economy known as “*Đổi mới*” in December 1986, the livelihoods of Vietnamese people underwent significant changes. The new market economy had a profound impact on the socio-demographic dynamics among the villagers in *Làng Thái Lan*. Concurrently, Chatchai Chunhawan's government in 1988 implemented the Thai policy of “changing the battlefield to be the trading field” (“*pliean sa nam rop hai pen sa nam kan ka*” in Thailand). This policy fostered regional peace and economic collaboration, leading to the opening of border gates among Indochina countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. It facilitated the movement of people and commodities, among other things. Moreover, this policy contributed to the acceptance of Vietnamese living in Thailand. With increased flexibility and legal support, including the granting of Thai citizenship, Vietnamese migrants were able to engage freely in trade and pursue various occupations. Many found employment in agricultural fields, while others ventured into businesses such as grocery stores, Vietnamese restaurants, noodle shops, motorbike shops, gas stations, construction, beauty salons, garages, clothing factories, and tourism. Currently, overseas Vietnamese have become local capitalists and elites in at least two provinces of Thailand - Nakhon Phanom and Nong Khai. These provinces are also considered centers of overseas Vietnamese culture. Vietnamese entrepreneurs have established the Thai-Vietnamese business association to support business cooperation and promote investment and trade between Vietnam

and Thailand. The association has over 1,100 Vietnamese members and engages in various activities related to investment, production, and business (Khoa, 2016, p.112).

Based on kinship networks, *Làng Thái Lan* became a place of origin for illegal migrants to Thailand. The strong connections between VKHH in Vietnam and overseas Vietnamese (Việt Kiều) in Thailand who did not return home in the 1960s facilitated the formation and development of a migrant transnational network. At least one bus trip transporting migrants to Bangkok, Thailand departs every week. The transnational lives of VKHH became intertwined with economic, social, and cultural realities in the context of transnational labor mobility. From a macro perspective, this increased mobility of Vietnamese migrants in Thailand led to a significant rise in their numbers from 1990 to 2016. During this period, the total number of Vietnamese migrants in Thailand grew from 110,000 to 160,000, an increase of 50,000 (Khoa, 2016, p.70). The majority of these migrants are undocumented and work illegally.

Due to its favorable geographical location, proximity to home, accessibility by bus, and well-developed infrastructure, Thailand is a more popular labor market for Vietnamese migrants from *Như Thanh* compared to South Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Saudi Arabia. Additionally, traveling to Thailand is less complicated and less expensive than to other countries, as brokers are not required and the cost is approximately 100-150 US\$ with a travel time of nearly 2 hours (Thông tấn xã Việt Nam, 2019).

Based on fieldwork data, the majority of Vietnamese migrants in the initial years of their arrival in Thailand engaged in full-time labor. Male workers primarily occupied positions in car parking services, construction, and as restaurant waitstaff. Female workers were employed as seamstresses (similar to their male counterparts), housemaids, and caregivers for the elderly. While these occupations did not necessitate a highly educated workforce, there were also instances of educated Vietnamese migrants accepting unskilled jobs in Thailand for higher wages. Migrants who opted for self-employment established stalls, became street vendors, sedan hawkers, or flower peddlers. Some even secured subcontracting roles in the garment industry, supply firms, and other sectors.

Ideally, Vietnamese migrants did not intend to remain as employees indefinitely. Their primary goal was to accumulate capital and transition into entrepreneurship, either as subcontractors for larger companies or as owners of food establishments. This is exemplified by the case of Mr. Linh, who arrived in Thailand in 2007 and initially worked in a factory in Ayutthaya Province upon the recommendation of his relatives. Within three months, he had acquired proficiency in sewing pants. After five years with the same factory, he made the decision to resign due to the insufficient income. In 2012, he joined his elder brother, who was also a subcontractor for a different pant-sewing company. Under the piece-wage system, he could dedicate approximately 15 hours to work, earning between 35,000 and 50,000 Baht per month. This allowed him to remit a more substantial amount of money to his family in Nhu Thanh.

Vietnamese people prioritize not only financial gain but also the establishment and maintenance of close and reciprocal relationships (*giúp đỡ lẫn nhau*), which are considered a moral imperative (*đức*). Particularly when abroad, they often recreate a social network (or “social institution”) known as the Vietnamese “*đồng hương*” (countryman). According to Bourdieu's concept, social capital is defined as a “durable network” of institutionalized relationships characterized by mutual acquaintance or recognition (Chen 2005, 50; Schuller et al. 2000, 4). For female migrants, maintaining networks of friendship (*người thân hữu*) and family (*dòng họ, gia đình*) is essential for establishing trust while away from home. Vietnamese transnational migrants must integrate into these social networks (networks of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition) (Chen 2005, 50; Schuller et al. 2000, 4). These networks are indispensable for the social networks built by female migrants. These networks have been a crucial factor in the influx of Vietnamese migrant mobility to Thailand since the 1990s.

Furthermore, in the pursuit of a livelihood, even amidst vulnerability, migrants have been able to accumulate economic, cultural, and social capital and convert these forms of capital into one another. Building on the previous discussion, through the concept of capital accumulation, I aim to highlight how migrants combine, circulate, and transform each type of capital (social, cultural, and economic) in their efforts to make a living and construct their homeland in Vietnam as a place. I will explore the

sets of cultural norms (in) visible social institutions embedded in religious ideals that facilitate their identity construction and place making.

Examined through the lens of “religious ideals expressing their identities” embedded in economic, social, and cultural practices, it becomes evident that their transnational lives are not only significant in the establishment of social networks and social institutions as mentioned above, but also in the co-creation of the living between people and spirits (Achariya & Tôn, 2022). Specifically, people typically worship: (1) the spirit of land and river (*đất có thổ công, sông có hà bá*), (2) the spirit of wealth (*thần tài*), (3) the spirit protecting ourselves (*thần bản mệnh*), and (4) spirits of place (*thần địa phương*). All spirits transborder together with the migrants, shaping their environment and infusing meaning into the places called “*Làng Thái Lan*” and *Như Thanh*. Furthermore, their human existence is guided by Confucian ideals that express their identities. These ideals include *đức* (morality), *tài* (economic ability), *phúc* (happiness), *lộc* (prosperity), and *thọ* (longevity). Thus, being a transnational migrant worker is an endeavor to accumulate various forms of capital in order to convert them into the fulfillment of such ideals that express their identities.

Thus, the subsequent focus of this research is to comprehend the religious lives of transnational migrants, particularly the role of religious ideals in expressing Vietnamese identities and shaping placemaking. For instance, the Confucian ideals of *tài*, *đức*, *lộc*, *phúc*, and *thọ*, as mentioned earlier, play a significant role in this process. This research examines the relationship between people and places through the lens of transnational experiences, where diverse cultures and religions contribute to the formation of place identities (or transnational places in a cultural dimension). Conversely, place also exerts a profound influence on the development and maintenance of individual and group identities (Shamauddin & Ujang, 2008, p. 400).

Undoubtedly, some migrants have been able to accumulate economic surplus. They repatriate this surplus and invest it not only to fulfill material needs but also to achieve their religious ideals and express their identities. From an insider's perspective, Vietnamese people live in close-knit groups, neighborhoods, and communities (*sống với người*) and maintain relationships with spirits (*thần linh*). Upon achieving economic success (*tài*) and returning home, they are expected to contribute material benefits to society to gain 'social

status and social respect (*đức and lộc*), which are considered integral to Vietnamese identity. For example, they are expected to host a feast (*liên hoan*) for their family, relatives, and neighbors (*đức and lộc*). Thus, *liên hoan* can also be viewed as a means of reintegrating themselves into the community by sharing their wealth rather than keeping it all for themselves. Additionally, they are expected to worship and make offerings to spirits (*lộc*) and donate to pagodas and the community (*đức*).

According to Vietnamese beliefs, personal achievements are not solely the result of individual efforts (*tự làm*) but also the result of the blessings of spirits (*lộc bắt tận hưởng*). Therefore, the Vietnamese maxim “*không được ăn hết, phải chia sẻ, lần sau sẽ có lộc*” (meaning – do not eat all, have to share, next time (you) will have more prosperity (*lộc*)) emphasizes the importance of sharing and contributing to the community. Ideally, individuals should not accumulate all their wealth but should allocate a portion to the spirits and the community. This research will explore how people utilize their surplus and invest it in their homeland to achieve their ultimate economic, social, and spiritual goals. Furthermore, it will examine whether these goals have been reinterpreted in the context of neoliberalism and modernity in contemporary Vietnam.

Furthermore, based on my preliminary survey, the villagers' daily life practices can be characterized as hybrid forms of two distinct cultures, deviating from traditional practices. Vietnamese returnees in *Làng Thái Lan*, despite having been back home for decades, continue to engage in Thai cultural practices. They consume Thai television and films. My observations conducted in December 2017 and August 2019 revealed this through their adoption of Thai dress, performance of Thai dance (*ram wong*), and rendition of Thai songs during celebratory events. In terms of cuisine, they occasionally consume sticky rice with their hands, a departure from the Vietnamese custom of using chopsticks. Additionally, they have developed a fondness for Thai dishes such as *lap* (pork chop salad), *xum tam* (papaya salad or 'som tam' in Thai), and *lod chong* (a Thai dessert). Some households have even established Thai food and grocery stores. Notably, one individual I observed regularly watches Thai news broadcasts and has expressed strong support for Mr. Thanathon and Dr. Piyabutra, the leaders of the Future Forward Party (พรรคอนาคตใหม่), an opposition party challenging the dictatorship.

According to the villagers of *Làng Thái Lan* and my own interpretation, the distinctive culture of this village is a product of cultural hybridization between Thai and Vietnamese influences. This is evident, for example, in wedding ceremonies and New Year celebrations. The villagers do not strictly adhere to Vietnamese beliefs regarding auspicious days and times, opting instead for dates and times that are convenient for them. They also celebrate both Vietnamese and Thai traditional New Year. In terms of language, I observed that many villagers are fluent in Thai. During a discussion, a man approached them, and they conversed in Thai, even addressing my main advisor in Thai during her visit for my fieldwork. However, they are equally proficient in both languages.

Therefore, we can observe that the ability to engage in hybridized cultural practices and speak multiple languages serves as a means of accumulating cultural capital, which can be converted into social and economic capital. In this context, I am particularly interested in exploring the process through which Thai culture and knowledge are trans-valued and integrated into the migrants' homeland. Within the context of neoliberalism and nationalism in contemporary Vietnam, how do hybrid cultures contribute to the livelihoods and community development of migrants, as well as the formation of a distinctive place? This phenomenon can be interpreted through the lens of Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of articulation, which suggests that the villagers of *Làng Thái Lan* occupy an in-between space, a liminal state where they negotiate and create differentiated and complex identities. These moments of articulation produce cultural difference (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1).

The overarching objective of this dissertation is to analyze the transnational process of placemaking, conceptualized as a progressive or globalizing place, through the interconnectedness of capital conversion, cultural hybridization, transnationalism, and the relationships of mobile individuals (i.e., VKHH and Vietnamese migrants). To comprehend the construction of place, place identities, and cultural hybridization in the context of transnationalism, the socio-economic disparities between the two countries, as well as the transnational networks that drive migration dynamics, will be taken into account. The hope is that the constructed place will provide voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese (or VKHH) and

Vietnamese migrants with security and stability at the borders (Bhabha, 1994). Furthermore, as Escobar (2001, p. 139) asserts, “place-based struggle might be seen as multi-scales, network oriented subaltern strategies of localization.” Place can also be viewed as a site of contestation for communal life. Thus, this research focuses on a specific group of people (community) and the ways in which they have created or continue to create a particular place as a means of expressing their communal identity, which is influenced by cultural hybridization.

1.2 Research questions

This research adopts the "Anthropology of Transnationalism" (transnational living) as its guiding framework to examine "placemaking" as a central concept. Anthropology of Transnationalism explores the transnational construction of difference, while placemaking focuses on the significance of locality within a global context. Local identity is shaped through multiple sites of social interaction (Daswani, 2013, pp. 32-39). The research investigates the following key questions:

1. How have voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese, local Vietnamese, and Vietnamese migrants historically and dynamically hybridized diverse cultures, influenced their surroundings, and imbued meaning into Làng Thái Lan and Như Thanh, demonstrating progressive placemaking?
2. What are the roles of cultural influences and various forms of capital from the host country (Thailand) and Vietnamese cultures and religions in shaping placemaking in the homeland (Vietnam)?
3. How are new values hybridized as a result of living in two worlds?
4. In what ways do placemaking activities empower Vietnamese migrant workers in Thailand?

1.3 Research objectives?

This research aims to investigate the interconnectedness of transnationalism, placemaking, culture, religion, and capitals in the daily interactions and practices of Vietnamese individuals who have voluntarily repatriated to their homeland after residing or being born in Thailand, as well as Vietnamese migrants who have worked and continue to work in Thailand. The research explores the processes by which these individuals construct their place in Vietnam. In this process of placemaking, the cultures and capitals of both countries undergo hybridization and conversion, playing a pivotal role in the creation of transnational places.

The specific objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To comprehend the place that Vietnamese migrants establish in Nhu Thanh, Vietnam, based on the power dynamics between them and other groups;
2. To examine the challenges associated with the fluid boundaries created by migrant community interpretations of their own (new) values related to place;
3. To analyze the processes of capital accumulation, transformation, and conversion among Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand, as these processes contribute to the construction of places in Vietnam;
4. To investigate cultural hybridization and identity construction in the placemaking process, exploring the related issues pertaining to cultural hybridization, identity construction, and the role of powerful individuals in these processes.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEWS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Literature reviews and review of related studies

For the theoretical review, a critical examination of relevant theories and concepts will be conducted. The aim is to understand how and under what conditions previous researchers have applied these theories and concepts in their studies. This analysis will facilitate the linking and operationalization of theories and concepts within the conceptual framework. In essence, it will aid in the elaboration of the conceptual framework, the identification of units of analysis, and the subsequent analysis of collected data. Based on the review, the theories and concepts employed in this research revolve around three primary issues:

2.1.1 Review of related theories and concepts

This section presents a review of relevant literature that employs the theories and concepts of placemaking, cultural hybridization, and identity construction.

Placemaking as a social process and mobility

The concepts of placemaking and migration have gained increasing attention in recent years. The concept of place is used to explore the relationship between people and geography, considering individuals as knowledgeable and sentient beings and focusing on human experience in the world. Place is a meaningful site that encompasses location, locale, and sense of place and is central to the notion of human geography (Cresswell, 2014). In other words, place is space that is occupied and defined (Short, 2001) through symbolization (Juan 2005, Kyle & Chick, 2007). Place allows us to observe the connection between the physical environment and the cultural way of life (Cresswell, 2014, p. 3). Furthermore, place is where architectures, physical elements, cultural aspects, historical significance, and everyday life activities are intertwined in the human experience of place. Place is composed of three broad interrelated components that give meaning to places: (1) the physical setting, (2) the individuals' internal psychological and (3) social processes and attributes and activities undertaken at the place (Shamsuddin & Ujang, 2008, p. 400).

Traditionally, place has been viewed as a static concept associated with rootedness, fixity, boundedness, and homogeneous identity with clear boundaries. However, Massey (2013) argues that since place is a product of everyday human mobilities and the movement of ideas and commodities, instead of perceiving movement and mobility as a threat to place (Cresswell, 2014, p. 7), we should consider place and placemaking as progressive (Kyle & Chick, 2007; Massey, 2013). As a social process, Massey (2001) views locality beyond physical and capital-bounded places, but rather as people interactions and social processes which are dynamic and change. Thus, many recent studies perceive the meanings of place as the products of interactive processes involving individual experience and interaction, social processes, and physical settings (material culture) (Massey, 2013; Mazumdar et al., 2000; Hart, 2004; Gold, 2005; Kyle & Chick, 2007; Shamsuddin & Ujang, 2008; Pierce, Martin & Murphy, 2011) and community history (Armstrong, 2016; Juan, 2005, p. 40).

Additionally, place is the articulation of social relations – local relations within the place and the connection beyond the local (Massey, 1994). Place is constituted by a number of differences, connections, multiple social relations, interactions, and social processes in the situation of co-presence (Massey, 2013). This notion allows us to view place as a product of practices and vice versa through a constant reiterative process (Hart, 2004).

Transnational migration, people and place identities

Place serves as a crucial space for interaction, fostering the development of migrant identity and community (Juan, 2005). Numerous transnational migration studies center on the concepts of self-identity and place identity, recognizing that these identities are not separate but rather that place identity forms a substructure of self-identity (Mazumdar et al., 2000). Places acquire meaning and contribute to the construction of identities (Escobar, 2001; Massey, 2013). Conversely, place reflects individual and collective identities, as the process of place construction shapes people's identities. Thus, place enables people to differentiate themselves from others (Kyle & Chick, 2007, p. 212). Individuals associate place with their identities and

engage in processes to protect these identities from external threats posed by different identities (Cresswell, 2014).

Place is particularly relevant to community. As Mazumdar et al. (2000, p. 319) argue, immigrant groups often establish their own communities where cultural identities are preserved and interactions with other groups are mediated. The formation of cross-border communities in the destination country serves to connect migrants with the social institutions of their country of origin, giving rise to the creation of new identities, even among individuals from diverse regions and social backgrounds (Gold, 2005, p. 266).

In terms of place identity, the identities of place are inherently unfixed (Massey, 2013) because identities are relational. Constructing place identity involves constructing the meaning of place, which centers on the concept of the cultural politics of place as the process of negotiating the meaning of place (Pierce, Martin, and Murphy, 2011, p. 56). Moreover, the identity of a place is not solely derived from internal factors but also from interactions with external or connected social relations (Massey, 2013). The concept of "negotiating space" refers to the process by which individuals or groups navigate and shape their surroundings to meet their needs and aspirations. It involves actively engaging with the physical, social, and cultural dimensions of a space to create a sense of belonging and empowerment. In the context of migration, negotiating space can involve: 1) physical space: migrants may adapt their living spaces, create new community centers, or establish businesses to make their new environment more familiar and welcoming; 2) social space: migrants may form social networks, join community organizations, or participate in cultural activities to build connections and gain a sense of belonging; 3) cultural space: migrants may negotiate their cultural identities, blending elements of their home culture with their new surroundings to create a unique and hybrid cultural experience. Negotiating space is an ongoing process that requires agency, resilience, and a willingness to engage with the new environment. It is a way for migrants to create a sense of home and contribute to the social and cultural fabric of their new communities.

Identity also encompasses multiculturalism as a representation of place linked to place identity. Identity pertains to the process of othering, the continuous negotiation between culture and complex configurations of meaning and power. Identity also emerges from everyday life experiences in the host country and is related to place (Armstrong, 2016). In this context, Armstrong (2016) finds that Vietnamese migrants occupy marginal economic enterprises but produce culture to fulfill their needs. As it occurs in the politics of identity pertaining to place attachment, she applies the concept of "space-in-between" to understand migrants' experiences of place. Space-in-between is the space that allows for the interweaving of host and migrant cultures over time. The host culture influences and alters the migrant's identity. Migrant workers also practice their own culture while simultaneously continuing their culture in their country of origin, creating cultural diversity in the host country. In this connection, there are dynamic interactions of cultures, power, and the sense of being multicultural (Armstrong, 2016).

Place attachment, sense of place and religious life of migrants

Place can be imbued with experience, feeling, and meaning (Cresswell, 2014). In other words, individuals attach themselves to a locality in an effort to create a sense of place (Shamsuddin & Ujang, 2008, p. 400). Place attachment emphasizes the human-place bond, with affect, emotion, and feeling being central to this concept, fostering a sense of belonging (Kyle & Chick, 2007). The role of attachment also contributes to the sense of place reflected in individuals' identities (Shamsuddin & Ujang, 2008). For instance, Mazumdar et al. (2000) discovered that cultural and social aspects, as well as distinct architecture, symbolic motifs, and the area of an ethnic enclave, contribute to creating a Vietnamese sense of place, reaffirming ethnic identity, and expressing nostalgia. The place integrates people, networks, interactions, religious events, and festivals, fostering solidarity and ethnic identity, ultimately establishing it as a Vietnamese place. In such cases, Little Saigon is not merely a commercial and social space but also a realm of religious life, rituals, and festivals. Many individuals utilize it to connect with their past, share experiences, and express their heritage. In this context, the interplay between religious life (ceremonial events)

and social life (people and network interactions) contributes to the construction of a sense of place.

Furthermore, migrants maintain symbolic and narrative connections to their homelands and perpetuate these linkages through religious, spiritual, or mythological relationships (Armstrong 2016). The cult of spirits is co-present in the human-place bond. Spiritual practices are evident within the boundaries of a community. However, spiritual religion serves as a means of transforming local perceptions of places through the novel political and economic dynamics of imperialism and capitalism (Taylor, 2007, p. 16). Thus, spirit-based religion is considered a local force in the transformation of local conceptions of place through local practices and is employed to establish place-based religion. Additionally, as Taylor (2007, p. 19) contends, local cults were revived and imbued with new meanings, mediating social relations to cope with the market economy.

Place, glocality, networks and capitals of migrants

Places serve not only as sites for representing the culture of ethnic groups but also as sites for constructing social networks (Juan 2005). In the globalizing world, places are produced through connections to the rest of the world (Cresswell, 2014). While place is often referred to as a locality, it is in fact local with wider processes, as we see place as shared spaces. Thus, place as locality is constructed through sets of social relations that bind them inextricably to wider arenas and other places (Massey, 2013, p. 143). Since people construct places even as they participate in translocal networks, Escobar (2001) suggested that we view place from the local side but with a global perspective. Local places are accommodated by the global conditions of people's lives. Various social actors play a role in creating the networks of the local that link to the global. Additionally, linking the local and extra-local places through the network place is to point out the relation between identity and power (Escobar, 2001, p. 143). Hence, placemaking is historically produced through interactions within local people's (wider) networks, including a powerful state and the market (Massey, 2001). Pierce, Martin & Murphy (2011) draw the concept of relational placemaking, linking place, politics, and networks together, which produces place via

socially, politically, and economically interconnected interactions among people, institutions, and systems.

One of the focal points of this thesis also emphasizes analyzing the forms, utilization, and functions of networks, as well as the process of network building. Accordingly, networks can be considered in various forms: **First**, social structure: networks consist of nodes and ties, which can reveal the global dimension of networks and their connections (Bartram, Poros, and Monforte, 2014, pp. 95-97). **Second**, institutional mechanism: networks facilitate resource allocation and distribution to support migrants' transnational living and regulate their social behavior by establishing norms or mores (Bartram, Poros, and Monforte, 2014, pp. 97; Portes, 1998, pp. 10). These networks can be enlarged or expanded due to the collective actions of the actors. **Third**, social capital: networks are closely related to social capital (Gold, 2005, p. 259) and can even be seen as a form of social capital (Arango, 2004, p. 28). Social capital is rooted in social networks and relationships (Lin, 2001, p. 41). Instrumentally, to fulfill economic purposes, social relations in networks are also considered "social capital."

Thus, social networks should be analyzed as a primary source of social capital (Portes, 1998; Higuchi, 1997, p. 73). Social capital refers to the social resources produced, invested in, and mobilized through social network utilization. It belongs to those who can access social networks (Lin, 2001, p. 41; Belanger & Wang, 2013, p. 43). However, Massey (2001, p. 137) argues that "*capital is not a thing, it is a process.*" This suggests that places can also be conceptualized as processes.

As places are also constituted by capital and the global – the globalization of the local that locals might be able to use to their own advantage – the production of place comes by capital and global forces – capitalism, new technologies, market integration linked to places. People in places might create local economies through socio-cultural practices that engage with the global (Escobar, 2001). Steven J. Gold (2005), who studied migrant entrepreneurs, argues that their place is not just a place of doing business and ethnic enclaves but is a place of relations in social networks, aggregating devices, anchors for identity, and representation of culture (Juan 2005), which is the center of shared migrants' life (Gold, 2005, p. 263). Identity is

constructed through place, which is the articulation between global capital and local culture. Connectedness of regional and transnational forms goes beyond the local bound. However, local economies and cultures are not outside the scope of capital and modernity, which can be seen through the "glocal" network (Escobar, 2001).

Social capital can be considered at three levels. At the **micro-level**, the focus is on the individual. However, in theoretical terms, based on Normal Long (1992)'s notion of the individual, it means the actors in development. Bourdieu (1990) discusses changing conflict relations and turning them into the actor's strategy, which is seen as social capital. Thus, individual bonds are analyzed as social capital, a technical tool to improve migrants' lives. Lin (2001) interprets social capital as an individual's or group's investment in social relations with an expected return to economic capital (Chen 2005, p. 50) and/or human capital (Lin, 2001). The social capital gained in relationships embedded in the network, as well as maintaining the network, can be considered a form of mutual obligation that constrains individual freedom (Gold, 2005, p. 259). At the micro level, local and household analysis, poverty reduction, personal well-being, and livelihood strategy are the main focuses. This level of analysis concerns much, for instance, mutual trust, group working, increasing skill level, and entrepreneurship analytical concepts for micro-analysis (Chen, 2005, pp. 51-7).

At the **meso level**, the level of interaction tends to view social capital in the form of social institutions such as the family, the educational system, and religion that are accumulated in collective actions (Chen, 2005, pp. 51-7). Bourdieu conceptualizes social capital as institutionalized relationships in which individuals aggregate their resources within a social network. In contrast, Putnam posits that such social capital is not solely for the benefit of individuals but also for communities and nations (Bartram, Poros, and Monforte 2014, p. 134). For Putnam, social capital extends beyond an individual's interest to encompass the mutual interests of the community and/or network. It functions as the norms and networks of civil society concerning civic participation (Chen 2005, p. 50). In comparison, Bourdieu's actor's strategy is more dynamic than that of Putnam and Coleman.

Emphasizing the form of social institution, just like James Coleman, Portes (1998, p. 10) sees social capital that is not only as the resources mobilized in the purposive action. But it is also norm and mores controlling or constraining of individual behaviors and self-interests. Social capital in this form binds the communities through mutual obligation and trust. This means the economic activities of the migrants are embedded in the institutionalized social relation and such relations function as a control mechanism alongside providing the benefits to the members. Certainly, many studies look at the development of the social institutions that support immigration and control migrants' social behaviors.

At the **macro** analytical level, the concept of capital does not solely refer to financial resources. Rather, it encompasses a broader context that includes transborder situations. Transnationalism, or anything "trans" (e.g., transculturality), is crucial for analyzing supranational or transborder and national contexts. Social capital, manifested in the form of social/ethnic networks, serves as a potent resource for constructing remittance economies, cross-border economic linkages and cooperation, and social development that bypasses state boundaries. The factors and conditions that sustain these networks revolve around ethnicity, historical roots, cultural dimensions, and place identity, which bind migrants together (Chen, 2005, pp. 51-7). The concept of locality can be employed as a strategy to redefine relationships with the state and facilitate broader connections. Meaning-making in the transborder context involves mobility, movement, and multiple relationships.

Over the past three decades, studies applying the concepts of transnational networks and social capital have primarily focused on two main issues. **Firstly**, they have explored how migrants utilize networks or acquire social capital and the roles they play within these networks (Lin, 2001; Vertovec, 2002). Factors influencing access to social capital include the migrants' position within the network, the strength of ties, the strength of ties and location, and the combined effect of position, ties, and location. Social capital and position are linked to status attainment, such that high social capital corresponds with high human capital (attained status) and vice versa (Lin, 2001, p. 63). Vertovec (2002) investigated the multiple roles of transnational networks among skilled workers, the nature of

transnationalism, and the patterns, processes, and impacts of transnational networks. He analyzed the relationship between transnational networks and skilled workers, examining transnational networks and migratory outcomes. Aguilera and Massey (2003) found that social ties, as a form of social capital, yield better wage outcomes for undocumented migrants compared to documented migrants. However, as Nan Lin (2001) has pointed out, understanding how social capital operates within social networks remains a critical question. According to Lin, this operation depends on the intersection of structure (embeddedness), opportunity (accessibility through networks), and action (use). The **second** approach, focusing on the process of network building, provides insights into the other side of the network. Rather than solely relying on the network, migration itself can be analyzed as a means of reinforcing social relationships across space (Vertovec, 2002).

While numerous studies have explored migrant networks in a positive light, relatively few have examined the potential drawbacks of network embeddedness, such as power relations, inequality, exclusion, exploitative networks, the quality of social ties within networks, the conditions of social ties (i.e., social, cultural, ethnic, and place aspects), and negative social capital (Gold, 2005, p. 268). Moreover, studies on migrant networks have often overlooked cultural and symbolic issues, focusing primarily on economic matters (Gold, 2005, p. 267) and the positive aspects of social capital. Additionally, the accumulation and convertibility of capital, as well as the mechanisms of exchange and operation within networks, warrant further investigation.

Various forms of capital, including financial, physical, human, social, and cultural, can be converted into other forms and transformed into something of value. Social capital can also facilitate access to other resources, such as human capital, cultural capital, or other forms of capital (Aguilera & Massey, 2003, pp. 672-3). This implies that individuals can mobilize and utilize resources to acquire additional resources. For instance, Lin (2001) asserted that social capital can be converted into human and economic capital, and vice versa. Migrant networks serve as a significant source of remittances, but they also facilitate the flow of social remittances, such as ideas, behaviors, and social capital, which contribute to societal change and economic

development in both the countries of origin and destination (Gold, 2005: 265). Social capital embedded in migrants' relationships fosters socialization into a "culture of migration" characterized by reciprocity, bounded solidarity, and enforceable trust (Aguilera & Massey, 2003, p. 673), which vary depending on historical conditions, ethnicity, and socio-economic circumstances. Similarly, social capital contributes to the development of human capital by encouraging individuals to enhance their knowledge and skills (Lin, 2001, p. 97).

However, despite the embeddedness of immigration and capital in social networks, it remains unclear whether the lives of migrants are inherently risky. As mentioned earlier, social networking can be a double-edged sword, offering both support and exploitation. A significant weakness of social networks lies in their disregard for unequal power and class relations (Belanger & Wang, 2013). In the following section, I will review relevant studies pertaining to Vietnamese migrants through the lens of capital, remittance, livelihood, and power shifts, which are undoubtedly embedded in their transnational social networks, to gain a deeper understanding of the realities of Vietnamese migrants' lives.

Considering place as a process of capital flow with a bundle of networks, it becomes evident that place is central to issues of development, culture, and the environment (Escobar, 2001). The multilateral network relationship among the trajectories that constitute them helps to motivate socio-spatial action (Pierce, Martin & Murphy, 2011, p. 58). Undoubtedly, networked processes of placemaking constitute politics. Place, politics, and networks are central concepts in contemporary human geography – networked place (Pierce, Martin & Murphy, 2011). Escobar (2001) argued that subaltern strategies of localization, understood as local strategies defending territories, can be viewed from two perspectives: (i) place-based strategies that rely on attachment to territory and culture; and (ii) global strategies through meshworks that enable social movements to engage in the production of locality by enacting the politics of scale from below. Localizing strategies for the defense of their territories include: (i) a place-based localizing strategy; (ii) a further strategy for localization; (iii) a shifting political strategy linking identity, territory, and culture at local, national, and transnational levels (Escobar, 2001, p. 163).

Cultural hybridization and place

Migrant spaces exist and interact within three distinct spaces: national space, local space, and imagined space (Armstrong, 2000, p. 310). Often originating from the same place, migrant spaces represent imagined communities that blend memories of the place left behind with an aspiration to resemble the host country (Armstrong, 2000). Migrants' mobile lives and unfixed, unbounded places contribute to a contemporary cultural landscape characterized by diverse cross-cultural influences, creating a patchwork of overlapping cultures. As a result, cultures become mixed and interstitial, moving between spaces of meaning. Hybridity permeates every aspect of society (Yazdiha, 2010). Thus, place becomes a site of heterogeneous rather than homogeneous identities due to the mobility and movement of people (Cresswell, 2014).

Building on Escobar's (2001) argument, place is constructed and modified by cultural practices and complex relations of culture and power that transcend local boundaries. This allows us to reconceptualize culture as deterritorialized and transnationally produced. Escobar focuses on the perspective of the multiplicity of place-based practices of culture, nature, and economy. Hybridization accompanies globalization, and Escobar (2000) argues that place and culture have always coexisted with and accepted inevitable hybridization and cultural transformations. Scholars contributing to the study of cultural hybridization emphasize the historicity of transcultural flows and entanglements, focusing on cultural change (Stockhammer, 2011). There is no longer a clear distinction between inside and outside (Cresswell, 2014, p. 7). Hybridization is detected as somehow transcending "borderlines" (Stockhammer, 2011). Local hybridization of economy and culture is maintained by indigenous communities, enabling them to shape the process of constructing local identity, social relations, and economic practices (Escobar, 2001).

Regarding the hybridity between migrant and host cultures, the work of Homi Bhabha (1994) also analyzes the complex issues of hybridity of identity. Bhabha (1994), a leading thinker on cultural hybridity in postcolonial critique, viewed post-colonial culture as hybrid, identified by both the people themselves and colonial powers. Notably, society is composed of a hybrid of different ethnic cultures and

present social experiences. For these reasons, we must understand the cultural difference in the process of cultural hybridization located in-between space and time, spanning different cultures where identities are formed. Consequently, the politics of placemaking is based on pluralistic and non-exclusionary goals (Escobar, 2001, p. 150). Additionally, under the concept of multiculturalism and cross-cultural hybridity, cross-cultural character celebrates difference derived from living with cultural allegiances. Thus, there can be no inherent notion of a superior culture and an inferior culture (Armstrong 2000) in placemaking.

Cultural remittance, religion's role, and placemaking

Remittance plays a pivotal role in placemaking, shaping the relationship between migrants and their countries of origin (Belloni et al., 2022; Cohen, 2011). It contributes to the development of both rural and urban areas, transforming physical spaces and creating new cultural and social landscapes (Lopez, 2019; McKay & Brady, 2005). Remittance establishes a transnational space, connecting migrants with individuals in their home country and fostering cultural exchange, tradition preservation, and the formation of unique identities (Belloni et al., 2022; Cohen, 2011; McKay & Brady, 2005). It is essential for maintaining and establishing transnational familyhood and translocal moral economy (Belloni et al., 2022; Katigbak, 2015; Small, 2012). Moreover, remittance can also play a significant role in climate change adaptation strategies, providing crucial economic assistance to households and communities affected by environmental stress and enabling investment in infrastructure in vulnerable regions impacted by environmental degradation (Entzinger & Scholten, 2022). Remittance also encompasses non-financial aspects such as knowledge transfer and the establishment of new social networks, enhancing the resilience of high-risk regions.

Remittance is closely intertwined with moral remittance, which involves transmitting deeply rooted values and ideals (Simoni & Voirol, 2021). For example, it serves as a means to maintain relationships, provide financial support, and contribute to community development. Recipients often view remittances as symbolic connections with overseas relatives, enabling them to improve their living conditions (Small, 2012). Thus, it is not merely an obligation but a moral duty to utilize remittances to enhance

the well-being of recipients. Emotions play a crucial role in shaping the moral frameworks of transnational families. Migrants bring cultural influences that lead to ethical and moral remittances, reshaping their home countries' social and political landscapes (Katigbak, 2015; Simoni & Voirol, 2021). Religious entanglement is significant in the context of moral remittance. For example, moral remittance is rooted in Islamic principles and traditions for Bangladeshi immigrants, where sharing and redistributing assistance from parents is seen as a moral and sacred duty (Stevanovic-Feen, 2012). Remittance practices are connected to Islamic alms-giving, known as zakat, among Pakistani migrants, highlighting the strong moral dimensions and reciprocal nature of remittance sending within the context of Islamic charity practices (Erdal, 2012).

In the case of Vietnam, extensive research has been conducted on various aspects of remittance studies. Studies have explored the influence of migration on household income and overall welfare, the intricate web of transnational family relations, and the motivations for Vietnamese women to send remittances (Phan & Coxhead, 2019; Pfau & Giang, 2009; Yeoh et al., 2013). Research has also focused on the impact of women's labor migration on their husbands, highlighting changes in gender roles and masculinities within the transnational family structure (Anh & Yeoh, 2011). Anh's research on Vietnamese migrant women in Taiwan highlights their perception of enduring hardships and sacrificing their own interests for their families as virtuous, considering themselves morally righteous through providing financial support via remittances, even in unhappy marriages (2016). However, despite the extensive research on migration, remittance, and morality, particularly in the context of Vietnam, there is a notable scarcity of studies exploring the influence of religious factors on the impact of remittance in placemaking. Therefore, this article aims to address this gap by examining the substantial role played by Confucianism in shaping moral values and its subsequent effects on remittance, contributing to a deeper understanding of placemaking in Vietnam.

2.1.2 Related studies on Vietnamese migrants

Vietnamese migrations have constituted a significant social phenomenon with a protracted history, dating back to the mid-20th century. During the 1950s-1970s, a substantial exodus of Vietnamese occurred, primarily due to the Vietnam War and subsequent conflicts. This forced migration was followed by a period of largely voluntary migration from the late 1980s onward, driven by economic and social aspirations. East Asian countries have emerged as the primary destinations for Vietnamese migrants, with Taiwan, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Malaysia being the most popular (International Organization for Migration, 2016).

To comprehend this phenomenon, it is essential to consider the theoretical frameworks that have been employed in migration research. Neoliberalism and world economic system theories, along with the rational choice theory, have been utilized to examine the economic and geographical factors influencing migration from less developed to more developed countries. However, these theories have been criticized for providing a superficial understanding of migration, failing to fully capture its complexity and diversity (Nguyen & Walsh, 2014).

Despite the limited number of studies that have examined the potential drawbacks of network embeddedness, several related studies have been conducted on Vietnamese migrations. Since the 2000s, migration studies pertaining to Vietnamese migrants have primarily focused on four main issues. **First**, social networks: studies in this area explore the role of social networks in Vietnamese migration, including the formation, maintenance, and utilization of these networks (Bagwell, 2008; Trần, 2008; Belanger et al., 2011; Winkels, 2012; Belanger & Wang, 2013; Thao, 2013; Nguyen, 2015; Chae et al., 2014; Pham et al., 2016). The **second** is on transnational marriage, family, and gender issues: These studies examine the experiences and challenges faced by Vietnamese migrants in transnational marriages, families, and gender roles (Duong et al., 2007; Wang, 2007; Truong et al., 2008; Jerneck, 2010; Belanger & Linh, 2011; Kim, 2012; Belanger & Tran, 2013; Belanger et al., 2013; Bich, 2013; Yeoh, Chee & Baey, 2013; Belanger, 2016; Locke, Tam & Hoa, 2014). The **third** is about remittance and livelihood diversification: Studies in this area investigate the role of remittances and livelihood diversification in the lives of

Vietnamese migrants and their families (Mitchell 2008, (Niimi, Pham & Reilly, 2009; Turner & Schoenberger, 2012; Thao, 2013; Yeoh, Dung & Yi'en, 2013; Nguyen, 2014; Amare & Hohfeld, 2016; Yeoh et al., 2017). And the **fourth**, is about placemaking and community building: These studies explore the ways in which Vietnamese migrants create and maintain communities in their new destinations, including the establishment of ethnic enclaves, businesses, and cultural organizations (Vertovec, 2002, p. 4; Juan, 2005; Mazumdar et al., 2000; Gold, 2005, p. 266; Suong, 2010; Escobar, 2001)..

Firstly, social network and institutional approaches enable us to comprehend various aspects of migration, such as the practices of migrants as social actors, types of relationships, complex relationships, sources and securing of resources, connections between the destination and the place of origin, network functions, purposes of connection, social obligation, exploitation, conflict and negotiation, politics, and so on. A significant number of migrant workers are not sent by registered broker companies controlled by the government. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that migrants are often inferior to the ethnic majority. Being a migrant often means being marginalized, especially when working in the informal sectors or, in other words, as illegal workers. Their lives are often stressful, and many migrants face abuse and human rights violations. This demonstrates that the informal economy exerts pressure on migrants and causes them suffering (Belanger & Wang, 2013).

However, in some cases, being a worker in the formal sector can lead to more abuse and suffering. As observed by Belanger et al. (2011), 30 percent of Vietnamese women working in Japan expressed a desire to leave due to abuse (fines for offenses, extreme strictness, dismissal of foreign workers who do not comply). For them, being unauthorized workers in the irregular sectors is preferable to working in the formal ones because they receive lower salaries despite working long hours and are treated poorly. Thus, to escape these conditions and become irregular workers who enjoy more flexibility, migrants require networks that connect them with Japanese middlemen. Moreover, various networks are essential for those who overstay and need to negotiate their illegal status. In general, migrants rely on personal networks as a form of social capital to provide them with information and other resources.

Additionally, personal networks appear to be the only mechanism that provides illegal migrants with an opportunity to migrate (Belanger & Wang, 2013).

In Thailand, the number of Vietnamese workers has steadily increased over the past three decades due to the establishment of transnational networks by overseas Vietnamese in Thailand. Tracing back over 300 years to the Kingdom of Ayutthaya period, there were old groups of overseas Vietnamese known as "*Việt Kiều cũ*." Approximately 60-70 years ago, there was an influx of new groups known as "*Việt Kiều mới*," who were forced to migrate due to the French Colonial war. As a result, several studies have focused on the relationship between overseas Vietnamese (*Việt Kiều*) and Vietnamese migrant workers as a network that assists migrants in finding jobs and obtaining settlement support in Thailand. Without personal networks, migrant lives would be impossible. Networks also provide resources to cope with everyday risks (Vân, 2015).

Unlike some ethnic groups, Vietnamese tend to rely on small-scale networks of their villagers and relatives. Vietnamese networks are largely based on family ties (Winkels, 2012; Thao, 2013; Vân, 2015). For Vietnamese, kinship-based systems are considered crucial institutions for migrants' vulnerable lives. These networks provide migrants with security functions (Winkels, 2012) by extending their own networks (Vân, 2015). Numerous studies have examined the roles of networks in Vietnamese migration, particularly in the informal sector (Thao, 2013). For example, networks can act as a form of social control through rumor and gossip, compelling migrants to adhere to social norms (Vân, 2015). Networks not only secure migrants' lives but also support the formation and development of their businesses in the receiving country. Susan Bagwell (2008) discovered that both weak and strong ties in informal networks support Vietnamese migrants' business innovation and competition in the UK, particularly strong ties among relatives and close friends.

Networks are not merely interactions and relationships among people but are also embedded in culture, class, and gender. Ngọc Trần (2007) examines Vietnamese garment workers and local people who challenge global capital by utilizing kinship culture, various networks of female workers, place, and class to support each other and protest against employers. Kinship and gender networks are considered cultural

embeddedness. Cultural and religious activities connect workers in the same place (place-based-bound), fostering resistance.

As my review has shown, many existing studies have focused on the positive aspects of migrant social networks. However, Belanger & Wang (2013) highlight the negative side of networks – the detrimental role of networks and the limitations of migrant networks, where material benefits take precedence over kinship or strong tie networks. Networks for human trafficking, along with suggestions from relatives or people in the same community, which are considered personal networks, can sometimes be dangerous. This is because social networks are embedded in market relations rather than market relationships embedded in society. Working abroad is complex, can be interrupted at any stage, and requires extensive negotiation. For these reasons, migrants cannot rely solely on personal networks (Belanger & Wang 2013).

The second issue pertains to gender, marriage, and family. Given that the proportion of Vietnamese female migrants to East Asia ranges from 28.8% to 33.3% (Hoang & Yeoh, 2011) and that there is a significant number of female migrants in Thailand (RFA Vietnamese 2012 quoted in Nguyen & Walsh, 2014, p. 84), most research on these issues tends to focus on female migration. Rolf Jensen, Donald M. Peppard, Jr., and Thăng (2013), in their study of Vietnamese female migrants who are roving street vendors in Hanoi, raise the question of why women, rather than men, migrate. This research examines the roles of men and women in families and communities. They found that men play a crucial role in building their household's reputation and representing the family at local events. Moreover, the primary parental responsibilities fall on the father, while the mother plays a subordinate role. Additionally, other factors that drive women to migrate include their superior money management skills compared to men and the greater availability of local jobs for men, particularly in construction.

However, when women migrate to work abroad, they gain more power, at least economically. This challenges the traditional role of men as the breadwinners of the household. Hoang Lan Anh and Brenda Yeoh (2011), in their research article titled *"Breadwinning Wives and "Left-Behind" Husbands: Men and Masculinities in the Vietnamese Transnational Family,"* explore the issue of masculinity when wives

migrate to Taiwan and become breadwinners while their husbands remain in Vietnam. Some of these husbands engage in unethical behaviors. In this context, gender roles and Vietnamese family structure and ideology are undergoing change. Thus, female migration impacts and challenges Confucian-based patriarchal norms and Vietnamese masculine ideology.

Another study that offers a different perspective on the previous one focuses on womanhood. Hoang Lan Anh (2016) again investigates Vietnamese female migrants in Taiwan, but instead of focusing on the disruption of Vietnamese patriarchal norms, this research emphasizes the Vietnamese femininity ideology of motherhood. As mentioned earlier, Vietnamese female migration leads to increased economic power for women. This poses a new challenge to the Vietnamese femininity ideology based on Confucianism's social order of womanhood as a social institution. Vietnamese women are expected to uphold morality and engage in social practices that transcend individual desires. They are obligated to prioritize family happiness (or *phúc đức* in Vietnamese). Vietnamese female identities are defined by the roles of sacrificing mothers and enduring wives, with core values of patience, faithfulness, and dedication. Despite being physically distant from their families, they strive to maintain family harmony and provide care from afar.

Given the increasing prevalence of transnational marriage among Vietnamese female migrants, some researchers have shifted their focus to these issues. Danièle Belanger (2016), for example, attempts to connect the concepts of migration, marriage, and marriage-related local businesses, viewing them beyond the lens of commodification of marriage/women, marriage markets, and human trafficking. She employs an ethnographic approach to examine migration and marriage as a local industry or locally based business, transforming villages into transit areas. Marriage migration is deeply embedded in village relationships and should not be solely viewed through the materialistic lens of profit-making (in matchmaking) but also in terms of emotional dimensions such as desires, empathy, proximity, and hope. Importantly, this research sheds light on the process of wife recruitment, in which local people play key roles by leveraging social capital, local networks, and local power to establish a new local business - an intimate industry that extends beyond matchmaking.

The third issue pertains to remittance and livelihood improvement approaches. Transnational migrants' networks are closely associated with the role of remittance, which is bound by social obligation. Vietnamese migrants, guided by morality and responsibility, are expected to remit money to their families. Remittance economies generated from migration enhance the livelihoods of families, communities, and the country of origin (Bartram, Poros & Monforte 2014, pp. 97-8). In terms of livelihood, remittances contribute to income diversification, enabling investments in agriculture, education, and housing (Niimi, Pham & Reilly, 2009; Thao 2013). Remittances also provide risk alleviation, inflation mitigation, poverty reduction, and intra-family inequality reduction (Niimi, Pham & Reilly, 2009). Migration is undoubtedly viewed as a livelihood strategy for livelihood and employment diversification. It can also help alleviate the unemployment crisis in Vietnam (Belanger & Wang, 2013). Beyond economic remittances, communities can also benefit from social remittances in terms of highly skilled laborers acquiring knowledge from abroad. This human capital contributes to local development (Niimi, Pham & Reilly, 2009).

The fourth theme centers around placemaking and community building. After reviewing relevant studies on Vietnamese migration, I discovered that the literature on migration and placemaking is relatively limited. Four decades ago, most migration studies related to place focused on migrants' adaptation to their new environment, examining the connections between migrants and the people, society, culture, and polity of their host country. However, in the past two decades, the focus has shifted to the transnational communities of migrants' dual lives – bilingualism, cultural diversity, and homes in two countries (Vertovec, 2002, p. 4). The concept of dual lives has been explored in various studies on Vietnamese migration. For example, Nguyen and Walsh (2014) examine the experiences of Vietnamese migrants in Australia who maintain strong ties to their home country. They argue that these migrants lead "dual lives," balancing their commitments to both their home and host communities. Another study by Belanger and Wang (2013) investigates the experiences of Vietnamese women who migrate to Japan for work. They find that these women often lead "dual lives," working in Japan while maintaining close relationships with their families and communities in Vietnam. The

concept of dual lives provides a useful framework for understanding the complex experiences of Vietnamese migrants who navigate between their home and host countries. It highlights the challenges and opportunities that migrants face as they adapt to new social and cultural contexts while maintaining connections to their home communities.

Nonetheless, some Vietnamese migration research has addressed the issue of placemaking. For instance, Juan (2005) employs a socio-spatial approach to conduct comparative studies of Vietnamese American communities and places – "Little Saigon" in Orange County, California, and "Vietnamese Village" in Boston, Massachusetts – to examine social and spatial relationships. The study finds that community building contributes to placemaking and vice versa. Thus, these places serve as sites for interaction, anchors for identity, and symbols of belonging, facilitating community formation. Mazumdar et al. (2000) link the concepts of ethnic enclaves, place identity, and attachment to elaborate on a sense of place. This sense of place is created through traditional architecture, nostalgia, and people's interactions in ritual ceremonies, events, holidays, and communication. It fosters communal solidarity and ethnic identity. Little Saigon, perceived as a Vietnamese place, became a site for learning about Vietnamese roots and socializing the new generation into Vietnamese identity.

However, migrant communities as places do not only provide solidarity and mutual aid, as the aforementioned studies suggest. They also encompass power relations (i.e., stratification, inequality, abuse, exploitation, exclusion). Strong (2010) examines the uneven geographical development conditions influenced by local placemaking practices of the Vietnamese diasporic community. Her argument centers around geographical inequalities as the product of uneven relations of power and social arrangements. She proposes the concept of hybrid placemaking to address uneven development. This notion enables a deeper understanding of the meanings of "difference" and "unity" in lived spaces, involving ongoing struggles over uneven geographical development in places of radical openness. This finding reveals the structural relations of power or inequality, which Arturo Escobar (2001: 142) refers to as "place-based politics," highlighting political action.

At this juncture, I have observed that existing studies have primarily focused on the community and place of the Vietnamese diaspora rather than that of migrants. Furthermore, there is a limited connection between place/community, identity, capital, and economy or livelihood. This research, however, will shift the focus from the Vietnamese diasporic place to the migrant place, allowing us to explore the relationship between place, network, identity, capital, culture, religion, and livelihood, despite the fact that literature on these issues remains rudimentary and fragmented.

2.2 Conceptual framework

Firstly, I will focus on the tactics and strategies of actors (de Certeau, 1984) regarding placemaking and negotiating space between Vietnam and Thailand. This will be followed by an examination of the contexts of glocality (state and market). I will then discuss negotiation strategies. Viewing cultures and identities as always in process and place as progressive (Massey, 2013; Cresswell, 2014) as well as a site of contestation (Escobar, 2001) and negotiation (Massey, 2001), or in other words, a "politics of place," this research will examine transmigrant placemaking to understand the role of places within the context of the dynamic transnational lives of Vietnamese who voluntarily repatriated in the past (or Việt Kiều hồi hương – VKHH) and present-day Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand in relation to their places of origin. An analysis of the dynamics of placemaking through the process of cultural hybridization and identity construction will be conducted. The places that are symbolically occupied and defined by VKHH and Vietnamese migrants, respectively, in this study will reveal the space in the analysis of the dynamics of culture (multiplicity of place-based cultures), power (critique of power, hegemony, and local knowledge), and economies (of the global and local) or the articulation between global capital and local culture in particular geographical locations (Escobar 2001: 141-2).

In conducting this research, I conceptualize placemaking as central to human everyday life and the process of reproducing social and cultural forms (Cresswell, 2014). Furthermore, the meaning of place is associated with the life experiences shared by people (Kyle & Chick, 2007). Migrant identity embedded in migrant places also relates to multiculturalism, where culture, politics, and capital are

intertwined (Armstrong, 2000). Additionally, the local economy and culture are interconnected with capital, modernity, and globalization (Escobar, 2001, p. 141).

This research considers place in terms of: (1) cultural hybridization; (2) constructing a common culture; and (3) the dynamics of people and identity construction (Ganjanapan, 2015). I conceptualize placemaking as the continuous interplay of history, culture, religion, and power relations that Vietnamese migrants navigate at both local and global levels. As Doreen Massey (2001) suggests, place is a local base connected to broader processes and is created by both internal and external mobilities (Cresswell, 2014).

In operationalizing this thesis, I will examine Vietnamese government policies on voluntary repatriation and transnational migration, the role of religion, history, multiculturalism, capital, and transnational networks surrounding cultural hybridity, and identity construction, all of which are incorporated into placemaking. The first part of this dissertation aims to understand the history, capital, and social boundaries since the resettlement period of VKHH in relation to their places of origin in Thailand and their old capital accumulated in Thailand and to Vietnamese society in Vietnam. This is because *Làng Thái Lan* is not ancestrally connected and does not have a rooted sense of place for VKHH and Vietnamese. However, these places have become their new homes.

In the second part, by examining the everyday life practices or the space of people's everyday lives in the process of making transnational migrant places, I will demonstrate how cultures have been hybridized, social networks of migrants have been built, and economic, social, and cultural capital have been accumulated, converted, and transformed. The consequences of these processes can be seen in the emergence of new transnational migrant identities as well as transnational place identity. Place identity brings about the condition for community building (*in Làng Thái Lan*, Vietnam). For Din Daeng, Bangkok, instead of exploring placemaking, I will examine how migrants convert the social and cultural capital embedded in their own networks and groups to contribute to placemaking in Vietnam.

In terms of cultural hybridity, this dissertation draws inspiration from Homi Bhabha's (1994) theory, which views culture as dynamic, fluid, and not essential,

and therefore cannot be fixed in time and space. This can transform our cultural identities. All culture is characterized by change, flux, and transformation. Most importantly, it is underlined by a sense of mixedness or interconnectedness that Bhabha calls "hybridity." Furthermore, the researcher seeks to understand cultural differences as based on hybridity created in moments of cultural transformation.

Based on Bhabha's notion, this research will emphasize the existence of hybridity of culture, or mixedness, within every form of identity. Notably, cultures are always in contact with one another, leading to cultural mixedness. Consequently, based on Bhabha's notion, there are working concepts applied in this research to analyze cultural hybridity; these include, for instance, cultural collisions and interchanges, repeatedness as something different, amputation, in-between space, and culture's in-between. Cultures, therefore, are mixed with other cultures because the place is interconnected with other places, not only in terms of physical interconnectedness but also in terms of cultural interconnectedness.

I will apply actor-oriented theory (Long, 1992) and everyday life practices of actor's tactic/strategy (de Certeau, 1984), (Gardiner, 2000) as analytical tools to see the local people inseparably connected with creativity. However, creativity and social actors are rooted in individual experiences and identities, which, in turn, explain the diversity of the hybridization processes. Moreover, the concept of historicity will be applied to examine the interpretation of the history of time and space that concerns hybridization (Stockhammer, 2011). This research will be conducted in two transnational communities - in Nhu Thanh, Thanh Hóa, Vietnam and in Bangkok, Thailand, to analyze transnational placemaking. This thesis will adopt a multi-theoretical approach. Underlying the main theory, three kinds of concepts - main concept, working concepts, and minor concepts seen as operationalization - are categorized. In addition, these concepts are specified by the contexts.

