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VIETNAMESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT REPATRIATES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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by

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VIETNAMESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT REPATRIATES:

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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The main purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of Vietnamese international students who returned to Vietnam after graduation from a U.S. higher education institution (henceforth, the repatriates). Areas to be explored include the transitional period, perceptions of the relevance of the U.S. education to their current life, reflections on their experience in the U.S., and their future plans. The knowledge drawn from this study can serve as useful reference information for current and future recruitment efforts, support services, and courses geared toward Vietnamese international students.

The current study aimed to explore the experiences of the mostly unheard voices of a particular group, the Vietnamese international student repatriate population. The researcher sought to understand this population through inviting them to describe their experiences using their own stories and interpretations of their lived experiences. Thus, qualitative research approach would appear to be the most effective and appropriate approach to accomplish the study's purpose.

Study participants are Vietnamese international students who graduated from a private university in the northeastern region of the U.S. whose functional pseudonym will be "Sunny University." The participants were purposefully selected based on two criteria: 1) graduated

from the selected university and 2) had returned to Vietnam to live after graduation. Seven student repatriates participated in the study.

Using open-ended interviews and follow-up communications, the participants were invited to discuss their experiences in depth. Extensive notes were taken from the interviews. The interviews were transcribed, translated, and coded for further analysis. Major themes were identified and interpreted to create a deep understanding of the participants' experiences.

Each participant brought their own background and personality with them to their study abroad journey. However, analysis of their interviews revealed major themes regarding similar concerns, experiences, and aspirations across their reflections. Their conversations revolved around four major themes: factors influencing their decision making processes regarding their departure and repatriation, adjustment processes to life and career changes, personal development and relationships, and career trajectories and aspirations.

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My journey as an international student in a social science field has been a challenging one. It feels so surreal to me that the little orphaned girl from a poor family in Vietnam is now getting a doctoral degree in the US. This is beyond my wildest dream growing up. I have been fortunate to have friends, mentors, and family who gave me support and encouragement through this long journey. I would like to give special thanks to the following individuals and groups for their generous support:

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overwhelmed with work and school. But at the end of the day when you greet me with your beautiful smile, I know everything will be fine. I love you baby boy!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the last decade, international students have become an integral part of the student population in the higher education sector (Bartram, 2007). International students contribute to the host country in several ways. Financially, international students and their dependents spend a substantial amount of money annually on tuitions, housing, food, and consumer goods. These expenditures make them a significant source of revenue for the local community (Lee, 2007). Skinner and Shenoy (2003) discussed multiple factors contributing to host countries' desire to attract international students. These factors may be categorized as economic, political/security, and academic. Economically, the benefits international students bring to the host countries are manifold. Besides paying for tuition and living expenses, international students also serve as research assistants and post-doctorate fellows who further research advancement in the host country, which improves the host country's competitive advantage in the global economy. Politically, a host country gains multiple benefits from hosting international students. International students provide the host community with the opportunity to be exposed to and learn from different cultures and political systems. Also, international students who return to their home countries usually bring with them good will about the host country. Educating international students is a great opportunity for the host country to influence future leaders who guide the development of their home countries. Academically, international students contribute significantly to cultural and research diversity on campuses. International students, often among the top academic performers in their home countries, provide a healthy and stimulating competition to host countries' students. Given the great benefits that international students bring

to host communities, the competition among countries to attract international students has been heightened. Countries that are making especially strong efforts to attract international students include the United States of America (henceforth, U.S.), the United Kingdom, Australia, France, and Japan (Skinner & Shenoy, 2003).

Context of the Problem

There are several reasons for international students to seek higher education abroad. Skinner and Shenoy (2003) suggested that the factors that lead students to becoming international students can be categorized as "push" and "pull" factors. The "push factor" refers to characteristics of home countries that contribute to students' decisions to seek higher education elsewhere; these include poor educational systems, social discrimination, limited entry-level job opportunities, and a variety of political and economic factors. The "pull factor" refers to incentives and characteristics of the destination host countries that attract international students and can include scholarship availability, quality of the education system, political ties, cultural and linguistic similarities, and the hope that holding an international education credential will contribute to achieving lucrative careers. Some international students intend, not only to study in the host country, but also to work, at least for a few years in order to gain experience in the same country after graduation. Hoffer et al. (2006) provided an estimate that among the doctorate recipients with temporary visas who received their degrees in the 2005 academic year, an overwhelming majority (73.9%) intended to stay in the U.S. upon graduation. Researchers have identified some common reasons for international students' intention to stay in the host country, including pursuing a more lucrative career, having access to job opportunities that might not be

available in their home country, and the applicability of the education (Bratsberg, 1995; Chen & Barnett, 2000).

Research on international student mobility has been focused on the flow from home country to host country; less attention has been paid to what happens after graduation or after students return to their home country, an issue often referred to as "reverse mobility" (Lee & Kim, 2010). There are several reasons for a need for more research on international students' reverse mobility. First, the repatriates can serve as sources of information for other students who are interested in studying abroad. Second, host countries invest considerable amounts of human and financial resources (faculty, staff, advisor, assistantship, grants etc.) in the education of international students; they have interest in acquiring knowledge about how these students utilize their training/education after graduation. Third, individual institutions and host countries' higher education systems are interested in learning about how relevant and useful the provided education has been for international students who return their home countries; knowledge gained can encourage them to provide targeted and pertinent improvements in their curricula and programs.

Within the limited pool of knowledge about the reverse mobility of international students, research has predominantly focused on students from traditional top-sending countries such as China, India, Korea, and Taiwan (Finn 2007; Jin, Lee, Yoon, Kim & Oh 2006; Saxenian 2005; Zweig, Fung, & Han 2008). Vietnam has consistently been among the top ten sending countries to the U.S. since 2009 (Institute of International Education, 2012a). In the 2011-2012 academic year, Vietnam was the eighth leading place of origin for students coming to the U.S. with 15,572 students (Institute of International Education, 2012b). However, very few research efforts have

been directed specifically toward Vietnamese international students, and even fewer have addressed Vietnamese students who return to Vietnam upon graduation from a U.S. higher education institution.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Vietnamese international students who returned to Vietnam after graduation from a U.S. higher education institution (henceforth, the repatriates). Areas to be explored include the transitional period, perceptions of the relevance of the U.S. education to their current life, reflections on their experience in the U.S., and their future plans. The knowledge drawn from this study can serve as useful reference information for current and future recruitment efforts, support services, and courses geared toward Vietnamese international students.

Research Questions

The following aspects of Vietnamese repatriates' experiences were explored:

1. The factors that influenced their decisions to study abroad and the selection of the destination country and institution.

2. Their experiences at the host institution in the U.S., including their first impressions of the overall atmosphere, of faculty and staff interactions and of support services.

3. Their perceptions of the challenges and positive developments that come with being an international student.

4. The factors that influenced their decisions to return to Vietnam.

5. Their transitions back into life in Vietnam.

6. The relevance of their U.S. education to their social lives and to their professional careers in Vietnam.

7. Their perceptions of the environment in Vietnam for international student repatriates.

8. Their future personal and professional plans.

9. Their suggestions for improvements to the U.S. education program.

Definition of Terms

International Student—A student from another country who is studying in the U.S. on a non-immigrant student visa, classified as an F-1, M-1, or J-1. This definition does not include permanent residents, resident aliens, "green card" holders, students on other sorts of visas, refugees, or immigrants.

Vietnamese international student repatriate – A Vietnamese student who returned to Vietnam upon graduation from a U.S. higher education institution.

Delimitations

This study was limited to Vietnamese international students who returned to Vietnam upon graduation from a U.S. higher education institution within the last five years to ensure the relevance of the research findings to the current context.

Limitations

The study's findings cannot be generalized to other groups of international students for at least three reasons. It was a qualitative study in which (1) the sample was small due to the difficulty in identifying and contacting participants, as there is no official network or organization of Vietnamese international student repatriates, (2) the data collected is comprised

of self-reports and participants may have left out or distorted their responses to the questions, and

(3) the characteristics of the sample of international students varied significantly.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Vietnamese international students who returned to Vietnam after graduation from a U.S. higher education institution (henceforth, the repatriates). Areas to be explored include the transitional period, perceptions of the relevance of the U.S. education to their current life, reflections on their experience in the U.S., and their future plans. The knowledge drawn from this study can serve as useful reference information for current and future recruitment efforts, support services, and courses geared toward Vietnamese international students.

International Students in the U.S.

The Institute of International Education (IIE) provides comprehensive statistics collected on international students in the U.S. through the annual *Open Doors* reports. Information provided in these reports includes the annual enrollment of international students in the U.S., the annual enrollment of international students in the Intensive English Program, and the annual enrollment of domestic students in U.S. study abroad programs. The data on international students, partially summarized below, were disaggregated in the report to address questions concerning places of origin, economic impact on states, and leading institutions.

In the 2011-2012 academic year, according to the most recent report (IIE, 2012a), the total number of international students in the U.S. was 764,495. International students comprised 3.7% of the total U.S. higher education student population. Doctorate-granting universities hosted 64% of all international students. In 2011-2012, undergraduate international students

outnumbered graduate international students for the first time since 2000-2001. Female students comprised 44% of international students in 2011-2012.

The top five places of origin (China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada) comprised 56% of all international students. Asian students comprised the large portion of international students in the U.S. As of 2012, China was the top exporting country at 25.4%, followed by India (13.1%) and South Korea (9.5%). The most popular field of study for international students was Business and Management (22%); STEM fields were among the more popular fields of study, as well (a combined 41%). The top five host states were California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, and Illinois. California, New York, and Texas hosted 32% of all international students in the U.S. International student enrollments tended to be highly concentrated in institutions with relatively large numbers of international students. U.S. institutions with one thousand or more international students comprised only 5% of all hosting institutions but hosted 66% of all international students in 2011-2012.

In addition to contributing to institutional cultural capital and campus diversity, international students have contributed significantly to the U.S. economy. The majority of international students (64% in 2011-2012) were supported through personal and family funds. Eighty-two percent of all international undergraduate students rely primarily on personal and family funds to pay for their studies. About 22% of international students received funds from U.S. colleges and universities, 6% received funds from their foreign government and university, and 5% received funds from current employers. In total, about 78% of the international students received most of their funding from sources outside of the U.S. In addition to paying tuitions, international students must pay for books, living expenses, transportation, food, housing,

entertainment, and health insurance. Most of these students are charged non-resident tuition rates that are often much higher than resident tuition rates. As a result, the hosting institutions' local economies acquire a substantial amount of income from international students. According to the 2012 *Open Doors* report, international students' total contribution to the U.S. economy in 2011 was estimated to exceed $22.7 billion.

Worldwide, there were over 4.1 million international students in 2010, a 10.8% increase over the previous year. In terms of absolute numbers, the U.S. was the top destination country, followed by the United Kingdom, China, France, and Germany. However, in terms of international enrollment as a percentage of total higher education enrollment, Australia was the leading country (21.4%), followed by the UK (18.6%), France (12.3%), Germany (11.4%), and the U.S. (3.6%). The U.S. had much room to grow in terms of international enrollment.

Challenges faced by international students. While all students entering higher education have to cope with the various new facets of the educational environment, the majority of international students have to deal with additional challenges, such as language and culture gaps (Bradley, 2000; Ellis et al., 2005). Similar to domestic students, international students are at risk for developing mental health problems, but international students are at higher risk due to loss of support systems and to acculturation stress (McLachlan & Justice, 2009). Mental health problems, such as depression, psychosomatic complaints, anxiety and paranoid reactions, have been suggested to be more common among international students (Sam, 2001).

Distressingly, international students seem less likely to utilize support services. For example, Rosenthal, Russell, and Thomson (2008) conducted a study of 979 international students attending an Australian metropolitan university that addressed the students' perceived

need for and use of university health and counseling services as well as their evaluation of those services. In addition, the researchers explored three domains of international student well-being: (a) relating to others, (b) living and studying in Melbourne, and (c) health and health-related behaviors. The results suggested that (a) international students were under-utilizing both health and counseling services due to a lack of information about the services and, to a lesser extent, due to having doubts about and discomfort with the services and that (b) within-person variables played a stronger role than culture in accounting for students' help-seeking decisions.

Closer to home, Mitchell, Greenwood, and Guglielmi (2007) examined the counseling center utilization patterns, during a two-year period, of 218 international and 222 domestic students at a large, public university in the eastern part of the U.S. The data revealed that international students were significantly more likely than U.S. students to have been hospitalized for psychiatric reasons. Also, the study found that international students used crisis hours more often than did U.S. students.

The myriad difficulties faced by international students contribute to international students' mental health risk; they include language difficulties, cultural shock, difficulties in negotiating day-to-day social activities, racial and ethnic discrimination (Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee, 2007, 2008; Li, Fox, & Almarza, 2007; Sam, 2001; Wang, 2009; Zhao et al., 2005), and a lack of physical activity (Yoh, Yang, & Gordon, 2008). The literature on international students has identified several major problems, such as loneliness, lack of support, few meaningful relationships with host nationals, culture shock, unfamiliar modes of teaching and learning, a changing sense of identity, unrealistic family and self-expectations, financial problems, crises at home, adverse experiences in the host country, isolation, and alienation (Deakins, 2009;

Hanassab, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Leask, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2007; Neri & Ville, 2008; Rosenthal et al., 2008). When international students, especially doctoral students, return home, they can sometimes find themselves feeling frustrated because of the vast differences between their overseas doctoral training and the realities of their home countries (Robinson-Pant, 2009). A qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with twenty-two Asian students at a New Zealand tertiary institution provides a critical summary of important challenges: (a) language difficulties and cultural differences, (b) unfamiliar patterns of classroom interactions, (c) lack of knowledge of academics norms and conventions, (d) inadequate learning support, (e) difficulties in making friends with domestic students, and (f) lack of sense of belonging (Campbell & Li, 2008).

In a study of 200 international students in Australian universities, Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, and Ramia (2008) found that two-thirds of the group had experienced the problems of loneliness and/or isolation, especially in the early months. Lee and Rice (2007) addressed international student perceptions of discrimination in the U.S. Utilizing in-depth interviews with twenty-four students from fifteen countries, the authors considered the numerous difficulties the students encountered, which ranged from perceptions of unfairness and inhospitality to cultural intolerance and confrontation. Some participants in the study reported that Americans' lack of desire to understand another culture contributed to their feelings of cultural alienation. Some participants even experienced direct abuse that involved verbal insults, which left deep impressions that these students could not easily forget. Urias and Yeakey (2009) conducted an analysis of the U.S. student visa systems that emphasized its misperceptions, barriers, and consequences. The researchers concluded that international students and scholars'

first experience in the U.S., especially those from the Middle East, was often one of frustration and anxiety. Going through the regulatory maze proved to be another challenge for international students in the U.S.

Adjustment. International students' adjustment to their new life overseas can be a dynamic and multifaceted process (Brown & Holloway, 2008). In an ethnographic study of international postgraduate students at a university in the south of England, Brown and Holloway (2008) found an association between the passage of time and a gradual decrease in acculturative stress. However, this was not a generalizable process; there was fluctuation not only in experiences across the student body but also in the individuals' subjective sense of success across different aspects of life in the new country.

In a study of 124 Turkish students studying in the U.S., Bektas et al. (2009) found that social support and self-esteem were predictors of psychological adjustment. Also, the results revealed that separation— co-national relationships— was the typical attitude of the participants in terms of their acculturation.

Wang (2009) introduced the concept of resilience into the study of adjustment of international graduate students at U.S. universities. He explored relationships among resilience characteristics, background variables, and adjustment problem areas, and the effects of resilience and background variables on adjustment. The study's statistical analyses revealed that resilience characteristics were moderately associated with background variables, correlated negatively with adjustment problem areas, and were better correlated with adjustment problem areas than were background variables. These correlations suggested that resilience had the greatest association with adjustment.

Vietnamese International Students

IIE provides enrollment information for Vietnamese international students in the U.S. According to IIE's 2012 Open Doors report, the number of Vietnamese international students in the U.S. has been increasing steadily for the last decade (IIE, 2012b). In 2011-2012, there are 15,572 Vietnamese international students in the U.S., up from 2,022 in 2000-2001. Vietnam has been a top twenty place of origin since 2006/07 and has remained a top ten place of origin for international students in the U.S. since 2010/11. In the academic year 2011-2012, Vietnam was the eighth leading place of origin for students coming to the U.S. Figure 1 outlines the trend of Vietnamese international student enrollment in U.S. educational institutions from 2000 to 2012.
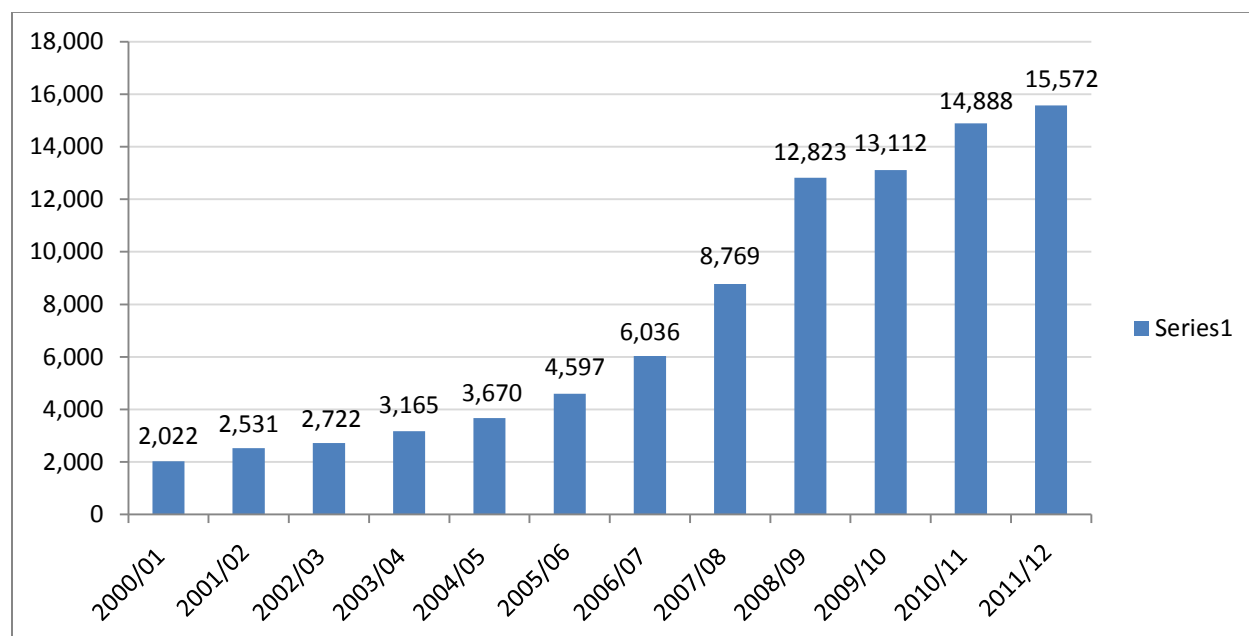
Figure 1. Vietnamese international student enrollment in the U.S. from 2000 to 2012

The majority of Vietnamese students study at the undergraduate level. Seventy-two percent of Vietnamese international students in the U.S. are undergraduates, while only 17% are graduate students.

In 2009, IIE conducted an online survey of 707 prospective students in Vietnam who had visited the U.S. Department of State-funded EducationU.S.A advising centers in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi and/or had attended one of the IIE Higher Education Fairs in Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, or Danang (IIE, 2012c). The U.S. was the overwhelming first-choice destination for respondents in Vietnam, with 82% of respondents listing the U.S. as their first choice. The most important reason cited for studying abroad was the quality or type of academic programs. Among the top reasons for choosing the U.S. as their study abroad destination were gaining cultural experience, improving language skills, preparing for a future career in a foreign country or foreign-based company, and obtaining a degree. Almost all respondents felt that good English language ability and an American degree would aid them in a future job search. Respondents reported that the top obstacles for studying abroad included cost, finding accurate information, obtaining a visa, the language barrier, and cultural differences.

The report also stated that the U.S. was perceived by most respondents to have a wide range of schools and programs and a high-quality higher education system, to be welcoming to international students, and to have many scholarships opportunities. However, many respondents also felt that the U.S. was an expensive place to study with high tuition costs. The U.S. was also perceived to be a less-safe place to study than other destinations such as Singapore and Australia. Also, many students indicated that they felt the U.S. had difficult procedures for obtaining a student visa.

The Current State of Vietnamese Higher Education

       Background information on the Vietnamese national educational system. Doan (2005) offers an overview of the history of the Vietnamese national educational system and its evolution through different stages, which correspond to national historical phases. For one millennium (111 BC to 939 AD), Vietnam was under Chinese domination. As a result, Chinese culture has the earliest and most significant influence on the culture and the educational philosophy of Vietnam. The philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism have had a strong impact in the shaping of Vietnamese traditional education. Confucian teachings on the importance of virtue, social order, and harmony have been the foundation of Vietnamese culture and education. From 929 AD to 1858, Vietnam went through a series of Vietnamese ruling dynasties, but Chinese influence remained predominant in the national educational system. During the period of 1858–1954, the educational system in Vietnam was mostly influenced by French ideology. One very important landmark in this period was the creation of the Vietnamese national language (*Quoc Ngu*), present-day Vietnamese. From 1954 to1975, Vietnam was split into two opposing states, with the North following the Soviet and Eastern European educational model and the South implementing the French and, later, American models (Binh, 2003). Starting in 1965, the South of Vietnam experimented with the American model of higher education with the establishment of three multidisciplinary universities, three specialized private universities operated by various religious groups, and a number of community colleges. However, in 1975, the two states were reunified under the North state government, and all of the American-affiliated higher education institutions in the South were abolished. From 1975 to 1986, the whole country followed the Soviet model of highly centralized management in all

spheres, including education. As a result, Vietnam suffered an economic crisis. In an effort to ameliorate the crisis, in 1986 the Vietnamese government decided to lead the country in a different direction through a bold move called *Doi moi* (Renovation). The government implemented innovative policies aimed at transforming the Vietnamese economy from a completely centralized system to a market economy with open policies for international relations (Dang & Nguyen, 2009). One of the major areas of transformation under this new direction was education. Since the adoption of the Renovation policy, Vietnam has been making impressive progress in increasing both the size and the quality of its national education system (Binh, 2003).

Current national education system. According to the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) website (MOET, 2006), the current structure of Vietnam's national education system consists of six levels:

1. Crêches and kindergartens: ages 3 months to 6 years old.

2. Primary education (5 years): ages 6 to 11.

3. Lower secondary education (4 years): ages 11 to 15.

4. Upper secondary education (3 years): ages 15 to 18. Alternatively, students can attend secondary technical and vocational education (3 to 4 years) instead of traditional high schools.

5. Higher education: junior college (3 years) and universities (4 to 6 years).

6. Postgraduate education: master's (2 years), doctor of philosophy (4 years).

In terms of administrative and financial aspects, Vietnam currently has four different kinds of educational institutions: public, semipublic, people-founded, and private. Public institutions are funded and controlled entirely by the government. Semipublic institutions are

created, managed, and funded by the state in partnership with other economic or social organizations or with individuals. People-founded institutions are those established and operated by social or economic organizations.

The MOET is the ultimate authority in the Vietnamese education system. However, the degree of central control is different at each educational level. The primary and secondary education curricula are completely dictated by the MOET. The MOET still controls most of the essential aspects at the higher education level, such as the total number of credits and the percentage of core courses, as well as required courses and specialized courses for each field (Doan, 2005).

Since the implementation of the Renovation reform in 1986, Vietnam has made significant progress in improving and some progress in expanding access to the national education system. The total number of students has been increasing rapidly, from 20 million in 1996 to 23 million in 2005 (World Bank, 2012). Also according to the 2012 World Bank report on Vietnam's educational development, Vietnam has achieved positive progress in ensuring the universalization of primary and lower secondary education. In the 2004–2005 school year, the participation rate of primary school-age children was 98.0%, and the transition rate from primary level (graduates) to lower secondary level (Grade 6) was 98.5%. From 2000 to 2005, 5.3 million people were trained in vocational training institutions, and the average rate of enrollment growth was 14.7% per year in professional secondary education.

Higher education system. According to the 2012 World Bank report on Vietnam's educational development, the 1986 reform orientation for higher education emphasized new goals and structural changes in the sector. Training was provided for various economic

components and to meet the diverse learning needs of the society. Instead of reliance on the state

budget, all possible financial sources were to be mobilized and used. Instead of implementing

only the planned targets set by the state, other non-state targets were also set and fulfilled.

Instead of rigid training programs, various flexible and diverse training programs were

developed to meet the requirements of employment creation and finding a job in a new market

economy with many job-related changes. One significant structural change was the merging of

the various agencies into one agency that had sole authority over and is responsible for the entire

educational system. The aforementioned Ministry of Education and Training was established in

1990 from the merger of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher, Technical, and

Vocational Education.

The MOET has since been the main authority responsible for the national education

system, which includes all levels from preschool to postgraduate programs (Ngo, 2006). In

1998, the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs assumed responsibility for

vocational and technical education. The MOET controls most of the essential components of

higher education, including the allocation of state funding and the setting of the curriculum. All

academic matters are regulated by the MOET. Despite the MOET's significant power over

higher education, other agencies are also involved. For example, universities of medicine and

pharmacy are controlled by the Ministry of Health. Based on training levels, higher education in

Vietnam includes college education, university education, master's education, and doctoral

education. College education offers training programs that are 1.5 to 3 years of study in

duration. Colleges can offer less than baccalaureate training programs, whereas universities

offer bachelor, master's, and doctoral programs. Research Institutes can offer doctoral programs

and, in cooperation with universities, can offer master's programs as permitted by the prime minister (MOET, 2006). In the 2011–2012 academic year there were 215 colleges and 204 universities in Vietnam. The total enrollment in higher education was 2,204,313, with 756,292 students enrolled in colleges and 1,448,021 students enrolled in universities.

Obtaining access to higher education in Vietnam can be very difficult because demand outpaces the capacity of colleges and universities. Only a small percentage of those who pass the national entrance exam will be considered for matriculation. The difficulty in accessing higher education contributes to the persistence of inequalities in Vietnamese society. For example, London (2004) pointed out that in 1998, 18- to 23-year-old students from the wealthiest quintile were 61 times more likely to be enrolled than those from the poorest quintile. The higher education entrance examinations are very competitive and stressful. The score on the exam is basically the only thing that determines eligibility for admission to colleges and universities. To prepare for this entrance exam, students usually start preparation programs at an afterschool college prep center when they are in their junior year in high school.

Until 2002, universities and colleges organized their own entrance examinations. In 2002, the MOET started and implemented a policy called "Three Things in Common" with the intention of improving access for students. The policy for all higher education institutions included common use of examination items, common organization of examinations, and common use of examination results. The intent was to set a common standard for higher education entrance. Also, the common use of the results meant that candidates could use their results to apply to multiple higher education institutions, instead of to just one as was the case in the past (Ngo, 2006). One of the priorities of the higher education reforms in Vietnam was to

increase access to higher education. To this end, a number of other policies have been implemented, including:

- Setting different admission scores for different groups of students depending on their resident location: big cities, suburbs and towns, rural, and mountainous areas.

- Giving admission priority to children of war veterans and of ethnic minorities.

- Creating a preferential policy: Ethnic minorities can be accepted into some higher education institutions without having to take the entrance exam.

- Upgrading existing higher education institutions to increase their capacity.

- Expanding the size of the higher education sector through the establishment of new institutions, especially nonpublic institutions.

- Expanding the types of programs offered, especially professional and vocational programs.

- Implementing need-based student loan programs for low-income students.

As a result of these reforms, access to higher education in Vietnam has experienced some progress. However, expanding access still remains a big challenge for Vietnamese higher education. Hayden and Lam (2006) have noted that only 10% of the college-aged group is enrolled in higher education due to various barriers such as inadequate capacity and socioeconomic disadvantages. Geographic concentration may be a barrier as well: Out of the 150 universities, 102 are located in just five big cities: Can Tho, DaNang, Hanoi, Hai Phong, and Ho Chi Minh (MOET, 2009).

Also, in response to the global trend of using English as the common language, the Vietnamese government has replaced Russian with English as the compulsory foreign language

in schools and universities. Growth in both the types and numbers of higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as in undergraduate enrollments in Vietnam has been impressive. The number of HEIs has increased almost 400 percent, from 101 in 1987 to 376 in 2009, of which 295 are public and 81 are non-public institutions. In 2009, more than 1.7 million enrolled in undergraduate degrees nationwide, an thirteen-fold increase in comparison with 1987 enrollments (Tran, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2011).

While these innovative efforts have created some progress, challenges remain (Pham, 2011). One big challenge is the persistence of old cultural values that hinder "student-centered" teaching and learning practices in Vietnam. For example, the deep-seated commitment to maintaining harmony and social order often inhibits the development of critical thinking and debating skills in students. Another concern involves the lack of standards of educational quality which has led to a lower-quality education in many colleges and universities. Concerns of quality have been a big contributing factor to the drastic increase in the number of Vietnamese students pursuing higher education in foreign countries (p. 220). In addition, the quantity and quality of teaching staff presents another challenge for educational reforms in Vietnam. As the number of institutions and students has exploded, the number of quality instructors has been lagging behind substantially. Currently, university staff do not follow the tradition of teaching and researching together because of their being overloaded with teaching responsibilities. Many cannot comprehend English materials, which limits their ability to stay current in their fields (p. 221). More than a decade has passed since the official shift in 2001 to a "student-centered" approach to education, but these challenges continues to hinder the progress of educational reform efforts in Vietnam.

In an effort to ensure quality standard for HEIs in Vietnam, in 2003, for the first time, the Examination and Education Quality Accreditation Department, under the direct control of MOET, was established. Twenty universities (eighteen public and two non-public) were selected to pilot the provisional regulation on accreditation of HEIs in 2004. After three years of trial, in 2007, an official guideline for the procedures and cycle for quality accreditation for HEIs, which detailed the steps in the evaluation process and the eligibility of an institution for accreditation status, was signed into law. An institution now has to meet at least 80% of the evaluative criteria to be granted the certificate for accreditation. In a critique of this guideline, Tran, Nguyen, and Nguyen (2011) argued that while the establishment of the Standard of Quality for HEIs in Vietnam can be seen as a sign of prioritizing quality in education, it also creates concerns:

> However, with the non-existence of the requirement on alignment at all levels of educational activities, the standard has pointed to a direction, in which neither quality as fitness-for-purpose nor quality –as- transformation is adopted. Instead, it has stepped on the pathway in which quality is seen as the provision of institutional input. If the Vietnamese government, in particular the MOET is serious about improving the quality of student learning, it is imperative for the Standard to shift to a direction driven by quality as transformation approach. (p. 138)

Development of International Education in Vietnam

In Vietnamese culture, there has long been a tradition of scholars travelling miles away from their hometown and sacrificing material comforts to pursue knowledge from famous teachers in faraway lands. It has been a prominent theme in numerous literary works. Many significant historical movements have been initiated by leaders who had studied abroad and brought new ideas back to Vietnam from foreign countries.

