

The Changing Configuration of Rural–Urban Migration and Remittance Flows in Vietnam

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The literature on domestic migration and remittances in developing countries has focused heavily on the acceleration of rural-to-urban migration and the one-way flow of remittances to migrants' rural families. A longitudinal and panel study of seven rural communities in three regions of Vietnam discovers a changing configuration of domestic migration and remittance flows in the country that is not easy to detect from national aggregate statistics. Numerous migrants from rural communities in the Red River Delta in the North and Mekong Delta in the South have returned home, migration in pursuit of education has increased, and remittance flows have become multidirectional. This changing configuration has to do not only with migrants' calculation of economic costs and benefits but also with a socioculturally constructed web of moral obligations to family members.

Keywords: Vietnam, migration, remittances, education, moral obligations, household-level decision-making, new economics of labour migration.

The current literature on Vietnam, and on Southeast Asia more generally, reports the continued acceleration of both international and domestic migration during the past quarter-century. The exportation of labour from Vietnam increased from fewer than 10,000 persons annually in the early 1990s to 106,840 in 2014. It has remained at this level since that latter year, while the number of marriage migrants has also been on the upswing (Nguyễn Thanh Liêm and Lê Bạch Dương 2015, p. 3).¹ In the case of domestic migration, analyses of Vietnamese census data report that the percentage of

people with a residential address outside the commune or ward in which they had resided five years earlier increased from 6.6 per cent of the country's population in 1999 to 8.6 per cent in 2009 (General Statistical Office 2011*b*, p. 21). The data also indicate that in Vietnam the major flow in domestic migration remained rural to urban. Reported trends for Vietnam are also evident in other parts of Southeast Asia (Guest 2009, pp. 360–61).

This article draws on a panel study undertaken in seven rural communities in Vietnam — located in the Red River Delta in the North, on the coast of Central Vietnam and in the Mekong Delta in the South. The article suggests a changing configuration of rural-urban migration and remittance flow in the past decade and a half. It captures a change that is difficult to detect from analyses of statistics aggregated at the national level. Migration actually declined in five of the seven communities studied, those in the Northern and Southern deltas. It accelerated in only the two communities located on the coast of Central Vietnam. The return of many migrants to their native rural communities had to do not only with economic benefits and costs but also with sociocultural logic — specifically the moral obligations of care owed to parents, children and spouses remaining in those native communities.

In the four study communities in the North and in Central Vietnam, domestic migration also shifted in yet another way. A significantly higher percentage of people in these four communities departed to pursue higher education and stayed in cities on a long-term basis. In many cases, the desire to provide financial support for younger family members pursuing higher education in cities underlay the decision to migrate or to continue migrating among middle-aged and older rural dwellers. Remittances in these cases flowed partly or wholly to family members in cities instead of mostly back to home villages. They became multidirectional. The overall increase in the multidirectionality of remittance flows has methodological implications for the study of remittances and their impact on rural communities.

Literature Review and Research Methods

Migration has attracted the attention of scholars in all the social sciences — from economics, sociology, geography and anthropology to political science, law and history.² Scholars have applied different theoretical approaches, from rational-choice to world-system and sociocultural theories.

Within the rational-choice framework, Oded Stark has suggested a shift in analytical focus, from individual decision makers to the household or a larger unit (Stark 1991). This shift in analytical focus leads to the introduction of new decision-making parameters. An example is the objective of minimizing risks to household welfare by having household members work in both urban and rural labour markets if these markets are seen to be fairly independent.³ In Stark's model, migrants and family members staying behind enter into contractual arrangements, with remittances of the former exchanged for the support of the latter (Stark 1991, p. 25). Although Stark takes sociocultural parameters into account, in his model the premise of a household's benefit maximization and cost minimization in its livelihood strategy remains within the rational-choice framework. In operation, that model, called the new economics of labour migration, tends to pay much more attention to economic costs and benefits than to non-economic ones. Within this framework and in his review of the literature on internal migration in developing countries, Lucas discusses not only permanent migration but also temporary and circular migration, two aspects of migration that he considers only partially documented (Lucas 1997, pp. 724, 730). The new economics of labour migration hypothesizes migrants' return to their home communities as resulting from their initial intention to accumulate savings for specific purposes and then to return, in a "target-saving strategy", or from their failure to achieve their economic and living objectives in destination areas (Lucas 1997, pp. 748–49). Many studies on internal migration in Vietnam have cited approvingly this analytical framework.⁴

From a radically different theoretical perspective, and with an emphasis on structures of inequality and historical dynamics, structural analysts consider urban centres in the developing world as nodes in the expansion of capitalism into the hinterland and the periphery of the world capitalist system. They analyse migration to these urban centres and over-urbanization as functions of the unequal relations between the capitalist core and periphery and between cities and hinterlands. As capitalism expands to the periphery, it channels profit to the core (Wallerstein 1979). Large-scale production lowers the cost of industrial goods and thus undermines handicrafts in many rural or peripheral areas, in a process that contributes to the impoverishment of these latter areas. The underdevelopment of the periphery or of rural areas is inherent in the unequal political-economic relationship between the core and the periphery (Frank 1967). In their historical and structural analyses, Marxist theorists suggest that, in the underdeveloped world, the underdevelopment of the countryside and the periphery pushes people into specific enclaves in which foreign capital has been invested — either cities or industrial zones — and that the profits derived from this investment are channelled back to the core of the world capitalist system. Migration thus represents a component of the movement of labour from the underdeveloped rural hinterland or periphery for the benefit of capitalism. Many migrants also send their children back to the countryside to be raised at relatively low costs, and many of these children will become labourers in the world capitalist system in due course. Workers laid off or retiring from work in the core or urban areas and without social or unemployment insurance can also return to the countryside and rely on relatives for support. Rural areas thus serve to reduce capitalists' labour cost (Mellaissoux 1981). The return of migrants to their native communities and their decision to have their children raised there are thus analysed in terms of economic exploitation and structural economic inequality. The world-system perspective suggests that despite migrants' remittances, profits accrue more to the core and the city than to the periphery or the countryside (Frank 1967).⁵

In the research on internal migration in Vietnam, Nguyễn Mạnh Tiến, although seemingly unaware of this theoretical literature, emphasizes the meagre incomes of most migrant industrial workers, their difficulty — due to high costs and considerable overtime work — in raising their children in urban contexts, the popular solution of sending children to home villages to be raised by relatives, these workers' need for significant overtime work in order to meet rising living expenses and to send remittances home, and the fact that most of them plan eventually to return to their home villages (Nguyễn Mạnh Tiến 2015).⁶

As Brettel and Kemper point out, both the rational choice framework and world system theory emphasize the importance of economic and political factors behind migration. They attach less importance to the sociocultural factors at work in the places of origin and destination and in the linkages between these places (Brettel and Kemper 2002, p. 33). In contrast, a number of studies of migration, especially in the fields of anthropology and sociology, have highlighted the importance of social relations and of gender, ethnic, village and other identities that are embedded in normative and ideological frameworks, subject to negotiation and restructuring, and variant across local sociocultural landscapes. Scholars paying close attention to sociocultural dimensions of migration have examined agency and social networks or social capital in the migration and urban adaptation processes, in rural-urban linkages, in the shaping of urban landscapes, and in the development of rural homeland (Massey et al. 1987; Lomnitz 1977; Brettell 2008; Mines 1981; Cohen 2011).⁷ Social norms and symbols of local or ethnic identity sustain both social networks and social capital (Trager 1984; Brettell 2008); analysts have, appropriately, devoted increasing attention to gender (Curran et al. 2005).⁸ Migrants' remittances to their families in home communities and their maintenance of social ties to those communities in general are also underlain by norms and shared identities (Brettell 2008, pp. 131ff.; Trager 1984). The interplay of norms, identities and agency is examined through the analysis not only of rural-urban linkages but also of the (re-)structuring of gender, family relations

and social ties among family members who have stayed behind in the sending community and among migrants in receiving areas (Judd 2010; Resurrection and Khanh 2007; Werbner 1990).

In an analysis of the multiple and often diverging narratives on the reasons for the same migration decisions in Vietnam, I have suggested that narratives on migration stressing economic difficulties at home and the need for income provide only a partial picture (Luong 2012). In many cases, migrants' departures for work elsewhere also involve non-economic factors, including tension in the family or in other important social relationships, academic failure in secondary school and other reasons. Even divergent narratives on the context and reasons for migrants' departures are underlain by a shared sociocultural framework for and of family life. In her research on circular migration among migrants from the Northern province of Nam Định, Nguyen Minh analyses rural-urban linkages not only in economic terms but also in terms of power, of the sociocultural logic of care and of householding (Nguyen Minh T.N. 2014).

