

## Acculturation Between Two Societies: Vietnamese Contract Migrant Workers in Japan

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### Introduction

International migration in Asia has gone through significant changes over the last few decades during what Castles and Miller (2009) have called “The Age of Migration”. According to the 2005 Migration Report published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the intensification of migration within Asia is one of the major global migration transitions since the early 1990s. Migration flows taking place between Asian countries consist primarily of low-skilled temporary workers from developing to more developed nations in the region. With studies suggesting that remittances have the potential to reduce poverty in migrants’ areas of origin, sending countries see temporary labor migration as a strategy to develop their economies. For receiving countries, including Japan and South Korea which are experiencing an aging population and fertility decline, migration benefits are perceived to be cheap and disposable labor.

International labor migration has become an important development policy for Viet Nam. The government assumes that migrants will send remittances home and enhance their skills through migration. There are approximately 500,000 Vietnamese migrant workers in different global locations (Abella and Ducanes 2009, 145). About 90 percent of these are deployed in Asia, with the main destinations being Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan (Government of Vietnam 2010).

But as more workers are sent abroad, evidence is accumulating to suggest serious problems with the country’s labor export programs. Despite increasing flows of remittances from migrant workers, international migration does not produce solely positive outcomes. In fact migration experiences are polarized between “winners’ and “losers” (Belanger *et al.* 2010, 67). This is caused by variables in pre-migration costs, working conditions,

degrees of deception about the nature of the work, net earnings and others. The “winners” are often those workers who have completed their contract, learnt sufficient skills that can help them to integrate into the local labor market after returning home, and have some savings after paying off their pre-departure expenses. In contrast, the “losers” are often those workers who have not paid their pre-departure debts, due often to early return or to having being deceived. Equally, if not more important, are the impact of socio-cultural factors on migrants’ success or failure.

This paper provides some light on the situation of Vietnamese migrants going to work in Japan, by documenting their experiences and difficulties in the migration process. In particular, the paper inquires into the acculturation of Vietnamese migrants in Japan, and how it affects different migration outcomes. No less important is the issue of reintegration when migrants return. The paper addresses questions of if, how, and under which conditions migrant returnees serve as agents for development and social change in their home communities.

Data for this paper is drawn from ethnographic research that combines participatory observations and in-depth interviews with 30 migrant workers (fifteen males and fifteen females). Of the total, 15 were located in Vietnam (Thai Binh and Hung Yen provinces) and 15 were in Japan (Osaka and Nagoya). In addition, three focus group discussions (one in Thai Binh and two in Osaka) of migrant workers were conducted.

The research is grounded in perspectives of acculturation that are distant from simplistic assimilation theories (Redfield *et al.* 1936), to include personal choice (Social Science Research Council 1954) and other interacting external institutional and internal group or individual characteristics (Zhou 2011).<sup>1</sup> Far from a uni-

dimensional process, acculturation can be reactive (assimilation is resisted), creative (new cultural norms emerge) or delayed (changes appear later). For example, most recent research on acculturation has shown that acquiring the beliefs, values and practices of the host country does not prevent immigrants from upholding their heritage beliefs, values and practices (Schwartz et al. 2010). The main features of acculturation include a complexity of determinants, including cultural characteristics of both societies of origin and of settlement, immigrant group acculturation, and individual-level variables operating prior to and during acculturation (Berry 1997).

### **1. Factors influencing acculturation of Vietnamese migrant workers**

#### **External factors**

##### *Programmatic factors*

International migration of Vietnamese workers to Japan has been institutionalized since the early 1990s through the Industrial Training and Technical Internship Program managed by the Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (JITCO). The program was established with the official purpose to bring into Japan workers from developing countries for training in technical skills so that, upon return, these personnel should become “the foundation of economic and industrial development” in their countries of origin (JITCO, 2012). From 1992 to 2010, the program recruited more than 40,000 Vietnamese workers (Le, 2010).

In essence, however, the program is viewed by critics as a Japanese government strategy to address the rising need for cheap and disposable labor in Japanese enterprises (Belanger et al. 2011, 32). To serve this objective, workers are deliberately selected almost exclusively from the young rural population in Vietnam. Before leaving for Japan, many workers had never been exposed to cultures other than their native communities. Indeed, most had never worked outside their family enterprise and possessed no working experience other than farming skills. This “migration selectivity” can partly explain the many adaptation difficulties that migrant workers face when they arrive in Japan.

