

# THE RE-INTEGRATION INTO RURAL AREAS OF VIETNAMESE MIGRANT WORKERS RETURNING FROM JAPAN BASED ON IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2020-05-12 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: ホアン, アン トゥアン メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.24517/00058198">https://doi.org/10.24517/00058198</a>

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## Abstract

In recent years, Vietnam's rapid economic growth has been accompanied, as in many other parts of the developing world, by increasing geographical labor mobility; the number of Vietnamese who have moved to Japan for work has also increased rapidly. However, while much attention is given to the needs and well-being of Vietnamese migrants, including raising their awareness of migration prior to their departure and during their time abroad. Less attention, however, is given to their reintegration upon their return to Vietnam. This study examines the experiences of Vietnamese migrant workers returning from Japan to rural areas, focusing on those who have faced difficulties in their reintegration process.

The study's findings indicate that Vietnamese migrant workers face challenges in the return and reintegration stage, the most important point being that experienced migrants have had difficulty reintegrating locally; the financial situation of several returnees worsened as a result of their labor migration, and some fell into debt upon their return and struggled to find work. Access to information about the domestic employment market, and resources for the support of returnees, have been limited and ineffective. Returning migrants found that upon their return, their capacities were not sufficiently recognized; few opportunities existed to develop their careers, and local businesses were often unattractive employers. The intention to re-migrate is a common feature among returned migrants, as they are often unsatisfied with their return and express a desire to re-emigrate in the future.

## Keyword

Return migration, Vietnamese migrants, Reintegration, Japan

聞き取り調査をもとにした日本からの帰国ベトナム人による  
農村地域への再統合

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## 要旨

近年、他の発展途上国と同様、ベトナムの急速な経済成長は一層多くの地理的な労働力移動を伴っており、就労のために日本へ移動したベトナム人も急速に増加している。しかし、多くの関心は出国前および海外滞在中におけるベトナム人移民のニーズや幸福などについて寄せられており、ベトナム帰国後における再統合にはあまり注意が払われてこなかった。そこで本研究は、日本から帰国したベトナム農村部における出稼ぎ労働者の再統合プロセスにおいて困難に直面している人々に焦点を当てる。

調査結果は、ベトナム人移民労働者が帰国および（再）統合の段階で課題に直面していることを示している。最も重要な点は、経験豊富な移動者が地元で再統合できなかったこと、労働移動の結果、帰国者数名において財政状況が悪化した者がいることである。借金したり、就業先をみつげるのに苦労している者もある。国内の就業先に関する情報や帰還者を支援する資源へのアクセスは限られており、効果的ではない。帰国移住者は帰国時に能力が十分に認識されていないことが明らかになった。キャリアを活用する機会はほとんどなく、地元の企業は多くの場合において魅力的な雇用先ではない。再渡航の意志は帰国者において一般的にみられている。彼らは帰国に満足せず、将来再渡航したいという希望を表明している。

## キーワード

帰国、ベトナム人移住者、再統合、日本

## 1. Introduction

Labour migration is an increasing global trend, presenting opportunities for improved livelihoods and incomes in developed and developing countries, including Vietnam. According to the report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam in 2017<sup>1)</sup>, there are about 800 thousand Vietnamese workers working in 30 different occupational categories in 40 countries and territories. Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Malaysia are the main countries that outsource labours from Vietnam. For families, labour migration can be a sound livelihood strategy, resulting in enhanced living standards and better work and education opportunities due to the remittances sent back by the migrant worker. For governments, international labour migration can be seen as an important component of a national development strategy, if the skills and resources which migrant workers have acquired abroad are

effectively developed upon their return.

However, while much attention is given to the needs and well-being of Vietnamese migrants, including raising their awareness of migration, prior to their departure and during their time abroad, less attention is given to their reintegration upon their return to Vietnam, especially, migrant workers returning from Japan in the rural area when Japan is tending to become a potential labour export market for Vietnamese people. The problems faced by migrants upon their return are not adequately recognized, either legally or in practice and this has reduced the benefits of labour migration for individual migrants, their communities and the Vietnamese economy. Returned migrants can face a plethora of challenges, including underemployment or lack of employment opportunities, in addition to debts, family conflicts, health issues and other problems. Vietnamese migrants often return to unskilled

work or to jobs that are similar to jobs they held before migration and without relevance to the knowledge or skills they gained overseas<sup>2)</sup>. A lack of both a social safety net and support for sustainable reintegration into communities compounds their problem.

