

# The Cultural Remittance and Hybridization of Confucian Practices: Placemaking of Vietnamese Migrants Working in Thailand

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## Abstract

The impact of remittances on development extends beyond economic growth for families and communities. This paper explores the cultural practices of Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand through a multi-sited ethnographic research methodology done in two countries – Thailand and Vietnam, including accompanying Vietnamese workers to Thailand. Specifically, it focuses on the influence of Confucian practices of cultural remittance and hybridization on placemaking within the migrant community in Vietnam. The study highlights the profound impact of remittances on development and the positive transformations they bring to the migrants' place of origin. It examines how Confucian practices shape the identities of the places of origin and Vietnamese migrants employed in Thailand. The authors argue that migrants involved in the informal economy have the annual opportunity to return home and contribute to the economy and culture of their homeland. For three decades, this process of transculturality has occurred as cultural remittances gradually hybridized with the local culture, enabling individuals to construct new identities and actively participate in placemaking. Consequently, the meaning of place of origin changes significantly from a negative place to a prominent, modern, and civilized community. This shift broadens the definition of what it means to be 'good people,' firmly rooted in the ideals of Confucianism.

## Keywords

Confucian practice; cultural hybridization; cultural remittance; placemaking; Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand

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## Introduction

When observing Vietnamese migrant workers abroad, it is typical for Thai society to raise questions such as "Why are Vietnamese workers so hardworking?" or "Why do they tend to avoid formal employment that comes with daily risks?" Furthermore, one may wonder why these workers typically have short tenure as employees. Choowonglert and Ton (2022) shed light on this phenomenon among Vietnamese migrants working in Thailand. It reveals that these migrants have a preference for informal sectors and frequently engage in illegal employment. This choice aligns with the Vietnamese mindset, influenced by Confucian values. It emphasizes entrepreneurship, in which they prioritize capital accumulation and develop their entrepreneurial abilities for their families' and relatives' stability and happiness.

Furthermore, factors include family background, economic status, and education. The memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Labor Cooperation between the governments of Thailand and Vietnam, signed in 2015, allows for the legal importation of Vietnamese workers. A second MOU was added in 2018. However, Vietnamese workers are only legally permitted to work in four occupations: laborers on fishing boats, construction workers, domestic helpers, and workers in 25 types of businesses. Additionally, they must pass an exam after completing English language training, even though Thai is the language used in the workplace in Thailand. Consequently, in practice, very few Vietnamese workers have been imported under this MOU system: only 94 workers from 2015 to 2021 – the remaining approximately 160,000 workers in the informal sector (Choowonglert & Ton, 2022).

As a result, many Vietnamese migrants in Thailand establish small-scale businesses like sub-contracting, peddling, or operating market stalls. Additionally, these migrants actively accumulate and convert economic, social, and cultural capital, which they later remit back to their homeland. This remittance serves as both a means to express their Vietnamese identity and a demonstration of their adherence to Confucian ideals (Choowonglert & Ton, 2022). Therefore, this study must highlight the significant role of Vietnamese migrants in Thailand, not only in accumulating capital and sending remittances for economic advancement but also in their commitment to upholding their religious principles and preserving their Vietnamese identity as *người good* [good people].

Nevertheless, a significant body of scholarly studies on the subject of remittances has predominantly concentrated on examining the effects of financial transfers in reducing poverty levels (Leamcharaskul & Boonyamanond, 2024; Pfau & Giang, 2009; Small, 2021; Tran et al., 2024). Furthermore, scholars have also delved into the influence of remittances on the economic development of the migrants' countries of origin, as demonstrated by the comprehensive investigations conducted by Cohen (2011), Hung (2022), and Lopez (2019). In addition, scholars such as Cohen (2011) and Belloni et al. (2022) have explored the influence of remittances on education and healthcare and their role in shaping the transformation of personal preferences and daily materiality. However, these studies have overlooked the interplay between the remitted culture from the host country and the home country's culture. This contributes to creating new meanings for the people and places in the homeland. Therefore, remittances can be perceived as extending beyond mere financial transfers, encompassing cultural and societal values while also playing a pivotal role in maintaining social, cultural, and political connections between migrants and their homelands (Belloni et al., 2022; Cohen, 2011; Hung, 2022; Lopez, 2019; Pfau & Giang, 2009; Small, 2021).