The earliest study abroad destination for Vietnamese scholars was probably China. Given the longstanding domination of China over Vietnam, the influence of Chinese culture in

Vietnam was enormous (Doan, 2000). However, in an effort to eliminate the millennium-long colonial ties with the Chinese Empire, studying in China was discouraged by many Vietnamese dynasties. It was not until the French colonization period that the trend of studying abroad developed extensively among Vietnamese people. Many prominent political and social leaders of this area were French-educated Vietnamese. Among these, the most significant historical figures include the communist leader Ho Chi Minh, the patriot intellectual Phan Chu Trinh, and the nationalist Nguyen An Ninh. These foreign-trained leaders introduced and championed some of the most profound changes in the history of contemporary Vietnam. In the later years of the French colonization era, a considerable number of Vietnamese scholars were seeking higher education in France. At this point, the restless political situation in Vietnam had caused the French to considerably change their perspectives on the flow of Vietnamese students into France. On the one hand, they wanted to increase the number of pro-French Vietnamese intellectuals by providing scholarships and attracting self-funded students from rich Vietnamese families. On the other hand, there was a growing concern among French officials about French-educated Vietnamese turning into nationalists who would advocate for Vietnam to gain national independence from France. In spite of the ambivalence in French policies towards Vietnamese students, the number of Vietnamese students in French universities grew steadily in the 1920s and 1930s. Among the various political ideologies introduced to Vietnamese students in France in that time period, communism quickly became immensely popular in many Vietnamese intellectual circles. A large number of students soon became communist activists and professional revolutionaries. They were deeply committed to and actively involved in the revolution to gain national liberation. In fact, they became the founders of the first and most

influential Vietnamese communist organizations, the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League (Thanh niên cách mạng đồng chí hội) and the Indochinese Communist Party (Đảng cộng sản Đông Dương), under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh during the 1930s. These French-educated scholars also played a crucial role in reconfiguring the Vietnamese educational system after 1945. One of their most significant contributions was the introduction of the Vietnamese national language as a medium of instruction into higher education in 1946. They were also considered major agents of change in the areas of press media and literature in Vietnam in that era.

In 1954, the Geneva Conference took place in Geneva, Switzerland, whose purpose was to attempt to find a way to settle outstanding issues on the Korean peninsula and to unify Vietnam and discuss the possibility of restoring peace in Indochina. The part of the conference on the Korean question ended without adopting any declarations or proposals. On Indochina, the conference produced a set of documents known as the Geneva Accords. These agreements separated Vietnam into two zones, a northern zone to be governed by the Việt Minh, and a southern zone to be governed by the State of Vietnam, then headed by former emperor Bảo Đại. A "Conference Final Declaration" provided that a general election be held by July 1956 to create a unified Vietnamese state. Although presented as the consensus view, this document was not accepted by the delegates of either South Vietnam or the U.S. Given the then current state of political divisiveness, it is not surprising that the trends of study abroad among Vietnamese during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were strongly influenced by political association and ideologies (Doan, 2000). In Vietnam in this era, financial resources for international education mainly came from foreign aid. As a result of their political affiliations, the North and the South

Vietnamese students were attracted to the two opposing political poles of the world, with the

U.S. and the Soviet Union as their major sponsors. North Vietnam, or the Democratic Republic

of Vietnam (DRV), received many scholarships as gifts of friendship from socialist countries

such as Bulgaria, China, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and the

Democratic Republic of Germany (DDR). The South of Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam

(ROV), similarly benefited from foreign aid from the United States, Japan, France, and other

capitalist countries (Doan, 2000, p. 135).

Two years after the withdrawal of the last U.S. forces from Vietnam in 1973, Saigon, the

capital of South Vietnam, fell to the communists, and the South Vietnamese army surrendered on

30 April 1975. In 1976, the government of united Vietnam renamed Saigon as Hồ Chí Minh

City. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw an increasing number of scholarships from the Soviet

block and other socialist countries to help Vietnam develop its human resources. However, with

the collapse of the Soviet Union in the later years of the 1980s, financial assistance for overseas

study for Vietnamese students was reduced drastically.

In 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam introduced the hugely influential new policy

called "Đổi Mới," which translates as "Renovation." The sole principle of Đổi Mới was to

transform the centrally planned economy into a more market-oriented system. Đổi Mới reforms

led to the development of what is now referred to as the Socialist-oriented market economy,

where the state plays a decisive role in shaping and guiding the economy, but private enterprise

and cooperatives play a significant role in commodity production. Đổi Mới helped Vietnam

establish diplomatic relationships with the capitalist West and with East Asia in the 1990s (Doan,

2000). The normalization of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the United States in

1994, the official reintegration of Vietnam into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) organization in 1995, and its joining in the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) Forum in 1998 provided many more opportunities for international collaborations and for Vietnamese to study overseas. By 1998, Vietnamese higher education had established academic links with 69 countries, 19 international organizations, and 70 non-government organizations (p. 139).

Mixed internal and external factors has led to the increasing demand for international education in Vietnam since the late 1980s (Doan, 2000). Internal factors include the aging of the current higher education staff and administrators and Vietnamese academia's over-reliance on Soviet-trained staff whose knowledge and leadership skills may be unsuitable for the newly fast-growing economy. The external factors include pressures from the global market-oriented economic system and a need to catch up with the outside world in many aspects. In Vietnam in the 1980s and 1990s, the government sent officials and higher education staff who had previously been trained in socialist educational systems to study abroad in Western or non-socialist countries for retraining. Some institutions took advantage of these scholarship opportunities to send their core staff to Western universities to study in high demand disciplines which were not available in socialist systems. Management, including educational management, became one of the most popular areas for overseas study. Between 1987 and 1998, an estimated 13,700 Vietnamese students and professionals were sent abroad to study. The largest proportion of these international students studied in the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries (53.29%). Another 30.6% studied in Western Europe, 6.8% in Australia and New Zealand, 6.7% in Asia, 0.9% in the U.S. and Canada, and 0.32% in Africa and Latin America.

However, Australia, France, Russia, Germany, Japan, China, Thailand, India, and the U.S. have

since become popular study abroad destinations for Vietnamese students (p. 151).

Australia was a strong ally for Vietnam since 1985, while the U.S.-imposed trade

embargo was still in effect. From 1985-1992, Australia provided Vietnam around 30 to 40

scholarships each year, mostly in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

(TESOL) for higher education teachers (Doan, 2000). Over time, Australia became the most

important scholarship donor, providing between 150 to 200 scholarships to Vietnam each year.

In 2002, Australia established the first foreign-owned university in Vietnam, a branch of

Australia's Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). Other important donors of

overseas scholarships are Japan, China, France, the U.S., and Singapore (p. 160). The early

investment of Australia in the Vietnamese educational market has paid off for them with a

remarkable growth of self-financed Vietnamese students in Australian higher education.

Australia at the start of the 21st century held a dominant position in the market for recruitment of

Vietnamese students abroad, with an average of 2,500 self-financed Vietnamese students who

contributed about $40 million (U.S.) in tuition fees to the Australian education sector annually.

In 1999, the Vietnamese government issued its first official plan for overseas study and

allocated a budget to promote overseas study. Overseas study was considered an effective

method to develop the country through acquiring knowledge about the best of the cultural,

scientific, and technological achievements of the more developed countries around the world.

The government invested yearly 100 billion Vietnamese *dong* (VND), which is the equivalent to

about 5 million U.S. dollars, for training roughly 350 Vietnamese scientists in developed

countries during the period from 1999 to 2005 (Doan, 2000). This policy mainly focused on

industrial studies, basic sciences, agricultural sciences, environmental sciences, and particularly

on high technology. A shortcoming of the plan was a lack of interest in the social sciences, even

though a shortage of qualified professionals with higher degrees in the social sciences existed in

Vietnam. A second drawback of the plan was the small number of students and professionals

who benefited from the state's financial sponsorship; large numbers of self-financed and foreign-

sponsored students fell outside of the state's mission and control (p. 168). In recent years, self-

financed study abroad has become a popular choice for upper middle class families because of

advances in information technology and rising incomes in Vietnam. Vietnam is considered a

growth market for education exporters such as Australia, Singapore, and the United States.

Social Capital

Social capital has been defined differently by many theorists; however, there is a general

consensus that social capital involves advantages for individuals based on relationships among

people. Specifically, most definitions focus on social networks and the norms that guide

interactions (Kilpatrick, Field, & Falk, 2003). Three widely cited definitions are attributed to

Bourdieu's (1986), Coleman's (1990) and Putnam's (2000) definitions. Bourdieu (1986) defined

social capital as:

> [T]he aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a
> durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance
> and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of
> its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a "credential" which
> entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (p. 248-249)

These resources can be created and maintained by the "application of a common name

(the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.)" (p. 249) and by sets of

norms governing interactions within networks. Individuals are not always aware of the profits

they receive from their social capital networks. Bourdieu posited that social capital requires continuous effort to maintain and enhance membership status in useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits.

Coleman's (1990) conceptualization of social capital is widely cited. He posited social capital as "the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person" (p. 300). Coleman discussed the modern life-fiction that society is comprised of discrete individuals acting independently to achieve individual goals and that the functioning of the social system consists of the combination of these individuals' actions. He asserted that "individuals do not act independently, goals are not independently arrived at, and interests are not wholly selfish" (p. 301). He defined social capital by its function:

> It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence. (p. 302)

For Coleman , social capital is embodied in the relations among individuals. Trustworthiness is an important element in the formation and promotion of social capital. Factors that influence the creation, maintenance, and destruction of social capital include the stability of social structure and ideology.

Putnam (2000) posited that the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks play important roles in individuals' and societies' success. To distinguish social capital from other forms of capital, he emphasized that "social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19).

Social capital has both an individual and a collective component. Individually, people use social connections to benefit their own interests. For example, individuals often get jobs because of whom they know, not what they know. Thus, networking would be an important investment for ambitious job seekers. In addition to the individual aspect, social capital also can affect the wider community. Well-connected communities tend to empower their members, while poorly-connected communities tend to deprive their members of many opportunities for success. Thus, social capital can be regarded as both a "private good" and a "public good."

Human Capital

Schultz (1961) famously argued that skills and knowledge should be regarded as forms of capital, which he termed "human capital." He posited that investment in human capital was probably the major explanation for the rapid economic growth in national output that characterized Western societies after World War II. While acknowledging the difficulty of exact measurement of human investment, he asserted that many insights can be gained by examining some major activities that improve human capabilities. These major activities include: (a) health facilities and services, (b) on-the-job training, (c) formally organized education, (d) continuing education for adults, and (e) migration of individuals and families for better career opportunities. Of these major activities, Schultz argued that education should be regarded as an investment that yields economic benefits for societies and individuals. He stated that human capital deteriorates when it is idle because unemployment impairs the acquired skills. Schultz asserted that human capital is the most distinctive feature of America's economic system.

Since the 1960s, the study of human capital has developed (Gilead, 2009). A first step in the advent of the economics of education took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Following a

number of benchmark studies by Schultz (1961), Mincer (1958), and Becker (1975), human

capital theory was established and rapidly gained prominence (Sweetland, 1996). Then the

second step in the advent of the economics of education occurred in the 1980s. In today's

modern society, adapting to a globalized economy that emphasizes the knowledge economy,

governments, educational institutions, and businesses currently place a major importance on the

economic aims of education and especially on the development of human capital.

Sweetland (1996) concurred that human capital theory suggests that individuals and

society derive economic benefits from investments in people. The literature relating to human

capital theory distinguishes among several types and means of education: (a) formalized

education at primary, secondary, and higher levels, (b) informal education at home and at work,

(c) on-the-job training and apprenticeships (Schultz, 1961), and (d) specialized vocational

education at secondary and higher levels (Corazzini, 1967).

Repatriation Experience

Few studies have investigated the repatriation experience (Sussman, 2002). The few

research studies about international students' intent to stay have mostly been limited by country

of origin, profession, or discipline. For example, Butcher (2002) considered East Asian students,

Zweig and Changgui (1995) studied Chinese students, and Baker and Finn (2003) studied stay

rates among international economics students in the US. Studies about the repatriation

experience focused on (a) professional expatriates returning to their home country after working

abroad or (b) U.S. study abroad students. Şahin (1990) argued that repatriation distress among

Turkish migrant workers correlated with the length of time abroad. Marital status and education

level among missionaries are also associated with the repatriation experience (Moore, Jones, &

Austin, 1987). U.S. study abroad students reported that differences between home and host

cultures affected their repatriation transition (Raschio, 1987). Other variables affecting the

repatriation experience include (a) personality traits such as neuroticism(Furukawa, 1997), (b)

decrease in social status among Finnish corporate repatriates (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997), and (c)

trauma exposure among international relief workers (Eriksson, 1997). In addition, identity

changes may be related to return home experiences (Isogai, Hayashi, & Uno, 1999; Werkman,

1982). Several investigators reported positive reentry experiences such as (a) more appreciation

of the host culture (Grove & Hansel, 1983), (b) improved relationships with parents (Martin,

1986), (c) positive changes in values orientation (Uehara, 1986), and (d) more awareness and

acceptance of cultural differences (Wilson, 1986).

Studies about the relationship between the abroad experience and the repatriation

experience presented conflicted findings. Cui and Awa (1992) found that sojourners with

previous overseas experience adapted better to subsequent overseas assignments due to

experience in coping with differences. Other researchers found an inverse relationship between

overseas adaptation and repatriation such that the more successful the adaptation to a host

country, the more distressing and difficult the return to the home country (Brein & David, 1971;

Brislin, 1981; Brislin & Van Buren, 1974).

Sussman (2000) proposed a theory of the transition cycle using a social psychological

framework, specifically focusing on self-concept and cultural identity. The Cultural Identity

Model (CIM) proposes several tenets: (a) cultural identity is a critical aspect of self-concept, (b)

salience of cultural identity is a consequence of the commencement of a cultural transition, (c)

cultural identity is dynamic and can shift as a consequence of the overseas transition and self-

concept changes, and (d) shifts in cultural identity serve as a mediator between cultural adaptation and the repatriation experience.

Hazen and Alberts (2006) reported (a) the factors that international students consider in deciding whether to stay in the U.S. or to return home upon completion of their studies and (b) how these factors vary by nationality, gender, or academic major. They investigated international students' decision-making processes through focus groups and informal conversations with international students from a variety of disciplines and countries (Chinese, Dutch, Greek, Indian, Japanese, and Tanzanian). From the focus groups, they found that, generally, professional factors usually encouraged students to stay in the U.S., while societal and personal factors typically encouraged a return home. The majority of the students in the study stated that they had originally intended to return to their home countries after the completion of their degrees. The authors suggested that economic and professional factors typically act as strong incentives for international students to stay in the U.S., while personal and societal factors tend to draw students back to their home countries. More specifically, on the structural level, differences in job markets, economic opportunities, and political systems significantly influence the decision-making process. On an individual level, students' family connections, personal circumstances, and personalities account for much of the variation between students.

Butcher (2002) conducted qualitative research with 50 graduates of New Zealand universities from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand about the reentry process into the host country. The article highlighted the difficulties faced by the graduates during the reentry process and offers suggestions to alleviate these difficulties. Butcher conceptualized the reentry as a grieving process. This grief, he posits, is best understood as a "disenfranchised grief" which

is "a grief that can be defined as the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported" (p. 357). Because of the lack of expectations for and acceptance of reentry grief, returnees may experience many psychological challenges. Disenfranchised grief may exacerbate and intensify the normal reactions of grief, namely, anger, guild, sadness, depression, loneliness, homesickness, and numbness. The author found that the returnees specifically encountered challenges with (a) their return to family ties, (b) their change in their worldviews, and (c) their expectations of their reentry. Many returnees found it difficult to go back to living under parents' roofs again. Their worldviews and expectations about familial responsibilities was different from their parents' worldview or expectations. Familial tensions were the norm for the returnees. Nevertheless, some returnees reported a better relationship with their parents because being away had helped them to appreciate their parents more.

Besides familial tensions, many returnees experienced disappointment with their employment situations. Butcher (2002) postulated that one of the biggest expectations of returnees might be immediately employment that would be relevant to their qualifications and paid well. He declared this not to be the case. Many returnees quickly become dependent on parents because they have had a hard time finding suitable employment after applying for numerous jobs and waiting for several months. For an international graduate, entering a workforce for which they may not know the norms and conventions and for which they may not have been educated compounded the problem. Degrees in economics and management may have limited benefits to a graduate finding employment in any of the countries addressed in this research (Butcher, 2002).

Another significant challenge for returnees is to reconcile the changes in their own worldviews and the worldviews of those around them. All of the participants in Butcher's study were from Southeast Asian countries whose cultures were still profoundly influenced by Confucianism. A returnee with a Westernized world view might have a hard time socially and professionally readjusting to Confucian societies. Returnees may find it difficult to fit back into their places in their families and their other social networks. Reconnecting with friends can present tensions because of different worldviews. According to Butcher (2002), the returnees' views will have changed because they have seen the world and their place in it from a different perspective.

Mooradian (2004) echoed Butcher's (2002) assertion of a host of difficulties facing international student returnees in their reentry process. Mooradian suggested that reverse culture shock differed from culture shock because there are many unexpected problems. People prepare for difficulties when they go abroad but often do not prepare for their reentry process. They expect home to remain home when they return. However, many returnees reported feeling that people and relationships have changed while they were away. Mooradian (2004) speculated that returnees might feel a lack of support from their home social support networks, which could leave them feeling sad, lost, and lonely. However, Mooradian also acknowledged the positive advantages of the reentry process. Returnees could utilize many of the characteristics of the overseas culture to develop a new cultural identity that would work to their advantage at home. These characteristics can include interpersonal communication (accent, language competence), physical (fashion, appearance), and behavioral (posture, nonverbal) attributes.

Mooradian (2004) asserted that reverse adjustment occurs in stages. The first stage, "leave-taking and departure", includes preparing to leave (saying goodbye, packing) and making logistical plans for going home. The second, "honeymoon stage," can last for about one month. As the returnees are newly back home, everyone is excited to see them, and they enjoy their time to visit people whom they missed while abroad. "Reverse culture shock," the third stage, begins when life starts returning to normal. The returnees realize that they have changed. They experience doubt, disappointment, and are overwhelmed by the prospect of starting over. Alienation, rejection, loss of sleep, anxiety, and fears and phobias are among common experiences of returnees. The fourth, and final, stage is "adjustment," when returnees begin to adapt to being at home, focus on the future, and try not to dwell on the past. It may take a returnee from six months to a year to feel like they have adjusted to the home culture and to a lack of constant desire to go back to their host country (p. 44).

A Study of Vietnamese Foreign-Trained Academics

Doan (2000) explored and assessed the roles of foreign-trained academics in Vietnamese higher education changes. Data for the study was drawn mainly from personal observations, documentary review, interviews, and a questionnaire conducted with Vietnamese scholars who had studied abroad and returned to Vietnam from 1987 onwards. This is the sole research study on this topic for Vietnam. Doan was able to complete the research mainly because of her "insider status" and connections with relevant authorities at the MOET and major higher education institutions in Vietnam. The author had earned both of her postgraduate degrees in the U.K. and since her return has been employed as a permanent academic staff member at a national university in Vietnam. She conducted more than 50 interviews and 100 questionnaire surveys

with individuals involved in different aspects of Vietnamese higher education: (a) policy makers and education officials in charge of personnel management and international cooperation at the MOET, (b) institutional leaders of selected universities and research institutes, (c) foreign-trained students and scholars, and (d) representatives of foreign organizations which had made contributions to overseas scholarships for Vietnamese students and scholars. The interviews with foreign-trained students and scholars focused on two areas: (a) exploring the impact of the overseas study experience on individual development in terms of academic competence, cultural adjustment, professional advancement, and (b) socio-economic status and on changes in instructional and managerial skills. Most student and scholar participants were higher education staff who had been sent abroad and funded by their organizations.

The study's findings suggested that these students' and scholars' had diverse motives for undertaking overseas study. Three forces interacted to influence their decisions: push factors, pull factors, and facilitating factors. The push factors included the fact that Vietnamese higher education was low in both quality and quantity, inconsistent entry requirements to postgraduate education, and desires to escape from the tensions of the work environment or to temporarily avoid uncertain changes at their home institutions. Among the pull factors, the most important reason was the desire to benefit from a period in a foreign environment to master a foreign language and to understand different cultures. Other pull factors included desires to gain new, advanced knowledge and the availability of financial support from the host countries. The facilitating factors included the development of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and other countries and the emerging internationalization of Vietnamese higher education. The prominent trend in study abroad so far has been that Vietnamese are attracted to those countries which have

provided considerable amounts of scholarship dollars such as Australia, France, Japan, the U.S., and the Russian Federation. However, for those individuals who had options to choose from, the leading destinations in descending degrees of popularity were the U.S., the United Kingdom, France, and Japan.

Doan identified several challenges facing Vietnamese students and scholars in their study abroad experiences. Many of the Vietnamese student participants were unprepared when they first encountered their new learning environments. The academic cultures in host countries were usually markedly different than the Vietnamese academic culture. The emphasis on independent reading and in-class discussions were new to most of the students. Because of the poor condition of public and academic libraries in Vietnam and of the tradition of learning habits that heavily rely on information given by teachers, these Vietnamese students were not accustomed to in-depth independent reading. The magnitude of reading material was overwhelming. When faced with these academic problems, Vietnamese students did not feel comfortable and confident in seeking help from formal sources such as tutors, teaching assistants, or professors. Instead, they preferred to use informal support networks such as fellow students and friends. Also, many participants were unprepared to operate high-tech equipment and computer software. One of the reasons for Vietnamese students' reluctance to seek help from professors could be cultural, because of Vietnamese culture's emphasis on proper social and power distances between students and teachers. The traditional relationship between teacher and students in Vietnam is usually formal, distant, and impersonal. Another reason for the distance between Vietnamese students and their foreign teachers was language and cultural barriers. In this study, those who studies in Russia, Eastern Europe, Australia, and the United States shared that many of their

foreign teachers showed genuine empathy with their linguistic difficulties, while those who studied in Japan and especially in France were less likely to have this advantage.   In addition to academic challenges, most of the student respondents experienced some periods of depression, homesickness, loneliness, familial issues, and physical discomfort, such as problems associated with foreign food and unfamiliar weather.

Aside from these difficulties, the majority of respondents had favorable impressions of foreign educational systems in which student were encouraged to be self-motivated and independent thinkers. The systems of examination and assessment in foreign institutions were considered by many respondents to be more valid and fair than the current system in Vietnam. Another feature of foreign universities that received great credit from the respondents was the network of libraries. Most respondents commented on how they were greatly benefited from the diverse sources of information in their hosts' libraries. These libraries also provide many participants with resources to learn more about Vietnam's technological, economic, political, and social position in the world. The opportunity to study information about Vietnam written from diverse perspectives was particularly helpful for students majoring in social science.

Regarding experiences while studying abroad, the respondents were concerned with academic matters and paid little attention to social life issues. Most respondents neglected institutional services aiming at enriching student social life such as bars, clubs, student unions, and ethnic associations. However, they were interested in mixing with people from other nations to learn about different cultures and in developing friendships and working relationships with teachers and colleagues with common academic interests. One respondent complained about the fact that the university where he studied had accommodated the group of Vietnamese students in

the same residence hall. This living arrangement limited exposure to native language speakers, and, as a result, he claimed his language competency level had not improved much by the time his training was completed.

Upon completion of the study abroad program, most of Doan's participants returned home immediately. Factors affecting their decision to return included (a) obligations to family, (b) experiences of social and psychological isolation abroad, and (c) ambitions to contribute towards the development of the Vietnamese education system. Some respondents, who had spent more than three years studying abroad, experienced reverse cultural shock when returning to Vietnam. They had developed an appreciation for certain norms and behaviors in Western cultures such as straightforward verbal communication and open and collaborative working relationships among colleagues. Therefore, they encountered feelings of alienation when they returned to their home institutions. For instance, they found that emotional and personal relationships were overly important in most work environments in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, most respondents emphasized positive individual developments as the main benefits of the study abroad experience. Three such changes were reported: (a) individuals experienced an increase in personal confidence and self-esteem; (b) eaching content and style influenced returnees who worked in higher education to promote a more equal relationship between teacher and student; and (c) the majority of returning lecturers developed an interest in doing research, something very few of them had been doing prior to going abroad.

Many respondents developed new perspectives on national identity, culture, and values. Living abroad among people who came from different countries gave these Vietnamese international students the opportunity to look at the Vietnamese culture from an outsider

standpoint and to more objectively assess Vietnam's position in the international context. Some became close friends with other Asian students and had the chance to see how Vietnam is similar to and different from neighboring Asian countries. These students reported that compared to the majority of Buddhist-inclined Thais and Muslim-oriented Malaysians and Indonesians, Vietnamese put less emphasis on religious bonds, racial discrimination, and gender differentiation. Noteworthy is the fact that the proportion of female foreign-trained academics remained low (Doan, 2000).

Conclusion

In this chapter, literature on relevant topics was discussed to describe the context of and conceptual framework for the study to follow. Information about international students in the U.S. was reviewed to emphasize the significant contribution of this student population to the American economy and culture as well as the rapid growth and promising potential of the international education market. An overview of the Vietnamese educational system and its international education policies was presented to explain the social and cultural context of this study. The concepts of social capital and human capital were described as these concepts may be helpful in understanding the reasons for the participants' return and career trajectories. Finally, an in-depth discussion of the first, and probably the only, study about Vietnamese international students' repatriation experience conducted by Doan (2000) was presented. Doan's work provides great insight into the historical context of Vietnamese international education development and into the experiences of foreign-trained academics who returned to work in Vietnam. However, her study focused almost exclusively on state-sponsored students and on scholars who had occupied prominent positions in the educational system prior to going abroad.

In the current study, I focus on privately funded students who returned to work in the private sector. In a sense, this study reflects the new trend in the Vietnamese international education field and offers the first presentation of the experiences and voices of the new wave of foreign-trained professionals in Vietnam.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

Despite ongoing developments in the literature about international students in the U.S., there is a lack of research on what happens after graduation for international students. Even less attention has been paid to international students who return to their home countries upon completion of their studies. Within the limited literature about those who return home, only the traditional dominant groups such as Chinese, Korean, and Indian students have been studied. Knowledge about Vietnamese student repatriates is almost nonexistent even though Vietnam has consistently been among the top ten sending countries over the last four years.

The purpose of the study was to explore the experience of Vietnamese international students who return to Vietnam after graduation from a U.S. higher education institution. Areas to be explored include transitional periods, perception of the relevance of U.S. education to their current lives, reflections on their experiences in the U.S., and their future plans. The knowledge drawn from this study can serve as useful reference information for current and future recruitment efforts, development of support services, and the development of courses geared toward Vietnamese international students.

Research Design

Research approach. Creswell (2013) recommended that qualitative research should be used when the research topic must be explored because of (a) a need to study a particular population and examine variables that would be difficult to measure objectively, or (b) a need to listen to unheard voices. Also, the qualitative approach is appropriate when the researcher needs

a complex, detailed picture of the issues in question and these details "can only be established by talking directly with people […] and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature" (p. 48). In this study I explored the experiences of the rarely heard voices of a particular group, the Vietnamese international student repatriate population. I sought to understand this population through inviting them to describe their experiences using their own stories and interpretations of their lived experiences. Thus, qualitative research approach was the most effective and appropriate approach.

The four philosophical assumptions of qualitative research. A researcher's understanding of the philosophical assumptions that underlie qualitative research is quite important because these assumptions shape how the researcher formulates research ideas and questions, how the collected data is coded and analyzed, and how the researcher interprets the findings (Creswell, 2013). The four philosophical assumptions are (a) beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), (b) epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge is justified), (c) axiology (the role of values in research), and (d) methodology (the process of research).

When considering ontological issues, I assumed that there were multiple realities and that each participant viewed experiences differently. I sought to describe these multiple realities. With respect to epistemology, I assumed that knowledge is known through subjective individual views, at least for the topic(s) of the study. In practice, this epistemological assumption encourages the researcher to "get as close as possible to the participants being studied" (Creswell, 2013, p. 20) through in-depth interviews, prolonged stays in the field, or multiple sources of data. I accepted the axiological assumption that all researchers come to their studies

with unique personal and professional backgrounds, qualifications, and value systems. This assumption requires qualitative researchers to acknowledge and report their values and biases and address how these values might influence the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Finally, qualitative research methodology is characterized as "inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data" (p. 22). This methodological assumption directed my attention toward building knowledge from the data gathered from study participants, rather than relying entirely on existing theories or on the researcher's pre-conceived ideas about the topic(s) at hand. Taken together, these assumptions provide the philosophical foundation for qualitative research studies. These assumptions are usually embedded within the researcher's chosen interpretive framework for a particular qualitative study.

   Interpretive framework. In the current study, the researcher seeks to understand the lived experiences of Vietnamese international student repatriates as described in their own words. The exploratative nature of the study called for an interpretive framework that focused on how each individual participant perceives his/her experiences. Social constructivism offers the best framework for the purposes of this study. Social constructivism holds that an individual's reality is influenced by his/her interactions with others and with the historical and cultural norms of his/her society (Creswell, 2013). Hence, each individual develops subjective meanings of his/her experiences and creates his/her own realities. Thus, from a social constructivist's stand point, there are multiple realities because there are multiple individuals. This social constructivist interpretive framework called for the employment of broad and general research questions that invite participants to elaborate on how they constructed meaning(s) out of

experiences. Interview questions were deliberately open-ended. The role that the researcher's

background and culture played in the research enterprise was also a point of strong emphasis in

this framework; thus, "research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be

independent of them" (Mertens, 2010, p. 16). Mertens (2010) asserted that, from the

constructivist framework, "knowledge is constructed by people active in the research process and

that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the

point of view of those who live it" (p. 16). The philosophical assumptions in the social

constructivist paradigm are as follows:

Axiology: Since the framework places great emphasis on the social and cultural

conditions of individuals, a constructivist researcher tends to embrace the principle of caring and

justice in his/her research agenda and implementation process. The constructivist researcher is

aware of the importance of and makes efforts to address issues of human relations between

researchers and participants. Constructivist research studies also tend to incorporate social

justice into the research process.

Ontology: Again, the assumption is that each individual constructs his/her own meanings

for experiences. Thus, reality is socially constructed and may change over time. In a

constructivist study, the researcher invites participants to define their own realities and allow

important concepts to emerge as constructed by the participants.

Epistemology: Knowledge is generated, acquired, and confirmed or disconfirmed through

social interaction. Thus, in constructivist qualitative research, the researcher and the participant,

or the inquirer and the inquired-into, engage in social interaction and influence each other. As a

result, the researcher usually employs a more personal, more interactive mode of data collection such as interviewing or observation.

Methodology: Constructivist researchers utilize research methods that are conducive to open discussion and elaboration such as in-depth interviews and observations. These approaches allow the researcher to interact with and observe the participants to glean clues into how they are constructing the meanings of their experiences (Mertens, 2010).

In this study, I explored the experiences of Vietnamese international student repatriates from individual participant's perspectives. Information about the cultural and social context of each participant was taken into account in the data analysis process to ensure a holistic understanding of experiences. Thus, the social constructivist interpretive framework, as stated above, was an appropriate approach for this study.

Population/Sample

Study participants were Vietnamese international students who graduated from a private university in the northeastern region of the U.S.; its functional pseudonym was "Sunny University." There is no one comprehensive sample frame for this population. After obtaining the Internal Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher reached out to potential participants using purposeful sampling and snowball sampling. The participants were purposefully selected based on two criteria: (a) graduated from the selected university and (b) had returned to Vietnam to live after graduation. I used snowball sampling after starting with a few key informants who have knowledge about or wide connections to people who might fit study criteria (Mertens, 2010). The researcher asked the key informants to identify potential participants for the study.