This research examines the experiences of Vietnamese migrant workers returning from Japan in the rural area, focusing on those who have faced difficulties in their reintegration process. While many migrant workers successfully improve their economic circumstances, this study focuses on the more difficult experiences in order to find ways to better assist stakeholders to address weaknesses in the systems and to better meet the needs of Vietnamese migrant workers.

Regarding the organization of this article, first, we develop an integrative theoretical perspective related to return migration and reintegration. Second, we explain our methodology, which includes in-depth interviews with Vietnamese migrant workers returning from Japan. Finally, we analyze the migrant workers' condition upon their return to Vietnam.

## 2. Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

### 2.1. Definition of the key concepts related to Return Migration and Reintegration

The concept of return migration understood in different ways within the literature, some scholars used few terms in research such as back migration, re-emigration, remigration, reflux migration, second-time migration repatriation, counterflow, counter current, return flow (Frank, 1974). The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) offered a definition for collecting data on international migration, returning migrants are "*persons returning to*

*their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short term or long term) in another country, and who are intending to stay in their own country for at least a year*"<sup>3)</sup>. The UNSD definition embraces four dimensions: 1) country of origin, 2) place of residence abroad, 3) length of stay in the host country, 4) length of stay in the home country after the return.

The reason for return differs from one to another and return is an individual migrant's decision. However, returnees first and foremost interest in the reintegration process is to get a job. Furthermore, having a secured position may also determine the possible return migrant whether the return would be permanent or temporary (DaVanzo and Morrison, 1981).

When they return to the home country, reintegration is becoming a highly concerning, complex and very much time-consuming process. Reintegration is a process of adaptation in terms of financial, social, in which human being survives. Return migrants have to reintegrate into a culture, society of the home country for a prolonged period. Transnational mobility is a significant tool of reintegration that connects the people to be prepared and motivated to return and to be reintegrated (Cassarino, 2007). Reintegration process is considered as an exchange between returnee and the society of the country of origin. Return migrants always have to reintegrate into the abandoned society, which might have changed during the long gap while the migrants had been abroad (Robert, 2005).

The concept of reintegration is very controversial, which has no specific definition of reintegration of migrant population. International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Vietnam defines reintegration as the re-

inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group or process, for example, of a migrant into the society of his or her country/community of origin or habitual residence.

According to Anarfi and Jagare (2005) and Cassarino (2008), reintegration is a process that enables the returnee to participate again in the social, cultural, economic and political life of his or her community of origin. As regards economic reintegration, it refers to the occupational and employment status of the returnees and their ability to afford a certain standard of living. It also includes entrepreneurial activities and local investments opportunities.

## 2.2. Challenges Involved in Reintegration

The existing literature provides paradigms of the reintegration problems returnees face once they are back to their communities of origin. Gmelch (1980) and Chirum (2011) discovered that the need to establish new friends, lack of social services, and lack of employment opportunities were the major deterrents to full integration for the majority of returnees.

A similar study by Levine (1982) also found that low standard of living, housing shortages, a long wait for jobs, and family conflicts were the major re-integration problems for most Southeast Asian returnees. McGrath (1991) added that most returnees faced a range of different reintegration problems including the poor economic situation and lack of employment opportunities; the unfriendly attitude of locals; and the inefficiency and slow pace of business activities. Zachariah and Rajan (2011) also indicated that indebtedness and unfavourable financial status of return migrants are some of the main challenges in the reintegration process of returnees. The Financial situation after

return and debt problems and access to money are obviously of crucial importance for setting up or revamping a life back after the return.