In addition, the program does not provide workers with quality pre-departure training so that they are better prepared for life in Japan. Important courses on Japanese language and culture and on legal matters are often short and insufficient. The workers we met in this study, for example, did not have the capacity even for very basic communication in the Japanese language; their understanding of Japanese culture was poor, and their knowledge of legal provisions for labor immigrants was very inadequate. For example, when we asked the workers about what they did when experiencing mistreatment, almost none showed an understanding of the labor law in Japan that they could use for their own protection.

A related issue is migration cost. Workers must pay very high pre-departure expenses, split into non-refundable components consisting of a recruitment fee, passport and visa fee, mandatory training, plane tickets, and a refundable safety deposit, to recruitment agencies. These agencies are local, private, for-profit companies that play the role of intermediary between Japanese enterprises in Japan and the labor market in Vietnam. Most of these agencies take full advantage of the country’s still poor regulations regarding labor emigration to maximize their profits at the expense of the migrants.

For the workers in our sample, the total cost, on average, was between US\$10,000-\$16,000. A large portion of this was a safety deposit of between US\$8,000 - \$12,000 which was due to be refunded if the workers fulfilled their labor contract and returned home in time. The imposition of the deposit has been institutionalized as a measure to reduce the possibility of workers “running away” or “over-staying” in Japan. The fees for Japan are higher than those for other labor-receiving countries in East and Southeast Asia (Belanger et al., 2011, 43). However, workers in Japan often receive a higher salary than in other countries. In addition, the fact that Japan is one of the world’s richest countries also boosts the desire of people to go, and consequently the migration cost. It should be noted that these high departure costs are not demanded by the Japanese government, but are imposed by local recruitment companies. As explained by one respondent:

“I decided to choose Japan because, first, Japan is more ‘civilized’ than Vietnam; second, its economy ranks first or second in the world... People in my commune who returned from Japan told me many good things about this country. They earned good money. Japanese people are very kind... Society is in good order... I see that all of them returned with good savings... Back home, they all can find jobs in Japanese corporations...”

*(Male worker)*

Yet to pay these fees, very often workers have to borrow money from banks, relatives, friends, or private money lenders, generally with interest rates of about 2 percent per month. Some workers in this study had to mortgage their houses and land to accumulate enough capital. The situation was even worse if workers relied on private agents and thus had to pay extra fees. The debt incurred by the high pre-departure costs puts strong pressures on workers, forcing them to work for longer hours to earn more. It can also prompt some workers to work in the irregular sector. As most of their time is spent for work migrants have almost no time for social activities. The story below of a young respondent working in Nagoya is not uncommon among the workers interviewed.

Hung paid a total of US\$17,000 to participate in the labor migration program to Japan. There, he began working for an enterprise in Nagoya. During the first year, Hung often worked overtime to earn more money in order to repay his debt. After a year, the enterprise reduced production due to the country’s overall economic slow-down. Hung was therefore not able to work extra hours. As a result, he left the enterprise to work in the irregular sector as a welder since the pay was higher and he could work many more hours. To make more money, Hung purchased goods stolen from shops by immigrant workers of different nationalities, then sold them to customers, mostly Vietnamese workers, at higher prices.

*(Excerpt from field notes in Nagoya)*

Finally, the program deploys workers in the lowest stratum of the Japanese labor market, compartmentalizing them into a short-term rotated labor category, with essentially no opportunity for occupational or social upward mobility. Upon completing their three-year contract, workers have no alternative but to go home. Thus, they find little incentive for acculturation as their life in Japan is predetermined to be temporary. As stated by one respondent:

“Coming here, I had many hopes. I wanted to learn as much as possible. But after two years I realize that the important tasks are all performed by the Japanese. They do not need us for that work”.

*(Male worker)*

### *Cultural distance between Vietnam and Japan*

Without exception, all the workers in the study experienced “culture shock” during the first stage of settlement. This means they experienced stress caused by numerous and immediate adaptation demands, as well as feelings of loss due to detachment from their familiar environment. They had a sense of uncertainty and helplessness regarding their identity and role and felt isolated from members of the host society. Indeed, the length of this stage is context-specific and dependent on individual variables. Those who originated in urban areas may have a certain ease of adaptation, due to some similarities in city lifestyles. Those originating in rural areas often found the abrupt change overwhelming and struggled to cope with the new social relationships, cuisine, etiquette, public attitudes and social order.