After getting contact information, I sent a letter of introduction and asked for participation in an interview study. Once a repatriate expressed interest in becoming a participant, the Informed Consent Form, approved by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln IRB, was sent for review. At the time of the interview, the participants were asked to sign two copies of the Informed Consent Form and to return one copy of the Informed Consent Form to the researcher and retain one copy for the personal files. Seven repatriates were the final pool of subjects to be interviewed

Instrumentation

The questions for the interviews were designed by the researcher using information from the several pertinent areas identified in the literature search for the study, which included (a) international student experiences, (b) social capital, (c) human capital, and (d) transitional theories, and by the adaptation of related research instruments. The questions were open-ended to invite in-depth elaboration from the participants. Follow-up prompts and questions were used as necessary to facilitate more detailed discussion of their experiences. For each area of interest for the study, a set of questions was devised that provided opportunities for participants to elaborate and to provide examples within each of the areas. Participants were also asked to provide demographic information, including gender, age, marital status, home town, source of financial support for studying abroad, number of years in the U.S., education background, and current employment status. The participants were invited to speak in either English or Vietnamese to ensure their comfort and confidence during the interview process. The interview protocol and demographic information form and the Vietnamese translation are included in Appendix C and Appendix D.

Data Collection Procedures

Emails were sent to the participants to confirm their intention to participate in the study. Upon receiving confirmation from the participants, the researcher sent the participants a follow-up email with an explanation about the study's nature and process. The informed consent form was attached to this email for review, and questions from the participants were welcomed. The informed consent provided information about the study's purpose and methodology as well as the participants' rights to confidentiality and to withdrawal at any time. Once all the participants' questions and concerns about the study were addressed, a time and place for the interviews were discussed and decided. Participants were then provided with a copy of the interview topics, as outlined in the interview protocol, prior to the scheduled interview.

The researcher traveled to Vietnam and stayed for an extended period of time to conduct face-to-face interviews with the participants. Each interview lasted from 45 to 90 minutes and was audio recorded for accuracy. During each interview, the techniques of probing, seeking clarification, and paraphrasing were used to ensure the accuracy of the recorded information. After an initial review, follow-up communications were conducted as necessary, depending on the participants' wishes. These steps ensured the accuracy of the interview transcripts. After the interviews and follow-ups, coding and analysis of the data were completed.

During the interviews, the researcher took extensive handwritten field notes. After each interview, the notes were immediately reviewed and clarified, and notations were added. The interviews began with an open-ended set of sequential questions, but follow-up questions and discussion were used as necessary to invite the participants to elaborate in greater detail about their experiences. The interview guide provided the opportunity to probe, to seek elaboration and

clarification, and to paraphrase responses to ensure the accuracy of content and meaning in the transcription process. The inductive approach was used in this study. The interviews were audiotaped.

Validation Strategies

Creswell (2013) asserted that validation in qualitative research is an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings while acknowledging the researcher's own experiences and biases. He argued that validation is a strength of qualitative research because "the extensive time spent in the field, the detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to participants in the field all add to the value or accuracy of a study" (p. 250). As a general recommendation for all qualitative research traditions, he encouraged qualitative researchers to employ multiple validation strategies to enhance the accuracy of study findings. Two pertinent methods of verification advocated by Creswell were used in this study to demonstrate the validity of the analysis: clarifying researcher bias and member checking.

Clarifying researcher bias. The researcher's position and assumptions was clarified at the outset of the study to help the reader understand the operational framework of the study. I discussed in detail my past experiences and potential biases with international students in general and with Vietnamese international students in particular that might influence my interpretation of the data before presenting said interpretation of the data.

Member Checking. In member checking, the researcher invites the participants to provide feedback on the data analysis and interpretation. I invited the participants to review their respective transcripts and to check for accuracy before the start of the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Procedures for collecting and analyzing data in qualitative research are subjective because qualitative researchers collect data by drawing on their capacities to observe and interact with other humans and the environment (Berg, 2004). However, Creswell (2013) has argued that while qualitative data analysis can be an evolving process, the analysis process usually conforms to a general model. This general model includes five phrases: organizing the data; reading and memoing; describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes; interpreting the data; and representing and visualizing the data.

Organizing the data. Whenever possible, immediately after each interview, the researcher listened to the interview recording to refresh and familiarize herself with the contents. Also, as soon as possible, the researcher would back up the voice recording for security and start the transcribing process, as suggested by Saldaña (2011). Since all the participants elected to speak in Vietnamese, the recordings were transcribed in Vietnamese and then translated into English. The entire interviews were transcribed verbatim. From the notes taken during the interviews and from the voice recording, notes about special dynamics, such as significant pauses or nervous laughter, were inserted into the transcription to aid in the interpretation. After I transcribed and translated the interviews, the translation was verified by Huyen Tran, Ph.D., a recent graduate of a U.S. university. The signed Translation Verification Form is included in Appendix F. Special formatting features such as italicizing, bolding, or highlighting were applied to mark portions of the transcript that stood out to the researcher as being of particular interest or significance.

Describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes. In general, qualitative research has no standardized methods of data analysis (Saldaña, 2011). Depending

upon the qualitative approach and the goals of the study, researchers can select one or more data

analysis methods from the many recommended guidelines and analytic strategies in the

literature. However, these analytic strategies usually emphasize one of three primary heuristics,

or methods of discovery: deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning:

> Deduction is what we generally draw and conclude from established facts and evidence.
> Induction is what we explore and infer to be transferable from the particular to the
> general, based on an examination of the evidence and an accumulation of knowledge.
> Abduction is surmising from the evidence that which is most likely, those explanatory
> hunches based on clues. (p. 93)

The data collected for this study were analyzed using inductive reasoning. The transcript

text was coded, and the codes were grouped into categories which in turn were integrated into

major themes. A code in qualitative research is defined as "a word or short phrase that

symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a

portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 96). Descriptive coding was used to

generate a set of codes that are words or phrases that "seem to stand out as significant or

summative of what's being said" (p. 99). Codes from all transcripts were clustered into

categories based upon similarities. These categories were then further grouped into major

themes. Themes are defined as "extended phrases or sentences that summarize the manifest

(apparent) and latent (underlying) meanings of the data" (p. 108). A computer-assisted

qualitative data analysis software called MAXQDA was used to cross-check the coding and

theming process to ensure the validity of the codes and themes.

Interpreting the data. In this phase of the study, I interpreted the data to generate

"lessons learned." Interpretation can take many forms such as interpretation based on hunches,

insights, and intuition (Creswell, 2013). I linked the interpretation of codes and themes to the

larger research literature base. Given the social constructivist interpretive framework underlying this study, the interpretations were tentative and inconclusive; the researcher's own background and values had to be examined as they might influence the interpretation.

Representing and visualizing the data. In this final phase of the data analysis, I focused on the representation of the findings in text. I described each individual's unique background and personal journey as well as the common themes that were found to be prominent across participants.

Researcher Role and Bias

Bias may exist in this study since analysis of the data is subject to the interpretations of the researcher. I am an international student from Vietnam. I completed her elementary and secondary education in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Vietnam. I have studied in the U.S. for more than eight years. Thus, I have an extensive first-hand knowledge of being an international student in the U.S. higher educational system. Since my arrival, I have become a U.S. citizen and have built a family in the U.S. Thus, I have no intention of returning to Vietnam to live and have not experienced the pressure of having to decide between staying in the U.S. and returning to Vietnam. My professional and research background also provides knowledge into the experiences of international students in the U.S. Taken altogether, my personal and professional background no doubt influences my attitudes in working with international students, especially in that I tend to be sympathetic to their concerns. Also, I often can relate to their experiences. However, since I have not repatriated and am not bound by the same legal requirements as other international students, I can also be viewed as an outsider to this phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

Three general ethical principles underlie all proceedings: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. Researchers must respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of participants. This research study complied with ethical standards by:

- Respecting the basic rights of the individual and ensuring that all participants involved in the research study were provided with Informed Consent that contained the elements of (1) information, (2) comprehension, and (3) voluntariness;

- Maintaining confidentiality of the data;

- Minimize adverse effects upon the participants.

I have adhered to the components of informed consent as presented by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln IRB. The informed consent (Appendix B) includes identification of the project, description of risks, description of benefits, disclosure of alternate procedures, a statement about confidentiality, participant's rights, contact information, and a statement regarding voluntary participation.

Summary

The participants were chosen based on a set of specific criteria. Twelve repatriates were contacted to gauge their interest in participating in the research. From these repatriates, seven agreed to participate. Using open-ended interviews and follow-up communications, the participants were invited to discuss their experiences in depth. Extensive notes were taken from the interviews. The interviews were transcribed, translated, and coded for further analysis. Major themes were identified and interpreted to create a deep understanding of the participants' experiences

Chapter 4

Background, Participants, and Theme Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of Vietnamese international students who return to Vietnam after graduation from a U.S. higher education institution. Areas to be explored included transitional periods, perception of the relevance of U.S. education to their current lives, reflections on their experiences in the U.S., and their future plans. In this chapter, the researcher described Sunny University's characteristics and the participants' backgrounds. An overview of the major finding themes is provided.

The Institutional Background

Sunny University was founded in the late 1800s as one of the first all-graduate institutions in the country (note: it now also educates undergraduates). Today, Sunny prides itself on being a renowned liberal arts-based research university that addresses social and human imperatives on a global scale. Sunny attracts students with its small size, urban location, capacity for interdisciplinary learning, and emphasis on effective practice, and with environment uniquely supportive of students' interests and ambitions.

Sunny's total enrollment is around 3,200. International students comprise 12% of all undergraduate enrollments. The average class size is twenty-one. About one third of the total enrollment are graduate students. About one third of all Sunny students study abroad. The student/faculty ratio is around 10:1. Sunny is a residential campus with 70% of students living on campus.

The Graduate School of Management. The Graduate School of Management (GSOM) at Sunny University launched in 1982. Over the last quarter century, Sunny GSOM has

experienced outstanding growth, and it continues to embody its mission of developing a diverse community of learners, researchers, and business professionals that prepares future leaders to think critically, manage collaboratively and contribute to their organizations and to society.

Accredited by AACSB International, GSOM is a small, academically rigorous business school that offers a personalized, collaborative learning experience. Recognized by *The Princeton Review* as a "Best Business School," GSOM was recently named one of the top sixteen places to study "green business" by *Entrepreneur* magazine. In the 2011-2012 edition of *Beyond Grey Pinstripes,* the Aspen Institute ranked the Sunny MBA in the top one hundred business programs worldwide for preparing students for the environmental, social, and ethical complexities of modern-day business. Sunny GSOM was included in the list of options for the MBA by the Ford Foundation and Fulbright scholarships in Vietnam.

The GSOM has a student body size of 500. A large percentage of the GSOM students are international students. However, according to the participants' assessment, the majority of these students were Chinese or Indian. The participants also perceived GSOM faculty as caring, understanding, and helpful. However, in general, they reported that they did not receive much institutional support during their time in the MBA program.

Participants' Backgrounds

The study abroad journey was a life-changing experience for all of the participants in this study. The essence of their experiences reflects several common themes. However, their perceptions of and attitudes toward these events were not identical. Recognizing these differences caused by each participant's unique background and personal characteristics helps to fully understand the essence of their experiences as Vietnamese international student repatriates.

In this section, I described each participant' uniqueness using demographic data collected through a survey, interview notes, and self-disclosed comments from the interviews. Each participant had a story to tell, and some are more direct, others more subtle.

Based on personal interactions and reviews of the interview transcripts, the researcher has developed a portrait of each participant. Their personality styles and communication approaches were diverse in multiple ways, ranging from extremely friendly to fairly reserved and from gregarious, long storytelling to short to-the-point answers. Overall, all participants were helpful, polite, and courteous. Even though they went through the same academic program, albeit with different specializations, their career trajectories were widely disparate. As a result, their perceptions of and attitudes toward current and future career prospects were significantly different from one another's, as well. They were at different points in their personal lives, ranging from being single to being divorced with child. Their family backgrounds and dynamics added to the uniqueness that sets each participant apart from the others.

Daisy. Daisy's interview was conducted in a coffee shop on a busy Hanoi street. Daisy was a friendly and cheerful lady in her late thirties. Though it was the first time we had met, Daisy greeted me with a big smile like I was an old friend. She was a great storyteller. She was down-to-earth in her demeanor and open to sharing details of her story. Daisy is married with a daughter who is around 8 or 9 years old. Her family belongs to an ethnic minority group, the Tày people, who lived in a mountainous area in the North of Vietnam. Her minority background has been a mixed blessing for her social and professional life. She shared that she grew up in a rural area with very limited access to education and modern conveniences. Her childhood experience of growing up in a poor rural area fueled her determination to study hard, as

education was considered the only way for her to escape poverty and rural life. An interesting feature of her ethnic group is that it is a matriarchal society. In her family, her dad took care of the housework, did the cooking, and cared for the children while her mom worked as the breadwinner of the family. Thus, growing up, she took it for granted that she would become a career woman and that her husband would take care of the housework. With a laugh, she told about the shocks she experienced when she roomed with students from the majority group, the Kinh people, during her stay in the U.S. For instance, she never learned how to cook since she assumed that it would be her husband's job. When she roomed with three male roommates, they expected her to be the best cook in the house since she was female. She jokingly said that they were in for a big disappointment. The first meal she cooked for them was a disaster. According to her, her cooking skill did not improve much, and she became famous, or infamous, for her limitations in the kitchen. Even though she laughed when she recalled the experience, she did say that she felt uncomfortable when her friends kept teasing her about her lack of cooking skill.

Her journey to earn a scholarship to study in the U.S. was quite eventful. Her mother had a good position in the Provincial Women's Union. Her mother had set up everything for Daisy's future so that Daisy could just be "fathered in" into her mom's organization. She was supposed to just graduate from high school and take the slot reserved for her in the local university. She did not even have to take the entrance exam. She did try to take the national entrance exam but did not score high enough to get into her institution of choice, so she followed her mother's advice to study at the local university. However, she was eligible only for in-service training programs, which made her unhappy. Thus, she took the exam again and got into a private university this time.

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in International Relations, she worked full-time for a short period. She wanted to bring about social changes in her area. However, after working for a while, she realized that it was impossible to make progress on social justice issues at the local level. She believed that everything was centrally controlled and that the locals almost never had any say. Citizens couldn't raise their voice because everything was controlled from the top by centralized government. This realization fueled her determination to seek out ways to study abroad to broaden her knowledge and change her career.

Her first opportunity came in 1996 when she was working in a governmental office. The Ford Foundation provided a few scholarships to study in the U.S. to promote social justice issues. These scholarships gave priority to community activist/leaders and to the rural areas. The first time that she had an opportunity, she did not even submit her application because she believed that she did not meet any of the criteria. Instead, she settled down, got married, and had a baby. After coming back from maternity leave, she was offered a chance to apply for the scholarship again. This time, she submitted her application for the scholarship but did not get selected because her low English proficiency score. However, because of her passion for social issues, she was offered free English courses for eight months. With the permission of her supervisor and the help of her mother to take care of her child, she went to Hanoi to take English classes. She was determined to study because she knew that she needed to change careers in order to get a better life. Finally, the second time she submitted her application for the scholarship, she was selected. She proudly shared that she became a celebrity in her hometown because of her ability to achieve such a prestigious scholarship. And so, she packed her language materials and set out to go to the "Land of Opportunity," leaving her job and her family

behind. Having to leave her then infant daughter was by far the hardest thing she had ever had to do in her life, she said.

At Sunny University, she chose International Development and Social Change as her major because of her passion for social justice issues. Like many other international students who had never been to the U.S. before, she ran into a host of difficulties at first. However, with her natural outgoing nature, she quickly built her social networks with local friends and fellow international students. She easily developed friendships with other students in her program because they had similar professional experiences and backgrounds, academic interests, and career aspirations. The first semester was extremely challenging for her academically because of the language barrier, but she persisted and improved gradually. She was active socially within the Vietnamese student community. The whole time though, she shared, her primary concerns were about the welfare of her baby and how much money she could save to send back home.

Not surprisingly, after graduation, she returned to Vietnam immediately. Once in Vietnam, she started her job search because she had resigned from her post in the governmental office. She soon realized that job hunting for a position suitable to her qualifications was a daunting task. After a few short-lived jobs, she finally became the Project Coordinator for an environmental non-profit organization. She loved the job but hated the traveling and administrative parts of it. Plus, the salary was barely enough to cover her family expenses. Her husband had resigned from his job to follow her to Hanoi, so now she is the only income for the family. Daisy is considering coming back to the U.S. to pursue a Ph.D. degree to improve her career prospects. This time, she plans to bring her family with her.

David. The researcher and David met at his coffee shop. He had just opened the café a few months earlier. David is in his mid-twenties, with a friendly face and personable demeanor. He was very helpful, courteous, and articulate. Over cups of cappuccino that he made for us, David shared his story in a calm, soft voice.

David comes from a family with ties to high level governmental officials. Both of his parents work in state-owned organizations. After graduating with his bachelor's from the Foreign Language Specialized School in Hanoi in 2008, he spent two years working for an auditing company. It was a good stable job with an attractive salary, but it was not his "passion," he said. He wanted to go back to school to pursue a graduate degree in some other field. However, he did not want to get a Master's in Vietnam because of the low quality of graduate education in Vietnam. Plus, his only option for graduate study in Vietnam would be going to school part-time while working full-time which he did not want to do. More importantly, he wanted to fulfill his life-long dream of studying abroad since he did not get a chance to do so during his undergraduate years. He had lived abroad before because his parents were sent to different countries several times by the state. This time, he wanted to go abroad by himself.

The U.S. was his first choice because it is a faraway land with great mysteries and is widely considered to be "The Land of Opportunity." Not sure where to start looking, David turned to the internet for information. He found a website devoted to discussions about MBA programs where many people shared their experiences with various MBA programs in the U.S. Through this website, he heard many positive things about Sunny University. Out of the eight universities he applied to, four accepted him, including Sunny University. The deciding factor

for him was the cost of tuition and living expenses. After considering the costs and scholarship values, he accepted the offer from Sunny University to study Finance.

In 2010, he left Vietnam for the U.S. to begin his dream journey which, he hoped, would significantly change his life. This was a tough decision to make personally because his girlfriend at the time was getting her Master's in the U.K. Instead of going to the U.K. to be with her, he chose the U.S. so as to fully immerse himself in his "American dream." He chuckled a little as he said these words.

Though he had never been to the U.S., as was noted above, he had lived abroad several times with his parents. He adapted quickly to his new life in the U.S. He really liked the fact that the university campus was small and that the living expenses were low. Some fellow Vietnamese students who lived nearby helped him get acclimated to the university and to the local community. With his background in foreign language study and his experience with living abroad, David did not have much problem with the language barrier. He thoroughly enjoyed his courses and road trips with friends to visit different parts of America. His favorite activities included staying up late studying in the university library and cooking delicious meals for his friends. Besides classes, he worked part time in the university coffee shop. Time flew by and before he knew it, it was time for him to graduate. He stayed in America for three months after graduation to look for job opportunities. He got some offers to work in New York but declined because the salaries were not good. Also, his family and girlfriend were waiting for him back in Vietnam, so he said goodbye to America and returned home to Hanoi in September of 2012.

Once in Hanoi, he started applying for jobs, but with not much luck. The finance market in Vietnam was not very developed, so there were no jobs that would fit his training from the

U.S. David also experienced some difficulties with reverse cultural shock. Learning to live again under his parents' roof and according to their house rules was one major challenge for him. After months of job searching, he terminated the job search and to open his own business. Along with three other partners, he ventured out to be an entrepreneur. Interestingly, this had been his lifelong dream. Even though accounting was his passion for a career, since he was a kid he had always dreamed of opening his own small restaurant so that he could come in and chat with his regular customers sometimes, he said. Now that he had his own coffee shop, he enjoyed coming in every day to make drinks for customers and talk to them. He is planning to develop a chain of coffee shops to establish a brand and increase his market share in Hanoi. He also recently became engaged to his long-term girlfriend. For the future, he plans to pursue a full-time position in an accounting or finance company and to run the café business on the side. At the present, he feels pretty content and happy with his life in Hanoi.

Lindsay. Lindsay and her husband had been living in Hanoi for about twenty months when we met for the interview. Interestingly, the day we met was the second-to-last day of their time in Vietnam. Lindsay had been running errands in between farewell parties for the last few days. She barely had time to catch her breath when she arrived at our meeting at a café. In many ways, Lindsay's story is unique for this group. For one thing, she had lived in the U.S. for almost ten years before coming back with her husband. Another thing is that her husband is a Caucasian U.S. citizen. These two factors gave her a huge advantage in her ability to find employment in Vietnam. Lindsay's father was a scientist who had worked in universities all over the world. Growing up, Lindsay's family usually lived in a different country every couple of years. She had gone through high school in America and then went on to attend the university

where her father was a working. She had met her husband in college but did not start dating him until she was in graduate school. During her junior year in college, her father passed away from a medical condition, and her mother and her brother moved back to Vietnam. She stayed in the U.S. by herself to finish college. After college, she worked for a short time at a bank while looking for a good graduate program. Through an acquaintance who was a professor at Sunny University, she learned about the MBA program there and applied. She got accepted into Sunny University with a considerably high value scholarship. She chose Marketing as her specialization in the MBA. She loved all of her business courses because she has always been passionate about business and international development. The Sunny campus was much smaller than her undergraduate institution's, which was something that she really liked because she got to know most of her fellow students and professors in her program. She also enjoyed having many dating options at Sunny University. She started dating her now husband during her MBA. After graduation she got married and lived with her in-law for a while while waiting for her husband to finish his master's degree. She and her husband have always been spontaneous spirits, and her subsequent decision to move back to Vietnam is an example of that spontaneity. It just so happened that, one day, she found a very cheap plane ticket to Vietnam and convinced her husband to go. A couple of weeks later, they arrived in Hanoi.

Initially, her plan had been just to visit her mother in Hanoi for a couple of weeks. However, once there, she fell in love with the dynamics of the fast-paced city and wanted to stay longer. Through friends and family, she found some great job opportunities both for her and for her husband. They became English teachers at a language center and at some universities. She also occasionally took some interpreting jobs for various foreign embassies, which she loved

because they usually gave her opportunities to travel around the country. Her mother and extended family were very happy to have her back after years of being away. As a white American with a master's degree, her husband was at a great advantage for lucrative jobs in Vietnam because of the deeply held prejudice in Vietnamese society that all things Western are of superior quality. In essence, they were living the dream: free of responsibilities, financially well off, and spontaneous. However, after about one year of living in Vietnam, her husband started to think about his long-term career and wanted to come back to the U.S. to pursue a Ph.D. He applied and was accepted to a Ph.D. program in the U.S. They decided to move back to America after twenty months of living in Vietnam.

Tracy. Tracy walked into the coffee shop looking tired but friendly. She had just come straight from work. She said that she usually did not get off work until 7 or 8 p.m., but she made an exception for the interview. Out of all the participants, Tracy proved the most open about sharing her feelings and perceptions. She was soft-spoken, humorous, and genuine. Like most young women in Vietnam, she had lived a sheltered life before going to study in the U.S. Her parents owned their own companies and only had two children. Thus, they were able to support her financially to study abroad. After graduating with her bachelor's degree from the National Economics University, which is located in Hanoi, Tracy decided to pursue graduate study in Finance in the U.S. She chose the U.S. because of the widespread perception that the U.S. had one of the best financial systems in the world. She applied and was accepted to Sunny University with a fifty percent scholarship which she was happy to have. Though her boyfriend at the time objected to her decision to study abroad, she went anyway because it had been her dream.

Her first semester in the U.S. was full of difficulties. The time zone difference between Vietnam and the U.S. alone was an enormous challenge for her. Since she had been very close to her parents, not being able to talk to them every day because of the time difference was a big challenge for her during the first few weeks. Also, there were many aspects of American life that were completely foreign to her. American ethnic and cultural diversity was something new to her. She had grown up in a homogeneous society where everyone looks the same and speaks the same language. Unlike some of its neighboring countries, Vietnam, especially in the big cities, is very homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and language.

Tracy also experienced difficulties with the language barrier. Like many other international students, her reading and writing skills were good, but her listening and speaking skills were not as good. She was also too timid to communicate with native speakers confidently. However, she was fortunate to have some great neighbors who were willing to be patient with her and to explain things to her in simple ways that she could understand. She also had support from her host family, who were Vietnamese-Americans, and from other international students. After the first semester, she became well-adjusted to her new environment and was doing great in her classes.

Since her program was small and since the majority of her fellow students were international students, she easily built friendships and connections with almost everyone. However, her main objective was to finish the program as soon as possible so that she could return home to her boyfriend, who has growing increasingly impatient with her for going away. She devoted most of her time to studying and did not get involved in many social activities. After two years, she got her degree (Master of Science in Finance) and was ready to come home.

However, right at this time, her younger brother arrived in New York to begin his college career in an Intensive English Program. Her parents asked her to stay in the U.S. to take care of her brother until he got adjusted because he did not speak much English and also because he needed financial support for his living expenses. Her boyfriend and his family, on the other hand, urged her to come home immediately. Torn between the two sets of loved ones, she finally decided to stay and to take a job in New York in order to support her younger brother. That was when her emotional breakdown began.

She lived in New York, New York, the most exciting city in the world, but Tracy did not get to enjoy it at all. She worked long hours. Though she loved her job and her work environment, she felt very stressed out because of work pressures. At the same time, she and her boyfriend started to argue a lot. Her boyfriend's family was putting pressure on him to get married and to settle down. She kept asking him to wait for her. After a few months of tension, she heard from their mutual friends that soon he would marry another woman.

The news about her boyfriend betraying her destroyed her emotionally. She became very depressed. She felt extremely lonely since she could not share her feelings with anyone. She did not want her parents and brother to worry about her, so she put on a brave face for months. Some nights, coming home from working late, she would just sit down in front of her apartment building and cry by herself before heading up to the apartment that she shared with her brother. After months of being depressed, she could not take it anymore and told her family about it. Her parents and even her brother asked her to come home immediately because she was very fragile. She quit her job and returned to Vietnam right away.

Once she was reunited with her parents, she felt much better emotionally. She was happy to have people around and not to have to worry about burglars breaking in at night, as she had when she lived all by herself. However, other aspects of her life did not go as she wanted. Career-wise, she could not find a suitable job that was compatible with her training and personality. She got a job as Corporate Finance Consultant with a local company. With her good English and professional skills, she exceled at work and got great performance review by her supervisor. However, she felt that she quickly hit a ceiling and could not advance much in her career because of her lack of "social connections" and because of her fellow employees' drive to advance by any and all means. She was unwilling to compromise her integrity for career promotion. Regarding her personal life, she was also frustrated with the limited dating options for her in Vietnam. Her parents, and everyone else, were pressuring her to just find a guy to marry. They kept setting her up with dates that she did not like. She complained about the patriarchal attitude of the guys she went out on dates with, and she could not see herself being happy with those sorts of guys. She also wanted to pursue more education in the near future. She felt that her family and friends would not approve of the idea that she would want to go to school instead of getting married because she was almost twenty-eight.   She wishes she could come back to the U.S. to study and work. This time, she said wistfully, she would not waste her time over a boy and would try to experience American life more fully.

Tony. Tony spent about ten years in the U.S. He came to the U.S. right after graduating from high school in 2000. He seemed very open and laid-back even though, at the time of the interview, he was working two jobs and was running his family's business on the side. He was humble and candid about himself and his experiences. The decision to study abroad was made

for him by his parents. At eighteen, he did not know what he wanted to do for a career. He just followed his parents' orders to come to the U.S. to study medicine and to become a physician. His favorite subject in high school had been biology, so he thought that he would do fine in medical school.

That turned out to be not the case. After graduating with a bachelor's in Biology, he was accepted into a medical program. He also started his internship in a hospital to earn real world experience in the medical field. Though he appreciated the kindness and professionalism of the doctors and nurses he worked with in the hospital, he could not see himself working in the medical field. He felt that the hospital environment was depressing and was not suitable for his personality. Plus, he was experiencing difficulties in his academic life. Medical school turned out to be much harder than he had expected. He was also living far from school. Between working, volunteering, and long commutes every day, he was usually exhausted by the time he got home. He started to fall behind in his classes. After one year of medical school, he dropped out because he felt that he did not have the passion for the medical field necessary to spending his whole life in it. His parents were outraged. They pressured him to stay in medical school. His response was to cut off all contact with them. He even refused to accept their financial support at that point. He got a part-time job as a waiter to pay for his expenses. For a few months, he was truly on his own emotionally and financially. Eventually, his parents had to give in. His mom actually flew all the way to America to visit him to make sure that he was fine. That was a defining milestone for him since he had always complied with his parents' wishes and had never made such a big decision in his life.

After dropping out of medical school, Tony applied to the MBA program at Sunny University. He chose a business program because he did not know for sure what he wanted to do with his life and because he thought that a business degree would give him more options. Once in the MBA program, he was very happy. Academically, he breezed through his classes because his English was excellent and because the workload for the MBA was so much lighter than medical school's. Socially, he became a much sought-after mentor for other international students because of his familiarity with American life and helpful nature. He was also adopted by a local family who invited him to stay with them in their home. Because of his good academic standing and English skills, he was selected to be a teaching assistant in his first year in the MBA program. He was also active in the university ballroom dancing club and in sports. His host family was very supportive and helpful. Tony felt fortunate to have a second family in America to help him feel less isolated and homesick. His two years in the MBA program at Sunny University were very memorable and enjoyable. He became less timid, more outgoing, more independent, and more mature. He also realized the importance of family and that his parents had always loved him unconditionally. Thus, even though at the beginning of his study abroad journey he had planned to stay in America to work for a few years, when he graduated he wanted to come back to Vietnam to live close to his family.

However, to hedge his bets, he looked for a job in the U.S. anyway. An IT company offered him a Business Consultant position, and he took it. He worked for the company for about a year when his Optional Practical Training (OPT) period expired. He decided that it was time to go home because he had been living far from home for ten years. His boss was very pleased with his work performance and work ethic, so he offered Tony a deal. Tony could

become an independent contractor for the company and could work from Vietnam via the Internet.

For Tony, the process of readjustment to Vietnam was fairly smooth. His family relationships were greatly improved. He and his father had had many disagreements that usually ended up in shouting matches. Upon his return to Vietnam after ten years of living abroad, things were much better between his father and him. According to Tony, his father used to have a very bad temper. However, his father had become calmer with age and with his conversion to Buddhism. Thus, when Tony returned home, he and his father got a long very well. Tony was also much more mature and independent. He even rented an apartment, even though he lived in his family home most of the time. Whenever he had a disagreement with his father, he would go stay in his apartment for a couple days for things to cool off before coming back home.

Career-wise, his job has not changed much. He continued to work for the American IT company via the Internet. He loves the work arrangement because he can be flexible with his time, the salary is high, and his colleagues are nice. Since his work is solely online, his daytime hours are usually free. In an effort to reintegrate himself into Vietnam, he accepted a lecturer position at a university in Ho Chi Minh City.

Relationships-wise, he has a girlfriend whom he has been dating for almost one year. He also has an active social life. He often hangs out with his students from the university because they really like his personable and friendly teaching style. He is also involved with a ballroom dancing club. However, he wishes he had more peer friends because he had lost touch with most of his friends in Vietnam while living overseas. Also, he still gets upset with the lack of professionalism in many Vietnamese workplaces. Overall, he is happy with his current life and

does not have any concrete plan for changes in the future. He attributes his successes and happiness to his strong work ethic, positive attitude, and good karma.

      Nancy. The interview meeting with Nancy was the shortest of all the interviews. Nancy was busy working even though it was late in the evening. Our interview was interrupted a few times by fellow employees looking for Nancy. Nancy looked well-composed but worn out. Out of all the participants, Nancy was probably the most reserved and brief in her responses. Nancy comes from an upper middle class family in a Southern mountainous province. Her father was a governmental official. He wanted Nancy to follow his career path and to work for the government. However, she did not want to be tied down to her hometown. Against her father's wishes, she went to Ho Chi Minh City to attend the Foreign Trade University and then worked for about five years in managerial positions in the private sector. During this time, she also got married and had a baby. After six years of working, she felt that she had hit a career ceiling at work and started to look for opportunity to pursue an MBA.