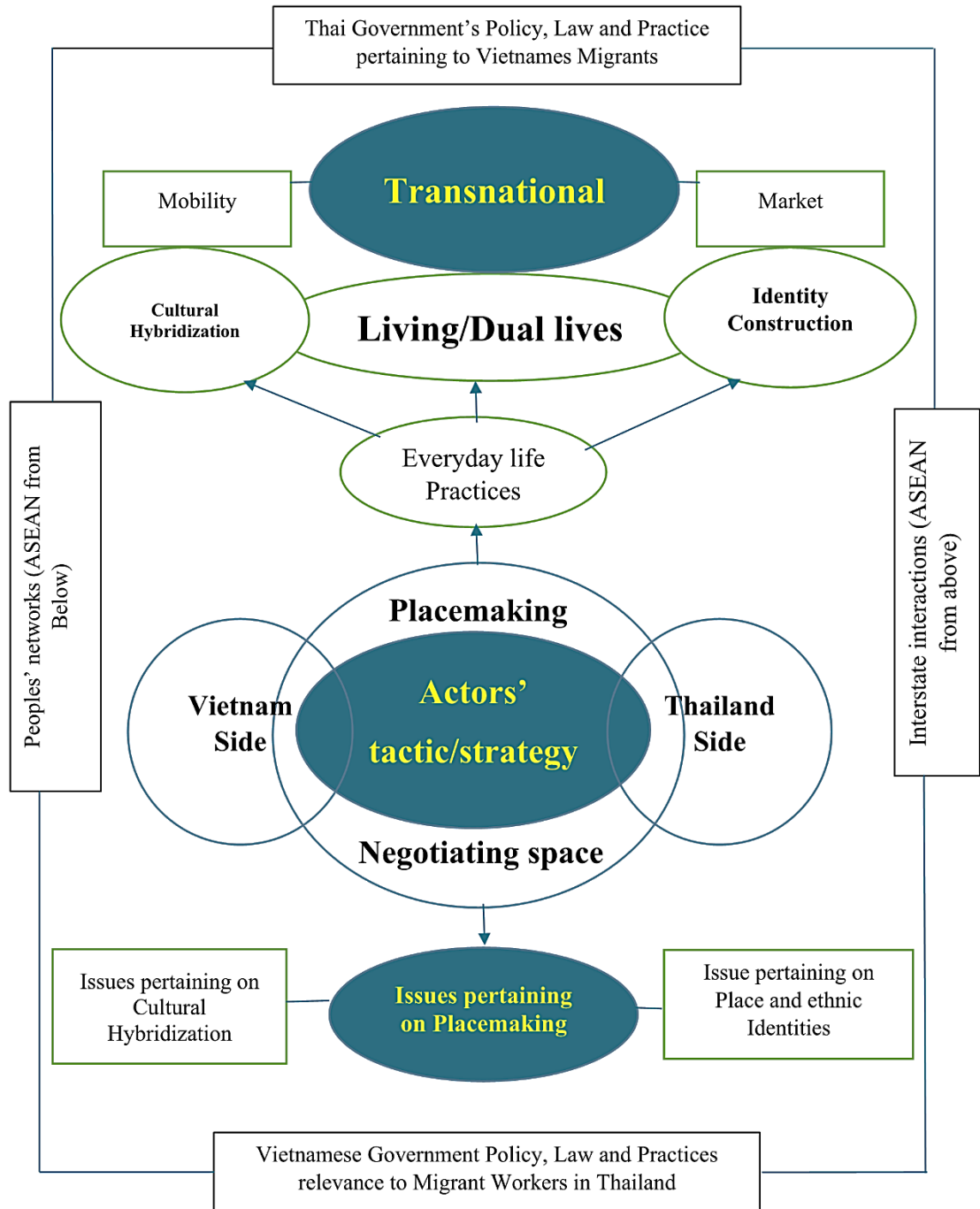


Figure 1: Diagram 1 - Conceptual framework

To delineate the concept of placemaking, I will adopt a multi-dimensional framework that encompasses: (i) the influence of social order structures and cultural norms shaped by religion; (ii) the dynamics of people's mobility and interactions at both macro and meso levels; and (iii) the articulation of capital with local conditions (Escobar, 2001). Subsequently, I will operationalize these concepts within the specific context of Vietnamese transnational migration.

Placemaking, as the central concept, will be contextualized by examining: (i) Thai government policies, laws, and practices related to interstate relationships, Voluntarily Repatriated Vietnamese, and Vietnamese migrants; (ii) Vietnamese government policies, laws, and practices pertaining to Vietnamese migrants in Thailand; (iii) the mobility of peoples (ASEAN from below); and (iv) interstate interactions and the involvement of global organizations in addressing Vietnamese transnational migration issues (ASEAN from above). Cultural hybridization and identity construction will serve as working concepts to explore the experiences of transnational living.

The concept of dual lives provides a useful framework for understanding the complex experiences of Vietnamese migrants who navigate between their home and host countries. It highlights the challenges and opportunities that migrants face as they adapt to new social and cultural contexts while maintaining connections to their home communities.

The concept of "negotiating space" refers to the process by which Voluntarily Repatriated Vietnamese, and Vietnamese migrants navigate and shape their surroundings to meet their needs and aspirations. It involves actively engaging with the physical, social, and cultural dimensions of a space to create a sense of belonging and empowerment. In the context of migration, negotiating space can involve: 1) physical space: migrants may adapt their living spaces, create new community centers, or establish businesses to make their new environment more familiar and welcoming; 2) social space: migrants may form social networks, join community organizations, or participate in cultural activities to build connections and gain a sense of belonging; 3) cultural space: migrants may negotiate their cultural identities, blending elements of their home culture with their new

surroundings to create a unique and hybrid cultural experience. Negotiating space is an ongoing process that requires agency, resilience, and a willingness to engage with the new environment. It is a way for migrants to create a sense of home and contribute to the social and cultural fabric of their new communities.

Rather than solely relying on single-level neoliberalism and world system theories that emphasize economic factors, geographical differences, and individual decision-making, I will employ a transnational network approach to capture the multi-dimensionality of migration and migrants' dual lives. This approach recognizes the connectivity between receiving and sending countries (Gold, 2005, pp. 257-8) as well as the dysconnectivity of transnational networks and the transplantation of migrant networks to destinations (Higuchi, 2010, p. 76). Transnational networks serve as a precondition for mobility and movement, providing social organization and resource mobilization for workers. Migrant networks facilitate dual lives (Gold, 2005, p. 265) by transmitting information, providing financial support, facilitating employment and accommodation, sending remittances, reducing costs and uncertainties, and safeguarding migrants' health and well-being. Social networks not only impact migrants' lives in receiving countries but also contribute to remittance and development in home countries (Bartram, Poros, & Monforte, 2014, p. 98), thereby contributing to placemaking in Vietnam. Specifically, I will analyze how economic, social, and cultural capital accumulated in Thailand contributes to placemaking in *Làng Thái Lan*, Vietnam.

By applying the transnational network approach, I will conduct a multi-level analysis of social dimensions such as groups, relationships, and social analysis of gender, ethnicity, class, age, religion, legal status, and place. This approach allows us to observe how the role of the state and its policies is bypassed due to the embeddedness of migrant transnational networks (Bartram, Poros, and Monforte 2014: 134) and places.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Research methodology

3.1.1 Research method

Recognizing individuals as knowing and feeling subjects rather than mere objects of study or purely rational beings, this research will primarily employ ethnography (focusing on transnational everyday life practices in the specified context) and ethnomethodology - indexical and reflexive analysis of social structures/orders as "taken-for-granted" affairs of actors. Consequently, this research does not establish variables in terms of causal relationships, as is customary in quantitative analysis.

Significantly, this research examines the placemaking, cultural hybridization, and identity construction of voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese (or *Việt Kiều hồi hương* - VKHH) and transnational Vietnamese migrants beyond a specific location. Specifically, I will conduct research in communities in both countries: Như Thanh District, Thanh Hóa Province in Vietnam, and Din Daeng District, Bangkok, Thailand. Therefore, I must employ a cross-border research methodology and the concept of "progressive place" to interpret the capital and analyze the data holistically.

This research will adopt a life-course approach to migration. This research approach will involve a combination of ethnographic methods, primarily non-participant and participant observation, talking with migrants while they are working or socializing, discussion, and in-depth interviews. I will collaborate with VKHH, migrants, and local authorities. Finally, I will conduct interviews and obtain official documents from local commune leaders and district authorities.

3.1.2 Units of analysis

My unit of analysis is not limited to place territories or bounded places/communities. Rather, as mentioned, I view places as "progressive places" or

"progress sense of place" or "global sense of place," which are clearly not bounded, rooted in places, and connected to wider social relations (Massey 2001).

I divide the analysis into two units – from macro, meso to micro levels. These are not separated sections in terms of contents; rather, they interact with each other. **The first** is the macro level, which encompasses transnational migrant networks. These are mainly personal networks or strong tie and weak tie networks. The rest are network corruption, underground business networks, and formal business networks. **Secondly**, the meso level focuses on the migrants' place, emphasizing Vietnam. At this level, the situation involves complex interactions involving capital, business, economy, culture, religion, and livelihoods. All these must be considered to observe mutual aids, power relations, conflicts, negotiation, and construction. Moreover, the accumulative capital of two places can be converted and circulated to each other to make transnational lives as well as place possible.

In addition, the linkage between people and place is crucial. Cultural hybridity and place identity reflect people's identity in the involvement of social interaction, lived and environment experiences, and the meaning of local culture (Mazumdar et al. 2000). **The third** is the micro level analysis, which examines people's everyday life practices, including everyday life politics. This level points out interactions between various actors – i.e., voluntary repatriated Vietnamese, Vietnamese migrants, their afar family, employers, brokers, local authorities, and the villagers in Nhr Thanh.

My research will pay more attention to the actors, who are multiple actors in the contexts interacting with local actors. Thus, the participants of this research consist of 4 groups. First, the voluntary repatriated Vietnamese going back to Vietnam during 1960-1964. Second, the voluntary repatriated Vietnamese's descendants. Third, the migrant workers who are now working in Thailand but returning home for a short period of time and still keeping working in Thailand. And fourth, the migrants who used to work in Thailand since 1990s. Nevertheless, as mentioned, the units of analysis are "place" and "production of place." The participants mostly are aged 20-59 years old. But still, a few are aged over 60 years old will be the key informant for inquiry about the history of this village.

3.1.3 Data analysis

The analysis will draw upon data on migrants' lives through their networks, places, and interactions. What do placemaking practices reveal about the people who produce them? I will focus on the social and cultural construction of places (placemaking), emphasizing the role of people's interactions in imbuing places with meaning. Place can be analyzed through three main approaches: descriptive, social constructivist, and phenomenological. This research will adopt a social constructivist approach.

Within the framework of placemaking, I will apply the ideas of Mazumdar et al. (2000). I will examine the networks, material culture, interactions of people, and celebration of religious events and holidays as factors that contribute to a sense of place, fostering ethnic identity and communal solidarity. *Làng Thái Lan* in Như Thanh district, Thanh Hóa province, Vietnam, and Din Daeng in Bangkok, Thailand, are considered places that embody memory, hope, and symbols of homeland for the Vietnamese migrants who reside there.

3.1.4 Validity and reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected, I employ triangulation as a research method. This involves immersing myself in the fieldwork, observing people's practices within their specific contexts, and not solely relying on interviews to gather information devoid of context. Data without context is inherently invalid and unreliable. Therefore, I will analyze the data in conjunction with the context-specifics, adopting an emic perspective rather than solely relying on the researcher's viewpoint.

3.2 Description of the field site

3.2.1 Research sites

In employing ethnography and ethnomethodology of transnationalism as research methods, I conceptualize the place of a locality or ethnographic site (Appadurai 1990) within the context of globalization and regionalization of ASEAN. This aligns with Arturo Escobar's (2001: 142) concept of "glocality," which bridges

the dichotomy of the local and global. However, the places where I conduct ethnographic work are not static and bounded but rather progressive (Cresswell 2014).

This thesis adopts a multi-sited approach that delves deeply into two locations: (i) *Làng Thái Lan* in Như Thanh District, Thanh Hóa Province in Vietnam; and (ii) Prachasongkroh Road, Din Daeng District, Bangkok in Thailand, where the migrants reside invisibly. These places are the sites of articulation between global capital and local culture.

Như Thanh is a mountainous district in Western Thanh Hóa Province, approximately 45 km from the central city of Thanh Hóa. With an area of 588.29 square kilometers, Như Thanh is not only a location for returned overseas Vietnamese but also a place of memory for them (*Việt Kiều*). This place can be seen as the center of place identity.

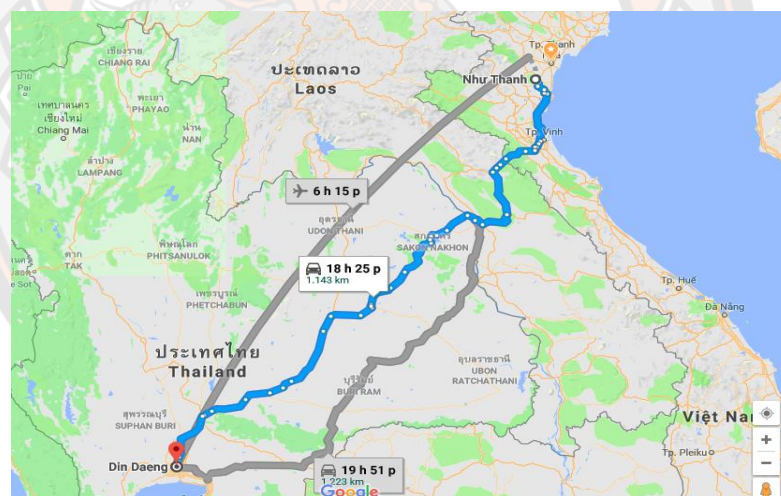


Figure 2: The map of the route from Như Thanh, Vietnam to Bangkok, Thailand

Source: Google map (<https://www.google.com/maps>)

Din Daeng is a significant location in Bangkok, Thailand, particularly for migrant workers. It is a popular destination for migrant workers from neighboring countries such as Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, who come to Thailand in search of employment opportunities. Din Daeng is known for its bustling streets and markets, which offer a variety of goods and services catering to the needs of these

migrant workers. The area is also home to several labor offices, including the Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, where migrant workers can register and obtain work permits.

The area's proximity to the labor offices and its availability of services make it a hub for migrant workers in Bangkok. Many migrant workers, especially those from Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, reside in Din Daeng due to its accessibility and affordability. The area's housing options, although limited, are often chosen based on factors such as proximity to work, affordability, and availability. This place is a location where plenty of small and medium garment industries are established. There are thousands of workers who are subcontractors and almost 100 percent of which are foreign migrant workers, mostly are Myanmar, Cambodian and Vietnamese, respectively. Estimatly there are about 2,000 Vietnamese sub-contractors there which Nhu Thanh people share around 10 percent. This location is considered as an invisible Vietnamese community.

Din Daeng is not only a place of work but also a community for migrant workers, offering a sense of security and familiarity in an unfamiliar environment. The area's housing choices reflect the dynamic and evolving preferences of migrant workers, influenced by factors such as personal needs, available alternatives, and the desire for better prospects in urban settings.

In summary, Din Daeng is a key location in Bangkok for migrant workers, offering a range of services and housing options that cater to their needs. The area's accessibility and affordability make it a popular choice for migrant workers from neighboring countries, who come to Thailand seeking employment opportunities and a better life.

Geographical context

Thanh Hóa province, situated in the North Central region of Vietnam, is approximately 160 kilometers north of Hanoi and 180 kilometers northeast of Hải Phòng. It is one of seven provinces designated by overseas Vietnamese for settlement and economic development in the mountainous districts of western Thanh Hóa.

The area inhabited by the VKHH community is situated within the former Nhu Xuân district, a mountainous region in western Thanh Hóa province. It is home to ethnic minority communities (Thai, Muong, Tho) and is renowned for its extensive ironwood forest and diverse wildlife. Its distance from city center of Thanh Hóa is 45 km to the Southwest.

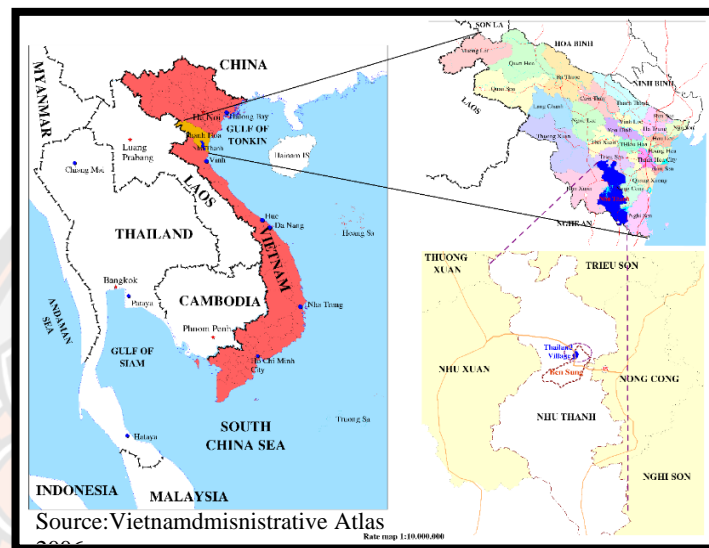


Figure 3: The map of Làng Thái Lan, Bến Sung town, Nhu Xuân district, Thanh Hóa province, Vietnam.

Source: Le Ha Thanh¹

Nhu Xuân district evolved from ancient times to the present day through various historical periods, including being part of different districts under different dynasties, facing colonization by the French, involvement in revolutionary movements, establishment of cooperatives, migration of people, dissolution of cooperatives, division into Nhu Thành and Nhu Xuân districts, and the establishment of Bến Sung town. Today, the VKHH community lives mixedly with Vietnamese officials and business people in the area.

Strategically, this area occupies a key position at the intersection of National Highway 45 and Hồ Chí Minh Road, connecting the Northern economic regions with

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the mountainous areas in the Northwest of Thanh Hóa province and the Northwest region of Nghệ An province. During the struggle against French colonial rule (1930-1945), the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) established a presence in the area to mobilize revolutionary forces and initiate uprisings. Subsequently, during the war against the United States, the area served as a vital hub for the production and transportation of food and supplies, linking logistical and reinforcement operations between the North and South of Vietnam.

After 1950, the government implemented a policy of population redistribution from the plains to the mountainous regions to establish new economic zones. In 1963, the first group of VKHH chose Bến Sung as their settlement and named it Vĩnh Long Village, cohabitating with other migrant communities. Over the following three decades, through their contributions to socio-economic development and in collaboration with other immigrant groups in Thanh Hóa province, the VKHH community transformed Bến Sung from a desolate mountainous area into an economic hub within Như Xuân district.

In 1990, the VKHH network established connections between Bến Sung and Thailand, leading to the migration of thousands of workers to Thailand and the exchange of goods between the two countries. This influx of migrant workers and trade opportunities fostered significant socio-cultural-economic development in the region. The VKHH community invested in and developed various business services, transforming the area from a mountainous region into a thriving neighborhood with a diverse range of services and goods imported from Thailand.

In 1996, Như Thanh district was established after being separated from the old Như Xuân district. Bến Sung was designated as the socio-cultural-economic center of the new district, with Vĩnh Long village selected as the administrative center. This designation attracted further investment in infrastructure development and led to an influx of migrant groups, resulting in a rapid increase in the local population.

While there may not be comprehensive documentation of the VKHH community's specific contributions to the economic development of the region and the establishment of Như Thanh district, their creativity and entrepreneurial spirit in developing cooperative economic initiatives in Vĩnh Long and pursuing business ventures after the "*Đổi mới/Reform*" period have undoubtedly played a significant role in the progress and prosperity of Bến Sung.

3.2.2 Chronology

Table 1: Brief summary of the historical process of forming the land of Như Thanh district, Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam:

	Như Xuân to 1963
Han Dynasty , 111 (B.C.) - 220	The land of Như Xuân belonged to Cu Phong rural district and Cửu Chân urban district.
Tuy – Duong Dynasty 618-905	Như Xuân land belonged to Cửu Chân district (including Nông Cống, Như Xuân and Như Thanh districts).
To the Tran Dynasty 1255-1400	Upon the separation of Nông Cống district from Cửu Chân district, the land of Như Xuân became part of Nông Cống district.
Le - Nguyen Dynasty 1428-1945	Như Thanh land belonged to Xuân Du, Nông Cống district
September 1, 1858	France invaded Viet Nam
1893-1908	Như Xuân county was established
1908-1911	The French colonialists attacked the area of Như Xuân and started to open coffee and rubber plantations.
1911-1914	French colonialists began to harvest timber from natural forests in Như Xuân area
1914-1929	French colonists began mining lead ore
1929-1930	France expanded the trail through the forest with the width of 2-5 m connecting Thanh Hóa city through Nông Cống district, and Như Xuân (now National Highway 45).
1930-1941	The revolutionary movement was just initiated and developed
07/1941	Thanh Hóa developed Như Xuân to become the revolutionary base of the province
1942-1945	Many movements to fight against the French colonialists to gain power began to break out and succeeded.
09/1945	Provisional Committee was established, renamed Như Xuân county to Như Xuân district
August 30, 1948	The Như Xuân Party chapter's establishment was announced.
August 1949	The Như Xuân Party chapter was established.
1954	Won the resistance war against the French colonialists.
November 1, 1955	America attacked South Vietnam
1959	Như Xuân district: 47 cooperatives were established
August 14, 1959	Tai Red Cross Society and the Red Cross Society of Democratic Republic of Vietnam got agreement on overseas Vietnamese in Thailand returning Vietnam
September 5, 1960	3 rd National Party Congress

1963-1964	Overseas Vietnamese in Thailand returned Bến Sung, Như Xuân.
1963-1965	62 households of chemical engineering migrated to Đồng Bồi Village (Vĩnh Lợi today), in Vĩnh Hòa commune, Như Xuân district
February 1965	62 VKHH households were granted land along both sides of the trail (NH 45) 1,500m ² /household.
05-1965	VKHH established Vĩnh Long village and Vĩnh Long Cooperative
1965	Thanh Hóa province issued a policy on rearranging the work force and population among different areas of Thanh Hóa province with the aim of "Building a new economic zone".
1966-1969	Như Xuân received 15,500 people and 6,500 migrant workers, mainly from Hoàng Hóa, Quảng Xương, and Đông Sơn communes.
1975-1979	Như Xuân district agencies evacuated and stationed in Vĩnh Long village
04/1975	Như Xuân district held the 9 th Congress in Vĩnh Long village
April 30, 1975	The country was liberated and unified
1977	Như Xuân district held the 10 th Congress in Vĩnh Long village
December 1986	The Government of Vietnam promulgated the "Đổi mới/Reform" policy
1987	Dissolved all cooperatives, shifted to develop household business
1987-1988	Some returnees came back to Thailand
1991	A network of migrant workers of VKHH was formed, connecting Làng Thái Lan to Thailand
November 18, 1996	The Government issued Decree No. 72 CP - Như Xuân district was divided into two: Như Thanh district (16 communes) and Như Xuân district (14 communes).
	Như Thanh – Vĩnh Long Village 1996-now
December 1996	Như Thanh district was established (16 communes), Vĩnh Long village became the district center
11/4/2002	The Government issued Decree No. 44-CP establishing Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district
2003	Bến Sung town was established, with Vĩnh Long village as the center.
1996-now	Many overseas Vietnamese families sold part of their land to officials of Như Thanh district and some businessmen who moved from elsewhere.
1996-now	VKHH community lives mixedly with Vietnamese officials and business people

3.3 The process of providing information and obtaining consent

Given that my data collection is predicated upon pre-existing friendship and neighborly relationships—implying familiarity with the participants prior to the commencement of the research—I shall employ non-verbal consent. This approach is deemed appropriate because, within the context of strong-ties relationships, individuals are cognizant of my identity and the research objectives underlying my presence in their community. Nonetheless, prior to data collection, I shall meticulously inform the participants about the research objectives and their significance to both their society and the broader ASEAN Community. This comprehensive briefing will precede my observations of their daily life practices, discussions with them, and in-depth interviews, as dictated by the specific circumstances. Furthermore, to safeguard the privacy and anonymity of the participants, I shall utilize pseudonyms for all persons, work units, officials, locations, and places mentioned throughout this thesis.

3.4 Managing risks to participants

Participants are empowered to terminate their involvement in the project forthwith should they perceive any element of risk. In such an event, their data will be promptly withdrawn from the analysis. Furthermore, they will be duly compensated until they are fully satisfied and comfortable. In other words, I am fully prepared to offer an apology for any errors or oversights on my part that may have violated their privacy. Should the situation warrant, I am also willing to provide monetary compensation, notwithstanding the unlikelihood of such risks materializing. It is important to emphasize that this research is firmly rooted in robust social relationships forged through neighborhood and networking ties, implying that I am well-acquainted with the participants prior to the commencement of the research.

CHAPTER IV

SETTLING AND CULTURALIZING PLACE: OUTSTANDING COOPERATIVES OF REPATRIATED VOLUNTARY VIETNAMESE IN NHU' THANH

4.1 Introduction

Throughout Vietnam's history, wars and conflicts have been prevalent, posing significant threats to the safety and well-being of its citizens. As a result, many Vietnamese have sought refuge in neighboring countries, with Thailand emerging as a preferred destination due to its peaceful environment, ample land, low population density, and favorable conditions for economic growth. By 1960, the Vietnamese migrant population in Thailand, primarily concentrated in the northeastern provinces along the Mekong River, had reached approximately 100,000 individuals, including their descendants (Poole, 1967). The largest influx of Vietnamese migrants occurred between 1945 and 1946, when nearly 50,000 people fled Laos to escape the ongoing conflict. Thai authorities initially referred to these migrants as "*Khôn Duôn Ôp pa dóp*" (refugees), but later adopted the term "*Khôn Thai chứa sãi chao Việt Nam*" (Vietnamese Thais) to describe their status as Vietnamese people of Thai origin (Quang, 2013, p. 137).

The Vietnamese migrant community in Thailand faced numerous challenges, including restrictive policies implemented by the Thai military government after 1948, which viewed overseas Vietnamese as potential threats and "spies" for the Communist Party of Vietnam. To survive and thrive in their new environment, the migrants adopted various strategies. They assimilated into Thai culture and language, forged alliances with local communities, and maintained close ties with their homeland. Simultaneously, they preserved their own cultural traditions, expressed their patriotism, and actively participated in the development of the Vietnamese revolutionary network in Thailand, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to their country's liberation (1945-1950).

In response to the call of President Hồ Chí Minh, many overseas Vietnamese returned to Vietnam to contribute to the nation's reconstruction. Between 1960 and 1964, over 50,000 Vietnamese migrants were repatriated in 75 voyages. These returnees were dispersed across various mountainous regions in Northern and Central Vietnam, where they faced challenging living conditions and skepticism from local communities.

Despite these obstacles, the returning Vietnamese migrants brought with them a wealth of cultural and social capital acquired during their time in Thailand. They skillfully utilized these resources to navigate the government's treatment and address concerns about their loyalty and patriotism. Their shared experiences as *phản bội dân tộc* (national traitors) fostered a sense of unity and determination among the returnees, leading to the establishment of a thriving VKHH community characterized by patriotism, modernity, and a unique blend of Vietnamese and Thai cultural identities.

This chapter draws upon the work of Peter A. Poole (Poole, 1970) to explore the motivations behind Vietnamese migration to Thailand and its implications for their subsequent settlement in Vietnam. It also examines the formation and accumulation of cultural and social capital among overseas Vietnamese, highlighting its significance in shaping their community's identity and contributing to the economic development of Thailand's northeastern region. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the role of overseas Vietnamese in supporting the Communist Party of Vietnam's network in Thailand, a topic not fully addressed by Poole.

Additionally, this chapter engages with Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet's analysis of the collapse of the agricultural cooperative economic model in Vietnam (Kerkvliet, 2005). While Kerkvliet primarily focuses on the failures of these cooperatives, this chapter acknowledges the successes achieved by individual returnees who leveraged their mixed cultural and social capital to establish cooperatives and contribute to local socio-economic development, fostering a VKHH community infused with a Vietnamese-Thai cross-cultural identity.

4.2 Accumulating capitals of VKHH mobility to Thailand

In this section, I will elucidate the social context of Vietnam, which was plagued by incessant wars and exploitation, resulting in widespread poverty. In contrast, Thailand enjoyed a period of relative peace and stability during the same period. Consequently, migration from the tumultuous environment of Vietnam to the perceived promised land of Thailand was driven by the aspiration for a brighter future. During their sojourn in Thailand, Vietnamese migrants amassed a wealth of economic, cultural, and social capitals. These resources subsequently became instrumental in enabling the migrant Vietnamese to establish a distinct and thriving community upon their repatriation to Vietnam during the period 1960-1964 and later.

Vietnam's historical oppression and migration

From 1858, the French colonialists invaded Vietnam and established a system of government to exploit its natural resources and cheap labor. They forced Vietnamese people to work in harsh conditions with low wages in rubber, coffee, and forest plantations. The brutal working environment in the French colonial plantations has left a lasting impact on generations of Vietnamese people. The proverb "*Cao su đi dễ khó về, khi đi trai tráng khi về bủng beo, Cao su xanh tốt lạ đời, mỗi cây bón một xác người công nhân*" (Rubber plantations are easy to enter but difficult to leave; when you go, you are a young man, when you return, you are a cripple; the rubber trees are so green because each tree is fertilized with the body of a worker) (Lân, 1999) reflects the harsh exploitation and beatings suffered by workers under the French Empire. This exploitation was not limited to Vietnam; the French colonialists also opened plantations in Laos and Cambodia, recruiting Vietnamese workers to work in these plantations. There were 58 French colonial plantations in Laos and 53 in Cambodia. The French colonialists also built roads connecting various areas in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, such as the route from Saigon-Tay Ninh to the Cambodian border and Vinh-Sam Nua (Laos), to facilitate the exploitation of natural resources in the Indochina region (H. Brenier, 1914, p. 186).

The primary land route utilized by the Vietnamese during their migration to Thailand through Laos in the past is the current Route Number 8, which connects Vinh city in Vietnam to Tha Khek in Laos. Along this route, individuals from

Nghê An and Hà Tĩnh provinces traveled to Tha Khek, located in Laos' Kham Muan Province. They subsequently crossed the Mekong River to Nakhon Phanom, a province in Northeastern Thailand. Additionally, Route Number 8 intersects with Route Number 13 at Ban Nam Thon, Bolikhamsai Province in Laos, before continuing to Vientiane, the capital city. The distance from Cao Troe point in Vietnam to Ban Nam Thon in Laos (opposite Ban Pheng, Nakhon Phanom Province in Thailand), where Routes Number 8 and 13 converge, is approximately 120 kilometers. The distance from Ban Nam Thon to Tha Khek is approximately 100 kilometers.

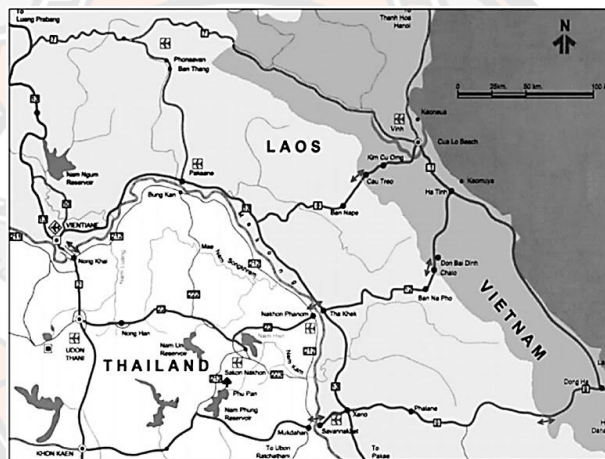


Figure 4: The Vietnamese migrated to Thailand via multiple routes

Source: Thanyathip Sripana, 2003, p.7

In addition to Route Number 8, Route Number 12, which connects Quang Binh in Vietnam to Tha Khek and subsequently Nakhon Phanom, was also utilized. From the Vietnamese-Lao border at Cha Lo, it leads to Kham Muan in Laos and then to Nakhon Phanom Province.

Route Number 9, which is typically discussed in the context of the East-West Economic Corridor in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), was also utilized by Vietnamese migrants from Quang Tri, Quang Binh, and Hue as they traveled to Mukdahan in Thailand (Mukdahan was formerly a district in Nakhon Phanom Province).

Route Number 8, which traverses mountainous terrain, presented the most challenging migration route. Even today, traveling through the mountainous landscape of Laos necessitates caution, particularly during the rainy season. Road improvements in such mountainous regions are challenging due to both the elevation and the scarcity of funding. Route Number 9 is a considerably more accessible route because it primarily traverses flat terrain. Historically, the French utilized Route Number 9 to transport weapons and ammunition between Vietnam and Laos.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, following their invasion of Northern Vietnam, the French colonialists implemented exploitative policies that compelled Vietnamese people to labor in harsh plantation conditions for minimal wages. This impoverished the Vietnamese people, forcing them to abandon their ancestral lands. As a result, a wave of migrants left their homeland in search of a better life in Thailand.

As part of their plan to exploit Indochina, the French colonialists established numerous plantations and mines in Laos and Cambodia, as well as roads connecting the three Indochinese nations (H. Brenier, 1914, p. 186). Vietnamese laborers migrated to Laos and Cambodia in large numbers to work in French colonial plantations and mines. By 1945, the number of Vietnamese migrants had surpassed 40,000 (Poole, 1970, p. 41).

Thailand: A land of peace and hospitality

The Kingdom of Thailand is situated on the Central Indian peninsula, covering an area of 513,520 square kilometers. Geographically, it spans from 5.30 to 26 degrees North latitude and 97.30 to 105.30 degrees East longitude, extending from latitude 50 to 210 North latitude. The northernmost point is Me Sai town (Chiang Rai), bordering Myanmar, while the southernmost point is Narathiwat, bordering Malaysia. The country's length stretches over 1500 kilometers. Thai people often compare their country to an ancient ax, but when examining the map of mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand resembles an elephant's head with a long trunk dipping into the Gulf of Thailand (Ninh, 1990, p. 44). Thailand has a relatively long history of state formation. The country's former name, "Kingdom of Siam," was used in ancient Vietnamese records to refer to the small state of Sukhothay (1260-1349). The official

name "Kingdom of Siam" was used from 1767 to 1939. In 1940, the official name was changed to "Kingdom of Thailand" (Chuc, 2003, p. 847). From 1945 to May 11, 1949, the name of Thailand was briefly reverted to "Siam." Since 1949, the name "Thailand" has been officially used to the present day.

Why Thailand Became a Popular Destination for Vietnamese Migrants? During the development of both Thailand and Vietnam, Thailand was perceived as a peaceful nation with hospitable and compassionate people. Additionally, its fertile and extensive land, along with favorable natural conditions, aligned well with the experiences of Vietnamese people seeking to establish their livelihoods. Furthermore, the Thai government implemented policies welcoming Vietnamese migrants, recognizing them as a valuable labor force for the country's socioeconomic development strategy. Consequently, Thailand emerged as a highly desirable destination for Vietnamese migrants seeking to settle down.

In comparison to the Vietnamese social context at the time, Thailand offered relative stability in various aspects. From the 14th century onward, Thailand entered the Ayutthaya period, which spanned over 400 years (1350-1767). During this period, the kingdom achieved significant development in various domains, with the Sukhothai (1569-1629) and Prasat Thong (1630-1688) dynasties being particularly notable.

From 1782, Siam entered the Chakri dynasty. The Siamese kings from Rama I onward actively encouraged immigration from neighboring countries. During the reign of Rama IV (1804-1851), the Siamese king issued an edict to the northeastern provinces, urging them to attract Vietnamese immigrants for trade and settlement. The king proclaimed, "If they come to Siam, they will be allowed to live, be protected, and not be hungry." He instructed provincial leaders in the region to provide land to Vietnamese migrants and facilitate their contributions to the country's prosperity (Khoa, 2016, p. 27).

Moreover, Thailand's geographical proximity to Vietnam, both by land and sea, facilitated migration. By land, migrants from Central Vietnam could cross the Annamite range and the Mekong River to reach Thailand. By sea, migrants from the Southern region of Vietnam could traverse the Gulf of Thailand to reach the Eastern

central provinces of Thailand. These favorable conditions enabled Vietnamese people to migrate to Thailand for trade and settlement throughout history.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, while other regional nations lost their independence and became colonies of the French and British empires, Thailand maintained its sovereignty through astute and conciliatory foreign policies. This peaceful and stable environment proved highly attractive to Vietnamese migrants.

Geographically, Thailand is divided into four distinct regions: the North and Northeast Region, the Western Region, the Central Region, and the Southern Region. This regional division, established by the National Geographic Council of Thailand in 1978, is widely recognized. Historically, Vietnamese immigrants to Thailand have primarily settled in the Northeast and East of Central Thailand.

Vietnamese migrants entered Thailand via two main routes. The first involved traveling overland through Laos or Cambodia and crossing the Mekong River. The second involved traveling by sea. Throughout the history of Vietnamese migration to Thailand, several groups, primarily generals and soldiers of Vietnamese dynasties, fled the country by ship and sought refuge in Thailand.

Vietnam's formation and development occurred primarily in the Northern region, with gradual expansion southward amidst ongoing warfare and social instability. The population faced poverty and underdevelopment. Vietnamese migration to new lands was a recognized phenomenon from an early period. Thailand, with its abundance, development, and peace, emerged as a familiar destination for Vietnamese seeking to escape poverty and establish new lives.

The first Vietnamese migrants to Thailand, a small group, arrived around the 7th century. However, the significant wave of Vietnamese migration to Thailand occurred from the 18th to 20th centuries, particularly during the mid-20th century. These migrants originated primarily from the Central region and the North of Vietnam, traveling to Thailand by land and sea routes for various reasons. The three main motivations for Vietnamese migration to Thailand were:

1. Seeking new economic opportunities
2. Fleeing wartime conditions

3. Establishing networks for the Vietnamese Communist Party

4. Pursuing education and promoting religious values.

Vietnamese migration to Thailand, driven by various factors as discussed earlier, resulted in the formation of communities in socioeconomic hubs within the Northeastern provinces of Thailand. These communities comprised Vietnamese individuals from diverse backgrounds, including the North, Central, and a few Southern regions, who lacked familial or village connections. Guided by the inherent Vietnamese communal spirit, they established cohesive communities, often intermingling with Chinese, Indian, and regional ethnic Chinese diaspora groups in Thailand. Through intermarriage with Thai locals, they gradually integrated into Thai society and engaged in economic activities similar to their Thai counterparts.

The livelihood pursuits of Vietnamese Thai individuals were highly diversified, with many professions being adopted from Thai, Chinese, and Indian communities. Consequently, business acumen, trade practices, and various professional skills were acquired by Vietnamese residents, becoming integral to their identity as an overseas Vietnamese community.

Nguyen Dang Khoa (2016) provides a comprehensive overview of the occupations undertaken by Vietnamese residents in the Northeast Thailand hubs. These include garment and fashion design, food businesses (production of tofu, fish paste, rice vermicelli, rice wine, cassava wine, etc.), brick manufacturing, grocery retailing, gold, silver, and gemstone trading, transportation, agricultural farming, rice milling, automotive and motorcycle repair, electrical work, sculpting, forestry, seafood processing, and fine arts. These occupations were diligently pursued by overseas Vietnamese, enabling them to accumulate economic and cultural capital. Notably, the entrepreneurial mindset and business acumen became defining characteristics of the overseas Vietnamese community.

Economic contributions and support for the Communist Party of Vietnam. The Vietnamese community in Northeast Thailand established a strong economic presence and developed economic networks that contributed significantly to the socio-economic development of the region. Overseas Vietnamese actively contributed

financial resources to the Communist Party of Vietnam's network in Thailand, providing vital support for revolutionary activities against French colonial rule.

Interruption of economic development, however, the economic progress and capital accumulation of overseas Vietnamese in Thailand faced a setback in the 1950s. The Thai government implemented a policy that prohibited Vietnamese from engaging in 25 major industries, restricting them to manual labor such as masonry, carpentry, and the production of fish paste and spring rolls (Huyen, 2015, p. 33).

4.3 Emotional connection to communist party of Vietnam (CPV) and their practices

“Chúng ta đi xa nhà, xa nước cũng chỉ vì nước mất nhà tan. Chừng nào chúng ta chưa giành lại được nước thì còn phải đi, đi trọn đời”

(We go far away from our home, our country just because our home and country were lost. As long as we haven't got our country back, we have to go, go for a lifetime)

“Người Việt đoàn kết thương yêu đùm bọc lẫn nhau và nhớ lấy cái nhục mất nước, và phải thấy cái nhục đó, ở bất cứ đâu cũng cảm thấy đau, thấy buồn”.

(Vietnamese people unite, love and care for each other and remember the humiliation of a lost country, and must see that humiliation, everywhere we feel pain and sadness)

Đặng Thục Hứa (Tai, 1965, p.16)

Đặng Thục Hứa was among the first patriotic revolutionaries to arrive in Thailand and establish connections with the existing Overseas Vietnamese community. He dedicated himself to spreading revolutionary ideas and mobilizing Overseas Vietnamese to join the Vietnamese revolutionary network in Thailand. His efforts ignited the patriotic sentiments of many Overseas Vietnamese, who despite living in relative comfort, harbored resentment towards the feudal regime and French colonialists responsible for the suffering of their homeland.

This indignation motivated Overseas Vietnamese to actively participate in the growing revolutionary network. Families willingly provided shelter and support to revolutionaries arriving from Vietnam, encouraging their male members to join the revolutionary movement. Patriotic youths, the children of Overseas Vietnamese, also

played a significant role. Numerous revolutionary bases were established under various names, including "*Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội*" and "*Trại Cày*" led by Phan Bội Châu and Đặng Thục Hứa from 1910 to 1920. From 1920 to 1925, revolutionary bases known as "*Trại Các Em*" were established and developed in Overseas Vietnamese communities under the guidance of Dang Quynh Anh.

With the arrival of the renowned revolutionary Nguyễn Ái Quốc (Hồ Chí Minh) in Thailand in 1925, the number of Overseas Vietnamese participating in the revolution surged. New revolutionary bases were established, such as "*Hội Hợp Tác*" and "*Hội Việt Kiều Thân Ái*" (Vỳ, 2001).

The Impact of the Vietnamese Revolutionary Network in Thailand. Over four decades of building and developing the revolutionary network in Thailand, numerous educational and training programs were implemented. These efforts attracted a significant number of patriotic Vietnamese migrants to Thailand. The network instilled a sense of patriotism in approximately 21,000 Overseas Vietnamese, who actively engaged in revolutionary activities (Poole, 1970, p. 31). This resulted in a robust network of Vietnamese revolutionaries in Thailand, serving as a hub for training revolutionary cadres and a transit point for revolutionaries from Vietnam and other countries.

The growth of the Vietnamese revolutionary force in Thailand provided substantial human and material support to the revolutionary forces in both North and South Vietnam, particularly in the struggle against French colonial rule. However, the expansion of the Vietnamese revolutionary movement in Thailand also raised concerns for the Thai military government. In 1947, the Thai government labeled Overseas Vietnamese as "dangerous people" and implemented policies to suppress their activities and the Vietnamese revolutionary movement in Thailand from 1948 onward. The culmination of this repression was the repatriation of Overseas Vietnamese from Thailand to Vietnam between 1960 and 1964.

4.4 Treatment in Thailand and the hope of repatriation: "*Bác Hồ Kêu Gọi*" (a call from Hồ Chí Minh)

Treatment in Thailand

Upon seizing power, the Thai military government perceived the Vietnamese community in Thailand as a politically suspect group. Consequently, a specialized security agency was established to carry out a campaign of severe persecution against overseas Vietnamese in the Northeast. This harsh treatment stemmed from two primary concerns: Firstly, the Thai government viewed the overseas Vietnamese community as a patriotic force supporting the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in its resistance against the United States, posing a potential threat to Thailand's security as an ally of the United States' anti-communist policies. Secondly, the Thai government believed that the overseas Vietnamese community in the Northeast served as a hub for communist propaganda and actively supported the activities of the Communist Party of Thailand (Thiệu, 2008, p. 138).

To control and restrict the activities of the Vietnamese community in Thailand, the military government implemented a policy of containment. Restrictive policies targeting overseas Vietnamese. In line with this policy, Overseas Vietnamese were restricted to settling in only 13 provinces in 1949. To further tighten control over their activities, on August 5, 1950, the Thai military government amended the regulations governing Vietnamese residency, limiting it to five provinces: Nong Khai, Sacol Nakhon, Ubon Ratchanthani, Nakhon Phanom, and Prachinburi. During this period, Overseas Vietnamese were prohibited from traveling freely between provinces. Any attempt to leave their designated province required prior approval from local authorities and the issuance of a travel permit (Poole, 1970, p. 41).

The implementation of these regulations created significant challenges and disruption for Overseas Vietnamese. The Thai military government's actions effectively confined them to specific areas, hindering their ability to pursue economic opportunities and maintain social connections.

In September 1950, the Thai military government aligned itself with the United States, signing a treaty of economic cooperation and military aid. This alliance

paved the way for the Thai government to support the US invasion of Indochina. The government recognized the government of Bảo Đại and demanded that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam cease propaganda activities among the Vietnamese community in Thailand. Vietnamese representative offices and information agencies were ordered to close. These developments created a perilous environment for overseas Vietnamese involved in the Vietnamese revolution.

Thai authorities harbored suspicions that the Oversea Vietnamese were covert agents of the *Việt Minh*, a nationalist and communist organization pivotal in Vietnam's struggle for independence from French colonial rule. This perception cast the Oversea Vietnamese in a negative light, branding them as potential terrorists. Consequently, they faced stringent restrictions: prohibitions on trade, forced relocation to southern Thailand, incarceration, and the denial of education to their children (Huyen, 2015, p. 33). Moreover, their possessions were subject to destruction, and the practice of Vietnamese language, culture, and religion was outlawed (Sriphana & Thin, 2005). These oppressive measures rendered the Overseas Vietnamese destitute and deprived them of fundamental freedoms, compelling them to abandon their communities in search of alternative living arrangements in Vietnam. (Khoa, 2016; Poole, 1970; Sriphana & Thin, 2005).

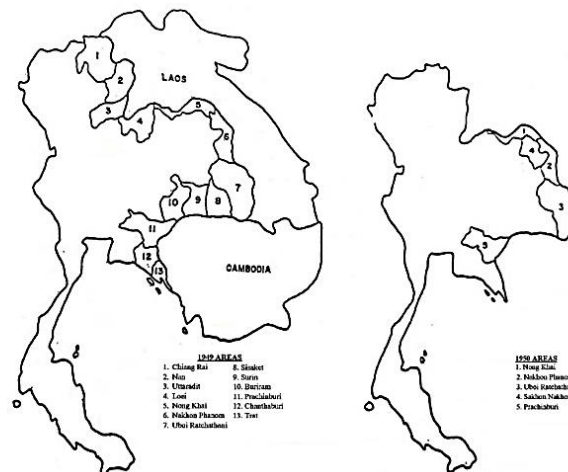


Figure 5: The areas of concentration of Việt Kiều between 1949 and 1950

Source: Poole, 1970, P.46

In 1956, the Phibun Songkhram government implemented a harsh policy of expelling Vietnamese from Thailand and sending them to South Vietnam under the Ngo Dinh Diem government. The justification provided was that Thailand maintained diplomatic relations only with Ngô Đình Diệm's government and not with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. However, this decision was met with fierce resistance from the overseas Vietnamese community. The majority of overseas Vietnamese in Thailand, particularly in the Northeast region, had emigrated from Central and Northern Vietnam. Furthermore, over four decades of establishing and expanding revolutionary bases in this region had resulted in a substantial number of revolutionary cadres, both veteran and newly recruited overseas Vietnamese. They had been indoctrinated with revolutionary ideology, patriotism, and a deep desire for national liberation and reunification. For them, the true embodiment of Vietnam was not Ngo Dinh Diem's government but Uncle Hồ Chí Minh. Driven by these sentiments, the Vietnamese community vehemently opposed the Thai government's policy.

The Vietnamese community in Thailand embarked on a new and intense struggle against the repatriation policy. The slogan "I would rather die than return to the South with the US-puppet" became a rallying cry. Overseas Vietnamese employed the Thai custom of cutting their hair and shaving their heads in mourning to protest the policy. Within a short period, approximately 70,000 Vietnamese in the Northeast region, young and old, had shaved their heads and donned black clothing to demonstrate their resolve (Poole, 1970). Some even dug graves and placed coffins in front of their homes, vowing to commit suicide by dismemberment if Thai soldiers attempted to forcibly return them to the South. There were instances of Vietnamese who were compelled to return to the South taking their own lives by cutting their necks with shards of glass.

Considering the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as the legitimate government and the Ngô Đình Diệm regime as traitors, the majority of Overseas Vietnamese yearned to return to the socialist North and join forces with Hồ Chí Minh and the Communist Party in nation-building (Hồng, 1999, p. 50). In response to the resistance of Overseas Vietnamese, Sarit Thanarat, who came to power in 1958, implemented even harsher measures. These included banning Vietnamese from

engaging in 28 essential occupations, raising income and business taxes for Vietnamese, suppressing and persecuting communists, prohibiting gatherings of more than seven Vietnamese individuals, and banning market interactions with Thai people (Huyề̀n, 2015). These draconian policies further marginalized Overseas Vietnamese, depriving them of livelihoods, freedom of movement, and basic rights. Their lives in Thailand became increasingly precarious.

The Hanoi government intervened, initiating negotiations with the Thai government regarding the repatriation of Overseas Vietnamese. After extensive discussions, an agreement was reached in 1958 between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Thai Red Cross in Yangon (Burma). This agreement stipulated that all Vietnamese in Northeast Thailand would be repatriated to North Vietnam. The struggle to return to the North with the Communist Party and President Hồ Chí Minh had been successful. Tens of thousands of Overseas Vietnamese registered to return to their homeland, eager to contribute to its reconstruction and join the fight against the United States.

A hopeful repatriation: "Bác Hồ Kêu Gọi" (A Call from Hồ Chí Minh). Amidst the persecution, a beacon of hope emerged for the overseas Vietnamese community in Thailand: the "Bác Hồ Kêu Gọi" (A Call from Hồ Chí Minh) movement. This movement, initiated by Hồ Chí Minh, the revered leader of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, aimed to rally overseas Vietnamese and encourage their return to their homeland to contribute to the nation-building process. The "Bác Hồ Kêu Gọi" movement resonated deeply with the Vietnamese community in Thailand, who had long yearned for the opportunity to return to their ancestral land. Many overseas Vietnamese, inspired by Hồ Chí Minh's call, made the arduous journey back to Vietnam, eager to play a role in the reconstruction and development of their war-torn nation.

In the face of the extremely stringent political and social constraints imposed by the Thai government on Vietnamese migrants, President Hồ Chí Minh exhorted overseas Vietnamese to repatriate and contribute to the nation's development with unwavering determination.

In 1959, President Hồ Chí Minh issued a heartfelt appeal to overseas Vietnamese residing in Thailand, urging them to return home and contribute to the reconstruction and defense of their fatherland. Inspired by his call, the overseas Vietnamese community swiftly organized repatriation efforts and prepared to transfer their assets accumulated over many years in Thailand to Vietnam, which would serve as a foundation for their new lives. According to Thai records from 1960, an impressive 70,042 individuals registered to return to North Vietnam within a short period. Statistics from the All-Thailand Red Cross Society indicate that approximately 67,965 overseas Vietnamese living in the Northeast region of Thailand, including the provinces of Nakhon Phanom, Nong Khai, Sakhon Nakhon, Udon Thani, and Ubon, registered to return home, accounting for roughly 97% of the total number of Vietnamese registered for repatriation. The remaining overseas Vietnamese were individuals suspected of communist affiliations by the Thai military government. These individuals were detained and imprisoned in two southern provinces of Thailand: Surat Thani and Phatthalung.

Table 2: The list of provinces having overseas Vietnamese registered for voluntary repatriation:

No	Province	Number of subscribers	Number of repatriates
1	Nakhon Phanom	22,198 people	15,815 people
2	Nong Khai	16,155 people	10,195 people
3	Sakhon Nakhon	12,535 people	8,313 people
4	Udon Thani	8,550 people	4,522 people
5	Ubon	8,527 people	5,689 people
6	Prachin Buri	1,585 people	806 people
7	Xurat Thani	213 people	75 people
8	Phattalung	279 people	121 people
Total 75 ships		70.038 subscribers	54,636 repatriates

Source: Poole, 1967, p 88, (Gathered according to the statistics of the All-Thai Red Cross Society)

The repatriation of Oversea Vietnamese residing in Thailand to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or Northern Vietnam) transpired between January 1960 and August 1964. This initiative was facilitated by an accord between the Thai Red

Cross Society and the DRV's Red Cross Society, signed on August 14, 1959. The repatriation aimed to bolster the DRV's nation-building endeavors. Hồ Chí Minh, revered as Uncle Ho, played a pivotal role in motivating Vietnamese overseas to return home and contribute to their nation's development and defense. Oversea Vietnamese communities responded enthusiastically, registering for voluntary repatriation. However, only 60% of the Oversea Vietnamese population in Thailand ultimately repatriated. Factors such as advanced age, travel difficulties with infants, and the uncertainties of starting a new life in Vietnam contributed to the lower repatriation rate.

Overseas Vietnamese who registered for repatriation primarily belonged to two groups: those who had migrated to Thailand seeking refuge from war and those who had established the Vietnamese Communist Party network in Thailand. The latter group, primarily residing in eight provinces in Northeastern Thailand, including Nakhon Phanom, Nong Khai, Sakhon Nakhon, Ubon, Prachin Buri, Xurat Thani, Phattalung (Poole, 1970), was prioritized for repatriation by the North Vietnamese government (1960-1961). They were settled in provinces and cities in North Vietnam, recognizing their contributions to the development of the Vietnamese Communist Party network in Thailand.

The second group, consisting of overseas Vietnamese who had fled the war, was repatriated later (1962-1964) and settled in challenging mountainous areas. This can be interpreted as a form of punishment for their perceived lack of commitment to the country.

On January 10, 1960, the first 1,000 overseas Vietnamese in Thailand returned home. President Hồ Chí Minh personally welcomed them at the Hải Phòng seaport. The repatriation process was interrupted in August 1964 due to the United States' invasion of northeastern Vietnam. The US military imposed a blockade on the Gulf of Tonkin, prohibiting vessels from entering or exiting Vietnamese territory (Hồng 1999). To safeguard the lives of overseas Vietnamese, the Hanoi government ordered them to cease their repatriation efforts. As a result, only 54,636 of the 70,038 overseas Vietnamese who had registered for repatriation were able to return to Vietnam on 75 ships. The 75th ship carrying returnees marked the end of the repatriation effort after

four years and eight months (Kachatpai Burutpat, 1978, p 85). The repatriation program for overseas Vietnamese was temporarily suspended from August 1964 onward.

The Vietnamese community in Thailand numbered over 100,000 individuals in 1960. Following the repatriation efforts, approximately 70,000 to 80,000 Overseas Vietnamese remained in Thailand in 1967. This group comprised approximately 20,000 former Overseas Vietnamese, 25,000 first-generation Overseas Vietnamese, and 30,000 second-generation Overseas Vietnamese (Poole, 1970, p. 87). Despite facing various challenges under the policies of the Thai military government, the Vietnamese community persevered and continued to thrive with the support of the Thai people. They played a significant role in economic development, fostering business cooperation and investment between Thailand and Vietnam, particularly in the central provinces of Vietnam. Notably, they served as a bridge in the establishment and growth of the Vietnam-Thailand labor network from the 1990s onward.

Overseas Vietnamese who returned to their homeland not only contributed substantial human resources to North Vietnamese society but also brought back valuable assets, both tangible and intangible. Tangible assets included thousands of tons of goods transported on 75 voyages, which were highly valued in the context of Vietnamese society at that time. Intangible assets included cultural capital, professional skills, and business acumen acquired during their extended stay in Thailand. These assets were effectively utilized by Overseas Vietnamese in building communities and establishing a strong mixed cultural identity that blended Vietnamese and Thai elements.

Repatriation with deep gratitude

The repatriated overseas Vietnamese community comprised long-established Vietnamese communities in Thailand (old overseas Vietnamese) and newer communities that had immigrated after 1946 (new overseas Vietnamese). Both groups had benefited from the support and compassion of the Thai people and government for generations. Their ability to settle and thrive was a testament to the unconditional support and humanity extended to them by the indigenous population.

The overseas Vietnamese held a profound sense of gratitude and affection for the Thai people, a sentiment that left an enduring mark on the Vietnam-Thailand relationship. Centuries of harmonious coexistence with Thais and other ethnic groups had become an integral part of the Vietnamese identity in Thailand. Vietnamese morality emphasized the importance of remembering one's roots and expressing gratitude for assistance received.

As a result, the overseas Vietnamese community reciprocated the kindness shown to them by the Thai people, sharing their struggles and extending support to those in need. They played a vital role in transforming the barren Northeast region into a prosperous and fertile land. The peaceful coexistence between Thais and Vietnamese was evident in the harmonious blending of music, with the strains of "*Tiến quân ca*" and "*Diệt Phát-xít*" (Kill Fascists) intertwining with the melodies of "*Hợp đoàn*" and "*Tôi yêu nước Thái*" (I Love Thailand). The source of these melodies, whether Vietnamese or Thai, remained unknown, symbolizing the deep friendship between the two peoples. These sentiments persisted even during the period of persecution under the Thai military government.

The compassion and humanitarianism displayed by the Thai people towards overseas Vietnamese during this challenging period stands as a testament to the enduring bonds between the two peoples. Overseas Vietnamese have consistently emphasized the importance of unity and adherence to the laws of their host country, as exemplified by their ancestors.