The major environment for workers’ acculturation is the workplace, where social interactions with the Japanese people are most intensive. The workplace is also where the host culture and heritage culture of the workers strongly interface. Interviews with the workers reveal a set of conflicting feelings regarding the clash between the two cultures. Repeatedly, we heard the respondents praise the discipline and devotion to work of their Japanese co-workers, which contrasted sharply with what they had experienced in Vietnam:

“I think the Japanese work like machines. Everyone just focuses on his or her work. They only talk with each other in work meetings. Even during breaks, they often stay silent. We do not feel comfortable. In Vietnam, we talked a lot during work”.

*(Male worker)*

“It is strange to me that good performance is considered normal here. But poor performance is severely condemned. They [managers] shout at us whenever they find that we are not doing good enough... In Vietnam, we are always praised if we’re performing well. Poor performance can be ignored if you are in good terms with managers”.

*(Male worker)*

“Japanese people always work to their fullest capacity. They consider the company their second home. Even during the breaks, I saw some workers still fixing something. It seems like they do not want to rest... Workers keep working hard even when no one is supervising them... In Vietnam, we always try to ‘escape’ work whenever possible”.

*(Female worker)*

“The Japanese are extremely keen on quality [of work/products]. Their professionalism is what I like most... It seems like they want all things to be perfect... They do not care about quantity so much as quality... In Vietnam, people are encouraged to just produce as much as possible”.

*(Female worker)*

“Criticism is not a personal matter in Japan. People appreciate criticism as they think it helps to improve their work. In Vietnam, if a boss makes a worker feels he is “losing face”, he [the worker] just simply quits the job”.

*(Male worker)*

The above interviews point to a fundamental difference between the two working cultures as experienced by the workers. The Japanese attach

a very strong personal moral value to work. For the Vietnamese, work is often seen as just a means to gain an income, an unpleasant necessity associated with pain and sacrifice. The Japanese work culture experienced by the workers helped them to develop a more critical view of the culture in Vietnam, and served as part of their workplace acculturation.

Probably the most challenging aspect for the Vietnamese workers is the management style at the Japanese enterprises, especially in the large corporate plants. Here the workers witness personally what Mauer and Kawashini (2005) describe in their sociological study of work in Japan: how work practice is deeply rooted in Japan’s unique culture which attaches strong values to hierarchy, group belonging, organizational solidarity and consensus.

#### *Hierarchy*

“The Japanese are very hierarchical. The boss is the boss and workers are worker... Whenever the boss says something, people just obey... The same [Japanese] boss of mine, in Vietnam I could see him regularly. I could take him around with me on my motorbike. I could not do that here”.

*(Male worker)*

#### *Group solidarity*

“I see that the Japanese work in groups. They learn how to do various tasks to be able to support each other, and they can do all the tasks if someone is absent. This also helps them not to get bored doing just one task... Usually they only do something if all others agree that they should do so... I think this is good for collaboration and management”.

*(Female worker)*

#### *Communication*

“Innovation is appreciated, but it must be communicated to managers and get approval before we can actually do it... In Vietnam, the situation is different. If we can make a ‘short-cut’ [even without communicating], we are praised”.

*(Male worker)*

Given the assimilationist/monocultural nature of Japanese enterprises, newly arrived Vietnamese workers must come to terms quickly with all these factors. For some, especially the young or those who previously worked for Japanese companies in Vietnam, the process is relatively easy. But for others, especially those who previously worked in Vietnamese factories and contexts, changing work habits often requires much time and effort. Some simply adapt their overt behaviors, such as showing up at work in time, concentrating on assigned tasks, or following rules on the shop floor. This is a survival strategy rather than a change of values.

“At the beginning they followed the rules strictly. They were afraid to be sent home. During the second year they learn tricks and become less disciplined, because they know that they will not be fired. Especially because they live together, their lifestyle does not change and they teach each other tricks to bypass rules at the plant”.

*(Female worker)*

### Group acculturation

As indicated in the interview above, close association among Vietnamese work-fellows is a strong factor for retaining the heritage culture. In fact, the way accommodation is arranged for workers strongly facilitates this association. Typically, employers arrange for workers of the same nationality to live together in one dormitory for the convenience of management. While this arrangement may facilitate intra-ethnic mutual support, it limits social engagement of the workers with the host community.