      A friend told her about a scholarship opportunity. It was the Fulbright Scholarship offered by the U.S. Department of State. Nancy did not think she would be chosen for the scholarship because it was very selective, with only twenty scholarships awarded nationally each year, but she applied anyway. She could not believe it when she got the news that she had been chosen. At that point, she had a tough decision to make. To accept the scholarship to study abroad in the U.S., she would have to give up her job and to leave her family behind, including her young daughter. However, the value of the scholarship was enormous and represented what was truly a once in a life time opportunity. After carefully weighting the pros and cons of both options, Nancy took the scholarship to study in the U.S.

Before starting her MBA program, Nancy was well oriented by the Fulbright program for about a month. When she finally began her program, she felt well prepared. Socially, she was open to learning new things and to making new friends. She did not encounter much culture shock as a result of the thorough orientation she had received. She even took the initiative to organize the Vietnamese international students at Sunny University. She sought out opportunities to connect with other Vietnamese students and organize social events. However, she did not want to limit her network to only Vietnamese students. She thought that the MBA program should be an opportunity for her to learn about other cultures and present Vietnamese culture to others. Whenever she had group projects, she deliberately looked for teammates from other countries in order to get to know their cultures better. Academically, she ran into some difficulties at first because of the language barrier. Even though she was familiar with many of the concepts discussed in her classes, she were not able to articulate and express her thoughts fully in class discussions and writing assignments. She even had trouble in asking for help from professors because she could not explain clearly to them what her questions were. After her first few classes, however, Nancy acclimated herself to the new academic norms and felt more confident in class. Her experience as a manager and her strong personality gave her the confidence to speak out in class and to question her professors critically.

Just when she felt settled into her social and academic life abroad, her home life in Vietnam began to take some unfortunate turns. Eventually, she had to take a break from her studies and to return to Vietnam in the middle of her program in order to handle her personal family issues. After a few months, though, she was able to come back to Sunny University to

finish her program. In 2010, after graduating, she came back to Vietnam to a high-paying job, her daughter, and a divorce.

Once back in Vietnam, she started learning her job and building a new life for herself and for her daughter. She loved the fact that she was lucky to have such a great job with high salary and high power. She enjoyed the dynamic work environment and the opportunities to learn new things and build new networks. She liked to go to social events and attend professional conferences. However, high-powered jobs usually come with high pressure and enormous workloads, and so she also worked long hours and was under constant pressure to manage multiple projects at once. She tried to make time for her daughter, but family time is hard to come by. She also reported that she had no time for romantic relationship. In her own words, "personal time is limited at present."

She also recognized the differences between the U.S. and Vietnamese cultures. She explained that she had more freedom to be herself when she was in the U.S. In contrast, when she is in Vietnam, she experienced pressure to spend more on conspicuous consumption as status symbols are necessary to impressing the people in her network circles. She also noted that Vietnamese culture tends to be more critical and to offer less in the way of compliments than American culture. She shared that she prefers living in the U.S. because of the higher living standards and the more supportive environment. However, she thought Vietnam was a better market for her career. She believed that she has an advantage in Vietnam because of her network while she was at a disadvantage in the U.S. because she did not have a professional network. Overall, she reported being happy with her current life and career. She jokingly said that the only thing she needs right now is a boyfriend.

Thomas. Thomas came from a medium-sized Southern city and a family with a long tradition of working in the financial industry. Growing up, he had always been interested in finance and wanted to work in the field. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in Finance from the local university, Thomas knew he wanted to study abroad to broaden his knowledge in the field. While working full time, he researched MBA programs at different universities in the U.S. He chose the U.S. because of its high quality education. He also wanted to have an opportunity to live in a faraway land with a culture that was completely different from Vietnamese culture.

He submitted applications to ten universities and was accepted by four of them. Of the four, two institutions, of which one was Sunny University, offered Thomas scholarships. After spending a considerable amount of time researching the two universities, he decided to enroll at Sunny University because of its reputation for international education. Before leaving for the U.S., he sought out advice from other international students in the U.S. about their experiences. He was reassured that things would settled down after the first few weeks. Taking their advice, Thomas was relaxed and prepared by the time he left Vietnam to start his study abroad journey in America.

The first few months in America were a challenging time for Thomas. At twenty-three, he was mature and independent, and he was eager to explore the new American culture and did not feel homesick much. However, his biggest problem was the language barrier. He had a difficult time communicating with others in English because his speaking skill was not good. He felt disheartened when people could not understand his accent. Cultural references were another

challenging area for him. He could not comprehend conversations about culture-specific topics such as sports or humor, which made him feel left out and isolated.

Fortunately, after six months, he started to improve his English skills and to acquire support networks from other international students. The Vietnamese students at Sunny University helped him to connect with students at other universities. He became more active within this community and quickly adjusted to his new social life. Academically, he did not have much in the way of problems. He did well in all his classes since he was passionate about the field and excited to learn more about it. He appreciated the openness and helpfulness of his American professors, whose approach was radically different from the style of his Vietnamese professors as an undergraduate.

He was very much enjoying experiencing American life and learning new things about finance when terrible news came from home. His grandfather had passed away. Being very close to his family and especially to his grandfather, the news destroyed him emotionally. What was worse was that he could not go home for his grandfather's funeral because he was in the middle of his program. If he were to leave, he might have been obligated to go through the whole visa interview process again, with the risk of not being able to come back to America to finish his degree.

After graduating and then coming back to Vietnam in a time of financial crisis, Thomas struggled for a few months to find a suitable job. When he first arrived in Vietnam, his family used their connections to secure a position in a bank for him. However, he did not take that position because he wanted to work for a big international company to get more experience in an international environment, so he went to work for a Swiss investment company. Also, around

that time, he experienced another tremendous loss. His father passed away within a few months of Thomas's arrival in Vietnam. His father was the pillar of the family. With his father gone, Thomas felt that he must assume that responsibility because he is his parents' only son. The emotional trauma of losing his grandfather and father, coupled with the pressure of supporting the family, had a long lasting, negative impact on Thomas's psychological health.

Thomas enjoyed the opportunity to learn about many big corporations and to consult businesses on their financial investments. However, he often felt frustrated because many Vietnamese companies do not listen to logical advice or follow regulations. He feels that his expertise has no value to these companies because all they care about is what kind of connections he can provide them. Thus, he does not have many opportunities to apply the complex knowledge that he had acquired in America. Also, he does not see career advancement opportunities in his company because it is a fairly small organization.

Thomas devoted most of his time to his career which leaves very little time for a personal life. He found it difficult to make new friends because he had not found anyone who could relate to his experiences and ideas. In addition, he was still depressed about the loss of his father and grandfather as well as the enormous pressure to succeed to hold up the family name. Outside of work, he took additional courses to improve his knowledge of the field. He returned home late at night feeling exhausted. He did not have the time or energy to engage in recreational activities outside of work. He was single and thinks that it will be a long time before he might have a romantic relationship. He has a strong drive to succeed, but he also questions the meaning and purpose of his life sometimes. "Sometime I feel like I don't know what I am doing," he said wistfully.

Introduction of Major Themes

Participant brought their own background and personality with them to their study abroad journey. However, analysis of their interviews revealed major themes (see Table 1) regarding similar concerns, experiences, and aspirations across their reflections. One noteworthy observation is that while they often discussed in detail the undesirable aspects of their careers after repatriation, they also made an effort to remain positive about their current and future career prospects. All of them shared a strong conviction that the time they spent studying abroad was the best time of their life. Even though they had lost many career opportunities and in some cases personal relationships as a result of their decisions to study abroad, they thought that studying abroad had given them invaluable experiences that they would never have had in Vietnam. Their conversations revolved around four major themes: factors influencing their decision making processes regarding their departure and repatriation, adjustment processes to life and career changes, personal development and relationships, and career trajectories and aspirations.

Theme 1: Decision Factors

- 1.1)Factors in Studying Abroad
  - 1.1.1)Career Change Aspiration.
  - 1.1.2) Desire to Broaden Knowledge.
  - 1.1.3) Desire To Experience Abroad Living.

- 1.2) Why the United States?
  - 1.2.1) Family's influence.
  - 1.2.2) Perception of quality.
  - 1.2.3) Attraction to The US Culture

- 1.3) Why Sunny University?
  - 1.3.1) Individual- Institutional Fit.
  - 1.3.2) Financial Aid Packages.

- 1.4) Post-Graduation Plans: To Stay or To Leave?
  - 1.4.1) Legal Immigration Circumstances.
  - 1.4.2) Personal Relationships
  - 1.4.3) Career Opportunities

Theme 2: Personal Matters

- 2.1) Personal Relationships.

- 2.2) Identity and Personal Development.

- 2.3) Affective Issues.

Theme 3: Career

- 3.1) Career Opportunities

- 3.2) Social Capital

- 3.3) Human Capital

- 3.4) Current career situations

Theme 4: Adjustment Processes

- 4.1) Adjustment to the US
  - 4.1.1) Challenges.
    - 4.1.1.1) New Arrival shock
    - 4.1.1.2) Academic acculturation
    - 4.1.1.3) Language barrier
    - 4.1.1.4) Issues With Chinese Students

  - 4.1.2) Adjustment to life in the US.
    - 4.1.2.1) Social life
    - 4.1.2.2) Academic Life
    - 4.1.2.3) Support sources

- 4.2) Readjustment to Vietnam
  - 4.2.1) Losses of career opportunities or relationships
  - 4.2.2) Reverse Cultural shocks
  - 4.2.3) Readjustment to Vietnam

Figure 2. Major Themes and Sub Themes

Chapter 5

Decision Factors

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of Vietnamese international students who return to Vietnam after graduation from a U.S. higher education institution. Areas to be explored include transitional periods, perception of the relevance of U.S. education to their current lives, reflections on their experiences in the U.S., and their future plans. In this chapter, I discussed the findings on the participants' decision processes. The participants cited myriad factors as influencing their decisions at each turn in the process. However, the similarity of these factors across participants is noteworthy. At each level of decision making, common themes emerged. The four major decisions in the whole process include the decision to study abroad, the host country selection, the choice of academic institution, and the post-graduation plans.
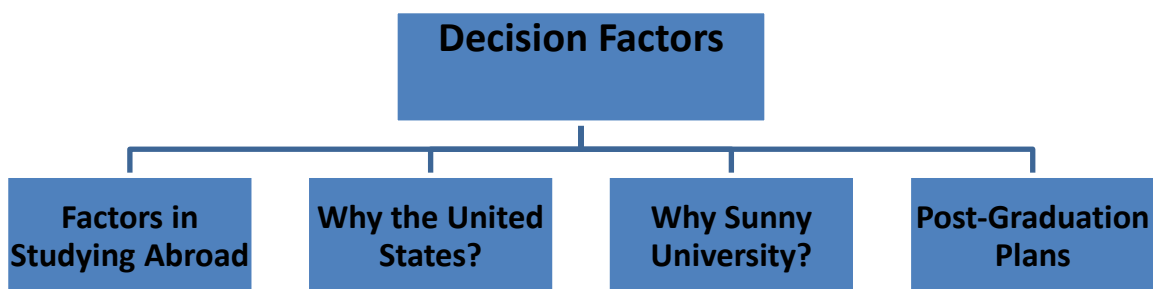
Figure 3. Decision factors.

Factors in Studying Abroad

As described in the participants' backgrounds, they all came from relatively privileged circumstances. Their families were either financially wealthy, were well-connected to the government, or both. With the exceptions of Lindsay, whose family relocated abroad because of

her father's career, and Tony, whose parents arranged for his study abroad trip, most of the participants were self-motivated to go abroad after spending some time working in Vietnam. Considering the financial and opportunity costs of the decision to resign from their then-current positions and to spend two years in a post-graduate degree program abroad, these individuals had deliberated over the decision carefully. The three major factors that influenced their bold determination to go abroad were a) career-change aspirations, b) desires to broaden their knowledge about their career passions, and c) lifelong dreams of living in a completely foreign culture.

Career change aspiration. Five of the seven participants had completed their undergraduate degrees in Vietnam and had worked for a while before going abroad to pursue post-graduate degrees. After working for a couple years, they became dissatisfied with their working conditions or realized that they had hit a career ceiling. They realized that working in Vietnam would not develop their potential to advance in life and career. They thought that studying abroad would launch new career directions. Daisy, for example, was initially passionate about her career choice until she realized the reality of the situation:

> My English was quite good and I wanted to work in the Foreign Affairs Committee in my province, so I registered for the International Relations Department at Dong Do University. I thought it was my destiny. However, after graduating and working, I realized that there was no progress in social justice issues at the local level. Everything was centralized and "top-down" so the locals almost have no say. Citizens can't raise their voice because everything had been controlled by the top centralized government. Therefore, I decided to study abroad to broaden my knowledge as well as change my career.

Nancy was more practical in her thinking. After five years of managerial experience, she learned that she needed some advanced degree to advance in her career field:

After six years of working, I felt that I had hit the ceiling. I asked my friends to recommend me an MBA program. One of them shared with me this scholarship, which she dreamed about for three years but didn't dare to apply. When I applied, I didn't think I would get it.

In David's case, he took a job upon graduation because it was a sensible, stable job with high potential for future earnings. However, after a couple of years, he was burned out and started to look for other opportunities:

There were two reasons for this: First, I wanted to change my career. Auditing wasn't my passion even though the salary was good. Auditing involves working with numbers a lot, so I chose a closely related field like finance. If I studied Master in Finance in Vietnam, I would be likely to be working full time and study, which I really don't like at all. Besides, the quality of many Master courses in Vietnam wasn't really good.

Changing careers involves taking risks, but these individuals were determined to pursue a different career path. They put in effort to research their opportunities, and in some instances jumped through several hoops to achieve their goals.

Desire to broaden knowledge. Second prevalent factor influencing decisions to study abroad was the desire to broaden knowledge about career fields and the world. They expressed strong passions for their career fields and expressed great interest in learning more about their fields. Tracy shared, "I loved to study finance, so I found all the Master programs in this field." Daisy offered a similar explanation for her decision:

It originated from my own desire to learn. At that time, I thought of studying MBA. My family has descended from the rural white Thai people, so my parents tried to study to get out of the rural life … Therefore, I decided to study abroad to broaden my knowledge as well as change my career.

Thomas cited the same reason for his decision, "I studied finance in [Sunny University], then I wanted to broaden my knowledge." Nancy showed great appreciation for the learning opportunity, despite all of the difficulties she encountered, "No matter what happened, I believed

this program was one of the most important milestones in my life. It actually broadened my knowledge. I really lived for myself." At the time of this decision, most of the participants were fairly career-focused and had a good idea on what they wanted for a career. Their main objective was to acquire deeper knowledge about and advanced skills for their fields.

Desire to experience abroad living. Four participants mentioned that one of the reasons for decision to pursue a graduate degree overseas was the dream of living abroad by themselves. David had lived abroad a few times because his parents were government officials and were sent abroad often. However, as an adult, he wished to live abroad to experience independence. He shared:

> Besides the Master degree, I also got another professional certificate, which was considered an important qualification in applying to a financial company. However, the more important thing is that I got to spend two years in the U.S. It was my main purpose because I loved to discover the new things as well as the new lifestyles.

Even though his then-girlfriend was studying in the UK at that time, he did not want to join her because MBA programs in the UK typically took only one year. He explained, "One year was enough for studying but wasn't for experiencing the real life."

Nancy shared a similar view about the purpose of her time abroad:

> I thought studying abroad was a chance to expose Vietnamese culture to others and to learn something new from theirs. You won't get many opportunities like that in your life. So when I first came, for Thanksgiving or Christmas I went to local people's places to experience the authentic feelings of these holidays. In my study times, I loved to join in a mixed group with students from different countries.

Nancy did not want to limit her network to co-national friends. She intentionally created opportunities to work with students from other countries. "Whenever I chose a group, I didn't choose the ones I already knew before but preferred to work with new people from different nationalities. I could learn about a lot of culture that way," she said. Another participant,

Thomas, purposely chose to study abroad for the opportunity to experience a completely new life style. He explained, "I wanted a completely different lifestyle. Singapore or other Asian countries are somewhat similar while I wanted to experience a completely new culture. Thus, I chose the U.S. as my destination." Tracy was excited for the chance to study abroad because she had never had the chance to live abroad before. "The longest time I stayed abroad was 7 weeks in my travel and business," she recalled.

Why the United States?

There are many choices for study abroad programs in Vietnam. Australia and Singapore have been more popular than the U.S. as host destinations partly because of their close proximity to and long-standing diplomatic history with Vietnam. Also, the popular perception is that the U.S. student visa process is the most difficult and that U.S. schools are the most expensive. These push and pull factors influence many Vietnamese students to exclude the U.S. as a study abroad destination. However, almost all of the participants considered the U.S. their first choice for several reasons including (a) family influence, (b) perception of quality, and (c) attraction to U.S. culture.

Family influence. For this group of participants, family influence was the weakest of the factors in their decision making. Indeed, only one participant cited direct family influence on his decision. Tony was eighteen years old and had just graduated high school when his parents sent him to the U.S. to study medicine. He flatly admitted that going to the U.S., "was my parents' choice, not mine." At eighteen, he did not question his parents' decision; he just, "knew it was what he [his father] wanted." In Thomas' case, the influence was more subtle. His family

influenced his choice of career field, which in turn influenced his choice of study abroad destination. He elaborated:

> There were two reasons basing on background of my family and mine. Firstly, my family traditionally worked in banking and financial field, and they had a positive impact on me, so I wanted to follow them. Secondly, I studied finance in [Sunny University], then I wanted to broaden my knowledge. These led me to go study in the U.S.

Perception of quality. A factor that these participants considered to be important in choosing the U.S. was the high quality of the educational and professional environment. Tracy believed that the U.S. had the superior environment for her career, "everyone said that the U.S. financial system is one of the best systems in the world, so I chose to study in the U.S. with [Sunny University]." Also interested in finance, Thomas chose the U.S., "because the education quality in the U.S. is better." David chose the U.S. because he believed that U.S. MBA programs would be superior, "the quality of many Master's courses in Vietnam wasn't really good." This theme is congruent with the findings of the Institute of International Education's (2012c) survey, which found that the majority of the survey responders rated the U.S. as having the best education quality.

Attraction to U.S. culture. Three participants were excited for the opportunity to experience American life. David was determined to live out his dream of living in America:

> The most important reason was that I had always wanted to study abroad but I didn't have the chance to during my undergraduate years. Therefore, spending two years abroad studying for a Master's was a great time for changing my life. … Singapore is too close to Vietnam, whereas the U.K. usually offers only a one-year master's program. Hence, I decided to choose the U.S. It's my American dream, it is far away from VN and I have dreamed of it for a long time.

Thomas shared the same enthusiasm for U.S. culture. He was certain about what he wanted, "I wanted a completely different lifestyle. Singapore or other Asian countries are somewhat similar,

while I wanted to experience a completely new culture. Thus, I chose the U.S. as my

destination." Tracy also was excited about the prospect of going to America because of the

contrasts between the two cultures:

> It [America] was so different from Vietnam. First, there is a twelve-hour gap of time zones between the two countries. Besides, culture and lifestyles and the financial systems are very different. America is the richest country in the world while Vietnam is a small, developing country. Besides, America is considered amultiethnic and multicultural country.

These participants were in their early twenties at the time of their study abroad

experiences. They all had lived sheltered and somewhat restrictive lives under their parents'

roofs. They had dutifully completed their undergraduate programs at local universities and had

started working right out of school. The decision to study abroad was their first chance to make

a big decision on their own for themselves. It was their first chance to express their personal

dreams and passions as adults. They chose the U.S. because they wanted to pursue their dreams

of living in the world's center of excellence in technology and education.

Why Sunny University?

Host institutions have a tremendous interest in identifying the factors that might influence

international students' selection decisions. In the current case study, each participant discussed a

host of reasons why they chose Sunny University. Some of the reasons were unique to each

individual's situation. For example, Nancy and Daisy were awarded full scholarships which

required them to choose from a short list of institutions. Lindsay had connections with a faculty

member at Sunny University who had recommended its MBA program to her. Tony chose Sunny

University mainly for convenience because he was already living in the same town. However,

five participants mentioned two common factors: a) the fit between their individual situations

and aspirations and the institutional environment and academic offerings and b) the value of the institutional financial aid packages.

Individual-institutional fit. Most participants conducted extensive research on MBA programs in the U.S. and applied to several institutions before selecting Sunny University. Daisy, with years of working experience, was practical and realistic in her assessment of the program at Sunny:

> [Sunny University] wasn't highly prestigious, but it specialized in development issues and communication development. Students here had the same interests in health, environment and climate change, etc. It was really good fit for people like me: not very excellent at language but really excellent at real-life experience. In the process of approval, the committee consider holistically whether I would succeed academically and that students should be able to share real-life experiences with one another.

Thomas had applied for admission at ten universities before settling on Sunny University. He researched the institution carefully before accepting their admission offer:

> At last, I accepted the offer from [Sunny University] because it had a good quality education in Finance fields and a great student community. It was such a good studying environment. Before accepting, I mainly spent a lot of time on finding information about [Sunny University] on the Internet.

Through her connection with a faculty member at Sunny University, Lindsay was introduced to the MBA program there. She learned more about the institution and the program and decided that it was a good fit for her career interests: "He [the faculty member] recommended a MBA program that I really liked. I can't remember clearly what the content of that curriculum was, but it may have been about business as well as International Development. That's why I chose [Sunny University], and I applied."

Unlike other participants who were highly intentional about choosing a program that matched their specific interests, Tony viewed the MBA program as a general program where he

could explore his interests. Since his parents had always made all of his prior academic

decisions for him, he had not had the chance to explore his individual interests. Thus, when he

finally dropped out of medical school, he was at lost for what to do: "At that time, I didn't really

know what I want to do with my life so I thought a business degree would open up many career

paths. So I applied to the MBA program at [Sunny University] with a loan from my parents."

His explanation for why he chose Sunny University was simple and candid:

> At that time, I had just dropped out, so I had no chance to get in many prestigious
> universities. Moreover, I switched from medical school without much business
> experience, while MBA courses in these [prestigious] universities required 2-3 years of
> working experience. Another reason was that [Sunny University] was near my adoptive
> parents' house.

These participants initially had some reservations about enrolling in Sunny University

because of its perceived lack of prestige. However, in the end, they chose Sunny University

because of the learning environment and the academic offerings that fit their situations and

interests. David explained his own skepticism and how he eventually got over it: "Before I

came to the U.S., I thought that this university didn't have a high ranking, so it must be different

from other ones. However, when I started school and had opportunities to visit other programs, I

realized that the difference was not much."

Financial aid packages. With the exceptions of Nancy and Daisy, who were awarded

full scholarships from the Fulbright program and Ford Foundation, respectively, all of the

participants received at least 50% tuition scholarships from Sunny University. They all

considered financial aid the most important deciding factor in their selection process. Tracy was

actively researching all of the universities that she could find that offered Master's in Finance

programs when she came across Sunny University. In the end, she chose Sunny University

because of its financial aid offer:

> I loved to study finance, so I found all the Master's programs in this field. I heard many people say that Massachusetts had some universities suitable for me, so I just applied to two universities. However, [Institution name]'s admission requirements were very high, so I didn't get accepted. Meanwhile, I got an offer from a university in the Netherlands, but I chose [Sunny University] because they offered me a fifty percent scholarship.

David's search for scholarship also led him to Sunny University. He applied to eight

different universities and was accepted by a few of them. Sunny University was his final choice

because of the value of its scholarship:

> I focused on searching for scholarships for Master of Finance. However, these scholarships weren't really common, so there were few universities to choose from. In fact, I got offers from some universities, but after considering accommodation expenses as well as the scholarship value, I decided to choose this university. My most important problem was the cost I would need to pay during my study time.

Like Tracy and David, Lindsay was awarded a valuable scholarship to attend Sunny

University. Attending was not a tough decision for her because she already liked the program,

but the scholarship was definitely the determining factor:

> He [a faculty member at Sunny University] recommended a MBA program that I really liked. I can't remember clearly what the content of that curriculum was but it may have been about business as well as International Development. That's why I chose [Sunny], and I applied. They accepted me and offered a very good scholarship, so I decided to go to [Sunny].

Thomas was adamant about getting a scholarship to study broad. In fact, it was his most

important criterion:

> One of the criteria for my choice was that I would be granted scholarship. I had submitted my application to over ten universities, four of which chose me, but just [Sunny University] and another university in Texas agreed to give me scholarships. At last, I applied at [Sunny University] because it had a good quality education on the Finance field and a great student community.

Although each participant had unique circumstances at the time that they applied for graduate school, which led to differences in their institution selection processes, some factors were considered important by most participants. A good individual-institution fit and the value of financial aid packages appear to have been prominent factors in most participants' decision making process.

Post-Graduation Plans: To Stay or To Leave?

The decision to study abroad was a life changing event that had significant effects on the participants' lives. Given the tremendous financial and time investments needed to study abroad, the participants worked hard to succeed academically and to complete their programs. The big question that came after graduation was "Should I stay in the U.S. or should I return to Vietnam?" Participants had their own unique post-graduation events that depended on their circumstances. Across participants, however, three common factors emerged. One of these three factors was the participant's legal immigration circumstance. The second factor that influenced post-graduation events revolved around the participant's personal relationships. The third factor concerned career opportunities.

Legal immigration circumstances. Most international students, upon graduation, have an opportunity to pursue an Optional Practical Training (OPT) period in the U.S. OPT is a period during which undergraduate and graduate students with F-1 status who have completed or have been pursuing their degrees for more than nine months are permitted by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to work for at most one year on a student visa for the purpose of getting practical training to complement their academic of studies. F-1 students are usually permitted a total of 12 months of practical training. This OPT option was available

for all participants except for Nancy because of her scholarship's restriction. She was required to return to Vietnam within 29 days of graduation and to serve her country for two years before being able to return to the U.S. Daisy, on the other hand, returned to Vietnam immediately after graduation because she did not find out until it was too late that her scholarship allowed her to stay in the U.S. after graduation. "I knew of it at the end of the second year. It was too late," she said. Plus, the legal process would have been lengthy. She explained her situation, "If I wanted to stay more, I must go through a very long immigration process, and I can't leave my husband." Thomas also had to leave the U.S. right after graduation. He recalled, "[S]ome students might choose to stay there one more year because they have OPT, but I had to leave the U.S. immediately because my visa was no longer valid."

At the other end of the spectrum, Lindsay could not return to Vietnam after her graduation because she had just married her husband, a U.S. citizen. According to immigration law, she had to stay continuously in the U.S. for two years after the marriage date to fulfill the residency requirement for her immigration process. On the bright side, she did not have the pressure to secure employment right after graduation in order to stay in the U.S. She took the opportunity to travel around the country with her husband. "After getting married, I got a Green Card, so I wanted to get a job immediately. In fact, I was offered a good job before being granted the Green Card but we were traveling in New York. Consequently, I missed that job," she said.

David, Tracy, and Tony all tried to find employment in the U.S. after graduation. They believed that working experience in the U.S. would make them more marketable when they came back to Vietnam. "I didn't want to waste my study effort and also wanted to know how my knowledge could be applied in the US. Thus, I decided to stay in the US to get a temporary job

for 1 year," Tracy explained. David "graduated and stayed in the US for 3 more months to find a

job" before deciding it was time to come home. Tracy and Tony both got job offers. They

worked for their respective companies until their OPT expired. At the time of his OPT

expiration, Tony wanted to extend his stay, however, his company was not able to sponsor him.

He explained:

> In 2011, my OPT was expired. Because my major was business administration but my job was in finance, my company couldn't sponsor me to stay. […] At that time, my work was making good progress, so I asked my boss to sponsor me to stay. Other people might have looked for other ways such as moving to another state or getting another job just to stay in the U.S. It was hard to get H-1B visa in [state name], California might be easier. At that time, I just thought that if it is not possible to stay, I would come back to Vietnam to get another job in the banking industry such as Citibank.

> In a similar vein, Tracy returned to Vietnam when her OPT expired. Admittedly, her

situation was further complicated by her personal relationship's circumstances, which are

discussed in the next section. Nonetheless, the expiration of her OPT was a significant event

because it was "the straw that broke the camel's back." OPT expiration meant she would need to

start the lengthy and often highly stressful process of applying for H-1B visa, a non-

immigrant visa that allows foreign workers to work in the United States. At the time, she did not

have the mental strength necessary to deal with yet another source of great stress, so she decided

to come home:

> As my OPT was running out, I didn't try to get another job and planned to come home when my OPT expired. At that time, my parents knew of my breaking up and advised me to come back home if I feel exhausted with life in the U.S.

Personal relationships. All of the participants considered their personal relationships a

determining factor for their post-graduation decisions. In most cases, they wanted to reunite with

their loved ones after having been away for a long time. Daisy could not wait to get back to her

baby. "I must come back to Vietnam because I had a small child, and I had already been away from her for four years," she shared. Similarly, David had planned to return to Vietnam right after graduation:

> To be honest, I had never thought to stay long in the U.S. because my family and my girlfriend lived in Vietnam. My girlfriend had taken a one-year study trip in the U.K. When she was preparing to return to Vietnam, I left to come to the U.S., and I didn't think she would be able to join me in the U.S.

In addition, he wanted to live close to his friends and relatives:

> I, myself, didn't really like to live in the U.S. but wanted to live near my relatives in Vietnam. In VN, I can go see my friends anytime. I had never thought that having a career in the U.S. would be simpler than in VN. No matter what, I think I have more opportunities in Vietnam.

Thomas also returned to Vietnam after graduation. His grandfather had passed away while he was studying in the U.S. He was very shaken by the loss and decided to come back home immediately after graduation to be with family. "Part of the reason for me to come back to VN is to be close to my family," he shared. Similarly, Lindsay was happy to have a chance to live near her mother after many years of living in the U.S. When she found a cheap ticket to Vietnam and "decided to visit my mother because she didn't get to attend my wedding before." Even though she was used to living abroad by herself, Lindsay still preferred having her family nearby. "I was so used to living away from my family because I had been away from home for ten years. However, it would be better if I could live closer to my family," she said. Her husband agreed to come with her, "He was so young that there was nothing to lose. We didn't have our own house in the US and he already knew that I would like to return to Vietnam."

Tony, who also had lived in the U.S. for ten years, wanted to come home to strengthen his familial relationships because he had been away for too long. Ten years of living in the U.S. had made him realize that there is no place like home:

> I have lived there for nearly eight years, so I actually wanted to come back home. After a long time living far away from home, I realized that my parents always love me unconditionally even though they can be controlling and strict sometimes. That guiding style was not for me, but they always support me.

He also hoped to have a chance to spend more time with his younger brother:

> I have a younger brother. He is eleven years younger than I. When I left Vietnam, he was just six. When I was gone for nine years, he was in high school. I felt like we didn't have a strong connection. I realized that there are more important things in life than staying in America.

When his OPT expired, he was ready to come home. "The only reason was that I wanted to come home, I have been away for too long," he said thoughtfully.

In contrast to other participants, Tracy was torn between staying and leaving because of the conflict in her personal relationships:

> My boyfriend also urged me to come back to Vietnam, as did his family. However, when I was going to repatriate, my younger brother arrived in the U.S. for an IEP course before his official school year. So, my parents told me to stay there to take care of him and find a job at the same time to gain experience. When he was more adjusted, I would return to Vietnam.

Her parents and her boyfriend demanded opposite things from her:

> My boyfriend didn't want me to stay there any longer for fear that I would never go back to Vietnam. On the other hand, my brother was facing some difficulties in his first days in the U.S., so I had to help him by staying with him and supporting him financially for living expenses. I felt responsible for my brother.