In their research on internal migration in Vietnam, scholars have only conducted cross-sectional studies, mostly in destination areas. They have focused primarily on the implications of migration for urban infrastructure (General Statistical Office and United Nations Population Fund 2005 and 2006; Li Tana 1996). Among the three main types of migration, potentially permanent migration and, to some extent, circular migration have received more attention from researchers than temporary migration involving temporary sojourning and eventual return to migrants' home communities. Destination-area studies permit investigation of migrants' intention to stay in those areas or to return to their home communities, but not of actual rates of return or of the reasons for returning. They cannot fully address hypotheses rooted in the structural or political economy theoretical framework discussed above. For example, Nguyễn Thanh Liêm has analysed the future plans of migrants to Hanoi, Đà Nẵng, Dak Lak and Bình Dương. He suggests that relatively better educated and married migrants and those who have migrated to smaller towns are more likely to intend to stay in the locales to which they have

migrated, while those with kin at home are less likely to do so (Nguyễn Thanh Liêm 2001). The reasons for these patterns are not clear from Nguyễn Thanh Liêm's multiple-regression analysis. Furthermore, this type of destination-area analysis cannot ascertain the extent to which migrants have in fact returned to their home communities.⁹

A 1999 cross-sectional study of migration from three communes (*xã*) in a Mekong Delta district adjacent to Hồ Chí Minh City — within ten kilometres of its southernmost point — reveals that 42 per cent of migrants from these communes, including those who left before 1975, have returned to their home communities (Vũ Thị Hồng, Patrick Gubry and Lê Văn Thành 2002, p. 254). These returning or “temporary” migrants are slightly less educated than migrants who have remained in the city (Vũ Thị Hồng, Patrick Gubry and Lê Văn Thành 2002, p. 261). Two of the most common reasons cited for return are family situations and economic factors. Among respondents, 45.3 per cent mention the former reason, specifically noting a desire to live with family in most cases, and divorce or separation from spouses in some others, while 44.6 per cent mention the latter, which include unstable jobs, low incomes and unemployment in destination areas (Vũ Thị Hồng, Patrick Gubry and Lê Văn Thành 2002, p. 286).¹⁰

In comparison to the cross-sectional studies undertaken by Vũ Thị Hồng, Patrick Gubry and Lê Văn Thành (2002), and by Lê Bạch Dương and Nguyễn Thanh Liêm (2011), the research in both sending and destination areas on which this article draws is broader in time frame. It makes use of longitudinal data, with panel surveys conducted in 2000 and 2012–13. It is also greater in spatial scope, with data from all three main regions of lowlands Vietnam. The research was first conducted in late 2000 in a number of urban destination sites, as well as in seven rural sending-communities in the three regions of lowland Vietnam — two in the North, two in Central Vietnam and three in the South — except for one site, in which local unrest forced the postponement of initial research to 2004.¹¹ These rural communities were restudied in 2012–15. In 2006, one Southern

community, “Southern 3”, was divided into two administrative units, labelled “Southern 3a” and “Southern 3b” in this article. Research methods combined participant observation, in-depth interviews and household and migrant panel surveys.

A survey of 1,430 households chosen by the random probability sampling method was conducted in 2000, except for the reported delay in one community due to local unrest.¹² In late 2012 and early 2013, the survey sample in the communities studied increased to 1,801 households, as researchers also included households whose members had split off from the 1,430 households originally surveyed. Further, 95 of the original 1,430 households were not resurveyed, mostly because of the temporary absence of adult household members and to a lesser extent because small elderly households had died out. The number of households not resurveyed because of the migration of entire households, a phenomenon occurring only in the Southern sites, was negligible.

The household survey was complemented by in-depth interviews and participant observation of a subsample of the surveyed households, chosen by the random probability sampling method.¹³ In 2012–13, in-depth interviews were conducted with 282 households, or 20 per cent of the 1,430 households originally surveyed, and with complementary interviews with a small number of households with migrants that had split off from households originally surveyed. Twenty-two fieldworkers also stayed for one or more days in 141 of these 282 households in order to conduct participant observation. A total of 273 in-depth interviews were also conducted with migrants, the majority during migrants’ Lunar New Year home visits and others in destination areas in Hồ Chí Minh City and surrounding provinces, in the Central Highlands, in Hanoi and in some other Northern towns and cities. These migrants came from a subsample of surveyed households that includes one of every two surveyed households, chosen by the random probability sampling method.

In 2013–15, I also conducted interviews with the owners of enterprises in different sectors and with community leaders such as officials and heads of voluntary and government-sponsored

associations in all study sites in order to gain insight into local economic and sociocultural dynamics. I also revisited hundreds of interviewed households in all study sites to gain further information.

Varying Trends in Domestic Migration

The data from my panel study of seven rural communities in Vietnam show that migration has become less important in the five study communities in the Red River and Mekong Deltas. As Table 1 shows, in these communities from 2000 to 2012, the percentage of households whose members included migrants declined by between 7 and 18 per cent, and the migrants as a percentage of the local population by between 3 and 5 per cent. The only two communities in which migration accelerated in this period are in Quảng Ngãi province on the coast of Central Vietnam.

Migrants' Return to Sending Communities: A Diversity of Reasons

Rural-urban migration in the five communities in the Red River and Mekong Deltas declined because of the return of large numbers of migrants. Fifty-three per cent of the migrants from the two Northern communities and 48.5 per cent of those from the Southern ones had returned to their villages by the time of our resurvey, in contrast to only 23.8 per cent of those from the two communities on the coast of Central Vietnam. Among migrants who returned to their home communities, a major reason — mentioned by 20 per cent of returning migrants — was the rising cost of living in destination areas and the consequently reduced attractiveness of migrating to them. For migrants with children, the high cost of living and the lack of time and space for children resulted in their sending children back to home villages to be raised by relatives, most often by grandparents. Among returning migrants, 14.8 per cent also mentioned job termination as the reason for their return. Northern and Central migrants mentioned this reason more often than those from the South, reflecting the fact that a higher percentage of the former worked as seasonal agricultural workers or workers on construction projects. A total of 19.1 per cent of returning migrants from coastal Central Vietnam also mentioned the temporary nature of their return,

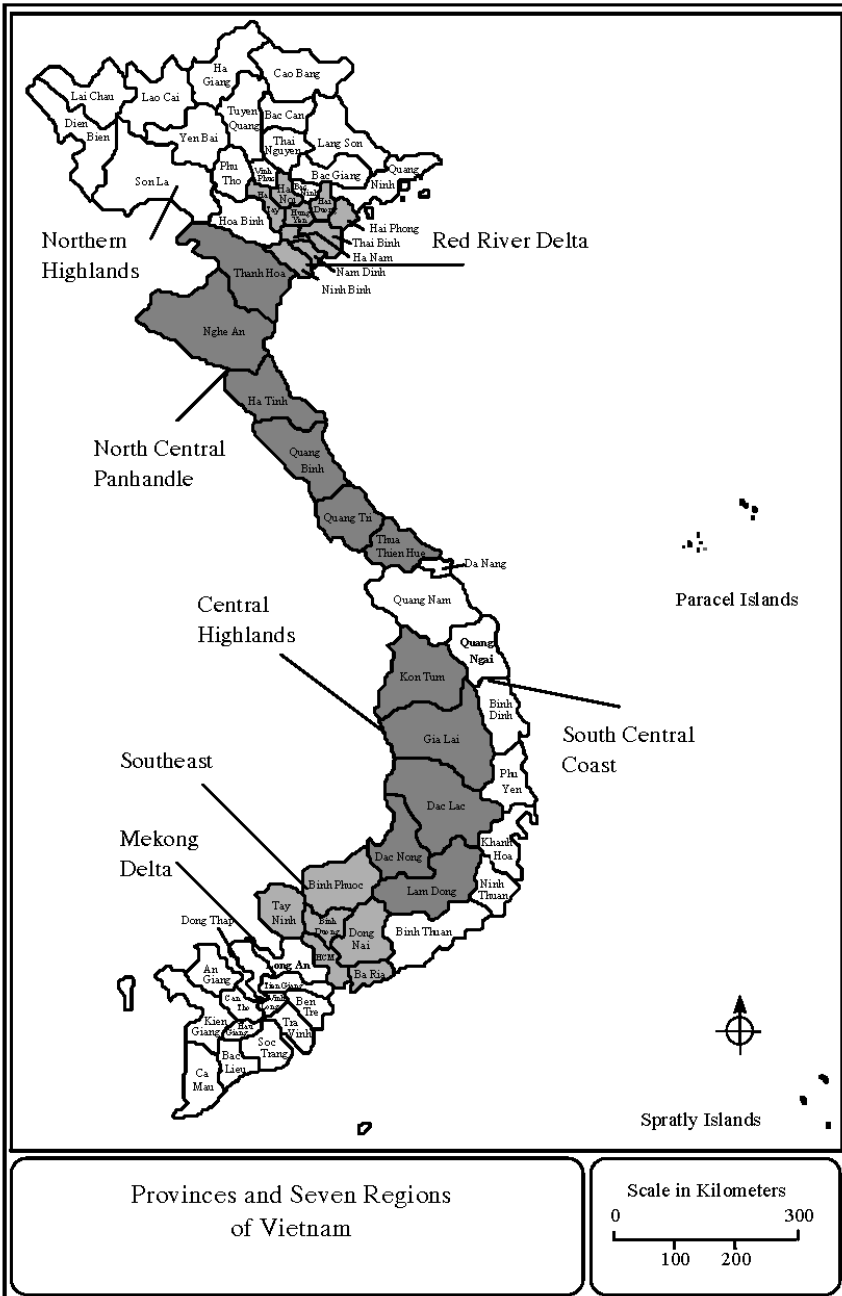


FIGURE Provinces and Seven Regions of Vietnam
Source: Map created by the author.