## 2.3. Theoretical Perspectives on Return Migration and Reintegration

Return migration and reintegration as a sub-process of migration have been theorised by various approaches and schools of thought which offered contrasting sets of propositions stemming from but not limited to the Neo-classical Economics (NE), the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM), Structuralism, Transnationalism and Social Network Theories. According to the Neo-classical perspective, migration is motivated by wage differentials between origin and destination areas, in which case migrants generally move from areas with suppressing wages to those with higher wages (Borjas, 1989). Using this framework, Thomas (2008) and Hirvonen and Lilleor (2015) argue that migrants will only return home if they fail to derive the expected benefit of higher earnings at the destination.

The NELM Theory considers return migration as part of a defined plan conceived by migrants before their departure from their places of origin (Thomas, 2008; Piotrowski and Tong, 2010). Adherents of this theory argue that the original plan of migrants includes designing an eventual return to their areas of origin after accumulating sufficient resources. Therefore, most migrants leave home with the intention of acquiring skills, savings, and other resources that would be useful to them upon their return home (Piotrowski and Tong, 2010).

Structural theories on return migration (according to this approach, return migration can either be a forced process or a calculated strategic plan; the situation in the country

of origin determines whether the returning experience is a success or a failure (Cassarino 2004)) on the other hand, stress the importance of the social, economic, and political conditions at the origin of migrants, not only as major factors in the decision to return, but also as components affecting the ability of return migrants to make use of the skills and resources that they have acquired at the destination (Diatta and Mbow, 1999; Thomas-Hope, 1999). Unlike the other two theories above, structural theories of return migration do not consider the success of the migration experience as a key factor in the decision to return; instead, they focus on the productivity of return migrants after arriving home. Structural theorists argue that returnees may not be able to reintegrate and consequently may decide to leave again if the 'gap' between their own norms and values and those at home is too large (Cassarino, 2004). Alternatively, returnees may also respond to expectations at home by spending their savings on consumption or unproductive investments which can affect their reintegration process negatively (Thomas, 2008).

Transnationalism compared to the NE, NELM and Structural approaches, provides a better framework for explaining return and reintegration. It sees reintegration as a process of re-adaptation which may not entail the abandonment of the identities migrants acquire while at the destination. While structuralists do not envisage the maintenance of social ties between origin and destination during the migration period and after return, these links are at the heart of transnationalism theory (Cassarino, 2004).

More importantly, there is less critical attention on any evidence supporting the challenges faced by returnees; hence, the

focus of this study. Potter (2005) and Preston (1993) argue that upon return from a chosen destination, the migrant needs to be reintegrated into the original society as it will be unrealistic to assume that the social and economic milieu to which migrants returned, had not changed since they left their communities. However, Laoire (2007) observed that several factors determine the extent to which migrants would be estranged upon their return home. These include the age of the migrant prior to leaving home, the length of time spent at the destination, the nature of contacts with family members and friends back home among others. There is no doubt that all the theories discussed above have contributed to shedding some light on the phenomenon of return migration and returnees' reintegration, but the structural and transnationalism theories guided the current study.

### 3. Data and Methodology

For the return migration research in Vietnam, a major difficulty issue is the lack of appropriate official and NGOs data as well as appropriate sampling frameworks in the form of census data. Official statistics in terms of return migration do not exist or the Vietnamese government generally does not capture most of the flow of return migration, especially data of migrant workers returning from Japan. That is why this study conducted original data collection through in-depth interviews.

The study adopted the structured and semi-structured interviews method, interviewing is typically done by face-to-face with audio recording. The fieldwork of the research was conducted from 19 to 29 December 2018 mostly in Nghe An province and other provinces such

as Thai Binh, Nam Dinh, Ha Tay, Hung Yen, Ninh Binh; these are provinces in the North that have a large number of labour export to Japan and interviewees in these provinces were randomly selected to check consistency with respondents in Nghe An province. The reason for choosing Nghe An is the main research site because this is the province with the largest number of people going to labour export aboard according to the report by Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>4)</sup> and Nghe An province is considered as a popular representative area for

migrant workers in the rural area of Vietnam today (see Figure 1 for the detailed location of the province). The sample of the research is Vietnamese who had been migrant to Japan for at least 1 year (minimum) and has voluntarily returned Vietnam. Before coming to Japan, they have just graduated from vocational schools or colleges and are in the process of finding jobs or doing seasonal or manual jobs.