Tracy remained in the U.S. to support her younger brother, which led to her break-up with the boyfriend. She was emotionally devastated because of the break-up. After a few more months in the U.S., she experienced depression and emotional breakdowns. At that point, she wanted to

come home to her parents for support: "As you know, I, myself, faced some pressures in my job, but I just kept them to myself and felt lonely every night. Both my work pressures and his [the boyfriend's] betrayal made me very sad and in need of emotional support."

Summary. These participants had left their homes to study in the U.S. partly because they wanted to be independent, to be free of parental restrictions, and to build new networks. However, after a few years of living abroad, most were ready to return home to their families. Even though they had enjoyed active social lives, made new friends, and created new support networks, they still longed for their parents, their siblings, their significant others, and their children back in Vietnam. Their personal relationships were, indeed, a powerful force in the shaping of their post-graduation plans.

Career opportunities. All participants appeared to be highly career-focused. As previously discussed, one main reason for studying abroad was to advance their careers. The huge financial investment into academic programs' tuition and living expenses put pressure on them to find well-paying jobs to generate reasonable returns on their investments. Thus, it was not a surprise that the participants expressed strong interests in and concerns for their career opportunities after graduation. They carefully weighed their options for finding career opportunities in either the U.S. or Vietnam. David explained his decision:

> I also thought of my career, and I realized that living in Vietnam would be better. At the time I left Vietnam, its economy was having a tough time. However, people believed it would be better in the near future. Although a salary in the U.S. might be higher than salaries in Vietnam, I believed that the total income and savings might not be better than Vietnam, even living expenses too.

Thomas shared David's belief in the potential of the Vietnamese market:

> I had had some good offers in McKenzie or Citibank before. They even went to the U.S. to interview the potential candidates, and I was so lucky to interact with them in some

rounds. I realized that Vietnam was a high potential market, and I also had some working experience at some American companies. So, I started to weigh my options in Vietnam and in the U.S. After much deliberation, I concluded that Vietnam had many great opportunities, so I decided to come back.

He also believed that his social standing in Vietnam would be better than the U.S.: "It seemed I didn't belong to the U.S. society. I didn't feel like a first-class citizen there, so I decided to repatriate. In Vietnam, I feel like I have better social standing." In addition, he had better connections to career opportunities in Vietnam:

[M]y family had their own relationships, which were very helpful for my future job. Even if they can't help me at all, I felt that I could still find a good job on my own. Perhaps I will get a lower salary, but I am ok with that.

Lindsay expressed the exact same perspective about her career opportunities:

I think that we usually think that it's coincidence but it's not at all. If I returned to the U.S. now, I would be considered as a fresh-graduate from a very normal university in the U.S. This was the same in Vietnam. Despite of having graduated, it was hard to get a job. If I didn't have a good network, no one knew who I was, so how I could show off myself? Thus, my degree was more valuable in Vietnam, not in the U.S., because I didn't have any good networks there.

The concern for limited options for careers in the U.S. was shared by Daisy and Nancy as well. Daisy did not think that she could compete successfully in the U.S. market because of her less than excellent academic achievement record. She candidly assessed her academic ability, "I didn't think my academic performance was excellent enough to stay there because my GPA was only 3.7." Nancy also acknowledged her limitations for a successful career in the U.S. "I was so lucky to be high up in the hierarchy in Vietnam. However, it was hard to find a suitable job in the U.S. because I wasn't specialized enough to get a job there," she shared.

In contrast to the other participants' favorable views of the career opportunities in Vietnam, Tracy believed that the financial crisis in Vietnam had caused the job market to shrink

significantly. Thus, she decided to find a job in the U.S. instead of returning back to Vietnam

right away:

> [A]t that time I was advised not to get jobs in Vietnam because its economy was in a difficult situation. The overseas students like me were lacking working experience and would have a hard time. I myself didn't want to waste my study efforts and also wanted to know how my knowledge could be applied in the U.S. Thus, I decided to stay in the U.S. to get a temporary job for one year.

Summary. In general, most participants shared the belief that they would have better

career opportunities in the Vietnamese market. They felt that they were at a disadvantage in the

U.S. market because they did not have professional connections/networks that would help them

find suitable employment. In addition, some of them worried about their chances of competing

with domestic students for jobs since English was not their native language and because they did

not have professional experience in U.S. organizations. They were also optimistic about the

prospects of the Vietnamese job market in the future. This finding is consistent with Lee and

Kim's (2010) conclusion about the push and pull factors of global mobility decisions for South

Korean repatriates:

> In this study, the push factors in studying abroad were located both at home and abroad in the form of globalization, the importance of having an international experience and the educational degree. The pull factors in returning to South Korea were family ties, culture, and tradition. In such ways, this study suggests an inverse of the common understanding that push factors solely reside in the home country and that pull factors are only within the host country. (p. 642)

Chapter 6

Personal Matters

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of Vietnamese international students who return to Vietnam after graduation from a U.S. higher education institution. Areas to be explored include transitional periods, perception of the relevance of U.S. education to their current lives, reflections on their experiences in the U.S., and their future plans. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the participants' reflections about their personal life. Throughout the interviews, the participants discussed their personal experiences in depth. At the beginning of the conversations, most of them focused on impersonal topics such as job descriptions and career plans. As the conversations proceeded, they started to open up about their personal lives. Their concerns mostly involved (a) personal relationships, (b) identity and personal development, and (c) emotional issues.
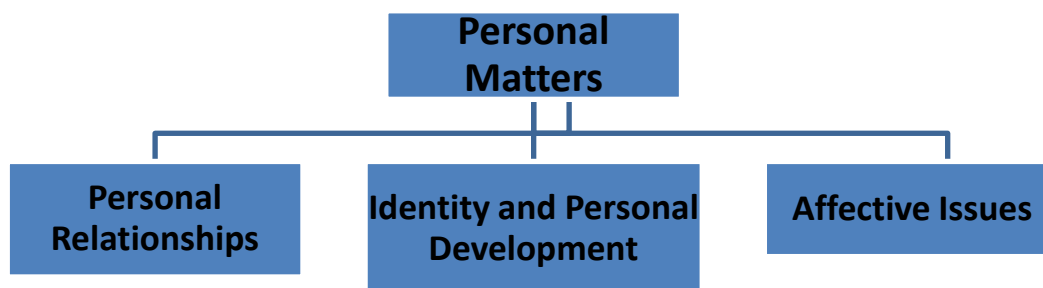
Figure 4. Personal matters.

Personal Relationships

Most participants expressed great concerns about their personal relationships. Depending on individual circumstances and life stages, their concerns varied in degree and specific topics. However, participants agreed that personal relationships played an important role in their lives. Some of the participants were more fortunate than others in this area of their lives. For some, the decision to study abroad had led to serious issues

Nancy, now in her mid-thirties, had gone through a divorce while trying to complete her MBA degree. Her daughter was just about three or four at the time. She actually had to interrupt her studies to come back to Vietnam to deal with her familial issues:

> My total program had 16.5 units. In the first year, I completed 10.5 credits, and I focused on studying because I had planned on taking my baby to live with me the following year. Unfortunately, my family had some troubles. I came back and stayed in Vietnam for some time, then returned to the U.S. to get my degree.

When asked about what she had gained and lost as the result of studying abroad, Nancy admitted, "My biggest loss was my family." In addition, her relationship with her father had worsened since her return:

> I felt it [familial harmony] is harder. Before I came to the U.S., my relationship with my family was already bad because my thinking was very different than my family's. My father formerly worked in a state-owned company, so he wanted me to follow his way - even after I came back from the U.S. But I had my own choices and didn't follow him. At last, I was considered as a rebel in his eyes.

Currently, she lives with her daughter in her own house and reported "very happy." However, given her extremely busy schedule, she shared, "My personal life has been limited at present." Her love life is also limited by her busy schedule. At the end of the interview, she jokingly said, "I am satisfied with all. I just need a boyfriend right now."

Daisy reported some similarities to Nancy's portrayal of personal life. Daisy also had a small daughter at the time she left for the U.S. And unfortunately, she will also soon become a single parent since she and her husband are currently going through the divorce process. Her daughter has always been her first priority no matter what. When Daisy was completing her MBA, she constantly thought about how she could take care of her daughter. "The only thing I cared about was how my kid was doing and how much money I could send back to my kid," she recalled. Her daughter was the main reason for her to return home immediately after graduation. She explained, "I must come back to Vietnam because I had a small child and I had already been away from her for four years." Also similar to Nancy, Daisy lived away from her parents because she wanted to pursue career opportunities in Hanoi, the capital city:

> All my family relationships were wrapped up in my province. When I came back to Vietnam I had to start again from the beginning and met more difficulties than the natives of Hanoi because they have their professional and social relationships here.

Unlike Nancy and Daisy, Tracy was a single woman in her mid-twenties, but like them she also had lost a serious long-term relationship because she had chosen to study abroad. Tracy was strongly committed to her boyfriend, was lonely but she recalled, "My boyfriend at that time was in Vietnam, so I felt very lonely and hardly made male friends here." The relationship ran smoothly for almost two years and then deteriorated. Tracy, still vividly emotional, explained:

> [S]ince I started my job in the U.S., our relationship started to have some problems. My boyfriend didn't want me to stay there any longer for fear that I would never go back to Vietnam. On the other hand, my brother was facing some difficulties in his first days in the U.S., so I had to help him by staying with him and supporting him financially for living expenses. I felt responsible for my brother. I tried to convince my boyfriend, but he, and even his family, didn't seem to understand. His lack of support led to many problems between us. In addition, his family was completely against me staying longer in the U.S., so we broke up.

She was torn between the two sets of loved ones - her own family and her boyfriend and his

family. She discovered that her boyfriend had cheated on her and was planning a marriage

shortly after they had just broken up, she was emotionally devastated:

> Perhaps he was under a lot of pressure from his parents and betrayed me. At that time, I was really shocked […] Both my work pressures and his betrayal made me very sad and in need of moral support. The life in New York was too fast for me to share any-thing with my colleagues, so I just kept it to myself.

She experienced emotional breakdowns for a long time:

> I was depressed for a long time. […] Once, I came home late, and then I just sat on the ground outside of the building and cried alone. I couldn't understand why he settled down so soon. I just knew of his wedding two weeks before it happened. Afterwards, he tried to keep in touch with me to apologize to me. He also said that he had made a huge mistake.

> When she returned to Vietnam, she was happy to live with her parents. They

provided great emotional support:

> I felt secure and happy to live with my parents. I also didn't need to rent a room like in the U.S., where I was so scared to stay alone at night. I was scared whenever there was a strange noise at night and didn't know whom to call. So, I felt much better living with my parents, knowing that I always have people besides me.

> However, her love life did not go well. Parents, colleagues, and friends pressured her to

settle down because she was "too old for getting married." She felt that her privacy was greatly

invaded:

> I didn't like the guys my parents recommended. My parents thought I was too picky and told me to lower my standards for a boyfriend. My relatives also advised me to just pick an ok guy because they thought a woman needs to settle down, get married, and start having kids. However, my mindset is different now; I didn't want to get married to one I don't love. Even at my workplace, they always talk about family, husbands, and kids, so I felt left out. My colleagues felt pity for me and advised me to get married as soon as possible. At that time, I felt that my private life was intruded upon excessively. When I lived in the U.S., no one asked me those kinds of questions or gave me advice like that.

As a result of her experiences in the U.S., she resisted the intrusions:

> I am already twenty-eight. I really wish to start my own family, just like other women. However, since I went abroad and saw the progressive lifestyle, when I came back to Vietnam I felt that Vietnamese men are so patriarchal and don't put much effort into their careers because they depend heavily upon their parents. Many parents spoil their sons, so if I marry them, my marriage life will be tough.

Thus, she felt "trapped" and frustrated with her love life. She wished to have another opportunity because "if I study abroad, I might meet another international student whose world view is more similar to mine, more open and progressive. He might be more independent."

Although the same age and single, Thomas and Tracy have remarkably different attitudes about their situations. Thomas's family did not pressure him to settle down. He, himself, wanted to focus on his career. In contrast to Tracy's case, however, people around him did not seem concerned about pushing him to settle down. He mostly devoted himself to his career. "My private life is as usual because I mostly devote myself the job. I haven't thought of settling down yet," he shared. However, he too encountered difficulty in his love life. He shared:

> I also had some considerable changes and am not like the old me in the past. However, I still preferred making friends with those who were like-minded or had the same ideas and passions with me because I wanted to share my work and life with those who understood me. Without empathy, it was hard to share. This was the same for choosing a girlfriend.

Lindsay, David, and Tony, reported feeling satisfied and happy with their current personal relationships. Lindsay was married to her longtime friend, Jack, a Caucasian American citizen. Like Lindsay, Jack was adventurous and spontaneous. When Lindsay wanted to stay to work in Vietnam, Jack agreed to come with her right away. Lindsay was very happy because she could be close to both her mother and her husband. She smilingly shared: "My married life was

very good because [Jack] loved to live in Vietnam. My great family was happy also because I was away for such a long time. My mother was so excited to see me after a long time."

However, the day of the interview was her last day in Vietnam before coming back to the U.S. in order for Jack to pursue his doctorate. She was willing to drop her work to accompany him back to America even though she wanted to stay in Vietnam longer:

> I have to return the U.S. because my husband [husband's name] is joining a Ph.D. program. [Jack] wants to do something meaningful, and I support his decision. Anyway, he has lived in Vietnam for two years and wanted to come back to the U.S. […] Everything has its trade-off. I think what I have now is partly because of [Jack]'s support.

David mainly focused much of the interview on his relationship with his parents after he returned to Vietnam. He described how his parents reacted to his new characteristics:

> Some are positive, some are negative. For instance, my parents were so pleased with my independence. However, that I came home late without informing made them upset. Sometimes, my father is concerned when I try to do so many things at once, so he would come to take a look. I didn't like the way he interferes in my business.

David came to accept that he and his parents would not agree on occasion, but he emphasized that he and they just need to be understanding. He made some changes to his behaviors to keep peace in the house:

> In fact, some were better, for some, both sides just have to learn to accept. Fortunately, my parents now were more understanding because I was mature enough to take responsibility for what I did. Moreover, I also had some changes in my lifestyle which were too hard to give up. Thus, they gradually accepted my changes. For instance, I was not allowed to be out overnight in the past, but now I just call for a permission to do that. I just have to accept that too.

Regarding his love life, he did not talk much about his girlfriend. However, he shared that they are engaged now. At the end of the interview, his fiancé walked into the coffee shop. His eyes brightened up when he saw her. They seemed comfortable and happy with each other.

Like David, Tony mostly focused on talking about his familial relationships. One of his biggest regrets from being abroad for so long was that he did not get to know his younger brother. He related:

> I have a younger brother. He is eleven years younger than I. When I left Vietnam, he was just six. When I was gone for nine years, he was in high school. I felt like we didn't have a strong connection. I realized that there are more important things in life than staying in America.

He noted that on his return to Vietnam, his "younger brother was more mature. They were happy to have me back. So the positive outnumbered the negative." Furthermore, Tony had had a contentious relationship with his father before studying abroad. "[M]y father was very strict. We weren't of compatible viewpoint, which made for many unnecessary quarrels in my house. In my high school time, there were many arguments between me and my father." Even while away in college in the U.S., Tony recalled, "Sometimes, I tried to tell them [the parents] how I felt, but they seemed not to understand, especially my father. He was always screaming at me." Upon his return to Vietnam, his relationship improved significantly. He explained:

> The older my father was, the less cantankerous he was. He also actively adjusted something in his viewpoints after having some trouble in his business. Besides, he converted to Buddhism five years ago, so now he is less hot-tempered. When I came back, I was more mature, so we learned to tolerate each other, so everything was better.

As an adult, he also found new strategies to deal with disagreements. His rental of a small apartment near the university where he teaches played an important role. He reported, "I can control my freedom. If there is any big disagreement, I will get out of my house and stay temporarily at my own apartment. When the situation gets better, I will come back home."

He expressed more confidence and comfort with romantic relationships. He stated, "I didn't have any high requirements for a girlfriend. When I was a student, I had some difficulties

financially. Thus, I just think the more financially secure I get, the more comfortable I am with romantic relationships." He happily shared, "To the best of my recollection, I met my girlfriend in June of 2011. We officially dated in November of the same year. We have been very happy ever since."

Summary. In this section, the researcher discussed the participants' reflections on their personal relationships. In cases where the participants returned to live under their parents' roofs again, their familial relationships experienced some degree of change depending on the nature of their relationships before the trip and upon how much they had changed as persons. Both sides, the participants and their parents, for the most part were willing to modify their thinking and behaviors to accommodate each other to maintain familial harmony. Living abroad for at least two years appeared to make the participants realize how much they had missed their families and how much their parents care for them. As a result, they tended to take a more mature approach to familial conflicts than they would have done prior to their trips to the U.S. These themes mirror Butcher's (2002) results with 50 graduates of New Zealand universities from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. The author found that returnees specifically encountered challenges with their return to family ties, their change in their worldviews, and their expectations of their reentry. Many returnees often find it difficult to go back to living under their parents' roofs again. Their worldviews and expectations about their familial responsibilities might be substantially different from their parents' worldviews or expectations. Familial tensions are the norm for returnees. Some returnees reported having a better relationship with their parents because being away from their parents helped them to appreciate their parents more. However, the degree of familial tensions reflected in the current study is of

much lesser degree. One possible explanation for this difference is the maturity level disparity between the two groups of participants, as Butcher's participants were mostly undergraduate students.

One prevalent observation about dating can be made about the gender difference among the participants. Of the four female participants, only Lindsay was happy with her love life. Lindsay had lived for about ten years in the U.S. and was happily married to an American citizen. The other three women had lost significant others during or after their trips. Nancy and Daisy became single mothers. Tracy was a single "old maid" that needed to be married off according to her parents and everyone else around her. The male participants, in stark contrast, expressed satisfaction with their love lives. David was engaged to be married to his long-term girlfriend whom he had started dating before his study abroad trip. Tony did not have to try very hard to find a girlfriend and has been happily dating her since 2011. Thomas was still single but reported feeling great about it because he is devoting all his time to his career. Plus, in contrast to Tracy's case, his family, friends, and colleagues were not looking at him with disapproval and pity because he is not settled down at twenty-eight. In fact, everyone was supporting him in developing his career.

Identity and Personal Development

Conversations with the participants produced a strong conviction that the study abroad experience had influenced identity development. In fact, almost unanimously the participants' reported positive identity development. They exhibited great enthusiasm when they talked about this aspect of their experiences. David shared his own drastic changes:

> Now, I am more independent, not financially, but in my thoughts. Before, I usually asked my parents for opinions about my career, but now I mostly decide by myself. For

example, if it were me before I left for the U.S., if I wanted to open a coffee shop, I may have either my relatives or my parents help in applying for a license, finding a designer, etc. However, after two years in the U.S, I almost did everything on my own. I may sometimes consult my parents if necessary but never depend on them. I am more decisive.

He declared that time spent in the U.S. revealed new way of life and worldview. He considered this change the most important thing he had learned in the U.S.:

I was more skillful at building my network, which I wasn't taught in Vietnam. My language skill was also better. I could communicate in English more fluently. How-ever, the best thing I gained was a different mindset. I felt it was so great to be more mature and more independent and more knowledgeable. If you didn't go study abroad, you wouldn't know your potential to develop like now, would you? If it wasn't for the two years in the U.S., I wouldn't have the courage to open this coffee shop.

He began to think more critically about things he had taken for granted for years before his trip:

I believed that my thoughts can't be the same as it was in the past. Whenever doing anything, I always have a comparison in my head between Vietnam and the U.S. For example, if I saw a Vietnamese doing something, I immediately would think of the way the Americans do that. Even though I usually don't express my feelings or do anything about it, the comparison is always in my mind. This comparison always made me upset, and I have never been like that before.

Even with his friends in his age group, he could sense the incompatibility in their worldviews:

Moreover, I, myself, felt it hard for us to have the same viewpoint because we lived in absolutely different environments. I wondered whether I would be like them or not, but I can't blame them because that is the Vietnamese lifestyle, because in Vietnam you need connections to advance in life. When we talk, they seem not to care about your education level; all they care about is how much money you make. After coming back from the U.S., I can't accept those ideas and, [I] feel uncomfortable. Perhaps in our society, money is most important thing. It is even more important than your true ability.

Daisy echoed David's reflection on his identity development in her discussion about the skills she had developed in her study time in the U.S.:

Although my degree was pretty general, it helped me improve my reading skill. Besides, planning skills helped me determined my goals. When sponsors assign me a project, I have to know its purposes. In part, these kinds of projects were usually in collaboration with the local community, so I usually know exactly what to do.

These highly transferrable skills became part of her professional identity. She proudly

shared, "Firstly, it was how I read materials effectively. Secondly, I knew how to determine my

purposes in any kinds of activities." When she first came back to Vietnam, it was these skills

that helped her to land a series of jobs before securing her current job.

Similarly, Tracy has developed to be a more mature and confident person than she

thought she could ever be:

> It could be said that my studying tour was a very good decision. Firstly, it made me more mature. Previously, I lived with my parents, I was so sheltered, but now I am more confident. Besides, the American education system was so great that I was able to learn a lot. Furthermore, the pressure of the expensive cost made me try very hard.

She emerged from her "shell":

> First of all, I became more mature. Secondly, I felt more confident because of having worked for some time. Thirdly, my knowledge was better. Fourth, my English and other skills were better. Besides, my analytical skill is better, and I am also less timid. Before, I didn't make friend with those who were so difficult to get along with. However, when living abroad, I had to make friends with many kinds of people, which made me more mature.

Tony expressed similar sentiments about his identity development as a result of his time

in the U.S. He became more appreciative of his parents:

> I have lived there for nearly eight years, so I actually wanted to come back home. After a long time living far from home, I realized that my parents always love me unconditionally even though they can be controlling and strict sometimes. That guiding style was not for me, but they always support me.

He had transformed from a sheltered boy who never had to lift a finger to do any house

work into an independent and self-sufficient man after a few years of living abroad. His general

self-efficacy increased substantially:

> Yes, when I think about it, when I was younger I was just like my younger brother now. I didn't know how to do anything at all at that time. No, it isn't that I didn't know, but it is that I didn't have to because other people did it for me. In the U.S., you have to cook and

go to the market on your own, even under the snow. It was miserable but I feel like I can do anything now.

His attitude about the meaning of his career also changed:

When I still studied at medical school, I thought I must stay in the U.S. at any cost to get back what my parents had invested in my study. However, after leaving that school, I didn't care too much about being practical and focused on experiencing my free life. I just tried my best, then what will be will be.

For Nancy, the two years in the MBA program in the U.S. was definitely an important milestone in her life. She declared, "No matter what happened [i.e., loss of marriage], I believed this program was one of the most important milestones in my life. It actually broadened my knowledge. I really lived for myself." "However, I also gained a lot. My world was flatter, my network was wider, my strategic view was better also," she reflected. One particular aspect of her new identity that she was particularly proud of was her ability to work with people from different cultures:

For instance, I could systematize what I had studied before and change the way I work in groups. Whenever I chose a group, I didn't choose the ones I already knew before but preferred to work with new people from different nationalities. I could learn about a lot of culture that way.

Thomas recounted, "First, my knowledge was much broadened. Second, my thoughts were more liberal than before. I was able to accept a multicultural society. And thirdly, my logical analysis was better. So, those soft skills were greatly improved, I think."

Summary. Participants spoke enthusiastically about their positive identity development. Being able to live and study abroad for a few years was a once in a lifetime opportunity for the participants to be free of familial constraints, and they were able to focus on developing their identities. In some instances, these changes were received positively at home. In other instances, the participants were disappointed by the negative perceptions of their changes. These

findings echoed Mooradian's (2004) findings. Mooradian asserted that returnees felt a lack of

support from their home social support networks, which left them feeling sad, lost, and lonely.

Mooradian also acknowledged the positive advantages of the reentry process. Returnees could

utilize many of the characteristics of the overseas culture to develop a new cultural identity that

would work to their advantage at home. These characteristics can include interpersonal

communication (accent, language competence), physical (fashion, appearance), and behavioral

(posture, nonverbal) attributes. The participants in the current study reported mixed experiences

regarding their new identity development, as well.

Affective Issues

The participants spoke at length about their emotions during and after their trips. Some

of these psychological issues were well-documented issues for international students, namely

homesickness, loneliness, and lack of social support. Tracy recalled:

> When I was sad, it was very lonely because I had no one to share with. As you know,
> there is a twelve-hour gap of time zones between the two countries; the daytime in the
> U.S. is the nighttime in Vietnam. I didn't want to share with my parents because I didn't
> want them to worry. In addition, my boyfriend at that time was in Vietnam, so I felt very
> lonely and hardly made male friends here.

Tracy appeared to be such a cheerful and friendly woman I had difficulty imagining her

being depressed, but she reported suffering depression after the traumatic break up with her long-

term boyfriend. At the time of the interview, she calmly described her feelings after discovering

that her boyfriend had been cheating on her. However, there was sadness and wistfulness in her

voice and in her eyes when she was talking about her emotional breakdowns:

> But at that time, I was shocked that he broke up with me, which made me lose control of
> my life at that time. If I were the one who initiated the break up, it would be totally
> different than him cheating on me behind my back. Even worse, I was the last person to
> know about his wedding. I was so sad, I lost control of my life. Although I didn't let it

negatively affect my job, I was no longer motivated to do anything else. I couldn't believe that my boyfriend of four years cheated on me. We had arguments before, but that time I couldn't believe that he could treat me like that. Later on, he apologized several times, but it was so meaningless. I felt like I didn't care about anything.

When she returned to Vietnam, she reflected, "I felt secure and happy to live with my

parents […] I felt much better living with my parents, knowing that I always have people besides

me." However, after a few months, she begin to receive pressure from her family and friends,

she did not appreciate the intrusion of her private life from everyone:

I was being pushed to settle down. It was no problems that my colleagues in the US didn't want to get marriage by 40 because they still wanted to enjoy their life. However, my father said that I was so old for getting married that I should think of settling down. Then I have to go on dates with guys that are completely incompatible with me. These made me feel trapped.

Career-wise, she also did not feel very optimistic about her chances of getting promoted

fairly because she does not have "the right connections." She sadly concluded:

I think my career might progress very slowly if I stay here. If I start my own family, I will need a higher salary, which means I might need to get another job and will have to work overtime and will have no time for myself. That's why I feel so trapped in VN.

She often wished that she had been stronger in the face of the break-up and had focused more on

her studies and job. "Sometimes, I think that if I hadn't had that emotional crisis, I could have

been more calm and passionate about my studies and wouldn't have wasted such a good time of

my life," she said wistfully.

Thomas experienced emotional breakdowns after he came home from the U.S., but for a

different reason. He experienced two enormous losses in a short amount of time. His

grandfather and his father passed away within a year of each other. At the time of the interview,

he was still not fully recovered from the shock:

I finished my working day without much excitement at all. My private life wasn't so typical because of some special events. During my study time in the U.S., my grandfather passed away. Then, a few months after I came back to Vietnam, my father passed away. Because I was the only son in my family, I was under tremendous pressure to be responsible for the family. I am affected greatly by these tragic events, so my case is atypical for repatriates, I think.

He did not have the mental energy for dating because he was still in shock. "[M]y grandfather and father passing away happened one year ago. Thus, I couldn't settle down at that time. Besides, I also needed some time to deal with my feelings then," he explained. As his parents' only son, he had the additional pressure of assuming the responsibility for his family after his father passed away. He had to hide his grief, "I was in an emotional breakdown. However, I didn't fall down because I was functioning as the support for my family. Thus, even though I was very sad, I had to act strong." Even though his mother and siblings had never required him to support the family, he could still feel the pressure, "That is an invisible pressure that I am the pillar of the family. The word 'pillar' might be an exaggeration, but it somewhat depicts my status. […] I am not very introverted, but too many bad things have happened that made me feel suffocated."

Lindsay, in contrast to Tracy and Thomas, reported feeling extremely and unqualifiedly happy with her life in Vietnam. She could not hide her enthusiasm, "Everything is wonderful. I have nothing to complain about. I just wanted to tell my husband, 'This is everything I have ever wanted and more,' everything is very ok." She loved the vibrancy of Vietnamese big cities and her current lifestyle. "I loved to live in an animated country like Vietnam. […] I have traveled a lot in Vietnam, like to Quang Ninh, Hai Phong, and just traveled with my friends, all of which enriched my life."

Summary. Participants were mostly just satisfied, content with their lives during and after the study abroad trips. Interestingly, homesickness was not a big concern for most of them. Tony candidly shared, "I seldom got these feelings (homesickness and loneliness). That was my chance to live far from home and escape from my parents' control." Nancy, on the other hand, was so driven to complete the program in the shortest time possible that she did not feel homesick. "I didn't feel that (homesickness). For one thing, I was already married with a kid, so I just came to study and then come back," she recalled. In spite of her marital problems during the study time, she repeatedly declared that "There was nothing to regret. Now, I am really happy with my choices."

Chapter 7

Career

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of Vietnamese international students who return to Vietnam after graduation from a U.S. higher education institution. Areas to be explored include transitional periods, perception of the relevance of U.S. education to their current lives, reflections on their experiences in the U.S., and their future plans. In this chapter, I presented the participants' reflections on career paths. All of the participants were strongly career-oriented. They devoted most of their time to working and to professional development activities. A large portion of their conversations revolved around their career issues. Four prevalent topics included (a) career opportunities, (b) current career conditions, (c) human capital, and (d) social capital.
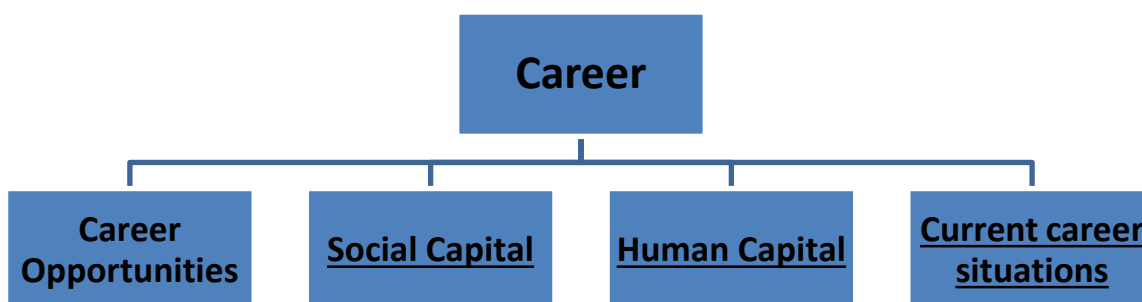
Figure 5. Career.

Career Opportunities

Most of the participants repatriated with an optimistic view of the Vietnamese job market's potential. David believed that there were more career opportunities for him in Vietnam:

I don't think it is harder to advance in my career, it just wasn't a good time to for my field in Vietnam. As you know, it was hard to apply for a job in Finance in the U.S. It was the same in Vietnam because of 2 reasons. First, the finance field is not very developed yet. Second, Vietnam is in a financial crisis just like the US. However, in the future when Vietnam recovered from its crisis, opportunities would be more and more and I will have a better chance to get a good job here. It might be easier to get a job in the U.S., but the opportunities for career advancement are limited. Besides, many services had already existed in the U.S but not yet in Vietnam. Thus, I will be able apply what I have learned from the U.S. when the time comes. Of course, this might be a very distant future. In short, I still believe that there will be more opportunities in Vietnam than in the US.

Thomas concurred:

[M]y family had their own relationships which were very helpful for my future job. Even if they can't help me at all, I felt that I can still find a good job on my own. Perhaps I will get a lower salary, but I am ok with that.