For the Vietnamese workers, housing in Japan becomes a cultural haven where home values, beliefs and practices are maintained through daily interactions with housemates. The structure of workers' days is characterized by joint activities, from working at the enterprise to cooking Vietnamese food and spending leisure time together. Cultural conformity at the group level, a strong feature of the Vietnamese culture, can discourage attempts by group members to adopt new attitudes and behaviors of the host society.

The shortage of free time also prevents the workers from participating in social life outside the enterprise and dormitory. They often leave the dormitory at about 7 am and only return after 5 pm. If they work extra hours, return can be much later. Exhausted from work, the workers just want to rest, even during the weekend. Only on a few occasions did the workers allow themselves to do some sightseeing and usually not very far from their base.

In addition, the general social remoteness of local people, particularly to foreigners, further limits the workers' acculturation. Language represents a strong barrier to integration of workers to their local neighborhoods and to Japanese society at large.

### Individual factors

Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the workers are also important determinants of the acculturation progress. Among the workers in our sample, there was a clear segregation between those who had an urban background, higher education attainments, previous experiences of acculturation (working in Japanese corporations in Vietnam), and those without these characteristics. Workers of the former group showed much better social learning capacity and social integration, for example in acquiring various cultural values and beliefs in both the workplace and the local community. Some were able to use the Japanese language in their daily activities, make Japanese friends who were co-workers or local inhabitants, and felt comfortable with the working environment at the enterprises where they were employed. Younger workers were more likely to adapt fast than older workers.

Acculturation attitudes and strategies account for the most variations in cultural adaptation and integration. In the study, the workers who were proactive about acculturation (e.g. being determined to learn Japanese, seeing value in acquiring local cultural beliefs and practices, participating in social life at work or in local communities) achieved a more balanced life. Essentially, there are three types of attitudes towards acculturation. Adopting

terminology from Berry (1997), the first can be classified as assimilation attitudes. Workers of this group comprise the young people who are enthusiastic about “going native”.

“I am determined that making money is just one goal. Another purpose of my coming here is to learn the ‘modern’ features of this country... I observe and learn from people around me in every way”.

*(Male worker)*

“I have changed quite a lot because I have learned hard. I thought we needed to change in order to adapt; if not we could not live here. I did not see any problem in adapting good practices. This is good for myself, and I have also asked other Vietnamese workers to do the same”.

*(Male worker)*

The second type of attitude is separation. Workers of this group have critical views of some Japanese values and are more comfortable with retaining their heritage cultural norms.

“Honestly, I prefer Vietnamese values. I think Vietnamese are more sociable. Here people just mind their own business”.

*(Male worker)*

The third type includes integration attitudes, i.e. retaining the heritage culture while embracing certain host values. Compared to other categories, workers with integration attitudes sustain a more balanced life and thus gain more from their migration experiences.

“Of course there are many things that we can learn from the Japanese. I think I have become much more mature compared to my first year of settling in here... Yet we are Vietnamese anyway, and there are things that I do not want to change. I am comfortable living this way”.

*(Male respondent)*

Finally, language plays an important role. In the study, it was clear that migrants with sufficient Japanese language capacity had obvious advantages and were more likely to be successful, both in cultural adaptation and other areas of work and life.

“Without knowing the language, it is very difficult to live there [Japan]. I know some people [migrant workers] who for three years did not dare to go anywhere. They just stayed home [after work] and knew almost nothing of things around them”.

*(Female worker)*

## 2. Acculturation variations and migration outcomes

Acculturation processes of the workers in this research followed four major paths. The first, found among the majority, took a U-curve similar to the acculturation process experienced worldwide by international migrants. This process starts at a high point, characterized by optimism, and then experiences a decline, or depression, before leveling off. It then goes through a “recovery” stage and ends up more or less balanced (Lysgaard 1955).

The second process starts at a low point. Frustration begins immediately upon arrival and remains for a while before migrants get used to the situation. Workers deployed to rural areas are more likely to experience these feelings.

“In the first six months or so I was very depressed. Calling home I just said ‘Oh Dad, oh Mom, I want to go home’... With time, I was able to adjust... I thought I could overcome [the situation] if the time [to stay] was not too long”.

*(Male worker)*

The third progression begins in a similar fashion to the first, yet never reaches the recovery phase. This situation is found among the so-called failed migration cases, in which workers are either placed in inadequate jobs or when the enterprises where they work face financial difficulties.