In addition to the economic, educational, and healthcare impacts of money remittance, it is imperative to consider the cultural aspect of remittance, commonly referred to as cultural remittances. These cultural remittances have a notable influence on the formation and preservation of cultural identities and traditions in the home country of migrants (Belloni et al., 2022). By transferring cultural practices, values, and ideas, migrants contribute to developing novel cultural landscapes. Moreover, they bring back knowledge, skills, and resources that contribute to the development and transformation of their hometowns, thus influencing the process of placemaking (McKay & Brady, 2005). Therefore, it is crucial not to underestimate the significance of cultural remittance in placemaking. These changes reflect the aspirations and experiences of migrants and their desire to enhance their hometowns through remittances (Lopez, 2019). Consequently, cultural remittances play a pivotal role in developing a place that embodies both local and ethnic identities, as exemplified in the case of *Lang Thai Lan* [Thai Village].

In this scholarly article, the authors seek to delve into the concept of cultural remittance within the context of a specific location known as Lang Thai Lan, officially designated as *Lang Vinh Long* [Vinh Long Village]. Located in the Ben Sung Municipality, Nhu Thanh District, Thanh Hoa Province, in the North-Central region of Vietnam, this place is primarily inhabited by Vietnamese individuals who have voluntarily repatriated their descendants and migrants. It serves as a prime example of cultural hybridity and the development of place identity. The phenomenon of transculturality often gives rise to unique areas where various cultures intertwine with the land, ultimately leading to new cultural practices and distinct identities associated with the specific place.

Moreover, the primary objective of this research is to comprehensively understand the cultural practices of transnational migrants, specifically those influenced by religious ideals, in this case, Confucianism. These practices are integral to expressing Vietnamese identities through cultural remittance and the hybridization of placemaking. The analysis undertaken in this study specifically focuses on the complex and dynamic process of cultural hybridization between Thai and Vietnamese cultures within the broader context of transculturality. Transculturality, as a concept, highlights the fluid and constantly evolving nature of cultural phenomena. It emphasizes that cultural boundaries are not fixed but relatively flexible and subject to continuous negotiation, as Welsch (1999) proposed. It also challenges traditional assimilation theories, highlighting the complexity of immigrant integration and emphasizing the significance of considering cultural identity throughout the process (Huu, 2021).

Religion, particularly Confucianism, plays a significant role in shaping the lives of transnational migrants as they navigate their existence in different countries. These migrants strive to embody the ideal Vietnamese identity, adjusting the positive qualities associated with the local Vietnamese population. In particular, when these migrant workers return to their homeland, they bring cultural remittance from Thailand. They then hybridize these elements with the local Vietnamese culture, creating a distinct and unique culture that sets their place of origin apart from the surrounding areas. Recognizing that the physical location is crucial in developing and preserving individual and collective identities among the inhabitants is vital.

## Cultural remittance, religion's role, and placemaking

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

In addition, remittance is closely intertwined with moral remittance, which involves transmitting deeply rooted values and ideals (Simoni & Voirol, 2021). For example, it maintains relationships, provides financial support, and contributes to community development. Recipients often view remittances as symbolic connections with overseas relatives, enabling them to improve their living conditions (Small, 2012). Thus, it is not merely an obligation but a moral duty to utilize remittances to enhance the well-being of recipients. Emotions play a crucial role in shaping the moral frameworks of transnational families. Migrants bring cultural influences that lead to ethical and moral remittances, reshaping their home countries' social and political landscape (Katigbak, 2015; Simoni & Voirol, 2021). Religious entanglement is significant in the context of moral remittance. For example, moral remittance is rooted in Islamic principles and traditions for Bangladeshi immigrants, where sharing and redistributing assistance from parents is seen as a moral and sacred duty (Stevanovic-Fenn, 2012). Remittance practices are connected to Islamic alms-giving, known as *zakat*, among Pakistani migrants, highlighting the strong moral dimensions and reciprocal nature of remittance sending within the context of Islamic charity practices (Erdal, 2012).