When the Thai military government implemented policies that adversely affected overseas Vietnamese, they encountered strong opposition not only from the Vietnamese community but also from various segments of Thai society. Monks from Buddhist temples played a significant role in protesting the oppressive measures. They condemned the hostile acts, provided shelter to those who were persecuted, and organized prayers for the well-being of overseas Vietnamese.

In turn, overseas Vietnamese who received assistance from Thai friends maintained a humble and respectful demeanor, adhering to the Vietnamese proverb *một miếng khi đói bằng một gói khi no* "A piece in poverty equals a great share in wealth." They made every effort to avoid causing inconvenience or distress to their

Thai hosts. Despite the challenges they faced, the deep-rooted friendship between the Vietnamese and Thai peoples remained intact. Even after returning to their homeland, overseas Vietnamese continued to cherish the bonds they had forged in Thailand.

The deep bond between the Thai people and the overseas Vietnamese was evident in the emotional farewells that marked the repatriation process. In recognition of the affection and gratitude they had received, many overseas Vietnamese communities donated funds and constructed commemorative structures as tokens of appreciation for the Thai people. Like Thai citizens throughout the country, overseas Vietnamese held the King and members of the Royal Family in high regard. Songs honoring King Bhumiphon were frequently performed at cultural events organized by the overseas Vietnamese community, alongside songs expressing love for their homeland and President Hồ Chí Minh. Whenever the King or members of the Royal Family visited the Northeastern provinces of Thailand, overseas Vietnamese joined Thai citizens in extending the warmest of welcomes.

Deep within their hearts, overseas Vietnamese acknowledged that they had two mothers: their Vietnamese mother, who had given them birth, and their Thai mother, who had nurtured them. These sentiments and memories were indelibly etched in the minds of every overseas Vietnamese. As they boarded the repatriation ships, they carried not only material possessions but also a profound remembrance of the enduring bond between the overseas Vietnamese community and the Thai people, particularly those in Northeast Thailand. For many overseas Vietnamese, Thailand had become a second home, a place where they had been cared for and supported during Vietnam's most challenging times.

These feelings and memories were carried forward by the overseas Vietnamese community and expressed through festivals and cultural events upon their return to their homeland. Notably, these unique imprints contributed to the establishment of Thai overseas Vietnamese communities, known for their distinct cultural characteristics and referred to as *Làng Thái Lan* "Thai Villages" by the surrounding population.

4.5 Cuộc sống mới nếp sống mới (new lives and new lifestyle); VKHH in struggling in their ancestor land.

To facilitate the repatriation of overseas Vietnamese (VKHH) from Thailand to their homeland, the North Vietnamese Government meticulously compiled comprehensive lists of VKHH households on each vessel. These lists integrated VKHH from diverse regions within Thailand.

Based on field observations and interviews conducted with VKHH residing in the Bến Sung area of Thanh Hóa, two distinct groups of VKHH emerged: 1) Cadres, Party Members, and Patriots: This group comprised individuals who actively participated in the Communist Party's revolutionary activities in Thailand. They received preferential treatment, securing repatriation on the initial voyages and resettlement in economically prosperous provinces and cities in Northern Vietnam; 2) War Fugitives: This group consisted of individuals who did not engage in the Communist Party of Vietnam's revolutionary network. They were subsequently assigned to settle in the Northwest region and the West of Central provinces.



Figure 6 and 7: President Hồ Chí Minh warmly greeted VKHH at Hải Phòng port in 1960

Source: H.Giang

On January 10, 1960, the inaugural vessel carrying 922 overseas Vietnamese arrived in Hải Phòng, located in Northeastern Vietnam (Dung, 2010). Subsequently, 74 additional voyages transported a total of 54,636 overseas Vietnamese back to their

homeland. These voyages also facilitated the repatriation of thousands of tons of cargo and personal belongings belonging to the returnees (Kachatpai Burutpat, 1978, p.85).

Each voyage spanned approximately 7-15 days. Due to seasickness, women and children primarily occupied the deck. Upon arrival at Hải Phòng port, VKHH were greeted by government officials and organized into groups within designated buildings. They remained in Hải Phòng port for approximately one week to undergo health checks and ideological orientation. During this period, they received ample food provisions and encouragement from government officials.

Notably, government officials engaged in discussions with VKHH to convey official messages, clarify expectations, and prepare them for the challenges and hardships they would encounter in their new settlement areas, which significantly differed from their previous living conditions in Thailand. The government emphasized the need for VKHH to fully comprehend the difficulties ahead and to prioritize national interests over personal well-being. They were encouraged to collaborate with the Communist Party and the State in developing the economy, particularly in remote mountainous regions. President Hồ Chí Minh conveyed the following message:

"Coming here, life will be more challenging than in Thailand because our compatriots are living frugally. Every grain of rice in the North is shared with the South. Therefore, overseas Vietnamese, please strive to contribute to economic development" (Giang, 2010).

Inspired by the spirit of national unity and economic development, numerous repatriated overseas Vietnamese (primarily from the second repatriation group) voluntarily registered to relocate to mountainous regions in the Northern and Central provinces. These areas were characterized by challenging socio-economic conditions, limited infrastructure, and low population density. The returnees embarked on a new chapter in their lives, driven by a determination to contribute their skills and knowledge to the development of new economic zones in these arid lands. Their mission was to transform desolate mountainous areas into thriving economic hubs, contributing to the overall growth and prosperity of the nation.

Thanh Hóa province, situated in the North Central region of Vietnam, approximately 160 km North of Hanoi and 180 km Northeast of Hải Phòng, was among

the seven provinces selected by overseas Vietnamese for resettlement and the establishment of new economic zones in mountainous districts in the western region of the province. Between 1962 and 1964, four groups of repatriated overseas Vietnamese communities relocated to Thanh Hóa province, settling in four distinct locations: 1) Thạch Thành district (approximately 35 households with 160 individuals); 2) Cẩm Thủy district (approximately 25 households with 95 individuals); 3) Ngọc Lặc district (approximately 32 households with 150 individuals); 4) Như Xuân district (approximately 62 households with 300 individuals). These midland mountainous areas served as economic connectors between the delta region and the high mountainous areas in Western Thanh Hóa province. However, they were characterized by a sparse population, limited infrastructure, a lack of social services, a rugged natural environment, and underdeveloped transportation networks. The indigenous population primarily comprised small ethnic minority communities (Thái, Mường, Mông, Thổ) residing in remote forest villages. Their knowledge and productive capacities were rudimentary, and they relied heavily on subsistence farming. This environment presented significant challenges and hardships for the overseas Vietnamese returning from Thailand..

The group of overseas Vietnamese who opted to settle in the Bến Sung area of Thanh Hóa province originated from the northeastern provinces of Thailand (Nong Khai, Udon Thani, Khon Kaen, Nakhon Sawan, and Nakhon Phanom). They were among the last groups to arrive on voyages 73, 74, and 75. Of the 62 households comprising 300 VKHH, approximately 32 households hailed from the North Central provinces, 25 households from the South Central region, and 5 households from the South of Vietnam. Notably, nine individuals of Thai origin were included among the 300 VKHH, being spouses of the overseas Vietnamese returnees. Mrs. Tam said:²

"I returned home on voyage number 72, which docked at Hải Phòng port in February 1963, carrying 830 overseas Vietnamese of various ages and genders. Following a week of rest and psychological stabilization, officials briefed us on the conditions in the new settlement areas. Overseas Vietnamese households then selected their preferred destinations and commenced their relocation. From Hải Phòng port, VKHH were transported to their respective provinces by train. Those

² Conversation of the author and Mrs. Hoàng Thị Tâm in Vĩnh Long village 2, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 07 March, 2019.

who chose Thanh Hóa disembarked at Thanh Hóa station and were subsequently divided into four settlement groups. VKHH bound for the Bến Sung area were provided with transportation by Thanh Hóa province to convey them and their belongings from Thanh Hóa train station to their designated location.

From the initial group of approximately 15 households that arrived in February 1963 to the final group in August 1964, Làng Thái Lan (Thai Village) grew to encompass 62 overseas Vietnamese households with over 300 individuals, including nine of Thai origin (spouses of VKHH). The local government assigned them to reside within the Thai ethnic community in Đồng Bồi village (presently known as Vĩnh Lợi village) in Vĩnh Hòa commune, Như Xuân district”.

The VKHH community comprised 62 individual households. Prior to their repatriation, they were engaged in various occupations as small and medium-sized traders in the economic hubs of Northeastern Thailand, specializing in food processing, goods transportation, garment and fashion design, and brick making. Despite lacking familial ties or prior acquaintances, they forged a cohesive and civilized community with a distinct identity. Together, they navigated the challenges they encountered.

Regarding the difficulties faced by VKHH in their new settlement areas, Mr. Dũng (a VKHH) recounted³:

"Upon our return, I was 11 years old. It was a profound shock, akin to a severe punishment. We transitioned from an urban lifestyle to primitive conditions within three weeks of leaving Thailand. Our existence became heavily reliant on nature and subsistence farming. However, these were not the only obstacles. As we belonged to the second group of VKHH, who had departed Vietnam during wartime, we faced prejudice and skepticism from the local population and authorities."

The relocation of VKHH to challenging mountainous regions was widely perceived as a form of punishment for their departure from Vietnam during the French colonial era. The government and local communities labeled them as "Đế Quốc" (Empire) people, implying that they were traitors who had failed to contribute to the national struggle. Consequently, they were marginalized and settled among ethnic minorities in remote areas, where basic necessities were scarce. As a result, the urban

³ Conversation of the author and Mr. Hoang Van Dũng in Vĩnh Long village 1, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 07 March, 2019.

lifestyle that VKHH had enjoyed in Bến Sung area, Vĩnh Hòa commune, Như Xuân district (now Như Thanh district), Thanh Hóa province, underwent a drastic transformation upon their return. They encountered two primary categories of challenges: 1) Arduous living conditions; 2) Disdain from the Vietnamese government and local population.

4.5.1 Struggling to make ends meet

From 1963 to 1965, prior to the establishment of their own community, VKHH endured severe economic hardships. The local government had assigned them to reside with the Tai ethnic minority community in Đồng Bồi village (presently known as Vĩnh Lợi village), a settlement of approximately 60 hectares inhabited by 70 households comprising nearly 400 Thai people who had migrated from the Northwest centuries earlier. The villagers' economic activities revolved around subsistence farming on upland fields, hunting, and gathering. Their livelihoods were entirely dependent on the vagaries of nature. They cultivated upland rice and other food crops on sloping hillsides, which served as their primary sustenance. Additionally, they utilized the fertile valleys for wet rice cultivation and the production of staple crops such as sticky rice, plain rice, maize, sweet potato, and cassava.



Figure 8: Entrance into Làng Thái Lan in 1965

Source: Ủy ban nhân dân huyện Như Xuân, 2019

However, agricultural yields were highly susceptible to weather conditions, resulting in periods of food abundance and scarcity. Hunting and gathering activities played a crucial role in ensuring food security. Bamboo shoots, yams, fruits, and wild animals such as chickens, boars, sambar deer, and muntjacs constituted the dietary staples of the Đổng Bôi villagers. Their cooking utensils were primarily crafted from clay, and they often employed bamboo tubes for cooking food and rice. Daily sustenance was procured through foraging for bamboo shoots, hunting wild animals, and fishing in nearby streams. At the time, commercial activities were virtually nonexistent in the area, and self-sufficiency was the norm.

The transition from the vibrant urban environment of Thailand to the desolate mountainous terrain of BẾN SƯNG was a profound shock for the overseas Vietnamese returnees. The area lacked basic infrastructure, including access to clean water, electricity, markets, and shops. Surrounding Đổng Bôi village was a pristine forest, with trails connecting to farmlands, streams, and neighboring villages. The area was home to a diverse array of flora, including ironwood, chukrasia, and madhuca pasquieri trees. Tigers, wild boars, snakes, deer, sambar deer, and muntjacs roamed the forests, providing sustenance for the local population. Mr. Lê Bá Sắc recalled⁴:

“Many VKHH were stunned upon arriving in BẾN SƯNG. It was a deserted mountainous region where the only sounds were those of birds, animals, and flowing water. Scattered throughout the area were small villages inhabited by ethnic minorities. In the vicinity of Khe Rông, we encountered a tiger at approximately 4pm. Khe Rông is a stream with pristine water, from which households in the BẾN SƯNG area procure water for cooking purposes. Prior to our return, the majority of the 62 households had been engaged in trade and business in urban areas of Northeastern Thailand. Now, we found ourselves in a desolate land devoid of infrastructure. We were surrounded by ancient trees, trails, and the sounds of wildlife. Life was entirely self-sufficient, dependent on the bounty of nature. The sparsely populated villages of ethnic minorities were separated by vast distances.”

The transportation network in the mountainous regions of Thanh Hóa province, including BẾN SƯNG, primarily consisted of trails constructed by the French

⁴ Conversation of the author and Mr. Lê Bá Sắc (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long village 1, BẾN SƯNG town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 22 December, 2019.

in 1929 for the exploitation of natural resources. At the time, Thanh Hóa province lacked an electricity grid. Consequently, inhabitants of mountainous areas like Bến Sung were unfamiliar with electricity, and all production and daily activities were carried out manually. Illumination in the evenings was provided by firelight or beeswax candles.

Stream water served as the primary source of domestic water. However, during the dry season, streams would often run dry. Household members were compelled to carry dendrocalamus barbatus tubes on their backs and traverse the forest to Khe Rông, approximately 2km from Đồng Bôi village, to fetch water for drinking and other domestic purposes. Khe Rông held great significance for the local community, as it was the source of their daily water supply. Household members utilized various containers (bamboo tubes, Dendrocalamus barbatus tubes, wooden barrels, etc.) to manually collect and transport water from Khe Rông. For the overseas Vietnamese returnees, the bicycles they brought back from Thailand proved to be invaluable assets in the northern region and Thanh Hóa province in particular. Bicycles facilitated their travel and made the transportation of domestic water and fuel more convenient. Mr. Sắ recounted⁵:

"Upon my return to Vietnam, I was in the eighth grade. Initially, we relied on Dendrocalamus barbatus tubes and wooden barrels to fetch water from Khe Rông for daily activities such as eating, drinking, cooking, and bathing. We also gathered firewood from the forest and stored it under our stilt houses for gradual use. Bicycles provided us with an advantage over neighboring communities in terms of mobility and the transportation of firewood and water."

Coping with difficulties

Food and medical shortages posed significant challenges for VKHH. The government's support policy provided each household with a monthly rice subsidy of 20kg, which proved insufficient for families of four to six members. Despite possessing financial resources, overseas Vietnamese encountered difficulties in purchasing food due to the self-sufficient nature of the local economy.

⁵ Conversation of the author and Mr. Lê Bá Sắ (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long village 1, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 22 December, 2019.

Sudden environmental changes, including exposure to mosquitoes and insects in the mountainous and forested environment, resulted in widespread illness among VKHH. Many suffered from fever, flu, and dengue fever. Fortunately, the availability of medicines brought from Thailand prevented any fatalities.

Young children faced particular hardships. Accustomed to the comforts of urban life in Thailand, including schools, electricity, and entertainment, they struggled to adapt to the primitive conditions in Bến Sung. The lack of medical services exacerbated their health issues, and they relied on traditional remedies from the local Thai ethnic community. These challenges caused significant stress and depression among VKHH. Families with young children, the elderly, and Thai Vietnamese were particularly vulnerable. The community's morale plummeted, and a sense of hopelessness prevailed in the new settlement area.

In response to these challenges, the 3rd National Congress of the Workers' Party of Vietnam in 1960 adopted a resolution on the tasks of the first 5-year economic plan. The resolution emphasized the need for balanced production capacity distribution across delta, midland, and mountainous regions, as well as the adjustment of human resources among regions. This policy led to the organization of migration from the delta to mountainous and midland provinces. In Như Xuân district of Thanh Hóa province, between 1963 and 1965, 2,829 new households comprising 14,869 individuals from lowland districts, primarily Hoàng Hóa and Quảng Xương, were resettled. Many Kinh families chose Bến Sung as their new settlement (Ủy ban nhân dân huyện Như Xuân, 2019, p.358).

Survival Strategy

To ensure food security, VKHH employed various survival strategies in addition to the government's monthly rice subsidy of 20kg.

One strategy involved utilizing their tailoring skills to produce clothing in exchange for food items such as sticky rice and game meat. These food supplies were carefully preserved through drying and storage. Another strategy employed by VKHH with fishing experience was to utilize nets brought from Thailand to fish in nearby

rivers and streams. This provided a reliable source of food in their new environment.

Mrs. Tâm (VKHH) described this strategy⁶:

“Small fish caught in rivers and streams were cleaned, salted, and preserved in wooden jars to make fish sauce. This fish sauce was used throughout the year and served as a versatile ingredient for various dishes, including Xom soup (canh xôm) and Som tum (xôm tằm). Salted crab was another novel dish introduced by overseas Vietnamese. They utilized their knowledge of salted crab processing to preserve food sources and create ingredients for their favorite dishes, such as Som tum, which requires salted crab as an essential component.”

Furthermore, VKHH participated in local gathering activities, collecting forest vegetables such as bamboo shoots, banana blossoms, and other edible plants. These ingredients were incorporated into familiar dishes, often seasoned with sauces prepared according to their own culinary traditions.

4.5.2 Living with conflicting ideologies

As previously mentioned, VKHH settlers in Bến Sung faced discrimination from both the Vietnamese population and the government. They were labeled as “*Đế quốc*” (the American air force) and “*Kẻ phản bội dân tộc*” (national traitors). This disdain stemmed from the perception that VKHH had abandoned their country during wartime to seek peace and prosperity in Thailand. While many Vietnamese fought and sacrificed for their homeland against the French Empire, VKHH were seen as shirking their patriotic duty. Upon their return to Vietnam after the North's victory over the French, VKHH were met with further disapproval as they were viewed as outsiders who had adopted foreign customs and values.

Besides, VKHH were also looked down upon by the local Vietnamese because of their “blended” culture. The locals did not consider VKHH to be Vietnamese because their daily cultural practices were not similar to Vietnamese people. The Thai cultural values of overseas Vietnamese were called a “half Thai – half Vietnamese” culture. They brought home and used their properties from Thailand such as cameras, cassettes, Singer sewing machines, bicycles, fabrics with Thai patterns, etc. This

⁶ Conversation of the author and Mrs. Hoàng Thị Tâm (VKHH) in Vinh Long village 2, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 26 December, 2019.

caused a conflict between the two groups. The local Vietnamese added new labels to VKHH community, such as *sính ngoại* (xenophile) meaning the group of people who prefer to use foreign goods and disregard domestic products, this also implied the group of people who were not patriotic. Mr. SẮc recounted⁷:

“Locals believed we were imperialists and mixed-race people. They criticized our clothing, customs, and cultural practices. They saw us as outsiders, not true Vietnamese.”

In addition to their cultural differences, VKHH faced discrimination from the local Vietnamese due to their perceived lack of agricultural skills. While agriculture was a strength of Vietnamese communities, VKHH had primarily worked in non-agricultural sectors in Thailand, such as small businesses, trade, food production, alcohol production, clothing design, construction materials, buffalo cart transport, car driving services, aquaculture, and fishing. Mr. Lê Văn Thìn⁸ described the situation:

*“The Vietnamese accused us of being imperialists who did not know how to farm and relied on the support of the locals and the government. At that time, the North Vietnamese government provided each VKHH household with 20kg of rice per month through stamps, which we called *sổ gạo* (rice books). We had to queue with Vietnamese people at state-run stores to receive our rice. They ridiculed and looked down on us. This was one of the most difficult and painful experiences that VKHH endured upon returning home in response to President Hồ Chí Minh's call.”*

In response to the labels of "imperialists" and "people who don't know how to farm," VKHH referred to themselves as "Keo land" (people from civilized and developed urban areas), while they called the local Vietnamese "Keo khốc" (people living in the mountains and forests with limited qualifications and knowledge). This discrimination persisted until the 1990s, with VKHH living in a closed community for nearly 30 years (1963-1990) and no marriages occurring outside the community. After the country's economic reforms, VKHH expanded their household businesses in Bến Sung, engaging in various occupations. By the mid-1990s, the first marriage between a member of the VKHH community and a local Vietnamese took place.

⁷ Conversation of the author and Mr. Lê Bá SẮc (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long village 2, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 30 March, 2018.

⁸ Conversation of the author and Mr. Lê Văn Thìn (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long village 2, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 30 March, 2018.

Employing various strategies, the VKHH community gradually acclimated to their new surroundings, overcame challenges, and secured food sources for each household. In February 1965, they separated from Đồng Bôi village and were allocated land by the local government. Subsequently, they constructed houses and established a new community named *Làng Vĩnh Long* (Vĩnh Long Village).

In February 1965, the Party Committee and People's Committee of Vĩnh Hòa Commune allocated land for settlement to 62 VKHH households. This included land for housing and gardening. The VKHH separated from Đồng Bôi village and established their own community on a gently sloping hill. According to the land allocation policy for VKHH implemented by the Như Xuân District People's Committee, each household received 1,500m² of land. These square lots were situated on both sides of the trail (now National Highway 45), which was constructed by the French in 1929 to facilitate the exploitation of natural resources and served as the only road connecting the delta region with the mountainous districts of Thanh Hóa province.

The total area of the overseas Vietnamese community was approximately 47.7 hectares, of which 20 hectares were designated for cultivation on the hill, while the remaining land was used for residential houses and transportation within the community (Ủy ban nhân dân Thị trấn Bến Sung, 2004, p.2). Surrounding the overseas Vietnamese community were ethnic groups such as the Mường, Thổ, Thái, and Vietnamese who had migrated to the area under the North Vietnamese government's policy of establishing new economic zones.

Within a short period from February to May 1965, over 60 houses made of *Dendrocalamus barbatus* were constructed on the hill. The VKHH utilized locally available resources such as bamboo, *dendrocalamus barbatus*, wood, and thatch to build their homes. Skilled carpenters within the VKHH group used their tools to chisel, saw, and assemble these materials into houses, roofs, fences, doors, and other structures. To protect the interior from the elements, the bamboo houses were covered with a composite mixture of mud, gravel, soil, and water, both inside and outside the walls. The roofs were thatched with two layers of palm leaves, providing insulation and preventing rainwater from penetrating the house. Each household

constructed two houses: a larger one for family activities and a smaller one for use as a kitchen. The main house was divided into three compartments: a living room in the center and two bedrooms on either side. The kitchen, built adjacent to the main house, followed a similar structural design. The entire 1,500m² plot was enclosed by a protective fence made of *dendrocalamus barbatus* and bamboo. At the entrance to the land, a sturdy gate was constructed using the same materials. The VKHH leveled the National Highway 45 trail in front of their houses, creating a smooth and even surface for easier travel.

Water for irrigation and daily activities was diverted from springs through *dendrocalamus barbatus* tubes to the community and distributed to each household. Overseas Vietnamese utilized their gardening land to cultivate a variety of plants and green vegetables to meet their daily nutritional needs, including vegetables, beans, gourds, squash, tubers, green tea, spices, fine herbs, and fruit trees (guava, jackfruit, pineapple). Bamboo and *dendrocalamus barbatus* were also grown.



Figure 9: *Thatched-roofed and earthen-walled houses constructed by VKHH*

Source: Ủy ban nhân dân huyện Như Xuân, 2019

This approach enabled households to achieve initial self-sufficiency in terms of green vegetables, ensuring an adequate supply of vegetables and essential spices for daily food preparation. Mr. Lê Văn Thìn stated⁹:

“VKHH utilized readily available materials such as wood, bamboo, Dendrocalamus barbatus, and palm leaves to construct their houses. During the construction process, VKHH received assistance from the villagers of Đông Bôi. They provided support and used buffaloes to extract and transport raw materials such as bamboo, schizostachyum, and palm to the construction site. Bamboo was utilized to create ropes for binding, while schizostachyum was woven into sheets for walls, partitions, and palm leaves were woven into sheets two to three layers thick for roofing. Mature, large, and thick Dendrocalamus barbatus were employed as pillars and supports for the houses. The walls of the houses were constructed using schizostachyum sheets, which were then covered with a thick layer of mud both inside and outside to protect the houses from heat, wind, and rain. These houses were characterized by their durability, coolness during the summer, and warmth during the winter.”

The VKHH community designated the village as "Vĩnh Long," symbolizing their aspiration for a cohesive returnee community that would foster economic prosperity and enhance the well-being of its inhabitants, akin to the image of a soaring dragon. This designation marked a significant milestone in the developmental trajectory of Như Xuân district, as the name "Vĩnh Long" was inscribed on its administrative map for the first time.

Mr. Lê Văn Thìn¹⁰ elucidated the etymology of "Vĩnh Long village":

“The VKHH derived the name "Vĩnh Long" by combining the appellation of Vĩnh Hòa commune with the "Khe Rồng" stream (where "Rồng" translates to "Long" or "dragon" in Chinese). During a meeting attended by representatives from 62 households, the majority expressed their preference for the name "Vĩnh Long." This nomenclature reflected the VKHH's aspirations for robust socio-cultural and economic development, symbolized by the image of a potent dragon ascending. Consequently, a novel residential community emerged on the administrative map of the erstwhile Như Xuân district.”

⁹ Conversation of the author and Mr. Lê Văn Thìn (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long village 2, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 30 March, 2018.

¹⁰ Conversation of the author and Mr. Lê Văn Thìn (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long village 2, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 30 March, 2018.

The village management board comprised four esteemed individuals who commanded the trust and respect of the VKHH community. They were entrusted with the responsibilities of administering and operating the community, as well as representing the VKHH in their dealings with local authorities (Ủy ban nhân dân Thị trấn Bến Sung, 2004, p.4)

The board members were as follows:

1. Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Xô – Village Head
2. Mr. Trịnh Ngọc Thước – Deputy Head of Village
3. Mr. Đậu Bá Thiệu - Secretary
4. Mr. Trần Hữu Phước - Accountant

Residing in a secluded enclave, the VKHH community embarked on a new chapter in their lives. Their daily interactions within the community were primarily conducted in the Thai language, and their cultural practices were imbued with Thai traditions. In terms of attire, the VKHH adopted a modern style, donning black trousers, vibrant and ornate shirts of their own design, contemporary watches, hats, necklaces, and footwear. This sartorial aesthetic starkly contrasted with the austere dressing habits of the Vietnamese population, who typically wore unadorned black trousers and brown shirts distributed through state-run trading systems and cooperatives.

The VKHH village resembled a hybrid hamlet, possessing both urban and rural characteristics. This was evident in the presence of modern appliances and possessions such as bicycles, radios, transistor radios, televisions, cassettes, sewing machines, cameras, and various tools and assets that each VKHH household had brought from Thailand. The sounds of Vietnamese-Thai music emanating from transistor radios filled the air in the late afternoons, creating a vibrant atmosphere amidst the vast mountains. Ram Vong dances and modern dances performed during holidays, weddings, and victory celebrations further showcased the Thai cultural heritage of the VKHH community, adding a touch of exotic beauty to the mountainous and forested landscape of western Thanh Hóa province, traditionally known as a region inhabited by ethnic minorities. In terms of cuisine, the VKHH practiced a distinct culinary tradition with many dishes originating from Thailand,

such as Lod Chong soup (peanut sweet soup/Lod Chong), *cà thị* soup, fish noodle soup, crab noodle soup, lap, Xôm tằm, and dipping sauces made from salted fish sauce and crab sauce. These culinary creations were novel and tantalizing to the inhabitants of the remote mountainous areas.

In May 1965, Resolution 5 of the 3rd tenure Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam called upon the entire population to embark on a new cultural and economic development path, emphasizing social progress. In response to this directive, the VKHH community established a handicraft cooperative, one of the few advanced cooperatives in Như Xuân district and Thanh Hóa province at that time. The cooperative played a crucial role in collecting raw materials from lower-level agricultural cooperatives specializing in the production of sugarcane, cassava, maize, beans, and rice. These raw materials were then processed into food products that were supplied to district trading cooperatives for distribution to the population (who used stamps to purchase food and other goods) and to military agencies for the sustenance of the army, in line with the slogans "*Tất cả để chiến thắng*" (All for the victory) and "*Tất cả để giải phóng miền Nam ruột thịt*" (All for the liberation of the South). Cooperatives were consolidated and expanded, becoming a significant economic force in the northern economy.

The inaugural management board of the Vĩnh Long Cooperative comprised the following members:

1. Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Xô – Chairman of Cooperative
2. Mr. Trịnh Ngọc Thục – Vice Chairman of Cooperative
3. Mr. Đậu Bá Thiệu - Secretary of Cooperative
4. Mr. Trần Hữu Phước – Accountant of Cooperative

According to Mr. Sắc¹¹:

"In 1965, the Vĩnh Long handicraft cooperative was recognized as one of the few advanced cooperatives in Như Xuân district. VKHH members contributed their tools and financial resources to support the cooperative's development. Each member who participated in the production activities of the Vĩnh Long handicraft cooperative earned 15

¹¹ Conversation of the author and Mr. Lê Bá Sắc (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long village 1, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 22 December, 2019.

points per day, which was 5 points higher than the daily point allocation for agricultural cooperatives and equivalent to half a kilogram of rice. These points were accumulated and converted into stamps or coupons that could be used to purchase food and goods at stores managed by the local government. Each workday began and ended with the sound of three gong beats from the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Cooperative. An officer recorded the working hours of each member at the end of each day.”

4.6. “*Làm đến chết*” (dedicated to working): politics of recognition and identity construction

The intertwined concepts of recognition and identity politics have emerged as significant themes in contemporary discourse, particularly in the realm of social justice and minority rights (Taylor, 1994). Charles Taylor postulates that our identities are partially constituted through the recognition of others, and that a deficit of recognition can engender harm and oppression. This premise has significantly influenced the development of identity politics, which entails struggles for the affirmation of specific identities and the acknowledgment of unique cultural attributes. On the one hand, identity politics is predicated on the principle that all individuals merit equal respect and that recognition should be accorded based on individuality. However, in the case of the VKHH, while emerging from experiences of grievance and exclusion, the politics of recognition did not lead the VKHH to disassociate from the local Vietnamese community. Instead, they sought to construct an identity that acknowledged the value of their particularity, namely their unwavering dedication to work (or “*lam den chet*” in Vietnamese) for the local and national economy, as a means of belonging to Vietnamese society. Therefore, this section examines the politics of recognition through the practices of constructing cultural capital (i.e. everyday life practice of *làm đến chết*) that led to the foundation for the success of the VLC, so that they would be recognized as national contributors.

***Làm đến chết*: dedicated to working for cooperative and nation, as a distinctive identity expressing national contributors**

Amidst the failure of the cooperative system due to members' laziness, negligence, and theft of produce (Kerkvliet, 2005), the VKHH community exhibited

remarkable unity and dedication, working tirelessly throughout the day and into the late evening. As noted, VLC operated independently, establishing multi-industry cooperatives to maximize labor productivity. Through these efforts, they sought to demonstrate their patriotism and substantial contributions to the community and nation, surpassing those of the Vietnamese. The VKHH community aspired to prove to the government and Vietnamese society that they were not national traitors (*phản quốc* in Vietnamese) or collaborators with the French air force (*đế quốc* in Vietnamese). Ultimately, they desired recognition and equal treatment with those who supported the Communist Party of Vietnam. Despite facing physical hardships and social stigma as alleged traitors or French collaborators, the VKHH community embraced the cultural practice of *làm đến chết*. This concept of unwavering dedication extended beyond financial incentives, as they sought to establish a unique cultural identity amidst political distrust. Their collective efforts and commitment to working for the cooperatives, even outside of conventional work hours, reflected their desire to create a distinct community with a strong patriotic spirit and a positive impact on the socio-economic development of their province.

During the Vietnam War (1970-1973), the American Empire intensified its raids in the North, targeting Thanh Hoa city and Nhu Xuan district to disrupt the transportation of military goods (Ủy ban nhân dân Thị trấn Bến Sung, 2004). In response, the VLC's buffalo cart played a crucial role in supporting the military by transporting thousands of tons of goods, food, and ammunition to military barracks in Nhu Xuan district and Thanh Hoa province. The VLC's fleet of buffalo carts, which were larger than local carts and pulled by two strong buffaloes, transported supplies to various military bases throughout Thanh Hoa province.

Despite the challenges posed by American bombing, the VLC's buffalo carts operated almost continuously, delivering supplies as soon as bombing ceased. The carts transported rice, clothing, goods, and the VLC members often ate and slept on the carts during their journeys. Thus, the VLC's efforts made a significant contribution to the victory over the American invaders in North Vietnam, demonstrating the resilience and determination of the Vietnamese people in the face of adversity (Ủy ban nhân dân Thị trấn Bến Sung, 2004).

By 1972, the buffalo cart fleet operated by the VKHH and local fleets had transported in excess of 1,000 tons of goods and weaponry. Subsequently, by 1978, the baked brick production group had manufactured approximately 7.5 million bricks and nearly one million roofing tiles, which constituted the primary construction materials that facilitated the infrastructural development of Nhu Thanh district. This resulted in the construction of numerous primary and secondary schools, as well as health stations (Huyện ủy, Hội đồng nhân dân, Ủy ban nhân dân huyện Nhu Xuân, tỉnh Thanh Hóa, 2019, p. 360). The food production teams operated continuously in multiple shifts to guarantee the provision of sufficient food quantities as mandated by the District People's Committee. All production groups within the VLC dedicated their efforts to producing goods and food, adhering to the slogan "*thóc không thiếu một cân, quân không thiếu một người*," which translates to "ensuring an adequate supply of rice and personnel for the military force." The group responsible for producing rice vermicelli, tofu, and rice milling had generated thousands of tons of products. Additionally, the cassava wine group produced over 1,000 liters of alcohol, which was supplied to local residents, officials, and military units within Nhu Xuan district.

Furthermore, the VKHH demonstrated unwavering patriotism, with 71 individuals enlisting in the combat force and 23 youths joining volunteer groups to facilitate the transportation of supplies and weaponry. In collaboration with local residents, they undertook extensive road repairs in various areas, totaling 141 kilometers. Additionally, they rehabilitated 57 kilometers of Road No. 10, constructed 4 kilometers of inter-commune roads, and 2.2 kilometers of the *Doc Trau* bypass. Eight bridges were repaired or newly built (Đảng bộ huyện Nhu Xuân, 1975).

Over the course of 8 years since its establishment, the VLC has made significant contributions to the production of food, construction materials, and garments, as well as the transportation of supplies to support both the civilian population and the military. In 1973, as the resistance war against the United States intensified, the demand for food, clothing, transportation, and construction materials surged. In response to this evolving context, the VLC was tasked by the local government to transition from a production cooperative to a specialized Handicraft

Cooperative. Concurrently, the VLC was divided into three distinct cooperatives: 1) *Minh Tiến* tailoring cooperative (later merged with Bến Sung Garment Cooperative); 2) *Vĩnh Tiến* buffalo cart transport cooperative; and 3) *Vĩnh Long* lime brick and wicker cooperative. Each cooperative established its own management board (Ủy ban nhân dân Thị trấn Bến Sung, 2004).

Solidarity, mutual trust, and the unwavering determination to establish a VKHH community with a distinct cultural identity served as the VKHH's countermeasures against the prejudice and disregard they faced from the government and Vietnamese society. While agreeing to participate in the establishment of the Cooperative and abide by government regulations, they simultaneously devised their own tactics and organized Cooperative activities independently to achieve their objectives. According to Michel de Certeau (1984), society can be divided into two groups: the producers of culture (or the ruling class) and the users (the ordinary people). de Certeau viewed cultural production as a means of exercising power and a mechanism of discipline. He argued that users could manipulate these mechanisms and "just follow them to evade them." de Certeau distinguished between "strategy" and "tactic" to explicate this power struggle. Strategy represents the overarching framework imposed by the ruling group, while tactic encompasses the discrete actions of individuals and groups to resist, often manifested through everyday actions. Different individuals and groups employ varying tactics to counter the strategies of the dominant group. Some may actively seek ways to challenge the prevailing ideology, while others may outwardly comply with such strategies but subtly subvert them. Consequently, de Certeau perceived everyday life practices as a form of consumption tactic, cleverly employed by the weak against the strong.

Morover, de Certeau's concept of social consumption, as outlined in his book *"The Practice of Everyday Life,"* (1984) emphasizes the creative and transformative aspects of how individuals use and interact with mass-produced goods and cultural products. He argues that consumers are not simply passive recipients of these products but rather actively engage with them, altering and reusing them in ways that reflect their own needs, desires, and cultural contexts. This process of consumption is characterized by "tactics," which are the ways in which individuals, often in response

to the "strategies" of institutions and power structures, adapt and modify the products and services offered to them to suit their own purposes.

de Certeau's work challenges the traditional view of consumption as a one-way process where consumers are merely passive recipients of products designed and produced by others. Instead, he highlights the agency and creativity of consumers in shaping the meaning and use of these products. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of modern consumer society, where mass production and consumption have become ubiquitous, and individuals are constantly interacting with and transforming the products and services available to them.

This discussion sheds light on the diverse protest tactics employed during the implementation of the Vietnamese government's agricultural cooperative model, which ultimately collapsed in the 1980s. The model's rigid structure and emphasis on collective farming stifled individual creativity and effort, leading to widespread resistance from Vietnamese citizens. The mobility of the Vietnamese people, particularly in rural areas, allowed them to evade the strictures of the cooperative system. By moving from one cooperative to another or engaging in non-agricultural activities, individuals could escape the constraints imposed by the government's economic policies. This mobility served as a form of resistance, as it enabled individuals to maintain a degree of autonomy and avoid the coercive measures associated with the cooperative model.

The widespread opposition to the agricultural cooperative model highlights the importance of individual agency and the limits of state power in shaping economic behavior. Despite the government's attempts to enforce its policies, Vietnamese citizens found ways to resist and protect their livelihoods. This resistance ultimately contributed to the collapse of the cooperative model and the adoption of more market-oriented economic reforms in Vietnam. So, the complex relationship between state power, individual agency, and economic development. It shows that even in authoritarian regimes, individuals can find ways to resist and shape economic outcomes.

However, they could not directly confront the government and instead resorted to protest tactics to discourage the ruling elite. One such tactic involved participating

in the Cooperative perfunctorily, known as "*tối ngày đầy công*" (full workday time). This entailed merely attending work to check attendance but refraining from actual work or performing it ineffectively. Individuals would simply present themselves at the Cooperative for the full eight-hour workday to fulfill their timesheet requirements, resulting in extremely low work efficiency. Another protest tactic stemmed from the Vietnamese viewpoint of "Everybody's business is nobody's business." This attitude led to a lack of care and maintenance for Cooperative assets, which were perceived as public or shared property. Consequently, damage to Cooperative assets, such as production tools, livestock, and plants, became commonplace.

The consequences of Vietnamese farmers' protest against the agricultural cooperative development model were evident in Vietnam's agricultural productivity during the period 1976-1980, prior to the collapse of the Cooperative economic development system. Specifically, rice yield declined from 11.827 million tons in 1976 to only 9.79 million tons in 1978. The average rice yield per capita also decreased from 211 kg in 1976 to 157 kg in 1980. According to the five-year plan (1976-1980), total rice yield was projected to double to approximately 21 million tons. However, in 1980, it only reached 14.4 million tons, representing 68.5% of the planned target (Phong, 2015; Đạt, 2002). The rice yield in the southern rice bowl also experienced a gradual decline, from 1.9 million tons in 1976 to 0.99 million tons in 1977 and 0.64 million tons in 1979 (Việt, 2015).

The inefficiency of Cooperative production led to a food shortage in Vietnam, necessitating the importation and acceptance of food aid from allied communist countries, the United Nations, and Western nations (Murray Hiebert, 1988; European Commission Press Release, 1986). Vietnam was on the brink of famine and would have faced starvation in the event of a major crop failure.

To further elucidate the collapse of the agricultural cooperative model in Vietnam, Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet conducted an analysis and identified the underlying causes that led to its failure. According to Kerkvliet, the weak governance and lack of accountability within the Vietnamese government, coupled with a pervasive lack of integrity and fairness, resulted in widespread corruption among Cooperative managers. This, in turn, severely eroded trust between Vietnamese

citizens and the Vietnamese government. Vietnamese farmers lacked the necessary motivation for economic development under the agricultural cooperatives, participated irresponsibly, and evaded work. Instead, they invested the majority of their labor and resources in developing their household farming economies. These factors were instrumental in the collapse of the agricultural cooperative model in Vietnam (Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, 2006).

However, Kerkvliet's analysis only adequately addresses the reasons for the collapse of agricultural cooperatives where Vietnamese members joined primarily for economic gain, and whose understanding of the system prioritized personal and family interests over the interests of the organization. His analysis overlooks other successful cooperative models, where members joined not only for economic purposes but also to establish a distinct cultural identity, as exemplified by the VKHH community in Vĩnh Long village, Bến Sung, Thanh Hóa province.

The VKHH community's ideology of solidarity and collective effort for the benefit of the community stood in stark contrast to that of the local Vietnamese, who consistently prioritized their personal and family interests. According to research by Y. Higuchi, the Vietnamese social relationship hierarchy places primary importance on family (1), followed by friends (2), and work (3), while the Japanese social relationship hierarchy prioritizes friends (1), family (2), and work (3) (Higuchi, Yoshiko, 1997). The Vietnamese consciousness clearly reflects the perspective of the extended family, encapsulated in the proverb "Chim có tổ, người có tông" (One should never forget one's ancestry), which implies that each individual belongs to a large family and identity, and they perpetually strive to develop their extended family into a more prosperous and powerful entity within the community. In their social interactions, they undervalue societal relationships and emphasize intra-family relationships. More specifically, relationships between individuals in the community are characterized as "*chúng ta*" (we – external), while relationships within their extended family are characterized as "*chúng tôi*" (we – internal) (Dung, 2009, p.4).

According to Michel de Certeau (1984), the nature of protest employed by individuals and groups against the ruling elite varies depending on their circumstances and level of awareness. Possessing a modern comprehension system

and significant capital, yet facing disdain from the government and the Vietnamese, the VKHH adopted a counter-strategy to resist the dominant group's tactics. This strategy was antithetical to that employed by the Vietnamese. The VKHH established and developed cooperatives according to their own principles, organizing and dividing labor using modern methods. They allocated human resources into specialized groups and produced food and goods under the guidance of the Cooperative leader. They implemented flexible working hours, operating day and night to maximize productivity. Their labor scores were determined based on the quantity of products produced, rather than the number of working hours (8 hours) as mandated by the government. Concurrently, the Cooperative leader devised a strategy to secure alternative sources to meet the basic needs of the VKHH community, given the state's prohibition on trading activities. This involved covertly utilizing goods produced by the Cooperative to barter for other commodities through the region's black market network.

Vĩnh Long Cooperative was unique in its registration of multiple business lines, requiring specialized knowledge and skills. These included a food production group (producing rice vermicelli, tofu, and cassava wine), a goods production group (engaged in garment manufacturing, milling, and fired brick production), and a transportation group. According to Mr. Sắ¹²,

“The VKHH community was divided into labor groups based on the resources and expertise of each member. To ensure that workers were assigned to appropriate groups and to establish a production line with optimal productivity, the Cooperative leaders held discussions with households to identify the most suitable labor groups.”

Specialization of production groups

Group 1: Rice Vermicelli Production Group

This group consisted of 12 households with prior experience in rice vermicelli production in Thailand. The quality of rice vermicelli (flavor and texture) was heavily dependent on the fermentation technique, ensuring that the rice flour was adequately fermented.

¹² Conversation of the author and Mr. Lê Bá Sắ (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long village 1, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 22 December, 2019.

Group 2: Tofu Production Group

Comprising 10 households, this group possessed extensive experience in tofu production and trading in Thailand. During their time in Thailand, they operated tofu shops and sold their products in markets throughout the Northeast region. This experience equipped them with the expertise to produce high-quality tofu upon their return to Vietnam.

Group 3: Cassava Wine and Cane Molasses Production Group

This group of 8 households had gained experience in cassava wine production while residing in the Northeast region of Thailand. They possessed knowledge in selecting high-quality ingredients and employing a specialized yeast-making technique to produce wine with a distinctive flavor and alcohol content tailored to consumer preferences.

Group 4: Buffalo Cart Transportation Group

With 20 households, this group represented the largest among the production groups. Instead of seeking loans from government banks to acquire means of production like other cooperatives in the district, 20 VKHH households pooled their funds to purchase 40 healthy and robust buffaloes for cart pulling. They diligently cared for and utilized these buffaloes to transport goods, materials, and ammunition for the army as needed.

Group 5: Fired Brick Production Group

This group brought together 12 young and physically fit individuals with experience in brick production in Thailand. Their expertise, coupled with strict discipline and hard work, enabled them to produce bricks of exceptional quality and quantity.

Group 6: Garment Group

The garment group comprised VKHH households with prior experience and expertise in the garment industry in Thailand. Upon their repatriation, they brought sewing machines to Vietnam and established a garment group. They procured fabric from the local government and engaged in the production of clothing and shirts as per specifications.

4.7. Making the place as *Làng Văn Minh Sáng Tạo*; VKHH collective identity construction

Cooperatives in Vinh Long village played a significant role in the production of food, goods, and raw materials in Vietnam. This was particularly evident in the case of Vinh Long village, where the cooperative's self-reliance, dedication, and access to local resources enabled it to produce unique and high-quality products. The cooperatives' abilities to generate a wide range of products transformed Vinh Long village into a hub for food and commodity production and transportation. This had a profound impact on the local economy, stimulating growth. The cooperative's success was attributable to its reliance on local resources and the dedication of its members. This has allowed the cooperative to establish a competitive edge and produce goods that were not available from other cooperatives in the province. As stated by Mrs. Mai Thi Tuong (interviewed on February 14, 2019), a VKHH¹³:

“Every day, VLC used one to two quintals of rice to make vermicelli, quintals of soybeans to make tofu, and hundreds of barrels of cassava wine were processed and fermented. Besides, thousands of meters of fabric were designed and used to make thousands of clothes every day; tons of milled rice, tens of tons of commodities were transported to many different places. Production groups became an important link in the food and commodity production system of VLC.”

Cassava wine, a product renowned for its distinctive flavor, garnered widespread acclaim from local communities and organizations within the district and neighboring regions. Leveraging their expertise in selecting premium cassava raw materials from local farms, coupled with their mastery of cassava brewing and fermentation techniques, the VKHH community crafted an exceptional cassava wine product that surpassed the offerings of other cooperatives. The wine's allure lay in its captivating aroma of cassava, harmoniously blended with the refreshing sweetness of yeast, tantalizing consumers with each sip. Its unparalleled quality propelled VLC's cassava wine to become the Cooperative's primary revenue generator, boasting a remarkable profit margin of 40%. VLC's cassava wine became an indispensable presence at government agencies, military barracks, and local festivities such as

¹³ Conversation of the author and Mrs. Mai Thị Tường (VKHH) in Vinh Long village 1, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh district, Vietnam on 14 February, 2019.

celebrations and weddings. Its prominence extended beyond the district, as pharmaceutical companies in Thanh Hoa province chose it as a key ingredient for herbal tonics, catering to the health and well-being of the military and the community.

Fired bricks, the second most celebrated product of VLC, had established themselves as an indispensable construction material for enduring structures, symbolizing stability and prosperity for families and government entities alike. Mr. Ngo Xuan Sao, a lecturer at a Vietnamese university, recounted in an interview conducted on October 20th, 2019¹⁴:

"Locals regarded these bricks as akin to stone in terms of their resilience. Owning a home constructed with VLC's fired bricks was a cherished aspiration for families, embodying the ideals of permanence and prosperity."

One more defining characteristic of VKHH, renowned throughout the Nhu Xuan district and beyond in Thanh Hoa province, was its extensive fleet of large buffalo carts. These carts, with their iconic wooden wheels and two robust buffaloes pulling at the helm, played a pivotal role in transporting vast quantities of goods. They hauled agricultural produce from production areas to VLC for processing as raw materials, and delivered bricks and lime to construction sites in the region. Moreover, these buffalo carts were indispensable in the transportation of rice, commodities, and ammunition to military installations across Thanh Hoa province. Their presence became deeply etched in the memories of officials and civilians alike, symbolizing the unique identity of VKHH.

Moreover, VKHH's garment products were distinguished by their contemporary style, appealing not only to locals and officials but also gaining recognition for their modernity. Tailoring, a craft that demands both technical proficiency in operating sewing machines and artistic creativity, played a significant role in VKHH's success. The company designed and produced 100% of the official attire for district officials, ranging from everyday wear to formal shirts and vests for office work. The VLC tailor brand became synonymous with modern, aesthetically pleasing designs and exceptional quality throughout Thanh Hoa province. VKHH's

¹⁴ Mr. Ngo Xuan Sao, lecturer at Hong Duc University, lives in Nong Cong district, Thanh Hoa province.

fashion-forward image set it apart from the local community, creating a distinct cultural identity.

During the period from 1970 to 1980, as a result of sustained efforts, VLC emerged as a leading entity within the cooperative economic development movement in Thanh Hoa province. The Thanh Hoa Provincial People's Committee recognized VLC as an exemplary cooperative, a beacon of success in producing goods, food, and foodstuffs throughout Nhu Xuan district, serving as an inspiration for numerous other cooperatives. In recognition of VLC's exceptional contributions to overall economic development, national security, and defense, the cooperative received numerous certificates of merit from the head of the Thanh Hoa Handicraft Cooperative Union and Nhu Xuan district. These accolades acknowledged VLC's achievements in goods production and its role in transporting food, goods, and ammunition to the army. Moreover, VLC was bestowed with various valuable and meaningful gifts of patriotism, a testament to their significant contributions to the overall development of Nhu Xuan district. (Ủy ban nhân dân Thị trấn Bến Sung, làng Vĩnh Long, 2004)

Thus, the success of the VLC in the context where most other cooperatives in the province had failed emerged as a beacon of hope. This achievement reflected the community's unwavering solidarity, its ability to mobilize and utilize capital resources efficiently, and its creation of a distinctive brand for the VKHH village. It underscored the crucial role of human capital quality as a determinant of a nation's economic prosperity. Furthermore, it showcased VKHH's diversified capital sources, coupled with innovative perspectives on economic development and national contributions. Infrastructure projects within the community were consistently implemented by VKHH with remarkable harmony and consensus among its members. Consequently, VKHH established a reputation as *Lang Van Minh Sang Tao* (creative civilization village), characterized by its diverse culture, progressive mindset, innovative production practices, and unwavering community spirit.

Many garment products were designed in a contemporary style, appealing not only to local residents and officials but also gaining recognition for their modernity. Tailoring demands not only technical proficiency in operating sewing machines but also creativity. VKHH designed and produced 100% of the attire for district officials,

ranging from casual wear to formal shirts and vests for office use. The Vĩnh Long Cooperative's tailoring brand became well-known throughout Thanh Hóa province for its modern, aesthetically pleasing designs and exceptional quality. VKHH's image, characterized by a modern fashion sense, set it apart from the local population and established distinct cultural characteristics.



Figure 10 and 11: Comparing the buffalo cart between locals and VKHH's

Source: Mr. Lê Văn Thìn

Notably, the VKHH community resembled a small hamlet, a hybrid of town and village, which stood out due to the presence of modern amenities that were novel to the locals at the time, such as bicycles, radios, transistor radios, televisions, cassette players, sewing machines, cameras, and various other tools and possessions brought from Thailand. Vietnamese-Thai music emanating from transistor radios in the late afternoon after work hours, Ram Vong dances, and celebrations for holidays, weddings, and victories, all complemented by modern, vibrant costumes adorned with traditional Thai patterns, created a unique and sophisticated aesthetic that stood out amidst the mountainous and forested landscape of Thanh Hóa province.

4.8. Conclusion

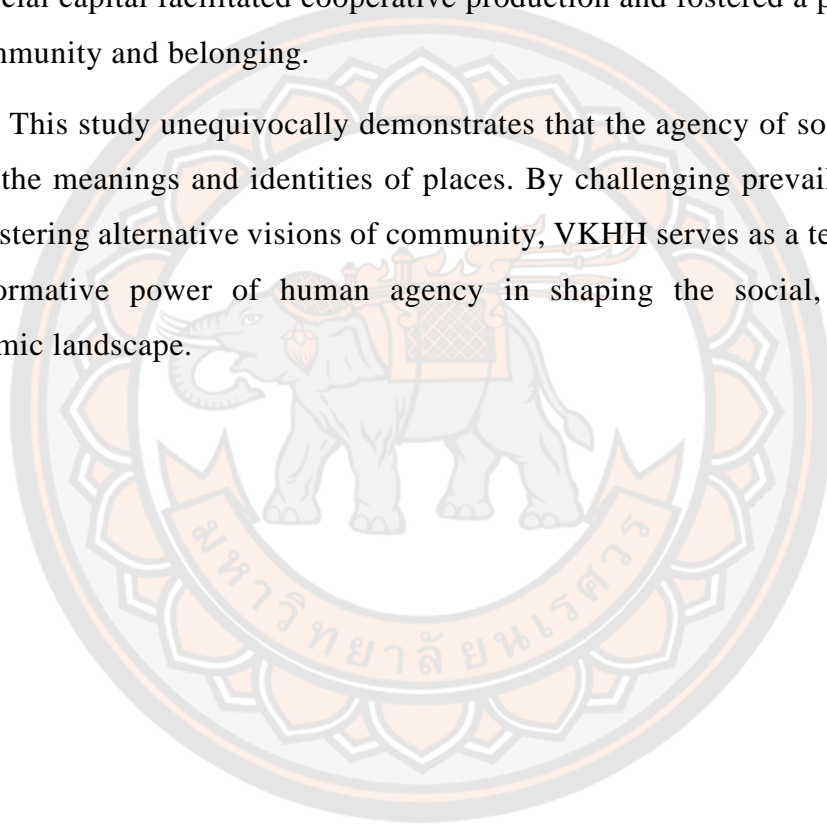
Through the judicious allocation of resources, VKHH laid the foundation for a flourishing community imbued with a distinctive cultural identity that set it apart. The inhabitants bestowed upon their enclave the new appellation of *Làng Văn Minh Sáng Tạo* (Creatively Modern Village). The genesis of VKHH can be traced to the intricate interplay between transcultural currents and local power dynamics. In its quest to forge a connection with its Thai heritage while harmonizing with its Vietnamese context, VKHH became an arena of contestation and negotiation. Transculturality empowered VKHH to transcend the constraints imposed by collectivization. By harnessing capital from Thailand and cultivating social capital in Vietnam, VKHH embarked upon a localized process intertwined with transnational flows. This confluence resulted in a unique identity that seamlessly blended Thai and Vietnamese influences.

Through their daily practices, VKHH members subtly reshaped state policies and asserted their autonomy. They devised their own set of regulations, known as "*làm đến chết*," which placed paramount importance on collective labor and cooperation. This negotiation of dominant structures exemplifies the strategies employed by marginalized groups. The VKHH's remarkable success underscores the pivotal role of human resources, capital, and creative practices in socio-economic development. The accumulation and judicious management of economic, cultural, and social capital facilitated cooperative production and nurtured a profound sense of community and belonging. This study unequivocally demonstrates that the agency of social actors possesses the capacity to shape the meanings and identities of places, challenging prevailing narratives and fostering alternative visions of community.

In conclusion, the judicious allocation of resources by VKHH laid the foundation for a thriving community with a distinct cultural identity. The interplay between transcultural flows and local power dynamics shaped VKHH's genesis, empowering it to transcend collectivization constraints. Through the harnessing of capital from Thailand and the cultivation of social capital in Vietnam, VKHH engaged in a localized process intertwined with transnational flows, resulting in a unique identity that blended Thai and Vietnamese influences.

Through their daily practices, VKHH members subtly reshaped state policies and asserted their autonomy. The negotiation of dominant structures through the implementation of *"làm đến chết"* exemplifies the strategies employed by marginalized groups. The remarkable success of VKHH underscores the pivotal role of human resources, capital, and creative practices in socio-economic development. The accumulation and judicious management of economic, cultural, and social capital facilitated cooperative production and fostered a profound sense of community and belonging.

This study unequivocally demonstrates that the agency of social actors can shape the meanings and identities of places. By challenging prevailing narratives and fostering alternative visions of community, VKHH serves as a testament to the transformative power of human agency in shaping the social, cultural, and economic landscape.