and 15.1 per cent mentioned labour needs at home. These reasons reflect the situation of seasonal migrants working on sugar, coffee and cashew plantations in destination areas and the engagement of many migrants from that same area in itinerant street vending in urban areas, which allowed them to go home to provide labour at times of peak demand in agriculture. Economic calculation figured prominently in these cases.

However, many returning migrants in all three regions also mentioned as a major reason for their return to home communities either the desire of their family members for them to be together or the need to care for family members, particularly children and ageing parents. While 18.5 per cent of all returning migrants mentioned the former factor, it was mentioned more frequently by those from the Northern and Southern communities studied. A total of 10.6 per cent of returning migrants mentioned the need to care for family members, which was mentioned more often by those from Central Vietnam. In addition, 8.9 per cent of returning migrants, those from the North with greatest frequency, mentioned the desire to live close to relatives and friends and on ancestral land.

Household 209 in “Northern 2” community serves as an example of temporary migration and the factors influencing the decision to return to one’s home.¹⁴ With two daughters and a son, and relying exclusively on agriculture for its livelihood, the family was not affluent. In 2002, at the age of nineteen, the elder sister went to Binh Duong province neighbouring Hồ Chí Minh City to work for a period of twenty months. In 2004, the second sister followed her path to Binh Duong and worked there for two years. The youngest child, a career officer in the armed forces, was stationed far away from home after his graduation from an officer training university in 2010. The two sisters reportedly decided to go to the South out of their desire “to know the world” and not because of economic needs at home. Both reported an abundance of jobs in Binh Duong. They were offered jobs on the assembly line for drawers in a factory making wooden furniture soon after arriving there. The factory had so much work that they regularly

TABLE 1
Summary Statistics on Migration, 2002 and 2012, for Study Communities

	Sampled Population	No. Sampled Households	Percentage of Households with Migrant(s)	Percentage of Migrants as Share of Population* (%M-%F)	% Working (%M-%F)	% Studying (%M-%F)
2000						
Red River Delta						
Northern 1	955	207	38	10	8 (7–1)	1.4 (0.9–0.5)
Northern 2	1327	283	66	19.4	15.8 (10.8–5)	2.2 (1.1–1.1)
Central Coast (Quảng Ngãi province)						
Central 1	712	150	35	9.8	7.4 (5.6–1.8)	2.2 (1–1.2)
Central 2	740	150	40	14.7	13.6 (8.1–5.5)	1 (0–0.3)
Mekong Delta (Long An province)						
Southern 1	721	150	48	15	12.6 (7.3–5.3)	2.2 (1.1–1.1)
Southern 2	736	150	44.7	17.1	14.1 (7.7–6.7)	2.6 (1.4–1.2)
Southern 3	1449	340	26	9.3	6.1 (3.9–2.2)	1.9 (1–0.9)
2012						
Red River Delta						
Northern 1	1141	281	19.6	6.2	2.5 (1.5–1.1)	3.6 (1.9–1.7)
Northern 2	1458	330	48.5	16.3	10.7 (7.4–3.3)	4.8 (2.7–2.1)
Central Coast (Quảng Ngãi province)						
Central 1	723	184	54	23	14 (9.4–4.6)	7.9 (3.9–4)
Central 2	825	196	66.3	33	24.5 (15.3–9.2)	7.4 (3.6–3.8)
Mekong Delta (Long An province)						
Southern 1	815	196	40	12.4	9.6 (5.4–4.2)	2.3 (0.9–1.4)
Southern 2	826	203	33.5	12.5	10 (5–5)	2.2 (0.8–1.4)
Southern 3a	825	209	19.1	6.3	4 (3–1)	2.4 (0.8–1.6)
Southern 3b	797	202	19.8	6.3	3.4 (2.1–1.3)	2.4 (0.9–1.5)

Note: *Some migrants moved elsewhere to take care of young grandchildren, or to seek long-term medical treatment — for example, kidney dialysis. Their number was so small that I do not list it here. For this reason, the percentages of migrants working and studying do not always add up to the total percentage of migrants in the local population.

Source: Household survey data from author's panel study.

TABLE 2
Reasons for Migrants' Return to Rural Native Communities

Reason for Return	Northern 1 and 2	Central 1 and 2	Southern 1, 2, 3	Total	
				N	%
Job dissatisfaction at destination	10	11	26	45	5.6%
Job termination at destination	66 (20.8%)	20 (13.2%)	32	118	14.7%
Low income and high living costs at destination	58 (18.2%)	27 (17.8%)	75 (22.6%)	160	20%
Sufficient financial accumulation for needs at home	16	6	9	31	3.9%
Economic opportunities at home	29	7	27	63	7.9%
Labour need at home	17	23 (15.1%)	36 (10.8%)	63	7.9%
Marital reasons and childbirth	18	14	37 (11.1%)	69	8.6%
Care for family members at home	28	25 (16.4%)	32	85	10.6%
Desire to be close to relatives and friends and to live on ancestral land	37 (11.6%)	9	26	71	8.9%
Responding to family's wish for being together	79 (24.8%)	7	62 (18.7%)	148	18.5%
Better security, environment and food at home	30	0	30	60	7.5%
Declining health or old age	16	10	30	56	7%
Limited opportunity for good childcare at destination	4	7	15	26	3.2%
Completion of studies	11	12	11	34	4.2%
Only temporary return to home community	10	29 (19.1%)	11	50	6.2%
Other	18	8	23	49	6.1%
Number of returning migrants to migrant total (in parentheses) in survey sample	318 (597) 53%	152 (638) 23.8%	332 (684) 48.5%	802 (1919)	100%

Notes: * Up to five reasons listed regarding a case of return.

** Percentages provided within each of three regional columns only for major reasons mentioned by at least 10 per cent of returning migrants in that region.

Source: Author's household surveys, 2012–13.

worked overtime and actually worked two shifts each day. They reported saving about US\$380 a year — almost 30 per cent of their income — and sent this money home. Their parents did not use this money for consumption, but rather put it in the family's savings account to meet each daughter's future needs — for example, the purchase of a motorcycle later. When the sisters went home for Lunar New Year, the parents pressured them not to return to work in Binh Duong. Both sisters followed their parents' wishes. The younger sister also reported that, of nine young women from the same province and another Northern province who had started work on the assembly line at her factory at about the same time in 2004, seven had returned to their native communities and married by 2013; only two remained in Binh Duong. At the time of the interviews in 2013, both sisters had quit their manufacturing jobs close to home after childbirth in order to take care of their children, and they worked only between one and three months a year on housing construction sites in their home village. The departure of the two sisters for the South had not been related to their family's risk-spreading strategy, as scholarship in the new economics of labour migration would suggest. Neither did their return have to do with that strategy or with the need of the capitalist sector of the economy for the non-capitalist one to support workers in the former sector in time of economic difficulties.

Interviewer: [Your two daughters] Thúy and Thủy went to Saigon, or to Binh Duong, for some time, right?

Mother: They went to Binh Duong, and each worked there for two years.... [After two years] Thúy was really car-sick [during a trip home for the Lunar New Year]. When getting home, she was in bed for two or three days. I told her, "If you are car-sick, you'd better not go back to the South." She listened to me, stayed home, and then got a job in a garment factory in Việt Trì.... The income in Binh Duong had been higher, and they liked to continue working there.

Interviewer: That was about Thúy. How about her sister Thủy?

Mother: The same. Thủy was also car-sick....