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

## Multi-sited ethnography and contexts

This study used a multi-sited ethnographic research methodology conducted in Thailand and Vietnam in 2022 and 2023. The authors traveled with brokers and migrants from their hometown to the Lao-Thai border checkpoint, which took approximately 20 hours. The focus of the study was to understand the experiences and perspectives of individuals. The research methods included staying overnight in *Lang Thai Lan* three times for non-participant observation, discussions, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. The researchers collaborated with Vietnamese migrants and local authorities in both countries. The study also employed a life-course approach to migration and analyzed the data using an emic view.

The research study was conducted at two specific research sites: *Lang Thai Lan*, located in Nhu Thanh District, Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam, and Daeng District (pseudonym), in a province in Thailand. *Lang Thai Lan* is the main focus of this study. It was known for its large ironwood forest. From 1963 to 1964, *Lang Thai Lan* served as *Viet kieu hoi huong* [a settlement for voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese] from various provinces in Thailand. By 1964, 62 families, approximately 300 people, gathered there under the arrangement of the Vietnamese government.

During their repatriation to Vietnam, amidst the war with the United States, the central and southern regions became the main battlegrounds. Additionally, a land reform policy led to the seizure of all land by the state. Consequently, instead of returning to their hometowns, the repatriated Vietnamese were relocated to upland areas of the north and north-central regions. These areas, previously covered in forests, were chosen for the establishment of villages and participation in planned economic production. They also had to serve in the military and learn the Vietnamese language. However, upon returning to Vietnam, they encountered many challenges. Not only did they face difficulties in constructing houses and villages and adapting to a collective system, which proved to be more challenging than in Thailand due to their backgrounds in small businesses, but they also encountered discrimination and derogatory remarks from the locals who accused them of being traitors to the nation, using the Vietnamese term *de quoc* [country]. This mistrust stemmed from their birth and/or upbringing in Thailand, as the locals and government officials doubted their loyalty to the nation. Despite adopting modern attire and utilizing contemporary products sourced from Thailand, they encountered discrimination and were consistently regarded as outsiders. However, according to the accounts provided by repatriated Vietnamese individuals, they assert to the authors that their decision to seek refuge in Thailand was not motivated by any intention to betray their homeland. Instead, their primary objective was to evade the imminent dangers of war and secure a place of safety. Their decision to voluntarily repatriate to Vietnam upon President Ho Chi Minh's request was driven by their love for their homeland (Choowonglert & Ton, 2022).

After repatriation, the people who chose to return voluntarily constructed a village and implemented a cooperative system, transforming it into a significant economic center for the neighboring community. In 1996, Vinh Long village, the official name of *Lang Thai Lan*, previously a part of the Nhu Xuan district, was established as the central hub of the newly created Nhu Thanh district. This decision was based on the village's commendable economic progress and development. Furthermore, being at the center of the new district attracted government officials, merchants, and entrepreneurs who sought to acquire land and establish homes and businesses in the area. *Lang Thai Lan* is now a critical economic and educational

center characterized by cultural diversity and a unique blend of Thai and Vietnamese cultures. It also benefits from its strategic location, with crucial transportation routes connecting it to other economic regions (Choowonglert & Ton, 2022).

The Daeng district, situated within a province in Thailand, is a significant research site due to a substantial foreign migrant community. This community has many small and medium garment industries, including Vietnamese contractors and subcontractors. In Daeng, the Vietnamese community is considered invisible as they live and work in the same building. The district is known for its diverse neighborhood, pluralism, and multiculturalism. Moreover, Daeng, along with another wholesale market, serves as a center for small and medium-sized enterprises in the garment manufacturing industry.