CHAPTER V

CAPITALS AND TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK MANAGEMENT IN MAKING PLACE CALLED “LÀNG THÁI LAN”

5.1 Introduction

The changing domestic and regional context paved the way for VKHH to return to Thailand and establish a network of migrant workers from Nhu Thanh, Vietnam to Thailand to work. In December 1986, following the collapse of the cooperative economic development model, Vietnam's socio-economic situation deteriorated significantly. The economic growth rate plummeted, while inflation soared to 774% in 1986, plunging the country into a severe socio-economic crisis (Lai, 2008). In response, the Vietnamese government implemented the "Đổi mới/Reform" policy, transitioning from a centrally-subsidized economy to a market economy and allowing individuals and households to engage freely in business and trade. This open-door policy facilitated the free movement of people and goods across borders. It marked a pivotal moment, presenting immense opportunities for Vietnamese citizens in general and VKHH in particular to pursue economic development.

Concurrently, in 1988, the Thai government led by Prime Minister Chatthai Chulhavan introduced a new policy aimed at transforming the Indochina battlefield into a marketplace. This policy permitted the free movement and trade of goods and people within the region, paving the way for VKHH to travel freely between Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. By 1990, Vietnam's diplomatic relations with neighboring countries had improved. The Thai government began issuing "pass"/permits (*Tàng đao*) and granted citizenship to second-generation VKHH members and those born in Thailand, recognizing VKHH as an integral part of Thai society (Quang, 2013, p. 126). This policy marked a new chapter for VKHH in Thailand. They officially became Thai citizens, enjoying full citizenship rights and the freedom to engage in business, trade, and travel

legally between the two countries. This development enabled the re-establishment of overseas Vietnamese networks in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand.

Since 1990, numerous VKHH members from Vĩnh Long village, Bến Sung, Vietnam, have returned to Thailand to visit their relatives. The economic disparity between Vietnam and Thailand was significant. While Thailand's economy experienced robust growth at a rate of 11.5% per year, with a per capita income reaching \$1,000 in 1989 (Mỹ, 1991, p. 15), new industries emerged, and demand for workers increased. In contrast, Vietnam faced high inflation rates in the early years of its economic reforms (1986-1988): 774.7% in 1986, 323.1% in 1987, and 393% in 1988 (Lai, 2008). Per capita income remained low, at \$98 in 1990 (Truong, 2019), approximately ten times lower than Thailand's, and unemployment was prevalent.

Upon their return to Thailand, VKHH members observed that workers in various sectors, including garment manufacturing, domestic work, elderly care, and sales, were in high demand and earned substantial incomes. In 1991, they returned to Bến Sung with the intention of recruiting workers from Vĩnh Long village to work in Thailand, marking the inception of a transnational migrant worker network from Nhu Thanh to Thailand. Tens of thousands of workers from Nhu Thanh were subsequently brought to Thailand by local brokers. Due to the geographical proximity between Vietnam and Thailand, workers were able to reside and travel between the two countries regularly. Economic and cultural capital were transferred from Thailand to the Bến Sung area by migrant workers, resulting in a transformative shift characterized by a vibrant Vietnamese - Thai hybrid culture.

This chapter examines the transfer of capital from the cooperative economic model to the household business model within the VKHH community, the formation of a business and trading network, and the increased interconnectedness and interaction between the VKHH community and local Vietnamese. This new context facilitated the reconnection of the VKHH network in Vietnam with their counterparts in Thailand.

Furthermore, this chapter employs Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital to analyze the transnational migration network of VKHH, which emerged as a significant social capital connecting Bến Sung to Thailand. This network enabled the free movement of people and goods between the two countries and facilitated the

construction of new cultural practices and identities. The new identities adopted by workers were shaped by their experiences of emigration, living, and working in both countries. Economic and cultural remittances were sent back to Vietnam by migrant workers, who integrated their newfound identities into their daily lives, transforming Bến Sung into a land of new identities. Through their livelihoods in both Vietnam and Thailand, VKHH members and migrant workers accumulated economic, cultural, and social capital, which they subsequently converted and transformed to construct their new identities and homeland in Vietnam. VKHH members combined, circulated, and transformed various forms of capital (social, cultural, and economic) in their pursuit of a livelihood and the development of their homeland in Vietnam.

5.2 Converting the capitals to neoliberal market under “*Đổi mới/Reform*” policy

The “*Đổi mới*” policy granted Vietnamese citizens the freedom to engage in business and trade throughout the country. Over three decades of development, the Vĩnh Long Cooperative achieved remarkable successes and gained recognition from the government and the public, becoming a hub for commodity production (as analyzed in Chapter 4). Capitalizing on the “*Đổi mới*” policy, VKHH utilized its accumulated capital to expand its business activities, diversify its livelihood options, and transform the Bến Sung area into a trading center.

VKHH possessed various forms of capital: 1) *Social capital*: network of VKHH members, VKHH living in Laos and Thailand, relationships between VKHH and Vietnamese, and high-ranking military officers in Như Xuân district; 2) *Cultural capital*: professional skills, salesmanship, business acumen, amiable personality, honesty, and reputation within the community; 3) *Economic capital*: assets accumulated from Thailand, work at the Cooperative, black market trading, and production tools (sewing machines, bicycles, mechanical cameras).

VKHH effectively leveraged these resources during the transition from cooperative to household business activities and the diversification of livelihood options in Bến Sung.

Most VKHH households had extensive trading experience in Thailand. Their strengths in food production, construction materials, and business were further

enhanced by the Vĩnh Long community. Additionally, VKHH's network in Vietnam and the network of VKHH in Laos and Thailand were re-established after 1990. The relationships between the VKHH community, Vietnamese, and local officials became valuable resources that facilitated the favorable development of business activities in Vĩnh Long village. VKHH diversified its business activities, and trading services proliferated in Bến Sung and surrounding areas. Notably, business activities were extensively connected by VKHH with inter-provincial and transnational business networks. Locally, VKHH engaged in various essential sectors, including garment design and production, trading of fired bricks, production of rice vermicelli, tofu, molasses, rice milling, cassava wine, grocery trading, machine repair services, civil electricity, restaurant services, hotels, filling stations, and trading in gold, silver, and precious stones. For the external market, VKHH also developed an inter-provincial and transnational business network, investing in freight trucks, opening purchasing agencies, logging/timber exploitation, and exporting "*Hàng tâm lý*" (psychological goods) (wildlife) to China, establishing Bến Sung as a trading center with a diverse range of business activities.

Agents for the procurement and export of “hàng tâm lý” (psychological goods-sensitive goods)

“Hàng tâm lý” (psychological goods-sensitive goods) referred to wild animals and herbs that were sourced locally and sold to Chinese traders for medicinal purposes, such as pickling wine or processing nutritious foods. Chinese consumers believed that these products could enhance male sexual performance.

As described in Chapter 3, Như Xuân is a mountainous region in the western part of Thanh Hóa province, with over 90% of its natural area covered by mountainous forests. It served as a connecting point for the primeval forests of neighboring districts and the northern region of Nghệ An province, and was home to ethnic minority communities. The area was rich in forest resources, including bee honey, herbs, medicinal plants, and wild animals such as tigers, wild boars, snakes, deer, sambar deer, muntjac, porcupines, pangolins, turtles, trionychidae, and other rare species (Ủy ban nhân dân huyện Như Xuân, 2019). Hunting and gathering were the primary livelihood activities of the ethnic minority communities. Prior to 1986,

there was no formal trading activity, and hunted wild animals were primarily consumed for sustenance. However, after 1986, the state permitted trading activities, and hunted wild animals became commodities.

Following the "*Đổi mới/Reform*" period, foreign trade and the export of goods were legalized by the state, and the hunting of wild animals was not yet prohibited. Numerous Chinese traders traveled to Vietnam to seek and purchase such items. The term "*Hàng tâm lý*" originated from the Chinese belief that wild animals, when processed into functional foods or supplements, could enhance male sexual potency and resilience.

In response to this demand, a network for the procurement and trading of "psychological goods" emerged in Vietnam. VKHH in Hanoi acted as an intermediary, connecting VKHH in the northern provinces to purchase "psychological goods" locally and export them to the Chinese market. In Như Xuân, Mrs. Tường, a Thai Vietnamese who had accompanied her husband, children, and family to Vietnam in 1963, became the first individual to establish an agency for the procurement of wild animals and herbs. To effectively carry out this operation, she leveraged her reputation to build a procurement network for "psychological goods" by collaborating with acquaintances in the area to assist her in sourcing wild animals, herbs, and exporting them to China.

In addition to Mrs. Tường, who emerged as the primary agent for wildlife trade in the Như Xuân region, approximately four to five other VKHH households engaged in purchasing activities on a smaller scale. They subsequently sold their acquisitions to Mrs. Tường at a higher price to generate profit. The individuals involved in hunting wild animals were predominantly ethnic minorities, including Tai, Mường, and Thổ, who resided in the ancient forests of western Thanh Hóa province.

"*Hàng tâm lý*" (wildlife products), after being procured, were transported to Hanoi by Mrs. Tường and sold to Mrs. Hương (a VKHH member residing in Hanoi). These products were then exported to China. During the period 1986-1996, the "*Hàng tâm lý*" trade flourished due to the abundance of wild animals and herbs. However, after 1996, the number of hunted wild animals declined significantly. To maintain a sufficient supply of "*Hàng tâm lý*," Mrs. Tường expanded her procurement network to

Laos. She collaborated with the overseas Vietnamese community in Laos, establishing small purchasing agents and arranging for the transportation of goods to Hanoi. This trading activity officially ceased in 2005, following the implementation of a Vietnamese government policy prohibiting the hunting and trade of wild animals. "*Hàng tâm lý*" trade not only generated substantial economic benefits for the trading households but also provided employment and income opportunities for ethnic minorities involved in hunting wild animals. Mrs. Trờng was among the first individuals in Bến Sung town to construct a spacious and aesthetically pleasing residence in early 2005, a testament to the financial success she achieved through this trade (Achariya & Ton, 2022).

Agents for purchasing and exporting wood to Chinese market

In addition to purchasing "*Hàng tâm lý*," the VKHH community capitalized on new local policies to engage in the trade and export of natural wood to China. Như Xuân district, one of the four largest districts in Thanh Hóa province at the time, boasted a total area of approximately 1,400 km², with 90% of its natural landscape comprising primeval forest. The Như Xuân region, renowned for its vast ironwood forests, had been exploited by French colonialists prior to 1945. Following the "*Đổi mới*" reforms, the Như Xuân District People's Committee authorized enterprises and households to participate in logging bids with the aim of expanding arable land and developing forestry trees.

Leveraging relationships established during their service as drivers for senior military officials in Như Xuân district, VKHH members such as Mr. Nguyễn Sắc, Mr. Hoàng Bá Dũng, and Mr. Lê Văn Thìn successfully bid for logging rights in numerous areas. They invested in over 10 used heavy-duty trucks to transport ironwood within the Như Xuân region and established connections with a network of VKHH members residing in Hải Phòng to facilitate the export of wood to China. The high demand for timber in China prompted the VKHH group to establish purchasing agents to acquire large quantities of timber from the region and neighboring districts. The process of bidding for forest exploitation, timber purchasing, and transportation for export to China by VKHH members was facilitated by several factors. Firstly, certain VKHH members maintained close relationships with high-ranking military

officials in Nhu Xuân district. Secondly, the VKHH community enjoyed a reputation for reliability and trustworthiness due to the contributions of the Vĩnh Long Cooperative. Thirdly, VKHH members possessed a network spanning different provinces, particularly in the Quang Ninh and Hải Phòng areas, which facilitated connections between Vietnam and China. Fourthly, VKHH members possessed proficiency in driving and repairing machinery and equipment.



Figure 12 and 13: The last remnants of black ironwood (*Olea laurifolia*) have vanished, replaced by a landscape of cultivated plantations.

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

The logging operations for export to China proceeded smoothly until 1990, after which the availability of timber gradually declined. To secure sufficient timber for export, Mr. Sắc and Mr. Thin explored opportunities to expand their purchasing market into Laos. Through their network of overseas Vietnamese in Laos, they swiftly acquired forest lands from local communities and transported the timber from Laos to the Móng Cái border gate for export to China. However, this business venture was officially prohibited after Prime Minister Võ Văn Kiệt issued Directive No. 462-TTg on September 11, 1993, banning logging in natural forests. Subsequently, VKHH members transitioned to providing freight services.

Following approximately a decade of exploitation, the ancient ironwood forest was replaced by extensive tree plantations, primarily consisting of acacia, eucalyptus,

and fruit trees. The majority of the black ironwood (*Olea laurifolia*) had been harvested, and the land had been converted for plantation use.

In 2010, logging activities for export to China resumed. Mr. Nguyễn Đăng Bắc, a third-generation descendant of VKHH, established Đại Phát Forest Products Co., Ltd. The company specializes in manufacturing products from wood, bamboo, and *Schizostachyum* for export to the Chinese market. Its annual revenue ranges from VND25 to 30 billion, contributing approximately VND500 million in tax revenue to the district budget each year. Additionally, the company has generated employment opportunities for over 100 workers.



Figure 14 and 15: VKHH's timber processing and export facility "Lâm Sản Đại Phát"

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Domestic and transnational bus transportation services

Following the decline of logging exports to China, the VKHH group transitioned to passenger transportation services. Recognizing the growing demand for travel and freight between Như Xuân and other regions, Mr. SẮc obtained additional capital from the Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development of Như Xuân district to invest in two 30-seat buses. These buses operated on the routes BẾN Sung -

Hanoi and Bến Sung – Quảng Ninh, with one trip per day. At the time, bus transportation in the mountainous region of Thanh Hóa province was limited, and there was minimal inter-regional transportation. However, the establishment of new transportation routes created business opportunities, connecting Như Xuân with other provinces and facilitating the development of trade and commerce. Numerous wholesale agents emerged, supplying goods to neighboring districts, and Bến Sung became a hub for trading and transporting goods throughout Như Xuân district.

In 1996, as the number of migrant workers from Như Xuân to Thailand increased, Mr. Sắc invested in two additional 45-seat buses to transport passengers from Bến Sung to Thailand. This service facilitated the migration of workers and their travel between Vietnam and Thailand. Goods from Thailand were also transported to the Bến Sung area for commercial purposes.

Garment and fashion design

The transition from cooperative-based garment businesses to household businesses fostered the growth of household enterprises. Over ten VKHH households shifted to garment and fashion design for men and women. Group 1 comprised seven tailor stores specializing in sewing and repairing fashionable clothing for women, including those owned by Mrs. Mậ, Mrs. Thanh, Mrs. Nguyệt, Mrs. Tâm, Mrs. Gái, Mrs. Hườ, and Mrs. Phong. Group 2 consisted of three tailor stores owned by Mr. Nhung, Mr. Ký, and Mr. Bình, which specialized in designing costumes for state officials and repairing clothes based on customer requirements. Among these, three garment businesses owned by Mrs. Tâm, Mrs. Nữ, and Mr. Bình expanded their operations to Yên Cát town, Nông Cồ, and neighboring districts.

The Vĩnh Long village garment brand gained recognition for its exceptional sewing techniques and modern designs. At the time, no other tailor store in the area could match the quality of VKHH's garments. With meticulous attention to detail, all fashion products incorporated both modern and traditional Vietnamese styles. The pricing was also tailored to suit different customer segments. Consequently, most district officials and residents of Như Xuân district with tailoring needs sought the services of Vĩnh Long and Bến Sung villages.

The garment industry venture of VKHH was established in 1986 and has been sustained to the present day. Subsequent generations of VKHH have continued to develop the resource capital inherited from their predecessors. Utilizing the revenue generated from the garment business, VKHH households have constructed substantial and aesthetically pleasing new residences, replacing the former dwellings characterized by thatched roofs and earthen walls.

After 2005, due to changes in fashion and garment needs of local people, VKHH altered their business model. They began to combine tailoring and importing clothes from China and Thailand. The new designs and reasonable prices fully met the fashion needs of people in the region. Simultaneously, they became agents to supply fabrics for tailor stores in Thường Xuân, Triệu Sơn, and Nông Cống districts.



Figure 16 and 17: VKHH's garment boutiques and singer sewing machines

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Vĩnh Long village of Bến Sung is renowned for its modern and traditional style garments. The honest personality and friendly behavior of VKHH have made a strong impression on Vietnamese people. Thanks to an abundant source of customers and favorable business activities, which brought good income, many spacious houses, designed with a blend of Thai-Vietnamese architecture, appeared in Bến Sung town.

Grocery stores

Interspersed with food and beverage and fashion stores were grocery stores invested by VKHH, offering a wide range of essential items for local life. Goods were procured from the center of Thanh Hóa City, primarily consisting of bath soap, washing soap, needles, thread, cutlery, confectionery, and cooking spices manufactured in Vietnam. VKHH utilized bicycles to transport goods from Bến Sung to Thanh Hóa City for wholesale procurement. Prior to 1995, only three grocery stores operated by VKHH existed in the Bến Sung area. Subsequently, additional stores were established by Vietnamese investors.



Figure 18 and 19: VKHH's grocery stores

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

From 1995 onwards, grocery stores evolved into wholesale and retail agents, expanding their product offerings to include not only Vietnamese-made goods but also imports from China and Thailand, which were transported via buses and local brokers.

Food and beverage business/restaurants

Vĩnh Long village was strategically situated along both sides of National Highway 45, a major thoroughfare for economic connectivity and transportation of goods between the central region, the delta within the province, the Northern economic zone, and the Western districts of Thanh Hóa province. Consequently, Bến Sung became a popular stopover for trading and transporting goods.

VKHH's business ventures included traditional Vietnamese food restaurants and Thai food restaurants offering dishes such as *lap* (pork chop salad), *xum tam* (papaya salad or "*som tam*" in Thai), and *lod chong* (a type of Thai dessert) to cater to a diverse clientele.



Figure 20: VKHH's Thai food shop

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

In addition to dishes infused with Thai culinary influences, VKHH also traded their traditional products such as Vĩnh Long cassava wine, rice vermicelli, and molasses, renowned for their distinct flavor and unmatched quality in other regions.

Hotel services

Since 1998, the demand for hospitality services among traders has witnessed a surge. In response to this growing need, VKHH in the Bến Sung area embarked on the construction of motels and hotels. During the period 2000-2010, VKHH established three hotels: Bạch Lim Hotel (2000), Thanh Xuân Hotel (2003), and Đại Dương Hotel (2009).



Figure 21 and 22: VKHH’s “Bạch Lim” and “Thanh Xuân” hotels

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Within the compact Bến Sung area, home to over 62 VKHH households, these three substantial hotels serve as convenient stopover points for traders and venues for events such as weddings and parties. VKHH's hospitality offerings extend beyond accommodation, encompassing car rental and karaoke services. The area's modern infrastructure and diverse business services have transformed Bến Sung into a modern

and sophisticated hub, akin to a miniature city replete with restaurants, hotels, and entertainment options. This transformation has rendered Bến Sung an attractive destination, drawing a significant influx of residents from neighboring areas seeking both residential and commercial opportunities.

Gold, silver and gemstone business

The inaugural gold and silver store in the Bến Sung area commenced operations in 1996. Its establishment was the culmination of networking efforts between VKHH in Vietnam and overseas Vietnamese residing in Thailand.

Mrs. Nguyễn Thị Dung, a Vietnamese returnee from Thailand, accompanied her husband back to Vietnam in 1963. In 1990, she returned to Thailand to visit her family. The concept of a gold and silver business emerged from her observations of a successful chain of such stores operated by overseas Vietnamese in Thailand. At the time, there were no gold trading activities in the Như Xuân area. Local residents were compelled to travel to the center of Thanh Hóa province to buy and sell gold, a highly inconvenient endeavor. Recognizing this unmet need, Mrs. Dung returned to Bến Sung in 1996 and established "Ngọc Dung Gold, Silver, and Gems" store. This venture represented a novel business concept in the area at the time.

In Vietnamese culture, amidst high inflation, converting currency into gold was widely regarded as the most effective means of preserving and accumulating wealth. Consequently, Mrs. Dung's gold shop fulfilled a practical need for local residents. Its strategic location attracted customers from the surrounding area, enabling them to conduct gold transactions conveniently and efficiently.

Bến Sung People's Credit Fund “Quỹ tín dụng Bến Sung”

Following the government's authorization to establish people's credit banks in 1993, a group of VKHH members, including Mr. Sác, Mr. Dũng, Mr. Nhung, and Mr. Cầu, became the initial capital contributors for the Bến Sung People's Credit Fund. Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Dung was appointed as the legal representative, and the fund commenced official operations in August 1998. This initiative facilitated access to capital for economic development within the community. According to Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Dung, the director of the fund:

"As of the end of 2019, the fund had 5,800 active clients, comprising 1,200 depositors and 4,600 borrowers. As of December 31, 2019, the outstanding loan balance stood at VND33,519,872,600, representing a 43.85% increase compared to 2018. Short-term loans accounted for VND23,826 million (71.08% of total outstanding loans), while medium-term loans amounted to VND9,694 million (28.92% of total outstanding loans). The majority of clients consistently made timely interest and principal payments. Notably, 203 households in Làng Thái Lan have opened savings accounts with the fund."

Filling station services

During the 2000s, business and trade activities in the Bến Sung area and Nhu Thanh district experienced significant growth. The region emerged as a hub for goods transportation between the plains and mountainous areas. However, the absence of a petroleum business hindered further development.

Mr. Thăng, a member of the VKHH community, and his relatives pooled resources to establish a petroleum business to support transportation and production activities in the area.



Figure 23: VKHH's petrol station

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

After completing the necessary administrative procedures, the *Khe Rông* petrol station - Mạnh Thắng Transportation Service Trading Co., Ltd. was established and commenced operations in October 2000. The petrol station supplies gasoline and oil to various vehicles, including trucks, cars, motorcycles, and agricultural machinery. According to Mr. Thắng:

"Our primary clientele consists of transportation companies operating on the Làng Thái Lan - Hanoi route, forest product transport enterprises, and personal vehicles in Làng Thái Lan. On average, we sell approximately 1,500 liters of petrol daily."

Residents of the area prefer to purchase petrol from the station due to the complimentary drinking water provided by the owner, a practice rooted in Thai business culture that has been adopted by the VKHH community.

5.3 Engaging in the cross-border labor market; kinship neighborhood ties between VKHH in Vietnam and Thailand.

This section will examine the "*Đổi mới/Reform*" and "*Pliensanamrop pensanamkanka*" policies in the context of their impact on local livelihoods. In the realm of economic development, the implementation of transformative policies has played a pivotal role in shaping local livelihoods. Two such policies that have garnered significant attention are "*Đổi mới/Reform*" in Vietnam and "*Pliensanamrop Pensanamkanka*" in Thailand. This paper aims to explore the impact of these policies on local livelihoods, highlighting their transformative effects and the challenges they have encountered.

The "*Đổi mới/Reform*" policy was formally implemented in Vietnam in 1986, following protracted challenges stemming from the reunification of North and South Vietnam. These reforms sought to revitalize Vietnam's economy and political system after the collapse of Soviet-style central planning. They marked a watershed moment in Vietnam's economic trajectory, propelling the country to become one of Asia's most promising emerging economies. Two years later, in 1988, Thailand introduced the "*Pliensanamrop pensanamkanka*" policies, which ushered in significant economic and political transformations. These policies were part of a broader shift towards democratization and economic liberalization that had begun in the mid-1980s. They

aimed to address Thailand's pressing economic and social issues, including high inflation, unemployment, and income disparities.

Following the implementation of the "*Đổi mới*" (*economic renovation*) policy in 1986, Vietnam adopted a proactive labor export policy, recognizing its significance in addressing unemployment, generating foreign currency, and contributing to the country's economic development. Prime Minister Phan Văn Khải emphasized the crucial role of labor export as a long-term strategy, he said "labor export is a very important strategy and plays a great role in solving the problem of unemployment, increasing foreign currency for the country, etc. Labor export must be considered an important and long-term strategy." During the period from 1986 to 1990, Vietnam exported an average of 70,000 workers annually (Tran, 2011). This figure placed Vietnam as the second-largest labor exporter in the region, after the Philippines (Belanger & Wang, 2013, p. 37). Post-1990, Vietnam continued to maintain a substantial number of workers employed abroad, with an average of over 27,000 Vietnamese workers deployed annually through state intermediary organizations (Nguyen, 2021).

However, Vietnamese workers seeking employment abroad must meet stringent eligibility criteria. These include: 1) Possession of a high school diploma or higher qualification; 2) Absence of any criminal record; 3) Age between 18 and 39; 4) Physical fitness, with height and weight requirements (1.6m and 50kg for males; 1.5m and 45kg for females); 5) Completion of vocational training and language and cultural orientation programs tailored to the destination country. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) is responsible for administering the Workers' Assessment Exams, which determine eligibility for overseas employment. Notably, all training costs, airfare, visas, and insurance expenses are borne by the workers themselves.

Labor Export Regulations and Procedures: The Vietnamese government has implemented stringent labor export regulations to ensure the welfare and protection of its workers. According to the Department of Overseas Labor (MOLISA), Vietnamese workers must navigate a six-step process to secure overseas employment (Thông tấn xã Việt Nam, 2019):

Step 1: Registration: Vietnamese workers register with state-licensed labor export enterprises.

Step 2: Selection: Recruited workers must meet the stipulated height, weight, and qualification requirements, and have a clean legal record.

Step 3: Training and Testing: Workers participate in a 74-hour training program covering legal regulations, culture, and language of Vietnam and the host country

Step 4: Labor Export Contract: Vietnamese workers sign employment contracts directly with foreign employers.

Step 5: Pre-Departure Expenses: Vietnamese workers are obligated to cover prescribed expenses, including service fees, brokerage fees, training costs, and deposits to prevent contract breaches. These expenses can range from US\$1,200 to US\$10,000, depending on the destination country and occupation. To secure the necessary funds, many workers resort to borrowing from banks, often using their land and homes as collateral.

In 2008, Japan ranked highest (US\$10,053), followed by Korea (US\$6,109), then Taiwan (US\$5,292) and Malaysia (US\$1,827). In order to have enough money to cover labor export fees, candidates must borrow money from banks by mortgaging the land and house they are living in. In 2010, the total number of workers who were able to borrow capital for labor export was nearly 82,000 people with a total loan of nearly VND1,700 billion (Camsa, 2011).

Step 6: Visa application: Workers complete the necessary documentation to apply for a work visa at the embassy of the host country in Vietnam.

Due to the high costs associated with legal labor export, many Vietnamese workers were unable to pursue overseas employment opportunities. Consequently, they sought alternative means of migration, including working domestically or finding ways to emigrate illegally.

Concurrently, the Thai government under Chatchai Chunchawan implemented a policy aimed at transforming Indochina from a conflict zone into a commercial hub. This policy fostered peace and economic cooperation within the

region, enabling people to travel and conduct business freely. It also marked the beginning of a significant wave of Vietnamese migration to Thailand, facilitated by the VKHH network.

On May 29, 1990, the Thai government granted citizenship to the children and grandchildren of Vietnamese immigrants, allowing them to engage in all occupations in Thailand, reversing a previous ban on 25 professions. This led to the establishment of numerous Vietnamese-owned businesses, including grocery stores, garment sewing workshops, restaurants, motorcycle shops, gas stations, construction companies, beauty salons, garages, and travel agencies. The thriving Vietnamese community in Thailand gave rise to a successful class of Vietnamese entrepreneurs. Subsequently, the *Hiệp Hội Thương Gia Việt Kiều* (Vietnamese Thai Business Association) was formed to foster networking and mutual support among overseas Vietnamese businesses. Over 1,100 Vietnamese entrepreneurs joined the association, creating a business network that facilitated investment and production activities in both Thailand and Vietnam (Khoa, 2016, p. 112). This development created a growing demand for workers within the Vietnamese community in Thailand.

In 1992, the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) was established, comprising six countries (China, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam). With the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the GMS Economic Cooperation Program was launched to promote economic cooperation and free trade (Nancy & Walsh, 2014, p. 75). In January 1992, six members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand – agreed to establish the ASEAN Free Trade Area. Vietnam joined ASEAN in 1995, followed by Laos and Myanmar in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999 (ASEAN).

These regional and international developments, coupled with Vietnam's domestic "*Đổi mới*" policy, created favorable conditions for labor export. However, stringent recruitment criteria and high costs prevented many Vietnamese workers from becoming legal migrant workers. As a result, they often resorted to working domestically for low wages or sought to migrate to neighboring countries through informal channels.

5.4 Connecting *Làng Thái Lan* to Thailand

In this section, I will delve into the intricate web of VKHH's social networks, shedding light on the pivotal role played by VKHH women in forging a transborder network that transcended geographical boundaries. I will also explore the remarkable contributions of pioneering brokers who served as catalysts for this remarkable achievement.

5.4.1 VKHH's social networks

As discussed in the preceding chapter, Vietnamese migration to Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand has spanned centuries, resulting in the formation of extensive networks of overseas Vietnamese communities in the region.

VKHH's relationship with Thai people and overseas Vietnamese in Thailand: The "Repatriation" program, which facilitated the return of Vietnamese from Thailand, was discontinued in 1964. This separation created a divide between Thai overseas Vietnamese, with some returning home and others remaining in Thailand. Communication was severed, but memories and emotions lingered. The protection and support provided by Thai people left an enduring mark on the hearts of overseas Vietnamese. The close bonds between Thai and overseas Vietnamese were evident in the emotional farewells and the desire for reconnection when circumstances permitted. Three years after the "Repatriation" program, the number of overseas Vietnamese residing in Thailand was estimated at approximately 80,000 (Nancy & Walsh, 2014, p. 72). This figure grew to 110,000 by 1990 (Ha Nguyen Khoa, 2016, p. 2). In 1990, the reopening of borders in the Indochina region and Thailand allowed for the free movement of goods and people. VKHH from Vĩnh Long village returned to Thailand to reunite with family and friends after years of separation. The network of VKHH, Thai Vietnamese, and Thai communities began to take shape, serving as a crucial form of social capital that facilitated the migration of workers from Vĩnh Long village to Thailand from 1990 onwards.

VKHH's Relationship with the Overseas Vietnamese Community in Laos: As mentioned in Chapter 4, the VKHH in Vĩnh Long village were among those who fled the war in Laos for Thailand in 1946. Subsequently, many overseas Vietnamese

sought to return to Laos to escape the repressive policies of the Thai military government, rather than repatriating to Vietnam. In 1990, overseas Vietnamese living in Laos, Thailand, and VKHH in Vietnam were reunited after 30 years of separation. Some overseas Vietnamese in Laos were married to high-ranking military officers who could influence the immigration process between Vietnam and Laos, as well as between Laos and Thailand. This paved the way for the smooth migration of workers from Vietnam to Thailand for employment.

Mrs. Sinh and Mrs. Loan, originally from Hà Tĩnh, Vietnam, migrated to Laos in the 1940s and then to Thailand in 1946. They later returned to Laos in 1950. Utilizing her husband's connections, Mrs. Sinh became a key intermediary in connecting Vietnamese migrant workers to Thailand. This explains the phenomenon of Vietnamese workers migrating to Thailand without passports, as mentioned in Chapter 1. As of 2008, approximately 40,000 Vietnamese people were residing in Laos, divided into three groups: (i) Laotian of Vietnamese origin (long-term residents with Lao nationality); (ii) overseas Vietnamese (Vietnamese nationals without Lao nationality); and (iii) recent arrivals with unstable residency status (Thiệu, 2007). The number of Vietnamese migrating to Laos continued to rise, reaching 100,000 in 2015 (Thoàn, 2019, p. 38).

Similar to Laos, the Vietnamese community in Cambodia has a long history of migration and settlement, dating back several centuries. After 1990, the connection between overseas Vietnamese in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and VKHH in Vietnam was reestablished. According to the State of Cambodia's (SOC) estimate, there are approximately 130,000 Vietnamese people residing in 19/21 provinces and cities in Cambodia. The area with the highest concentration of Vietnamese is Phnom Penh, followed by towns and townlets along the Mekong River, Tonle Sap, and major roads (Tuấn, 2007, p. 47). Unlike Thailand and Laos, the living conditions of the Vietnamese in Cambodia have been relatively favorable due to the support of the Royal Government of Cambodia. As a result, the Vietnamese community has been able to establish communities and develop their livelihoods across all 19 provinces of Cambodia (Khoa, 2016, p. 109).

VKHH and overseas Vietnamese in the region have formed a network of migrant workers from Vietnam to Thailand. This network plays a crucial role in connecting Vietnamese migrant workers to Thailand, facilitating their economic pursuits, and fostering closer relations between VKHH and the Vietnamese community. The experience of living in both countries has allowed Vietnamese workers to embrace new cultural practices and forge a new identity (this aspect will be explored in subsequent sections).

5.4.2 The role of VKHH women in building a transborder network

This section I will elaborate about the process of cultural interference between VKHH and Confucius, and the role of Thai culture in promoting VKHH women to participate in the process of building a migration network, helping Vietnamese workers come to Thailand to work and maintain until today.

Gender roles and cultural hybridization in the VKHH community

During their settlement in B n Sung, the VKHH's perspectives on gender roles within the family and society underwent a process of hybridization. This cultural amalgamation continued to intensify after 1986, as VKHH women expanded their household businesses. This development created new opportunities for VKHH women to engage in business activities and interact more frequently with Vietnamese customers. Consequently, many traditional Confucian views and practices from Vietnam were adopted and integrated into their daily lives, leading to the formation of a new identity that blended Thai innovation with Vietnamese tradition.

Confucian ideology, introduced to Vietnam centuries ago, has profoundly influenced Vietnamese perceptions of gender roles within the family and society. Confucian ethical principles, such as the "Three Submissions" and "Four Virtues," emphasize the domestic role of women. However, Vietnamese women have also traditionally contributed to household economies by working alongside their husbands in various productive activities.

In pre-reform Vietnamese society, girls were raised to embody feminine qualities that emphasized both psychological and physical resilience and self-sacrifice (Drummond & Rydstrom 2004; Shoet 2013). After the 1986 reforms, the role of

women in maintaining family harmony was further emphasized (Belanger and Barbieri 2009). Women were seen as playing a crucial role in fostering family happiness through their economic contributions and the education of their children (Locke, Hoa, Tâm, and Nguyễn, 2012; Rydstrom, 2006). Vietnamese Confucianists even referred to women as "family generals" who held the "key to the money box," signifying their responsibility for managing household finances, ensuring food security, and overseeing children's education. They were also granted societal authority through the adage "wife first" (*nhất vợ nhì trời*) and the proverb "husband's order is not as powerful as that of wife" (*lệnh ông không bằng công bà*). Researchers have recognized the significant position of Vietnamese women within the family: "Most women have an important position in the family. Because women manage all the material facilities, manage the house, keep in touch with relatives, clearly see the family's responsibility to the village and the community/country" (Ngoc Them, 1997, p 49).

Within Vietnamese society, men are traditionally regarded as symbols of the family, representing it at various community events such as weddings, festivals, and funerals. Their worth is often measured by their ability to convert personal resources into financial assets and provide for their families (Lan Anh & Yeoh, 2011, p. 723). Vietnamese society traditionally views women as the primary caregivers and financial managers within the family, often sacrificing their own needs for the well-being of their loved ones. In contrast, men are seen as the diplomatic representatives of the family, responsible for attending important community events and representing the family's interests.

Thai-Vietnamese cultural hybridization

The traditional identity of Thai women emphasizes leadership, power, and strength, as well as a propensity for cooperation and independent development. In contrast, the traditional identity of Vietnamese women revolves around sacrifice, financial and household management, and ensuring food security for the family.

The hybridization of Vietnamese and Thai culture within the cognitive system of VKHH women manifested itself in their approach to building and managing a network of transnational migrant workers. Firstly, they exhibited the traditional Vietnamese feminine trait of sacrifice by becoming local brokers who facilitated the

migration of Vietnamese workers to Thailand. This involved leaving their families and enduring arduous 60-hour bus journeys repeatedly for many years. Secondly, they demonstrated the traditional Thai feminine traits of connection, cooperation, and operational efficiency in running the migrant worker network. To successfully bring workers from Bến Sung to Thailand, local brokers required not only strong communication skills and fluency in Thai but also the ability to operate, connect, and negotiate with partners in the migration networks in Laos and Thailand. They were also responsible for arranging transportation, accommodation, and job placement for workers upon their arrival in Thailand.

Thus, to excel as a broker, a woman needed to possess both sets of qualities: the tolerance and sacrifice characteristic of Vietnamese women and the ability to connect, cooperate, and operate a migrant worker network characteristic of Thai women. VKHH women possessed both these qualities, forming a new identity that was a product of the hybridization of Vietnamese and Thai culture as they navigated and practiced both cultures concurrently. This new cultural identity empowered VKHH women to perform effectively as brokers.

The roles of a local broker encompassed a wide range of tasks involved in bringing Vietnamese workers to Thailand, which, from a Vietnamese perspective, were considered *việc lặt vặt* "odd" jobs more suited to women (Achariya & Ton, 2022). Additionally, the jobs that migrant workers performed in Thailand, such as garment work, housework, cooking, sales, and elderly care, were traditionally viewed as women's work in Vietnamese society. This perspective explains why, during the first 15 years (1990-2005), the majority of Vietnamese migrant workers in Thailand were women.

5.4.3 Pioneers of brokerage

The network of Vietnamese-Thai migrant workers began to take shape in the 1990s. The pioneering local brokers who brought Vietnamese migrant workers from Nhr Thanh to Thailand were all overseas Vietnamese of Thai origin who had followed their husbands back to Vietnam in 1963. Their unique social capital, including extensive networks within the overseas Vietnamese community, resilience, organizational abilities, and proficiency in both Vietnamese and Thai, enabled them to establish a successful network for Vietnamese migrant workers. To form and develop

the Vietnam - Thailand migration network, women are local brokers, with extremely rich cultural and social capital. Both have the responsibility to take care of food security in the family (Confucius), and also have the mindset of pioneering women, with the ability to lead and arrange all tasks in the process of building a labor network. migration (Thai culture). The first VKHH women participating in building the migrant labor network below have been mentioned and studied very carefully by two authors, Achariya Chowonglert & Le Van Ton (2021).

Mrs. Sà and Mrs. Téng

When discussing the migration network of workers in Như Thanh, migrants and local brokers alike invariably mention Mrs. Sà and Mrs. Téng as the individuals who initially established this network.

Mrs. Sà and Mrs. Téng were born in Khon Kean province and raised in Thailand. While Mrs. Sà was of pure Thai descent, Mrs. Téng was of mixed Vietnamese-Thai heritage, with a Vietnamese father and a Thai mother. In 1963, both women migrated to Vietnam with their families and settled in Vĩnh Long village, Bến Sung, Như Thanh, Thanh Hóa, Vietnam.

In 1986, the Vietnamese government implemented the "*Đổi mới/Reform*" policy, which granted citizens the freedom to travel and conduct business. Concurrently, countries in the region adopted open border policies. In this context, Mrs. Téng and Mrs. Sà approached the Thai Embassy in Hanoi, where they provided evidence of their Thai heritage and expressed their desire to return to their homeland to visit relatives. After completing the necessary paperwork, the two women left Vietnam and returned to Thailand in 1988. Upon their return, the two women sought employment opportunities in Thailand. Through the recommendation of a close friend, Mrs. Téng secured a position in a garment factory in the Ban Sang area. Her proficiency in Thai language and culture, coupled with her adept sewing skills, allowed her to quickly integrate into her new work environment. Her salary was 10-12 times higher than what she could have earned for similar work in Vietnam at the time. Mrs. Sà also found employment in a garment factory in Ban Som Piao, in central Thailand, thanks to a friend's referral.

During her time working and living in the Ban Sang area, Mrs. Téng recognized the high demand for garment workers. Additionally, many overseas Vietnamese and Thai families sought domestic help, elderly care, sales assistants, and other similar services. However, Thai citizens generally showed little interest in these types of jobs, making it challenging to recruit workers. Recognizing this opportunity, Mrs. Téng contacted Mrs. Sà, and together they devised a plan to return to Vietnam and recruit workers from among the children of VKHH in Vĩnh Long village to work in Thailand. In 1991, the first group of workers from Vĩnh Long village migrated to Thailand for employment. The initial jobs held by Vietnamese migrant workers during this period primarily consisted of tailoring/garment work, domestic work, elderly care, and sales and restaurant assistance.

According to Mrs. Tâm¹⁵, Mrs. Téng possessed exceptional job placement and negotiation skills, which allowed her to profit handsomely from arranging for people to work in Thailand. Mrs. Sà, on the other hand, faced challenges as many Vietnamese workers failed to honor their financial obligations to her. Despite these setbacks, the two women collaborated to establish a network of migrant workers and developed a worker network in Thailand. Mrs. Téng focused on placing migrant workers in jobs in the Ban Sang area, while Mrs. Sà brought migrant workers to work in the Ban Som Piao area.

In 2000, Mrs. Sà divorced her Vietnamese husband, remarried a Thai man, and settled permanently in Thailand. Subsequently, she discontinued her work as a broker due to health reasons. Despite her second marriage, she remained childless and passed away in Thailand in 2012 at the age of 71.

In 2003, Mrs. Téng divorced her Vietnamese husband and married a Thai man. She brought her children from Vĩnh Long village to Thailand and naturalized them as Thai citizens. Her children attended school in Thailand and are now married and employed there. None of Mrs. Téng's three children have followed in her footsteps as migrant worker brokers. Currently, Mrs. Téng is 80 years old and resides with her

¹⁵ The author's conversation with Mrs. Hoàng Thị Tâm (a broker) in Vinh Long village, Nhu Thanh, Thanh Hoa on February 20, 2018

Thai husband. Her former husband in Vietnam has also remarried a Vietnamese woman and currently lives in Bến Sung, Như Thanh, Vietnam.

Mrs. Sà and Mrs. Téng played pivotal roles in establishing the migration network between Như Thanh, Vietnam, and Thailand. Their efforts in connecting Vietnamese workers with employment opportunities in Thailand led to the establishment of a thriving migrant worker community. However, their experiences differed, with Mrs. Téng continuing to profit from the network while Mrs. Sà faced challenges and eventually discontinued her involvement. Nonetheless, their contributions laid the foundation for the migration network that continues to operate today.

Mrs. Tường

Mrs. Tường, a native of Thailand, was born and raised in Khon Kaen province. In 1963, at the age of approximately 22, she resided in Thailand with her entire family, including her parents and siblings. Prior to returning to Vietnam, she and her overseas Vietnamese husband had two children. After repatriating to Vietnam, she gave birth to seven more children (one of whom passed away at birth in 1987). In 1992, Mrs. Tường returned to Thailand to visit her siblings and birth parents.

A significant turning point in her life occurred in 1994 when her husband passed away from a stroke. Shortly thereafter, she experienced psychological distress and engaged in gambling (poker) with a business group in the Như Thanh area. This resulted in substantial financial losses, transforming her from a wealthy individual to a debtor at the age of 54. With no remaining funds, her husband deceased, and her children facing challenges, she made the decision in late 1996 to bring five of her seven children back to Thailand to reside with her parents' family. They were naturalized and received their education in Thailand. Her two older sons remained in Bến Sung.

Through the assistance of her cousins in Thailand, Mrs. Tường secured employment at a restaurant, where she earned a substantial income. She traveled extensively to visit family and friends, attended numerous training programs in the restaurant industry, and expanded her network to include both Thai and overseas Vietnamese individuals. This network provided her with access to business owners

and employers. Once her network in Thailand had grown sufficiently, she began connecting migrant workers with employment opportunities. In 1996, she became a broker, facilitating the migration of workers from Nhu Thanh to Thailand. Each month, she assisted approximately 15 workers. Each trip spanned roughly 10 days, encompassing the recruitment of workers in Nhu Thanh, their transportation to Thailand, and the securing of employment for them.

Mrs. Tường was widely regarded as a highly respected individual in the Nhu Thanh area. Prior to becoming a broker, she had operated a purchasing agency for wild animals that were exported to China. Her reputation was well-established, which gave her an advantage in recruiting local workers. In 2018, at the age of 71 and after more than two decades of working as a local broker (1996-2018), Mrs. Tường discontinued her activities of transporting people and goods between Vietnam and Thailand due to health concerns. From the age of 60 onwards, she had experienced increasing bone and joint problems (attributable to spending 18 years sitting on buses). By the age of 70, the osteoarthritis pain in her legs and back had intensified, rendering her unable to continue her work. Consequently, she ceased her operations as a migrant worker broker. Presently, Mrs. Tường resides in Vĩnh Long village with her son and daughter-in-law, where she operates a shop selling Thai goods. She spends much of her time relaxing on an electric massage chair and engaging in card games with fellow VKHH members in Vĩnh Long village as a form of entertainment in her later years.

Mrs. Tường's life journey exemplifies the resilience and adaptability of Vietnamese women. Despite facing numerous challenges, including the loss of her husband and financial difficulties, she persevered and found success as a local broker. Her network-building skills and reputation in the Nhu Thanh area enabled her to connect migrant workers with employment opportunities in Thailand, improving their lives and contributing to the transnational migration process. Mrs. Tường's story highlights the important role that women play in facilitating labor migration and fostering cross-border connections.

Mrs. Tâm

Mrs. Tâm's parents, originally from Quang Binh province in Central Vietnam, migrated to Thailand in 1946. Mrs. Tâm was born in the Northeast region of Thailand

in 1955. During the author's and his advisor's conversations with Mrs. Tâm, she communicated with the advisor in fluent Northeastern Thai and with the author in a soft and easily comprehensible Central Vietnamese accent. She and her family returned to Vĩnh Long village in 1964 aboard the ship 72. Upon her return to Vietnam at the age of 9, she continued to use both Vietnamese and Thai, having been exposed to both languages during her time in Northeast Thailand. Unlike other VKHH, she faced minimal communication difficulties in Vietnamese upon her return. She grew up working in the garment industry at the Vĩnh Long Cooperative. After the country's economic reforms (*Đổi mới*), she established her own tailoring business in Yên Cát town, Như Xuân district.

Her daily practice of both Thai and Vietnamese languages enabled her to become fluent in both. At the age of 20, she married an overseas Vietnamese returnee in Vĩnh Long village and had three children (two sons and a daughter). In 1974, her husband passed away due to a serious illness, leaving her to raise her three children as a single mother through her tailoring work. In 1997, when her children had grown, she took her youngest daughter to Thailand to work in the garment sector. Through an overseas Vietnamese friend in Thailand, she was referred to a garment factory in Bang Nam Piao district, a district in the central province of Thailand, where she worked for several years. In 2008, after 11 years of working in the garment industry and living in Thailand, she joined a network to facilitate the migration of workers from Như Thanh to Thailand for garment work. Simultaneously, she engaged in the hand-carrying of goods from Thailand to Vietnam, which she sold to a network of customers (primarily affluent households and district officials in the center of Bến Sung town).

Many Vietnamese workers migrated to Thailand through her network, but some failed to pay her. In 2011, after three years of working as a labor broker, she decided to discontinue her involvement. When asked about the cases of unpaid debts and her response, she shared¹⁶:

"During 2008-2011, as a new broker, few migrant workers in Làng Thái Lan knew about me. Therefore, I had to reach out to workers who were seeking employment in Thailand, assuring them of job

¹⁶ Conversation with Ms. Tâm - one of the local brokers in Vĩnh Long village, Bến Sung, Như Thanh, Vietnam on 10/12/2020.

opportunities and suitable salaries. Since the workers lacked the funds to cover the brokerage fees upfront, I extended loans to them, with the understanding that they would repay me once they received their first monthly salary in Thailand. However, after a short period of employment, they connected with other workers in the Làng Thái Lan network in Thailand and found alternative jobs with higher salaries. They subsequently quit their current positions, changed their phone numbers, and severed contact with me, refusing to settle their debts. They claimed that the jobs I had arranged were unsuitable, the salaries were low, or the employers treated them poorly... I made no attempt to locate them or contact their families in Làng Thái Lan to recover the money for two reasons: 1. facilitating the illegal migration of workers to Thailand is not protected by Vietnamese law; 2. we, VKHH, aim to assist Vietnamese workers and foster close and harmonious relationships. Therefore, I chose to remain silent and temporarily suspend this line of work."

Despite temporarily halting her involvement in facilitating the migration of workers from Nhr Thanh to Thailand, she continued to travel frequently between the two countries to engage in the hand-carrying of goods, primarily cosmetics, shampoos, and lotions, which she sold to government officials working at the Nhr Thanh District People's Committee. Additionally, she visited her youngest daughter, who resided and worked in Thailand. Her daily routine was rather unique. Due to her proficiency in listening, reading, writing, and speaking Thai, she frequently watched Thai news programs (taking interest in elections and party vote percentages) and Thai movies (traditional films). She also regularly read Thai books to deepen her understanding of the Thai people, culture, and political landscape, considering Thailand her second home.

Mrs. Tâm's experiences as a local broker highlight the challenges and complexities involved in facilitating transnational labor migration. Despite her fluency in both Vietnamese and Thai and her deep understanding of the cultural nuances of both countries, she faced difficulties in collecting payment from migrant workers who often broke their commitments to her. This led her to discontinue her work as a broker after three years. Mrs. Tâm's story also underscores the importance of trust and reputation within the VKHH community. Her decision to prioritize the

well-being of Vietnamese workers and maintain close relationships within the community, even at the expense of her own financial gain, reflects the strong sense of solidarity and mutual support that exists among VKHH members.

Despite the challenges she faced, Mrs. Tâm's contributions to the network of Vietnamese migrant workers in Thailand are undeniable. Her ability to navigate the complexities of both Vietnamese and Thai society and her commitment to helping her fellow VKHH members find employment opportunities in Thailand have made a significant impact on the lives of many Vietnamese workers.

Other brokers

Following the pioneering efforts of Mrs. Sà, Mrs. Téng, Mrs. Tường, and Mrs. Tâm, a new generation of local brokers emerged after 2005 to meet the growing demand for migrant workers from Nhu Thanh, including both men and women. These brokers were primarily Vietnamese-Thai individuals, descendants of VKHH who had migrated to Thailand for work since the 1990s. Their fluency in Thai and established networks within the overseas Vietnamese community in Thailand, coupled with their connections to factories and businesses in need of workers, provided them with the necessary resources to become successful brokers. They facilitated the migration of workers not only from Nhu Thanh district but also from other districts in Thanh Hóa province.

These novel brokers were predominantly Vietnamese-Thai individuals, descendants of Vietnamese laborers (VKHH) who had migrated to Thailand for employment opportunities since the 1990s. They possessed fluency in the Thai language and had cultivated extensive networks within the overseas Vietnamese communities residing in Thailand. A defining characteristic of these brokers was their familial lineage, with many being either the offspring of Thai mothers and Vietnamese fathers or direct descendants of VKHH. Their ability to communicate effortlessly in both Vietnamese and Thai, combined with their established connections to factories and businesses seeking labor, equipped them with the essential resources to excel as brokers. They played a pivotal role in facilitating the migration of workers not only from the Nhu Thanh district but also from various other districts within the Thanh Hóa province. At present, approximately 20 brokers specialize in coordinating

the migration of workers to Thailand and managing the transportation of goods between Thailand and Bến Sung. Notable among them are Mr. Duc, Mr. Binh, Mr. Hoang, Mrs. Xuan, Mrs. Kim Tu, Mrs. Leng, Mrs. Dung, and Mrs. Ha.

The emergence of this new generation of brokers reflects the evolving nature of the migration network between Nhu Thanh and Thailand. As the demand for migrant workers continues to grow, so too will the role of these brokers in facilitating the movement of people and goods across borders.

Women migrant workers' engagement

As analyzed above, Vietnam has been profoundly influenced by Confucianism for an extended period. This ideology establishes a dichotomy between women and men, prioritizing men as the "stronger" gender, bestowing upon them status and authority within the family structure, and assigning them physically demanding and strenuous tasks (Quang, 2013). Consequently, men are typically entrusted with significant responsibilities, such as financial provision and decision-making. Conversely, Confucianism posits women as the "weaker" gender, requiring protection from their "stronger" counterparts, and relegates them to menial and secondary tasks. Therefore, the division of labor within Vietnamese society has historically been predicated upon gender roles, a perspective largely shaped and perpetuated by Confucianism (Khiêu, 1991).

During the period from 1990 to 2005, the occupations pursued by Vietnamese migrant workers in Thailand primarily consisted of: 1. Garment work; 2. Domestic labor; 3. Elderly care; 4. Sales positions; 5. Restaurant cleaning. From a Confucian perspective, these occupations were traditionally considered *lặt vặt* "light" or "feminine" tasks within Vietnamese society. Consequently, during this period, women comprised over 90% of the total number of workers migrating from the Nhu Thanh district to Thailand for employment.

Post-2005, the range of available occupations expanded, with the addition of new job opportunities for migrant workers, including security guards, waiters, parking attendants, traders, construction workers, welders, and others. This diversification of job types led to an increase in the number of male migrants seeking work in Thailand,

with a significant surge in 2010. Currently, the number of male and female workers from the Nhu Thanh district employed in Thailand has reached a state of near parity.

Expansion of migrant networks

The network of migrant workers originating from the Nhu Thanh district in Vietnam has witnessed significant growth, extending beyond the boundaries of Nhu Thanh to encompass all districts within the Thanh Hóa province. Simultaneously, the network within Thailand has undergone continuous expansion, incorporating a diverse range of occupations.

1990-1993: 100% were female workers, as VKHH's kinship networks of Vietnamese laborers (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long village, Bến Sung, played a pivotal role in initiating the migration network to Thailand;

During this period, common types of jobs for Vietnamese migrant workers included garment work, sales, and domestic labor. They worked mainly in the following areas: Ban Sang, Ban Som Piao, Pathum Thani. These occupations and work locations are common among Vietnamese migrant workers in Thailand. Garment work is a major industry in Thailand, and many Vietnamese workers find employment in factories that produce clothing and textiles. Sales and domestic labor are also common occupations for Vietnamese workers, who often work in shops, restaurants, and homes. Ban Sang and Ban Som Piao are two districts in Pathum Thani province, which is located just north of Bangkok. These districts are home to a large number of Vietnamese migrant workers.

1993-2005: Approximately 99% of migrant workers were female. These workers included kinship networks of Vietnamese laborers (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long village, individuals with close ties to VKHH outside Vĩnh Long village, people from neighboring communes, and close customers of VKHH businesses in the Bến Sung town area of the Nhu Thanh district who sought to join the migration network in Thailand.

- Occupations: Garment work, sales, domestic labor, restaurant cleaning, street vending, restaurant waiting
- Work locations: Ban Sang, Ban Som Piao, Pathum Thani, Wat Co, Ayutthaya

2005-2010: Vietnamese workers expanded their migration to neighboring districts, including Như Xuân, Thường Xuân, Nông Công, Triệu Sơn, Ngọc Lặc, and Bá Thước. The number of male workers participating in the network gradually increased.

- Occupations: Garment work, sales, domestic labor, restaurant cleaning, street vending, waiting, security guarding, parking attendance, construction work
- Work locations: Ban Sang, Ban Nam Piao, Pathum Thani, Wat Co, Ayutthaya, Ang Thong, Talat.

2010 - present: The number of workers participating in the migrant network to work in Thailand has spiked dramatically, originating from most districts in Thanh Hóa province, but Như Thanh migrant workers still make up the majority. Since 2010, the number of migrant workers from Thanh Hóa province, particularly from the Như Thanh district, participating in migrant networks in Thailand has experienced a significant surge. These networks have expanded beyond Như Thanh to include migrant workers from Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces, fostering a cohesive Vietnamese migrant worker community in Thailand.

Migrant workers from these networks engage in a diverse range of occupations, including: 1) Garment worker; 2) Salesperson; 3) Domestic worker; 4) Restaurant cleaner; 5) Street vendor; 6) Waiter; 7) Security guard; 7) Parking attendant; 8) Construction worker; 9) Garment factory owner; 10) Vegetable shop owner.

Their workplaces are primarily located in the following areas: Ban Sang, Ban Som Piao, Pathum Thani, Wat co, Ayutthaya, Ang Thong, Talat, Din Deang, Don Mueang, Lat Krabang. The migrant worker network originating from the Như Thanh district in Vietnam has undergone significant expansion, extending beyond its initial boundaries to encompass all districts within the Thanh Hóa province. Concurrently, the network within Thailand has diversified, incorporating a wide range of occupations. The growth and diversification of the migrant worker network from Như Thanh to Thailand reflect the evolving needs of both the sending and receiving countries. Migrant workers play a vital role in meeting labor demands in Thailand, while also contributing to the economic development of their home communities in Vietnam.

5.5 Constructing transnational social network and social order in sending Vietnamese migrants to Thailand

In this section, I will meticulously analyze the multifaceted role of local brokers in facilitating the migration of Vietnamese workers to Thailand for employment and the subsequent remittance of their earnings back to their home country. Additionally, I will provide a detailed account of the sequential steps involved for a Vietnamese worker to attain the official status of a migrant worker in Thailand.