Daughter Thủy: When my roommates all went home for the Lunar New Year, I felt sad staying there by myself.... So I went home too. My family told me to stay in the village to get married. They said, “If you continue working in the South, and if you get married to a Southerner, how can we see you?” They demanded that I stay in the village. Furthermore, I also got car-sick in travelling.... In my thinking, I had earned a good income [in the South], and my job there was not heavy in comparison to agricultural work [at home]. I thought that, if I stayed home, I would have no income. But my [elder] sister told me about an industrial zone opening up near Việt Trì, about seventeen kilometres away. She also told me not to go again. As a result, I did not go back to my job [in the South] while my roommates did.... I was one of the first few workers [in a garment] factory [in the new industrial zone].¹⁵

Those three reasons for a migrant’s decision to return home — the wishes of family members, the desire to be close to family members, the need or wish to care for family members — are linked to the web of socioculturally constructed moral obligations. The case of a couple that returned to the husband’s native village, “Southern 2”, in the Mekong Delta after many years of employment as a textile worker, in the case of the wife, and bus transportation worker, in the case of the husband, in Hồ Chí Minh City illustrated the importance of this web of obligations.

Wife: If my husband’s paternal grandfather had not passed away, I would have stayed in the city and not have yet returned here....

Interviewer: What was the thinking behind the return at the passing of the paternal grandfather?

Wife: When the paternal grandfather passed away, my husband had this simple thought: he had been raised by his paternal grandparents, and with the passing of his paternal grandfather, he could not let his paternal grandmother live by herself. He wanted to show filial piety as a grandchild. And as a wife, I felt that I had to return here with him.¹⁶

The case of a couple involved in business from “Central 1” community who returned to care for the husband’s ageing parents as well as

for their own children also demonstrates the importance of this web of obligations.

Wife: I felt that it was not enough to make a living with agriculture. We needed to find work elsewhere. But we could not leave our home village for good. After I got married, my husband and I went to Dak Lak [to run a hospital cafeteria as our business], but he said, “I can abandon neither our home village, nor parents, nor ancestors’ tombs. When parents are old, we have to take care of them”. As a result, he returned to the home village [in 1999]....

We ran our business comfortably. But because of the jealousy of others, our contract to run the cafeteria was not renewed.... At that point [in 1999], our children were growing up, and my husband’s parents were getting old. My husband is the eldest son, with an obligation to care for his parents.

We were also concerned that our [growing] children would get into bad behavioural patterns [without parents at home].¹⁷

If Southern and Northern migrants, many of whom worked in Hanoi or the Hồ Chí Minh City–Biên Hòa–Bình Dương triangle, cited better security, a better environment and home-grown food as important reasons for returning home, none of the returning migrants from Central Vietnam mentioned these factors. This difference may reflect the fact that migrants from that latter region did not concentrate as heavily as those from the South in large cities. Many of those former worked in smaller urban areas or even in rural parts of the Central Highlands where security and the environment were better and where lower levels of pesticide use meant that they had more direct access to safer agricultural produce.

In general, non-economic reasons, linked to the socioculturally constructed web of moral obligations, figured as prominently as economic ones in the decisions of many migrants to return to their rural home communities.

The Dispersal of Industrial Production and the Changing Configuration of Migration

As a number of migrants stayed on in their home villages instead of returning to their workplaces after Lunar New Year home visits,

enterprises recurrently report difficulties in labour recruitment after the Lunar New Year. The labour shortage resulting from rapidly increasing industrial production in Vietnam was particularly intense in the Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh City–Biên Hòa–Bình Dương areas. According to official statistics, the labour force in manufacturing in Vietnam increased from 3.2 million people in 2000 to 7.1 million in 2012 (General Statistical Office 2002, p. 41, and 2014a, p. 115), and the value of manufactured goods exported from Vietnam increased from US\$9.8 billion to US\$80 billion in this same period (*Thời báo kinh tế Việt Nam* 2001, pp. 18–21; General Statistical Office 2014b, p. 20). Competition from the construction industry, whose labour force expanded from 930,000 persons in 2000 to 3.3 million in 2012 (General Statistical Office 2002, p. 41, and 2014a, p. 115) exacerbated the labour shortage in the growing manufacturing sector.

In face of the recurrent shortage of labour in the manufacturing sector in the Hanoi area and the Hồ Chí Minh City–Bình Dương–Biên Hòa triangle, firms have resorted to two strategies. First, they have organized buses for workers commuting from an increasingly large radius, and, second, they have dispersed industrial production to other provinces. A major industrial manufacturer in Vietnam, footwear subcontractor Pou Yuen with almost 90,000 workers in one industrial complex in Hồ Chí Minh City, exemplifies the first strategy. It organizes a fleet of a few hundred buses to bring, on a daily basis, workers from the countryside within a sixty-kilometre radius and from the three neighbouring provinces of Long An, Tiền Giang and Đồng Tháp (L. Tuyết 2017). This commuting arrangement allows workers to live at their rural homes at a much lower cost and to be in daily contact with their family members, which is a very important factor for workers with small children. This shift in industrial labour strategy in Vietnam is also possible because of the country's improved road system, which allows for easier commuting and transportation of rural workers to industrial plants, and because of the lower prices of motorcycles commonly used by individual commuters.¹⁸ As an alternative, many manufacturers have also established production facilities in other provinces in order

to facilitate the recruitment of workers who prefer to stay in their rural homes and to commute to work instead of migrating away from home at much higher financial and social-psychological costs.

The situation in two of the communities studied in Long An province, “Southern 1” and “Southern 2”, reflects the adoption of this latter alternative. The villages are located approximately thirty kilometres from Hồ Chí Minh City. The footwear subcontractor Ching Luh, which started operations in 2002 and is located at about ten kilometres from these communities, employed more than 25,000 workers in 2012, including a large number of young workers from the two communities (Lê Vũ Tuấn 2011). The majority of these workers commuted to work on motorcycles, while some relied on company buses for transportation. As early as the 1990s, Nestlé built a mineral water factory for its “La Vie” brand on the territory of “Southern 3”, located about sixty kilometres from Hồ Chí Minh City. Between 2000 and 2012, four additional factories established with foreign capital were set up there; each of these five factories employed several hundred workers. In the neighbouring commune of Tân Hương, in Tiền Giang province, an industrial zone also began operating in 2007, and the twenty-nine enterprises in the zone employed 31,473 workers in 2013 (Sở Lao động 2013). Young people of the study communities in the Mekong Delta who had completed lower secondary school had little difficulty finding industrial employment either at home or within commuting distance of their home villages.

Similarly, in the Red River Delta, the young people in “Northern 1” in Bắc Ninh province who had completed lower secondary school had no difficulty finding industrial employment, as Bắc Ninh had become a major industrial centre in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Its nine operating industrial zones employed more than 230,000 workers in 2016 (Ban Quản lý các khu công nghiệp 2017). The study community in Bắc Ninh is located only three kilometres from the Tiên Sơn industrial zone, which began operating in 2000 and in which 121 enterprises employed more than 20,000 people in 2012 (Y. Linh 2012). Among the companies operating in the

industrial zones of Bắc Ninh are many well-known multinational corporations, including Samsung, Nokia, Canon and Foxconn. In the province of Phú Thọ, where “Northern 2” community is located, opportunities for industrial employment are not as numerous as in Bắc Ninh province. But a member of this community owned a cement factory in an industrial zone within the commuting distance of the community, and employed many of his relatives and fellow villagers. This industrial zone also has a garment factory and other factories offering employment to the residents of “Northern 2”.

In the context of these developments, it is not surprising that many migrants in the early 2000s returned to their home villages and commuted to work in nearby industrial facilities. Of the twenty-four families in the “Northern 2” survey sample that the research team could not contact in 2004 because all of their adult members had migrated, seven had returned to this community by 2012. Not only did many migrants return to their home villages, but many interviewees also reported that the availability of jobs closer to home and of company-organized bus transport from home to the workplace, coupled with the lower costs of living at home, meant that fewer of their relatives and neighbours migrated in search of work.

The narrative of Household 233, in “Southern 2”, presented a theme recurrent in all three of the Southern communities as well as in the Northern ones.

Respondent: People no longer want to migrate and to live elsewhere. They want to stay here [in the home village] and to work close by.

Interviewer: It is also easy to get a job while staying in the home village, isn't it?