The personal network has been exploited to find out the respondents and "snowball" sampling method had been taken into account

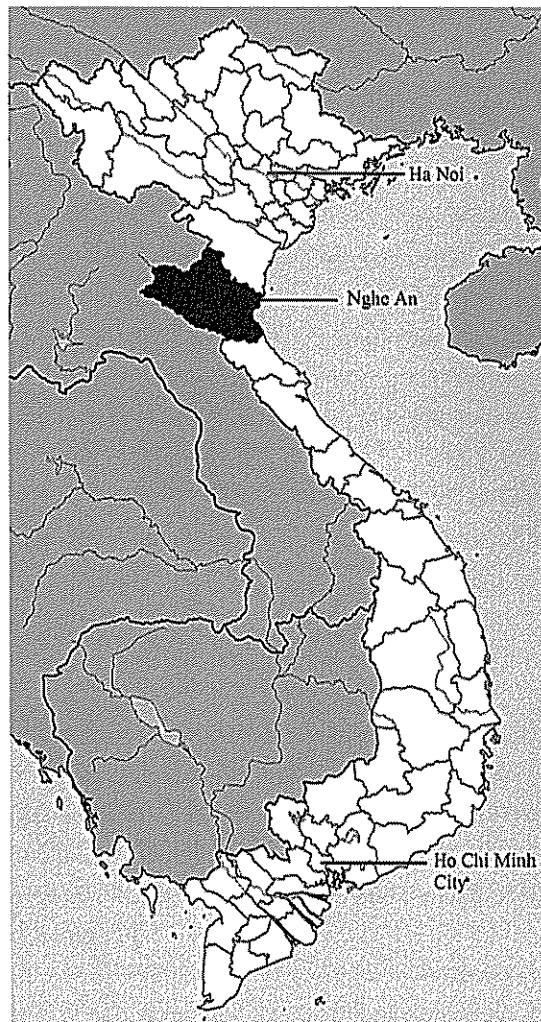


Figure 1: Location of Nghe An province

Table 1 : List of interviewees with Vietnamese migrant workers returning from Japan

Number of Respondents	Gender	Place of Birth	Year of Birth	Workplace in Japan (prefecture)	Duration of Stay	Type of work in Japan	Job before going to Japan	Job after returning from Japan
No.1	Male	Nghe An	1970	Ibaraki	2 years (1998 - 1999)	Precast concrete	Mechanic Worker	Owner of an Electronics Repair Shop
No.2	Male	Nghe An	1992	Shizuoka	1 year (2016 - 2017)	Sorting and transporting goods	Student	Looking for a job / Intentions to re-migrate
No.3	Male	Nghe An	1992	Chiba	3 years (2015 - 2018)	Construction	Construction Worker	Looking for a job / Waiting to re-migrate
No.4	Female	Nghe An	1985	Hokkaido	2 years (2015 - 2016)	Chicken Factory	Worker	Coffee Shop Owner
No.5	Male	Nghe An	1985	Nagano	1 year (2018)	Agriculture	Worker	Waiting to re-migrate
No.6	Male	Nghe An	1992	Nagano	1 year (2018)	Agriculture	Student	Waiting to re-migrate
No.7	Male	Nghe An	1992	Tokyo	3 years (2014 - 2017)	Construction	Construction Worker	Looking for a job / Waiting to re-migrate
No.8	Female	Nghe An	1992	Hokkaido	3 years (2015 - 2018)	Food	Student	Waiting to re-migrate
No.9	Male	Nghe An	1987	Ishikawa	3 years (2015 - 2018)	Construction	Construction Worker	Mechanical Engineer
No.10	Female	Nghe An	1986	Aichi	3 years (2007 - 2010)	Garments	Worker	Sewing Factory Worker
No.11	Male	Nghe An	1983	Tokyo	3 years (2004 - 2007)	Steelworks	Construction Worker	Looking for a job / Waiting to re-migrate
No.12	Male	Thai Binh	1984	Chiba	3 years (2014 - 2017)	Construction	Worker	Worker
No.13	Female	Ha Tay	1988	Kyoto	3 years (2015 - 2018)	Trainee Management and Interpreters	Student	The employee of a Japanese company in Vietnam
No.14	Male	Thai Binh	1986	Ibaraki	3 years (2012 - 2015)	Software Development	Student	The employee of a Japanese company in Vietnam
No.15	Male	Nam Dinh	1986	Chiba	3 years (2011 - 2014)	Information Technology	Student	Private company employee
No.16	Male	Ninh Binh	1985	Tokyo	3 years (2015 - 2018)	Scaffold	Mechanic Worker	Mechanic Worker
No.17	Male	Hung Yen	1988	Tokyo	2 years (2015 - 2017)	Construction	Worker	Worker
No.18	Female	Nam Dinh	1987	Osaka	3 years (2016 - 2018)	Nurses	Student	An employee of the Labour Export Consulting Company