5.5.1 The role of local brokers

In the early period (1990-2010), the role of brokers was extremely important in connecting Nhu Thanh people to Thailand. Local brokers played a crucial role in the migration process, from recruitment to problem resolution. They identified potential migrants, provided information about the Thai labor market, and assisted with document preparation. Brokers also organized transportation for workers and provided ongoing support throughout their stay in Thailand. By leveraging their social networks and informal channels, brokers facilitated the migration of thousands of individuals, enabling them to seek employment opportunities abroad.

Act as headhunters of workers in Làng Thái Lan

In the early period from the 1990s to 2005, the economic situation of households in the Nhu Thanh area was generally very difficult, and the rate of unemployed workers was high. Many families wanted their children to participate in the government's worker export programs. However, such programs charged very high fees which were beyond their ability, so working in Thailand was considered an effective alternative.

However, the information about the worker market in Thailand and the risks faced by the workers were barriers to migration. Therefore, to reach workers who were interested in migrating, local brokers played a crucial role. They started by approaching individuals and families they knew, providing information about the worker market in Thailand, and committing to a good income and ensuring the safety of the workers during their migration and employment in Thailand.

Brokers also identified potential migrants who had the skills and experience that were in demand in Thailand. They approached these individuals and families, providing information about the Thai labor market and persuading them to consider migration as a viable option. Brokers also assisted with the preparation of necessary documents, such as passports and work permits.

By leveraging their social networks and informal channels, brokers facilitated the migration of thousands of workers from Nhur Thanh to Thailand. Their role was essential in connecting individuals to employment opportunities abroad and improving the economic well-being of their families and communities.

Act as a consultant

When approaching workers who desired to migrate to Thailand to work, an important issue was how to make them and their families understand the work, Thai culture, working conditions, salary, and method of sending money to their families, and who would protect them during their employment in Thailand. Therefore, brokers were required to provide adequate information to workers and their families before they made the decision to migrate to Thailand to work.

Brokers served as consultants, providing comprehensive information about the Thai labor market and the migration process. They discussed work conditions, Thai culture, salary expectations, and remittance procedures. To build trust, brokers often promised to refund fees if the migration did not meet expectations and only charged after workers had secured employment in Thailand. Brokers also committed to protecting workers in case of any problems in Thailand. In addition to providing information, brokers also provided advice and guidance to workers and their families. They helped workers to identify potential employers and negotiate contracts. They also provided support and assistance to workers who encountered problems during their stay in Thailand.

By providing comprehensive information and support, brokers played a vital role in facilitating the migration of workers from Nhur Thanh to Thailand. Their role was essential in ensuring that workers were informed about the risks and benefits of migration and that they were prepared for the challenges of working in a foreign country.

Support with paperwork

After the workers agreed to migrate to Thailand to work, the next step was to apply for a passport, which was one of the most important documents helping them enter and exit different countries. In the period 1990-2005, the process of applying for passports in Vietnam was not well-known. If workers themselves applied for passports, they would not know where to start, where to go, or what to do. Moreover, during this time, the passport office support staff would often inquire about the purpose of individuals who applied for passports and then consider whether or not to issue them.

Therefore, to ensure a convenient and fast process of paperwork, brokers would contact passport staff in their network prior to the procedure. Brokers would cover all costs. The paperwork would be completed after 2 to 3 weeks. By leveraging their social networks and informal channels, brokers facilitated the passport application process for migrant workers. Their role was essential in ensuring that workers had the necessary travel documents to migrate to Thailand and begin working. In addition to the above, brokers also provided other forms of support with paperwork, such as helping workers to obtain work permits and other necessary documents. They also provided advice and guidance to workers on how to complete the necessary paperwork and navigate the bureaucracy.

As a transport connector

Upon obtaining the necessary documents and securing a sufficient number of workers (3-5 workers per trip), brokers would agree with the migrant workers on the date, time, and place of departure. In order to avoid the attention of local authorities in terms of sending workers from Nhu Thanh to Thailand to informally work, when they reached the end of Thanh Hóa province, they would get off the bus and take a bus straight to Dong Ha City. From there, they would continue to take a bus to Lao Bao border gate, Quang Tri province, to enter Laos.

Then they would continue to take the bus to Vientiane. The workers' group would be arranged by brokers to transfer to a small van covering 16 seats at an empty roadside parking lot before arriving at Vientiane bus station. A group of overseas

Vietnamese in Laos led by Mrs. Sinh, whose husband was a police officer, had close relationships with immigration departments in Laos and Thailand. Mrs. Sinh would be responsible for transporting and completing immigration procedures for the group of Vietnamese migrant workers, successfully exiting Laos and entering Thailand.

Mrs. Sinh played an extremely important role in the Viet-Thai migrant worker network. Although the countries in the region had open-door policies and allowed people and goods to circulate among countries, illegal workers were not allowed to immigrate to their country. Meanwhile, new Vietnamese migrant workers who were unable to speak Thai were easily detected by officials and their entry was refused. Thanks to the network of overseas Vietnamese in Laos, Vietnamese workers could easily enter and exit among countries.

Brokers played a crucial role in organizing the transportation of migrant workers from Nhu Thanh to Thailand. They coordinated with bus companies and border officials to ensure the safe and discreet passage of workers.

Act as a job connector in Thailand

The brokers' role did not end with successfully bringing Nhu Thanh workers to Thailand. As committed to workers and their families, the brokers were responsible for finding jobs and salaries as promised before any migration. During this period, there were three main job categories that the workers could choose from, including garment, housework, sales, or restaurant assistant.

After looking for jobs and agreeing on a monthly salary with the workers' employer (who could be overseas Vietnamese or Thai), the brokers gave their phone numbers to workers. The workers would contact the brokers in case of needing help or sending money home. The brokers would be entitled to the payment of their wages one month later, when the workers received their first month's salary.

Brokers played a crucial role in connecting migrant workers from Nhu Thanh to employment opportunities in Thailand. They identified potential employers, negotiated contracts, and provided support and assistance to workers throughout their stay in Thailand. By leveraging their social networks and informal channels, brokers

facilitated the migration of thousands of workers, enabling them to seek employment opportunities abroad and improve their economic well-being.

Act as an intermediary to transfer wages and goods

In the period 1990-2005, workers who migrated to work in Thailand could only send income and goods to their families in Nhu Thanh through brokers. This arrangement fostered a strong relationship between the brokers (overseas Vietnamese) and the Nhu Thanh people (migrant workers and their families). The brokers became benefactors, as the workers' income in Thailand not only significantly improved their family's quality of life but also elevated their social status.

This role as an intermediary for remittances and goods was crucial for the economic well-being of migrant workers and their families. Brokers provided a safe and reliable channel for workers to send their earnings back home, which was essential for supporting their families and investing in their communities. By facilitating the transfer of goods, brokers also enabled workers to share the benefits of their migration with their loved ones in Vietnam.

The relationship between brokers and migrant workers was often characterized by trust and mutual support. Workers relied on brokers to ensure that their earnings were safely delivered to their families, while brokers relied on workers to maintain a steady flow of remittances. This mutually beneficial relationship contributed to the success of the migration process and the economic development of both Nhu Thanh and Thailand.

Act as a person who handled any arisen problem

After completing the process of bringing Nhu Thanh workers to Thailand and finding jobs for them, did the brokers' role end? The answer was no. In fact, as shared by many local brokers (Mrs. Tường, Mrs. Xuân, Mrs. Tâm), during the process when Nhu Thanh migrant workers worked in Thailand, the brokers were responsible for assisting the workers to handle problems arising out in Thailand, for example: helping them change their workplace because their current job was not suitable or there was a conflict with their employer. In particular, the brokers were responsible for guaranteeing the workers when they were arrested by the Thai police for illegal job,

helping them pay fines and get out of jails, and not be deported by the Thai police to their homeland. To do this well, the brokers would connect to the network of overseas Vietnamese living in Thailand for intervention. The brokers who performed well in their role would enhance their reputation, demonstrate the power and ability of overseas Vietnamese and VKHH, and be trusted and respected by the workers.

This role as a problem solver was essential for the well-being of migrant workers in Thailand. Brokers provided support and assistance to workers who encountered difficulties, such as workplace disputes, legal issues, and financial problems. By intervening on behalf of workers, brokers helped to protect their rights and ensure their safety.

The ability of brokers to resolve problems effectively was crucial for maintaining the trust and respect of migrant workers. Workers relied on brokers to help them navigate the challenges of working in a foreign country and to ensure their fair treatment. By fulfilling this role, brokers played a vital role in fostering a sense of community and solidarity among migrant workers in Thailand.

Change of brokers' role

In the period 1990-2010, brokers played a crucial role for Nhu Thanh migrant workers. However, after 2010, their role underwent significant changes due to several factors.

There are many factors contributing to the change in brokers' role. Development of Migrant Worker Networks: The network of Nhu Thanh workers in Thailand, as well as the broader network of Vietnamese migrant workers, grew stronger over time. This enabled workers to establish online networks through platforms such as Facebook, Zalo, and Viber, where they could exchange information, find jobs, and connect directly with employers.

Advancement of Information Technology: The proliferation of the internet and social media made it easier for workers to access information about the Thai labor market and connect with potential employers.

Changes in Thai Immigration Policy: After 2005, ASEAN countries implemented an open-door tourism policy, allowing citizens to travel within the

region without visas for up to 30 days. This made it easier for Vietnamese workers to enter Thailand for short-term work.

Increased Demand for Unskilled Labor: The Thai labor market continued to experience a high demand for unskilled workers, creating more opportunities for Vietnamese migrant workers.

Integration of Vietnamese Workers in Thailand: Many Nhu Thanh workers who had lived and worked in Thailand for several years became fluent in Thai and familiar with Thai culture. This facilitated their integration into Thai society and made it easier for them to find work directly with Thai employers.

Thai Government Crackdown on Illegal Workers: After 2016, the Thai government implemented stricter measures to prevent the employment of illegal workers. This led many Vietnamese migrant workers to establish their own businesses, such as garment factories, and recruit workers directly from their hometowns.

New role of brokers:

As a result of these changes, the role of local brokers evolved. They were no longer responsible for finding workers, securing jobs, or transferring money on behalf of workers. Instead, their primary function became facilitating the entry and exit of migrant workers between Vietnam and Thailand.

Brokers played a vital role in ensuring that workers had the necessary documents and followed the proper procedures to enter Thailand legally. They also assisted workers in navigating the Thai immigration system and obtaining work permits.

The role of local brokers in the migration of Nhu Thanh workers to Thailand has undergone significant changes over time. While brokers were once indispensable intermediaries, the development of migrant worker networks, advancements in information technology, and changes in Thai immigration policy have reduced their traditional responsibilities. Today, brokers primarily facilitate the entry and exit of workers between Vietnam and Thailand, playing a more specialized role in the migration process.

5.5.2 Becoming Vietnamese migrant workers

To become unofficial workers in the Thai labor market, Nhu Thanh migrant workers typically followed a ten-step process (revised from Achariya & Ton, 2022), as outlined by the author after accompanying three migration trips from Nhu Thanh to Din Deang, Thailand.

Step 1: Initial contact

Workers seeking migration would either directly contact relatives, friends, or neighbors working in Thailand through social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Zalo) or be approached by employers in Thailand who needed workers.

There were two main cases: Firstly, the workers in Nhu Thanh who demanded for migration would directly contact their relatives, friends, or neighbors who were working in Thailand through the social networks (Facebook, Zalo). Secondly, due to the need for worker recruitment, many Nhu Thanh employers in Thailand directly contacted their relatives, friends and neighbors living in their hometown.

Step 2: Connection with local brokers

Once an agreement was reached between workers and employers, the workers would connect with local brokers responsible for facilitating their safe passage from Nhu Thanh to their workplace in Thailand.

Step 3: Passport application

Workers would apply for passports at the headquarters of Thanh Hóa Province Public Security, located approximately 45 kilometers from Nhu Thanh District.

Step 4: Departure arrangements

Workers and brokers would determine the date, time, and location for the start of the migration. In accordance with Vietnamese cultural beliefs, workers often consulted shamans to determine an auspicious day and time for departure, ensuring good fortune during the journey and subsequent employment in Thailand.

Step 5: Migration costs

Workers were responsible for paying migration costs to brokers, ranging from 3,000 Baht (for fully-documented workers) to 10,000 Baht (for workers with "dead passports" or no passports), This includes bus fare, meals, and fees to be paid to the brokers in Vientiane, Laos, to carry out the entry and exit procedures at Nong Khai border gate into Thailand. Costs could vary based on the relationship between workers and brokers, with family or close connections resulting in lower fees.

Step 6: Organize a party to pray for fortune and luck at home

Before the departure, the workers' families often prepared a tray of rice to offer to the ancestors and gods, informing them that a family member would migrate to Thailand for work. They prayed for the ancestors' and gods' blessings during the trip and employment in Thailand. Additionally, the migrant's family held a small party, inviting close relatives to attend, wish good luck, and encourage the migrant workers to work hard and send money to their families.



Figure 24: Pre-migration gathering for Vietnamese workers

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Ancestor worship is a deeply ingrained belief among Vietnamese people, who believe that the spirits of the dead continue to exist in the world and influence the lives of their descendants (Ngoc, 2002, p. 319). The cult and deification of the deceased gave rise to ancestor worship, which is widespread in Vietnam. Ancestor

worship activities typically occur on anniversaries, holidays, and New Year to commemorate the deceased and show respect. It also takes place during important events such as weddings or workers' migration to distant workplaces, with the belief that the ancestors and gods will "bless" them and bring good fortune.

Step 7: Brokers booked bus to pick up group of migrant workers

Buses from Hanoi to Vientiane typically did not pass through the BẾN Sung area unless the bus drivers had received an appointment from local brokers. Therefore, the brokers were responsible for contacting and scheduling, agreeing on time and location with bus drivers. The buses picked up Như Thanh workers between 8 pm and 12 pm and traveled along the Hồ Chí Minh trail to the Cầu Treo international border gate connecting Hà Tĩnh province to Laos, arriving around 4:30 am the next day.



Figure 25: Vietnamese workers travel to Thailand by bus

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

The author initially wondered why the brokers and workers did not migrate to Thailand by air, which would have saved time, health, and money. Several low-cost airlines, such as VietJet, Thai AirAsia, Nok Air, and Thai VietJet Air, offered flights between the two countries for as low as 1,900 Baht to 3,600 Baht per trip, with a flight time of approximately 2 hours. In contrast, the migration by road cost the workers between 3,000 Baht and 10,000 Baht.

After speaking with the group of migrant workers, the author learned that the Vietnamese government had tightened regulations on illegal migration and employment abroad, making it difficult for migrant workers to obtain exit permits at airports. Additionally, they were required to prove their financial ability (20,000 baht in cash), proof of residence, their guarantor in Thailand, and two-way air tickets.

Therefore, migration by road from Như Thanh to Thailand was the most viable option, allowing the workers to successfully migrate to Thailand, despite the higher costs and longer travel time (36 hours).

Step 8: Entry procedures in Laos at Cầu Treo International Border Gate

Upon reaching the Cầu Treo International Border Gate, which serves as a vital connection between Vietnam and Laos under the jurisdiction of Hà Tĩnh province, the brokers overseeing the group of workers instructed them to disembark from the bus and present their passports for the necessary exit procedures into Laos.



Figure 26 and 27: Vietnamese workers enter to Laos from Vietnam

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

These procedures commenced promptly at approximately 7:00 AM. Following the completion of the exit procedures, the workers proceeded on foot for a distance of approximately 500 meters from the Cầu Treo International Border Gate (Hà Tĩnh province, Vietnam) to the Nam Phao Border Gate in Laos. At this location, they underwent the requisite entry procedures.

By 7:45 AM, all diplomatic formalities had been finalized, and the bus resumed its journey to Vientiane, the capital city of Laos. This marked the successful transit of the workers into Laos, paving the way for their continued travel to their intended destination.

Step 9: Connection with broker network in Laos

As the bus approached Vientiane, the Nhu Thanh brokers established contact with Mrs. Sinh (age 59), the leader of a group of overseas Vietnamese brokers in Laos. Born in Hà Tĩnh, Mrs. Sinh and her family migrated to Laos in 1939, sought refuge in Thailand during the war in Laos in 1946, and returned to Laos in 1950.



Figure 28 and 29: Arrival in Vientiane and transfer to Nong Khai Border Checkpoint.

Source: Lê Văn Tôn and Achariya Choowonglert

Following the "terrorism" policy implemented by Thai armed forces, she fled to Laos, where she married a native Laotian. Mrs. Sinh was fluent in Vietnamese, Lao, and Thai. Her husband, a senior military official in Vientiane, maintained connections with immigration officers at the Nongkhai border gate on both the Laos and Thailand sides.

Leveraging her husband's relationships, Mrs. Sinh established close ties with immigration officers in Laos and Thailand, forming a network that facilitated her management of exit and entry procedures between the two countries for Vietnamese workers migrating to Thailand from 1991 to the present. She played a crucial role in assisting Nhur Thanh workers with their entry procedures from Vientiane, Laos, to Thailand.

Mrs. Sinh typically received migrant workers in a deserted area by the roadside, approximately 5 kilometers from the Vientiane bus station. The group of migrant workers swiftly unloaded their luggage from the bus and transferred to a 16-seat van operated by the group of overseas Vietnamese brokers. Mrs. Sinh personally drove the van, transporting the group of migrant workers to the Thanaleng border gate in Laos, retaining possession of all passports. She processed the exit procedures for 15 Nhur Thanh workers and three brokers at the Thanaleng border gate, Laos, in approximately 10 minutes. The van then proceeded to the Nongkhai border gate in Thailand, and within 15 minutes, the entire group of Nhur Thanh workers had entered Thailand without incident.

Notably, the workers remained in the van throughout the process, and no immigration officers from the host country approached to conduct checks, despite the presence of a migrant worker holding a "dead passport" (a passport banned from entering Thailand due to previous arrest by Thai police or overstaying the 30-day visa exemption).

The van continued to the Nongkhai bus station and made a stop at a restaurant adjacent to the station. Mrs. Sinh's responsibilities concluded at this point, and the group of workers disembarked, rested, and had a meal before continuing their journey to Bangkok on another bus belonging to the transportation network of Nhur Thanh brokers. These buses were typically owned by overseas Vietnamese in Thailand who operated in the transportation sector. The bus transported the group of migrant workers from Nongkhai to Mo Xit bus station in Bangkok, a journey of approximately nine hours. From there, the brokers took a taxi to deliver the group of migrant workers to their designated workplace, marking the final step in the brokers' role of transporting the group of workers from Nhur Thanh to Thailand.

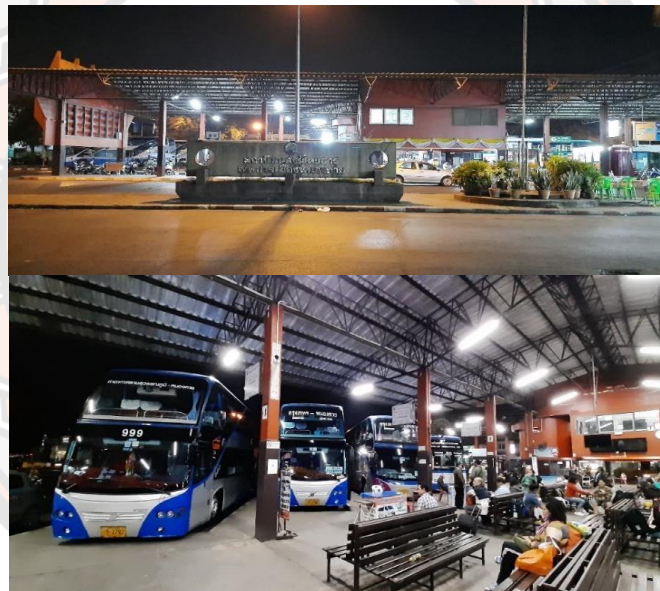


Figure 30 and 31: Nong Khai bus station (transit point for Vietnamese workers to Bangkok, Thailand)

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Thus, the migration process of Nhur Thanh workers to Thailand was facilitated by the network of VKHH, which minimized the costs and risks incurred by the workers.

Step 10: Welcome party and prayer ritual at destination

In accordance with Nhur Thanh workers' cultural traditions, they would organize a small party to welcome new members and facilitate their adaptation to the

new work environment. Additionally, they would prepare offerings to burn incense and pray to the gods at their destination.

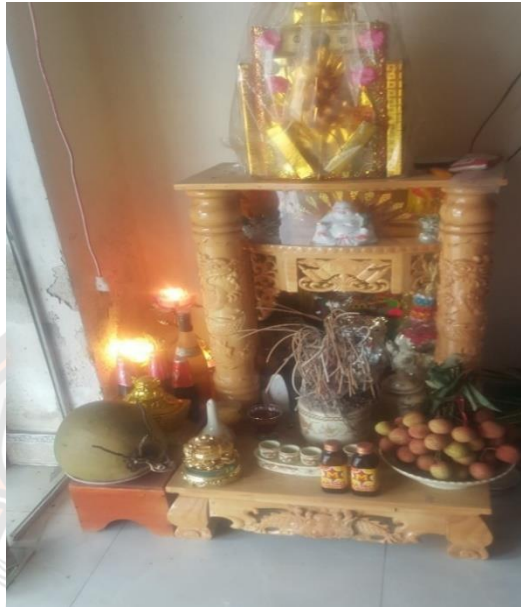


Figure 32: Vietnamese workers' worship practices in Thailand

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Vietnamese culture is polytheistic, with the belief that *đất có Thổ Công, sông có Hà Bá* "on lands, there are local gods; down in rivers, there are water deities." This belief holds that lands are governed by *Thần Đất* Land Spirits, while rivers are governed by *Thần Nước* Water Spirits. Therefore, the workers made offerings to the *Thần Đất* and *Thần Nước* at their new place of residence, seeking their protection during their stay in Thailand. These devotional practices are an important part of the cultural and spiritual lives of Vietnamese workers in Thailand. They provide a sense of comfort and support, and help the workers to connect with their cultural heritage while living in a foreign country.

After burning incense to worship the gods at the new workplace, the group of former and new workers would organize a party. In addition to the members under the management of the garment contractor, they also invited other nearby contractors to this welcome party. These gatherings fostered closer networking among the Nhu

Thanh migrant workers in Din Deang, providing support for one another in their work and in dealing with issues related to the police or seeking orders from Thai employers.



Figure 33: Welcome party for new Vietnamese migrant workers in Thailand.

Source: Lê Văn Tôn & Achariya Choowonglert

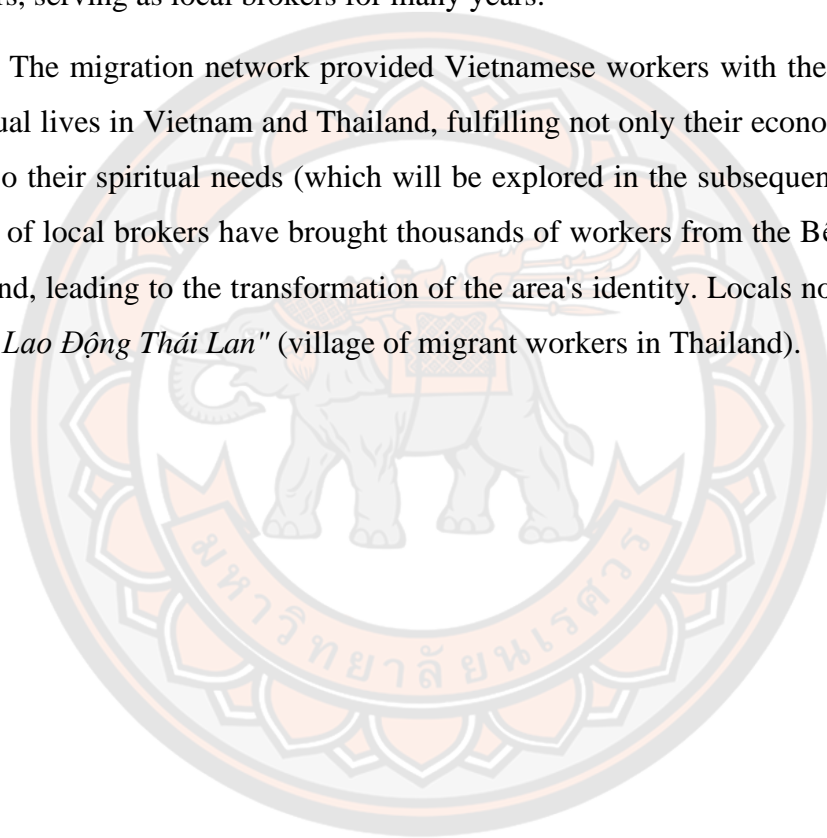
5.6 Conclusion

The implementation of the "Đổi mới/Reform" policy marked a significant turning point for VKHH, enabling them to transition their economic model from cooperatives to household businesses. This shift facilitated the establishment of business and trading networks, fostering closer connections and interactions between VKHH and local Vietnamese communities. As VKHH engaged in both Thai and Vietnamese cultures during their daily lives and business dealings, a unique cultural identity emerged, characterized by a hybridization of both traditions. Thai women's cultural traits of leadership, networking, and management complemented Vietnamese women's resilience and unwavering spirit.

The evolving domestic and regional landscape presented an opportunity for VKHH residing in Vietnam and overseas Vietnamese communities in Laos and Thailand to reconnect after decades of separation. VKHH in Vietnam were able to return to Thailand, forming a transnational overseas Vietnamese network spanning Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. This network became a valuable social capital, paving the way for Vietnamese workers to migrate and work in Thailand with greater ease.

The cultural hybridization process yielded significant benefits, empowering VKHH women to effectively combine Thai women's leadership and networking abilities with Vietnamese women's endurance and resilience. Local brokers are able to endure hardship, such as performing various odd tasks while transporting migrant workers to Thailand and spending extended periods (60 hours per trip) on buses over many years, which is a characteristic of Vietnamese women's culture. These hybrid cultural values enabled VKHH women to establish and maintain a network of migrant workers, serving as local brokers for many years.

The migration network provided Vietnamese workers with the opportunity to lead dual lives in Vietnam and Thailand, fulfilling not only their economic aspirations but also their spiritual needs (which will be explored in the subsequent chapter). The efforts of local brokers have brought thousands of workers from the Bến Sung area to Thailand, leading to the transformation of the area's identity. Locals now refer to it as "*Làng Lao Động Thái Lan*" (village of migrant workers in Thailand).



CHAPTER VI

CONSTRUCTING HYBRID COMMUNITY IN *LÀNG THAI LAN*

6.1 Introduction

The impact of remittances on development extends beyond mere economic growth for families and communities. Through a few years-long multi-sited ethnography, this chapter aims to explore the experiences and cultural practices of Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand. The chapter specifically focuses on the influence of Confucian practices, cultural remittance, and hybridization on the process of placemaking within this migrant community in Vietnam. It sheds light on the profound impact of remittances on development and the positive transformations they bring to the migrants' place of origin. Specifically, it delves into the Confucian practices, in shaping the identities of both the places of origin and Vietnamese migrants employed in Thailand. The authors assert that migrants engaged in the informal economy have the annual opportunity to return home and contribute to the economy and culture of their homeland. This process, known as transculturality, occurs as cultural remittances gradually hybridize with the local culture over a span of three decades. It fosters the necessary conditions for individuals to construct new identities and actively contribute to the process of placemaking. Consequently, the place of origin undergoes a significant transformation, transitioning from a negative perception to actively creating a more prominent, modern, and civilized community. This shift broadens the definition of what it means to be “a good Vietnamese”, firmly rooted in the ideals of Confucianism.

Vietnamese migrant workers in Thailand not only engage in arduous labor (16 hours per day) but also diligently acquire Thai cultural capital (Thai cultural practices) to enhance their personal development, mitigate risks, and augment their economic capital accumulation. However, their efforts extend beyond mere economic surplus accumulation; they repatriate these surplus earnings to fulfill both material needs and religious ideals.

To ensure their safety and well-being in the host country, Vietnamese workers diligently adopt Thai cultural practices (e.g., speaking Thai, consuming Thai cuisine, adhering to local attitudes and behaviors, practicing environmental protection, and participating in traffic regulations). Simultaneously, they preserve their traditional Vietnamese cultural values, such as community solidarity, mutual assistance, and filial piety towards parents and grandparents. This parallel adherence to Vietnamese and Thai cultural values fosters new identities that are subsequently implemented in their homeland, differentiating their communities from neighboring areas.

The rapid development of Bến Sung has led to a surge in business activity and the availability of a wide range of products. In addition to domestic goods, a significant portion of products are imported from Thailand through the networks established by Vietnamese workers. This network facilitates the continuous flow of diverse goods from Thailand to Vietnam.

The reputation for integrity, honesty, and harmony in business dealings among VKHH has fostered a distinctive business environment in the region. This has contributed to the development of a trading network between Bến Sung's merchandise agents and small business units in various other localities within Thanh Hóa province.

Since 2010, the completion of the transportation system connecting districts with smooth asphalt roads has significantly increased the volume of goods in the Bến Sung area. In 2009, the largest market in Bến Sung was established, becoming the primary trading center in Như Thanh district.

The market offers a vast array of merchandise, including household goods, electronics and machinery, garments, and consumer products such as washing powder and clothing. These products are imported from China and Thailand and come in a variety of models, types, and prices, catering to the diverse needs of consumers.

Currently, Thai goods are occupying a large position in the market in Như Thanh district. In particular, Bến Sung Town has become one of the areas focusing on trading and transporting Thai goods. This is the gathering place for groups, repatriated overseas Vietnamese, Vietnamese workers migrating to work in Thailand, and at the same time, bus routes transporting goods and labor cross-country between Vietnam -

Laos and Thailand run regularly 2-3 times/day through this area. Therefore, trade activities and goods exchanges are always busy and bustling, including all items from consumer goods to construction goods. In fact, through fieldwork, observations, and conversations with people in the Bến Sung Town area, Như Thanh district, Thanh Hoa province, the author realized that overseas Vietnamese and Vietnamese workers working in Thailand and their families, especially a large number of indigenous people, are increasingly inclined to trust Thai products. To meet the increasing consumer demand of people in the area, many agents and stores were opened and imported goods through local brokers. In particular, after the ASEAN common community was officially established at the end of 2015, when import tax rates were gradually removed as well as customs clearance procedures became simpler than before, all types of goods from ASEAN countries are flooding into Vietnam, especially consumer goods and food from Thailand, creating a new consumption trend of Vietnamese people. From 2015 onwards, the number and types of products and goods imported from Thailand have increased significantly. Thanks to the bus route transporting workers and goods, consumers here have access to many imported products from Thailand of quite good quality, from household items, fashion, to food products such as confectionery, drinks, and fresh fruits, turning this place into a center for trading Thai goods not only in Như Thanh district but also a center for trading Thai goods in the region of 11 mountainous districts of Thanh Hoa province.

Consumers in this area have gradually formed a habit of choosing Thai products with good quality, beautiful packaging, and very reasonable prices. This is evidenced by the fact that Thai goods are appearing more and more on store shelves, from traditional markets, to supermarket shelves, or online stores in this area. Fairs and promotional activities to introduce Thai products are also organized regularly every quarter by overseas Vietnamese traders and agents and workers in Thailand investing and doing business in their home country. At the end of April 2019, a Thai goods fair held at Bến Sung Market, Bến Sung Town attracted thousands of visitors and shoppers.

Thai products - a new consumption trend of people in Như Thanh district and surrounding areas. Thai products transported to the Như Thanh area are quite familiar

to overseas Vietnamese consumers, Thai workers, and even indigenous people. According to the author's observations, the Bến Sung area is home to many agents importing consumer goods originating from Thailand. This is the first item transported back to the country by local brokers since 1995. Consumers here welcome and trust it to this day, including:

Thai laundry detergent is used a lot in Nhu Thanh district, Thanh Hoa province, including famous brands such as Nice & Queen, Dnee, Kleansy, Epo, Aro,... This product is trusted by people more than domestic products because the product has a gentle, non-irritating scent and a long-lasting fragrance. Similar to laundry detergent, shower gel, and shampoo are also highly appreciated by the people here for their quality.

Previously, Thai clothing was transported back home by local brokers and Vietnamese workers from Thailand as gifts for family members and clans. When realizing that the need to use and buy and sell this item increased not only from the overseas Vietnamese group, their workers, and relatives, but also the need to use Thai fashion products from the local people themselves, many Vietnamese people in this area began to favor fashion products originating from Thailand because of their high applicability, coolness, and design that is close to their preferences. Besides, Thai clothes, shoes, and handbags have prices that are not too high, so they are suitable for most young people in Nhu Thanh district and neighboring districts. Famous brands that local brokers transport to Nhu Thanh for sale include: Jaspal, CPS Chaps, LYN, etc. Although the prices of these fashion brands are more expensive than popular clothes, in return, they have diverse designs, unique and of much better quality than domestic products, are welcomed and enjoyed by many Vietnamese consumers.

In Bến Sung Town, Thai cosmetics are as popular as Japanese, Korean cosmetics, etc. Moreover, their prices are very cheap thanks to the purchasing process at manufacturing factories and then being transported directly to Vietnam through a network of local brokers, with low costs from cross-country bus services. There are many famous cosmetic manufacturing brands in Thailand such as Yanhee, Karmart, Oriental princess, Panpuri and Senspa...are transported by local brokers to Bến Sung Town and distributed to wholesalers and retailers in the area.

Similar to the items discussed above, Thai household appliances have become familiar items here, loved by many local housewives, from knives, scissors, baskets to rice cookers, electric appliances, pans, etc. They are of good quality and can be used for a long time, so they are potential items for business. Therefore, the quantity transported back to the country is increasing.

As a country located in Southeast Asia, Thai food is quite suitable for the taste of Vietnamese people, especially Vietnamese workers working in Thailand, overseas Vietnamese, and is now quite familiar with indigenous people. Thai products such as cereals, Thai rice, or snacks, these products are all very popular in trade.

Consumers in Thanh Hoa province in general and 27 districts and towns in Thanh Hoa province in particular can fully access genuine Thai electronic products in the Bến Sung Town area, Như Thanh district, Thanh Hoa province. Currently, according to observations and interviews with overseas Vietnamese agents in the Bến Sung area, there are many wholesale and retail agents from neighboring districts who have come to this area to buy goods and place electronic orders of origin from Thailand such as rice cookers, fans, hard drives, and many other electronic devices. Thailand is considered a paradise of snacks, Thai snacks are popular with many dealers in the Bến Sung area such as: milo cube, candy, giant snack chips, Bento squid, banana/strawberry/mango cake, seaweed snacks,...

In recent years, especially around Tet, the demand for confectionery originating from Thailand among people in the mountainous districts of Thanh Hoa province has been increasing. Consumers here always believe that Thai goods are always luxurious, novel, of guaranteed quality and safe, and are more luxurious when given as gifts than domestic goods. Through the research process, the author found that many consumers consider Thai confectionery to have a reasonable price and better quality than Vietnamese confectionery, so it is even more popular.

Car and motorbike parts and accessories from Thailand have become a popular choice for consumers in the Bến Sung area and surrounding areas, especially for auto repair shops and distribution agents. This popularity mainly stems from the guaranteed quality, reasonable prices, and uniqueness of Thai products, which often

bring newness and appeal to cars that have been loved by the Vietnamese overseas community and Vietnamese workers working in Thailand.

Many components are imported to Vietnam by local brokers to meet the needs of consumers in this area such as headrests, backrests, steering wheel covers, cigarette lighter dispensers, vacuum cleaners, tire pumps, car perfume, floor lining, interior maintenance and cleaning agent, dash cam, and many other products. In general, accessories, toys, and car parts from Thailand provide many choices for consumers and are an important source of supply for car and motorbike repair businesses in the Nhu Thanh area.

Thus, the new policy of ASEAN 2015 allows countries in the region to transport goods with 0% tax. Through the network of local brokers, bus routes transporting goods and Vietnamese migrant workers working in Thailand, many goods are purchased by local brokers and workers at warehouses in Thailand and easily transported to Vietnam, turning the Bến Sung area into a center for trading goods originating from Thailand. This contributes to giving this place extremely unique and distinctive characteristics that no other area has.

6.2 The influence of confucian ideals and practices on migrants' lives and identities

The influence of Confucian ideals on Vietnamese workers is multifaceted and deeply ingrained in Vietnamese society. Confucianism, a system of ethical and philosophical teachings developed by the Chinese philosopher Confucius, has shaped Vietnamese culture and values for centuries. Confucianism places great importance on family and community. Vietnamese workers often have strong family ties and a sense of responsibility towards their extended family members. They may prioritize family obligations over personal ambitions and are willing to make sacrifices for the well-being of their loved ones.

Despite the perceived decline of Confucian ideology in Vietnamese society following the social revolution and the adoption of gender equality, traditional gender norms persist and exert significant pressure on individuals, particularly in their professional pursuits and family life. Both men and women are expected to work

tirelessly to achieve success and contribute to their families and society. The prosperity of the family, the comprehensive development of children, and the family's social status heavily rely on their efforts. The driving force behind them is not a desire for material wealth, but rather a profound religious conviction. Vietnamese migrant workers, influenced by five Confucian ideals, employ strategies to embody Vietnamese identity, which is evaluated based on wealth/ability, morality, happiness, fortune, and longevity (or *tài*, *đức*, *phúc*, *lộc*, and *thọ*, respectively in Vietnamese). This explains why Vietnamese migrants are known for their dedication and hard work. Confucian values are reflected in the actions of individuals who dedicate around 15 hours each day to their tasks, endure hardships, save money, invest in homes and modern appliances, prioritize their children's education, care for elderly parents, establish household livelihood sources, support family and neighbors, and contribute to community projects.

Tài refers to the ability/skill, talent and wealth that enable Vietnamese migrants to construct high-income. From an economic perspective, talent is viewed very realistically as the ability of an individual in society to earn money. Those who have the ability to earn a lot of money from their work, as long as it is not illegal, are considered by society to have *tài*. Conversely, an individual who is unable to make money and depends on their family for living is considered by society as a person without *tài*. Vietnamese people often call this person "*bất tài*" (meaning talentless). The demonstration of *tài*, through hard work, is passed down as an economic asset to future generations. The manifestation of *tài* among Vietnamese individuals is frequently demonstrated through the prevalence of opulent residences and modern automobiles. Within Vietnamese society, specifically in the northern region, there exists a custom of partitioning houses as a means to signify economic and social standing, thereby reflecting the significance of the concept of *tài* in five distinct levels. The hierarchical structure of the residences in Vietnamese society is represented by multiple levels, ranging from the first level denoting the highest status to the fifth level representing the lowest status. The size and grandeur of these residences are indicative of an individual's social standing and wealth. As a result, there is a strong emphasis in Vietnamese society on utilizing accumulated *tài* to construct large houses, rather than solely focusing on accumulating economic capital in other domains. In Vietnamese society, possession of

tài is highly valued and respected. This motivates Vietnamese migrants to strive and distinguish themselves from workers in neighboring countries. They dedicate extensive hours of work, aiming to become contractors or entrepreneurs in order to enhance their income and achieve stability. Thus, possessing economic ability not only leads to prosperity but also aligns with the principles of Confucian ideology.

However, the presence of morality (*đức*) is crucial when discussing *Tài*. Within Vietnamese culture, the proverb “*tiên học lễ, hậu học văn*” which translates to “a child must first learn how to behave before acquiring knowledge” emphasizes the importance of *đức* in conjunction with *tài*. Additionally, the proverb “*có tài mà không có đức thì vô dụng, có đức mà không có tài thì làm việc gì cũng khó*” conveys the message that “having ability without morals is futile, while possessing morals without ability makes success challenging”. Therefore, migrants endeavor to generate income (accumulating *tài*) while simultaneously emphasizing the accumulation of capital and offering assistance to their families (expressing *đức*). Additionally, *đức* also encompasses the ethical obligation towards kin, relatives, and the community, exemplifying collaboration and solidarity among them.

In the context of gender in Vietnam, there exist certain societal expectations for women to embody specific ideals, namely the three obediences (*tam tòng* in Vietnamese) and four virtues (*tứ đức* in Vietnamese). The three-obedience entail adhering to the guidance of one's father, showing respect and obedience towards one's husband, and displaying deference to one's son in the event of the husband's passing. On the other hand, the four virtues encompass women's responsibilities, including household chores and skills, maintaining a gentle demeanor, presenting oneself respectfully, and exhibiting qualities such as kindness, grace, and fostering good relationships. Vietnamese women are primarily tasked with looking after the family and participating in economic development alongside their spouses. Their identity is deeply rooted in these virtues and their contributions to both the family unit and society. Furthermore, they are taught to endure hardships and make sacrifices, both mentally and physically (Werner, 2004). In addition, according to Confucian philosophy, men are expected to embody the noble qualities of a gentleman, such as wisdom (*trí* in Vietnamese) and courage (*dũng* in Vietnamese). Wisdom refers to

possessing moral discernment, while courage encompasses both physical and mental bravery. Men are expected to be the primary providers for their families, striving to achieve the five Confucian ideals that represent Vietnamese identity. By embodying these ideals, men earn respect and attain a higher social status. However, it is worth noting that the five Confucian ideals, particularly virtue and benevolence, are applicable to women as well.

Based on the research conducted by Choowonglert and Ton (2021), it is evident that Vietnamese migrants exhibit a strong inclination towards the principles of Confucianism, which significantly shape their sense of self. Particularly, men encounter immense societal pressure to embody the qualities of good people by actively pursuing economic prosperity and upholding the fundamental values of Confucianism, namely *tài* and *đức*. By adhering to these ideals, individuals contribute to the preservation of social harmony and gain admiration and esteem within Vietnamese society. A man with a strong Vietnamese identity is expected to have the necessary qualifications for his profession, provide financial support for his family (which demonstrates *tài* and *đức*), prioritize the well-being of his loved ones (expressing *phúc*), experience favorable circumstances (having *lộc*), and maintain good health (having *thọ*). As a result, Vietnamese individuals with limited education face difficulties in finding well-paying jobs and improving their economic status, leading to their marginalization in society. They often end up working in agriculture and facing discrimination from wealthier individuals who perceive them as lacking skills. Consequently, they are unable to fulfill all five aspects that reflect Confucian ideals.

Thus, a significant number of individuals choose to migrate to Thailand, where they engage in informal employment sectors that provide piece-rate wages. These migrants remit money to their families in Vietnam with the intention of improving their social status and challenging the perception of poverty and incapability. Simultaneously, the act of sending money back to their hometown reflects the fulfillment of Confucian ideals and serves as a means of expressing the Vietnamese people's identity. Moreover, the annual and occasional return to their home country as well as the potential for permanent repatriation, contribute to the mixture of Thai and Vietnamese cultures. This process further enhances a progressive

mindset that is in line with the evolving Vietnamese identity, along with the influence of Confucian ideals. The subsequent section will demonstrate the process of cultural remittance and the resulting cultural hybridization that contribute to the formation of the significance associated with a place known as *Làng Thái Lan*.

6.3 Economic accumulation and remittance (savings)

Economic accumulation and remittance refer to the process by which individuals or households earn income in one location and transfer a portion of it to another, typically to their home country. In these cases of Vietnamese migrant workers, this process involves earning income in destination countries and remitting a significant portion of it to their families and communities in Vietnam. Remittances from Vietnamese migrant workers play a crucial role in the economic development of Vietnam. They constitute a substantial source of foreign exchange, providing much-needed capital for investment and economic growth. Moreover, remittances contribute to improved living standards for families in Vietnam, enabling them to afford better housing, education, and healthcare.

Beyond their economic impact, remittances also foster social stability in both the destination and home countries. By reducing poverty and inequality, remittances promote social cohesion and reduce the likelihood of social unrest. Additionally, remittances facilitate cultural exchange between different countries, as migrant workers share their experiences and perspectives with their families and communities back home. To elucidate the processes of economic and cultural capital accumulation among Vietnamese workers in pursuit of both economic and religious objectives, this study examines the cases of a canvas business owner, garment contractor, vegetable stall owner, and garment worker employed by Vietnamese contractors.

Our case study comprises five cases, *starting from Mr. Khoa, the canvas business owner*, was born in 1983 and migrated to Thailand in 2008 via the VKHH migration network. Due to financial constraints, he discontinued his education at an early age (grade 3) and engaged in manual labor with minimal compensation in the Nhu Thanh and Hanoi regions.

In 2008, facilitated by a broker (Mrs. Tường), he immigrated to Thailand and secured employment as a garment worker for a Thai employer in the Ayutthaya area. He collaborated with fellow villagers from Vĩnh Long and Như Thanh. During the initial six months, he received support from his friends in the form of food and lodging. They also provided guidance and training on garment production tasks. After six months of apprenticeship, he acquired proficient garment-making skills and prioritized income generation, remitting funds to his family in Vietnam monthly through brokers who facilitated the migration of individuals from Như Thanh to Thailand.

After five years of employment in Thailand, he had accumulated approximately VND700 million (one million Baht), which he remitted to his family to construct a new home, replacing the temporary thatched cottage they had been residing in. This substantial sum, atypical for a hired laborer, enabled his family to acquire a spacious and comfortable residence. He is highly regarded by his family for his filial piety “*Đức*” and admired by his neighbors for his financial acumen “*Tài*”. He acknowledges that accumulating such wealth would have been improbable if he had remained a hired laborer in Vietnam.

Beyond financial remittances, Mr. Khoa has assimilated numerous Thai cultural practices. He enjoys traditional Thai cuisine, possesses knowledge of Thai culture, exhibits appropriate behavior, and engages in humor akin to Thai individuals. Notably, his proficiency in Thai language and communication skills are exceptional, with an accent indistinguishable from native Thai speakers in the Bangkok region.

Following a football match with a group of Vietnamese canvas vendors in the Lat Krabang area, he was introduced to a new opportunity by a friend and invited to drive a canvas truck in Thailand, offering an income 1.5 times higher than his garment-making earnings. Leveraging his Thai language proficiency and cultural understanding, he transitioned to canvas sales throughout Thailand.

He emulates the dress code of Thai company employees, communicates courteously, and interacts with customers in a manner consistent with Thai customs. These strategies have proven highly effective, generating substantial income for his business. When inquired about his monthly earnings, Mr. Khoa indicated that they

fluctuate depending on the sales location, typically ranging from 30,000 to 60,000 Baht after deducting.

Engaging in canvas trading via private vehicles fosters extensive interactions with diverse individuals and Thai communities across various regions. This exposure enhances their understanding of Thai culture and society. The accumulation of capital, as discussed earlier, instills confidence as they traverse Thailand to sell their products. During an interview, the author inquired about their concerns regarding detection as undocumented workers and potential reporting to authorities. Mr. Khoa dismissed such fears, asserting that their proficiency in Thai language, mannerisms, and negotiation skills make it challenging to distinguish them from Thai salespeople. Additionally, they demonstrate flexibility in accommodating customer requests, such as refunds, fostering goodwill and support. Their familiarity with Thai customs and transportation routes, coupled with experience navigating checkpoints, further minimizes apprehension.

The use of cars rather than trucks for canvas transportation is a strategic choice to avoid police scrutiny. Mr. Khoa explained that their mobility extends from urban centers to rural areas, mountainous regions, and border zones. Employing a truck in border areas poses risks due to frequent checkpoints and thorough inspections, including vehicle documentation and driver's licenses. This increases the likelihood of detecting undocumented workers and subsequent arrest. Conversely, cars facilitate seamless passage through checkpoints, aided by the group's fluency in Thai. However, they acknowledge occasional police checks resulting in fines for lacking international driver's licenses, typically ranging from 500 to 1,000 Baht. Notably, they have also encountered instances of being identified as undocumented workers. However, their proficiency in Thai language and cultural knowledge enables them to negotiate with the police, resulting in bribes of approximately 10,000 Baht to avoid arrest.

By 2021, Mr. Khoa had accumulated sufficient funds to construct a substantial residence adjacent to his parents' home. For Vietnamese migrant workers, amassing wealth for homeownership represents a significant achievement, garnering respect within their families and communities.

The second case study is Mr. Cảnh, a garment contractor. Mr. Cảnh, born in 1980, hails from Nhu Thanh, Vietnam. He discontinued his education at the second grade to assist his parents in forestry. His family relocated to Nhu Thanh in 1967 as part of the government's "buliding a new economic zone" initiative. Due to his family's financial constraints, he left school prematurely to support his parents.

In March 2007, Mr. Cảnh and three other workers from the Nhu Thanh district were brought to Thailand by Mrs. Tường via the Vietnam-Laos-Thailand route. His initial employment in Thailand was as a welder for an overseas Vietnamese employer in Burthuphany province, earning a monthly salary of 5,000 Baht. During his first year of employment, he diligently studied Thai language, achieving intermediate proficiency. He also familiarized himself with Thai climate, culture, and cuisine. However, after a year, his salary remained stagnant, and the hazardous nature of welding prompted him to contact Mrs. Tường, seeking a new job opportunity. Through Mrs. Tường's referral, Mr. Cảnh secured employment at a garment factory in the Ayutthaya garment industrial zone. Within six months of training, his garment-making skills improved significantly, resulting in increased speed, efficiency, and daily output. Consequently, his monthly income rose to 8,000 Baht.

Mr. Cảnh remitted his accumulated earnings to his family in Vietnam to support his parents and siblings. However, in 2008, during a crackdown on undocumented workers in Thailand, he and several Vietnamese workers were apprehended and detained for approximately 14 days at a police station. He contacted Mrs. Tường, who coordinated with overseas Vietnamese in Thailand to provide bail and secure his release without deportation.

In 2009, Mr. Cảnh entered into a marital union with an acquaintance from a garment factory in Ayutthaya province. Subsequently, he and his spouse secured employment at a restaurant in Ang Thong. His proficiency in Thai language enabled him to establish direct contact with the employer, bypassing the need for a broker's assistance. Their primary responsibilities involved serving food to patrons, maintaining the cleanliness of the establishment, and washing dishes. The demanding work schedule, extending from 9:00 AM to 10:00 PM with minimal breaks, required

constant movement and multitasking, leaving Mr. Cảnh and his wife exhausted at the end of each workday.

Towards the end of 2011, through connections within the Nhu Thanh worker network in Din Deang, Mr. Cảnh and his wife made the decision to resign from their restaurant positions in Ang Thong after approximately 14 months of service. They transitioned to employment as garment workers in the Din Deang area.

During his tenure as a master tailor in a Thai employer's garment factory in Din Deang, Mr. Cảnh engaged in meticulous observation and learning. He gained valuable insights into the garment industry network, acquired expertise in garment quality control, and developed effective worker management strategies. This period of employment served as a catalyst for his knowledge and experience accumulation.

In 2014, the Thai government implemented a policy prohibiting Thai employers from utilizing migrant workers without valid work permits. Consequently, a campaign was launched to apprehend undocumented workers. Mr. Cảnh, along with numerous other Vietnamese workers, returned to Vietnam during this period to evade arrest and explore new employment opportunities.

In early 2016, after more than a year of working in the construction sector in Hanoi, Vietnam, Mr. Cảnh found that his income was insufficient to sustain his family. This prompted him to return to Thailand and resume his employment in the garment industry.

From employees to contractors and self-employed individuals

As previously mentioned, Vietnamese workers do not aspire to long-term employment with Thai employers. Their primary objective is to accumulate capital and seek opportunities for improved employment and income. In the Din Deang area, approximately 60 garment contractors from Nhu Thanh operate, each employing between 8 and 30 workers. These contractors were formerly garment workers for Thai employers. During their employment, they immersed themselves in Thai culture, acquired Thai language proficiency, and gained insights into the trading practices and order fulfillment processes of Thai employers.

In 2016, when the Thai government prohibited Thai employers from utilizing undocumented workers, opportunities emerged for Nhu Thanh workers with sufficient

capital to establish themselves as garment contractors. Mr. Can's fluency in Thai and close relationship with the owner of a Thai garment factory proved instrumental in his transition. With their assistance, he secured a rental property, acquired used sewing machines, and established connections with local contractors to secure orders.

The author expressed surprise at Mr. Can's transformation from a migrant garment worker to a self-assured tailor shop owner. Mr. Can attributed his success to the knowledge and experience he gained during his tenure as a master tailor in a Thai garment factory. He observed and learned effective techniques for quality control, worker management, piecework assignment, and compensation. This accumulated knowledge and experience gave him the confidence to embark on his own venture as a contractor in Thailand. Mr. Can shared:

"During my tenure as a master tailor in a Thai garment factory, I gained valuable experience through observation and conversations. I learned effective techniques for goods control, worker management, piecework assignment, and worker compensation. With this accumulated knowledge and experience, I am confident in my ability to succeed as a garment contractor in Thailand."



Figure 34: *Mr. Cậ becomes clothing contractor in Din Deang, Thailand.*

Source: Lê Văn Tôn & Achariya Choowonglert

After securing a garment workshop and acquiring the necessary sewing machines, Mr. Cậ employed a workforce of 20 garment workers, primarily consisting of his relatives and neighbors from the Nhu Thanh district. He

implemented a piecework wage system, with each finished pair of pants or shirt earning an average of 33 Baht. The operational and payment methods he adopted closely resembled those employed by his former Thai employer. As a garment contractor, he received 40 Baht per product from the Thai contractor, retaining 7 Baht to cover expenses such as police payments, sewing machine maintenance, and utilities. This transition to garment contracting resulted in a significant increase in income, with monthly earnings ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 Baht.

In mid-2018, having accumulated substantial capital, Mr. Cậ̣n invested in a land plot in Nhụ Thanh, spanning an area of 250 square meters. His long-term plan is to establish a distribution agency for Thai products upon his eventual departure from Thailand.

The third case study is Mrs. Hặ̀ng, the owner of a green vegetable shop. Prior to establishing her vegetable shop, Mrs. Hặ̀ng, like many other workers, held various positions for Thai employers.

Currently 45 years of age, Mrs. Hặ̀ng migrated to Thailand in 2005 through the VKHH migration network. Her initial employment involved providing care for elderly individuals in an overseas Vietnamese household in Thailand. In 2007, she transitioned to garment work in Ayutthaya.

In 2008, Mrs. Hặ̀ng was apprehended by the police for undocumented employment and subsequently deported back to Vietnam. Upon her return, she sought employment in the *Sóng Thặ̀n* industrial zone in Binh Duong province. However, the low wages she earned as a garment worker proved insufficient to support her family. After a year of employment, she was compelled to return home to care for her critically ill mother. To cover the expenses of her mother's medical treatment, she mortgaged her mother's house red book (land use right certificate) at a bank. Following her mother's discharge from the hospital and recovery, Mrs. Hặ̀ng contacted a broker (VKHH) in *Lặ̀ng Thặ̀i Lan, Bặ̀n Sung*, and returned to Thailand to resume garment work in Din Deang. Upon receiving her monthly salary, Mrs. Hặ̀ng remitted funds back home to settle her outstanding debt. Through two years of diligent work, she successfully repaid the loan she had obtained for her mother's medical treatment.

In 2012, Mrs. Hằng transitioned from garment work to assisting in vegetable sales at Din Deang market for a Thai employer. Over five years of diverse work experiences in Thailand, she diligently practiced the Thai language and gained familiarity with Thai culture. Consequently, during her tenure as a vegetable sales assistant, she earned the affection of her employer due to her industrious nature, amiable personality, and proficiency in Thai. As Mrs. Hằng remarked, "The owner loves me very much, like her own child". In 2012, the owner of the vegetable stall decided to discontinue her business and offered to sell the stall to Mrs. Hằng. The daily rental fee for the stall was 160 baht. Mrs. Hằng's workday commences around 5:00 AM, with assistance from her husband or brother. Goods are transported to the vegetable stall via tuk-tuk from the main market, based on orders placed the previous night. Mrs. Hằng and her assistant organize the vegetables into bunches and display them on shelves for sale. As she arranged the shelves, Mrs. Hằng explained, "Typically, the vegetables I receive are divided into two portions. Half are displayed for sale, while the remaining half are stored in two large freezers. Once I sell the first half, I recover my initial investment. The second half represents my profit." She said:

Her workday commenced around 5 am, with assistance from her husband or brother. Goods were delivered to the vegetable stall by tuk-tuk from the main market, based on orders placed the previous evening. She and her assistant would then divide the bundles of vegetables and arrange them on shelves for sale. As she organized the shelves, she remarked, "Typically, the vegetables I receive are divided into two portions: half are displayed for sale, while the remaining half are stored in two large freezers. Once I have sold the first half, I have already recouped my initial investment, and the remaining half constitutes my profit."