In Lindsay's case, she came back to Vietnam on a spontaneous decision but then stayed

long-term because she found job opportunities:

I by chance found a cheap round-trip ticket, just $800, and decided to visit my mother because she didn't get to attend my wedding before. After one week in Vietnam, I really loved it here. It was plentiful of opportunities and absolutely different than New York, where I sent out many applications without any reply.

Nancy also believed that it would be less difficult for her to build a career in Vietnam.

"To be honest, I prefer living in the U.S. However, I found it better to work in Vietnam," she

said. Her career prospects in the U.S. did not look as promising because of her lack of

specialization, whereas in Vietnam she had opportunities to attain high-level leadership

positions. "I was so lucky to be high up to the hierarchy in Vietnam. However, it was hard to

find a suitable job in the U.S. because I wasn't specialized enough to get a job there," she

candidly shared.

Six participants found employments within a year of repatriating to Vietnam. Social

Capital and Human Capital were utilized to different degrees in the job search process.

Social Capital

Social capital has been defined differently by many theorists; however, there is a general consensus that social capital involves advantages for individuals based on relationships among people. Specifically, most definitions focus on social networks and the norms that guide their interactions (Kilpatrick, Field, & Falk, 2003). Three of the most widely cited definitions are Bourdieu's (1986), Coleman's (1990), and Putnam's (2000) definitions. Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as:

> [T]he aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (pp. 248-249)

These resources can be created and maintained by the "application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.)" (p. 249) and by sets of norms governing interactions within the networks. Individuals are not always aware of the profits they receive from their social capital networks.

Most of the participants who reported feeling satisfied and/or happy with current jobs got the jobs through their social capital networks. Interestingly, it seemed that the first time they consciously thought about their social capital benefits was during the interviews. However, Tony readily recognized his advantages:

> I was admitted to Citibank because of my family connection. I got my lecturer position in university because of my father's recommendation. In fact, after working at that university, I was appreciated and promoted to be director of this program, but I don't have enough time to take on that mission. I think social capital is useful in the beginning and after that, you have to base it on your human capital if you want to advance.

Lindsay recalled how much easier it was for her to find jobs in Vietnam than in the U.S.,

"I had a lot of support. While finding a job in the U.S. was so hard, it was much easier in

Vietnam because my relatives have helped me a lot with their connections." Because of her

family background and connections, she encountered seemingly incidental job opportunities:

> That [job opportunity] was by chance too. My uncle and the English Center's manager,
> who wanted to find an English teacher, played together in a ping pong club. My uncle
> recommended me with the manager, and I came to talk to him. Then, I was accepted.

Later, in one of our conversations, when the researcher explicitly mentioned the concept of

Social Capital, she realized that she was in fact a beneficiary of her social capital networks in

Vietnam:

> I think that we usually think that it's coincidence, but it's not at all. If I returned to the
> U.S. now, I would be considered as a fresh-graduate from a very normal university in the
> U.S. This was the same in Vietnam. Despite my having graduated, it was hard to get a job
> [based upon my credentials]. If I didn't have a good network, no one knew who I was, so
> how I could show off myself? Thus, my degree was more valuable in Vietnam, not in the
> U.S., because I didn't have any good networks there.

In the end, she acknowledged the important role her family's connections played in her success:

"Yes, it might partially contribute to my advantages. I appreciated that my family knew how to

make use of their networks. Many people even didn't rely on any relationships."

Similarly, Nancy did not have to go through the formal channels of finding employment.

She was recommended to different positions by her friends. "Fortunately, I didn't need to apply

for any jobs. I just told my friends that I need a job, and someone recommended me a job," she

shared. She has been strategic about cultivating her social capital:

> Everything has its own process, so you need to build your network gradually. Before
> returning to Vietnam, I met a president of a fund-raising association. I came and talked to
> him about a project I wanted to do and asked him where I could find funding for it. He
> appreciated me, and then asked me to work in his organization. But as you knew, I
> specialized in Marketing, so I didn't know what to do in his organization. You need to

take risks and put yourself out there. In the first three months in my company, I did nothing but learning from those who specialized in finance. This job required me to constantly work with many enterprises, which helped me to build my network.

In the same vein, David acknowledged that his social capital in Vietnam was much bigger than in the U.S. His family and friends provided great support for his career:

My relations in the U.S were mainly wrapped up in the university and friends level, which didn't help me in a career so far. However, when I went back to Vietnam, I had a lot of friends that can help me in my career. My ten-year friends now are fairly accomplished, like designer or architect, etc. Like for this coffee shop, my friends helped me design and build the whole thing. I just oversaw the construction and gave them ideas. Before, when I had just graduated in Vietnam, I applied to a position in a state-owned company. My parents helped me by using their connections, although I didn't like it. As you know, being accepted to a state-owned company was really hard if you didn't have any good connections. Thus, I realized that social networks and connections were very useful.

While the participants who were reportedly happy about their jobs, they were less aware of their social capital advantages. The participants who struggled to find jobs were highly conscious about the fact that they were at a disadvantage because of their lack of social capital or the right connections. Even though her family's connections had helped her with access to scholarships to study abroad, Daisy was on her own when she came back to Vietnam after the study abroad trip. She moved to Hanoi with the hope of finding better career opportunities because Hanoi is a much bigger city than her hometown. However, once in Hanoi, she struggled to find suitable jobs because she had no social capital in Hanoi:

They [family's connections] helped me nothing. All my family relationships were wrapped up in my province. When I came back to Vietnam, I had to start again from the beginning and met more difficulties than the natives of Hanoi because they had their available social relationships here.

David also encountered instances in which he did not have the right connections and was frustrated with the whole process:

When you apply to a state-owned enterprise, you have to take tests about the bureaucratic policies, which can't really assess professional expertise at all. For example, the test to get into the Customs Department tests you on customs law and how to conduct yourself as a government official. The candidates have to enroll in prep courses to prepare for the test, but can the test really assess their ability? Another example is Viettin Bank. They gave us some English questions which really couldn't assess our ability. Especially in the interview, if you don't have connections, you would never be able to answer their excessively difficult questions. It seems like everything always depends on social connections. If not, our competence will be disregarded. The fact is that we always need to build our relationships everywhere. Networking is important in the U.S., too, but in Vietnam it is too heavy.

Tracy also had difficulty in finding a suitable position partly because her family did not have the right connections:

I had to apply to many companies on my own. In some cases, they didn't even call me for an interview. In other cases, I passed all the interviews but ended up being told that they offered the job to a more qualified candidate. So I was very dispirited.

Her options were limited by the fact that many jobs in the finance industry required connections:

I also wanted to work in the coordination sectors. For that, I just applied to the State Bank because it is related to the issuance of government bonds. However, I didn't have the right connections, so I couldn't get those positions.

The reality was that "the good working opportunities still mainly go to the ones with the right connections to the governmental officials, not the ones like me," she said. Even when she could get a position, her chances to get promoted to higher level positions were slim because, again, she did not come from a powerful family:

No, it [foreign Master's degree] may help me at the present. I might be more advantaged than the domestic graduates, and it may be easier to pass the first round in some cases. However, when it's time for the examination for a position, I had the same opportunities as the other candidates, which usually means not a chance for those positions. Perhaps holding these examinations was just empty formalism, because the good positions might have been deliberately reserved for the members of an influential family.

After working for a while in the finance sector in Vietnam, she sadly realized that the important positions in the sector were only for those who have strong ties with the government:

To be honest, in the finance sector, it is great if you have connections to the government, because the government has shares in many industries, such as natural resource mining and banking. The government is both the regulating body and a shareholder. And even with stocks and pharmaceuticals. Often times, the big investments must go through the big government officials. If I were the daughter of a big government official, I would tell them that, and they would hire me, not because they are afraid but because they know they will benefit from my family connections. But me, I only have professional expertise, so I take orders from other people. It is a lot of hard work for very little reward.

Summary. The participants' experiences with finding career opportunities in Vietnam reflected the crucial role of social capital in the Vietnamese job market. All of the participants who reported feeling happy with their current careers had strong Social Capital networks that connected them to job opportunities. They did not have to undergo formal hiring processes. Once they got into their positions, they accumulated more social capital and had access to more job opportunities. In contrast, the participants who struggled to find employment were clearly aware of their lack of social capital. They appeared to perceive that, no matter how hard they worked, they would not be promoted fairly since all of the good positions would be reserved for people with the "right connections."

Human Capital

Schultz (1961) argued that skills and knowledge should be regarded as forms of capital, which he termed human capital. He posited that investment in human capital was probably the primary explanation for the rapid economic growth in national output that characterized Western societies after World War II. While acknowledging the difficulty of exact measurement of human investment, he asserted that many insights can be gained by examining some major activities that improve human capabilities. These major activities include: (a) health facilities and services; (b) on-the-job training; (c) formally organized education; (d) continuing education for adults; and (e) migration of individuals and families for better career opportunities. Of these

major activities, Schultz focused his attention on education. He posited that education should be

regarded as an investment that yields economic benefits for societies and individuals. He stated

that human capital deteriorates when it is idle because unemployment impairs the acquiring of

skills.

The participants in the current study went to the U.S. to develop their human capital

through a graduate education degree program. Upon completion of the program, they perceived

that they had gained significant knowledge and important skills, or human capital. David

discussed these gains at length with great enthusiasm:

> Besides, my knowledge has been more profound. Two years studying in the U.S. was more useful than four years learning mechanically [i.e., by rote] in Vietnam. I usually spent the whole day studying in the library while I hardly ever did that in Vietnam.

He described a host of other developments:

> In fact, in my master's program I had to relearn a lot of my undergrad knowledge, but this time around I found them more interesting and felt very motivated to dig deeper. I felt highly confident in the knowledge I learned in the U.S. Furthermore, I was more skillful at building my network, which I wasn't taught in Vietnam. My language skill was also better. I could communicate in English more fluently. However, the best thing I gained was a different mindset. I felt it was so great to be more mature and more independent and more knowledgeable. If you didn't go study abroad, you wouldn't know your potential to develop like now, would you? If it wasn't for the two years in the U.S., I wouldn't dare to open this coffee shop.

Daisy shared a similar appreciation for her Human Capital development as a result of her

time in the U.S.:

> I also know how to make a report. Although there were many available forms, different projects with different sponsors would be reported differently. […] Firstly, it was how I read materials effectively. Secondly, I knew how to determine my purposes in any kinds of activities. […] It was really helpful. My current job is certainly much better because I handle documents very quickly.

Similarly, Tony asserted that he had developed important skills that helped him adapt to and thrive in different environments, which contributed to his career success:

> [M]y specialized knowledge was and is applied to my present job. What I got was my fast adaption and my positive viewpoint on my life. I don't know whether these were produced from my education in the U.S. or my life in VN, but they are so useful.

Thomas also acknowledged his own development in terms of professional and life skills, "First, my knowledge was much broadened. Second, my thoughts were more liberal than before. I was able to accept a multicultural society. And thirdly, my logical analysis was better. So, those soft skills were greatly improved, I think."

Even though the repatriates made efforts to make the best out of their situations, many of their professional skills and knowledge did not get utilized as much as they had expected. As Tracy described, "I got some issues in my career. I got a job, but it was so different from what I had learned that I couldn't apply much of my specialized knowledge in it." She was able to apply part of her training to the job, but the more complicated and advanced knowledge was barely ever used:

> Taking on a job was the best real occasion for me to deeply understand what I have learned. I studied Business Finance and was so lucky to get a suitable job. Previously, I used to work as a currency analyst, which was suitable to my discipline but related to macro analysis more. […] Fortunately, I was accepted to a position of consultant of corporate finance later. From that time onwards, I had more opportunities to go deeply into companies and did the immensely micro jobs. However, I also met some difficulties in applying what I learned in school to real life situations.

Tony worked full time via the Internet for an IT company based in the U.S. He did not have the opportunity to utilize his academic training much:

> I studied accounting and worked in the financial analysis field of this company. At that time, my first project didn't require IT knowledge. Gradually, I worked in the IT Business Consulting Department, which supplied IT applications for business management. Thus, I have not used much of my accounting degree.

Although Tony seemed to take it in stride that he had not used his degree much, Thomas

expressed a high level of frustration with the misfit between his academic training and his

current work:

> However, the most disappointing issue was that I couldn't apply what I had studied in my
> real work. For example, my writing and speaking skills as well as some specialized
> knowledge were pretty good, but I couldn't make use of them because the Vietnamese
> working environment has set me into a rigid frame. I feel a little suffocated. For example,
> the way I think and talk about projects doesn't seem to fit the working environment in
> Vietnam. So, I feel stuck.

> Lindsay had a more positive interpretation of her situation:

> I could apply them in other fields. Some people thought that if I specialized in marketing
> I should work in marketing fields, but it wasn't true. We could use marketing in many
> things, including advertising ourselves. For example, I made a marketing strategy for my
> husband – [husband's name], and then he got a good job with a high salary. That was so
> great, wasn't that?

> **Summary.** In general, human capital development has been a mixed blessing for most

participants. They expressed great appreciation for the skills they acquired during their time in

their academic programs. However, all of them have not been able to apply their academic

training to their jobs in a meaningful way. In other words, they built up their human capital

while they attended school in the U.S. by developing skills and acquired knowledge but their

current jobs did not allow them to utilize or apply much of their knowledge.

Current Career Situations

The repatriates were strong career-oriented individuals. A large portion of our

conversations involved various aspects of and feelings about the participants' current career

situations. Most of them discussed both the positive and the less desirable aspects of their jobs.

Unsurprisingly, those that were unhappy with their jobs spent considerably more time talking

about stressors at work. Others focused on the bright side of their jobs. Tony was positive about

his job:

> I actually enjoy my current job. My colleagues and teammates have been fun, nice, and work effectively together. The working environment is excellent. Especially, my boss trusts in me and lets me work without any supervising, which makes my working environment so great as well.

He also loved the online working arrangement in which he had been given a great amount

of autonomy and flexibility:

> Yeah, my company always has a lot of projects. I just tell him how much time I can work for each project, or when I am almost done with a project and want to get on another one. I usually work on two or three projects at a time. […] At the beginning of a project, we usually spend a lot of time on meetings and training. Sometimes, the meetings go from 10 p.m. to 2 or 3 a.m. in the morning. Then, we start to run those projects. I have more flexibility in this stage.

Lindsay also had been having a smooth sailing in Vietnam so far, "I didn't know how

others were, but I was so lucky. Although my work was sometimes up and down, everything in

general was so smooth so far." She had had a series of short-term jobs and had spent some time

traveling with friends. She "loved to live in an animated country like Vietnam."

Similarly, David was happy with his career choice of owning a coffee shop chain.

Owning a small eatery had been his childhood dream. He seemed happy and content to be

running his small coffee shop:

> For a career, accounting is really my passion. However, since I was a kid I have always wanted to open a small restaurant and chat with regular costumers sometimes. When I lived in the U.S., I was considered the chef of the Vietnamese Student Association. Everybody wondered why I didn't stay in the U.S. for a cooking career. At that time, I had never thought cooking was my career. Accounting was going to be my main career, but I am so happy now owning my own coffee shop. Every day that I come here to make drinks for customers and chat with them, take care of them, I am pretty happy. But I think I need to develop my business more because this is not making enough money for my living expenses.

Thomas expressed satisfaction with his current work environment:

> I was so lucky to work in my present company because I can use a lot of what I learned. My company operates in fund management, and the fund I am in charge of is listed up on foreign markets. Thus, my knowledge on foreign accounting and finance was used frequently. However, I need to apply my knowledge and learning in Vietnam to the Vietnamese partners. In brief, I am so satisfied with my current job.

However, he also acknowledged his challenges in finding a suitable work environment:

> The thinking of people around me may be better or worse than mine, and I don't want to judge people. However, it was totally different from mine, which made it hard for me to find a suitable working environment in Vietnam.

> Daisy also had mixed feelings about her jobs:

> To be honest, I love to travel for my job. However, because I have a family and my relatives live far way, my job is affected significantly. I think one of the most important conditions for this job is still being single! Working for NGOs means always traveling a lot. For instance, I had to spend at least five days on local stay and it took about ten hours each way to get there and back.

Besides the time pressures, Daisy also had to deal with other issues that made her work life more hectic:

> I had to manage everything myself. Right now, I have two new researchers, but one of them is fresh graduate, so they didn't know how to analyze even raw research. That was the reason why I had to do everything, even contacting local authorities. Although I gave them a lot of opportunities, they weren't experienced enough to take them on. Traveling was nice, but reporting was tiring. There were too many reports: Report for Implementation, Report for the Research Activities, Report for Sponsors, Quarterly Report, Bi-annual Report, Annual Report, etc.

Keeping up with the busy work schedule was tough on Daisy. "I felt so worn out with my plans. I set a schedule till this November. Basically, I had to follow up very closely with all my projects," she said wearily.

Daisy was not alone in her frustrations with working conditions. Tracy expressed despair with her work environment, which she felt penalized her for being a woman:

Right now I am still working with partners, but when it's time to secure a contract, a male boss must do it. In Vietnam, there are a plethora of consultant companies offering pretty much the same service. So if you are in the middle of a bidding war, you can ask the partners out for dinners and drinks and make them like you, then they might offer you the contract. I really don't want to do that because I want to come home around 7 p.m. to rest and have some personal time to refresh my mind. I can't go out eating and drinking all night. That's why I think career advancement is very limited for women here. In other countries, you usually have business meetings at your office, not going out all night after work. In Vietnam, many contracts are signed after business hours. You have to work long hours and go out drinking to get contracts. I can't do that because I am a woman, and I can't drink that much. So, I know if I continue to work here, my professional experience will increase, but my salary will not. I can't advance because I can't bring in contracts.

In addition, she did not want to compromise her personal integrity to advance in her career:

He [my boss] wanted me to be in charge of working with foreign partners because other colleagues didn't have the language skills necessary. My boss also expected me to be more aggressive, scheming, and opportunistic, but that is not my personality. First of all, I think it's very difficult to change. Second, I don't want to change myself in that direction. Perhaps this will always be my big limitation in his eyes. So, sometimes I felt very dispirited.

Thus, she felt trapped in her current career because she could not see herself being promoted fairly.

Even though Tony loved his job, he reported that he was too busy to have a life outside of work:

I don't have much time to find friends. I don't have much free time. My daily routine includes teaching during the day, working via the internet at night, and playing sports in my remaining time. That's all. I don't have time to hang out in cafes.

Thomas echoed Tony's comments about being too busy to spend any time on personal life:

I totally focused on my career. On my first days in Vietnam, I was so busy because I was taking a very hard course about the fund management field. I finished it last summer. To be honest, I didn't spend much time on myself and my family, so there isn't anything considerable to share. That's why my life outside of work is not very rich. I focus exclusively on my job and on things I can do to advance in my career.

He also found it frustrating to deal with some of his clients:

> When working with some oil companies, they seemed to ignore all the general working regulations yet required us to follow them. And they want you to have certain connections. Besides, there were some immutable regulations in the finance and fund management fields for analysis, but they didn't care. It is very hard to talk to Vietnamese businesses about finance and fund management policies or about how their thinking is not appropriate anymore. […] [T]he problem was that what I tried to do was so absolutely different from what they were doing.

To work with them, Thomas had to learn to play by their rules because they were big clients. He felt terrible about it. "Having to adjust to something which wasn't in my nature certainly made me feel suffocated. However, I considered it a necessity of my job," he explained.

Another undesirable part of some participants' work situations was a low salary. Tracy felt that she had to put her life plan on hold because she just could not afford a family on her current salary:

> My current salary is much lower than those who were in the same position as me, although I worked very hard and devoted all of myself to my company. Thus, if I had a baby, I wouldn't be able to raise him up in good conditions with my present salary. I even still depended on my parents. Prices have escalated more and more, while my salary wasn't raised any more. The inflation of a developed country was only 2%, while it was more than 20% in Vietnam.

Thomas agreed, "the complexity of my job was the same [as in the U.S.]. However, my salary and benefits are much lower."

Summary. In conclusion, the participants had different experiences regarding their career conditions and situations. Some reported being satisfied and happy with their current jobs. Others showed signs of serious stress about work. One thing they all seemed to have in common was long working hours making it difficult for them to have fulfilling personal lives. These characteristics are consistent with Butcher's (2002) findings. Butcher (2002) found that besides familial tensions, many returnees experience disappointment with their employment situations.

He posited that one of the biggest expectations of returnees was that they would immediately find employment that would be relevant to their qualifications and that paid well. This is usually not the case. Many returnees quickly become dependent on their parents because they usually have a hard time finding suitable employment, even after applying for numerous jobs and waiting for several months. For an international graduate, entering a workforce of which they may not know the norms and conventions and for which they may not have been educated compounds this problem. Butcher also found that degrees in economics and management may have limited benefits to a graduate in finding employment in any of the countries in his research. The participants in the current study reported similar experiences and feelings to those in Butcher's study.

Chapter 8

Adjustment Processes

The purpose of the study was to explore the experience of Vietnamese international students who return to Vietnam after graduation from a U.S. higher education institution. Areas to be explored include transitional periods, perception of the relevance of U.S. education to their current lives, reflections on their experiences in the U.S., and their future plans. This chapter is focused on the participants' reflections on adjustment processes.

Adjustment processes were another topic that received significant attention from the participants. Both the adjustment to the U.S. and the readjustment to Vietnam were discussed at length. Interestingly, some participants found it harder to readjust back to Vietnam than to adjust to the U.S. even though they had lived most of their lives in Vietnam. The time in the U.S. had changed them considerably, making it difficult to fit back into their old lives in Vietnam. This section discusses the highlights of their conversations on the adjustment processes.
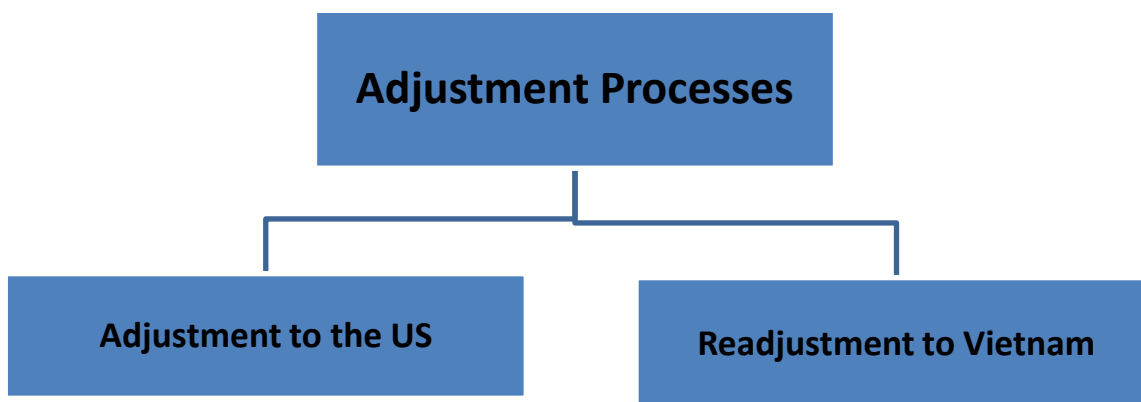
Figure 6. Adjustment processes.

Adjustment to the U.S.

Challenges. Five participants had never been to the U.S. before starting their MBA programs. Unsurprisingly, they encountered some difficulties during their time in the U.S. Four prominent issues include new (a) arrival shock, (b) academic acculturation, (c) the language barrier, and, interestingly, (d) issues with the overwhelmingly large number of Chinese students.

New arrival shock. Most repatriates had talked to someone who had been abroad or had researched Sunny University carefully before their departure. However, they still encountered some shocks when they first arrived at Sunny University. Daisy recalled her experience:

> I ran into a lot of difficulties because of coming from a rural area in Vietnam. However, one great thing was that the current students were very supportive of the newcomers. Two days after arriving in the U.S., I didn't know how to make a call because it was summer, so nobody was around, and we didn't know where the phone booths were. Four of us, three males and one female, went out to look for phone booths because the student support services did not open in the summer. Even though I carefully prepared for the trip, I still felt shocked. Finally, the neighbors let us use their phone to call Vietnam. My significant limitation was that it took me a long time to remember new streets. I even took a long time to find out some places in my university.

Tracy experienced similar difficulties when she first arrived in the U.S. Everything was so different and strange. She had to work hard to adjust:

> The longest time I had stayed abroad was seven weeks in my travel and business. So, I was new to the surroundings when I first arrived in the U.S. It was so different from Vietnam. First, there is a twelve-hour gap between time zones for the two countries. Besides, the culture and lifestyle and financial system are very different. America is the richest country in the world, while Vietnam is a small developing country. Besides, America is considered as a multiethnic and multicultural country. Thus, I had to adapt from the beginning.

Tony came to the U.S. when he was eighteen. Previously, he had lived a strictly controlled and sheltered life. Thus, he struggled to adjust. Fortunately, he had friendly roommates with whom he explored his new environment:

When I was a freshman, I was assigned to live with a Brazilian guy and an Indian American guy in the residence hall. Then, we together discovered some activities and clubs in my university. I knew International Student Council by chance through an activity fair for new students. This fair attracted a lot of foreign students to join in, including Vietnamese ones. After that, I gradually adapted to it. Although eighty percent of students in [Sunny University] were male, I just took part in a few activities because I hadn't really felt comfortable with the American living environment yet.

Nancy had a month long pre-departure orientation with the Fulbright scholar group before she left for her MBA. She was confident and well-prepared. Thus, even though she encountered some difficulties, she was able to adjust easily:

Just like for everyone, I had some cultural shock. However, I had been living far away from home because I had moved to Ho Chi Minh city from my hometown, so I had experience overcoming difficulties. So when I came to the U.S., I encountered many new things, but I was not too shocked.

One thing that she was not prepared for was the cold weather. "Weather was one of the most difficult things I faced," she recalled.

Thomas' new arrival shock was with the lack of diversity in the program:

It was one of the things I should express because it had a heavy impact on me. When I first arrived there, much of the information from the university said that the International Student Association was the strength of Clark. However, the international student community wasn't very diverse in cultures but was mainly the Chinese and Indians. Thus, I was very disappointed.

Academic acculturation. Some participants found it difficult to understand and meet the academic norms and standards in the U.S. Daisy described her academic challenges thusly:

My study was such a persistent process. I must pass the most difficult class in my program to be allowed to go on to other courses, but my listening and comprehending skills were really bad then. My midterm exam was a take home exam with a main question and minor one. A fellow Vietnamese student told me I should read some Vietnamese materials to get the basic knowledge to complete my test. I tried to ask for help from my professor but couldn't. I had to complete the test on my own and got a 7/10. My professor said, "your ideas on the test were quite good, but the argument was not persuasive enough to support the main ideas."

For Tracy, her main problem was the lack of interaction with domestic American students in her program:

> While I was in my master's program, everyone around me was very friendly. However, the big disadvantage I faced was that my study program seemed to be too theoretical. The nature of subjects in the Finance Department were math-related, so few American students enrolled in the program because they wanted something more practical or they were afraid of math.

Nancy also experienced problems with her academic performance because of some misunderstandings with her professor:

> I was mostly happy with them, except for a few experiences. For example, once I got a topic from my professor, then I asked him about something that I hadn't been clear about yet. Nevertheless, he misunderstood that I asked him for clues. Later, although I got an A+ on my own, he thought somebody had helped me.

Language barrier. For some of these participants, their academic issues originated from their limited language skills when they first arrived in the U.S. The language barrier is a well-documented challenge for most international students. Some participants in the current study experienced great difficulty with language. "As for language, I couldn't hear anything at all in the first two months," Daisy shared. She experienced severe stress because she could not follow lectures at all:

> My Pakistani teacher's pronunciation was so hard to follow. Reading an English book was hard, and not being able to understand and take notes in class made it worse. Once, when I got out of class, I met a second-year Thai student and asked her to share some experiences because I was so stressed out. She said, "You should calm down and keep on. After this semester, your English skills will be greatly improved. When I first started, I attended class for just twenty minutes and then left and cried because of the stress."

Tracy also encountered difficulty with communicating in English. She recalled the language barrier in her first semester:

When I was in Vietnam, I was good at reading and writing, while my listening and speaking were so bad because I was too timid to communicate with the foreigners confidently. So, I met some difficulties in language.

Similarly, Thomas could not make friends because his language skills were not good

enough to understand peers conversations and cultures:

My big issue was the language obstacle. In interactions with friends, I ran into some difficulties because I didn't understand their culture. For example, when they talked about sports like basketball, I really couldn't understand much. However, I was doing fine in my classes, not much problem there.

He felt dispirited when people could not understand his pronunciation:

In the first six months, I ran into a lot of obstacles. My pronunciation wasn't good enough for people to understand what I said. Thus, most of my conversations weren't comprehensible, which made me disheartened. I mean, other people couldn't understand what I said, and there was not much depth to my conversations. However, six months later, everything got better. I integrated better with international friends.

Nancy concurred:

It was said that the MBA curriculum was quite hard because of learning in English completely. Therefore, language obstacles might not allow you to perform as well as you would wish. […] The main problem was sometimes I couldn't fully express my ideas, which created some unnecessary misunderstandings.

The language barrier inhibited them from expressing fully their thoughts and abilities.

They felt left out in social situations because people could not understand what they said and

vice versa. They were dispirited and stressed out, but they persisted. None of them even thought

about giving up, even though others might have. Daisy recalled an example of a fellow student

who gave up after one semester:

[A] classmate who was good at English, but he failed because of being lack of real life experiences. Although his professor tried to create supportive conditions for him to study and sent him up to ten emails, he didn't reply at all. Then I had to come to see him on a snowy day, but he said the test was too difficult for him to do. The professor even gave him the whole summer to complete it, but he declined. He had finished the remaining subjects and packed his luggage and was ready to come back to Vietnam.

Issues with the overwhelmingly large population of Chinese students. One interesting

common concern for the participants was the fact that Chinese students were over-represented in

the MBA programs. David voiced his concern, "I also was satisfied with the program's quality

except for the huge amount of Chinese. People called my university China Town, almost 80-90%

of international students were Chinese." He later stated that it was one of his main negative

experiences with the program:

> There were two main problems: Firstly, the socialization of students wasn't as much as I expected. Secondly, it was so hard to approach other international students. Maybe most of them were Chinese who weren't really friendly. Hence, it was more difficult to make friends with them than other international students.

He cited a specific racial incident that negatively affected many international students:

> In my final school year, the Chinese Student Association was very active. However, there was an issue that all their announcements were completely in Chinese and posted everywhere in the university. I felt pretty annoyed by that. Then somebody wrote on one of the announcements "Please Speak Human Language," which was so funny. I think it is a problem. The problem is that the university wasn't able to moderate Chinese students' the activities which negatively affected other students.

> Tracy also discussed her issues of the overrepresentation of Chinese students in her

academic program:

> However, the big disadvantage I faced was my study program seemed to be too theoretical. The nature of subjects in the Finance Department is math-related, so few American students enrolled in the program because they wanted something more practical or they were afraid of math. Meanwhile, there were a lot Chinese students in my program. They were very good at math and worked very hard, too. But it is a weakness also because they brought the Chinese culture into class and group discussions. Some of them went to school because of their parents' wishes. They were the only child, from rich families, so they didn't work well in groups. So, they made it difficult for all of us.

The large proportion of Chinese students led to "less diversity and sometimes their working

styles were very Chinese, which caused some negativity problems in my university," Tracy

recalled.

Tony expressed his concerns for the academic progress of the Chinese students:

> Maybe language was actually the main obstacle for the new students, especially Chinese students, to express themselves. Thus, they seemed to be a little bit slow in understanding. The Chinese hardly expressed their ideas in the class. Besides that, some Asian students were caught cheating on tests, which created a bad precedent for the following generations. That situation diminished only when strong disciplinary actions were taken.