Respondent: Yes, it is easy [as there are] many enterprises. If not a job here, then a job there. It is no longer necessary to go to [Hô Chí Minh] city to get jobs.¹⁹

The decline in migration from the study communities in the Red River and Mekong Deltas took place despite the robust growth of the Vietnamese economy in the 2000–2012 period and the continuing

demand for manufacturing labour in the industrial zones in these two parts of Vietnam.²⁰

In contrast, the two study communities in coastal Central Vietnam are located in Sơn Tịnh district of Quảng Ngãi province, where industrial employment opportunities within commuting distance of the two villages remained limited in 2012.²¹ The Tịnh Phong industrial zone, which was established in 1997 and is the only such zone operating in this district, employed only somewhat more than 400 workers three years after opening. By 2012, the largest employer in this industrial zone was a garment factory that began operations in 2005, employed 1,200 workers at one point, and began falling behind in salary payments to its remaining 500 workers in 2008 (Trần Đăng 2011; Phạm Khang 2009). By early 2013, the situation had begun to improve. The state garment conglomerate Vinatex bought this garment company, the Japanese electronics company Foster opened a factory in the zone with the plan to employ 2,200 workers, and two more garment factories had opened there (Hoàng Hà 2013). However, between 2000 and 2012, the expansion in industrial employment in Sơn Tịnh district was only sporadic. It is not surprising that migration from the two study communities in this district accelerated despite the establishment of the Dũng Quất and Tịnh Phong industrial zones. It accelerated because of the small size and sporadic expansion of the latter and the reported difficulty that local people encountered in getting jobs in the former.²² With a Vietnam–Singapore industrial park — the “VSIP” — in operation nearby by 2015 and the previous strong success of Singapore-invested industrial parks in other parts of Vietnam, it is possible that industrial employment for the people of Sơn Tịnh district will increase significantly and that out-migration from the two study communities in this district will decline. That would see the communities follow a trend observed in the five communities in the Red River Delta and the Mekong Delta studied here.

As the rapidly expanding industrial production in Vietnam was dispersed from Hanoi and the Saigon–Bình Dương–Biên Hòa triangle to other provinces, the two Vietnamese metropolises of Hanoi and

Hồ Chí Minh City or Saigon followed the strategy of developing their financial, trade, technology and tertiary educational sectors. They attracted highly skilled migrants, rather than manufacturing workers, in increasing numbers. In a reflection of this trend, migration from the rural communities studied here became more selective in the 2000–2012 period, with more students — especially from Northern and coastal Central Vietnam — migrating to pursue higher education and remaining in the big metropolises after completing their education. This migration complements the existing migration flow to fill regional or nation-wide niches in trade and services.

The migration from Tĩnh Bình or “Central 2”, one of the two communities in Central Vietnam studied here, illustrates that last phenomenon well. “Central 2” villagers figured prominently in the itinerant vending of keychains, sunglasses and other small items in the southern half of Vietnam. The number of “Central 2” villagers participating in this trade increased from about 480 in 2000 to approximately 1,300 in 2012. The latter figure represented 24 per cent of the active labour force in the commune and 50 per cent of the migrants from “Central 2” (Luong 2018, p. 89). Vendors from “Central 2” in this trading network had considerable geographical mobility across the southern half of Vietnam. Middlemen and middlewomen organized their movement in order to reach seasonal tourist markets, to take account of variations in weather and to take advantage of region-specific peak income periods. A middlewoman from “Central 2” reported moving annually with fellow villagers-cum-peddlers across the southern half of the country. They sold their goods during the cashew-harvesting season from February to April in Bình Phước in the southeast, in Huế on the coast of Central Vietnam from May to September, and during the coffee harvest season towards the end of the year in the Central Highlands.

Similarly, a number of peddlers from “Central 2” moved from the coastal city of Vũng Tàu to the Central Highlands at the end of the year because the domestic tourist flow to Vũng Tàu peaked in the summer — a hotter season and a popular vacation time for families with children out of school for the summer. Some vendors

also reported moving back and forth between the Mekong Delta and the Central Highlands. They sold their goods to farmers with after-harvest earnings in the former, and to farmers and agricultural workers during the coffee harvest season in the last few months of the year and the cashew and peppercorn harvest seasons from February to May in the latter.

The trading niche of migrating “Central 2” villagers is far from unique in Vietnam. Migrants from the coastal district of Đức Phổ in Quảng Ngãi province, and particularly from the commune of Phổ Cường, carved out for themselves the niche of selling noodle soup (*bán mì gõ*) through home delivery in Hồ Chí Minh City (Dương Minh Anh 2006). Villagers from Lịch Động village in the Northern province of Thái Bình came to dominate the nation-wide trade in sunglasses, opening numerous shops throughout the country (Anh Thu 2005; Hà Thông 2007; Nguyễn Tuấn 2014). A Lịch Động official estimated that more than half of the residents of the village had left to engage in the sunglasses trade all over Vietnam (Trọng Phú 2005). In yet another example, migrants from lower Nam Định province in the Red River Delta have dominated commerce in the household junk trade in Hanoi and throughout Northern Vietnam (Digregorio 1994). Migration to pursue work in specialized trading and service niches on the part of people from a number of communities in the North and on the coast of Central Vietnam is unlikely to abate, no matter how much industrial production is dispersed.

The return of many migrants to their home villages in the context of the dispersal of industrial production unites them spatially with their children, spouses and other family members and consequently reduces the translocality of many rural households. But the increase in migration on the part of other rural Vietnamese to enter specialized trading and service niches and to pursue education has an opposite effect. A number of the more successful traders in those niches, most of whom come from Northern and coastal Central Vietnam, own residential land and houses in both destination areas and their home villages. According to a well-informed migrant in Bình Dương province originally from the Northern study site in Phú Thọ

province, of the more than forty families from that site who had moved to this Southern province, all of whom had properties in their home village, twenty owned land and eight owned houses in Binh Duong.²³ This phenomenon is not restricted to villagers from just the informant's community. I also observed the same phenomenon in the case of Tỉnh Bình, "Central 2", where a number of households owning houses in the Central Highlands still maintained or even renovated their houses.

Owning houses in destination areas enables migrants to bring their children from the countryside to stay with them in urban settings. It thus reduces separation among household members, but it does not necessarily bring salience to their urban identity or greater identification with the urban setting, as a number of these households still spend a considerable amount of money renovating their unoccupied rural homes. The case of Mr Hùng, a member of Household 77 in the study village of Sơn Dương in Phú Thọ province, "Northern 2", highlights this phenomenon.

Born in 1976, Hùng got married in 1999.²⁴ He and his wife, who is one year younger, have one daughter and a son, born in 2000 and 2002. They bought a piece of land in Sơn Dương in 2001, and had a house constructed in the village in 2004. They financed its construction with interest-bearing loans of 62 million *đồng* obtained mainly from a bank and secured by a land certificate, as well as with interest-free loans from relatives and friends. According to Hùng, when he left Sơn Dương in 2006, he only hoped to earn enough to pay off these debts. In 2009, as he and his wife had succeeded in paying most of them off, she returned to Sơn Dương, spent 36 million *đồng* to renovate the kitchen and bathroom in their house and stayed for five months to explore business options for the couple in the home village. Finding potential earnings too low to support their children in the long run, they decided to stay in Binh Duong as garment traders, selling primarily to factory workers. They bought land and had a house constructed there in 2010. They financed the land purchase and construction of this second house mainly with loans, including two bank loans totalling 240 million *đồng* and

interest-free loans totalling 180 million *đồng* from Northerners in their social network in the destination area.

Following the completion of their house in Bình Dương, Hùng and his wife brought their two children to Bình Dương to live with them. They secured places for their children in a local public school with little apparent difficulty.²⁵ They also switched from the itinerant trading of compact discs to stationary trading in garments. They felt confident enough about their new business to take out bank loans to finance long-term leases on two stalls in local markets. They obtained these loans from a bank in their home district, and offered their parents' certificates for land in their home village as collateral. Despite these leases, his good business in the destination area, and his property there, Mr Hùng stated that he had no intention to settle in Bình Dương.

Interviewer: You say that you want to return to your home village. Why? You have a successful business here.

Mr Hùng: There are a few reasons. First, I am the eldest son, and my father wants me to stay in our home village. I also want to take care of my parents in their old age. It is easier to do business here, but I have to listen to my father. Only if I respect my father would my children respect me. If my father insists that it is an obligation, I will return.

Interviewer: Any other reasons?

Mr Hùng: No other reasons.

Interviewer: You would not return if you were not the eldest son?

Mr Hùng: No, I would not.

Interviewer: Why?

Mr Hùng: Many reasons. In the home village, a lot depends on personal relations. For example, if somebody in the home village does not like you, he/she will cause you trouble. Here, there is more room to do as I want. It is more difficult to do business at home. If I return to the home village, it is only for retirement. Not to do any business.

Interviewer: When do you plan to return to your home village?

Mr Hùng: I do not know yet the time. It depends on my parents. I just know that I will return for sure.

Interviewer: Does your wife agree to this plan?

Mr Hùng: She will have to follow me. If I return to the home village, she will return for sure.

Interviewer: Have you ever thought of a return to your home village because of problems encountered here [destination area]?

Mr Hùng: When I first arrived [in the South], I missed my mother, my children, my family. I thought that I would return [to the home village] upon earning enough money to pay off the debts [from the house construction]. Now being used to [living and working] here, my question is what I can do in the home village. Nothing, because of all the social gathering, drinking, banqueting there....