Mrs. Hằng's vegetable sales operation typically extends from 5:00 AM to 8:00 PM. She and her assistant meticulously maintain the cleanliness of their workspace, including the vegetable shelves and the surrounding area. Waste is collected and disposed of responsibly in designated trash cans. Mrs. Hằng emphasizes the importance of adhering to Thai cultural norms regarding sanitation, as a clean and odorless trading environment is crucial for business success. Over the years, Mrs. Hằng's business has experienced steady growth, attributed to her expanding customer

base and diversification of products. According to her, this is an important task, she must always keep the environment clean, according to Thai culture. If the sanitation condition is bad, if the trading area is dirty and has a bad smell, her business will surely be in trouble.

2012-2016: During this period, Mrs. Hăng's daily earnings ranged from 1,000 to 1,500 baht due to a limited customer base. However, 2016-2019: Her income increased to 2,000-3,000 baht per day as she expanded her product offerings and attracted more customers.

2019-2022: The COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of many small vegetable shops, resulting in an influx of customers to Mrs. Hăng's stall. Consequently, her daily earnings surged to 4,000-5,000 baht.

When asked about her strategies for maintaining a safe and successful vegetable trading business in Thailand, Mrs. Hăng emphasized the importance of cultural assimilation, she said: *"Don't make yourself different from the locals, practice their culture"*. She believes that by adopting local customs and practices, she can avoid attracting unwanted attention from the authorities.

Mrs. Hăng's strategy of using cultural capital to maintain safe business in Thailand could be summarized as follows:

Firstly, maintain a positive work ethic: Demonstrate diligence, avoid complaints, and refrain from criticizing customers or competitors. This includes adhering to proper sanitation practices and fostering positive relationships with neighbors.

Secondly, cultivate a pleasant personality: Engage in friendly communication, be respectful, and avoid confrontations. Many Vietnamese garment contractors and vegetable traders in Din Deang exhibit these qualities, including kindness, politeness, and a willingness to listen to others.

Thirdly, Avoid competition with Thai businesses: Respect the established business practices of the local community and refrain from engaging in activities that may cause resentment or discomfort.

Fourthly, offer assistance to neighbors: Be willing to lend a helping hand to Thai vendors and engage in conversations to build rapport.

Fifthly, embrace Thai cuisine: Adapt to Thai tradition cultures, such as consuming spicy dishes and trying traditional Thai dishes like pickled fish and papaya salad or “som tam”, and some other sour soups.

Sixthly, engage in playful banter: Participate in light-hearted teasing and humor, which is a common aspect of Thai social interactions.

Garment workers

The term "*làm đến chết*" (work to death) aptly describes the grueling work schedule of garment workers, who typically commence their day at 9:30 AM and toil until approximately 2:00-3:00 AM the following day, often pushing themselves to the brink of exhaustion.

Within the garment industry, wages are calculated on a per-product basis. The average compensation for each garment (pants, tops, skirts) ranges from 33 to 45 baht, contingent upon the complexity of the item. Consequently, workers strive to produce as many garments as possible to maximize their earnings. On average, garment workers in Din Deang labor for approximately 14-16 hours per day, resulting in daily incomes of around 1,200 baht. This explains the preference of Vietnamese workers to migrate to Thailand for garment work, as wages in the informal sector are tied to productivity rather than fixed workdays, as is the case in Vietnam.

A typical workday for garment workers begins at 8:30 AM with breakfast. Garment production commences around 9:30 AM (with flexible hours and optional start times). A 30-minute lunch break is taken at approximately 2:00 PM, followed by continued work until 7:00 PM. Workers then take a 90-minute break for rest, showering, and dinner before resuming work until 2:30 AM. Team members collaborate to tally the number of garments produced (for wage calculation). They typically retire around 3:00 AM and rise again at 8:30 AM the following day.

For nearly 24 hours each day, garment workers remain confined to the premises where they are employed by Vietnamese tailoring contractors. Their time

outside is severely limited due to two primary reasons: (1) their desire to maximize work time and (2) their limited Thai language proficiency.

Overall, garment work demands technical proficiency, physical endurance, and meticulous attention to detail. It is classified as a skill-based occupation, requiring approximately 3-6 months of training for entry-level proficiency. However, attaining the level of expertise associated with professional garment workers requires significantly more time and experience.

The fourth case study is the case of Mr. Dũng, born in 1984. After completing the fourth grade, he migrated to Thailand in 2007 to pursue employment as a tailor in the Ayutthaya region. During his initial three months, he worked as an apprentice, receiving only a fraction (1/5) of the standard wage for professional tailors. After a year, he transitioned to a different garment factory with improved compensation (5,000 baht per month). In 2012, following four years of experience, he relocated to the Din Deang area through his sister's connections, securing a salary of 15,000 baht per month. By 2016, he had joined his brother's garment contracting business, earning 40,000 baht per month.

Remittances in-kind encompass the intangible assets, such as ideas, practices, mindsets, worldviews, values, attitudes, behavioral norms, and social capital (knowledge, experience, and skills), that migrant populations consciously or unconsciously transmit from host to home countries (Safran, 1991).

Economic remittance

Dual living of migrant workers can facilitate the construction and reconstruction of their new identity through economic remittance. As a result, they strive to work diligently and remit as much money as possible to their home country for investment in various sectors, thereby enhancing their family's quality of life and social standing, ultimately contributing to the formation of a new identity.

The impact of remittances on development extends beyond mere economic growth for families and communities. Through a few years-long multi-sited ethnography, this paper aims to explore the experiences and cultural practices of Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand. The paper specifically focuses on the

influence of Confucian practices, cultural remittance, and hybridization on the process of placemaking within this migrant community in Vietnam. It sheds light on the profound impact of remittances on development and the positive transformations they bring to the migrants' place of origin. Specifically, it delves into the Confucian practices, in shaping the identities of both the places of origin and Vietnamese migrants employed in Thailand. The authors assert that migrants engaged in the informal economy have the annual opportunity to return home and contribute to the economy and culture of their homeland. This process, known as transculturality, occurs as cultural remittances gradually hybridize with the local culture over a span of three decades. It fosters the necessary conditions for individuals to construct new identities and actively contribute to the process of placemaking. Consequently, the place of origin undergoes a significant transformation, transitioning from a negative perception to actively creating a more prominent, modern, and civilized community. This shift broadens the definition of what it means to be “a good Vietnamese”, firmly rooted in the ideals of Confucianism.

When observing Vietnamese migrant workers abroad, it is normal for Thai society, as it often does, to raise questions such as "Why are Vietnamese workers so hardworking?" or "Why do they tend to avoid formal employment that comes with daily risks?" Furthermore, one may wonder why these workers typically have short tenures as employees. A study conducted by Choowonglert and Ton (2022) sheds light on this phenomenon among Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand. It reveals that these migrants have a preference for informal sectors and frequently engage in illegal employment. This choice aligns with the Vietnamese mindset, which is influenced by Confucian values and emphasizes entrepreneurship. As a result, many Vietnamese migrants in Thailand establish small-scale businesses like sub-contracting, peddling, or operating market stalls. Additionally, these migrants actively accumulate and convert economic, social, and cultural capital, which they later remit back to their homeland. This remittance serves as both a means to express their Vietnamese identity and a demonstration of their adherence to Confucian ideals (Choowonglert & Ton, 2022). Thus, it is imperative for this study to emphasize that Vietnamese migrants in Thailand not only amass capital and remit funds for economic

development, but also strive to uphold their religious ideals and preserve their Vietnamese identity as 'good people' or 'good Vietnamese'.

Nevertheless, a significant body of scholarly studies on the subject of remittances have predominantly concentrated on examining the effects of financial transfers in reducing poverty levels within Vietnam (Pfau & Giang, 2009). Similarly, scholars have also explored the impact of remittances on the economic development of the migrants' countries of origin, exemplified by studies conducted by Cohen (2011) and Lopez (2019). Additionally, the influence of remittances on education and healthcare, as well as their role in shaping the transformation of personal preferences and daily materiality, has been investigated by scholars like Cohen (2011) and Belloni et al. (2022). Nevertheless, these studies disregard the concept of transculturality, which allows for the interaction between the remitted culture from the host country and the culture of the home country, thereby constructing new meanings for the people and places in the homeland. Therefore, remittances can be perceived as extending beyond mere financial transfers, encompassing cultural and societal values, while also playing a pivotal role in maintaining social, cultural, and political connections between migrants and their homelands.

Henceforth, in addition to the economic, educational, and healthcare effects of money remittance, it is crucial to take into account the cultural dimension of remittance, known as 'cultural remittances', which has a significant impact on shaping and preserving cultural identities and traditions in the migrants' country of origin (Belloni et al., 2022). By transferring cultural practices, values, and ideas, migrants contribute to the emergence of new cultural landscapes. Furthermore, they bring back knowledge, skills, and resources that contribute to the development and transformation of their hometowns, thereby influencing the process of placemaking (McKay & Brady, 2005). Thus, the importance of cultural remittance in placemaking should not be underestimated. These changes reflect the aspirations and experiences of migrants, as well as their desire to improve their hometowns through remittances (Lopez, 2019). Consequently, cultural remittances play a vital role in the development of a place that embodies both local and ethnic identities, as exemplified in the case of *Làng Thái Lan*, meaning 'Thai Village'.

Thus, in this section, the authors seek to comprehend the religious practices of transnational migrants and the role of religious ideals in the expression of Vietnamese identities through cultural remittance and placemaking. Our analysis focuses on the process of cultural hybridization in placemaking within the context of transculturality, specifically examining the influence of religious ideals, transnational migration, and cultural remittance. Transculturality underscores the fluid and ever-evolving nature of cultural processes, where cultural boundaries are malleable and subject to constant negotiation (Welsch, 1999). Religion, particularly Confucianism, plays a significant role in shaping the dual livelihoods of individuals across national borders, as migrants strive to embody the ideal Vietnamese identity, embodying the positive qualities associated with the Vietnamese people. However, upon their return to their homeland, migrant workers bring back cultural influences from Thailand, hybridizing them with the local culture to create a distinctive new culture that sets their place of origin apart from the surrounding areas. The place itself plays a vital role in the development and maintenance of both individual and collective identities among its inhabitants.

These case studies demonstrate that the participants have invested in multiple areas.

First, invest in building a new house

In the Vietnamese cultural context, an individual's "Talent" (*Tài*) and their family's social standing are often reflected in the type of house they own. This symbolic representation can be categorized into five distinct levels, each carrying specific connotations. Families residing in houses of grades 1, 2, and 3 (typically constructed with solid concrete) are perceived as affluent and occupying a high position within the community. Conversely, families living in houses of grades 4 or 5 (often made of bricks, tiles, or thatched roofs) are considered less fortunate and of lower social status. This traditional Vietnamese identity marker is employed to assess an individual's "Talent/financial resource" (Achariya & Ton, 2022).

Consequently, migrant workers often aspire to construct substantial houses as a means of establishing and expressing their newfound identity within the community, demonstrating their possession of "*Tài*".

As previously discussed, the household economy of migrant workers is predominantly agricultural, with their residences typically classified as grade-4 houses or, in some cases, grade-5 houses. Additionally, their educational attainment is generally low, resulting in unskilled labor status. Consequently, when migrant workers secure employment in Thailand, their primary objective is not long-term employment with Thai employers. Instead, they endeavor to assimilate into Thai culture by learning the Thai language, adopting Thai cuisine and mannerisms, and establishing relationships with Thai individuals (including Thai entrepreneurs). Through these efforts, they aim to transition into roles as contractors and self-employed individuals in Thailand, thereby constructing a new identity as highly skilled laborers possessing "Tài/Talent." This transformation enables them to accumulate wealth more effectively.



Figure 35 and 36: Mr. Cậ's house

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

"Tài" (the ability to generate substantial income) is subsequently converted into cultural capital through the construction of new, larger homes. Once migrant workers have accumulated sufficient funds, they invest in building new houses or renovating existing ones (upgrading from grade-4 to grade-3 houses). This strategy represents the most expeditious means of establishing and expressing their new identity, as the community can immediately recognize their transformation. By constructing large, aesthetically pleasing homes (grades 2 or 3), workers

simultaneously demonstrate their "*Tài*" (earning capacity) and "*Đức/Morality*" (familial responsibility). This constitutes their new identity, fostering increased confidence, prestige, and respect within the community. Moreover, the new identity can be viewed as a form of cultural capital that can be further converted into economic capital by the individuals themselves.

For instance, in the case study, "Mr. Cảnh" migrated to Thailand for employment in 2007. He married in 2010 and welcomed a child in 2011. Having completed grade 6, he discontinued his education and resided with his parents' family in an aging grade-4 house. After eight years of working as a garment worker for a Thai employer, he had successfully integrated into Thai culture (evidenced by his proficiency in the Thai language, consumption of Thai food, use of Thai products, and positive relationships with Thai entrepreneurs). In 2016, he and his wife separated and established their own garment workshop, transitioning from employees to contractors and self-employed individuals. In 2019, Mr. Cảnh and his wife invested their savings in constructing a new house in Như Thanh (grade 2) to replace their previous grade-4 residence. The modern design of the new house made it a prominent landmark within the community. Mr. Cảnh gained widespread admiration and respect as a successful individual possessing "*Tài*" and exhibiting filial piety "*Đức*", demonstrating the construction of a new identity through dual living. In other words, dual living facilitated the establishment of a new identity more effectively than would have been possible through a one-sided existence (residing solely in Vietnam).

The new identity can be conceptualized as a form of cultural capital that can be continuously converted into economic capital by the individuals themselves. In 2020, an investment project aimed at developing eco-tourism in the "Bến En" area led to an increase in real estate prices. Recognizing this new opportunity and leveraging his established identity (as a respected member of the community), Mr. Cận established a real estate transaction office within his new house. He approached households interested in selling land, negotiated and agreed upon selling prices, and subsequently connected them with potential buyers (primarily investors from outside the area) at a higher price. Thus, by virtue of his reputation and trustworthiness within the community (as a talented and reputable individual), Mr. Cận successfully

facilitated land purchase and sale transactions with individuals and households residing in the community.

The fifth case study is Mr. Dương migrated to Thailand for employment in 2009. Having completed grade 5, he worked as a canvas salesman throughout rural Thailand. He married in 2005 and became the father of two children. Due to health issues, Mr. Duong frequently experienced medical problems, resulting in hospitalizations and medical expenses. Consequently, his business in Thailand was disrupted. Currently, he and his family reside in an aging grade-4 house with a limited living space (40 square meters). However, due to financial constraints, he has been unable to construct a new home.

Mr. Dương's feelings of inferiority and self-consciousness are evident in his reluctance to attend social gatherings with friends and his avoidance of interactions with affluent individuals in the village. Furthermore, his eldest son, now approximately 23 years old, works in Bắc Ninh province and rarely visits home. He has repeatedly declined to introduce his girlfriend to his family, fearing that she would discover their impoverished living conditions. In this case, it is apparent that Mr. Dương's efforts to establish a new identity have been unsuccessful, and his previous identity remains intact. According to Vietnamese cultural norms, Mr. Dương is not considered a respected individual due to his perceived lack of "*Tài/Talent*."

Second, invest in buying modern household appliances

Their new identity is not solely reflected through their residence. The new identity is further reconstructed through the acquisition of modern appliances within the home. In other words, the family's possession of contemporary appliances contributes to the reconstruction of their new identity as sophisticated and modern individuals, based on the appliances they utilize. Vietnamese society adheres to the belief that "your belongings show who you are" (*Người sao của chiêm bao là vậy*), implying that an individual's or family's wealth, sophistication, and modernity can be ascertained by observing their behavior and assets, such as buildings, vehicles, and home appliances. Therefore, in addition to constructing an aesthetically pleasing new home, migrant workers also invest in purchasing modern appliances such as televisions, speakers, air conditioners, tables and chairs, massagers, hoods, and coffee

makers to reconstruct their new identity, not only as individuals with "Tai" (wealth), but also as civilized and modern individuals.

Third, invest in children's education

In the parent-child relationship, Confucianism emphasizes two fundamental principles: "kindness" (*tử tế*) and "filial piety" (*hiếu*). "Tu" entails the love and responsibility of parents towards their children, including their obligation to nurture and educate them (Thêm, 1997). The Vietnamese Government's Decree No. 122/2018/ND-CP of September 17, 2018, on regulations for considering and awarding the title of "cultural family," specifically states in Clause 1, Article 2, that "Children of school age must be attending school and meet the standards of universalization of lower secondary education and above." In essence, investing in children's education is a parental responsibility and a defining characteristic of Vietnamese parents.



Figure 37: Migrant workers' children get a good educational achievement

Source: Mr. Pham Dang Khoa

Beyond remittances for home construction and the purchase of modern appliances and vehicles, migrant workers also invest in their children's education to establish a new identity as individuals with "Tài," wealth, and refinement, thereby replacing their previous identity as impoverished individuals with limited education

and social standing. Migrant workers recognize the importance of investing in their children's education to cultivate a new identity (higher education) by providing access to quality education within the country or even abroad (overseas study).

Vietnamese parents adhere to the philosophy of *hy sinh đời bố cũng cố đời con* "sacrificing the life of the father, strengthening the life of his children," signifying their willingness to work diligently and invest in their children's education in the hope of facilitating their children's construction of a new and improved identity. Parents endure hardships and sacrifices, prioritizing their children's academic success and future achievements.

In a case study, Mr. Đức, a local broker in Bến Sung, exemplifies this phenomenon. Having completed grade 11, he discontinued his education and migrated to Thailand in 2007 to work as a tailor with his sister. He married in 2010 and became the father of four children (three girls and one boy). The savings he accumulated from his garment work and cross-border transportation of workers and goods between Vietnam and Thailand were invested in the construction of a four-story house (grade 2) and the purchase of modern appliances. He also prioritizes his children's education, enrolling them in private schools in Bến Sung despite the higher costs. He believes that the superior quality and educational environment of private schools provide his children with greater opportunities for development. Additionally, he supplements their formal education with extracurricular math and English courses at educational centers. His children's academic achievements are a source of pride not only for his immediate family but also for his extended family. Through these investments, Mr. Đức and his family reconstruct their new identity, demonstrating that they possess not only "*Tài*" and "*Đức*" but also children with "*Tài*" who excel in their academic pursuits.

Fourth, invest in expanding forestry land

As discussed in Chapter 4, following 1986, Như Xuân district implemented a policy that permitted individuals to participate in bidding to exploit ironwood forests, with the acquired land subsequently allocated to households within the district for the cultivation of forestry trees (melaleuca, melaleuca, acacia, eucalyptus, fruit trees). On average, each household was granted 2 hectares of land. However, by 2010, numerous

households sought to sell their forest land due to various reasons. Many Vietnamese workers and their families invested their savings in purchasing forest land from households in the area. Currently, many Vietnamese workers and their families have expanded their forestry operations from 2 hectares to 5-6 hectares.

The household of Mrs. Hằng exemplifies this trend. In 2000, her family received 2 hectares of agricultural land from the local government. In 2010, her family invested in purchasing 2 hectares of forest land from a neighbor for the cultivation of acacia trees. In 2014, she invested in purchasing an additional 2 hectares. As of 2023, her family owns a total of 6 hectares of forest land. Typically, after 5 years of cultivating acacia trees, Mrs. Hằng's family can harvest and sell the trees to a local factory that processes and exports wood to China. After deducting all expenses associated with seedlings, caretakers, fertilizers, and harvesting, the average profit per hectare of acacia trees harvested after 5 years of planting is approximately VND85 million (USD4,000).

The case of Mrs. Hằng's family is representative of many families with migrant workers employed in Thailand who save their earnings and invest in expanding their forest land. Due to the demand for wood from processing and export companies in the area, this product consistently commands a high price and enjoys stable output. Consequently, owning 6 hectares of forest land for acacia cultivation generates an average annual income of approximately VND100 million (\$4,500) for Mrs. Hằng's family. This income, combined with earnings from labor in Thailand and other sources, contributes to the financial stability of her family.

Given the nature of migrant work in Thailand, migrant workers often travel between the two countries. However, they employ local laborers to perform all tasks related to planting, weeding, pruning, and harvesting at a competitive wage of VND300,000 per day (USD15). As a result, seasonal job opportunities in the Nhu Thanh area remain abundant, providing non-migrants with additional employment opportunities, increased income, and improved living conditions.

Fifth, invest in real estate

In addition to investing in forestry land for economic gain, many migrant workers also invest in real estate. This investment trend emerged on a small scale in the 2010s and gained popularity among migrant workers after 2016, when a significant number of Vietnamese workers transitioned to roles as contractors and business owners in Thailand. Consequently, as migrant workers' incomes increased from 30,000 baht to 120,000 baht per month (USD1,500 - USD4,500), many began saving their earnings and investing in real estate.

Within the research group of migrant workers employed in Din Deang, the author conducted interviews and discovered that approximately 40% of the workers had purchased one or more residential land plots, with a minimum of one and a maximum of three plots. These purchases were primarily made from households within the community or in the Nhu Thanh district. For instance, in 2015, Mrs. Hằng, after three years of trading green vegetables in Thailand, had accumulated savings exceeding VND700 million (USD30,000). Her family invested in a land plot near their home with an area of 120 square meters, at a cost of VND500 million (USD22,000). In 2017, they further invested in another land plot for VND750 million (USD35,000).

In 2018, the Nhu Thanh district implemented a policy to develop the Bến Sung town area, involving investments in upgrading transportation infrastructure, urban landscaping, and constructing public utilities such as schools, hospitals, and shopping centers. These infrastructure improvements and public amenities led to an increase in real estate value within the area. In 2020, Sun Group invested in a project to develop the Ben En eco-tourism area, attracting real estate investors from Hanoi, Hải Phòng, and other provinces. As a result, the price of real estate surrounding the Ben En area experienced a significant increase. Due to this tourism development project, the value of Mrs. Hằng's real estate investments also increased by three to four times.

Mrs. Hằng's family's real estate investment is representative of the numerous cases where migrant workers have invested their savings from working in Thailand into real estate, reaping substantial financial benefits. These investments have significantly strengthened their families' economic standing.

Sixth, invest in business stores

Numerous migrant workers employed in the garment and fashion retail sectors in Thailand have established connections with a network of wholesale clothing stores in Patunam Market, Thailand's renowned hub for Asian-style fashion items that align well with Vietnamese fashion preferences.

As previously mentioned, Vietnamese workers do not intend to remain as hired laborers indefinitely. They typically work diligently and, after accumulating a certain amount of capital and gaining valuable work experience (economic, cultural, and social capital), they seek new opportunities to enhance their income. Mrs. Trang's case exemplifies this trend. Born in Nhu Thanh in 1992, she migrated to Thailand in 2012 and worked as a clothing saleswoman in a Thai shop at Patunam Market. Over eight years of employment, she developed fluency in Thai and gained a comprehensive understanding of the fashion goods network in the area. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, she returned to Nhu Thanh and, while awaiting Thailand's reopening, ventured into online fashion sales through Facebook.

By 2022, as her online customer base expanded, she made the decision to rent a physical store in Bến Sung Town and establish her own business. Mrs. Trang personally selects fashion items from Patunam Market and transports them to Nhu Thanh via bus. Her business has flourished, attracting a loyal clientele due to its affordable pricing, high-quality products, and exceptional customer service. She consistently implements loyalty programs and offers discounts during holidays. For instance, on the morning of October 18, 2022, the author witnessed Mrs. Trang's highly professional and respectful interactions with customers in her clothing store. Despite a customer's extensive and time-consuming perusal of numerous clothing items, ultimately resulting in no purchase, Mrs. Trang maintained her composure and thanked the customer for their visit, expressing hope that they would return in the future when new stock arrived.

In contrast to the often ill-tempered and verbally abusive sales tactics employed by some Vietnamese vendors in similar situations, Mrs. Trang's approach exemplifies her deep respect for her customers. When the author inquired about her current income in comparison to her previous overseas employment, she responded:

"My income from selling clothes here ranges from 20 to 30 million VND per month."

Beyond fashion stores, migrant Vietnamese workers have also invested in a diverse range of other businesses in Thailand, including beverage shops, restaurants specializing in Thai cuisine and groceries, and Vietnamese food and grocery stores in the Bến Sung area (which will be analyzed in a subsequent chapter).

Seventh, economic support for brothers in the large family

In the Vietnamese cultural ethos, the concept of *con người có tổ có tông* "never forgetting one's ancestry" holds great significance. Each individual is considered part of an extended family lineage, a unique identity that is a source of pride for its members. Consequently, Vietnamese individuals strive to enhance the prosperity and strength of their family, viewing it as a symbol of success and a testament to the pride of its members (Dung, 2009, p. 4).

The responsibility of individuals extends beyond the immediate family unit to encompass the extended family, a defining characteristic of Vietnamese identity. Vietnamese individuals are inclined to support their cousins within the family lineage, perceiving it as an inherent obligation (Morality–Talent/Đức-Tài).

The case study of Mrs. Hằng's family exemplifies this phenomenon. Her family consists of four siblings, with Mrs. Hằng being the eldest. Following the passing of her father, her mother remains alive but is no longer capable of working. In 2020, Mrs. Hằng's younger brother constructed a new house, and the other three siblings collectively provided him with an interest-free loan of VND800 million (USD35,000). In 2022, the youngest sister married, and the other siblings contributed funds to celebrate her wedding (VND65 million) (USD3,000).

These examples illustrate the diverse investments made by Thai migrant workers in Vietnam, ranging from home construction and the purchase of modern appliances to real estate, forestry land, and various business ventures. Through these investments, they construct and reconstruct their new identity, characterized by economic affluence, social sophistication, and business acumen.

6.4 Practicing the two cultures in dual lives

For practicing Thai cultures, To mitigate the risks of apprehension by Thai authorities and expand their business networks, migrant workers adopt strategies to integrate into Thai society by constructing new cultural identities. This approach has proven effective for their survival in Thailand.

One of the primary cultural practices migrant workers engage in is learning to speak Thai fluently. This is achieved through daily interactions with Thai employers and co-workers, as well as by living among Thai people. Proficiency in Thai language is essential for long-term employment in the host country. After working in Thailand for several years (typically 3-6), most migrant workers develop fluency in Thai, enabling them to communicate effectively, understand Thai culture and society, and adjust their behavior accordingly.

In addition to language acquisition, migrant workers diligently learn and practice skills such as salesmanship, customer service, appropriate dress, communication styles, and friendly demeanor, mirroring the behaviors of Thai people. They also patronize local Thai businesses, purchasing 100% of their daily necessities from nearby shops. Notably, migrant workers incorporate Thai cuisine into their daily diets, consuming dishes such as "*som tam*" (papaya salad), "*lap*" (pork chop salad), and "*lod chong*" (a Thai dessert).

Migrant workers modify their daily habits to conform to Thai societal norms, reducing the likelihood of being identified as illegal workers. While they continue to socialize and celebrate, they do so discreetly, often holding gatherings indoors with locked doors and minimizing noise levels. This is in stark contrast to traditional Vietnamese drinking and socializing customs, which are typically characterized by loud conversations and boisterous behavior. Migrant workers recognize that such behavior is frowned upon in Thai residential areas and could lead to reports to the authorities, potentially resulting in legal consequences.

In their daily lives and work, migrant workers make conscious efforts to observe and adopt Thai cultural practices. These include planting and decorating flowers in front of their homes, maintaining a clean environment, showing

compassion for animals, refraining from slaughtering live animals, and avoiding spitting. Migrant workers diligently practice these habits to minimize risks in the host country. They decorate their living spaces with flowers, ensure the cleanliness of their surroundings, treat animals with kindness, consider pets as companions, abstain from slaughtering live animals, eat quietly, and refrain from spitting. These newly adopted cultural values are incorporated into their daily routines to reduce the likelihood of detection and apprehension.

Migrant workers leverage online platforms such as Facebook, Zalo, and Viber to connect with the Vietnamese worker network. This network serves as a valuable information exchange, where members share updates on Thai police inspections and government policies affecting undocumented workers. Armed with this knowledge, migrant workers can develop effective strategies to mitigate risks.

In terms of attire, migrant workers typically reserve traditional Vietnamese clothing for indoor settings. When venturing outside, interacting with Thai people, or working, they adopt Thai dress codes. They opt for looser-fitting garments, in contrast to the tighter-fitting clothing commonly worn in Vietnam.

Migrant workers also observe and emulate Thai traffic behavior. They refrain from excessive honking, drive in the right lane, and adhere to Thai driving practices to avoid causing discomfort or inconvenience. They are particularly mindful of speed limits in residential areas, avoid reckless overtaking, and yield to other vehicles when necessary.

Migrant workers actively cultivate relationships and engage in friendly communication with Thai people in their workplaces and neighborhoods. This is a crucial survival tactic for several reasons. Firstly, many migrant workers are employed in informal economic sectors such as street vending, restaurant services, and garment manufacturing, where they interact with Thai people on a regular basis. Secondly, they reside within Thai communities, necessitating close relationships and the adoption of Thai cultural practices to blend in seamlessly.

In addition to fostering amicable relationships with Thai locals, migrant workers also engage with local police officers, negotiating with them to ensure their safety during work and to receive advance notice of impending police inspections. This arrangement

typically involves a monthly payment of 1,900 baht (\$60) per migrant worker. However, this does not guarantee complete immunity from legal action.

While bribing local police is a common practice, Vietnamese workers prioritize building positive relationships with their neighbors and other community members. For instance, Mrs. Hăng, a vegetable vendor in a local market, has established a strong rapport with her Thai customers, including police officers who frequent her stall. She has diligently adopted Thai cultural practices and maintains close ties with other vendors and police acquaintances. Despite having been arrested twice in the past (2006 and 2008), Mrs. Hăng has learned from her experiences and emphasizes the importance of cultural assimilation and avoiding conflicts with Thai residents. When asked if Thai locals are aware of the presence of undocumented Vietnamese workers in the Din Deang area, Mrs. Hăng acknowledges that it is common knowledge. However, she notes that Thai residents generally treat Vietnamese workers respectfully, provided that their behavior does not negatively impact the community. She shared that¹⁷:

"The best way to avoid risk of arrest is to practice Thai culture, live in harmony, and not to cause conflicts with them, not to make a difference or impact on Thai people". When asked about whether Thai people know Vietnamese workers are working in Din Deang area or not? She answered that "everyone in this area knows that there are a lot of Vietnamese workers working without a work permit."

The author continued asking "how do Thai people treat Vietnamese workers?" She answered that *"everyone here is very nice, no one talks on or look down on Vietnamese workers, however, if it affects their lives badly, we will be in trouble"*.

According to the author's fieldwork, research findings indicate that most arrests of Vietnamese workers in Thailand stem from their conspicuous behavior. Actions such as excessive drinking, gambling, spitting, slaughtering animals, honking horns, and engaging in disruptive fights often prompt Thai residents to report them to the authorities. These incidents result in substantial fines and potential deportation.

¹⁷ Conversation of the author and Mrs. Hăng (migrant worker) in Din Deang, Bangkok, Thailand on 14th April, 2022.

A recent example occurred on August 20, 2022, when two migrant workers from Nghệ An province were apprehended by Thai police for working illegally. Their arrest was precipitated by their loud music, which disturbed neighbors who subsequently reported them. The incident occurred in the presence of the author and other Vietnamese workers, who acknowledged their own safety despite being known as Vietnamese. This highlights the importance of cultural conformity and avoiding behaviors that could draw negative attention from Thai residents.

For practice Vietnamese cultures In addition to adopting Thai cultural practices, Vietnamese workers also maintain their Vietnamese cultural values. Confucian ideology emphasizes the concept of "*Đức*" (virtue), which fosters a sense of mutual assistance among relatives and neighbors, often referred to as a "reciprocal" relationship *có đi có lại mới toại lòng nhau* (Choowonglert & Ton, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Vietnamese workers sought to return home, including those with expired passports. Despite the high cost of broker fees (20,000 baht), brokers agreed to assist them at the same rate as other workers (3,000 baht). Subsequently, after the pandemic subsided in 2021, workers who had received assistance from brokers connected them with new migrants who need to travel to Thailand for seeking jobs, even those who were not related.

Another example of mutual support is the case of Mr. Long and eight other Vietnamese workers who were arrested by Thai police during a government crackdown on illegal workers in 2017. While detained for 21 days, Mr. Cậ, a garment contractor in the same area, provided them with meals and necessities. After their trial, they were sentenced to pay a fine of 40,000 baht each and deported back to Vietnam. Due to their inability to pay the fine immediately, they remained in detention for an additional 10 days until Mr. Cậ secured enough funds to assist them. He also purchased bus tickets for their return to Vietnam. The fine amount was later repaid after Mr. Long's group arrived in Như Thanh. However, through the migration network of VKHH, Mr. Long's group returned to Thailand in late 2017 and resumed working in the garment industry in the Din Deang area, this time with greater experience in evading police detection. They rented houses with rear or side exits to facilitate escape during police raids. In 2018, Mr. Cậ incurred significant gambling

losses and was unable to pay his workers' salaries. Mr. Long and his group contributed 80,000 baht as a loan to Mr. Cậ, without any formal loan agreement. To date, Mr. Cậ has not repaid the loan, but Mr. Long and his group have not demanded repayment, recognizing his financial difficulties and his previous assistance to workers.

The examples of Mr. Cậ and Mr. Long and his group illustrate the reciprocal relationships that exist among Vietnamese workers, even those who are not related. These relationships are rooted in their shared hometown (Bến Sung, Như Thanh) and the close bonds they have formed.

For practice spiritual culture, Why practicing Thai culture this means the everyday life practice, while practicing Vietnamese culture, this means they still maintain their Confusion despite their migration to Thailand, Vietnamese workers maintain a deep-seated belief in the presence of deities in their new surroundings. They adhere to the notion that "*đất có Thổ Công, sông có Hà Bá*" (each land is managed by different god) and express their reverence by engaging in religious practices wherever they reside, work, or conduct business. Regardless of their occupation in Thailand, Vietnamese workers make a point of visiting temples and pagodas on full moon days and holidays to worship and pay homage to the deities they believe preside over their current location. Within the garment factories where Vietnamese workers are employed, the author observed the ubiquitous presence of small altars situated on the first floor of the building. On the first day of each month, the garment contractor purchases fruits to offer and worship, following the same customs practiced in Vietnam. These offerings are typically accompanied by prayers for blessings and protection. Additionally, Vietnamese workers frequent temples and pagodas in the vicinity of their workplaces or businesses.

During one of the author's interactions with Mr. Khoa, a canvas business owner, the author witnessed firsthand the practice of religious observance among Vietnamese migrants. While driving through Buriram province, Mr. Khoa and his assistant stopped at a pagoda. They disembarked from the vehicle and entered the pagoda, where they knelt before a statue of a deity and clasped their hands in prayer. The content of their vow was as follows: "Namo Amitabha Buddha, we are Dung

and Khoa, migrants from Vietnam working in Thailand. Today, we are conducting business in Buriram province. Dear sacred gods, bless us with success in our endeavors, peace, and safety. Namo Amitabha Buddha." They then bowed three times to the ground before standing up. Upon returning to the vehicle, the author inquired about their visit to the pagoda. Mr. Khoa explained that they had stopped to "pray for holiness and patience for good," emphasizing the importance of seeking divine protection and peace wherever one may go.

In Vietnamese culture, "*Hiếu*" (filial piety) is a fundamental cultural identity. It encompasses not only caring for grandparents and parents during their lifetime but also honoring ancestors and expressing gratitude for one's roots. Vietnamese tradition dictates that deceased grandparents should be revered as if they were still alive "Respect as at". Worship rituals are performed to commemorate their virtues and remind descendants of their legacy. Anniversaries are observed annually to express gratitude and remembrance (Bích, 2003).



Figure 38: Mr. Khoa and Mr. Dưỡng (canvas business) conduct spiritual practice

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

On these occasions, family members are expected to participate fully in the preparation and execution of the worship ceremony to demonstrate respect for their ancestors. Vietnamese workers place great importance on the anniversaries of their grandparents' and parents' deaths. During fieldwork in Din Deang and Nhu Thanh, the author observed that Vietnamese workers often made time to return home for two significant events: the anniversaries of their grandparents' and parents' deaths and the Vietnamese New Year. During these times, they would engage in activities such as cleaning, redecorating, and rearranging the altar. Ceremonial offerings, including flowers, fruits, and food dishes, were carefully selected and prepared to honor deceased grandparents, parents, and other ancestors.

Solidarity and a sense of community are deeply ingrained in Vietnamese traditional culture and identity. Migrant worker groups maintain regular communication through online platforms and in-person gatherings to exchange information on labor recruitment, warn each other about Thai police inspections targeting illegal workers, and coordinate other activities. During Thai holidays, Vietnamese worker groups often organize social events such as parties and sports activities to foster connections and exchange. These activities strengthen cohesion among members, creating social capital for information sharing and mutual support, thereby showcasing the traditional Vietnamese identity. Examples of such activities include:

Firtly, organize dining and parties in various festivals

Mr. Cậ and his workers frequently organize festive gatherings on public holidays, including International New Year, the Thai traditional New Year "Songkran," and other special occasions such as birthdays, welcoming new workers, and watching football matches to cheer on the Vietnamese team. For instance, during the 2020 International New Year, Mr. Cậ hosted a celebration in Din Deang with a total of 28 attendees.



Figure 39: Vietnamese workers gather a party in their working place, Thailand

Source: Achariya Choowonglert

He purchased a pig for 5,000 baht, while the participants contributed additional funds for wine, beer, and fruit. The preparations for the party were shared among the participants, with each individual taking responsibility for a specific task, fostering a sense of camaraderie and joy. The men prepared ingredients such as chopping and marinating meat and vegetables, while the women cooked and cleaned. In addition to hosting parties in Din Deang, they also attend similar events organized by other Vietnamese workers in neighboring areas.

Secondly, play a football match on Sunday

One of the popular activities among Vietnamese male migrant workers in Thailand is the organization of football matches between work groups on Sundays. This activity serves as a platform for Vietnamese workers from various regions of Bangkok and its vicinity to congregate and engage in friendly football competitions.

Beyond promoting physical well-being, these matches foster a sense of community and strengthen the network of Vietnamese workers in Thailand. The shared experience of participating in these events enhances their interconnectedness, providing a support system during their time working abroad.



Figure 40: Vietnamese workers gather football games in their working place

Source: Nguyễn Văn Dũng

Workers from Như Thanh are employed in various locations, including Din Deang, Wat Palm, Pang Sang, and Ayutthaya. They communicate through a Facebook group and often gather on Sundays, their usual day off, at the Din Deang football field. They divide into teams and engage in football matches. After the game, all participants contribute financially to a post-match gathering, with the winning team covering 40% of the total expenses and the losing team covering the remaining 60%. During these gatherings, they discuss work-related issues and challenges faced by their fellow workers, offering mutual support and assistance in problem-solving.

3) Live together as a big family to reduce living costs

To minimize living expenses, the majority of worker groups opt for shared housing arrangements, fostering a sense of community. In the case of garment workers in Din Deang, they typically rent two- to three-story houses where they reside and work collectively as a family unit. For instance, Mr. Long's group comprises 12 individuals, including six young couples who share meals and work responsibilities, thereby reducing their living costs.

Vietnamese migrant workers prioritize not only financial accumulation (economic capital) but also social connections and participation in migrant worker

networks (social capital). They strive to navigate the cultural nuances of both Thailand and Vietnam (cultural capital).



Figure 41: Vietnamese workers live and work together in their working place

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

By accumulating these forms of capital, they mitigate risks and create opportunities. Upon their arrival in Thailand, they prioritize cultural capital acquisition, including proficiency in Thai language, comprehension of Thai social norms, and adaptation to Thai society. As their capital grows, workers may transition into small-scale entrepreneurship (e.g., garment contractors, vegetable vendors, canvas business owners). This shift reflects their evolving identity, facilitating economic accumulation and the expression of their entrepreneurial capabilities.

6.5 Hybridizing cultural remittance

Vietnamese migrant workers from Như Thanh often reside and work in small communities within Thailand. While they maintain their traditional cultural values, they also engage with and adopt aspects of the local culture, forming new values and perspectives. For instance, they may incorporate Thai views on gender equality, environmental sanitation, traffic participation, modern attire, and home decor into their own lives. As a result, they construct a new identity that blends traditional and contemporary elements. These new identities are reflected in their lifestyles and are evident upon their return to Bến Sung, Như Thanh, Vietnam.

Firstly, changing the gender power and roles

The most evident identity and the life style are the most clearly seen from the implant the profound impact on dynamic gender. The migration of Vietnamese individuals to Thailand has had a profound impact on the dynamics of gender power and roles. The authors examine the transformation of gender power and roles among a group of migrants employed in the garment manufacturing industry, covering a time span of nearly three decades from 1991 to 2022. Prior to 2007, the majority of workers in Thai garment factories were women. However, a noticeable shift in gender composition occurred as more men began accompanying their wives and working as seamstresses. This resulted in women assuming the role of primary breadwinners, remitting money back to their families and acquiring greater economic influence. Additionally, women took on traditionally male responsibilities such as investing in house repairs and construction. These changes highlight the significant shifts in traditional gender power and roles within the Vietnamese migrant community in Thailand.

As a result, men in various occupations such as welding or mobile phone sales experienced a decline in their economic power, earning significantly less than their female counterparts. In order to regain their status, men began acquiring sewing skills and joining their wives in Thai garment factories. Conversations with male migrants from different backgrounds revealed that although women's work was lighter and more comfortable, it still required patience and endurance, which was unfamiliar to Vietnamese men. Additionally, it was observed that Thai male workers, as well as workers from other countries, also engaged in seamstress jobs traditionally associated with females. Importantly, this work took place indoors, reducing the risk of government intervention. Consequently, male workers received on-the-job training, leading to a steady increase in the number of male seamstresses, eventually reaching parity with female workers by the early 2010s. This shift in labor distribution challenges the traditional Confucian perspective on gender roles, which mandated strict occupational segregation. The cultural acceptance and integration of Vietnamese migrants in Thailand have played a significant role in facilitating this change. As a

result, male migrants have developed hybrid identities, combining traditional values with contemporary ideals.

Therefore, migration shapes individuals' self-concept, blending traditional values with modern ideals. This fusion is evident in the everyday lives of migrants, whether they settle in Thailand or return to their hometowns in Vietnam. Over time, *Làng Thái Lan* has witnessed a significant shift towards gender equality in domestic responsibilities. Men now actively engage in tasks like shopping, dishwashing, cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing. These changes become even more pronounced when migrants reintegrate into their Vietnamese communities. Decision-making dynamics within households have transformed as well. Couples now engage in collaborative discussions and jointly make decisions. This is exemplified by the case of Linh and Anh (pseudonym), who made joint decisions concerning the construction of their house. Rather than Linh unilaterally making all the decisions, he actively included his wife in discussions regarding the construction plans and financial investments. Linh's proposals were only implemented with his wife's consent. This shift towards mutual respect and gender equality within relationships is facilitated by exposure to foreign work experiences and the assimilation of new cultural values.

Another case involves Ha and Doan (pseudonym), a couple who faced a decision during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite having received the COVID-19 vaccination, the husband, Doan, opted to reduce the potential risk and remained in their hometown. Conversely, the wife, Ha, recognized a lucrative business prospect and made the decision to persist with her trading activities in Thailand. In lieu of basing their decisions solely on the cultural norms prevalent in Vietnam, where the husband assumes a dominant role, the couple engaged in thorough discussions to explore their alternatives. Ultimately, they reached a mutual agreement whereby Doan would return to Vietnam to fulfill the responsibility of caring for their sons, while Ha would actively pursue her trading activities in Thailand. Ms. Ha state that:

Despite the COVID-19 outbreak, I recognized a lucrative opportunity due to the closure of numerous vegetable stores, resulting in a six-fold increase in customers at my vegetable stall. I emphasized the significant financial loss that would have occurred if I had closed my stall. Consequently, I made the decision for him (her husband) to

return home while I remained in Thailand, believing that returning home would be straightforward, but re-entering Thailand would be challenging. He (her husband) concurred with my assessment. Our decision to have him (her husband) return to Vietnam while I stayed in Thailand proved to be correct.

This example highlights the importance of respectful communication in decision-making and reveals the changing gender dynamics among migrants. The migration of Vietnamese individuals to Thailand has also challenged traditional gender power and roles in the garment manufacturing sector, moving away from Confucian-based division of labor. This shift extends beyond the workplace, impacting household responsibilities and decision-making dynamics.

In addition to the joint decision-making, there is a case where a woman is the contractor. Specifically, Ms. Binh (pseudonym) left her family in *Nhu Thanh* and migrated to Thailand to work as a garment worker. Initially, she worked for a contractor in the same hometown. After three years of employment, she developed proficiency in Thai communication and cultural practices, enabling her to interact fluently and adapt to Thai customs. Her enhanced communication skills fostered close relationships with Thai owners, leading to the acquisition of orders directly from them. Consequently, in her fourth year of employment, she established her own sewing facility and recruited three friends from her hometown, also skilled tailors working in Bangkok, to join her venture. Due to her established connections with Thai garment owners, she secured numerous orders at favorable prices, receiving 1.10 US\$ per product instead of the prevailing rate of 1.02 US\$.

Furthermore, there is a case of a woman who, after working in Thailand for about ten years, saved up money and invested in opening a clothing store at *Bén Sung* Municipal Market. Before opening the store, she sold her products on Facebook. Later, when her sales improved, she opened a physical store. Her store is characterized by its cleanliness and politeness. Even if customers try on a lot of products but do not make a purchase, she remains welcoming, which is often different from local traders who tend to be unhappy when customers try on a lot of products but do not make a purchase.



Figure 42: Vegetable vendor couple in Din Deang (Mrs. Hằng and her husband)

Source: Achariya Choowonglert

Thus, the female entrepreneur cases mentioned above delves into the shifting gender roles and the transformation of identities among migrants. Female migrant workers exhibit qualities of endurance and sacrifice, traditionally associated with women, as they contribute to the economic well-being of their families. This exemplifies the four virtues (or “*tứ đức*” in Vietnamese) and the creation of blessings (*phúc*) for their families. On the other hand, the male individual who changed careers to become a seamstress and achieved economic success was commended for his skill (*tài*) and intelligence (*trí*). He also received recognition for valuing his wife's opinions and assisting with household chores, demonstrating his moral virtue (*đức*). Consequently, the household thrived and experienced blessings (*phúc*), leading to prosperity (*lộc*).

Moreover, the fact that both men and women work in the same type of occupation promotes equality, such as both being primary earners and sharing household responsibilities. This enables them to accumulate economic capital, particularly in constructing large and spacious concrete houses, rather than solely relying on a single breadwinner. This not only reflects the skill (*tài*) of men but also underscores the skill (*tài*) of women. The presence of these expansive concrete houses makes *Làng Thái Lan* a symbol of wealth, evident from the grandeur of its architecture.



Figure 43,44,45,46 and 47: Vietnamese man workers share housework with their wives

Source: Achariya Choowonglert

However, after 2005, this perspective has undergone a transformation, as evidenced by the network of migrant workers from Nhu Thanh in Thailand. Over the past 15 years, the number of male migrants employed in garment, sales, and restaurant services in Thailand has steadily increased. This shift indicates a departure from the gender-based labor division shaped by Confucian thought. The concept of gender equality is also widely reflected in the division of household labor, which has largely broken free from the gender roles prescribed by Confucian ideology. Men actively participate in domestic responsibilities such as grocery shopping, dishwashing, cooking, cleaning, childcare, and laundry.

Second, hybrid form it's reflect from bilingual community

Làng Thái Lan in Vietnam is a remarkable bilingual community, with its residents proficiently speaking both Vietnamese and Thai. During our field survey in *Làng Thái Lan*, we observed that people fluidly utilize both languages in their daily interactions. They often incorporate Thai words such as 'nee le, nan le, nun, khap, dai,

mai dai, leu' which respectively translate to 'here, therefore, those, yes, can, cannot, so' into their sentences. This bilingual proficiency has become widespread, even among Vietnamese individuals who have never visited Thailand. They are familiar with the aforementioned Thai words and some common phrases like “*thao rai pi*” (How much does it cost?) and “*khop khun mak*” (Thank you very much). The practice of bilingual communication has been embraced by repatriated Vietnamese since the mid-1960s. It has become a crucial asset for them to establish and expand their labor network in Thailand since the 1990s, enabling the people of *Làng Thái Lan* to seek employment opportunities in Thailand.

In Thailand, Vietnamese migrants exhibit a distinct approach compared to foreign workers in neighboring countries, as they actively strive to assimilate into Thai society in order to avoid feeling like outsiders. They employ various strategies, such as attaining fluency in the Thai language, adopting Thai attire, and even embracing Thai cuisine. These practices are crucial for securing long-term employment and gaining acceptance from Thai contractors and local residents. Within the initial years of working for Thai employers, a majority of migrant workers become proficient in the Thai language and develop a more melodious and calming speech pattern, distinct from the nasal, assertive, and rapid tone commonly associated with native Vietnamese speakers. By embracing Thai culture and language, these migrants are able to seamlessly integrate into Thai society, maintain job stability, and avoid conflicts with Thai locals. Furthermore, this enables them to expand their professional network within Thailand. This strategic approach greatly aids Vietnamese migrants in Thailand in terms of their survival, accumulation of cultural capital, conversion of cultural capital into economic capital, and creation of opportunities to become self-employed contractors with their own employees.

Due to their frequent travels between Vietnam and Thailand, they have a strong interest in news related to social, political, cultural, and economic changes in Thailand. Speaking both languages allows them to express their Thai identity. In Vietnam, they showcase their differences through Thai language practices. During the village's annual New Year party, they enjoy Thai-style food and drinks, sing Thai songs, and perform Thai dances. They gather afterwards to discuss their experiences

of living in both Thailand and Vietnam. They closely follow news from Thailand, particularly the transition from a military to a civilian government and the 2019 elections, which significantly impact their livelihoods. Their ability to seamlessly combine two languages showcases their linguistic prowess and defines *Làng Thái Lan* as a bilingual community with unique cultural hybridity.

Third, hybrid form it's managing Thai food and products

Làng Thái Lan, renowned in *Thanh Hoa* city and the surrounding districts for its extensive array of Thai restaurants and shops, plays a pivotal role in the promotion of Thai culture and the attraction of Thai cuisine enthusiasts. Within this vibrant enclave, three prominent businesses specialize in Thai goods, along with 12 small grocery stores and numerous market stalls, offering an extensive selection of Thai products. *Làng Thái Lan* can be described as a mini Thai society, affectionately referred to as the 'Thai Village' by the local Vietnamese community. This unique identity has emerged through cultural hybridization and the presence of Vietnamese individuals who have embraced Thai cuisine and upheld culinary traditions even after returning to Vietnam.



Figure 48: Vietnamese workers' meal (including Thai-Viet cuisine)

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

These individuals also have a strong preference for Thai skincare products, cosmetics, and other goods, leveraging their knowledge in Thai cuisine and trading networks to foster economic growth. As a result, *Làng Thái Lan* has earned a well-

deserved reputation for offering authentic Thai products, distinguishing it from neighboring areas.

These goods are procured from a wholesale supermarket located in *Udon Thani* province, Thailand. They are then transported across the border with the assistance of local brokers who facilitate the movement of Vietnamese migrants to Bangkok. Once repatriated to Vietnam, these brokers handle the transportation of the goods to *Làng Thái Lan*, where they are subsequently distributed to various shops and stalls within the district. During their stay in the village, the authors had the opportunity to relish in authentic Thai cuisine and partake in consuming Thai products, which created an experience that evoked a sense of being in Thailand. Thai delicacies such as *lap* (pork chop salad), *som tam* (papaya salad), *tom yum* (spicy Thai curry), and *lod chong* (a type of Thai dessert) are readily available. Consequently, the number of shops selling Thai goods has witnessed a steady rise, extending to the surrounding areas of *Bến Sung* town. Many local residents express that visiting *Làng Thái Lan* is synonymous with visiting Thailand.



Figure 49, 50, 51 and 52: VKHH and Vietnamese workers trade Thai goods

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Fourth, hybrid form it's enhancing polite and friendly communication

In the pursuit of long-term stability and capital accumulation in Thailand, Vietnamese migrants often assimilate into Thai culture. This assimilation is also

evident in their communication styles. The authors have observed that Vietnamese migrants exhibit traits akin to Thai people, such as friendliness, politeness, and respect, even within their own community. In contrast to Vietnamese individuals, Thai people possess a more tactful approach to concealing their emotions, including anger, hate, boredom, dislike, annoyance, and so forth. They avoid direct refusals or offensive speech. Hằg, a Vietnamese migrant, highlighted that in order to avoid conflicts with both Thai individuals and fellow migrants, Vietnamese migrants must adopt the Thai style of communication (Hằg, personal communication, January 21, 2021). Similar to their Thai counterparts, Vietnamese migrants refrain from immediate responses or refusals, instead observing the reactions of their interlocutors. Additionally, they tend to maintain a pleasant demeanor, often smiling during conversations, thereby fostering a calm and harmonious communication environment.



Figure 53: *The author am talking with VKHH in Làng Thái Lan*

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

The polite communication goes beyond personal interactions and significantly impacts customer service, playing a pivotal role in the prosperity of businesses in *Làng Thái Lan*. To illustrate this point, let's examine the case of Trang, a 31-year-old Vietnamese migrant who relocated to Thailand in 2012. In 2020, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, she returned to Vietnam and established a clothing shop where she sold fashionable attire through Facebook. As her online customer base grew rapidly, Trang

decided to expand her business by renting a premises in the district market and opening a physical shop in 2022. During my visit to her shop on the morning of October 18, 2022, I noticed that Trang interacted with customers in a highly professional and respectful manner. Despite the fact that a customer spent a considerable amount of time selecting numerous clothing items, resulting in a disordered display, they ultimately did not make a purchase. In contrast to the selling approach adopted by Vietnamese sellers, who tend to be easily provoked and may resort to swearing at customers, Trang remained composed and exhibited utmost respect towards the buyers. She expressed gratitude to them and extended an invitation to revisit her shop, assuring them that a fresh assortment of clothing styles would be available next time. Consequently, this courteous and respectful communication aligns harmoniously with the broader notion of morality (*đức*).

Fifth, hybrid form it's queuing culture and traffic etiquette

It is truly captivating to witness the remarkable embrace of orderly queuing by the Vietnamese migrants in *Làng Thái Lan*. This cultural phenomenon not only reflects their profound respect for others but also exemplifies the emergence of a new moral code within their community. The stark contrast between this queuing culture and the more chaotic behavior commonly seen in Vietnam, where jostling and competing to be served first can often lead to conflicts, is both striking and inspiring.



Figure 54: VKHH and Vietnamese workers' traffic culture in Làng Thái Lan

Source: Mr. Hoàng Văn Dũng

Since 2017, the author has had the privilege of frequent visits to this place. Initially, it was intriguing to observe the former residents or migrants who had lived in Thailand queuing up in an orderly manner to withdraw money from ATMs, a behavior uncommon among the local Vietnamese. During that time, a few individuals attempted to cut in line, but they were swiftly halted by these former migrants who were committed to maintaining the queue's orderliness. Consequently, the local Vietnamese gradually adopted this queuing practice when withdrawing money. Over the course of several years, the authors discovered that the influence of this queuing culture extended beyond ATM queues. This area has now transformed into a space where locals queue up to receive various services. This remarkable shift has given rise to a new cultural phenomenon, solidifying the adoption of a more disciplined approach within the community.

Furthermore, the adoption of traffic etiquette by these migrant workers upon their return to Vietnam is yet another commendable practice. Since 2017, the author has witnessed several instances in *Làng Thái Lan* and *Bến Sung* town where aggressive driving, excessive horn usage, and reckless behavior are exceptionally rare. This starkly contrasts with the prevalent Vietnamese culture characterized by incessant honking, lane encroachment, and hazardous overtaking. The development of these new cultural values in *Làng Thái Lan* not only expands people's perspectives on morality but also brings about a positive impact on society as a whole. It is truly heartening to witness such a transformation and the profound influence it has on the community's behavior and mindset.

Sixth, promoting environmental awareness

In *Làng Thái Lan*, especially in *Bến Sung* municipality, people prioritize environmental protection. Vietnamese individuals who have returned home have influenced the community with their cleanliness habits and the tradition of decorating homes and public spaces with flowers. This promotes good health, discourages littering, and enhances the beauty of homes and neighborhoods with trees and flowers. Unlike neighboring communities, the residents take proactive measures to maintain cleanliness and preserve beauty. They go beyond government officials' requests for cleaning public spaces. The village and municipality stand out for their distinctive

Thai-designed trash bins placed in front of each household, showcasing Thailand's cultural identity. This unique aspect can only be observed in *Làng Thái Lan*. The town of *Bến Sung*, when compared to neighboring areas, is exceptional in its pristine and visually pleasing living environment. The clean streets serve as a testament to the community's distinct values and emerging cultural norms.