Thomas was disappointed with the perceived false advertisement concerning the diversity

of cultures in his MBA program:

> It was one of the things I should express because it had a heavy impact on me. When I first arrived there, much information from the university said that the International Student Association was the strength of [Sunny University]. However, the international student community wasn't very diverse in cultures but was mainly the Chinese and Indians. Thus, I was very disappointed.

He said that the university administrators did not take action to improve the situation even

though students had filed complaints:

> I, and even many Chinese students, have complained to my university that there were too many Chinese students in the international student community. They just explained that those Chinese students were great students. Maybe they were really good, but what I wanted was to learn more things from other students of different countries, not just the Chinese.

Summary. In general, the participants experienced some of the well-documented

adjustment issues for international students, namely new arrival shock, academic performance

issues, and the language barrier. While all students entering higher education have to cope with

the various new facets of the educational environment, the majority of international students

have to deal with additional challenges, such as language and culture gaps (Bradley, 2000).

However, one interesting common issue for these participants was that the overrepresentation of

Chinese students in their programs had negatively affected their academic and social

experiences. With the explosion of the number of Chinese international students, this issue

might be a new challenge for higher education professionals and educators to address.

Adjustment to life in the U.S. The participants reported loving their time at Sunny

University. For many of them, that was the first time they could be free from familial and

working obligations and live for themselves. Most of them became more social and outgoing.

They overcame academic challenges and performed well in their classes. They made friends and

created their own social support networks away from home.

Social life. Most of the participants enjoyed rich social lives during their time in the U.S.

Tracy was very pleased with her new living environment:

> My learning environment was quite pleasant. The state I lived at was different from New
> York. In New York, life is fast, and it's hard to make close friends. While I was in my
> master's program, everyone around me was very friendly.

She had great friends and an active social life. "In fact, my social life was pretty abundant. My

friends were very fun," she recalled.

Tony also had a great time at Sunny University because the institution offered many

social activities. "Social activities in [Sunny University] were more excited," he commented.

He sought out opportunities to get involved on campus:

> I joined in some activities in my university because International Student Council was
> very strong at that time. Since I studied in the [undergraduate Sunny University], I have
> joined in the ballroom dance team. And I continued to participate in the dance club at
> [Sunny University].

Lindsay talked about her time at Sunny University with great enthusiasm:

> It was such a great time. I have lived in the U.S. for a long time, so I easily got used to
> the living environment there. I had everything I needed. As for studying, everything was
> very good. The studying environment with international students made me really excited.
> I also had made some good friends.

She loved the fact that Sunny University was a small school where she could get to know people:

> I was very lucky to meet such a fun group. Besides, my school was very small. There were about 80 students in my class and all of us were international students who were in the same situations. Thus, it was easy for us to sympathize with one another.

She seemed to enjoy every aspect of her life during her time at Sunny University:

> The two years in the master's program were wonderful in several aspects. I studied what I loved and got a lot of good friends. Some programs and events in my university were so useful. I also was well-liked by my professors.

She emphasized her master's program:

> I didn't run into any difficulties, for my master's program I mean. In my undergrad program [in the U.S.], I didn't have that many friends because my university was too large for a small Vietnamese girl like me to make friends with anybody. Thus, I had very few friends in my classes and on campus. It was better at the master's level because it's more specialized and we had small classes so everyone was very close. I never felt lonely. A lot of guys were interested in me too.

> Speaking of her experience at Sunny University, Daisy recalled having a good social life

as well:

> No difficulties at all. I am very outgoing and adaptive, so my social life was good as usual. The only thing I cared about was how my kid was doing and how much money I could send back to my kid. So I adapted quickly to life here.

The participants appeared to have a rich social life at Sunny University. After the initial shock of coming to the U.S., they started to connect with other students and joined in social activities. At the same time, they were improving their academic performance.

Academic Life. Some of the participants encountered academic difficulties at the beginning of their trips. However, as they became more adjusted to life in the U.S., they also improved their academic issues. Near the end of her first semester, Daisy was able to reach out to ask for help from her professors:

In the final exam, I met with my department chair to ask for advice. I said to my Dean: "I have presented many truly difficult issues. In my process of reading materials, I didn't care what the author wrote, I just took note of his viewpoints but still retained my own opinions." Then she said: "That's right, I just needed you to do that, but you should remember your explanations had to be persuasive enough to support your ideas.' At the last, my final test got 18/20 points with a lot of compliments from my professor.

Similarly, Tracy employed study skill strategies to help her catch up with course

work. At the beginning of her program, she could not understand lectures or comprehend

complex readings. However, she worked hard to improve her academic performance. By

the second term, things were better for her:

However, when I didn't understand something, I asked them again, and then they explained to me in a simpler way. These difficulties were in my first semester, and it got better in the second term. As for my lectures, if I couldn't understand something, I would read more about it at home.

Thomas recalled, "However, six months later, everything got better. I integrated better

with international friends." He utilized the academic support available in his classes:

Besides the main professors, my class had teaching assistants who usually were international students. Thus, if I couldn't make an appointment with my professor, I would meet with the assistant. If he couldn't help me, then I would need to meet with the professor.

Lindsay also adjusted well to being in graduate school:

It was such a great time. I have lived in the U.S. for a long time, so I easily got used to the living environment there. I had everything I needed. As for studying, everything was very good. The studying environment with international students made me really excited. I also had made some good friends.

She had changed her attitude about academic performance, which she believed might have

helped her perform better:

At that time, I always completed my assignment so easily because of my being suitable for business. It just took me one time to understand, while other students needed to read twice or more. Perhaps because my attitude changed when I was in the master's program, I didn't need to get an 'A' but focused instead on what I could learn. I even didn't care if

I got 'B's, but just thought of what I would get after completing an assignment. Perhaps that was my positive thought. As for my scores, although they couldn't be as high as before, my knowledge was broadened more.

Similarly, Nancy made great progress in her classes, too. She became more outspoken in class. "Later, all my assignments were done relatively well. After the few first classes, I was accustomed to speaking out in class. Whenever my professors gave an inadequate explanation for any problems, I raised my voice to comment," she described her progress.

Support sources. Most of the participants came to the U.S. alone. They did not know anyone at Sunny University. However, over time, they created their own support networks away from home. Most participants reported that their most important source of support was the local Vietnamese community. Right after arrival, Nancy took the initiative to build her network by forming a group of Vietnamese students:

> I usually asked for advice from my host family and the current students. The first thing I did was gather together all Vietnamese students in my university. […] I went to the Student Center and asked them about the Vietnamese students on campus. Some students had been living there for eight years but hadn't connected with one another until I came.

Nancy had the advantage of being part of the Fulbright Scholarship group, which provided her with a careful orientation about life in the U.S. Thus, she was bolder than the other participants in networking. Other participants took a while to get to know people and integrate into existing networks. For David, the current Vietnamese students around his neighborhood supported him the most. He recalled:

> There were some Vietnamese students living near my university. Most of them were from Southern Vietnam, so I had a lot of support. […] A former female colleague, who had come there three months before me, helped me in those days. We resigned from our jobs together and studied in the same university. However, the Vietnamese students I had mentioned above helped me the most.

The first few weeks in the U.S. were tough for Daisy because of her rural background. Fortunately, she found support from the Vietnamese student community. "I ran into a lot of difficulties because of coming from a rural area in Vietnam. However, one great thing was that the current students were very supportive of the newcomers," she shared. Tracy concurred, "My Vietnamese friends were so important in providing support." Thomas also acknowledged the importance of his network of Vietnamese friends. He said, "[T]hey [the Vietnamese student community] helped me a lot, especially my Vietnamese schoolmates. Both the group of Vietnamese students in [city name] and those living near my school were so friendly. I felt everything was so easy." He gradually built his network within the Vietnamese student community. "When I started school, there were about four or five Vietnamese students in my school, so I made friends with them. They, themselves, had their own network with Vietnamese students at other universities, which helped me extend my connections," he shared.

Besides the Vietnamese student community, some participants reported receiving help from local residents. Tracy recalled, "When I first came to the U.S., I boarded at a local Vietnamese couple's house. They helped me a lot because we spoke the same language. After a while, they gave me a lot of good advice." In addition to the Vietnamese community, Tracy also had a good relationship with her American neighbors. She recounted:

> Our American neighbor was very friendly; when I ran into difficulties I could ask them for help. […] My neighbors were very nice to me first. I actually was very cautious in making friends with anyone. However, it was my neighbors who were so nice to me first, so I opened up.

Similarly, Tony also developed a great relationship with an American family who eventually considered him their adopted son:

I taught [Vietnamese to] four families, one of which invited me to their home on Thanksgiving Day because they knew I lived alone. It was in 2005, and their five-member family lived in [state name]. They told me that the dinner table had six chairs, but their family had five members, and they invited me to be their adoptive son to sit in that sixth chair. In 2006, I moved to [state name] to study medical school. After I enrolled in [Sunny University], I lived in my foster parents' house because it was near my school.

Tony was very appreciative of their kindness. "They treated me very kindly, just as they treated one of their own kids. They were very easy going, too," he said. Nancy also commented on host family, "I usually asked for advice from my host family and the current students."

All participants utilized the institution's support. However, they only used institutional services once or twice for things like career advising or immigration issues. A few participants thought that the university's international student services were not very useful. David commented on the career services office:

Those services were pretty good, such as the internship program, though I only used it once before graduating. The service center was also helpful in holding many contests and events. I would rate their services pretty high, especially because I have studied in Vietnam and have seen that these services were almost nonexistent in Vietnam.

Tracy, on the other hand, utilized more services, especially at the beginning:

The International Office in my university exclusively specialized in legal procedures. They helped you with the necessary paperwork when you wanted to get a part-time job. Or if you wanted to go out of the U.S., they would help you to make sure that your visa status was good. Generally, the International Office and other services were very helpful. In the first week, we international students were given a brochure with information about how to get a phone, find services such as transportation (bus, cabs), and navigate the road system. They also arranged transportation for us to get around town every week. Sometimes we went on road trips to commercial centers and conferences as part of my study program.

Thomas also found the International Office and Career Services helpful:

The International Affairs Office helped us a lot about the legal matters, such as visa and OPT. Besides, I also had my university's service center help me find a part-time job. They mainly gave me information about the job opportunities and showed me how to find

a part-time job, what to prepare for an interview and how to dress, etc. In general, they were quite helpful.

Lindsay attended few events. She explained:

For student services, I only attended international events, movie nights, or guest speakers. To be honest, I didn't need student services because they didn't offer that many services anyway. They had OPT services, but I didn't need that because I had done it before so I knew how it worked. I just utilized some of their websites. That's all.

Daisy reported negativities about the university services for international students:

The available services in my university were very bad during my course. Like I said, it was only after a student failed that they started support services for international students. In fact, there were some services, but they were not convenient. I just went to the library whenever I was looking for materials. As for food or where to go for fun, the service center didn't have information for this.

Tony offered more positive comments about Sunny's services:

[Sunny University] was very strong in international student activities because they had a large international student population. They knew that international students might be very unfamiliar with the U.S. They always cared for what international students needed by holding some cultural activities, outdoor events, and even tours to visit other states in the U.S.

Faculty members were another institutional source of support for the participants was.

Tony was impressed with his professors. "Teachers were very supportive of international students. They even invited us to their house for BBQ party, and so on," he said. Thomas concurred, "[T]hey [professors] were a lot nicer than teachers in Vietnam. I felt that they always listened to us and understood the difficulties we were facing too." He also received academic help from his professors and teaching assistants:

Besides the main professors, my class had teaching assistants who usually were international students. Thus, if I couldn't make an appointment with my professor, I would meet with the assistant. If he couldn't help me, then I would need to meet with the professor.

Similarly, Daisy recalled, "In the final exam, I met with my Department Chair to ask for advice."

The participants were at awe at how accessible and open their American professors were. In Vietnamese culture, there is a large social distance between students and professors. It is rare for students to have open discussions with professors. All of the participants enjoyed the more egalitarian professor-student relationships in the U.S.

Summary. This section described the participants' adjustment to life in the U.S. Most of the participants experienced cultural shock and the language barrier when they first arrived in the U.S. However, by the second semester, their difficulties diminished as they became more connected and socially active. All of them believed that their most important support network was the local Vietnamese community. Some of them also developed close relationships to local American families who offered them great advice and emotional support. They also utilized some university services, mainly the International Office for legal issues and Career Services for employment preparation information. They spoke highly of their professors, who were accessible, understanding, and helpful to them. However, institutional support seemed to rank low in their support networks, partly because they did not feel the need to use services on campus.

Readjustment to Vietnam

Most of the participants came back to Vietnam because of relational and career reasons. They had loved ones and support networks in Vietnam. Most of them also believed that they would have better career prospects in Vietnam because of the fast growing economy and the availability of their Social Capital. However, for some, home did not feel the same. Some of

them had changed significantly, which was a mixed blessing for them. The participants, themselves, usually perceived these changes as positive developments. Some of their loved ones appreciated the changes; others were skeptical of the value of these changes. From the participants' conversations about their readjustment processes, three common themes emerged: lost career opportunities or relationships, cultural differences between Vietnam and the U.S., and their readjustment to life in Vietnam.

Losses of career opportunities or relationships. All participants acknowledged that the time they had spent abroad was in many aspects the best time of their lives. However, when they returned to Vietnam, they realized that they also had lost a few years of their careers. David, through his father's connection, was offered a job in a state-owned auditing company right after his bachelor's graduation. Thus, when David resigned from his position and go study abroad for two years, he forfeited a lucrative and highly sought after career opportunity. When he returned to Vietnam after two years, his colleagues had advanced in their careers. Plus, he could not even come back to his former position because of the economic downturn:

> First, about losses, I have lost many career opportunities. While I studied in the U.S., my former colleagues were promoted to manager positions with higher salaries than the current average salary in VN. I also skipped some other good opportunities, like applying to a state-owned company or other good workplaces. At present, our economy was so difficult that I couldn't get the same opportunities like those anymore.

> Thomas shared the exact same situation:

> I let two years of my youth elapse without any considerable achievements, despite having experienced many new things in the U.S. Besides, while my friends were working to accumulate experience and build their own networks, I was still a student and didn't keep pace with them. Thus, after being back to Vietnam, I had to start all over. However, I think my losses could be compensated later.

Similarly, Daisy had a government job with many benefits, guaranteed job security, and high career advancement potential before her study abroad trip. When she came back, she was jobless:

> When I came back to Vietnam, my boss had been promoted. At that time, one of my former colleagues, who is good at both French and English but couldn't really talk to clients, studied Master of Laws in Hanoi. Then, she quit her position to apply for a new one at the Ministry of Education. People thought that even a domestic student like her would quit her job, so someone who had studied abroad like me would surely quit my job. As you might know, the Vietnamese government allowed its officials to have up to two years of paid study leave. However, they didn't know whether I would come back to contribute to the country. Hence, when I started my English course, my tenure benefits were cut. One year into my master's program, I resigned. So when I came back to Vietnam, I was jobless, although I wanted to work for them again, but probably stayed in the city.

Besides losing their career opportunities, some participants also experienced losses in their personal relationships. David reported that he had lost many friendships over the time he spent in the U.S.:

> Besides, some of my friendships have faded away. After two years, my friends are now fewer, some of whom used to be my close friends. But after I came back from the U.S., I found it was difficult to talk to them. I wondered whether my feelings were accurate or not, but it is a real barrier.

He stated that the distance between him and some friends might have been caused by his different life experiences and his friends' prejudice against international student repatriates:

> This might come from the viewpoint of life. As you can image, as soon as they graduated, they found a job, dedicated themselves to it, and were gradually promoted. I, on the other hand, worked for a while after graduation, then I quit my job to come to the U.S. to discover new things. Maybe they think that I am not mature and that I still want to play around. Sometimes, they question my ability and the practical value of my degree. Thus, these differences were the main reasons for us to grow apart from each other.

Also, the repatriate's value systems had grown considerably different, which widened the friendship distance:

Moreover, I, myself, felt it hard for us to have the same viewpoint because we lived in absolutely different environments. I wondered whether I would be like them or not, but I can't blame them because that was Vietnamese's lifestyle, because in Vietnam you need connections to advance in life. When we talk, they seem not to care about your education level; all they care about is how much money you make. After coming back from the U.S., I can't accept those ideas and feel uncomfortable. Perhaps in our society money is the most important thing. It is even more important than your own ability.

Tony also encountered similar difficulty in his friendships. When he returned from the U.S., many of his friendships were lost because of differences in lifestyle and values:

It is true that I wish I had more friends now. I just have a few close friends. One of them is [friend's name], whom you might know. We have been best friends for a long time. As for other guys, there are too many differences that make us gradually drift apart from each other. For instance, almost all of my friends have gotten married, while I haven't yet. Some of them work in the state-owned companies and spend their free time on drinking, while I don't. Most of them don't like sports, while I do, etc.

Another of Tony's regrets was the loss of time with his younger brother:

I didn't spend much time with my younger brother from ten years ago. I can't take back those years, but I can only make it up to him. […] To be honest, if you want to talk about what I lost, the issues with my younger brother could be considered as my loss.

Tony was fortunate because he was able to make up lost time with his brother. His younger brother "was more mature" and was "happy to have me back." Tracy, on the other hand, was not as lucky. She lost her long-term committed relationship, which depressed her for a long time. She was slightly choked up recalling the experience:

However, I lost many things, one of which was my love. I was depressed for a long time. Later on, I realized that he didn't deserve me, so I stopped regretting it. I just regretted not enjoying the whole experience in the U.S. because of being too depressed at that time. I was living in the U.S., in NYC, but I was very sad. Once, I came home late, and then I just sat on the ground outside of the building and cried alone. I couldn't understand why he settled down so soon. I just knew of his wedding two weeks before it happened. Afterwards, he tried to keep in touch with me to apologize to me. He also said that he had made a huge mistake.

In an even more severe case, Nancy lost her marriage while she was abroad. She stated: "My biggest loss was my family. This was an excuse, not the cause though."

Reverse cultural shocks. Some of the participants experienced reverse cultural shocks upon their return to Vietnam from the U.S. Five participants had lived their whole lives in Vietnam, except for the two years in the study abroad program. However, their whole worldviews had changed significantly. They were more prone to get upset about things they used to consider normal. David described his frustrations with things he would have considered normal two years ago:

> However, I, myself, had many changes. For instance, I was very upset with those who run red lights or litter on the street or do not fasten seat belts, even my family. When I leave the house, my parents have to ask where I am going or why I am not home yet. I am not also used to being asked whenever I am going out. However, I think it will be not difficult to adapt to.

He also acknowledged a comparison of the Vietnamese and American ways of doing things:

> I believed that my thoughts can't be the same as it was in the past. Whenever doing anything, I always have a comparison in my head between Vietnam and the U.S. For example, if I saw a Vietnamese doing something, I immediately would think of the way the Americans do that. Even though I usually don't express my feelings or do anything about it, the comparison is always in my mind. This comparison always made me upset. I had never been like that before studying abroad.

> Tracy had experienced more serious cultural shocks in many aspects of her life:

> I was very upset, especially when people cut in line in the super markets. Also, I got some issues in my career. I got a job, but it was so different from what I had learned that I couldn't much apply my specialized knowledge on it. Besides, I was under pressure and being pushed to settle down. It was no problem that my colleagues in the U.S. didn't want to get married by forty because they still wanted to enjoy their lives. However, my father said that I was too old for getting married, that I should think of settling down. Then I had to go on dates with guys that were completely incompatible with me. These made me feel trapped.

She was discouraged from pursuing her dreams:

I was accustomed to life in the U.S., so when I returned to Vietnam, I sometimes felt very exhausted because I had to readjust to life here. As you know, living in the U.S., I had the freedom to chase my dreams. Even if I wanted to spend four or five years to study higher, it was no problem. My dream was respected, so I didn't have doubts about making it come true. However, the Vietnamese don't approve that an almost thirty-year-old woman like me doesn't want to settle down but wants to study, instead. Each comment per person was enough for me to become dispirited. Chasing my dream is difficult; it's harder when nobody supports me and everyone tries to talk me out of it. So my dream is very limited here. Thus, if I could, I would go abroad again.

At work, she also felt so left out because of the cultural differences. She was used to the American working environment. Her current employment environment required her to engage in office politics and vicious (and sometime dirty) competition to get ahead. She could not fit in and did not want to compromise her moral integrity to gain career promotions. She described the situation:

If you worked in the U.S., your teammates would support you to complete the joint missions because they just care about the shared goals. Here, if they like you, they will work with you; if they don't like you, forget about getting help. Also, they might like you today and not like you tomorrow. This was such a common difference between the two cultures. Besides, you have to learn to be 'flexible' in your dealings with people. In the U.S., maybe people are too focused on their own work to poke around in others' work. But the Vietnamese have a bad habit of scrutinizing everything, even the trivial things. So sometimes I feel very tired with work and still have to learn to play the political game with my colleagues. Sometimes, I just want to sit there and work on my tasks so that I can get them done early and go home. Their side conversations are so meaningless; I don't want to participate in them.

Thomas also felt trapped in his life in Vietnam, although his problems were mostly career related:

I had lived in Vietnam for so long before and even spent one year working before arriving in the U.S., so I got accustomed to that lifestyle and didn't get any shocks. However, the most disappointing issue was that I couldn't apply what I had studied in my real work. For example, my writing and speaking skills as well as some specialized knowledge were pretty good but I couldn't make use of them because the Vietnamese working environment has set me into a rigid frame. I feel a little suffocated. For example, the way I think and talk about projects doesn't seem to fit the working environment in Vietnam. So, I feel stuck.

Even though she truly enjoyed her life in Vietnam, Lindsay did notice some cultural differences in professional norms between the U.S. and Vietnam. The Vietnamese sometimes did not go straight to the main issues at hand, but usually beat about the bush. They were not as organized or professional as people in the U.S. "This must be a cultural difference," she explained. She encountered a very different working style in Vietnam:

> [S]ome things need to be adjusted to be more suitable in the Vietnamese working environment. As you know, everything in the U.S. is more structured and organized. Offices were so orderly, while they weren't in Vietnam, where a coffee shop could be taken as the office. And I had to change my attitude, because the working style in Vietnam is not very orderly. You don't always have to send a well-structured email; you can just call or text, as long as you get the job done.

Even Nancy, who was relatively successful in her transition and career, experienced some cultural shocks at first:

> When I first came to work in VN, I felt that I was less energetic than my colleagues. Many overseas students usually met with the same situation. Many talk about how in the U.S. people often compliment your ability, while in Vietnam, you don't get that. I think it's cultural. For instance, American parents always praise their children, but the Vietnamese usually criticize their kids. It's part of the culture.

She also felt that she needed to show off more status symbols in Vietnam to gain acceptance from her networks. "I feel less pressured in the U.S. For example, here in VN, among my friends, I can't just ride a scooter, especially in Hanoi. In the U.S., nobody cares," she said in explaining why she had to own a car even though it is usually more convenient to get around on a scooter in Vietnam.

Summary. Generally speaking, all of the participants experienced reverse cultural shock to some degree when they returned to Vietnam. They had changed significantly as people. However, they did not anticipate that home would change, that friendships would disappear, and that people would judge them harshly because they did not follow the typical life trajectory for a

Vietnamese. These experiences were also found in Mooradian's (2004) study. Mooradian

suggests that reverse culture shock is different than culture shock because there are many

unexpected problems. Many people prepare for difficulties when they go abroad, but often do

not prepare for their reentry process. They expect home to have remained home for when they

return. However, as many returnees sadly discover, people change and relationships change.

Returnees might feel a lack of support from their home social support networks, which leaves

them feeling sad, lost, and lonely.

Readjustment to Vietnam. Some participants had relatively smooth transitions because

they already found great career opportunities. Others had to struggle to find employment.

However, most of them adjusted their attitudes to adapt to their lives and career situations.

David shifted his focus from what he had lost to what he could do now to be happy:

> To be honest, I really regretted it because I was very passionate about what I was
> studying in the Certified Management Accountant program, which is very valuable in
> Vietnam. Besides, I spent two years on studying, so I feel like I have wasted my time
> when I changed direction to business. However, I can apply what I studied to my new
> job. To me, the most important thing is how I can earn a living and how I can find a
> career and a lifestyle that are compatible with my interests, not what I have invested in.
> The fact is that it's hard to define what I had spent and what I got from others. Hence,
> from now on, I just care about what I will get and how I can earn money. And whatever I
> do, the coffee shop business is my passion.

Daisy shared that for her "it seemed that adapting to America was easier than readapting

myself to Vietnam." When she first came back to Vietnam, she had to manage to support her

family because everyone was dependent on her. However, she finally realized that she was

somewhat successful at readjusting herself:

> While I was in school, everything had been taken care of. However, after returning to
> Vietnam, everything became so difficult for me in restarting my life. I had to rent an
> apartment, find a new job, find a new school for my kid. My husband even quit his job to
> follow me. Moreover, I was very experienced in working for government agencies, but

not for an NGO, because working for an NGO required me to be really dynamic. Only two weeks ago did I realize that I am not doing too bad, because it took me two years to get settled in in my previous organization.

Tracy reported:

I felt secure and happy to live with my parents. I also didn't need to rent a room like in the U.S. where I was so scared to stay alone at night. I was scared whenever there was a strange noise at night and didn't know whom to call. So, I felt much better living with my parents, knowing that I always have people beside me. However, I had to manage my life on my own and adapt to the new living environment in Vietnam.

In some instances, she could not and would not make adjustments because doing so

would compromise her integrity:

My boss also expected me to be more aggressive, scheming, and opportunistic, but that is not my personality. First of all, I think it's very difficult to change. Secondly, I don't want to change myself in that direction. Perhaps this will always be my big limitation in his eyes. So, sometimes I felt very dispirited.

In some other situations, she made adjustments to fit in with her colleagues:

However, it was so different in Vietnam, if you were so confident and tried to prove yourself, you would be considered arrogant. This sometimes adversely impacted your career. So, it was best that you lower yourself and ask to learn from others. […] I sometimes had to speak in flattering terms to them.

She sadly concluded, "if there was no other choice, I would lower my expectations and

try to adapt."

Tony was much more fortunate than Tracy because he continued to work for a U.S.-based

company after repatriation. He did not have to deal with any major adjustments because his life

remained basically the same:

I didn't feel any significant changes when I returned to Vietnam. After graduating, I spent more than half of my time on work. In the U.S., after work, I came back home, had dinner, and went to bed. It was the same in Vietnam, except that if I am in my own apartment I cook, if I come over to my parents' house, they cook.

He took up a second job to help with the re-integration into Vietnam:

> My father recommended me when his friend, who is working in that university, was looking for a lecturer. I was free during the day and hadn't totally adjusted to Vietnam yet. So I accepted the position because it has flexible hours and I thought it was a good job.

He attributed his successful transition from the U.S. to Vietnam partly to his positive

attitude and flexibility:

> I just try to make the best of my situation. In any circumstances, if I can't change them, I will change myself to adapt to reach better things. Being rigid just makes everything worse and worse. To be honest, I am very dissatisfied with some issues in Vietnam. For example, the Vietnamese administrative body is so complicated and bureaucratic, but what could we do? We can't make a fuss or get violent. So, we just need to keep smiling and hope they will do their jobs. Thus, we need to adjust internally to fit the situation.

Thomas also learned to accept the cultural differences and readjust himself to the

environment:

> Although the time I lived in Vietnam was more than in the U.S., I was not used to the working environment in Vietnam. My thinking was also drastically different from my colleagues'. I thought about how different it is between my formal educational training environment and the people I work with in Vietnam. However, I gradually accepted that and adapted to my current life.

When he had to drastically change his work philosophy to satisfy Vietnamese clients'

needs, he felt conflicted. "Having to adjust to something which wasn't my nature certainly made

me feel suffocated. However, I considered it a necessity of my job," he said. He considered it

reasonable to critically examine which traits were appropriate for which cultures and make

adjustment accordingly:

> I can't share with them [family and friends] my experiences during my study abroad time as well as what I'm doing now. I also have a distance when talking with my friends. What I wanted to share I can't really explain to my friends and family. However, I know how to adjust myself. I will adapt to the foreign life when living abroad. And when I live with my family, I had to give up things that are not appropriate for this culture to get along with them.

Summary. All of the participants made real efforts to readjust themselves to their new

lives in Vietnam with various degrees of success. They all recognized that they needed to make

changes to fit in with their social and working environments. Their adjustment processes to

some degree conform to what Mooradian (2004) described as stages of reserve adjustment for

repatriates. Mooradian posited that many researchers believe that reverse adjustment occurs in

stages. The first stage is called leave-taking and departure. This stage includes preparing to

leave (saying goodbye, packing) and making logistical plans for going home. The second stage

in reverse adjustment is the honeymoon stage, which can last for about one month. The

returnees are newly back home, everyone is excited to see them, and they enjoy their time to visit

with people whom they missed while abroad. Reverse culture shock, the third stage, begins

when life starts returning to normal. The returnees start to realize that they have changed. They

experience doubt, disappointment, and are overwhelmed by the prospect of starting over.

Alienation, rejection, loss of sleep, anxiety, and fears and phobias are among the common

experiences of returnees. The fourth, and final, stage is adjustment. At this stage, returnees

begin to adapt to being at home, focus on the future, and do not dwell on the past. It may take a

returnee from six months to a year to feel like they have adjusted back into their home culture

and to not constantly desire to go back to their host country (p. 44). All of the participants in the

current study had been back to Vietnam for at least one year. According to Mooradian's

assertion about the reserve adjustment stages, they should all be in the final stage. However,

some participants – namely Daisy, Tracy, and Thomas – could still mostly be characterized by

stage three, reverse cultural shock. They still longed for opportunities to go abroad again to

improve or escape their current situations. Lindsay also did not fit into the stages because she

had basically been living in the honeymoon stage for the whole twenty-plus months of her stay. This deviation may be a result of her time in Vietnam as an adventure and a temporary period because she is married to an American and thus had more options than the other participants.

Chapter 9

Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

As has been mentioned in the literature review, there is a dearth of research studies informing higher education educators about the outcomes of overseas education for international student who return to their home countries after graduation. In this study I sought to explore the lived experiences of Vietnamese international students repatriates after graduating from MBA programs at a small liberal arts university in the US. The researcher sought to tell the story of each participant as they progress through their academic and career journeys as well as identifying common themes in their experiences.

Each participant's story is unique. However, there are some common characteristics among most of the participants. All come from relatively privileged backgrounds in which their parents are either powerful or wealthy or both. All dreamed of coming to the US to broaden their knowledge about their career fields. They consistently considered the time they lived in the US the best time of their lives. Their social life was active and rich. They overcame language barrier to excel at their study. They learned to live independently and develop their identity as an individual. Previously, they mostly identified themselves by their social and familial roles and obligations. Studying abroad in the US gave them time and space to live for themselves for the first time. Their exposure to the US cultural traditions of valuing individual uniqueness and encouraging individual development made a strong impression on them. Some of them changed their worldviews and personalities drastically because of their experiences in the US. All considered these personality changes the best things they have gained from the study abroad

experiences. However, these changes seemed to generate a mixed bag of reactions from the participants' loved ones and professional networks when they returned to Vietnam.

Relationship wise, there is a mixed bag of situations for the participants. Most of them found more emotional support when they came back to their families. Their familial relationships tended to improve upon their returns.   Their parents appeared to be happy about their newly developed maturity and independence. However, in Nancy's case, her relationship with her father was worsened because he would not approve of her working in the private sector instead of in state-owned organizations.