if some of the interviewed respondents have their own network to hook up the researcher very easily. All issues relating to ethics such as confidentiality, privacy and informed consent were strictly adhered to. The fundamental information of interviewee is shown in table 1.

#### **4. The status of Vietnamese migrant workers returning from Japan**

This section will focus on the analysis of the status of migrant workers returning from Japan, relying on in-depth interviews were conducted with trainees/working people who have finished the program and came back to Vietnam. Most returnees are those with low-skills labour qualifications so that there are a clear difference and contrast compared to those with degrees and high-skills labour qualifications. The experiences of those interviewed indicated that Vietnamese migrant workers face challenges in all stages of their overseas labour migration such as migration stage, the return and (re) integration stage.

##### **4.1. The reason for coming to Japan, the recruitment stage and difficulties encountered during the migration process**

###### *The reason for coming to Japan*

Economic factors are key drivers of international labour migration<sup>5)</sup>. Economic factors, such as low income, poverty and the lack of employment opportunities and livelihood options, are major motivating factors in making migration decisions. Inherent disparities in living standards, opportunities for well-paid employment and income within the country have motivated migrants to look for new, even temporary, opportunities abroad.

This statement remains valid in our

interviews, 100% of the interviewees said that migration for economic reasons is particularly prevalent, especially in the context of globalization and free trade. Another reason is labour export also is the wave at local/commune and people think that labour export is the only economic escape route in the locality while local light industry does not develop so it does not create many jobs.

“At present, labour export is the best option for us when it is very difficult to apply for jobs in big cities while there are not many jobs locally and low salary. Most young people choose to go to work abroad as the only way to improve their lives” .

(No.7, man, 27 years old, 23 December 2018)

###### *Recruitment stage and difficulties encountered by migrants*

The Vietnamese state governs low-skilled migrant subjects through the Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA), together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior. Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB), an administrative unit under the Ministry of Labor, oversees all stages of labour export policy: pre-departure, the time overseas, and then return home. DOLAB works closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' consular departments to explore foreign labour markets and to address under- and unemployment in Vietnam. DOLAB monitors the trends in labour demand around the world and publishes country-specific requirements for temporary workers on their official website. To aid in understanding the “productive networks” of the recruitment system with its strong state influence below is an analysis of

the sources of labour brokers. Many brokers come from state employment agencies, such as city/provincial employment centres overseen by city-level labour departments of MoLISA, or district employment centres under district-level labour departments. Brokers can come from employment centres of the labour federations who acted as liaisons for recruitment companies. In rural areas, labour brokers are from mass organizations, such as peasants' and women's unions, and also have their own employment centres, such as peasant employment centres. Private recruitment companies in Vietnam do exist, but they often have some connections to the state, many retired state officials in some ministries set up private recruitment companies. To meet the labour export quotas, labour brokers from local mass organizations, including women's unions and peasants' unions, would visit potential migrants and their parents at their homes to recruit them. At the local level, the labour federations' employment offices recruit potential migrant workers for some recruitment companies<sup>6)</sup>.