Figure 55, 56: VKHH participate in cleaning up the street.

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Since 2018, Saturday afternoons have been designated as the day for communal cleaning in *Bến Sung* municipality. Every week at 17:15, all households gather to enhance street cleanliness through tidying efforts. This cultural practice showcases their responsibility and solidarity, contributing to the village's overall identity. The residents' conscientiousness in preserving the environment is impressive, especially in mountainous regions where environmental awareness often lacks. Both former inhabitants and migrants from Thailand exemplify their commitment to a clean, green, and beautiful community. This distinction is evident in the cleanliness and comfort of their own toilets compared to others, where local residents prioritize

regular cleaning and dryness. On the other hand, local Vietnamese tend to neglect cleanliness, leading to perpetually damp and malodorous toilets.

Seventh, hybrid form it's dressing in Thai style

In Thailand, both voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese and migrants have shown a tendency to adopt the Thai style of dressing as a means to hybridize into the local culture. Similarly, when in Vietnam, they have become accustomed to dressing in the Thai fashion. Moreover, during cultural events such as weddings, New Year celebrations, and village sports competitions, they choose to wear Thai-style clothing to assert their distinct identity. For migrants, adopting the Thai style of dressing while in Thailand is seen as a way to avoid standing out and to integrate into Thai society. Consequently, a new cultural trait has emerged among Vietnamese migrants, where they gradually embrace the colorful, wide, and airy fashion style of Thailand.

According to the authors' observations, it is notable that the majority of repatriated Vietnamese individuals who participated in the New Year party in 2020 adorned costumes that accurately depicted the cultural identity of Thailand. Women often wear dresses adorned with bright white pearls, which enhances their beauty. Some repatriated Vietnamese even wear luxurious fur hats combined with short curly hairstyles, a stark departure from traditional Vietnamese costumes. Meanwhile, men opt for vests, ties, and prominent leather hats, showcasing their civility. This distinctive style of dressing is often seen as unusual by the locals and easily distinguishes the repatriated Vietnamese from other Vietnamese individuals. However, by embracing the Thai fashion style, repatriated Vietnamese are able to showcase their unique identity, which is a fusion of Vietnamese and Thai cultures. This expression of uniqueness brings them a sense of pride, sometimes leading them to feel a sense of superiority towards the locals.

Eight, hybrid form it's blending Vietnamese and Thai architectural elements

In the *Làng Thái Lan* area, including *Bến Sung* municipality, it is a common practice for villagers to construct houses that incorporate both Vietnamese and Thai architectural elements. These unique houses combine the distinctive Vietnamese architectural framework with a Thai-style roof design featuring open gables. Unlike

traditional Vietnamese houses with concrete roofs, these houses reflect the villagers' preference for convenient and spacious living, reminiscent of their time spent in Thailand. For example, Thin's house beautifully showcases a fusion of Vietnamese and Thai styles. While the 1st and 2nd floors adhere to Vietnamese design principles, the roof adopts a Thai architectural style. Moreover, the 3rd floor is often left open, and the roof is typically made of steel frame and tiled, deviating from the concrete or corrugated iron roofs commonly found in local houses. The main characteristic of this design is the use of stacked tiles with a sloping structure.

Another noteworthy example is Cảnh's house, which predominantly features Thai-style architecture. The roof primarily consists of materials produced in Thailand and imported to Vietnam. Despite having sufficient funds to build a multi-story house, Cảnh chose to construct a single-story dwelling, which is a departure from the preference of Vietnamese people who often opt for multi-story houses when they have enough financial resources.



Figure 57: Hybrid architecture in house construction of VKHH in Làng Thái Lan

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Additionally, Cảnh's house boasts a spacious garden, reflecting his priority of having a large land area, similar to Thai preferences. In contrast, Vietnamese people generally prioritize investing in additional floors rather than purchasing expansive land. Furthermore, the house fence in this area is a sliding fence, similar to the Thai

style, unlike the open-design fences commonly seen in Vietnam. This blending of modern Thai consumer tastes with local culture is evident in the architectural design of these Thai-inspired houses, which distinguishes *Làng Thái Lan* from other places in Vietnam. When a friend from Hanoi visited this location, he experienced a profound sense of uniqueness, remarking that this place is unlike any other in Vietnam.

Ninth, engaging in the next generation

Vietnamese workers employed in Thailand often experience interruptions in their work due to factors such as arrest and deportation, natural disasters like floods, or global events like the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, they frequently travel between Thailand and Vietnam to meet their economic and religious obligations.

Undeniably, Vietnamese workers have been able to accumulate economic surplus, which they repatriate to invest not only in meeting their material needs but also in fulfilling their religious aspirations and expressing their newfound identity. However, living and working in a single country may not allow them to fully realize both their economic and Confucian goals. This was evident during the COVID-19 outbreak when Vietnamese workers were forced to return home for two years. While they were able to reunite with their families and fulfill their religious obligations (Đức-Phúc), they faced financial difficulties due to the loss of income, hindering their ability to meet their material needs. This situation highlights the challenge of simultaneously pursuing both goals.

This dilemma explains why many Vietnamese workers returned to Vietnam to escape the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 but soon made the decision to return to Thailand, despite the closure of borders in the ASEAN region and the associated risks. For example, individuals such as Mr. Cảnh, Mr. Long, Mr. Hong, and Mrs. Hà returned to Thailand within three months of their initial return to Vietnam.

Notably, migrating to Thailand for work has become a growing trend among the children of migrant workers. These children exhibit a preference for seeking employment opportunities abroad rather than pursuing higher education or employment within Vietnam. They often lack the aspiration to continue their

studies beyond the 12th grade, driven by the belief that they can secure jobs with sufficient income to elevate their quality of life and social status within their families and communities.

Indeed, I have observed that many young people in Nhu Thanh district are choosing to drop out of school early and accompany their parents to work in Thailand or seek employment abroad through overseas employment agencies or government-sponsored programs. This trend of early school dropout is becoming increasingly prevalent among the younger generation in Nhu Thanh district.

For instance, Hăng's two children, Nam and Binh, both decided to migrate to Thailand with their parents to work as tailors in Din Deang after completing high school. Similarly, Mr. Cậ's daughter dropped out of the 9th grade to work as a hairdresser in Thailand, reflecting a broader trend among young people to discontinue their education after high school and seek employment abroad.

For Vietnamese migrant workers, leading dual lives has been instrumental in accumulating economic surplus in the host country. They repatriate this surplus to invest not only in meeting their material needs but also in fulfilling their religious aspirations and expressing their identities. This perspective has become the new cultural identity of migrant workers and their subsequent generations in Nhu Thanh district.

Several studies have explored the relationship between religion and remittance, focusing on moral principles, reciprocal obligations, familial ties, and gender identity (Anh, 2016; Anh & Yeoh, 2011; Feen, 2012; Phan & Coxhead, 2019; Pfau & Giang, 2009; Stevanovic-Erdal, 2012; Yeoh et al., 2013). This article is intended to further explore these issues by delving deeper into the multifaceted identities of migrants influenced by Confucianism, thereby contributing to the emergence of a hybrid culture and the establishment of a distinctive place known as *Làng Thái Lan*. Based on the extensive research conducted, this study identifies four fundamental issues and draws important conclusions.

Firstly, migrants' practices involve self-exploitation, hard work, capital accumulation, and remittance to their hometowns, reflecting their economic

capabilities (*tài*), virtues (*đức*), and happiness (*phúc*). Unlike previous research on cultural remittance, it goes beyond the obligation of sending money back to the family and involves the adoption of Thai products, mindsets, and cultural practices (i.e., Thai habitus) by migrant workers in their home country. This hybridization with the local culture constructs a new culture that expands the boundaries of Confucian ideals, particularly in terms of morality (*đức*). As a result, the people in *Làng Thái Lan* have a more distinct way of life, cultural aspects, and mindset compared to other neighborhoods in *Như Thanh* district and surrounding areas.

Secondly, having dual lives enables Vietnamese migrants to enrich their cultural identity and promotes transculturality (Welsch, 1999), creating a “between space” of multiple connections (Banerjee & German, 2010) or “space-in-between” of interweaving between Thai and local culture (Armstrong, 2000). This mixture of cultures showcases the distinctive characteristics of the Vietnamese people, resulting in a new cultural identity (Escobar, 2001) and a hybrid culture. Ultimately, choosing transnational lives allows Vietnamese workers to fulfill Confucian ideals and construct their new identities.

Thirdly, religion, particularly Confucianism, plays a pivotal role in the preservation of culture for international migrants, enabling them to attain their social and cultural objectives through economic success in the informal sector. This aligns with Bourdieu's notion of capital (Erel, 2010) and reinforces the Vietnamese migrants' association with being "good Vietnamese". In Vietnamese society, masculinity holds a dominant position, motivating men to work diligently and exhibit their leadership role within the family by embodying specific qualities (i.e., *trí*, *dũng*, *tài*, and *đức* in Vietnamese) (Anh & Yeoh, 2011). Conversely, femininity in Vietnamese culture underscores moral and social obligations, prioritizing the well-being of the family over individual desires (Anh, 2016). These ideals and social norms, influenced by Confucianism, serve as the impetus for migrants' diligent efforts and self-exploitation, reflecting the moral fabric (*đức*) within their families.

Finally, when examining placemaking processes, it is clear that *Làng Thái Lan* is not a static or homogeneous location (Massey, 2001). Even after Vietnamese migrants voluntarily returned, they and their descendants continued to migrate to

Thailand. This makes *Làng Thái Lan* a locality that extends beyond physical boundaries (Massey, 1994), involving movements of individuals and circulation of ideas and objects (Cresswell, 2014; Kyle & Chick, 2007; Massey, 1994;). The concept of transculturalism emphasizes that *Làng Thái Lan* is a dynamic, progressive, and contested space. The interaction between cultural remittance and local culture has resulted in new place identities in Vietnam, seen in social and cultural aspects, architecture (Mazumdar et al., 2000), and symbolization (Juan, 2005; Kyle & Chick, 2007). Cultural identity is closely tied to place, allowing people to distinguish themselves through everyday practices (Escobar, 2001).

Tenth, the descendants of VKHH celebrate the longevity of their grandparents, showing filial piety (*đức*).

Longevity celebrations are a cherished tradition among the Vietnamese people, reflecting their deep respect and filial piety towards their elders. Rooted in the Confucian principle of "To be grateful to one's benefactor," these celebrations also embody the belief that honoring the elderly brings longevity and societal respect to the younger generation.

As adherents of Confucian thought, both the Vietnamese and VKHH communities place great importance on longevity celebrations for their grandparents and parents. When attending the 80th birthday celebration of Mr. Le Ba Thin's family (VKHH), the author witnessed firsthand the profound significance attached to this occasion. Family members expressed their belief that having a long-lived elder in the family was a great blessing, bringing joy, pride, and prosperity to the descendants.

Sharing the same opinion with the Vietnamese, VKHH attached the great importance to the longevity celebration for the elderly in the family. When the author attended the longevity celebration of Mr. Le Ba Thin's family (VKHH), the author accidentally overheard the conversation between the attending members (who were descendants of the family). The conversation expressed the views that any family of which member lived a long life was a great blessing. The descendants in the family who had the opportunity to celebrate their parents' longevity were to gain more joy and pride (Happiness- Wealth).



Figure 58 and 59: The descendants of VKHH celebrate their grandparents' longevity

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

In the photo 58 and 59, the family's descendants celebrate the 80th birthday of Mrs. Tuong (a local broker) and Mr. and Mrs. Le Ba Thin (VKHH) in Vĩnh Long 1 village, Bến Sung Town, Thanh Hóa Province.

Similar to the Vietnamese way of organization, the longevity celebration by VKHH was organized into two parts. Part 1 of the longevity celebration was organized by the local government with the elderly in the community at the cultural house in Bến Sung Town, with many meaningful activities such as gift giving, awarding certificates to the elderly, cultural and art performance, and poetry reading by the elderly. Part 2: The descendants of VKHH held the longevity celebration for grandparents and parents at home. VKHH practiced the culture of longevity celebration like the Vietnamese, they prepared confectionery and tea to invite the neighbors to join in the fun and congratulate the elderly on good health. The descendants of VKHH wished good words to express their gratitude, hope their

parents and grandparents have a long life, and give some small gifts such as: a shirt, a scarf... to please the grandparents.

Tenth, practice spiritual culture

Đức Ông Temple (also known as Khe Ròng Temple) is situated within the Vĩnh Long 1 neighborhood (Thai Village) of Bến Sung Town (Nhu Thanh), Thanh Hóa Province. The temple derives its name from its location adjacent to a stream called Khe Ròng, which historically provided domestic water to the first settlers in the area.

According to local folklore, during the final years of the resistance against the Ming invaders, King Le Loi, following the plan of Nguyen Chinh, marched into Nghệ An to gather forces before advancing north to confront the Ming army. Among the insurgents under Le Loi's direct command, a general fell ill and passed away in this area. After achieving victory, Le Loi honored those who had fought valiantly against the enemy by constructing Đức Ông Shrine in memory of their contributions to his triumph (Manh Cuong, 2020).

As previously mentioned, Đức Ông Temple was initially known as Đức Ông Shrine. Following the establishment of Nhu Thanh District, the local government encouraged residents, including VKHH members, to contribute funds and labor to expand the shrine into a temple, creating a larger communal spiritual space for the community.

During holidays, New Year celebrations, and full moon days each month, Đức Ông Temple serves as a spiritual sanctuary for VKHH members and local residents. They gather here to burn incense and express their reverence and gratitude towards national heroes, seeking peace and protection in their lives. This practice reflects a fundamental aspect of Vietnamese culture, honoring those who have fought to defend the nation against foreign invaders.

Beyond fulfilling VKHH members' spiritual needs, the practice of spirituality at Đức Ông Temple also strengthens community cohesion. The sacred space fosters a sense of unity between VKHH members and Vietnamese residents, promoting compassion, tolerance, and the shared remembrance of national heroes. Within this

sacred space, distinctions between VKHH and Vietnamese fade away, as all who gather are recognized as children of Vietnam, paying homage to those who have protected their homeland.

Consequently, Đứ́c Ông Temple is not only regarded by VKHH members as a place of spiritual practice but also as a space that reinforces and connects the broader Vietnamese community. The author's observations indicate that interactions within this space are characterized by mutual respect and affection.



Figure 60, 61 and 62: VKHH and the locals practice the spirituality at Đứ́c Ông temple, Làng Thái Lan

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Ancestor worship

The spiritual culture of Thailand is the Buddhist faith, spiritual activities are taken place at temples and involve monks. Therefore, the Thai people worship Buddha; and in their thought, temples and pagodas are very sacred places. The worship of ancestors in the family is not their spiritual culture.

In contrast to the Thai spiritual culture, which emphasizes Buddhism and temple-based practices, Vietnamese spirituality includes a strong belief in ancestor

worship. Vietnamese people believe that individuals possess both a physical body and a soul, which remain connected even after death. Upon death, the soul departs the body and enters the underworld, where it continues to exist with similar needs to those in the physical world (Oánh, 2001).

VKHH members share the Vietnamese belief in the continued presence and influence of ancestral spirits. They believe that these spirits can perceive thoughts, behaviors, and gestures, and intervene in the lives of their descendants in the physical world. Consequently, VKHH members often make offerings to their ancestors and pray for their well-being before embarking on significant life events, such as migrating to Thailand or returning to Vietnam. This belief serves to strengthen the bond between VKHH members and their deceased ancestors, and reinforces the importance of filial piety and family unity.



Figure 63: *The descendants of VKHH burn incense to their ancestors on the wedding day*

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

In contrast to Thai cremation practices, which involve scattering ashes in rivers and worshipping at temples, VKHH members adhere to Vietnamese burial customs. When a death occurs within the VKHH community, the family organizes a funeral ceremony and buries the deceased according to traditional Vietnamese rituals. However, these rituals are often simplified to streamline the process while

maintaining a solemn farewell for the departed. For instance, VKHH may omit customs such as the eldest son walking backward.

After a period of 3-5 years, VKHH members conduct a reburial ceremony. This involves exhuming the coffin, collecting the deceased's bones, and placing them in a smaller coffin or sarcophagus. This is then reburied to provide the deceased with a more permanent and dignified resting place. In the photo 64 and 65, the ancestral tomb of the VKHH community is depicted. The mausoleum grounds have been modernized and well-maintained, reflecting a level of investment and care that is uncommon in this mountainous region. This tomb stands as a testament to the VKHH community's commitment to preserving their Vietnamese cultural heritage, even in a foreign land.



Figure 64 and 65: Mausoleum area for ancestor worship of the Làng Thái Lan

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

The Mausoleum area for ancestor worship holds significant cultural and spiritual importance in Vietnamese society, serving as a sacred space where individuals pay homage to their deceased ancestors through various rituals and offerings. This practice is deeply ingrained in Vietnamese culture and is regarded

as a manifestation of filial piety, a fundamental virtue that contributes to the maintenance of a harmonious social order.

Within the Mausoleum area, an altar is typically present, adorned with incense bowls where families offer prayers and make offerings to their ancestors. Additionally, many families establish shrines within their homes and businesses, providing a dedicated space for ancestral veneration. These offerings and rituals are frequently performed during significant traditional or religious events, such as death anniversaries, the commencement of a new business venture, or when family members seek guidance or support.

6.6 Inter-connectedness between VKHH and the locals: Becoming true Vietnamese

Interconnectedness refers to the manner in which VKHH engage with the local population and the state to express their identity as authentic Vietnamese citizens. Throughout their experiences of living, working, and conducting business in Bến Sung, VKHH have collaborated with locals to participate in economic, cultural, and social activities organized by local authorities. They have also adopted Vietnamese cultural practices and adhered to legal regulations and social norms established by the local community and the state, demonstrating their commitment to assimilating into Vietnamese society.

To prove that we are truly Vietnamese, VKHH has made efforts to participate in many activities in many different fields.

Firstly, VKHH strives to participate in work at local government organizations. VKHH have actively pursued personal development, qualifying themselves to become state workers and officials in non-business sectors such as education, banking, and local government. They work alongside Vietnamese colleagues, fostering a collaborative and harmonious work environment characterized by Vietnamese cultural values. The VKHH community boasts over 26 individuals employed in the education sector at various levels (kindergarten, primary, secondary, and high schools) within Nthur Thanh district. Additionally, 11 VKHH work for the Nthur Thanh District People's Committee, while others hold positions in diverse fields.

These individuals include VKHH who returned home with their families in 1963 and second-generation overseas Vietnamese. Within the professional environment shared with local Vietnamese, VKHH adhere to cultural norms aligned with traditional Vietnamese values. Teachers, for instance, wear the Vietnamese traditional dress (áo dài) during their work at educational institutions. They demonstrate empathy and camaraderie towards their colleagues, uniting and supporting one another. Beyond classroom instruction, they actively participate in school events and extracurricular activities, embodying the work ethic expected of teachers in Vietnamese society. Furthermore, VKHH have embraced traditional Vietnamese office culture. In accordance with Vietnamese customs, gifts and well wishes are exchanged during traditional Vietnamese holidays, Tet (Lunar New Year), and celebratory occasions such as promotions. These gifts may include valuables or monetary contributions. During fieldwork in Bến Sung, the author observed numerous instances of VKHH presenting congratulatory envelopes containing money to colleagues and superiors. Unlike Thai gift-giving practices that emphasize spiritual significance, Vietnamese gift-giving often involves tangible items or cash. By adopting these cultural behaviors in the workplace, VKHH have fostered harmonious and cooperative relationships with their Vietnamese counterparts.

Secondly, VKHH participates in the Women's Union of Bến Sung Town. In accordance with the policy of Như Thanh District regarding the establishment of women's groups within the community, the *Làng Thái Lan* Women's Union (VKHH) was formed. The VKHH is responsible for both mobilizing members to adhere to the guidelines and policies set forth by the Communist Party and the State, as well as providing support for their economic development. Numerous VKHH women have volunteered to participate in the organization, demonstrating the sense of responsibility that Vietnamese citizens feel towards their society.

Becoming a member of the Union not only signifies a citizen's responsibility to the State and its people, but also underscores the value placed on women in society, who are expected to be "capable of national affairs and duteous at housework." The women have initiated local patriotic emulation movements, such as "*building a happy family*" in conjunction with "*Studying and following Hồ Chí Minh's ideology, morality*

and style." They have also encouraged community members to adopt the model of building a family based on the "5 no, 3 clean" criteria: "No poverty, no relatives violating the law and social evils, no domestic violence, no violation of population policy, no children suffering from malnutrition and dropping out of school"; and "Clean house, clean kitchen, clean alley." The women's group has also facilitated communication and provided guidance to households on waste sorting, contributing to the creation of a green, clean, and beautiful community environment.

Furthermore, the VKHH has collaborated with local members to propose ideas and projects aimed at supporting women's economic development. Several models have been implemented to assist underprivileged women in this area, including *túi gạo tiết kiệm* "Raising plastic pigs for saving," "Saving bags," and "Belief breeders." Between 2017 and 2022, a total of 287 million Vietnamese dong was saved, and 31 economically disadvantaged women members received loans for economic development from organizations such as Đông Muoi branch, Xuan Dien, Quarter 3, Hai Ninh, Xuan Phong, Doi De, Hai Tien, Van Thanh, Xuan Lai, Kim Son, and Vĩnh Long 2.



Figure 66: VKHH cooperated with the locals to plant flower pots

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

During the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2021) that affected the Nhu Thanh district, the VKHH actively distributed leaflets, masks, and sanitizers at schools and the Bến Sung market, reaching a large number of local residents. This demonstrated the sense of responsibility felt by these elite citizens and their commitment to protecting the community during the pandemic. It is important to note that all activities undertaken by the VKHH were voluntary and not compensated by the State..

In the context of new rural and civilized urban development, the VKHH has partnered with households in Bến Sung to raise funds and organize members into small groups responsible for planting and maintaining over 6 km of flower roads and 630 flower pots. This initiative has contributed to the creation of a *sáng -xanh-sạch-đẹp* (bright - green - clean – beautiful) urban landscape in Bến Sung. The accompanying photograph depicts a group of women, including Ms. Mui (VKHH) and two other Vietnamese women, tending to flower pots in Bến Sung.

Third, make an effort to participate in youth union activities and become core members of the organization's leadership team. The Youth VKHH, representing the second and third generations, have actively participated in Youth Union movements. Their involvement extends beyond Bến Sung Town, as they have become prominent members of the leadership of Nhu Thanh District's Youth Union. Notably, Mr. Bui Quang Thinh and Hoang Ngoc Binh (second-generation VKHH) have served as core members of the Youth Union's executive board.

As members of the Youth Union, the young VKHH embody the spirit of an advanced Vietnamese citizen, characterized by patriotism, national resilience, a healthy lifestyle, thrift, honesty, positivity, and exemplary conduct in learning, working, and participating in social activities and the defense of the Fatherland. The Bến Sung Youth Union engages in activities that protect the legitimate rights and interests of officials, union members, and teenagers. It organizes activities and creates an educational and training environment for union members and teenagers, contributing to the implementation of political, economic, cultural, social, national defense, and security tasks within the locality.

The Youth Union collaborates with authorities, mass organizations, and economic and social organizations to effectively address youth affairs, foster the

development of the Youth Union, and actively establish trade unions, associations, and pioneer organizations in residential areas. It also participates in the construction and protection of the Communist Party and the government. Through their activities and contributions, the young VKHH have unequivocally demonstrated their identity as elite, patriotic, and responsible Vietnamese citizens dedicated to their community.

Fifth, strive to meet the requirements and become a Party member of the Communist Party of Vietnam in Nhu Thanh district. Additionally, VKHH members have dedicated themselves to career advancement and aspired to become Party members, fulfilling the expectations of Vietnamese society and embodying the qualities of an elite Vietnamese citizen. They have diligently adhered to legal regulations and contributed to the development of organizations and communities, striving to "become Party members, prioritize work, become leaders, and strive for a high position in the State apparatus" (Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS), 2020). Joining the Communist Party of Vietnam not only aligns with societal expectations but also enables VKHH members to demonstrate their loyalty to the fatherland, revolutionary ideals, and unwavering obedience to the assignments and transfers issued by the Party.



Figure 67: Admission ceremony applied by Làng Thái Lan Party cell for VKHH members

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Joining the Communist Party of Vietnam not only aligns with societal expectations but also enables VKHH members to demonstrate their loyalty to the fatherland, revolutionary ideals, and unwavering obedience to the assignments and

transfers issued by the Party. Since 1965, over 37 VKHH members have become Party members. On April 2, 2023, the Party Cell of Bến Sung Town Secondary School admitted two new Party members, including one Vietnamese and one second-generation VKHH member.

The first VKHH member to be admitted to the Communist Party of Vietnam in Bến Sung Town was Mr. Nguyễn Sinh Sắc, a driver for senior military cadres who has served the local government since the 1970s and was admitted to the Party in 1990. The significant number of VKHH members who have become Party members in Như Thanh District, totaling 37, underscores the community's qualifications, capabilities, and unwavering loyalty to the fatherland.

Sixth, VKHH and their descendants actively participate in sports, cultural and artistic exchange activities with organizations and communities in the region. Beyond their contributions to the overall development of the country, VKHH members have actively participated in sports and cultural exchange activities organized by local authorities. These activities aim to foster opportunities for community members to interact, exchange ideas, and strengthen their bonds.

VKHH members have collaborated with local Vietnamese to establish groups and clubs for various age groups, ranging from teenagers to senior citizens. They have enthusiastically engaged in exchange activities with other units within Như Thanh District, including children's football, volleyball, and artistic performances for the elderly.

In football and volleyball competitions, Bến Sung Town, with its core of young VKHH members and Vietnamese players, has consistently achieved high rankings in tournaments organized by the district. Their physical strength, skills, and teamwork have earned them recognition and appreciation from other participating units.

For cultural exchange programs organized by Như Thanh District and Bến Sung Town, VKHH members have actively participated in rehearsals and performances alongside local Vietnamese. Their repertoire includes patriotic songs such as "My Homeland Vietnam," "The Communist Party is my Life," and "Hồ Chí Minh's Song." Dressed in traditional Vietnamese attire, the Áo Dài, VKHH members

have showcased their musical talents and expressed their love for their country, the Communist Party, and Hồ Chí Minh. Their performances have not only demonstrated their artistic abilities but have also served as a testament to their Vietnamese identity and unwavering patriotism.



Figure 68: The elderly VKHH and local Vietnamese participated in cultural performances organized by the Nhu Thanh district in 2022.

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

VKHH members actively participated in physical training and sports activities organized annually by Nhu Thanh District and Bến Sung Town. These events brought together units from across the district. VKHH members collaborated with local Vietnamese to form teams of teenagers and young people who competed and exchanged ideas with neighboring communes.



Figure 69: The youth's football team of Làng Thái Lan won the first prize in 2022

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

These activities provided opportunities for interaction, exchange, and the building of solid relationships among the participating units. The photograph depicts the youth football team from Bến Sung Town, which emerged victorious in the 2022 football tournament.



Figure 70: *The women's football team of Làng Thái Lan in 2022*

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Young VKHH women actively collaborated with local Vietnamese women to establish women's football and volleyball clubs. These clubs participated in competitions and exchanges with other units within the district.



Figure 71 and 72: *The women's volleyball team of Làng Thái Lan in 2022*

Source: Lê Văn Tôn

Sports exchange activities provided valuable opportunities for VKHH and local Vietnamese to interact, build relationships, and demonstrate their solidarity and mutual understanding. These activities fostered a sense of community and strengthened the bonds between VKHH and Vietnamese residents in Bến Sung Town and the broader Như Thanh District.

Over time, politically, *Làng Thái Lan* has transformed from being perceived as a “dwelling of traitors and strangers” to a place where people actively shape a more outstanding, modern, and civilized community. Furthermore, the transculturality process also leads to a new gender identity that does not conflict with the traditional social order of Vietnam, allowing voluntarily repatriated women and female migrants to have more power in expressing their opinions within the family and fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. This expresses a place of gender equality. However, women who have never stayed in Thailand find it challenging to negotiate with the social order and cultural norms to realize their power. This progressive shift in place expands the definition of what it means to be a “good Vietnamese”, based on Confucian ideals.

6.7 Conclusion

The network established by VKHH and migrant workers serves as a crucial form of social capital, facilitating connections between Vietnamese workers and Thailand and creating opportunities for them to live and work in both countries. Over the years, thousands of workers have migrated to Thailand, and the capital they have accumulated has enabled them to fulfill not only their economic aspirations but also their religious obligations.

VKHH and Vietnamese workers have introduced not only economic capital to Bến Sung but also cultural capital, enriching the area with new and contemporary cultural values evident in their daily lives. The simultaneous practice of Vietnamese and Thai cultures has become their defining characteristic and has played a pivotal role in their mobility, enabling them to adapt and thrive in the host environment. Upon migrating to Thailand, they carried with them

Vietnamese traditional customs to maintain their informal way of life, and upon returning to Vietnam, they brought back novel cultural values acquired from the host country, distinguishing themselves from other Vietnamese.

This dual existence has allowed VKHH and Vietnamese workers to fulfill both their economic and religious goals more effectively, a feat that would have been challenging if they had resided and worked in only one location. By incorporating new cultural practices in Vietnam, Vietnamese workers and VKHH have transformed the area into a hybrid or blended space (this aspect will be explored in greater detail in the subsequent chapter).

The socioeconomic contributions of the VKHH community have positioned it as the focal point of Nhu Thanh district, officially designated as Vĩnh Long 1 and Vĩnh Long 2 neighborhoods on the district's administrative map. The area boasts a thriving commercial and business sector, attracting newcomers to live, work, and establish businesses. This influx has led to the dissolution of VKHH's exclusive ownership of the area, and they have embraced cohabitation with Vietnamese residents.

To avoid cultural conflicts with newcomers and local authorities, VKHH has adopted strategies to negotiate with local Vietnamese, preserving both Vietnamese and Thai cultural practices while fostering harmonious coexistence. This approach has enabled them to build and develop their homeland into a more civilized and prosperous region. In everyday life, the prevalence of Thai cultural values has prompted local Vietnamese residents and those living in the area to refer to it as the *Làng Thái Lan* (Thai Village), despite its official administrative designation.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

For a few decades, debates on migrant's identity, culture and placemaking has been centered on five interpretations. **First**, people's and place identity and contesting sites of migrants (Amstrong, 2000; Mazumdar et al., 2000; Escobar, 2001; Kyle & Chick, 2007; Srong, 2010; Massey 2013;); **Second**, sense of place and religious life of migrants (Amstrong, 2000; Mazumdar et al., 2000; Kyle & Chick, 2007; Shamduddin & Ujang, 2008); **Third**, social network and capitals of migrants (Vertovec, 2002; Aguilera & Massey, 2003; Arango, 2004; Chen 2005; Gold, 2005; Juan, 2005; Bagwell, 2008; Trần, 2008; Higuchi, 2010; Belanger et al., 2011; Pierce, Martin & Murphy, 2011; Winkels, 2012; Belanger & Wang, 2013; Thao, 2013; Bartram, Poros & Monforte, 2014; Chae et al., 2014; Nguyen, 2015; Pham et al., 2016); **Forth**, transnational marriage, family and gender issues (Belanger, 2007; Wang, 2007; Truong et al., 2008; Jerneck, 2010; Belanger & Linh. 2011; Kim, 2012; Belanger & Tran, 2013; Belanger et al., 2013; Bich, 2013; Yeoh, Chee & Baey, 2013; Belanger, 2016; Locke, Tam & Hoa, 2014). **Fifth**, remittance and livelihood diversification (Mitchell, 2008; Niimi, Pham & Reilly, 2009; Turner & Schoenberger, 2012; Thao, 2013; Yeoh, Dung & Yi'en, 2013; Nguyen, 2014; Amare & Hohfeld, 2016; Yeoh et al., 2017). However, situated in the context of present glocality, regionalization of ASEAN, multiethnicity, and multiculturalism, previous researches about migrant placemaking were not deep enough to explain the complex phenomena, especially for those who returned to their mother country (Vietnam) and later went back to work in the country where they originally established their roots and/or were born (Thailand). As someone who belongs to two homelands and has a connection to both cultures.

Thus, this thesis is an effort to fulfill the gap of knowledge on transnational migration by applying the concepts of cultural hybridization in progressive placemaking in present Vietnamese migrants' homeland (i.e., in Vietnam); whereas lots of researches have been emphasized to the migrant placemaking "outside" their homeland. This chapter is an attempt to conclude the analysis of

processes of placemaking perceived as a progressive place (Massey, 2013) by conceptualizing the ideas of cultural hybridization. As mentioned, while most of researches focus on making place in the receiving countries, this thesis, vice versa, analyzes Vietnamese migrants placemaking in the sending country by investigating the interconnectedness and mixedness of cultures from outside (i.e., Thailand) with Vietnamese culture since period of collectivization, perceived as *Làng Văn minh sáng tạo* (creatively modern village), and presently, *Làng Thái Lan* (Thailand village). Thus, we can prove that *Làng Thái Lan* or even the places expanding from *Làng Thái Lan* (in Như Thanh district) have been a hybrid place delivering new cultures and new place-based identities a distinctive place of cultural hybridization, migration culture and creativity.

By applying multi-sited ethnography, the researcher trace back to the historical settings of *Làng Thái Lan* and then follow up VKHH's and Vietnamese migrants' social, cultural religious, and economic everyday life practices embedded in the transnational networks of the both countries – Thailand and Vietnam. This approach helps us to understand deeply about multi-levels social phenomena that are relevant to the transnational economy, politics, culture, and religion of those who have “dual lives” connecting between the sending country to the receiving country.

7.1 Major findings and arguments of the study

There are four key issues found in this research. However, I will conclude the findings based on the research objectives (research issues) and followed by the main arguments.

First issue: understanding the place called “Làng Thái Lan” based on power relations

As a **negotiating space**, the place called *Làng Thái Lan* has identified as a hybrid place occupied and defied firstly by Việt Kiều hồi hương (voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese or VKHH) and then by various groups – VKHH and their descendants, local Vietnamese, VKHH descendants who acquired Thai nationality, Vietnamese migrants, and Vietnamese new comers (i.e. businessmen and local authorities).

In relation to local Vietnamese, they have been seen as *người phản quốc* (betrayal people) and/or *người đê quốc* (cooperate with French) colonial invaders). They tried to show that they are patriotic by joining the army to fight with America as a person with special skills such as driving a car, repairing machinery. Especially, as mentioned they have also created *Làng văn minh sáng tạo* expressing their existing ability (gained when they were in Thailand) as an entrepreneurs that were more creative and more civilized than the local Vietnamese. They constructed creative and productive cooperatives producing secondary products such as sugarcane alcohol and buffalo carts. By so doing they did not practice all government-designated cooperative structures and systems. But have created its own method of operation informally by assemblage, converting the capitals taken from Thailand and “*làm đến chết* (sacrifice at work)” for their cooperatives. So, as a production of place, this village is considered as the place of entrepreneurs so-called *Làng văn minh sáng tạo* labeled as **place of creative economy** as mentioned earlier. In addition to showing potentials in combat in the American war and participation in building a national economy at the public level. Moreover, they contested the stigmatized labels condemned by local Vietnamese “*đê quốc* (taking invader side)” by creating the terms “*Keo Khok* (the local Vietnamese living in the upland (meaning in their forest))” and “*Keo Land* (themselves who are living in the lowland (meaning in the city))” in order to differentiate themselves from local Vietnamese in terms of skill in national development.

In relation to the local authorities, VKHH were under the official surveillance, and being observed if they are loyal to Vietnamese nation because they fled to Thailand and some of them were born and grew up in Thailand. Besides, because they were in severe situations of impoverishment and starvation than they could imagine (before repatriation to Vietnam), someones tried to escape back to Thailand and then were arrested and punished by the local authorities. The relationship between government officials and villagers has always been tense and lacking trust, which has led to stress and unease. Although this situation has improved significantly, it has not completely disappeared until today.

Furthermore, after 1996, *Làng Thái Lan* became a downtown, center of the new district called “Nhu Thanh” that was separated from Nhu Xuân district. They faced external forced coming from both market and local officials to sell the land to the new comers – the local authorities and the small and medium entrepreneurs. They have to live together with the new comer Vietnamese, who currently make up about 40-50 percent of the population in this place. So, this place is therefore a collection of various groups, interactions and conflict. However, to be together, VKHH, their descendants and Vietnamese migrants have attempted to build solidarity and concurrently they differentiate themselves from the local Vietnamese and new comer Vietnamese. Regardless, the researcher has seen the effort of VKHH and their descendants, who are international migrants in transforming tense relationships into creative ones through various activities such as the annual village sports competition.

Likewise, in the midst of the 1990s, not long after both countries adopted market-oriented policies through cross-border kinship networks, this village became a center for illegal labor export to Thailand. This placed them in a network of cross-border relationships and brought Thai culture back across the border once again. As a result, the cultural hybridity springs from transnational and wider social interactions. This place, as a in-between space, serves as a connecting and articulating points of cultures between Thailand and Vietnam. Therefore, this place has become a location that exists within a broad relationship. Just like the global culture articulated with the local culture. Thus, power relations here do not limit in the local but also in translocal level. As Massey (2013, p. 143) argued place is constructed through the set of social relations which bind them to wider networks including state and transnational labour market (Massey, 2001).

Based on the study's findings, Vietnamese workers on multinational networks face risks related to their power relationships with Thai government officials, people in the business industry, and competitors. However, being a part of such networks is crucial for maintaining an enhanced quality of life. The ability to continuously live in Thailand results in the adoption of Thai habitus and the blending of Thai culture with Vietnamese culture. And the ability to continuously

participate in the informal economy in Thailand for more than 2-3 decades has allowed them to accumulate various types of capitals, especially economic, social, and cultural capitals, and remit these capitals to *Làng Thái Lan* and its extended villages in Nhu Thanh district, which will be discussed in the next section.

Second issue: the issues working with the unstable boundaries generated by migrant community interpretations of their own new values related to place

Seeing through a social process, *Làng Thái Lan* has never been static, bounded and homogeneous place. But this place is about everyday human mobilities and movement of things and concepts as Kyle & Chick (2007), Messey (2013), and Cresswell (2014), argued. That's the place is considered as locality beyond physical boundary (Messey, 2013). Even though VKHH were at the end of exile but they and their descendants have been still mobile to Thailand as Vietnamese migrants.

Tracing back to period of collectivization, the national borders were closed. Fleeing across borders was almost impossible. But after implementation of *Đổi mới* policy of Vietnam side and the policy *pliean sa nam rop hai pen sa nam kan ka* (changing the batterfield to be the trading field) of Thai government, the transnational kinship, female and neighborhood networks played an important role in sending illegal migrants from *Làng Thái Lan* to Thailand. Furthermore since 2005 visa-free travel policy in ASEAN countries was applied between Vietnam and Thailand. It has been a condition to the almost-free mobilities of people and to progressive placemaking. In this point, I would argue that **mobile life has become a culture** of the people there. The villagers especially the young are unable to make a hope in their life without transnational mobility.

Due to the unstable border, although crossing the border for tourism purposes between these two countries is exempted from a visa for 30 days, the politics and laws of Vietnam and Thailand do not allow illegal border crossing for work purposes. Therefore, they have to use their underground network that is linked to their relatives and close acquaintances for border crossing. This network is managed by Thai women who are married to VKHH or in other words, the fact is that VKHH is not only Vietnamese but also includes Thai women and their mixed-race children. Later, this network expanded to some male brokers.

Maintaining and building this network is essential to sustain the informal economy and provide an important condition for Vietnamese labor to participate in the informal economy. So, in the effort to establish and maintain cross-border networks, this research has demonstrated new values that relate to gender, ethnicity, familiarity, and the need for coordination and cooperation, even when unconventional methods are required within the network, particularly with government officials from both countries, or even between international agents and labor forces. It can be concluded that kinship and Neighborhood networks are the vital condition bringing about the flux of VN migrant mobility.

Thus, the reason why villagers are able and skilled in various aspects is because they go beyond local boundaries and connect to regional and transnational places. Therefore, in the next issue, the researchers will point out the process of accumulating and translating various capital to create their place in Vietnam.

Third issue: the process of capital accumulation, transformation and conversion of Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand that are involved in the construction places in Vietnam

The accumulation and management of diverse forms of capital, encompassing economic, cultural, and social domains, exert a profound influence on the trajectory of social and economic development. The management of economic capital, such as skills, material assets, and technological advancements as well as cultural capital, represented by knowledge, values, and attitudes, facilitates cooperative production. This process necessitates the establishment of social capital, comprising trust, collective consciousness, and positive interpersonal relationships. Social capital serves as a catalyst for resource mobilization and the acquisition of additional capital, fostering reciprocity and trust. This virtuous cycle supports the development of cultural capital, which shapes individuals' cultural consumption and behavior, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

This research shows that migrants' abilities to accumulate, combine, circulate and convert each type of capitals in constructing their place as well as making a better living. As Massey (2001, p. 137) argued capital is a process, not a thing. It can be

conceptualized as a process. What I would like to conclude here is the dynamic and endless meanings of hybrid place has been taking place since VKHH resettlement there – *Làng Văn Minh Sáng Tạo* (creatively modern village) during collectivization era, then *Làng Lao Động Thái Lan* (village of the migrant workers in Thailand) in the period of economic renovation (*Đổi mới*), and presently *Làng Thái Lan* (Thailand village).

In addition, as mentioned previously, they are able and skilled people as entrepreneurs due to connectedness of regional and transnational lives. Because they invest in social relations seen as social capital that can convert to be economic capital. Traced back to the period of resettlement in Vietnam, in the mid of 1960s, VKHH assembled in working in cooperatives, as Chen (2005) found in the forms of mutual obligation, mutual trust, group working, increasing skill level considered as social capital, they transferred their entrepreneurial abilities gained from Thailand to develop their cooperatives in Vietnam. Besides, this thesis also found that presently as a cross-border migrant workers returning to or remit money and culture to their home country in order to build their home and homeland bringing about shifting the new meanings of place. By everyday life practices and symbolizing place, this place is therefore an location that has been redefined through the hybridization of cultures, which will be discussed in the next issue.

By leveraging social capital, communities can enhance economic conditions and promote community development. Furthermore, cultural capital influences individuals' cultural consumption of new values and behavior (Bourdieu, 2007), shaping interactions within a geographical place and fostering a sense of place and belonging. This dynamic interplay between different forms of capital contributes to the overall social and economic development of a society.

Forth issue: Cultural hybridization and identity construction in the placemaking process as well as analyze the related issues pertaining to cultural hybridization, identity constuction and powerful people through the placemaking processes

Apparently, for decades, *Làng Thái Lan* has been defined as a characteristic place of cultural mixedness between Vietnamese and Thai cultures seeing through everyday life practices, symbol motifs, area of the different, distinct that reaffirming

people identity, expressing the mixedness of two cultures. Everyday life practice, for example speaking bilanguages, having everyday life Thai foods, having wedding party in Thai style, new year party in Thai style. Symbols of place such as xum tam (papaya salad or “som tam” in Thai), lac xong (a kind of Thai dessert or lod chong in Thai) many Thai food shops, Thai grocery stores are found there. The physical setting, cultural practices and the social process done at the place. There are the intertwineness between cultural practices of difference and historical significance. As things go, hybrid culture and hybrid identity make their place distinctively.

In these points, I would like to make 3 arguments related to the issues on cultural hybridization and identity construction in the placemaking process

First argument: Làng Thái Lan as a negotiating place, value and identity of voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese (VKHH) and Vietnamese migrants in ancestral country

As Armstrong (2000: 194-5) mentioned, the formation of a place and the diversity of ethnicities are the products of interactions or negotiations between self-definition and the definitions imposed by others. Self-definition is formed through the creation of ethnic identity and the preservation of culture. In this case *Làng Thái Lan* grants the articulation of social relations among various groups (i.e. VKHH and their descendants, Vietnamese migrant, and local Vietnamese and new-comer Vietnamese. In the meantime, *Làng Thái Lan* is also an area of convergence between local, national, and global interests. This means that the Vietnamese identity has been reconfigured in the context of a transnational community.

For more details, it can be interpreted that daily life practices of cultural hybridization done by VKHH and international Vietnamese migrant workers have created a new definition of their cultural value and place-base identity. They have negotiated with the state in terms of being authentic Vietnamese by taking the original values of being Vietnamese defined by the state (i.e., loyalty to the nation, love for the Communist Party, paying taxes, solidarity as one heart for rural development, creating new rural areas), combining them with the new values they have been habitually practiced and learn from Thai culture, and creating a new Vietnamese place-based culture. Although they and their descendants were repatriated, mobile and have dual lives - born/grown up in Thailand or even returned to Thailand as transnational

migrant workers again, they still define themselves as authentic Vietnamese in the definitions of the state as well as in the additional definitions that they have created anew, such as being a selfless person without expecting any returns, not take advantage to others to show their superiority. And most importantly, they strive greatly to participate in building the nation's economy, along with showing an identity that differs from the typical Vietnamese.

Therefore, for them, the power to define Vietnamese identity or the characteristics of Vietnamese people should not belong to the state only. And Vietnamese identity should not be limited to the national border of Vietnam. Rather, it should go beyond that. In other words, local residents can define Vietnamese identity in relation to migration and border crossings, because no matter what kind of Vietnamese you are, you can still participate in the development of Vietnam's society and country, just like Vietnamese people who live in Vietnam. Consequently, the definition of Vietnamese identity should not be narrow-minded. It can be seen that the aforementioned characteristics are the characteristics of the people who have been created by this place. As Kyle & Chick, 2007 argued, place is a reflection of people's identity because the process of placemaking has modified the identity of the people. Therefore, a place helps people create their own uniqueness from others.

Second argument: Dual lives shape the place-making process

It is also a place of strategic religious practices of new identity construction of dual-live migrants. Due to the fact that constructing self-identity cannot be accomplished if one limits themselves to only one place, which in this case is Vietnam. Having two dual lives and being able to move between Vietnam and Thailand allows the people to achieve the Confucianism ideals expressing Vietnamese identities (tai, đức, phúc lộc and thọ - ability, morality, happiness, blessing and longevity). Not at all Confucianism ideals in the traditional way, but through a new interpretation of the people's mindset, combining with the teachings of Buddhism, such as giving without expecting anything in return. The happiness of a family is not solely based on the wife obeying her husband, but rather both parties are equal. By this reason, it is unimaginable for them to live without being in two countries. This idea is similar to Bahabaha's notion (1994) of articulation, that the villagers have

been in the in-between space of sending and receiving countries to create cultural articulation an hybrid identity.

Third argument: This place cultivates a "culture of migration and mobility" through everyday practices and the roles of the actors.

As previously mentioned, since the establishment of the free market after Đổi Mới policy implementation (on Vietnam side) and the policy of transformation of the battlefield into a commercial field (on Thailand side), this place has been developed into a "labor export area to foreign countries" and a cultural hybridization for people, goods, and ideas. The youth who are born and grow up here have the hope of becoming international labor. Nowadays, it is not just going to work in Thailand, but going to Taiwan, Japan, and Korea are also the goals of young people here.

The characteristics of the culture of migration and mobility are closely linked to multilateral network relationships or social capital such as reciprocity, solidarity and trust embedded in kinship and neighborhood networks (Aguilera & Massey, 2003) as well as historical, economic, and ethnic conditions.

Social actors play a pivotal role in shaping the meanings and identities of places. This study examines how VHKK contested the dominant narratives and meanings associated with their village. Through their everyday practices, VHKK members actively engaged in placemaking, modifying the state's collectivization policies and asserting their autonomy. For example, they established their own regulations and practices, known as *làm đến chết* (dedicated to working), which prioritized collective labor and cooperation. This negotiation to dominant structures, particularly in the economic, political, and cultural spheres, exemplifies the tactics of creative and resistant actions employed by marginalized groups (de Certeau, 1984). The transcultural influences of the VKHH members allowed them to transcend societal norms and cooperative's structures and regulations, becoming agents of change.

Through their persistent and innovative practices, the VHKK members gradually transformed the meaning of their place, from *Làng Việt Kiêu hồi hương từ Thái Lan* (village of repatriated Vietnamese from Thailand) to *Làng Văn Minh Sáng*

Tao (creative civilization village). This transformation stands in contrast to the findings of Kerkvliet (2005), who attributed the collapse of collective farming in Vietnam to factors such as insufficient trust among peasants and poor governance. The success of the VKHH in developing a thriving village amidst the failures of other cooperatives highlights the crucial role of human resources, capital, and creative practices in socio-economic development. This study suggests that the agency of social actors can significantly influence the meanings and identities of places, challenging dominant narratives and fostering alternative visions of community.

Fourth Argument: The process of placemaking through the Interplay between transculturality and localism, leading to ASEAN community construction from below

The ASEAN Community, established in 2015, aims to foster a cohesive and prosperous Southeast Asian region. While economic integration and political cooperation are crucial, the foundation of the community lies in the vibrant people-to-people interactions that transcend borders. However, the findings in this research show that interpersonal or people-to-people connections play a pivotal role in shaping the ASEAN identity. Cultural hybridization, facilitated by cross-border networks and the search for a common ASEAN identity, provides platforms for individuals to engage, learn from each other, and dispel stereotypes. Through these interactions, a sense of shared values and common aspirations emerges, fostering a sense of belonging among the diverse ASEAN population, as exemplified by the case of *Làng Thái Lan*.

This research contributes to the notion of "ASEAN from below," which refers to the level of people-to-people relations leading to ASEAN Community construction. This thesis emphasizes mutual economic dependence and cultural exchange at the grassroots level. The cross-border network connecting *Làng Thái Lan* to its neighboring communities is a testament to this phenomenon.

Moreover, people-to-people interaction also promotes mutual understanding and empathy. As found in this research, these interactions contribute to the development of human, social, cultural, and economic capital within the countries involved. This fosters entrepreneurship and a skilled workforce, driving economic

growth and social progress. By fostering people-to-people interaction, a virtuous cycle is created that strengthens the bonds between citizens. It promotes a sense of unity, understanding, and cooperation, which in turn contributes to the stability, prosperity, and well-being of the region.

In conclusion, the construction of the ASEAN Community is not merely a political or economic endeavor but also a human-centered process. By nurturing people-to-people interactions and embracing transculturality and localism, the ASEAN community fosters a shared identity, develops various kinds of capital, and ultimately creates a more cohesive and prosperous Southeast Asia.

Fifth argument: Pertaining to the cultural remittance and hybridization of Confucian practice in placemaking

Over the course of several decades, there have been extensive research studies conducted to examine the correlation between religion and remittance. These studies have primarily investigated various factors such as moral principles, reciprocal obligations, familial ties, and gender identity in relation to remittance (Anh, 2016; Anh & Yeoh, 2011; Feen, 2012; Phan & Coxhead, 2019; Pfau & Giang, 2009; Stevanovic-Erdal, 2012; Yeoh et al., 2013). This article is intended to further explore these issues by delving deeper into the multifaceted identities of migrants influenced by Confucianism, thereby contributing to the emergence of a hybrid culture and the establishment of a distinctive place known as *Làng Thái Lan*. This study, grounded in comprehensive research, elucidates four pivotal concerns and derives significant findings.

Firstly, the Confucian practices of migrants encompass the notions of self-exploitation, diligent work, capital accumulation, and sending remittances to their hometowns. These practices not only reflect their economic capabilities (*tai/trí*), virtues (*đức*), and overall well-being (*phúc*), but also go beyond the mere obligation of monetary support for their families. Migrants also engage in the adoption of Thai products, mindsets, and cultural practices in their home country, establishing a dynamic hybridization with the local culture. This cultural hybridity expands the boundaries of Confucian ideals, particularly in terms of prosperity (*tai*) and moral conduct (*đức*). Consequently, the inhabitants of *Làng Thái Lan* exhibit a more

distinctive way of life, cultural aspects, and mindset compared to other neighborhoods in the *Như Thanh* district and its surrounding areas.

Thus, Confucianism plays a pivotal role in the preservation of culture for migrants, enabling them to attain their social and cultural objectives through economic success in the informal sector. This aligns with Bourdieu's notion of capital (Erel, 2010) and reinforces the Vietnamese migrants' association with being “*người giỏi*” (good people). In Vietnamese society, masculinity holds a dominant position, motivating men to work diligently and exhibit their leadership role within the family by embodying specific qualities (Anh & Yeoh, 2011). Conversely, femininity in Vietnamese culture underscores moral and social obligations, prioritizing the well-being of the family over individual desires (Anh, 2016). For the authors, these ideals and social norms, influenced by Confucianism, serve as the impetus for migrants' diligent efforts and self-exploitation, reflecting the moral fabric (*đức*) within their families.

Secondly, the continuous travel between Thailand and Vietnam by multiple generations since the late 1980s, as well as the back-and-forth travel within one's lifetime over a decade, has resulted in the inhabitants of *Làng Thái Lan* leading what can be described as dual lives. This phenomenon of dual lives not only allows Vietnamese migrants to enhance their cultural identity, but also fosters transculturality, creating a space of multiple connections or a hybridization between Thai and local culture. This amalgamation of cultures highlights the unique characteristics of the Vietnamese people, leading to the emergence of a new cultural identity and a hybridized culture. Ultimately, by opting for transnational lives, Vietnamese migrants are able to uphold Confucian ideals and construct their new identities.

Thirdly, when examining the situation in its place of origin through the process of placemaking, it becomes evident that *Làng Thái Lan* is not a static or homogeneous place, consistent to Massey's (2001) concept of a progressive place. Even after Vietnamese migrants willingly returned, both they and their descendants continued to migrate to Thailand. This expands the scope of *Làng Thái Lan* beyond its physical boundaries, encompassing the movement of individuals and the circulation of ideas and objects (Cresswell, 2014; Kyle & Chick, 2007; Massey,

1994). The concept of transculturalism highlights the dynamic, progressive, and contested nature of *Làng Thái Lan*. The interaction between cultural remittance and the local culture has resulted in the hybridization of culture, leading to the emergence of new place identities in Vietnam, as observed in social and cultural aspects such as architecture (Mazumdar et al., 2000) and symbolization (Juan, 2005; Kyle & Chick, 2007). Cultural identity is intricately linked to place, enabling people to distinguish themselves through their everyday practices (Escobar, 2001).

Finally, over time, politically, *Làng Thái Lan* has transformed from being perceived as a “dwelling of traitors and outsiders” to a place where people actively shape a more outstanding, modern, wealthy. Furthermore, the transculturality process also leads to a new gender identity that does not conflict with the traditional social order of Vietnam influenced by Confucianism, allowing voluntarily repatriated women and female migrants to have more power in expressing their opinions within the family and fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. This expresses a contesting space of gender equality. However, women who have never stayed in Thailand find it challenging to negotiate with the social order and cultural norms to realize their power. This progressive shift in place expands the definition of what it means to be good people, based on Confucian ideals.

7.2 Implications of the study

Amidst the transformation of various places in Southeast Asia into hybrid communities reflecting multiculturalism and diversity, this research **firstly**, implicated to the ASEAN community building still emphasizes the position of the ASEAN-from-below perspective. Therefore, it is important to also give academic position to the ASEAN-from-below perspective, especially in terms of the movement of goods, people, and culture across borders, reducing nationalistic biases, ethnic prejudice and constructing a sense of identity based on diverse definitions of nationhood, as Bhabha (1990) argued that the space of the nation is a "contested space" for constructing new alternatives and social movements of different groups in their daily lives and politics of difference. This results in the construction of a new meaning and new directions, opening up the "unbounded place" to contest the meaning of high/national culture and claiming to be the "local

culture of the nation," (i.e., the villagers in *Làng Thái Lan* defied themselves as alternative authentic Vietnamese), which is not about integrating the localities into the framework of being the "essence of the nation" that reduces various cultures. It is also not about being something else of local culture. However, this is a process of hybridization to create new meaning of place.

Therefore, as Bhabah (1990) argued, in constructing a new meaning of the nation, the sphere of analysis should not be confined to the discourse of nationalism, but should be situated in the locality where it is concealed and spread within the nation itself. This is because localities have a greater sense of citizenship than being at the center. There is also a mix of cultural differences and distinctions (such as gender, ethnicity, and social class) that exist in localities. Moreover, localities are more than just representatives of hierarchy within the framework of nationalism or as counterparts to the state. Therefore, the discourse on the nation requires a "double movement". That is, the nation and the locality negotiating with each other. Furthermore, the discourse is still in the process of cultural formation and social processes that are not based on the centrality of hierarchy. The discourse on social movements can be viewed from both the perspectives of phenomena and socio-economic political science, in terms of protecting the nation's place. Ethnicities attempt to create diverse frontiers in their respective territories (Escobar, 2001).