Some of the participants were saddened by the fact that some of their friendships had drifted apart when they came back from the US. The literature suggests three reasons for this phenomenon. First, they just lost touch with one another because of the time and physical distance for a few years. Many of their friends had entered different life stages such as getting married and having kids. Thus, they did not have much in common anymore. Second, some of their friends might have a prejudice against study abroad repatriates. These friends might believe that it was a sign of immaturity that the participants took time off work to study abroad. This prejudice reflects a Vietnamese cultural ideology that familial obligations must take precedence of individual development. In other words, only the "spoiled rich" take time off work to study abroad. They are also skeptical of the true value of a foreign degree. They question if the repatriates have gained any useful knowledge from their time abroad. Third, the participants themselves have developed a new worldview that was completely different than many of their friends'. In David's case, some of his friends seemed to have a strong materialistic value system while he valued education and character development. In Tony's case, many of his

friends' main hobby outside of work was drinking which is very common in Vietnamese culture

while he would prefer playing sports. These reasons made it difficult for the participants to

reconnect with old friends or make new friends in Vietnam after they returned home from the

US.

Regarding romantic relationships, there were a gender difference in the participants'

perceptions of their love life. The three male participants reported being happy or content with

their love life. David was engaged to be married to his long term girlfriend. Tony has been in a

happy committed relationship for about three years. Thomas was still single at the time of the

interview. However, he made a conscious decision to devote all his time to building his career.

He felt content being single because he had no internal or external pressures to settle down. In

contrast, of the four female participants, only one, Lindsay, was happy with her love life.

Nancy's marriage was broken when she was still in the US. She was divorced by the time she

returned to Vietnam. In her current high power position, she enjoyed a comfortable material and

active social life. However, she seemed to be constantly under stress at work and often work

long hours. Being a single mother, a career woman, and an extremely busy individual left very

little time for her personal life. She often felt exhausted and lonely. Similarly, Daisy is going

through a rough time as she is finalizing her divorce. She works for a NGO and soon will be a

single mother which might limit her love life significantly. Like Thomas, Tracy was a single

individual in her late twenties. However, unlike Thomas, she was under extreme pressure both

internally and externally to find a man to settle down with. Externally, her parents kept pushing

her to get married by setting her up with dates because in their opinion she was getting too old

for a woman to get married. Even her relatives and work colleagues put pressure on her to settle

down. Internally, she dreamed of starting her own family with a man she loves. However, she

could not see herself being married to any of the men her family introduced her too. In her

opinion, most of them were very patriarchal, "spoiled," and unambitious men who depend on

their parents for financial support and obey their parents mindlessly. She has changed, she said.

She wanted to marry for love, not out of necessity. Thus, she was constantly in emotional

turmoil and conflicts regarding her love life. In a relatively patriarchal society like Vietnam,

women are often discouraged to pursue higher level of education or high power positions

because it would make them less marriageable. Thus, the female participants in this study,

except for Lindsay, who is married to an American, had to deal with this double standard issue

on top of the common stressors of repatriation.

In conversations about their careers, some participants were happier than others about

their current employment conditions. Nancy, Lindsay, and Tony were the ones with the most

positive perceptions of their jobs. Thomas and Daisy liked some aspects of their job but disliked

the intensive traveling schedule and long hours. David could not find a suitable job and opened

his own coffee shops. Tracy felt "dispirited" and "trapped" in a viciously competitive work

environment where affiliation was valued more than expertise and hard work. A closer

examination of the nature of their career situations revealed an interesting observation. Of all the

participants, Nancy was the only one with a career leading high paying job that she was fairly

satisfied with and considered comparable with her experience and education. All the other

participants either had temporary jobs or demanding low paying jobs that they disliked or felt

trapped in. Lindsay and Tony were happy with their jobs. However, they both have some types

of temporary jobs in Vietnam. Lindsay had gone through a series of short term jobs such as

English interpreting and program coordinating. She enjoyed them because they were exciting and gave her experience in different roles. She did not need a permanent position because she and her husband were in transition and did not plan to stay in Vietnam for long. Tony took a lecturer position in a business program at a university. He got paid by the hours he teach with no benefits or job security, essentially he was an adjunct. He took the job mostly because it had flexible hours and he wanted to get out of the house. His full time job was with an IT company in the US. Thus, he did not mind the modest income and the lack of job security from his teaching job in Vietnam. The other four participants commented on their low job satisfaction and low pay. Daisy, Thomas, and Tracy all have low level consultant type jobs. They all complained about the long hours they were expected to work and the unreasonably low compensation packages. Tracy shared that one of the reason she did not want to start a family right now was that her salary was too low to support a family with kids. Thomas commented on how the "complexity" of the job was comparable to jobs in the US but the salary was much lower. After months of looking for jobs without success, David opened his own coffee shops. He enjoyed managing his coffee shops. However, financially, he was still dependent on his parents because his coffee shop was not making enough profit to cover his living expenses. Generally speaking, career wise, the participants have been disappointed with their jobs because of the low salaries, long hours, and the inability to apply their educational training from the US to their current work.

Most of the participants were still struggling to readjust themselves to the Vietnamese working and living environment. All of them worked very hard and tried to keep a positive attitude. At the beginning of our conversations, they mainly focused on the positive aspects of

their lives. Later on in the conversations, when the researcher and the participants have established rapport, they became more open to disclose deeper feelings and concerns about their personal and professional lives. For some of them, readjusting to Vietnam felt much more difficult than adjusting to the US during their study abroad time. There was a sense of being "trapped" or "suffocated" because they had very little room in their lives for meaningful personal and professional development. Some had resolved to changing themselves to fit the environment even though it might mean that they would have to give up a large part of the perceived positive development they had gained during their study abroad time. Others were seeking out opportunities to go abroad again to escape the miserable work environment. In other words, most of them have not adjusted well to Vietnamese working environment even after more than one year. These findings suggest that the readjustment process might take considerably longer than previously asserted in the readjustment stages model (Mooradian, 2004).

Recommendation

      Support services for graduate students. As discussed in Chapter 4, the participants mainly relied on their co-national fellow students and friends for social and academic support during their time in the US. They rarely utilized institutional support services. Thus, they did not form a strong bond with or integrate into campus life. Based on the findings of this study, I recommend the following support services for graduate Vietnamese students:

    1) Incorporate co-national networks into institutional resources. Institutions should develop a close working relationship with co-national student groups. To help international student integrate into campus life, institution should reach out to these informal co-national networks to offer them formal status and support. A participant,

Nancy, pointed out that many Vietnamese students had studied at Sunny University for years without communication with one another until Nancy took the initiative to organize meetings. The institution could and should have taken that initiative a long time ago. Most of the participants were very active and talented but were not connected to the campus because they mostly socialized within their co-national groups. Incorporating these informal networks into the institutional structure would be an effective way to engage graduate international students.

2) Create an International Student Academic Success Unit. The participants also commented that they mostly relied on peer support for academic matters. The first few times they tried to ask their professors for help, there were misunderstandings partly because of their language barrier. An International Student Academic Success Unit could have been helpful to provide international students with academic advising, workshops, and tutors. Depending on the size of the institution and resources available, the unit can be big or small but having at least one point of connection for academic resources would be helpful for international students. The unit should engage faculty, student affairs staff, and peer tutors in the effort to promote international students' academic success.

3) Incorporate international content into class materials. One challenge for the participants were that they completely unfamiliar with the working environment in Vietnam. They could not apply their educational training because their training was based on the US environment which was totally different than the Vietnamese environment. Incorporating more international content into courses might help

international students be more prepared for their returns. Having international students conduct research on the conditions of the field in their own home country could help the students have a more realistic vision and expectation about the working environment of their field in their home country.

4) Promote a more culturally diverse and balanced student body. Some of the participants complained about the lack of diversity within their programs. They were disappointed to find out that most of their fellow students were international students. One major reason for them to study abroad was to have the opportunity to experience the American culture. Thus, they were disappointed to learn that very few students in their programs were domestic American students. They felt that they missed out on opportunities to immerse themselves in the American culture and interact with domestic students. On top of that, they were upset that a majority of their classmates were Chinese students. The over-representation of Chinese students led to negative social and academic issues for some of the participants. They felt uncomfortable with the fact that the classrooms were overwhelmingly dominated by Chinese students. Their perception of the program was negatively impacted by this lack of diversity. Institutions should be more mindful and purposeful in their recruiting and admission practices to promote a more diverse and balanced student body to ensure a rich and comfortable learning environment for students.

5) Increase teaching experience for international students. Some of the participants were offered lecturer positions in Vietnam partly because of their experience as teaching assistants in the US. As Vietnam, as well as other developing countries, open its

doors to foreign ideas and investment, more and more foreign higher education institutions are being established in Vietnam. These institutions often recruit repatriates with foreign master degrees to teach undergraduate programs. Institutions could help international graduate students be more prepared for this emerging employment option by encouraging the students to develop their teaching experience. Teaching skill workshops and teaching assistant positions can offer great opportunities for the students to gain some teaching skills.

6) Strengthen pre-departure and pre-repatriation orientation programs. Nancy appeared to be very well adjusted both when she first came to the US and when she returned to Vietnam. She attributed her smooth transitions partly to the careful pre-departure orientations she was given. Before her trip to the US, she received a month-long orientation from her scholarship sponsor organization. Before she returned to Vietnam, she was well prepared with the help of a support group for Asian women. They gave her useful advices such as "after 2 year, a shirt would be much tighter, when I come back to VN, I will have to readjust to life in VN." However, she was the only one reported having these pre-departure orientations. Other participants either learned about the US from an acquaintance or the internet. None of them mentioned any pre-repatriating orientation program. Investing in both pre-departure and pre-repatriation programs might help international students be more prepared and confident in the adjustment and reverse adjustment processes. These orientation programs should engage the informal networks of co-national groups and formal institutional services such as counseling or support groups. Technologies could help

greatly in these orientation programs by connecting the students to co-national

mentors via the internet to discuss typical issues in the adjustment and reverse

adjustment processes for students from a particular culture.

7) Develop strong international alumni networks. Having a strong alumni network in

different countries can serve as both a useful recruitment tool and a professional

network for repatriates. Words of mouth can be an important source of information

for students who are considering overseas study. Thomas and David sought out

people who had lived in the US to ask for advice. Alumni organizations can serve as

social support and professional networks for repatriates. Informally, the participants

in the current study belonged to a loosely organized Sunny University alumni group.

They would get together once in a while to reconnect and share their experience in

Vietnam. Institutions could incorporate these informal alumni organizations into its

support structure for international students which could help the students with their

adjustment processes and strengthen their tie to the institution even after graduation.

Some of these repatriates became important, high power figures in their countries

who could be instrumental for the development of the institution's international

collaboration goals.

Future research. After analyzing the current study's finding and the literature review,

the researcher was able to identify areas of interest for future research in international student

repatriation. These recommendations are aimed to fill in gaps in the literature about the reverse

adjustment issues. International students' adjustment to host country has received significant

attention from scholars for the obvious reason that it is a very stressful experience for most

international students. However, reverse adjustment can also be very distressful for repatriates

because they are less likely to expect and be prepared for it. Different angles and methods of

research can be helpful in addressing the complexity of the reverse adjustment processes for

international student repatriates:

1) The research seemed lacking is in applying theoretical frameworks to reverse

   adjustment process. Martin, Bradford, and Rohrlich (1996) used expectancy violation

   theory to look at adjustment, but that was one of the few studies on adjustment that

   contained a theoretical framework. Limited research was found that connected any

   theoretical framework to reverse culture shock.

2) Comparing the adjustment processes of individuals from different countries. Studies

   comparing individuals from individualist countries to either other individualist

   countries or to collectivist countries could help identify some factors associated with

   the readjustment process. It appears that there is a lot of room for further research in

   the area of reentry and reverse culture shock.

3) Many studies link adjustment to other communication and psychological principles.

   However, little research is available on the relationship between the reverse

   adjustment process and cultural variable,s such as individualism/collectivism, self

   construals, power distance, high and low context or gender. I recommend continued

   research on relationships and gender.

4) Reentry is a longitudinal process. However, there has not been any study that looked

   at reentry from a longitudinal perceptive. Research looking at the long-term effects

of intercultural adjustment looking back at repatriates after two years, five years or even ten years after their reentry may produce some interesting findings.

5) One major trend leans towards the bias of an individualist approach when looking at the readjustment process. Most literature seemed to be written from an individualist standpoint. The ideas and research are biased against many of the collectivist values. Some positive factors relating to reentry and adjustment were that individuals were more self-reliant, independent and self-confident. These qualities would not be looked at favorably in collectivist cultures where group unity, harmony and conformity are valued. While some studies did look at collective or interdependent international student repatriates readjusting from time spent in individualist cultures, there have been very few studies regarding individualist adjustment in collectivist cultures. A comparison of the two situations should be helpful in providing a more balanced view of the readjustment process for international student repatriates.

These recommendations are presented in the hope that critical issues in the readjustment process of international student repatriates will be better understood by higher education educators and researchers. The principal intent of the current study is to contribute some insight into the under-researched phenomenon of international student repatriations in Vietnam. The findings highlighted the critical concerns and issues for the participants. Each participant's story as well as the group's commonality was discussed to present the complexity of their lives as a whole and their reentry experiences in particular. The researcher hopes that the findings, discussions, and recommendations will inform educators, administrators, and scholars in their efforts to better

understand and more effectively support international students in their pre-departure preparation,

college success, and reverse adjustment process.

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Appendix A

Letter of Introduction

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Vietnamese international student repatriates:

My name is Anh Le. I am a doctoral student in Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. The topic of my dissertation is "Experience of Vietnamese International Student Repatriates." Data collection of this study will be in form of private one-on-one interviews. Participants will be asked to answers a few open-ended questions about their experience as a Vietnamese international student repatriate. Each interview session should last from 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews will be audiotaped.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of Vietnamese international student repatriates including their perspectives on their experiences in transitioning back to and how relevant their higher education training from the U.S. is to their life in Vietnam. I'd like to extend my invitation to you to participate in this study. As a participant in this study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own journey and contribute to the knowledge pool about Vietnamese international student repatriates. The findings of this study may help higher education professionals be better informed about how to relate to and Vietnamese international students.

Please respond to this message by **March 25, 2013** to inform me of your intention.

If you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to email me at blessta@gmail.com or contact my project supervisor, Dr. Barbara LaCost, through email at blacost1@unl.edu or by phone at 402-472-0988.

Your time and consideration is greatly appreciated!

Anh Le, Primary Investigator
Graduate Assistant
PhD Student
EdAd Graduate Student Association
Educational Leadership and Higher Education
Department of Educational Administration
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Appendix B

Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Lincoln

Informed Consent

Identification of Project: Experience of Vietnamese International Student Repatriates

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the stories of Vietnamese international student repatriates. The topic of this study was selected based on the need to hear the Vietnamese international student repatriates' perspectives on their experiences in transitioning back to and how relevant their higher education training from the U.S. is to their life in Vietnam to have a better understand of this unique population. You are invited to participate in the study because of your unique experience as a Vietnamese international student repatriate.

Procedures: The researchers will interview the participants about their experiences. The interview will take place at a location and time chosen by the participant. The conversations will be tape recorded. Each interview will last about 45-60 minutes.

Risk: There are no known risks associated with this study

Benefits: Participation in the study will give you an opportunity to reflect on your journey in the U.S and transition back to Vietnam. Also, if you are interested in the results of the study, a copy will sent to you when the study is completed.

Confidentiality:
Any personally identifying information obtained during this study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a secure location in the researcher's office. Only the researchers have access to the data. The information obtained in this study may be published in professional journals or presented at meetings, but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. You may email the researcher anytime and your questions will be answered in 24 hours. You may also contact my major professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (402-472-0988). Sometimes study participants have questions or concerns about their rights. In that case, you should call the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 or irb@unl.edu.

<u>Freedom to Withdraw:</u>
You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the researcher or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

<u>Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:</u>
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant:_____

Date: _____

Name and Phone number of the researchers:

Anh Le
Principal Researcher
402-304-5093

Barbara LaCost, Ph.D.
Secondary Researcher (Major Professor, UNL)
402-472-0988

Appendix C

Interview Protocol in English

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR VIETNAMESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT REPATRIATES

1. Introduce myself
2. Explain the purpose of this interview and the participant's rights briefly.
3. Give the participant the informed consent form to review and sign.
4. Give the participant the Demographic Form to fill out.
5. Thank for participating in an interview.
6. Use probing questions as needed.
7. If an interviewee has difficulty answering a question, provide examples or share my experiences.
8. Sub-questions will be used as needed to invite the participant to elaborate more.

Interview Questions

1) Please tell me about yourself (family, education, occupation, important things in your life…)
   - Your family background
   - What did you study in the United States?
   - At what University?
   - How long ago?
   - Where did you get your
   - How many years were you living in the states?
   - When did you come back to Vietnam?
   - How did you get to be in your current professional position?
   - What are some important matters in your life right now?

2) Why did you decide to study in the United States instead of in Vietnam or any other country?
   - Were there other places in the U.S. that you considered or just the one place?
   - Were there any particular benefits to studying in the United States versus studying in Vietnam?

3) Why did you choose this institution where you studied?
   - When you went there did you know other Vietnamese students already before you arrived or had heard of anybody who had studied at that institution?
   - How did you know about them?
   - Who influenced your decision about your institution selection?

4) How would you describe your experience as a Vietnamese international student in the U.S.?
   - Specific examples of positive and negative experiences?
   - Any surprises when you get there? Did you visit the university before you went?
   - Anything you didn't expect when you arrived?
   - Any support groups helped you out?
   - Any difficulties when you arrived? What was the most difficult thing when you got there?

- Who helped you?
- What was your experience with student services (career office, student involvement, housing…)
- What were your experiences with students, faculty, and staff?

5) How did your plan (regarding your desire to stay in the U.S. or return to Vietnam upon graduation) evolve over time?
- Before coming to the U.S., what was your plan regarding what you would do after graduating from the institution in the U.S.? Why?
- How did your plan change over the course of your study?
- At the end of your study, when you were getting ready to graduate, what was your plan for the future?
- How did you feel personally and professionally right after you graduated? Did you want to stay or leave the U.S.?
- Why and how did you decide to come back to Vietnam?
- Did you come back because you have more personal and professional connections in Vietnam?

6) How do you feel about your transition back into Vietnam?
- Did you encounter cultural shock because you were used to the American culture?
- Professionally, how did you feel about your career in Vietnam?
- How did you feel about returning to your family in Vietnam?

7) What do you think you have gained or lost as a result of your study abroad experience in the U.S.?
- Was your degree valued in Vietnam?
- How do you think other people perceive you?
- How relevant was your educational training to working in Vietnam? How can you apply your U.S. education to your career in Vietnam?
- What are some of the important skills/competencies you have acquired in your study in the U.S.?
- What kinds of connections did you gain?
- What did you lose?

8) Is there anything else that you think would be important for me to know in understanding the experience of Vietnamese international student repatriates from the United States?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol in Vietnamese

QUI TRÌNH PHỎNG VẤN CÁC SINH VIÊN VIỆT NAM HỒI HƯƠNG

1. Giới thiệu về bản thân
2. Giải thích ngắn gọn về mục đích của cuộc phỏng vấn và quyền lợi của ngườ tham gia
3. Trao đơn Nhận Thức Ưng Thuận cho người tham gia đọc và ký tên
4. Trao đơn Thông Tin Bản Thân cho người tham gia điền vào
5. Cảm ơn người tham gia phỏng vấn
6. Sử dụng câu hỏi phụ khi cần thiết
7. Khi ngườ được phỏng vấn gặp khó khăn trong việc trả lời câu hỏi, đưa ra ví dụ hoặc chia sẻ kinh nghiệm của chính mình
8. Câu hỏi phụ sẽ được dung khi cần thiết để khuyến khích ngườ tham gia cho thêm chi tiết

Câu hỏi phỏng vấn

1) Xin bạn cho biết thông tin về bản than (gia đình, giáo dục, nghề nghiệp, những điều quan trọng trong cuộc sống bạn…)
- Thông tin về gia đình
- Bạn học ngành gì tại Hoa Kì?
- Học tại trường nào?
- Học khi nào?
- Bạn sống tại Hoa Kì bao nhiêu năm?
- Bạn trở lại Việt Nam khi nào?
- Bạn đã vào được vị trí hiện tại như thế nào?
- Điều gì là quan trọng trong cuộc sống của bạn ngay lúc này?

2) Vì sao bạn chọn du học tại Hoa Kì thay vì học tại Viet Nam hay một nước nào khác?
- Bạn có suy nghĩ về các nước khác ngoài Hoa Kì không hay chỉ có một nơi?
- Có những lợi ích đặc biệt gì khi du học tại Hoa Kì thay vì ở Việt Nam hay các nước khác?

3) Vì sao bạn chọn trường này?
- Khi bạn đến đó, bạn có biết ai đang học tại đó hay không?
- Nếu có, bạn biết họ như thế nào?
- Những ai có ảnh hưởng đến quyết định chọn trường của bạn?

4) Kinh nghiệm của bạn về cuộc sống của một sinh viên Việt Nam du học tại Hoa Kì như thế nào?
- Ví dụ về những kinh nghiệm tốt và xấu?
- Có những bất ngờ gì khi bạn mới đến nơi? Bạn có đến thăm trường trước khi vào học không?

- Có những gì ngoài mong đợi khi bạn đến nơi?
- Có những nhóm nào đã giúp đỡ bạn?
- Có những khó khăn gì khi bạn mới tới? Điều gì là khó khăn nhất?
- Những ai đã giúp đỡ bạn?
- Kinh nghiệm của bạn với các dịch vụ hỗ trợ sinh viên như thế nào (văn phòng hướng nghiệp, văn phòng phong trào sinh viên, kí túc xá…)?
- Kinh nghiệm với các sinh viên, nhân viên, và giáo sư?

5) Kế hoạch của bạn về việc ở lại Hoa Kì hay trở về Việt Nam đã thay đổi như thế nào?
- Trước khi đi du học, bạn có kế hoạch gì cho tương lai sau khi tốt nghiệp tại Hoa Kì? Tại sao?
- Kế hoạch của bạn thay đổi như thế nào trong thời gian bạn học tại Hoa Kì?
- Khi bạn gần học xong, ngay trước khi tốt nghiệp, kế hoạch của bạn là gì?
- Ngay sau khi tốt nghiệp, bạn cảm thấy thế nào? Bạn muốn ở lại hay rời khỏi Hoa Kì?
- Vì sao bạn quyết định trở về Việt Nam?
- Có phải bạn trở về vì bạn có nhiều mối quan hệ ở Việt Nam?

6) Khi mới trở về, bạn cảm thấy như thế nào?
- Bạn có cảm thấy bị sốc vì đã quen với cuộc sống tại Hoa Kì?
- Về vấn đề sự nghiệp, bạn cảm thấy sao về sự nghiệp của mình tại Việt Nam?
- Bạn cảm thấy thế nào khi quay lại với gia đình tại Việt Nam?

7) Bạn nghĩ gì về những gì bạn có thêm hay mất đi vì kinh nghiệm du học tại Hoa Kì?
- Bằng cấp của bạn có giá trị như thế nào ở Việt Nam?
- Bạn nghĩ mọi người xung quanh nghĩ về bạn thế nào?
- Chương trình giáo dục tại Hoa Kì có liên quan thế nào với sự nghiệp của bạn tại Việt Nam? Bạn có ứng dụng những kiến thức bạn đã học được tại Hoa Kì?
- Những kĩ năng/kiến thức nào là quan trọng nhất mà bạn đã học được tại Hoa Kì?
- Bạn đã có thêm được những mối quan hệ nào?
- Bạn đã mất gì?

8) Bạn còn có gì muốn chia sẻ để giúp tôi hiểu rõ hơn về kinh nghiệm của sinh viên Việt Nam hồi hương?

Cảm ơn bạn rất nhiều!

Appendix E

IRB Approval letters

UNIVERSITY OF **Nebraska** Lincoln

March 13, 2013

Anh Le
Department of Educational Administration
1740 C Street Lincoln, NE 68502

Barbara LaCost
Department of Educational Administration
127 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20130313396 EX
Project ID: 13396
Project Title: VIETNAMESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT REPATRIATES FROM THE U.S.: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Dear Anh:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Exemption Determination: 03/13/2013.

1. The stamped and approved informed consent form has been uploaded to NUgrant (file with -Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use this form to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the form, please submit the revised form to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;

* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB

May 6, 2013

Anh Le
Department of Educational Administration
1740 C Street Lincoln, NE 68502

Barbara LaCost
Department of Educational Administration
127 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number:
Project ID: 13396
Project Title: VIETNAMESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT REPATRIATES FROM THE
U.S.: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Dear Anh:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review
of the Request for Change in Protocol submitted to the IRB.

1. It has been approved to translate the interview protocol into Vietnamese.

Your official approval letter will be uploaded to NUgrant shortly.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board
any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects,
  deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was
  unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research
  procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that
  involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding
  that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or
  others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved
  by the research staff.

This letter constitutes official notification of the approval of the protocol change. You are therefore authorized to implement this change accordingly.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB

_____

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

October 4, 2013

Anh Le
Department of Educational Administration
1740 C Street Lincoln, NE 68502

Barbara LaCost
Department of Educational Administration
127 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number:
Project ID: 13396
Project Title: VIETNAMESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT REPATRIATES FROM THE
U.S.: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Dear Anh:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review
of the Request for Change in Protocol submitted to the IRB.

1. It has been approved to have another Vietnamese native speaker verify that the
   translation is accurate.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board
any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects,
  deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was
  unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research
  procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that
  involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding
  that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or
  others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved
  by the research staff.

This letter constitutes official notification of the approval of the protocol change. You are therefore authorized to implement this change accordingly.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

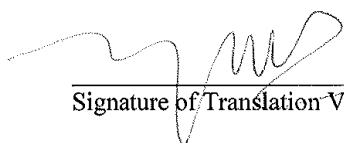Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB

Appendix F

Translation Certification
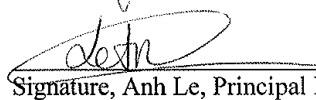
Translation Verifier: Confidentiality Statement

I ___HUYEN___   ___TRAN___ (name of translation auditor) agree to hold all information contained on Vietnamese transcripts and English translations of the transcripts in confidence. I will see no identifiable data and know none of the participants. This translation verification is for a dissertation written by Anh Le entitled:

VIETNAMESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT REPATRIATES:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

I understand that to violate this agreement would constitute a serious and unethical infringement on the informants' rights to privacy.

_____   ___12/5/2013___
Signature of Translation Verifier   Date

_____   ___12/7/2013___
Signature, Anh Le, Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix G

Sub Theme and Codes

1)Decision factors		
	Why the US	
		Family's influence parents' choice background of my family family strongly supported me my family was a big influence on me
		Perception of quality the best systems in the world education quality American education
		Attraction to the US culture American dream lifestyle richest country in the world multiethnic multicultural country
	Factors in studying abroad	
		Career change aspirations change my career. change my career better life. the ceiling change my career.
		Desire to broaden knowledge desire to learn broaden my knowledge broadened my knowledge loved to study finance
		Desire to Experience Abroad Living the real life discover life styles authentic feelings changing my life
	Post-graduation plans	
		Personal relationships relatives younger brother connection come home family family mother family come back home parents

		<u>Legal Immigration Circumstances</u> visa H1B visa OPT immigration process compulsory scholarship's conditions
		<u>Career Opportunities</u> Economy Salary temporary job working experience banking industry company in the US careers future job salary offers potential market opportunities network hierarchy suitable
	Why Sunny	
		<u>Individual-Institution Fit</u> Appropriate Choice working experience studying environment curriculum positive chance
		<u>Financial Aid Packages</u> Suitable accommodation expenses scholarships cost
2) Personal Matters		
	<u>Personal relationships</u> Parents Boyfriend Relatives Family younger brother girlfriend relationships trust settle down friends	

	empathy mother married husband private life father personal life baby break up come back home supports connection important close to my family closer to my family	
	<u>Identity and Personal development</u> Independent Decisive Mature Changes Responsibility Viewpoint Ideas Uncomfortable more skillful language skill different mindset more knowledgeable potential effectively effectively purposes more confident learn a lot analytical skill free life financially secured I feel like I can do anything now more liberal logical analysis soft skills greatly improved more liberal learn about a lot of cultures important milestones lived for myself broadened my knowledge My world was flatter my network was wider my strategic view was better	

	reading skill	
	<u>Affective issues</u> Trapped Excitement Pressure tragic events feelings emotional breakdown sad strong suffocated regret invisible pressure wonderful happy lonely shocked kept it to myself depressed cried alone homesick stress comfortable felt enough dispirited	
3) Career		
	Current Career Situations	
		<u>Time</u> free time friends weekend busy enough time family time free time personal life limited travel a lot more personal time all night
		<u>Financial</u> Difficulties Depending Money living expenses salary prices inflation payment benefit

		<u>Colleagues</u> Teammates new researchers fresh graduate fun effective politic game threatened foreign-educated friendly friends
		<u>Work environment</u> Convenient Excellent Supervision Flexibility Suitable working environment smooth animated traveling a lot family reports limitation opportunities promotion being a woman stuck progress connections devotion working environment regulations relations different career advancement stressed out subsidiary companies
	Career opportunities	
	Human Capital	
		<u>Value of degree</u> foreign degree common valuable prestigious foreign Master degrees same advantageous opportunities

		Application of education specialized knowledge complex waste financial knowledge ability foreign company professional expertise assess competence general different macro analysis micro jobs difficulties financial analysis Accounting degree English skills old knowledge applied disappointing real work other fields marketing strategy specialization
		Personal Development Decisive Mature Network building skills English skills Independent Knowledgeable Potential Courage Reading skills Confident analytical skill experiencing life financially secured liberal accepting experience cultural diversity strategic view
	Social Capital Parents Connection social networks state-owned company	

	good position Provincial Women Union a slot in the university family relationships social relationships apply on my own governmental officials influential family recommended father's recommendation helpful relations associations useful in the future support relatives mother uncle network business relationships friends	
4) Adjustment Process		
	Adjustment to the US	
		<u>Challenges</u> Difficult Listening skill comprehending skill failed few American students less diversity negativity problems dropped out strange shocked different uncomfortable heavy disappointed cultural shock Weather China Town Chinese Chinese Student Association Racial incident too theoretical Chinese working style Cheating Passive Chinese students Chinese in resident hall too many Chinese students

		pronunciation Reading skill stressed out cried speaking skill timid language obstacle misunderstandings
		<u>Adjustment to the US</u> Vietnamese students current students library making friends sympathy professors close friends romantic attention happy great friends international friends support classmates Vietnamese friends Vietnamese schoolmates host family internship program student bus system International Office road trips career service center international events teachers Department Chair teaching assistants neighbor Adoptive parents
	Readjustment to Vietnam	
		<u>Losses</u> career opportunities faded friendships communication barrier lost love depressed trust reputation connection with younger brother 2 years of my youth Broken marriage tenure benefits jobless

		Reverse Cultural shocks cultural shocks tired dispirited discouragement bureaucratic administration drastically different less energetic more critics, less compliments freedom restriction all about money connections pressure to settle down office politic unprofessional work places less organized less structured emphasis on status symbols
		Readjustment Adapt restart my life prices escalated weather was so hot and humid lower my expectations and try to adapt. No significant changes enjoy Vietnamese food as usual American company change myself to adapt gradually accept a little bit adjustment I couldn't change them, so I adjusted myself I don't want to change myself in that direction a necessity of my job suffocated give up things that are not appropriate I just have to accept it because I can't change my mindset Wish to go abroad again Flexible future plans get an MBA in another specialty focus on my present job