“I felt like I was in a prison, it was very painful. My boss was very difficult. Probably he was too stressed... Working hard ten hours a day and returning to the dormitory was no better... We Vietnamese did not talk to each other for months”.

*(Male worker)*

The last path is characterized by a flat line of frustration. While this happened to only a few workers, the result was a total migration failure.

“The life like we had, in a rural area, was full of difficulties. We enjoyed nothing, we were feeling frustrated all the time. The boss showed no concern for us... So after one year when they closed my contract [the company went bankrupt], I was happy that I could go home”.

*(Male worker)*

In another case, a female worker was deployed to work on a farm. Because of unfavorable contract terms, she received a much lower salary compared to other co-workers doing the same kind of work; she had to work extra hours without pay; she was not allowed to use a cell phone, and her passport was kept by her boss to prevent her from running away.

The different acculturation processes resulted in different migration outcomes. For the first two progressions, migration outcomes varied. The successes or failures of their migration were dependent on external and individual factors described in the previous sections. For the last two acculturation paths, migration outcomes were mostly negative. At best, the workers fulfilled their contracts and had some savings after repaying their debts, but they felt they had to swallow bitter experiences abroad. At worst, some returned home before finishing their contract, had debts instead of savings, or became run-away workers living at risk in the irregular sector.

There was a slight difference between the male and the female workers in our sample. Few female workers underwent the third and fourth

acculturation paths. They showed more resilience in life and work on foreign soil. Compared to their male counterparts, they tended to preserve more of their own cultural heritage and acquired fewer of the cultural values of the host society. One possible explanation is that compared to men, female workers often adopt a more utilitarian approach towards migration: they concentrate on working, saving, remitting and returning home. They also spend less time on leisure activities, do less travel, and stick to their female fellows while abroad. These attitudes reflect the traditional social role prescribed to women, dictating the need for them to sacrifice their own social life to devote themselves to the welfare of their families.

### 3. Reintegration at the home community

All the migrant returnees that we met experienced difficulties upon returning to the familiar social and cultural milieu of their communities of origin. In the study, we found three kinds of attitudes towards returnees on the part of the home community. The first, and most common, attitude was optimistic, considering the returnees as agencies of “modernity” who would bring “modern” values to, and promote economic development for, the communities. It should be noted that for many local people, “modernity” or “modernization” are values, both material and cultural, attached to “Western” societies, which in this case includes Japanese society. The second attitude contained resentment, whereby the returnees were viewed as the “lucky ones” who had money and looked down on the local poor. The third attitude was openly hostile, judging the migrants as a threat to social stability by “importing” foreign values that would obliterate traditional ones. While the second and third kinds of attitudes were found only in a minority of local people, such reactions can give the migrant returnees a bitter sense of rejection and isolation.

The common process of readjustment of the returnees in the study took two paths. For most, returning to Vietnam resulted in a reverse cultural shock when values and behaviors cultivated abroad were not embraced by the local people.

“I am frustrated because my politeness and sincerity receive nothing in return”.

*(Female worker)*

“I do not dare to push too much to change co-workers’ work attitudes because they would say ‘ah, this guy is showing off; he’s strange; he is insane to think he is higher than us”.

*(Male worker)*

“What people in Japan see right, here they [Vietnamese] see wrong... and vice versa”.

*(Male worker)*

A simple solution adopted by some returnees is to give up and readjust their behaviors in order to melt back into the local culture. Yet there are a number of returnees who quickly overcame the cultural shock and determined to make a life for themselves and to push for possible changes. Belonging to this group were migrant returnees who sustained proactive attitudes towards work and life, both in Japan and Vietnam. Many had good savings and had acquired sufficient technical and life skills abroad.

Dzung returned home in 2008. With the savings and learnt skills from his work in Japan, he opened a company producing bags of recycled plastic to export to the Chinese market. Because of the economic crisis in 2009, he suffered a big loss. Not one to give up, Dzung then invested all his capital in a furniture business. He imports wood from South Africa and produces furniture for the national market. For the last two years, his business has been quite successful, rewarding him with an annual personal income of 840 million Dong (about US\$42,000).