Secondly to further study developing the concept of building ASEAN Community from below, we should emphasize the importance of elaborating the idea of cultural network. Culture network refers to attitudes, values, and beliefs shared within the historical relationships of economic, social, and group contexts (Hofstede 1980, 1993 cited in Ceci, Masciarelli and Poledrini, 2020). In the case of international cultural networks, it is a network that links social actors who share common foundations. In a horizontal network, it leads to a new form of international creativity and collaboration. It is also a new form of cultural exchange, cultural participation and communication that is democratic and without division. Currently (21st century), the space of cross-border relations is marked by the activities of international networks and cross-cultural networks, which focuses on the interest in mutual cultural dependence (Cvjeticanin, 2006).

Thirdly, the Interplay between transculturality and localism in placemaking. The interplay between transcultural flows and local power dynamics exerts a profound influence on place-based movements and cultural identities (Escobar, 2004). This dynamic relationship is exemplified in the construction of the *Làng Thái Lan*. The genesis of the VKHH involved a complex interaction between transculturality and local forces. While seeking to reconnect with its Thai heritage, the VKHH simultaneously adapted to its Vietnamese context, resulting in a dynamic construct shaped by everyday life practices and interactions. This site of contestation and negotiation became a crucible for the interplay between transculturality and localism. Transculturality empowered the VKHH to transcend the constraints of collectivization. By leveraging economic and cultural capital from Thailand, and constructing social capital and capital management in cooperative production in Vietnam, the VKHH engaged in a localized process with transnational capital flows. This process facilitated the construction of a unique identity that reflected both Thai and Vietnamese cultural influences, embodying a blend of transcultural influences and local experiences.

Finally, through the use of multi-sited ethnography, which tracks the movement of cross-border Vietnamese migrants, this research fieldwork has demolished the limitations of research that divides research sites (bounded sites) by linking various localities of two countries (Vietnam and Thailand) plus one (Laos) and social, cultural, and economic practices in international networks and progressive places. Moreover, with the commitment to fieldwork in the two countries, the researchers have gathered insightful data that reveals the alternative definitions of place and the identity of VKHH and Vietnamese migrants (in fact, Vietnamese people) who do not have a birthplace in Vietnam and move between Vietnam and Thailand more clearly. Thus, the researchers suggest that in developing the idea of ASEAN from-below, the multi-sited ethnography should be used to follow people, goods, policy, discourse, ideas, specific problems and so on across national borders.

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APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR VKHH AND VIETNAMESE WORKERS

**Khoa Khoa học Xã hội, Đại học Naresuan, Thái Lan cộng tác cùng
Đại học Hồng Đức, Thanh Hóa, Việt Nam**

Bảng phỏng vấn sâu dành cho VKHH và Lao động di cư Việt Nam

Đây là một nghiên cứu về quá trình xây dựng cộng đồng của VKHH và lao động di cư, chúng tôi rất mong nhận được sự tham gia hỗ trợ của bạn. Mong bạn có thể bớt chút thời gian và công sức để trò chuyện. Xin chân thành cảm ơn.

Kết quả từ nghiên cứu này sẽ có thể được xuất bản trên tạp chí quốc tế (bằng tiếng Anh), và chúng tôi hết sức sẵn lòng chia sẻ với bạn thông qua thư điện tử. Trong trường hợp đó, vui lòng cho chúng tôi biết địa chỉ thư điện tử của bạn:

Phần I: Phỏng vấn sâu VKHH tại Làng Vĩnh Long, Bến Sung, Thanh Hóa

VKHH trước khi về nước

1. Ông bà đến Thái Lan định cư vào thời gian nào? Và trong bối cảnh như thế nào?
2. Cuộc sống ở Thái Lan có những thuận lợi và khó khăn gì? Ông bà đã có những cách thức nào để vượt qua những khó khăn đó?
3. Tại sao ông bà quyết định hồi hương năm 1960?
4. Những cảm nhận của ông bà khi tàu cập bến Hải Phòng và khi về định cư tại Bến Sung?
5. Những tài sản nào ông bà mang về từ Thái Lan?

Việt kiều hồi hương

6. Những khó khăn Việt Kiều phải đối mặt khi di cư đến Như Thanh năm 1962?
7. Ông bà đã có những biện pháp nào nhằm đối phó với những khó khăn đó?
8. Hãy mô tả về vùng đất Như Thanh vào thời điểm người Việt Kiều về đây 1963.
9. Ông bà đã sử dụng những tài sản mình mang về từ Thái Lan vào phát triển Làng Thái Lan như thế nào?
10. Các kiến thức, kỹ năng mà ông bà đã học được trong thời gian định cư bên Thái Lan, được sử dụng như thế nào khi hồi hương?

11. Ông bà tham gia Hợp tác xã đã sản xuất những gì đóng góp cho quân đội Việt Nam trong thời gian chiến tranh chống Mỹ và cho nhân dân huyện Như Thanh trong giai đoạn 1965-1986
12. Tại sao cộng đồng VKHH luôn đoàn kết, gắn bó?
13. Những kinh nghiệm buôn bán từ bên Thái Lan đã giúp ích cho ông bà như thế nào trong việc phát triển kinh doanh hộ gia đình sau năm 1986 trên đất Như Thanh?
14. Những nét khác biệt rõ ràng về văn hóa, lối sống của Việt Kiều so với người Kinh trong suốt thời gian qua.

Giao thoa văn hóa

15. Điệu nhảy Romvong được Việt Kiều thực hành từ khi nào và được tổ chức vào những dịp nào trong năm? Anh chị hãy miêu tả cảm xúc của mình khi tham gia các sự kiện này.
16. Những món ăn nào của Thái Lan được Việt Kiều chế biến thành món ăn của mình trong suốt thời gian qua? Hương vị và cách làm của những món ăn này có gì giống và khác nhau với món ăn của Thái Lan. Hãy miêu tả.
17. Hàng hóa, nguyên liệu, thực phẩm được vận chuyển từ Thái Lan về Như Thanh như thế nào? Ai là người vận chuyển hàng hóa?
18. Bà con Việt Kiều đã tham gia các hoạt động thể thao, giao lưu văn nghệ với người dân ở các Làng lân cận như thế nào? Ai tổ chức? ông bà có đóng góp kinh phí gì không?
19. Bà con Việt Kiều sử dụng tiếng Thái Lan trong những bối cảnh nào? Khi sử dụng tiếng Thái ở Làng Thái Lan ông bà có cảm nhận như thế nào?
20. Những trang phục, trang sức pha trộn giữa Việt Nam và Thái Lan ông bà đặt may hoặc mua ở đâu? Ai thiết kế? Ông bà thường mặc những trang phục này trong những sự kiện nào? Ông bà hãy nói rõ lý do.
21. Ông bà có thường xuyên xem thời sự, thông tin về đất nước Thái Lan qua những kênh nào? Những thông tin thời sự về đất nước Thái Lan có làm cho ông bà thay đổi cảm xúc trong cuộc sống? Ông bà thường quan tâm đến những lĩnh vực nào?
22. Lý giải về việc có nhiều Việt Kiều treo ảnh vua Thái Lan thứ 9 và bác hồ trong nhà?
23. Hàng hóa, món ăn thái lan được buôn bán trên địa bàn Làng Thái Lan phục vụ cho những nhóm khách hàng nào?

Xây dựng cộng đồng

24. Anh chị hãy mô tả sự thay đổi của Làng Thái Lan qua các thời kỳ tính từ thời điểm 1963. Hãy nói rõ.
25. Hiện nay có bao nhiêu hộ gia đình làm kinh doanh buôn bán hàng hóa Thái Lan?
26. Có bao nhiêu hộ mở hàng quán buôn bán các món ăn Thái Lan?
27. Nguồn khách đến sử dụng dịch vụ ở đây gồm những ai? Ước lượng bao nhiêu phần trăm giữa các nhóm khách hàng đó?
28. Những thiết kế và quá trình xây dựng các cơ sở hạ tầng (điện, đường, trường học, nhà cửa...) trong Làng Thái Lan được bà con thực hiện như thế nào?
29. Hãy liệt kê và miêu tả những sản phẩm nổi tiếng được bà con Việt Kiều sản xuất từ Làng Thái Lan từ quá khứ cho đến hiện tại?

Phần II: Phỏng vấn sâu lao động Việt Nam di cư đến Thái Lan

Thu nhập, tiền gửi, đầu tư

1. Những lý do chính mà anh chị quyết định lao động bên Thái Lan?
2. Những khó khăn mà anh chị phải đối mặt khi mới bắt đầu lao động bên Thái Lan? Nói rõ về những cách thức anh chị vượt qua những khó khăn đó
3. Mỗi ngày anh chị dành khoảng thời gian bao nhiêu tiếng để làm việc? thời gian còn lại anh chị làm gì?
4. Thu nhập bình quân của lao động làm việc bên Thái Lan mỗi tháng? Bao nhiêu trong số đó dành cho tiền anh ở và sinh hoạt? Bao nhiêu gửi về Việt Nam cho gia đình?
5. Số tiền người lao động gửi về thông qua kênh nào?
6. Số tiền gửi về được các hộ gia đình sử dụng đầu tư vào những lĩnh vực nào? Lý do họ đầu tư vào những lĩnh vực đó là gì? Những lợi ích mang lại ngắn hạn và dài hạn là gì?
7. Hiện nay, có những hộ gia đình nào nhờ vào nguồn tiền gửi về và đầu tư có hiệu quả cao, giúp họ ổn định cuộc sống và có thu nhập ổn định.
8. Kinh tế gia đình thay đổi đã ảnh hưởng thế nào đến biểu tượng gia đình, sự tự tin của bản thân?
9. Chất lượng cuộc sống của anh chị được thay đổi như thế nào khi sử dụng nguồn tiền anh chị gửi về?

10. Nguồn sinh kế của anh chị em trong gia đình anh chị có những biến đổi như thế nào khi nhận những sự giúp đỡ bằng các nguồn vốn trợ giúp của anh chị? Hãy nói rõ.
11. Sức khỏe của các thành viên được chăm sóc như thế nào trước và trong khi anh chị đi lao động bên Thái Lan?
12. Có sự thay đổi nào trong việc đầu tư học hành cho con cái anh chị so sánh giữa trước khi đi lao động và khi đi lao động bên Thái Lan?
13. Vai trò và vị trí của cá nhân trong gia đình được thể hiện như thế nào thông qua việc gửi tiền về cho gia đình?
14. Anh chị đã làm thế nào để gắn kết Làng xóm trong thời gian mình đi lao động ở Thái Lan và khi ở nhà?
15. Anh chị có những trợ giúp gì cho anh chị em, bố mẹ trong gia đình hay không? Điều đó giúp anh cảm thấy như thế nào? Cộng đồng có những đánh giá về vai trò của anh trong việc giúp đỡ mọi người trong gia đình?
16. Mạng lưới lao động giúp ích gì cho anh chị trước, trong và sau khi lao động bên Thái Lan.
17. Anh chị đã có những đóng góp, ủng hộ gì cho cộng đồng? Nói cụ thể.
18. Những kiến thức, kỹ năng mà anh chị học được trong thời gian lao động bên Thái đã giúp ích anh chị những gì trong việc mở rộng nguồn sinh kế, thu nhập khi quay trở lại Việt Nam?

Xây dựng cộng đồng

19. Anh chị hãy mô tả những vai trò của Brokers trong việc kết nối người lao động từ Như Thanh vào mạng lưới lao động tại Thái Lan? Ngoài ra họ còn đóng những vai trò nào khác?
20. Động lực nào giúp anh chị có thể làm việc mỗi ngày từ 13 đến 16h khi lao động bên Thái Lan?
21. Ngoài chuyển tiền công lao động về Như Thanh, anh chị còn chuyển những loại hàng hóa nào khác? Lý do anh chị thực hiện việc này là gì?
22. Anh chị hãy miêu tả những thay đổi về mặt nhận thức trong lối sống của mình sau một thời gian dài lao động bên Thái Lan?

Cảm ơn bạn rất nhiều về thời gian và những đóng góp quý báu của bạn./.

Lê Văn Tôn

APPENDIX B**VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES FOR VKHH in 1963****THỦ TƯỚNG CHÍNH PHỦ**

VIỆT NAM DÂN CHỦ CỘNG HÒA**Độc lập - Tự do - Hạnh phúc**

Số: 25-TTg

*Hà Nội, ngày 19 tháng 04 năm 1963***THÔNG TƯ****VỀ MỘT SỐ CHÍNH SÁCH ĐỐI VỚI VIỆT KIỀU MỚI VỀ NƯỚC****THỦ TƯỚNG CHÍNH PHỦ**

Trong ba năm qua, chúng ta đã đón trên ba vạn Việt kiều ở Thái-lan, Tân-đảo và Tân-thế-giới về nước. Với lòng yêu nước, tinh thần tự lực cánh sinh của kiều bào, nhờ sự giúp đỡ tận tình của các cấp chính quyền, đoàn thể và của nhân dân các địa phương, nói chung kiều bào đã ổn định đời sống, tham gia sản xuất, góp phần vào công cuộc xây dựng nước nhà.

Để giúp đỡ kiều bào có thêm điều kiện khắc phục những khó khăn bước đầu khi mới về nước, phát huy tinh thần tự lực cánh sinh, ý chí phấn đấu để mau chóng ổn định đời sống và làm đầy đủ nghĩa vụ của người công dân. Hội đồng Chính phủ, trong Hội nghị Thường vụ của Hội đồng Chính phủ ngày 7-3-1963, đã quyết định bổ sung một số chính sách cụ thể đối với Việt kiều mới về nước như sau:

1. Thanh niên Việt kiều mới về nước, trong thời gian hai năm đầu, được hoãn tuyển vào quân đội thường trực và được miễn tham gia các lớp huấn luyện quân sự tập trung dài hạn, nhưng phải làm đầy đủ nghĩa vụ khác của người quân nhân dự bị, tham gia dân quân tự vệ, làm công tác bảo vệ trị an ở địa phương và ở cơ sở. Tuy nhiên trong thời gian được tạm hoãn, người nào xung phong tòng quân mà có đầy đủ điều kiện thì vẫn có thể được xét tuyển vào vào quân đội thường trực.

2. Việt kiều mới về nước được miễn đi dân công và lao động nghĩa vụ trong năm đầu theo quy định của điều lệ dân công và thông tư về chính sách lao động nghĩa vụ. Hết năm đó, người nào còn gặp khó khăn, đời sống chưa ổn định thì có thể được

Ủy ban hành chính địa phương xét và quyết định tạm miễn thêm một thời gian nữa, nhưng không qua một năm.

3. Việt kiều mới về nước tham gia sản xuất nông nghiệp, sản xuất thủ công nghiệp, được miễn thuế trong một thời gian không quá hai năm kể từ ngày về nước, theo các quy định như sau:

- Việt kiều tham gia sản xuất trong các hợp tác xã nông nghiệp cấp thấp thì được miễn thuế nông nghiệp đối với phần ruộng đất dành lại làm riêng và phần ruộng đất góp vào hợp tác xã.

- Việt kiều tham gia sản xuất trong các hợp tác xã nông nghiệp cấp cao thì được miễn thuế nông nghiệp đối với phần ruộng đất dành lại làm riêng;

- Những tập đoàn sản xuất, hợp tác xã sản xuất nông nghiệp mà thành viên điều là Việt kiều mới về nước thì được miễn thuế nông nghiệp trên toàn bộ diện tích trước đây chịu thuế; còn đối với ruộng đất mới khai hoang, phục hoang thì được miễn thuế nông nghiệp theo thể lệ hiện hành;

- Việt kiều tham gia sản xuất trong các tổ sản xuất, hợp tác xã sản xuất thủ công nghiệp mà phần thu nhập được hưởng còn thấp, đời sống gặp khó khăn, thì được miễn phần thuế lợi tức doanh nghiệp tính trên thu nhập của Việt kiều ấy;

- Những tổ sản xuất hoặc hợp tác xã sản xuất thủ công nghiệp mà thành viên điều là Việt kiều mới về nước thì được miễn thuế lợi tức doanh nghiệp. Trong trường hợp tổ sản xuất hoặc hợp tác xã sản xuất nói trên gặp khó khăn thì Ủy ban hành chính địa phương có thể căn cứ vào đề nghị của cơ quan thuế mà miễn hoặc giảm một phần thuế doanh nghiệp trong một thời hạn nhiều nhất là hai năm;

- Đối với Việt kiều mới về nước còn làm ăn riêng lẻ thì Ủy ban hành chính địa phương cần giải thích, giúp đỡ Việt kiều đi vào con đường làm ăn tập thể. Trong thời gian người đó chưa tự nguyện tham gia các tổ chức làm ăn tập thể thì được miễn thuế nông nghiệp hoặc thuế lợi tức doanh nghiệp như các trường hợp trên.

4. Việt kiều mới về nước được chính quyền địa phương giúp đỡ, sắp xếp việc làm tùy theo khả năng, nghề nghiệp của từng người và điều kiện cụ thể của từng địa phương. Trong thời gian hai năm kể từ ngày về nước, Việt kiều nào gặp nhiều khó

khăn trong sinh hoạt thì được Ủy ban hành chính địa phương xét và trợ cấp để có thêm điều kiện khắc phục khó khăn ổn định đời sống. Mức trợ cấp cụ thể sẽ do Bộ Nội vụ và Bộ Tài chính quy định.

Những chính sách giúp đỡ đối với Việt kiều mới về nước nói ở trên chỉ thực hiện trong thời gian hai năm. Hết thời gian đó Việt kiều sẽ làm ăn sinh sống như mọi công dân khác.

Những chính sách đó thể hiện sự quan tâm giúp đỡ của Đảng và Chính phủ đối với Việt kiều mới về nước. Các Ủy ban hành chính các cấp cần giải thích kỹ những chính sách ấy cho Việt kiều hiểu rõ, làm cho mọi người tin tưởng, phấn khởi, đem hết khả năng và sức lao động của mình để nhanh chóng ổn định đời sống, góp phần xây dựng miền Bắc và đấu tranh thực hiện thống nhất nước nhà.

Các Bộ, các ngành có liên quan ở trung ương có nhiệm vụ hướng dẫn các Ủy ban hành chính địa phương thực hiện tốt thông tư này. Những quy định trước đây trái với thông tư này điều bãi bỏ.

TM. HỘI ĐỒNG CHÍNH PHỦ

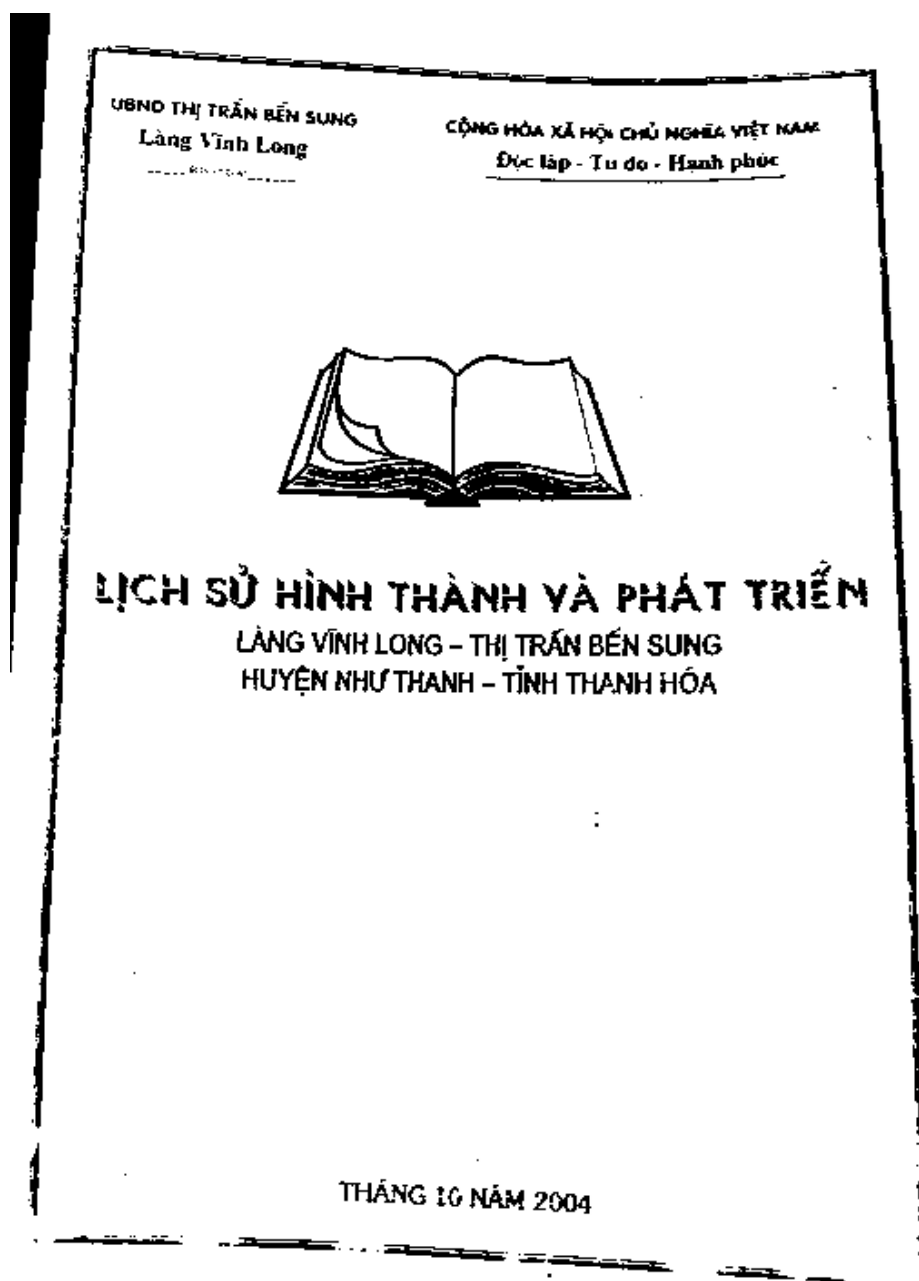
THỦ TƯỚNG CHÍNH PHỦ

(đã ký)

Phạm Văn Đồng

APPENDIX C

PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE OF BẾN SUNG TOWN, VĨNH LONG VILLAGE, 2004



UBND HUYỆN NHƯ THANH
THỊ TRẤN BẾN SUNG
Làng Vĩnh Long

CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM
Độc lập - Tự do - Hạnh phúc

LỊCH SỬ HÌNH THÀNH VÀ PHÁT TRIỂN LÀNG VĨNH LONG - THỊ TRẤN BẾN SUNG

Vĩnh Long là 1 làng được hình thành cách đây 40 năm. Hiện nay Vĩnh Long là 1 trong sáu làng của thị trấn Bến Sung, nằm giữa trung tâm huyện lỵ Như Thanh, trải dài từ cầu Khe Rồng đến cầu Vĩnh Lợi dọc theo quốc lộ 45. Khởi đầu từ cuối năm 1963 đến tháng 2 năm 1965 Vĩnh Long tập hợp những bà con Việt Kiều yêu nước từ Thái Lan về theo tiếng gọi thiêng liêng của tổ quốc. Họ đã được chia đất làm nhà sinh cơ lập nghiệp tại đây, so với quê gốc, Vĩnh Long được coi như là quê hương thứ hai vậy. Dù là người của hàng chục tỉnh thành trong cả nước đủ Bắc, Trung, Nam quy tụ lại nhưng bà con Vĩnh Long đã 1 lòng đoàn kết, phát triển kinh tế, góp phần chống Mỹ cứu nước và xây dựng quê hương mỗi ngày càng giàu đẹp.

Từ cuối năm 1996 đầu năm 1997 huyện Như Thanh được thành lập và Vĩnh Long trở thành trung tâm huyện lỵ thì nhiều cán bộ huyện và bà con nơi khác đến sinh sống trên địa bàn làng tạo thành 1 cộng đồng dân cư mới với nhiều dân tộc cùng phong cách sinh hoạt đa dạng càng phát huy thêm truyền thống tốt đẹp của quê hương làng xóm Việt Nam. Trên bước đường xây dựng chủ nghĩa xã hội, công nghiệp hóa, hiện đại hóa đất nước, Vĩnh Long đang ra sức tạo dựng 1 cuộc sống ấm no hạnh phúc, văn minh làm cơ sở phấn đấu thành 1 làng văn hóa mẫu mực.

I. VAI NET VỀ VỊ TRÍ ĐỊA LÝ, DIỆN TÍCH VÀ DÂN CƯ VINH LONG

Làng Vinh Long hình thành trên 1 quả đồi lớn có độ dốc thoải thềm, có Khe Róng chảy qua bao quanh phía Tây và phía Nam. Vinh Long không có ruộng nước, cũng không có rừng. Tổng diện tích đất đai Vinh Long là 47,7ha trong đó đất canh tác và vườn tạp là 20ha, còn lại là đất chuyên dùng, đất xây dựng và đất giao thông, đất thổ cư khoảng trên 1ha.

Vinh Long phía Bắc giáp làng Vinh Lợi.

Phía Tây giáp làng Đông Long

Phía Đông giáp làng Hải Ninh và trụ sở cơ quan huyện

Phía Nam giáp Khe Róng.

Tổng số dân có 217 hộ với 862 nhân khẩu

Trong đó: Có 417 nam và 445 nữ.

Có 46 hộ cán bộ công chức, có 12 hộ có người hưu trí mất sức.

Vinh Long có 4 dân tộc anh em sinh sống gồm: Thổ, Kinh, Mường, Thái với các dòng họ sau: Họ Nguyễn, Họ Lê, Trần, Võ, Quách, Hàn, Phạm, Phan, Trương, Đoàn, Đỗ, Hoàng, Hà, Dương, Hồ, Ngô, Lương, Đậu, Vi, Bùi, Vũ.....

Trước năm 1996 Vinh Long chỉ có hơn 100 hộ bà con Việt Kiều từ Thái Lan về nhưng sau khi trở thành 1 làng trong thị trấn Bến Sung huyện lỵ Như Thanh thì số hộ dân được bổ sung thêm và tăng lên gấp đôi. Hơn 1/3 số hộ là công chức, cán bộ, giáo viên, y bác sĩ. Bản chất của dân làng Vinh Long là yêu nước, ham học, ham làm và sống hòa thuận, tương thân tương ái trong cộng đồng dân cư. Ở Thái Lan về bà con mang theo nhiều ngành nghề truyền thống như may mặc, mộc, nghề chế biến thức ăn, nghề làm các loại bánh, nghề cơ khí, nghề gò hàn, nghề buôn bán kinh doanh, nghề xây sát..... Những nghề này đã giúp bà con có việc làm và ổn định cuộc sống sau này.

Trên địa bàn Vinh Long hiện nay có đóng trụ sở các cơ quan Huyện ủy, UBND huyện Như Thanh, viện kiểm sát, Tòa án, kho bạc, trường THCS Dân tộc nội trú, Cơ quan quân sự huyện và công an huyện.

II. KHÁI QUÁT QUÁ TRÌNH HÌNH THÀNH VÀ PHÁT TRIỂN CỦA LÀNG VINH LONG

Từ cuối năm 1963 đến tháng 2 năm 1965 bà con Việt Kiều tư Thái Lan hồi hương lần lượt được Tỉnh Thanh Hóa và huyện Như Xuân đưa về mảnh đất giáp Khe Rông này lập nghiệp. Ban đầu tổng số có 62 hộ gồm trên 300 nhân khẩu. Trách nhiệm quản lý bà con được Đảng ủy và UBND xã Vinh Hòa cùng huyện Như Xuân lúc đó giao cho 5 Đảng viên do ông Nguyễn Ngọc Xô làm bí thư chỉ bộ và các ông:

Bùi Văn Hòe.

Đậu Bá Thiệu.

Trịnh Ngọc Thuộc.

Nguyễn Thanh Khâm.

Buổi đầu để chuẩn bị lập HTX thì ông Bùi Văn Hòe phụ trách nông hội cùng chỉ bộ Đảng đứng ra chia đất cho bà con làm nhà ở, đồng thời giao đất ở Gò Tượng, Bãi Sậy cho bà con nhanh chóng bắt tay vào sản xuất hoa màu, khoai, sắn.

Vinh Long lúc bấy giờ là 1 khu rừng hoang vu rậm rạp, còn nhiều cây Lim to, cây cổ thụ lớn chỉ có 1 lối mòn trâu đi từ Khe Rông vào làng Đồng Bối (Vinh Lợi bây giờ). Thỉnh thoảng 4h chiều đi qua Vinh Long vào Eo Gắm còn được thấy Hồ ngồi chờ. Thế mà chỉ vài tháng sau, Vinh Long đã có nhà cửa khang trang dù chỉ là tranh tre nửa lá, vườn tược đã lên xanh rau màu, đường đi lại thẳng, sạch. Mỗi hộ 1500m² đều tấp tểnh như kê ô. Với bàn tay cần cù sáng tạo bà con Vinh Long sau nhiều năm lưu lạc quê người đã bước đầu tạo dựng nên 1 cuộc sống đầy hứa hẹn trên mảnh đất của tổ quốc Việt Nam yêu quý.

Sau khi cán bộ chủ chốt được đi thăm quan các nơi ở Thạch Thành và được đi dự đại hội tổng kết của Việt Kiều toàn miền Bắc thì tháng 5 năm 1965 tổ chức lập HTX Nông nghiệp lấy tên là Vinh Long. Ghép tên xã lúc đó là Vinh Hòa và Khe Rông (Long Khê) lại với nhau thành Vinh Long, ý mong muốn mảnh đất này sẽ là 1 con rồng vươn lên mãi mãi. Qué

Hương mới của bà con từ nay đã thật sự có tên trên bản đồ địa chính huyện Như Xuân.

Ban quản trị đầu tiên do: Ông: Nguyễn Ngọc Xô làm chủ nhiệm.
 Ông: Trịnh Ngọc Thước làm phó.
 Ông: Đậu Bá Thiệu làm bí thư.
 Ông: Trần Hữu Phước làm kế toán

Thời gian này bà con làm lao động nông nghiệp trồng ngô, khoai, sắn để tự túc thêm ngoài số lương thực nhà nước cấp. Làm chung, giờ giấc theo tiếng kèn hợp tác, ăn chung chia theo công điểm lao động. Trẻ em được đến trường hòa nhập với các bạn bè lân cận. Các cụ già ở nhà làm vườn, trồng cháu và giúp cõm nước. Cứ thế sau hơn 1 năm do yêu cầu của cuộc sống và để phân công lao động hợp lý hơn, HTX đã lập thêm nhiều tổ ngành nghề khác ngoài trồng trọt ra như làm mỳ sợi, làm đậu phụ, may mặc, xay xát, vận chuyển xe trâu. Đây cũng là 1 cách giải quyết đa dạng hóa công ăn việc làm để tăng thu nhập cho bà con.

Từ đầu năm 1966 HTX chủ trương trồng Mía ở Gò Tượng và khai được phép huyện Như Xuân, Đầu năm 1967 HTX bước vào công nghiệp hóa: ép mật và nấu rượu mía. Thời gian này ông Xô đã được điều lên xã Vinh Hòa làm phó chủ tịch và ông Thước đã sang HTX mua bán của xã nên ở Vinh Long. Ông: Bùi Văn Hòe làm chủ nhiệm.

Ông Đậu Bá Thiệu làm bí thư.

Ông: Ngô Văn Thanh làm phó chủ nhiệm.

Ông: Trần Hữu Phước làm kế toán.

Vài năm sau HTX lại mở rộng làm thêm Rượu sắn. Các đội thanh niên phải lên tận Bãi Trành để đưa sắn về. Nhờ chuẩn bị kỹ khâu nguyên liệu, máy móc dụng cụ chuyên dùng và kỹ thuật viên cùng nhân công lành nghề nên sau 1 thời gian ngán rượu Vinh Long đã nổi tiếng ngon gấu xa. Công nghệ làm rượu Mía, rượu Sắn khá phức tạp nhưng bà con Vinh Long do khéo tay và hay làm, ham học hỏi nên sớm nắm bắt được quy trình sản xuất có chất lượng và hiệu quả. Trong thời gian đó rượu Vinh Long đã tung ra thị trường bán và đã cung cấp liên tục cho công ty được và các

HTX trong huyện. Rượu Vinh Long cũng đã không thể thiếu trong các cuộc liên hoan mừng chiến thắng và đại hội báo công, mừng công hàng năm của các cơ quan huyện Như Xuân. Với lãi suất 40%, Rượu Vinh Long đã là nguồn tăng thu nhập cho bà con lao động. Đây chính là giai đoạn phồn vinh nhất của HTX thủ công nghiệp Vinh Long. Trong thời gian này Vinh Long đã được Huyện Như Xuân và ban liên hiệp HTX thủ công nghiệp Tỉnh Thanh Hóa tặng nhiều bằng khen và phần thưởng xứng đáng. Và cũng trong thời gian này giặc Mĩ điên cuồng leo thang mở rộng chiến tranh ra miền bắc. Chúng ném bom Hàm Rồng, Lạch Trường rồi dần dần cả Khe Rồng Vinh Long nữa làm cho 2 người dân vô tội thiệt mạng. Bà con Vinh Long lúc đó cùng với nhân dân cả nước lại phải gánh thêm 1 trách nhiệm nặng nề là vừa phải đảm bảo sản xuất vừa phải sẵn sàng chiến đấu bảo vệ tổ quốc. Đội dân quân ngày đêm luyện tập trực chiến. Các tầng lớp thanh niên, trung niên, các đội xe trâu được quân sự hóa, trang bị vũ khí, luôn luôn cảnh giác ứng chiến kịp thời khi cần thiết. khắp nơi đào hào giao thông, hầm cá nhân và làm lán trại ẩn nấp, sơ tán ông bà già, trẻ em. Tinh thần đánh Mỹ sục sôi. Dân làng không tiếc sức người, sức của, 1 lòng chi viện cho Miền nam và bảo vệ miền Bắc xã hội chủ nghĩa. Thanh niên nô nức ghi tên tình nguyện vào bộ đội, thanh niên xung phong sẵn sàng chiến đấu hiến dâng cả máu cho sự nghiệp bảo vệ tổ quốc vĩ đại của toàn dân tộc. Trong HTX mỗi người 1 việc ai cũng muốn đóng góp thật nhiều cho đất nước. Các đội xe trâu không kể ngày đêm lo vận chuyển thóc gạo, đạn dược cho bộ đội ăn no đánh thắng và bảo đảm cuộc sống hàng ngày cho cán bộ công nhân viên. Nào Tứ Trụ (Triệu Sơn), Rừng Thông (TP Thanh Hóa), ngã Ba Chè (Thiệu Hóa) nào Xuân Du, Thanh Kỳ, Yên Cát... Bất cứ nơi đâu khi cần là đội xe trâu hăm hở làm nhiệm vụ. Hàng nghìn tấn hàng đã đi qua trên các ngã đường. Ăn trên xe, ngủ trên xe, lóc cóc theo đường mấp mô trâu đi mà vẫn vui như mùa xuân trẩy hội. Tổ xay xát cho lương thực nhiều hôm phải làm thêm giờ, thêm ca để có đủ gạo cung cấp theo yêu cầu. Trong làng, đêm đêm dưới ánh đèn măng xông, thanh thiếu niên vẫn tổ chức văn nghệ, múa nháy, tiếng hát át tiếng bom, càng nâng cao khí thế chiến thắng.

Sang năm 1973, cuộc kháng chiến chống Mỹ bước vào giai đoạn quyết liệt, lương thực cần cung cấp nhiều cho tiến tuyến, nên lúc bấy giờ, mía, sắn rất cần thiết cho sản xuất đường và khẩu phần ăn hàng ngày, nên cấp trên không cho Vĩnh Long chung cất rượu mía, sắn nữa. HTX Vĩnh Long được chuyển dần lên HTX TCN cấp cao và tách ra thành 3 HTX mới: 1 HTX may mặc Minh Tiến (Nhập với Bến Sung), 1 HTX vận chuyển xe trâu Vĩnh Tiến (nhập với Bến Sung) và 1 HTX với gạch đan lát Vĩnh Long. Mỗi HTX có 1 ban quản trị riêng. Ở HTX Vĩnh Long, ông Bùi Văn Hòa làm chủ nhiệm, ông Ngô Văn Thanh làm phó, chị Hoàng Thị Quế làm kế toán và ông Giảng cán bộ Miền nam tập kết về hưu làm Bí thư.

Tiếp đó từ 1976 đến 1978: Ông Phạm Phú Long làm chủ nhiệm, ông Ngô Văn Thanh làm phó, ông Ngô Văn Trọng làm kế toán và ông Nguyễn Văn Mong làm bí thư.

Từ 1975 - 1979 các cơ quan của huyện Như Xuân sơ tán về đóng ở Vĩnh Long được dân làng giúp đỡ nhiệt tình. Đến năm 1981 xóa bỏ bao cấp, mỗi HTX phải tự lo lấy công ăn việc làm, tạo thu nhập bảo đảm cuộc sống cho xã viên. Đây là giai đoạn đầy khó khăn thử thách nhưng bà con vẫn đồng tâm nhất trí vượt qua được.

Từ năm 1979 đến năm 1984: Ông Phạm Phú Long làm chủ nhiệm, ông Nguyễn Tấn Thành làm phó, chị Nguyễn Thị Định làm kế toán và ông Nguyễn Văn Mong làm bí thư.

Đến năm 1987 thì giải thể toàn bộ. Bà con Vĩnh Long với ngành nghề sẵn có từ trước lo tạo dựng lấy cuộc sống của riêng mình. Mọi hoạt động có phần lắng xuống nhưng tinh thần yêu nước, ước nguyện đi theo Đảng trên con đường xây dựng CNXH như Bác Hồ đã chọn thì không hề thay đổi.

Từ năm 1987 đến năm 1989: Ông Hoàng Đức Toàn làm chủ nhiệm, ông Nguyễn Tấn Thành làm phó, ông Nguyễn Văn Đước làm bí thư và ông Trần Hữu Phước làm kế toán.

Bước vào thời kỳ đổi mới, từ năm 1990 thì ông Hoàng Đức Toàn làm ruộng bản và ông Nguyễn Văn Đước làm bí thư. Sau đó, ông Nguyễn Quang Phú thay ông Đước và từ năm 1995 - 1998 thì ông Toàn kiêm luôn

cả trưởng bản và bí thư. Kể đó từ 1998 đến nay thì ông Lê Văn Thìn làm trưởng thôn và ông Toàn vẫn giữ cương vị bí thư. Trong một thời gian dài gần 30 năm trước năm 2000 chi bộ Vinh Long chỉ kết nạp thêm được 1 Đảng viên và từ năm 1999 – 2001 thì kết nạp thêm được 3 Đảng viên mới. Số đảng viên cũ dần dần già yếu, số đảng viên mới chuyển đến tăng thêm nên chi bộ vẫn nắm giữ được chức năng lãnh đạo và quản lý địa phương. Hiện nay chi bộ có 7 Đ/c vẫn sinh hoạt đều đặn và chỉ đạo, tổ chức, lo toan mọi việc cho xóm làng. Các đoàn thể thanh niên, phụ nữ, nông dân, cựu chiến binh, người cao tuổi được củng cố và hoạt động thường xuyên có hiệu quả. Ban công tác mặt trận, đội dân quân vẫn có những đóng góp tích cực trong đại khối đoàn kết toàn dân và giữ gìn an ninh trật tự địa phương.

Từ năm 1990, một số bà con trong làng đi làm ăn xa có thu nhập khá nên đã cải thiện được cuộc sống gia đình. Vào cuối năm 1996 đầu 1997, huyện Như Thanh được thành lập, trụ sở huyện đóng tại Vinh Long, nhất là từ khi có quy hoạch thị trấn thì một số vườn tạp được chuyển thành đất ở nhường lại cho cán bộ huyện, công chức và dân nơi khác đến niên đời sống dân làng và bộ mặt thôn bản đã đổi mới khác hẳn trước. Nhà cao tầng, nhà mái bằng mọc lên rất nhanh. Các hộ mua xe ô tô tải ngày càng nhiều và các dịch vụ cũng được mở rộng đa dạng. Hơn nữa nhờ được vay vốn ngân hàng, vốn tự có của các đoàn thể để phát triển sản xuất, xóa đói giảm nghèo nên các hoạt động kinh tế ngày càng nhộn nhịp, đời sống nhân dân được nâng lên rõ rệt.

III. NHỮNG ĐÓNG GÓP CỦA BÀ CON VINH LONG TRONG KHÁNG CHIẾN CỨNG NHƯ TRONG XÂY DỰNG HÒA BÌNH

Số người tham gia bộ đội đánh Pháp, đánh Mỹ và các thời kỳ sau 1975 có 71 người và 3 thanh niên xung phong. Trong kháng chiến nhân dân Vinh Long đã ra sức chi viện cho tiền tuyến với khẩu hiệu “thóc không thiếu 1 cân, quân không thiếu 1 người”. Thanh niên nô nức ghi tên tình nguyện vào bộ đội, thanh niên xung phong. Xã Viên hăng hái sản xuất làm ra nhiều của cải và đi dân công phục vụ chiến trường. Dân quân trực

chiến, đào hầm hào giao thông, giải quyết hậu quả của bom đạn, sơ tán kho tàng. Đội xe trâu tích cực vận chuyển lương thực, đạn dược và vật liệu cho bộ đội và các cơ quan huyện. Các tổ xay xát, vôi gạch đã cố gắng có nhiều sản phẩm đáp ứng đủ yêu cầu. Cả làng thi đua lập nhiều thành tích ủng hộ kháng chiến, bảo đảm chính sách hậu phương quân đội, giúp đỡ những gia đình liệt sĩ thương binh, gia đình quân nhân. Do vậy nhiều cá nhân và gia đình đã được chính phủ và quân đội tặng nhiều huân huy chương cao quý ghi nhận công lao.

Hiện nay ở làng có 13 liệt sĩ, 7 gia đình có công với cách mạng, 6 bà mẹ liệt sĩ còn sống, 7 thương bệnh binh, 30 gia đình có huân huy chương các loại và 53 quân nhân xuất ngũ trở về. Nhiều liệt sĩ hy sinh ngoài chiến trường đã để lại tấm gương dũng cảm rất đáng tự hào. Có bà mẹ sẵn sàng cho 2,3 người con lên đường làm nhiệm vụ. Có nhiều quân nhân đã đóng góp sức mình cho cách mạng các nước bạn: Lào, Campuchia. Có bà mẹ có 2 liệt sĩ.

Sau ngày 30 tháng 4 năm 1975 đất nước thống nhất, với niềm vui chiến thắng. 3 HTX Vinh Tiến, Minh Tiến và Vinh Long đã có nhiều đóng góp tích cực cho công cuộc hàn gắn vết thương chiến tranh và xây dựng đất nước. Vinh Long khi đó đã sản xuất gạch, vôi đáp ứng nhu cầu xây dựng của huyện Như Xuân. Một tổ khai thác đá, một đội làm gạch đã lên Yên Cát sản xuất vật liệu để xây trụ sở của cơ quan huyện. Đội xe trâu cũng ở lại ngày đêm để chở đất, chở cát, chở gạch phục vụ công trường. Hàng nghìn khối đất đá, hàng trăm vạn viên gạch đã đáp ứng được nhu cầu xây dựng. Nhờ vậy mà chỉ trong 2 năm rưỡi với điều kiện khó khăn lúc bấy giờ, cuối năm 1979 các cơ quan ban ngành huyện Như Xuân đã được từ Vinh Long chuyển lên đóng tại Yên Cát trong những dãy nhà mới xây khang trang đẹp đẽ.

Sẽ là thiếu sót lớn nếu không nói đến những đóng góp đáng kể khác của bà con Vinh Long về mặt văn hóa ẩm thực, trang phục và phong cách sinh hoạt trong những năm 1960 - 1970 - 1980 của thế kỷ trước. Ở mảnh đất vùng sâu vùng xa khi họ cô gầy do quan Châu quản lý ngày xưa, việc

bà con Việt Kiều ở Thái Lan về lập nên 1 xóm nhỏ nửa phố, nửa làng lạ mắt đã là 1 ấn tượng sâu sắc cho cư dân nơi đây. Bà con Việt Kiều về lại mang theo những của hiếm lúc bấy giờ là Radiô, cátset, đài bán dẫn, máy hát, máy ảnh, máy khâu và xe đạp nhiều kiểu dáng đẹp để đã làm phong phú thêm cuộc sống vật chất và tinh thần ở nơi heo lánh này.

* *Về ăn:* Lại thêm việc du nhập những món ăn mới ngon miệng như chè lạc soong, thập cẩm, canh cà thị và cả cách ăn bún với rau, nước lèo khác với cách ăn truyền thống như bún chả, bún riêu cua.

* *Về mặc:* Thi trước kia bà con nơi đây chỉ biết mua quần áo may sẵn của mậu dịch, bách hóa, giờ đây đã có các tiệm may mở ra với các loại vải bền đẹp, mốt mới nổi tiếng như tiệm may: Chị Mót, chị Thanh, chị Nguyệt với các loại trang phục nữ và ông Nhung, ông Kí với trang phục nam. Có thể nói bà con Vĩnh Long về đây đã đem theo những nét đẹp văn hóa mới bổ sung thêm cho truyền thống văn hóa ngàn xưa của các dân tộc.

IV. ĐỜI SỐNG KINH TẾ - VĂN HÓA - XÃ HỘI CỦA LÀNG VĨNH LONG HIỆN NAY

- Dân Vĩnh Long đều có vườn nhưng đất xấu, khô hạn, giá trị kinh tế kém. Số dân sống về nghề trồng trọt chăn nuôi không nhiều chỉ chiếm khoảng 25%. Số hộ buôn bán, kinh doanh ăn uống giải khát, vật liệu xây dựng và tạp phẩm, làm dịch vụ các loại ngày càng tăng rải dọc theo quốc lộ 45 chiếm khoảng 25%. Số hộ là cán bộ, công chức, giáo viên, y bác sĩ chiếm 35%, còn nữa là hưu trí mất sức và 1 số hộ làm ngành nghề khác

Nói chung đời sống nhân dân tuy có được cải thiện nhưng chưa cao còn ở mức trung bình là phần lớn. Thu nhập bình quân đầu người khoảng 250.000đ/tháng. Nhiều con em của làng đi làm ăn xa đã thành đạt nhờ trí tuệ và tài năng đã và đang có nhiều cống hiến cho đất nước. Hiện nay làng có 32 nhà cao tầng (14%) 65 nhà mái bằng (30%) 116 nhà cấp bốn (54,5%) và 4 nhà tranh tre (1,5%). Trong làng có 1 xe ca chở khách, 21 xe ô tô tải, 1 xe công nông, 4 xe trâu kéo, 2 máy húc, 2 máy cày, 2 máy chế biến gỗ. Cả làng không còn hộ đói, chỉ còn 3 hộ nghèo.

100% hộ dân có điện lưới sinh hoạt và phương tiện nghe nhìn. Nhiều gia đình có xe máy các loại. 100% hộ dân được dùng nước sạch từ giếng khơi và giếng khoan. Con em trong làng đến độ tuổi tất cả đều được tới trường từ Mầm Non đến THPT.

Số học sinh tốt nghiệp THPT thi đỗ vào Đại Học, Cao Đẳng, Trung cấp, Trường dạy nghề năm nào cũng có. Hiện nay làng đã có 5 kỹ sư, 21 đại học, 10 cao đẳng, 15 trung cấp và nhiều con em đang theo học các trường chuyên nghiệp trong cả nước.

Chi hội khuyến học của làng hàng năm đã bỏ ra 1 triệu đồng để khen thưởng các học sinh giỏi, học sinh tiên tiến, xuất sắc, các cháu thi đậu Đại Học, Trung cấp và động viên các gia đình nghèo ham học vượt khó tạo nên 1 nét mới trong hoạt động văn hóa giáo dục.

Hiện nay làng có 54 cán bộ ban ngành của huyện, 50 giáo viên, 5 y bác sỹ và 2 cán bộ Thị trấn.

Làng Vĩnh Long cùng với cả thị trấn được công nhận phổ cập THCS.

Cùng với sự phát triển về kinh tế và văn hóa, mọi hoạt động trong làng càng ngày càng có nhiều tiến bộ. Từ việc vui đến việc buồn đều theo nếp sống mới: Tổ chức gọn nhẹ, tiết kiệm văn minh. Công tác dân số - Kế hoạch hóa gia đình, công tác vệ sinh môi trường, an toàn giao thông, phòng chống tội phạm, bài trừ tệ nạn xã hội, công tác xóa đói giảm nghèo, làm từ thiện và giữ gìn an ninh trật tự thôn bản đã được chi bộ, chính quyền và các đoàn thể trong làng hết sức coi trọng và có chương trình hoạt động cụ thể. Tổ công tác Mặt trận và tổ hòa giải của làng đã và đang hoạt động có hiệu quả.

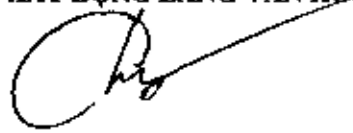
Cuộc vận động toàn dân đoàn kết xây dựng đời sống văn hóa ở khu dân cư do ủy ban trung ương mặt trận tổ quốc phát động được dân làng nhiệt tình hưởng ứng kết hợp với các phong trào phấn đấu xây dựng gia đình văn hóa, ông bà cha mẹ mẫu mực, con cháu hiếu thảo. Tất cả các hoạt động này sẽ là cơ sở để làng Vĩnh Long phấn đấu thành làng văn hóa đủ năm tiêu chuẩn xứng đáng với truyền thống lịch sử 40 năm hình thành và phát triển.

Vinh Long - mảnh đất thân yêu là quê hương thứ hai của bà con Việt Kiều từ Thái Lan về nước 40 năm qua hội tụ trong lòng tổ quốc Việt Nam đang cùng với cộng đồng các dân tộc anh em xây dựng cuộc sống mới ấm no hạnh phúc, văn minh, giàu đẹp. Sẽ là làng văn hóa, Vinh Long như biểu tượng con Rồng vươn lên đầy sức sống mãi mãi đúng như tên gọi Vinh Long ; Hai tiếng yêu thương.

ND THI TRẦN BẾN SUNG


Trần Bến Sung

T/M BCD XÂY DỰNG LÀNG VĂN HÓA


Lê Văn Thìn

APPENDIX D

SOME PICTURES IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS OF THE VKHH COMMUNITY AND VIETNAMESE MIGRANT WORKERS

1. Coupons used for buyings food stuff during the pre-Đổi mới period in Vietnam



There is the fresh meat temp coupon which was used to buy meats according to the weight on it.



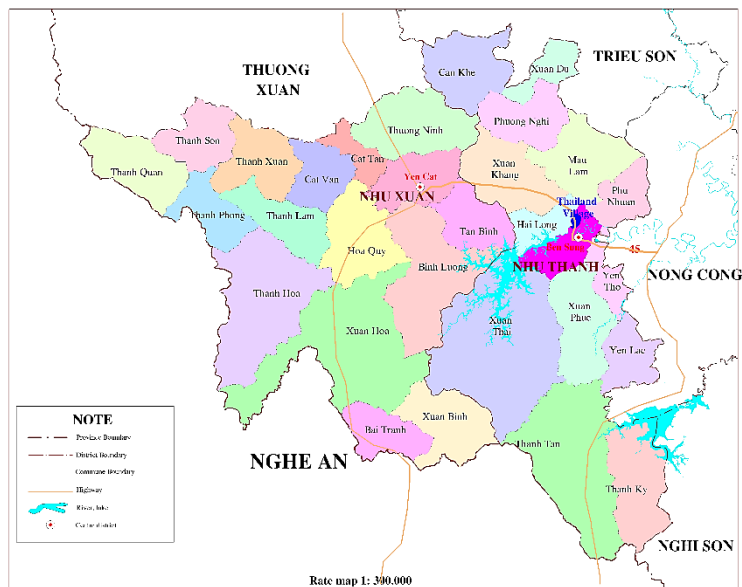
There is the fuel temp coupon which was used to buy fuel like oils, coals, firewoods etc according to the weight on it.



There is the fabric temp coupon which was used to buy fabrics according to the metres on it.

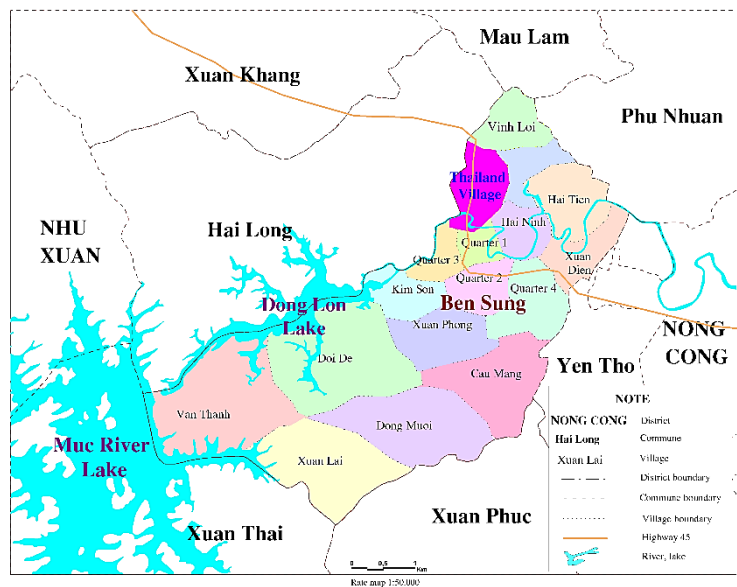
Source: The news on column “Kenh14” in “The temp coupons in the subsidiary economic period” (<http://www.Kenh14.vn>). Retrieved on April 29th, 2012

2. The maps



Map of Nhu Xuan and Nhu Thanh districts following administrative division

Source: Le Ha Thanh¹⁸



Map of Bến Sung Town and Làng Thái Lan

Source: Le Ha Thanh¹⁹

¹⁸ Lecturer at Hong Duc University, Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam

¹⁹ Lecturer at Hong Duc University, Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam

3. Làng Thái Lan



Figure 1 and 2: Làng Thái Lan, Bến Sung town, Như Thanh, Thanh Hóa Province
Photographs by Lê Văn Tôn
Taken on May 25, 2019.



Figure 3-5 Gathering of the VKHH in Thanh Hóa and their heirs at *Làng Thái Lan*.
 Photo taken by Lê Văn Tôn and Atchariya Chuwonglert (respectively)
 on February 6, 2020.



Figure 6-7 VKHH's costume in *Làng Thái Lan*.
Photo taken by Lê Văn Tôn on February 4, 2023.



Figure 8 VKHH's "0 dong" (free meals) restaurant supports poor workers in the Thanh Hóa city.

Photo taken by Lê Văn Tôn on February 26, 2023.



Figure 9-10 Charity activities of the VKHH at the hospitals in Thanh Hóa.

Photo taken by Lê Văn Tôn on October 17, 2022.



Figure 11 VKHH's charity wardrobe collection in *Làng Thái Lan*.

Photo taken by Lê Văn Tôn on August 12, 2022



Figure 12-13 Mixed construction architecture of Vietnamese workers *Làng Thái Lan*.

Photo taken by Lê Văn Tôn on December 19, 2022.



Figure 14-15 Community cleaning activities of VKHH and Vietnamese *Làng Thái Lan*

Photo taken by Lê Văn Tôn on October 17, 2022.



Figure 16-17 VKHH participated in sports exchanges with Vietnamese communities in Như Thanh district, Thanh Hóa province

Photo taken by Lê Văn Tôn on March 26, 2022.

4. Vietnamese migrant workers traveling to Thailand



Figure 18-19-20 The atmosphere of sleeping on the bus of Vietnamese migrant workers crossing the border into Thailand.

Photo (selfie) by Lê Văn Tôn (face shown) on November 16, 2019.



Figure 21 At the border checkpoint of Cầu Treo, Hà Tĩnh Province, Vietnam
Photo by Atchariya Chuwonglert on November 16, 2019.





Figure 22–25 Vietnamese migrant workers and the author arrived in Vientiane, Lao PDR, and transferred to a van to cross the Nong Khai border checkpoint.

Photo taken by Lê Văn Tôn on November 16, 2019.

5. Vietnamese workers in Thailand





Figure 26–30 Vietnamese workers’ lives in Thailand.

Photo taken by Lê Văn Tôn on November 16, 2019.

BIOGRAPHY

Name-Surname	Ton-Le Van
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Awards	"National Research Council of Thailand 2023 Award" in the discipline of "Sociology" in the category of "Superior" under the title of The Informal Economy Embedded in the Transnational Social Networks Vietnamese in Thailand