Interviewer: Do you plan to file for permanent residency here, or just leave your [official] status [as a sojourner] as it is?

Mr Hùng: I leave it as it is. What is the point of getting a permanent residency (KT 1 status) here while I will return to my home village?²⁶

For successful migrants like Mr Hùng, whether to stay in the long run in the destination area involves negotiation with several different parties. First, they must negotiate with parents on whether their parents would be willing to move to the destination area or not. If not, migrants must negotiate with siblings and possibly with other close relatives, regarding care for their ageing parents in the home village. Finally, they must negotiate with their own children. The latter, busy with careers, tend to lean heavily on the grandparents of their children — successful migrants like Mr Hùng — for childcare, and those grandparents also take it as their obligation to help with the care of grandchildren.

Less successful migrants, without property in destination areas, normally send their children of less than eighteen years of age back to their home villages, as living costs are much higher in cities than in the countryside and as they tend to be too busy with work to provide quality care for their children. That work may include

overtime work in factories or early-morning or night-time work as traders. The children are normally raised by the grandparents or by one parent in the home village. For migrant parents, grandparents are first-choice caregivers. If grandparents are not available or healthy enough to care for grandchildren, one parent normally returns to the home village, while the other parent tries to earn enough to provide additional income for the family back in the home village. If both parents are migrants, and if children are entrusted to grandparents, many couples would still decide that one parent should return to the home village to provide additional support for the children when the children enter high school. This support would help ensure that children concentrate on studying instead of being distracted by such temptations as video games or dating during the more turbulent teenage years. If one or more children succeeds in passing an entrance examination to a college or university, financial pressures mount. Parents might either engage in migration again or intensify their economic activities in destination areas in order to increase earnings and to support their child or children through college or university. Financial pressures are very strong if two or more children are in university or college at the same time.

Migration for Educational Pursuit and the Increasing Multidirectionality of Remittances

For young villagers, departing for educational pursuits has become more common in the past decade and a half. The increase in educational migration, with the strong prospect of permanent departure from village life after graduation, is the second major trend in Vietnamese domestic migration in this period. This trend counteracts the trend that has seen the return of many migrants to their home villages in the context of the dispersal of industrial production. As Table 1 shows, the percentage of people migrating for educational purposes increased from 1.4 to 2.2 per cent of the surveyed population in the two Northern study villages in the early 2000s to 3.6 to 4.8 per cent in 2012. This increase was more

dramatic still from the two communities in coastal Central Vietnam where the increase was from 1 to 2.2 per cent in 2000 to more than 7 per cent in 2012. These increases reflect the expansion in Vietnamese higher education. College and university students have increased in number from 116 students per 10,000 people in 2000 to 248 per 10,000 people in 2011–12, when approximately 2.2 million Vietnamese were enrolled in tertiary institutions (General Statistical Office 2011*a*, pp. 97–98, and 2014*a*, p. 670).

Started in 2007, the student loan programme of the Vietnamese government's Social Policy Bank (Ngân hàng Chính sách Xã hội) had reached 1.8 million households and provided loans to 2.3 million students by the end of 2012, when outstanding loans totalled 35,800 billion *đồng*.²⁷ As the annual expenses for a student in Hanoi or Hồ Chí Minh City currently amount to at least 30 million *đồng* — and run higher at some institutions, especially private universities and colleges — and as the government loans are capped at 11 million *đồng* per student per year, loans cover at most 36 per cent of expenses. Among rural households whose per capita income is average or below average, and especially those with more than one member attending college/university, one strategy is for a parent to migrate and to earn additional income to cover educational expenses. A family may thus have one migrating parent working in one city and a child attending college or university in the same city or another one.

Two cases, one from each of the two study communes in Quảng Ngãi province, highlight these patterns.

In 2012, Household 338 in Tịnh Minh village, “Central 1”, was composed of a couple, the husband born in 1960 and the wife in 1962, and two sons, born in 1987 and 1990. In the earlier 2000s, the household had also included the couple's two daughters, born in 1983 and 1984, the husband's parents, the father born in 1915 and the mother in 1923. The husband was the eldest son of his parents. The couple in Household 338 had migrated in 1994 to the province of Dak Lak in the Central Highlands, entrusting their four children to their grandparents in the home village. Initially working as seasonal coffee pickers, they received help from the wife's

younger sister, who worked in a hospital in this same province, and obtained permission to open a cafeteria in the hospital. In 1999, unsuccessful in rebidding for the concession to operate the cafeteria, concerned about their children reaching the teenage years without parents at home, and faced with the declining health of the husband's parents, they returned to Tĩnh Minh, or "Central 1". The husband's parents passed away in 2007 and 2009. The couple's two older daughters, who had received post-secondary technical training of relatively short duration — just one or two years — in the early 2000s, got married in 2007 and 2010, and moved with their husbands to the Central Highlands. The two sons each pursued four or five years of university education in Hồ Chí Minh City. The elder son completed his studies in interior design in the summer of 2011 and began working immediately as an interior designer in a relatively well-paying job in that same city. He got married in 2012 and made plans to move to Đà Nẵng to be closer to both his own and his wife's families. The younger son went to Hồ Chí Minh City in 2008, spent one year studying a college programme in consumer electronics, switched to business administration at Hùng Vương University in 2009, and was about to finish his university study in the summer of 2013.

Except for the 1994–99 period, the couple in this household relied mainly on agriculture for their livelihood. In March 2011, the wife decided to work as a kitchen helper in the provincial capital of Quảng Ngãi, about twenty-three kilometres away from "Central 1", in order to supplement the family's modest earnings from crops and animal husbandry.²⁸

In the same year, 2012, Household 468 in Tĩnh Bình, "Central 2", was composed of a couple, the husband born in 1955 and the wife in 1960; the husband's widower father, born in 1928; and four sons, born in 1983, 1986, 1990 and 1992. The husband was the eldest son of his parents. The wife had migrated in 1995 to work as an itinerant vendor in the South, initially selling glazed mung bean balls (*bánh cam*) in Saigon and later moving into the itinerant vending of keychains, sunglasses and lighters — a strong trading niche for

migrants from Tỉnh Bình to the southern half of Vietnam. Except for a very short stint during which he joined his wife, the husband remained in the village. He farmed until 2001, when he leased his land to other villagers afterwards, and worked primarily as a carpenter. The eldest son opened a pawn shop in the special economic zone of Dũng Quất in his native province in 2008 or 2009. After losing a considerable amount of the capital provided by his parents, he moved to Bình Phước province to stay with his paternal aunt and cousins and eventually followed his mother into the itinerant trade of keychains and sunglasses. The three younger sons all attended the Đà Nẵng University of Engineering (*Đại học Bách Khoa Đà Nẵng*), and were thus a source of pride for the parents. In the summer of 2012, the second son graduated and found a temporary job in Đà Nẵng, while the two younger sons were still in university and lived with the second son in a rented room in Đà Nẵng.

The main source of Household 468's income was the wife's trading activities. During the tourist season, she worked in Huế, a former imperial capital with a UNESCO World Heritage designation. In the last quarter of the year, when the tourist flow to Huế declined because of the rainy season there, she moved to Bình Phước in southern Vietnam to sell her wares during the cashew-harvesting season, and then to the Central Highlands in the first quarter of the year. She also moved up the commodity chain in 2009 to start working as a middlewoman, using her savings, a bank loan and interest-free loans from her younger brother and son-in-law. She continued working as an itinerant vendor herself, to enjoy the high profit margins that itinerant vending yielded.

The migration histories of Households 338 and 468 share at least three features. First, the pursuit of university education on the part of five sons in the two families is part of the trend towards more migration for education and eventual departure from native villages on the part of better educated youth. Second, the two households made many family decisions on the basis of the need to care for the husbands' elderly parents and to provide financial support for their children's education. Third, with children pursuing higher

education, remittances from migrant parents also flowed to family members in cities. Remittance flows became more multidirectional, with methodological implications for their study.

In both of the study communities in Quảng Ngãi province, as in the two Northern communities studied, higher education received strong emphasis, more so than in southern Vietnam. This regional difference is long-standing, going back to previous centuries in Vietnamese history and reflecting the former frontier environment of the South, its historically lower population density and easier conditions for those seeking to earn a livelihood. It should be noted here that the success of the five sons in Households 338 and 468 in university entrance examinations was no small feat. Their parents spoke about their enrolment at university with great pride, as many young people in the two communities studied did not succeed in the entrance examinations. The parents remained happy with the achievement of their sons despite the fact that the relative scarcity of jobs requiring university education in their native villages and district meant that the chance of their university-educated children returning to their home villages was rather low.

Households 338 and 468 took many major decisions with strong consideration of the children's educational pursuits. In 2000, for example, the wife in Household 468 interrupted her trading career and returned to the home village for a year when the eldest son's grade-twelve studies appeared to have been sidetracked by his non-academic interests.