There is a fact that the interviewees mainly seek information on labour export through district employment centres under district-level labour departments or through local brokers. When participating in the migration process, the interviewees reported a range of problems such as:

- Lack of information about recruitment and related conditions: Respondents reported a lack of information on the migration process and the costs involved, while some were not accurately informed of the type of work at destination.
- Lack of occupational and other pre-departure training: Several of those interviewed reported that they had no

pre-departure training despite official requirements, while others found the training they received of little value at the destination.

- Receiving lower salaries than stipulated in contracts: Whilst the majority of respondents said that they had received salaries as agreed upon in the contracts, there was still a concerning number who reported they did not.

#### 4.2. Return and (re)integration stage

According to this study, all respondents stated that the reason for their return was the labour contract ended. The financial situation of several returnees had worsened as a result of their labour migration, and some fell into debt on return and struggled to find work. They found their capacities were not sufficiently recognized upon return; few opportunities existed to develop their careers, and local businesses were often not attractive employers.

##### *Limited financial sources for fees and debts*

For many Vietnamese migrant workers, additional challenges linked to their migration experience were awaiting them upon their return to Vietnam. Problems often related to financial concerns. The pressure to save money abroad was also related to the fact that the majority of returnees had borrowed money in order to get to Japan. The total cost of labour export to Japan averages from 4,000USD to 12,000USD, in order to get such a large amount of money they have to borrow from their family networks, friends, or from the bank. Due to the short travel time (1 to 3 years), the accumulated amount is not much (their income monthly earned range from 1,200USD to 1,700USD, after deducting expenses and taxes,

the remaining savings are 500USD to 700USD), in many cases, workers have to repay their debts before they can send money home. We found similar experiences expressed by our migrant interviewees: most migrant workers have to use their first-year or second-year earnings to repay their debts.

“My family had to borrow about 4,500USD plus the family's money, a total of over 10,000USD to cover the procedures for me to go to Japan for 3 years”.

(No.7, man, 27 years old, 23 December 2018)

“Almost all the money we earned in the last two years was just enough to cover our debts and buy some household items, after returning home we had nothing but empty hands”.

(No.17, man, 34 years old, 26 December 2018)

In connection with the reintegration strategies of return migrants in the study area, two interviewees who were interviewed during an in-depth interview made the following sterling revelations:

“When you travel and return like this the family thinks you have made a lot of money and all their problems are always on you. Since I came, the pressure from my relatives is just unbearable and because of that, I have moved away from my family house to rent elsewhere. Another problem is that you know when you are away from home for some years, you lose all your friends when you finally return and you have to start again”.

(No.14, man, 33 years old, 26 December 2018)

Not only stuck into debt problems but also issues of family conflict and related social

relationships involve to returning migrants make them feeling unwelcome once they returned.

However, in our survey, not all of the returned migrants are in debt and financial difficulties, there are still some returning people who have better accumulate of savings, which enabled them to open their own stores like an electronics repair shop (No.1, man, 49 years old) or coffee shop (No.4, women, 34 years old).

#### *Difficulties of getting new occupations*

All the returned migrants stated that they promptly search for jobs upon their return to Vietnam. It is noteworthy that many of the migrant workers who were employed in agriculture and food prior to their migration transferred to the manufacturing, construction and services sectors upon their return to Vietnam.

“Although, I came to Japan to work in agriculture, when I returned to Vietnam we did not want to continue working in the agriculture sector because it was seasonal and the income was very low. We want to find new jobs related to factories, construction in industrial zones or big cities but very difficult because of the lack of information and qualification is limited”.