Vietnamese migrants mainly work as garment contractors for Thai entrepreneurs. They recruit fellow Vietnamese garment workers from their hometowns, usually relatives and neighbors. These Vietnamese contractors employ around 6 to 20 workers and provide shared accommodations for them, constructing a Vietnamese worker community. Additionally, the contractors offer services to the workers, which they must pay for (around USD 142), ensuring their safety and minimizing police involvement. Becoming a garment contractor increases their income, with average monthly earnings ranging from USD 1,418 to 2,837, depending on the orders. The workers earn between USD 851 and 1,418, depending on the orders and sewing capacity. Specifically, as mentioned, Vietnamese contractors typically rent a multi-story residence (3–5 floors), and garment workers reside and work within the same buildings. The contractors are responsible for acquiring daily orders commensurate with the workforce. Each worker produces approximately 50–60 pieces daily, receiving USD 1.03 per completed piece. However, the contractor deducts USD 0.15 per piece, resulting in a daily income of USD 66 for a contractor if they had eight workers (480 pieces sewed daily). Workers, after deducting expenses from the contractor, such as rent, utilities, and local police bribes, will earn USD 0.88 per piece. If they work for 26 days, the worker's monthly profit is approximately USD 1,418. Similarly, a contractor with 15 workers can earn approximately USD 2,837 monthly.

Thus, the monthly income in these occupations is significantly higher than working in Vietnam for four months. This aspect compels individuals to seek employment within this industry, allowing them to amass wealth and return it to their home country. This serves economic purposes and aligns with their desire to uphold their identity as virtuous individuals rooted in Confucian ideals.

## **The influence of Confucian ideals and practices on migrants' lives and identities**

Despite the perceived decline of Confucian ideology in Vietnamese society following the social revolution and the adoption of gender equality, traditional gender norms persist and exert significant pressure on individuals, particularly in their professional pursuits and family life. Both men and women are expected to work tirelessly to succeed and contribute to their families and society. The family's prosperity, the comprehensive development of children, and the family's social status heavily rely on their efforts. The driving force behind them is not a desire for material wealth but rather a profound religious conviction. Vietnamese migrant workers, influenced by five Confucian ideals, employ strategies to embody

Vietnamese identity, which is evaluated based on *tai*, *duc*, *phuc*, *loc*, and *tho* [wealth/ability, morality, happiness, fortune, and longevity, respectively]. This explains why Vietnamese migrants are known for their dedication and hard work. Confucian values are reflected in the actions of individuals who dedicate around 15 hours each day to their tasks, endure hardships, save money, invest in homes and modern appliances, prioritize their children's education, care for elderly parents, establish household livelihood sources, support family and neighbors, and contribute to community projects.

*Tai* refers to the ability/skill, talent, and wealth that enable Vietnamese migrants to construct high incomes. From an economic perspective, talent is viewed very realistically as the ability of an individual in society to earn money. Those who can earn a lot of money from their work, as long as it is not illegal, are considered by society to have *tai*. Conversely, an individual who cannot make money and depends on their family for living is considered by society as a person without *tai*. Vietnamese people often call this person *bat tai* [talentless]. The demonstration of *tai*, through hard work, is passed down as an economic asset to future generations. The manifestation of *tai* among Vietnamese individuals is frequently demonstrated through the prevalence of opulent residences and modern automobiles.