Wife: That year, when in grade twelve, Son [the eldest son] just loved fun. People said that as a mother, I was not present to take good care of him, and that he had been spoiled in getting whatever he had asked for. He did not listen to my husband. As a result, that year, I stayed home for the whole year and switched my business to trading hogs [in the local area]. My husband worked as a carpenter at home. We both tried to correct Son's course and to get him to study.

Interviewer: Did your husband ask you to come back, or did you decide on your own?

Wife: My husband said that Son did not listen to him, and just fooled around. He said that if I stayed home, Son might listen to me and focus on studying.... It has been more than a decade since I stayed home that year.... Then Long [the youngest son] entered lower secondary school, and his two elder brothers were also in secondary school at the time. Their educational expenses kept mounting. Although my husband's carpentry shop was doing pretty well, I thought that his earnings were not sufficient, and I decided to resume my mobile trading activities to help cover their educational expenses.²⁹

Similarly, the wife in Household 338 explained that she and her husband had decided to end their migrant life and to return from the Central Highlands in 1999, partly because their children needed more parental care.

Interviewer: Why did you return home [in 1999] instead of continuing living in Dak Lak?

Wife: For two reasons. First, the children were growing up. We were concerned that they would be getting into bad behavioural patterns. Furthermore, my husband was the eldest son, and his parents were getting old and weak. We had to take care of them.³⁰

In February 2011, with two sons in university at the same time, with modest income from agriculture, and despite her arthritis and respiratory problems, the mother in Household 338 decided to resume her migrant life. She found a job as a kitchen helper in the provincial capital of Quảng Ngãi. A few months later, in summer 2011, her elder son graduated and landed a job. With a fairly good income for a young graduate of 10 million *đồng* a month and in a pattern typical in Vietnamese families, he covered the food and accommodation costs for his younger brother. This help relieved the financial pressure on the parents, since the younger brother's government-sponsored educational loan was sufficient to cover most of his tuition and his part-time job provided him with pocket money. However, the mother decided to continue working to help pay off her two sons' educational loans. Both the father and the mother

repeatedly emphasized that the mother would return home when the younger son graduated and obtained a stable job, and when some of his educational loan was paid off.

Wife: I found agricultural income inadequate [to support my two sons]. I had to work outside of agriculture to supplement the family income. Otherwise, when my sons needed some money, say 1 million *đồng*, if we relied only on agriculture, we would have to sell 150–200 kilogrammes of paddy, the amount harvested from over 500 square metres of rice land. Even with that, my children did not have enough. I decided to go to work....

Interviewer: You earn 2 million *đồng* a month. How much do you send to family members?

Wife: I used to send 1 million *đồng* [a month] to my sons. Because they earn extra income now, I send only half a million *đồng*. I work to help my sons with their education and educational loan payments, to pay for fertilizers for our rice fields and to cover my husband's occasional medical expenses — so that we do not have to get too much into debt.

Interviewer: At the end of this [2012–13] academic year, when your [younger] son graduates, will you return to your home village?

Wife: I plan to return home in 2013, when my [younger] son graduates, has employment income, and when I help to pay off [a part] of his educational loan. I will let my children take care of things at that point, and I will return to live with my husband. In my current job, I feel sad and pitiful [at this point].... [Why?] At this advanced age, I still have to leave home to work. I feel pitiful... Once I quit this job and return to the village, we will just grow vegetables [and rice] to feed ourselves. If we are short of money, I trust that my children, with their employment incomes, will remember their parents.³¹

The wife in Household 468 voiced a similar opinion.

I plan to quit trading when my sons complete their university study. I am getting old. I will stay home, raise cattle, hogs, and chickens, and may cultivate some of the land currently rented out. I will not have to beat the streets anymore to earn money.³²

Parents migrating to work and to support the educational pursuits of children are target savers (Lucas 1997, p. 748). At the same time, it is important to note that the financial support for the higher education of the five young students from these two households did not come only from their parents. The two sons in Household 338 also received a modest monthly stipend of 500,000 *đồng* and generous portions of cooked food a few times a month from their maternal aunt living in Saigon. When the elder of the two sons in Household 338 first went to Saigon to study, his elder sister, who worked in a pharmacy in Saigon at that time, also covered the cost of his food and of his accommodation in the room that they shared. When the sister got married and moved in with her husband, the brother moved in rent-free with a male relative. When he began working full-time after his university graduation in the summer of 2011, he similarly covered the food and lodging expenses of his younger brother who lived with him. Similarly, although the second son in Household 468 did not yet in 2013 have a stable job to his liking, he also covered the rent for his two younger brothers, who shared a room with him in Đà Nẵng.³³

Financial support for family members does not necessarily take the form of remittance sent back to the home village. It may not even take the form of cash, as in the case of the food provided by a maternal aunt for her two nephews at university, or the food and accommodation provided by an elder sibling for a younger one. In this context, the flow of financial support is not necessarily urban–rural. It becomes multidirectional. One result of the increasing multidirectionality of migrants’ financial flows is that family members at home do not always know fully or precisely the amount of financial support provided by migrants. Living in his home village, the husband in Household 338 reported that his elder son, the interior designer, did not send any money to the family in 2012, while the elder son reported providing 10 million *đồng* to his family in addition to his financial support to the younger brother staying with him. When asked in an in-depth interview, the elder son elaborated that this money was provided mainly on the occasion of the Lunar New Year.³⁴ In the case of Household 468, the husband reported that his wife

had sent the family — mainly their sons at university in Đà Nẵng — 68 million *đồng* in 2012 and 72 million *đồng* the previous year.³⁵ When asked independently, the wife reported sending 70 million in 2012 and 120 million in 2011.³⁶ The husband himself acknowledged that he had no first-hand knowledge of the amount remitted, as his wife had sent money directly to their sons in Đà Nẵng a few times a month. She had sent 1 to 1.5 million *đồng* each time, whenever money was available.

In the context of the multidirectionality of financial flows from migrants, a family member at home may not know precisely the amount of money remitted, while the migrant himself or herself in all likelihood remembers the total figure very well.³⁷ My own triangulation of migrants' remittance figures and figures given by members of their rural household in the two coastal communities in Central Vietnam indicate that overall the former are 45 per cent higher than the latter. This is not to count the financial contribution of migrants to public causes in home villages, mainly to the construction of ancestral halls and religious temples. In a small subsample of twenty households and their migrant members in two coastal communities in Central Vietnam, migrants' and household members' reports on remittances, including money sent to family members in cities, matched one another or diverged by less than 10 per cent in seven cases. In three cases migrants reported much lower remittances than did their family members at home, and in ten cases migrants reported greater levels of remittances than did their family members at home.³⁸ Another source for discrepancy is that some migrants send money directly to creditors in home villages to pay back loans. As households become multisited through migration, and as financial flows from migrants become multidirectional because an increasing number of young rural people are attending college or university in cities, multisited studies become more important in research on migration and its impact on rural communities.

Conclusion

Going beyond aggregate national statistics, and based on a restudy of seven rural communities in three regions of Vietnam, this article

suggests that domestic migration and remittances in Vietnam have taken on a new configuration. In the last decade and a half, domestic migration has declined in five of the seven communities studied because of the dispersal of industrial production and industrial workers' increasing commuting to reduce their living costs and to be closer to children and other family members in their home villages. The non-economic reasons for migrants' return to those villages, which are linked to a socioculturally constructed web of moral obligations, have figured as prominently as economic ones. While migration continues to accelerate in two of the seven communities studied, there are increasing signs that the acceleration will slow down by 2020. Among reasons for migration, the pursuit of higher education has become much more important in Northern Vietnam and coastal communities in Central Vietnam. In this context, remittances flow in many cases to family members residing and studying in cities, and not simply back to migrants' home villages. Remittances have become increasingly multidirectional. On the basis of a comparison of migrants' and family members' reported remittance figures, I suggest that multisited community-level studies and interviews with both migrants and family members at home are necessary to gain a full picture of domestic migration and remittances in contemporary Vietnam.³⁹