(No.6, man, 27 years old, 22 December 2018)

Additionally, the number of migrant returnees using their savings for investment in production and business opportunities at home is very low, as mentioned above, only No.1 and No.4 used saving to open their own stores. Regarding No.1 life story, he came to Japan as a worker of precast concrete in 1998–1999 period, after two years, he returned to hometown in Nghe

An province with a little money accumulated. After many local job applications but not successful due to very few suitable jobs and interests. He decided to use the amount of money he accumulated to go to a vocational school for 2 years with the specialization of electronic repair. After finishing his education, he opened an electronics repair shop at home and he has been doing this job for 18 years until now. After years of hard work, he has built a big house with full facilities and monthly income is about 600USD enough to cover family living expenses and children's education costs and other expenses. Another business success story is No.4, she came to Japan in the period of 2015–2016 and working for a chicken factory located in Hokkaido. Here she meets and falls in love with her hometown people - her husband now. After 2 years of hard work they returned home and got married, using the money that they accumulated to build a house and also a home coffee shop. In early 2018, her husband continued to go to labour export to Russia and she stayed to continue managing her coffee shop. The shop brought her about 750USD monthly revenue, compared to the average local income, this can be considered as a high-income level.

Savings are instead mostly used to pay off debts and for home-related needs like household furniture and consumer goods, and for children's education.

“People may think that I must have money, that I must be richer. When I ask them to borrow money, they may think that it is not true. I tried to ask people around that I wanted to set up my own business but I failed. People think that it is not correct that I want to set up a business, they may think that I will go

abroad again with that money”.

(No.10, women, 33 years old, 23 December 2018).

Moreover, age, education and work experience have become more crucial in finding employment. Returnees had not been able to study or work abroad in meaningful jobs where they could gain work experience useful in Vietnam after the return. In comparison with friends and other people who did not go abroad, they were therefore disadvantaged, because they lacked a diploma, skills and useful work experience.

“For returnees, it is very difficult to find a job because you do not have a certificate to work for a firm or company. Coming to Japan in less than 1 year, we are just seasonal workers”.

(No.9, man, 32 years old, 23 December 2018)

Many returnees have trouble finding suitable work matching their job experience and skills gained overseas, while workers with no technical qualifications or education reported difficulties in finding work, even skilled workers struggle to find jobs relevant to the work experience gained abroad. A key reason for this is the lack of support from local authorities and recruitment agencies to facilitate returnees' reintegration into the local labour market. Another reason is that the main economic activity in Nghe An province is agriculture and there are very limited jobs that can be used to take advantage of the experience and skills of returning migrants.

#### *Intentions to re-migrate*

Intention to re-migrate is a common feature among returned migrants. Many of our interviewees indicated they were not satisfied

with their return and expressed their desire to re-emigrate in future. Most migrant workers (16 people over 18 interviewees) came to Japan to work as trainees or interns, according to the Japanese government's regulation, people came to work for only a maximum period of 3 years, after that they must be returned home. Most of the respondents said that these 3 years period is too short compared to other countries, they hope the Japanese government will extend working time up to 5 years or more.

"I came here to work for 3 years when I just gained experience and accumulated a little capital, I had to come back, I hope to stay a lot more".

(No.16, man, 34 years old, 29 December 2018)

Some interviewees said they are still waiting for new regulations to return to Japan to work, while others are considering Japan as a stepping stone to prepare them for other desirable destinations. They had plans and goals to work their way up, starting with Japan as a successive step, then Korea, Taiwan. Their expectations are to improve their living conditions and to save and invest along the way. These workers want to accumulate capital to help their families and to travel to new places in the hope of improving their futures.

"Because my working time in Japan for 3 years has ended and I cannot return to Japan. So, I am preparing documents to export labour to Korea".

(No.7, man, 27 years old, 23 December 2018)

"If there is an opportunity, I still want to work overseas, in a different country to learn new things. For example, I'd go anywhere offered by the [recruitment] company - another country such as

Taiwan".

(No.8, women, 27 years old, 24 December 2018)

In sum, the migrant subjects choose to engage in step-wise upward mobility to improve their situations.

#### 4.3. Assistance from organizations

Returnees frequently mentioned that because they had been abroad they did not know anymore how things worked in Vietnam. They, therefore, needed practical information on how to start. However, whether the information depending on what returnees did with the information they received, on whether they had the motivation and capacities to build up their lives again and on whether the information corresponded to their needs at that particular moment. Because there are just a few organizations (such as Youth Union and Viet Nam Women's Union) in Vietnam providing return assistance, there is a need for a broader offer of information, including how to gain access to information and other assistance (organizations).