Yet only a few returnees are able to open their own businesses. To do so requires not only relatively large capital but also multiple skills that are not available to many migrant workers participating in the training and internship program. For example, one returnee dreamt of opening a consulting firm to

support migrant workers going to Japan. However, after several failed attempts, he ended up working as a technician for a Japan-Vietnam joint venture in his home province. In fact, for most of the returnees, their occupational aspirations are often limited to gaining a job in a Japanese corporation. Indeed, compared to other local people, these returnees have many advantages stemming from their familiarity with Japanese work culture. The returnees interviewed for this paper confirmed that those who return from Japan were very likely to be employed again by a Japanese company if they applied.

Probably the major contribution brought home by the migrant workers is social. It was notable that many migrants showed a strong admiration for Japanese social values, including, most notably the civic virtues of mutual respect among citizens, public order and legal compliance, honesty, dignity and responsibility, as well as other features such as politeness and cleanliness. Indeed, many work norms and attitudes such as work quality, self-discipline and prudence were also appreciated. All returnees wanted to apply at least some of these values into their immediate social surroundings, including their family, community and workplace.

“What I like most about the Japanese is their serious attitudes towards work and their personal responsibility about almost everything. I just want to tell anyone I know about these values, with the hope that they will follow them. I too always hold up these values in everything I do... I just want Vietnam to be ‘civilized’ like Japan... This is also what I will teach my future children”.

*(Male worker)*

The returnees fully realized that changes would take time, but some showed strong determination to cultivate these values consistently.

“I really want to promote good public attitudes among the people. I am ready to do it, step by step, with no expectation that things will change overnight. I will do the

easiest things first, things that people will more likely to accept, then introduce other things, one by one, over and over again. It will take ten years, twenty years.”

*(Male worker)*

Finally, many returnees exhibited certain economic and social entrepreneurial qualities. Their attempts to capitalize on their Japanese-built human capital, including learnt skills, to their own advantage and to improve the well-being of their families and communities, were impressive, even though the levels of success varied. One respondent expressed his desire to open an enterprise producing household goods from recycled materials. Another respondent was developing a plan to establish a garbage-processing company.

Ironically, female returnees were less active than their male counterparts. Although they sent more remittances home, they had less power over the money's use, given their inferior status within a patriarchal family order. Often they let their parents spend the money for unproductive purposes, for example, to buy luxury goods, while they kept just a small amount for themselves, for their future marriage. Female returnees aged between 25 and 28 were focused on finding a husband and building their own families. Younger returnees were often thinking of migrating again. Some had already started to learn Korean in order to join the labor program to South Korea. The male returnees, in contrast, were much more proactive in using their savings and applying the knowledge and skills they had learned in Japan.

“Money? My father keeps it all. He just wants to improve the house, to live more comfortably... I asked him for some money to buy a motorbike so that I can go around and visit friends... My boyfriend [a migrant in Japan] will be back next year and we plan to get married... but I have to ask permission from my parents as we cannot decide ourselves.”

*(Female worker)*

## Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest the importance of acculturation in the migration process. Migrants often experience a double “identity crisis”, one in the receiving country and one in the society of origin upon returning home. Better acculturation will help lessen these crises. Some critical determinants of acculturation can be influenced through programmatic measures to produce better migration outcomes.

First, it is very important to provide migrants with quality pre-departure training with a focus on language, cultural adaptation and legal matters.

Second, the safety deposit migrants must contribute is currently set too high, pushing most into heavy debt. This has serious consequences for migration outcomes. Better regulation and monitoring of recruitment agencies regarding migration fees is therefore critical. Prevention of “run-away” and “over-staying” migrants, which is the purpose of the safety deposit, could be achieved through other management and welfare measures. In addition, there should be special loan schemes for migrants so that they do not have to rely on private lending sources.

Third, there should be bilateral arrangements between the governments of Japan and Vietnam to ensure that the migration program will meet the development objectives of both countries, including the protection of migrants' well-being and elimination of unauthorized conduct of migrants.

Fourth, the Vietnamese government should develop policies and collaboration with local communities and the private sector to make the reintegration of migrant returnees economically and socially beneficial for both the society and migrants.

Finally, while abroad, migrants should form extensive support networks, formally and informally, not only for protection but also for better integration and acculturation, in order to maximize the strengths

of both host and heritage values for the benefit of themselves and of the host society. This would help to make migration truly productive and generate cultural developments that benefit not only migrants but also the countries of origin and settlement.

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**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> In assimilation theories, immigrants are expected to gradually abandon their heritage cultural and behavioral patterns to accommodate the dominant culture of new homelands. The process is seen as inevitable, progressive and irreversible. (Padilla & Perez, 2003).

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