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NOTES

1. Also see Miller (2015).
2. See Brettel and Hollifield (2008).
3. Also see Lucas and Stark (1985), Massey et al. (1987) and Guest (1989).
4. For example, Lê Bạch Dương and Nguyễn Thanh Liêm (2011, p. 18) and cf. Carruthers and Trung Dinh Dang (2012, p. 148).
5. Also see Binford (2003).
6. Also see Nguyễn Đức Lộc (2015, pp. 18–21).
7. Some rational-choice theorists also pay attention to the role of social networks in reducing the costs of information and of adjustment to a new environment; see for example Lucas (2007, p. 112).
8. Also see Chant and Radcliffe (1992).
9. This 1997 migration and health survey included in its sample 710 respondents living in rural communities in two Northern provinces, Thái Bình and Nam Định. However, analyses make extensive use of the data only from migrants in their destination areas.
10. Lê Bạch Dương's and Nguyễn Thanh Liêm's cross-sectional study was conducted in both the destination areas of Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh City and rural sending communities in Thái Bình province in the Red River Delta in the North and Tiền Giang province in the Mekong Delta in the South (Lê Bạch Dương and Nguyễn Thanh Liêm 2011). The authors conducted a survey of approximately 1,400 households in the twelve sending communes, 800 of which included migrants and 600 of which did not. However, their study focuses on economic and non-economic impacts of migration on sending households and on receiving areas. It did not examine the extent of or the reasons for migrants' return to their home communities.
11. See Luong (2010, pp. 247–52) regarding the political turmoil in this village.
12. Four of these seven communities — two in southern Vietnam and two in Central Vietnam — were selected in 2000 as a part of a 1997–2001 interdisciplinary study of migration and urbanization. That study focused on Hồ Chí Minh City. These four communities are located in the two provinces that sent the largest number of migrants to Hồ Chí Minh City at that time: specifically Long An province in the upper Mekong Delta and Quảng Ngãi on the coast of Central Vietnam. The latter province is located about one-hundred kilometres south of Đà Nẵng; see Luong (2009) and Nguyễn Quang Vinh et al. (2009). The U.S. Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the Institute of Social Sciences in Hồ Chí Minh City jointly managed this interdisciplinary project funded by the Ford Foundation

- from 1997 to 2004. I served as the leader of the SSRC expert team in this project. At the same time, with funding by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Toronto, I also conducted my own research in three other rural communities, one in the Mekong Delta in the South and the other two in the Red River Delta in the North, where I had started research in the 1987–92 period. These three communities were added to the study on which the present article draws in order to provide a broader geographical scope for a study of migration and rural-urban linkages in 2012–15. Two fieldwork teams, one for the North and the other for the South and the coast of Central Vietnam, conducted household surveys and in-depth interviews. The Northern team had fifteen members and the Southern one twenty-six researchers. To ensure consistency, survey supervisors for all field sites came only from the Southern team. In 2012, researchers also stayed in 5 per cent of the households in the survey sample for purposes of participant observation.
13. For this Phú Thọ community, I extrapolate from 2004 survey data my estimates for the village economy in 2000.
 14. Interviews with the parents and the elder daughter, Household 209, “Northern 2” community, respectively on 9 January 2013 and 13 January 2013, conducted by Cao Trung Vinh.
 15. Interviews with the father and elder daughter, Household 209, “Northern 2” village, respectively on 9 January 2013 and 13 January 2013, conducted by Cao Trung Vinh.
 16. Interview with members of Household 188, “Southern 2” community, 11 October 2012, conducted by Hồ Ngọc Trí.
 17. Interview with the wife in Household 338, “Central 1”, 26 February 2013, conducted by Nguyễn Ngọc Anh.
 18. See Vann (2010).
 19. Interview with Household 233 in “Southern 2”, 18 October 2012, conducted by Hồ Ngọc Trí.
 20. Despite the global economic difficulties due to the financial crisis that started in the United States in 2008, Vietnam continued to experience robust economic growth. The economy grew at rates of 5.7 per cent in 2008, 5.4 per cent in 2009, 6.4 per cent in 2010, 6.2 per cent in 2011, 5.3 per cent in 2012, 5.4 per cent in 2013, 6 per cent in 2014, 6.7 per cent in 2015 and 6.2 per cent in 2016 (*Thời Báo Kinh tế Việt Nam* 2015, p. 9; Ha Phuong 2016). At the firm level, the labour force in the biggest industrial plant in Vietnam, belonging to footwear subcontractor Pou Yuen, remained at around 90,000 between 2011 and 2015.
 21. The real names of these two communities are Tĩnh Minh and Tĩnh Bình. However, they are here referred to as “Central 1” and “Central 2” for the sake of readers not familiar with Vietnamese names.

22. The Dũng Quát industrial zone is well-known for being the location of the first and currently still the only oil refinery in Vietnam. Local people widely reported nepotism in recruitment, which favoured people from other provinces.
23. Migrants from the study village of Son Dương, “Northern 2”, in the Phú Thọ province in the North who moved to the South formerly concentrated most heavily in Kiên Giang province in the lower Mekong Delta, with many engaging in the food trade there. Currently, their most popular destination is Bình Dương province with its thriving trade in foodstuffs and garments for industrial workers. A trader with a meat stall in Bình Dương can reportedly earn US\$1,000–1,500 a month. Many “Northern 2” villagers in Kiên Giang province have migrated to Bình Dương in the past decade.
24. The name used here is a pseudonym. The information about Mr Hùng and his family is based on the separate interviews with him as well as with his younger brother and the latter’s wife, all on 19 May 2013, in Bình Dương, conducted by Nguyễn Thị Nhung.
25. As Mr Hùng’s children were eight and ten years old at the time of their move to the South, by Vietnamese law and regardless of their official registration status in the destination area, they were guaranteed places in a public school through the end of grade nine, since Vietnam requires education to the end of that grade for all children. However, Mr Hùng believed that his children got into a public school in Bình Dương thanks to his social connections.
26. Interview with the husband in Household 77, 19 May 2013, Bình Dương, conducted by Nguyễn Thị Nhung. In Vietnam, using the household registration (*hộ khẩu*) system, each urban ward or rural commune divides its residents into four categories: those officially recognized as local residents (KT1); those officially recognized as residents of the province and officially recognized at one point or another as local residents of another ward or commune in the same province but not as residents of the given ward or commune in which they live (KT2); those classified as long-term temporary residents (*tạm trú dài hạn*), who have moved from other provinces (KT3); and those classified as short-term temporary residents (*tạm trú ngắn hạn*) from other provinces (KT4). Migrants without accompanying immediate family members — spouse, parent or child — and residing in a city for years remain classified as KT4 or temporary residents, while those living with spouses, parents or children; having jobs and housing; and intending to reside in the city on a long-term basis are classified as KT3. KT1 and KT2 residents are eligible for provincial state sector employment and provincial social services. They are also entitled to property ownership rights in the city, and, in the case of KT1 and KT2

children, to priority access to local schools. KT3 and KT4 residents are not eligible for employment in the provincial state sector or for most social services. Until 2005, they were de facto not eligible for official property ownership.

27. In principle, the student loan programme is currently available only to students from officially poor and near-poor households. However, local governments, which need to certify this status for applying households, routinely facilitate access to loans for virtually all households that would like to apply to this programme. The current loan limit is 11 million *đồng* per student per year, with 7.2 per cent annual interest. Interest is now payable annually instead of only after the completion of the studies, as there had been complaints from borrowing families about high payments owed after completion.
28. Interviews with the father in Household 338 on 12 January 2013, conducted by Nguyễn Ngọc Anh, and with the mother in this household on 26 February 2013, conducted by Lê Thế Vững, both in “Central 1”.
29. Interview with the mother in Household 468, “Central 2”, on 20 February 2013, conducted by Lê Thế Vững. The names given by the respondent have been changed to pseudonyms.
30. Interview with the mother in Household 338, in “Central 1”, on 26 February 2013, conducted by Lê Thế Vững.
31. Interview with the mother in Household 338, in “Central 1”, on 26 February 2013, conducted by Lê Thế Vững.
32. Interview with the mother in Household 468, in “Central 2”, on 20 February 2013, conducted by Lê Thế Vững.
33. Interviews with the elder son in Household 338 on 20 December 2013, and with the younger son in the same household on 15 June 2013, respectively by Lê Thế Vững and Nguyễn Ngọc Anh; interview with the elder son in Household 468 on 16 February 2013 conducted by Lê Thế Vững. Lê Thế Vững interviewed the two elder sons in the latter’s rural native communities. The interview with the younger son in Household 338 was conducted in Hồ Chí Minh City.
34. Interviews with the father in Household 338 on 12 January 2013, conducted by Nguyễn Ngọc Anh, and with the elder son in this household on 20 December 2013, conducted by Lê Thế Vững. Both interviews took place in “Central 1”.
35. Interview with the father in Household 468, in “Central 2”, on 6 January 2013, conducted by Lê Thế Vững.
36. Interview with the mother in Household 468, in “Central 2”, on 20 February 2013, conducted by Lê Thế Vững.
37. Of course, figures given by migrants are not completely reliable either,

- as those unable to send much may inflate the figures in order to maintain face and to uphold the image of a filial son or daughter.
38. I have examined the remittances in only twenty cases for which we have both migrants' and other household members' reports on their level and which I revisited for additional information at the household level in the summer of 2014.
39. Also see Luong (2012).

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