As a result of the lack of information and support programs from local government, return migrants have to face many challenges to reintegration once they return to Vietnam, especially, reentry into the domestic labour market.

"After returning, we absolutely did not have any business relationship with the previous recruitment company, nor did we receive any help from the local government in finding new jobs".

(No.3, man, 27 years old, 22 December 2018)

Returnees with technical skills and languages acquired abroad could significantly contribute

to local economic development if they received greater support from local authorities and agencies responsible for job counselling and creation. Awareness of their return and reintegration support options is a problem for Vietnamese migrants while they are outside the country. The Government has significantly improved the online accessibility of migration-related information, but it is uncertain that migrants will have web access in the host country. The consular offices of Viet Nam remain a key point of contact for international migrants. There is currently no consular service available that is designed to support all groups of migrant workers in their return and reintegration process. Return migrants are in need of training and support in job placement to transfer and apply the skills they learned from overseas. As Vietnam opens, more FDI firms and Japanese companies are establishing their factories in the country and have a high demand for those experienced labourers.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper assessed challenges return migrants from Japan face in reintegrating into their communities of origin in the rural area of Vietnam. The experiences of those interviewed indicated that Vietnamese migrant workers face challenges in the return and (re) integration stage, the most important point is that experienced migrants have not been able to reintegrate locally.

In term of the rural area such as Nghe An, the financial situation of several returnees had worsened as a result of their labour migration, and some fell into debt on return and struggled to find work. Access to information about the domestic employment market and resources

to support returnees is limited and ineffective. There is a lack of support programs aimed at helping migrants find employment which capitalizes on the knowledge and experiences they gained while working abroad. Return migrants found their capacities were not sufficiently recognized upon return; few opportunities existed to develop their careers, and local businesses were often not attractive employers.

Intention to re-migrate is a common feature among returned migrants as they were not satisfied with their return and expressed their desire to re-emigrate in future. Starting with Japan then Korea, Taiwan, their desires are to improve living conditions and to save and invest along the way. These workers want to accumulate capital to support their families and to venture out to new places in the expectation of improving their future prospects.

In research terms, this study has revealed a number of important and interesting findings that consistent with the existing literature on return migration and reintegration and contribute to studies of returning migrants in Vietnam. The difference in this study compared to other studies about return migrant and reintegration is its focus on the new labour market (Japan). While other studies show that migrant workers in countries like Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia... often have long-term employment of 3 to 5 years or longer but in Japan, migrant workers can only work for up to 3 years under the Technical Intern Training Program up to 2017. This led to disparities in accumulated income as well as the many problems that return migrants from Japan face when they return such as facing financial difficulties or falling into debt status. The new program since 2017 made it possible for migrant

workers to stay in Japan for up to 5 years. The findings emphasized here, mostly descriptive, clearly call for further investigation of this issue.

## Notes

- 1) "Vietnam Migration Profile 2016" – A report by Ministry of Foreign Affairs with financial and technical support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Ha Noi, August 2017.
- 2) DOLAB (2013), "Returning Vietnamese migrant workers: Policy and Practice", this report was developed by Vietnamese Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB) in cooperation with International Organization for Migration (IOM). Access from [https://vietnam.iom.int/sites/default/files/IOM\\_Files/Projects/Labour\\_Migration/RMW\\_eng.pdf](https://vietnam.iom.int/sites/default/files/IOM_Files/Projects/Labour_Migration/RMW_eng.pdf)
- 3) UNSD (1998), "Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration", Revision 1, United Nations, New York.
- 4) "Vietnam Migration Profile 2016" – A report by Ministry of Foreign Affairs with financial and technical support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Ha Noi, August 2017.
- 5) "The Review of Vietnamese Migration Abroad", Consular Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Hanoi, 2011.
- 6) Interview with No.18 – A Returned Migrant from Japan and now working like an employee for Labour Export Consulting Company in Hanoi, 29 December 2018.

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