Within Vietnamese society, specifically in the northern region, there exists a custom of partitioning houses to signify economic and social standing, thereby reflecting the significance of *tai* in five distinct levels. The hierarchical structure of the residences in Vietnamese society is represented by multiple levels, ranging from the first level, denoting the highest status, to the fifth level, representing the lowest status. These residences' size and grandeur indicate an individual's social standing and wealth. As a result, there is a strong emphasis in Vietnamese society on utilizing accumulated *tai* to construct large houses rather than solely focusing on accumulating economic capital in other domains. In Vietnamese society, the possession of *tai* is highly valued and respected. This motivates Vietnamese migrants to strive and distinguish themselves from workers in neighboring countries. They dedicate extensive work hours, aiming to become contractors or entrepreneurs to enhance their income and achieve stability. Thus, possessing economic ability not only leads to prosperity but also aligns with the principles of Confucian ideology.

However, *duc* [morality] is crucial when discussing *Tai*. Within Vietnamese culture, the proverb '*tien hoc le, hau hoc van*' [a child must first learn how to behave before acquiring knowledge] emphasizes the importance of *duc* in conjunction with *tai*. Additionally, the proverb '*co tai ma khong co duc thi vo dung; co duc ma khong co tai thi lam viec gi cung kho*' conveys the message that 'having ability without morals is futile while possessing morals without ability makes success challenging.' Therefore, migrants endeavor to generate income [accumulating *tai*] while simultaneously emphasizing capital accumulation and offering assistance to their families [expressing *duc*]. *Duc* also encompasses the ethical obligation towards kin, relatives, and the community, exemplifying collaboration and solidarity among them.

In the context of gender in Vietnam, certain societal expectations exist for women to embody specific ideals, namely the three *tam tong* [obedience] and four *tu duc* [virtues]. The three-obedience entails adhering to the guidance of one's father, showing respect and obedience towards one's husband, and displaying deference to one's son in the event of the husband's passing. On the other hand, the four virtues encompass women's responsibilities, including household chores and skills, maintaining a gentle demeanor, presenting oneself respectfully, and exhibiting qualities such as kindness, grace, and fostering good relationships. Vietnamese women are primarily tasked with looking after the family and participating in economic

development alongside their spouses. Their identity is deeply rooted in these virtues and their contributions to both the family unit and society.

Furthermore, they are taught to endure hardships and make mental and physical sacrifices (Werner, 2004). In addition, according to Confucian philosophy, men are expected to embody the noble qualities of a gentleman, such as *tri* [wisdom] and *dung* [courage]. Wisdom refers to possessing moral discernment, while courage encompasses physical and mental bravery. Men are expected to be the primary providers for their families, striving to achieve the five Confucian ideals that represent Vietnamese identity. By embodying these ideals, men earn respect and attain a higher social status. However, it is worth noting that the five Confucian ideals, particularly virtue and benevolence, also apply to women.

Based on the research conducted by Choowonglert and Ton (2021), it is evident that Vietnamese migrants exhibit a strong inclination towards the principles of Confucianism, which significantly shape their sense of self. Notably, men encounter immense societal pressure to embody the qualities of good people by actively pursuing economic prosperity and upholding the fundamental values of Confucianism, namely *tai* and *duc*. By adhering to these ideals, individuals preserve social harmony and gain admiration and esteem within Vietnamese society. A man with a genuine Vietnamese identity is expected to have the necessary qualifications for his profession, provide financial support for his family [which demonstrates *tai* and *duc*], prioritize the well-being of his loved ones [expressing *phuc*], experience favorable circumstances [having *loc*], and maintain good health [having *tho*]. As a result, Vietnamese individuals with limited education face difficulties in finding well-paying jobs and improving their economic status, leading to their marginalization in society. They often work in agriculture and face discrimination from wealthier individuals who perceive them as lacking skills. Consequently, they cannot fulfill all five aspects that reflect Confucian ideals.

Thus, many individuals migrate to Thailand, engaging in informal employment sectors that provide piece-rate wages. These migrants remit money to their families in Vietnam to improve their social status and challenge the perception of poverty and incapability. Simultaneously, sending money back to their hometown reflects the fulfillment of Confucian ideals and serves as a means of expressing the Vietnamese people's identity. Moreover, the annual and occasional return to their home country and the potential for permanent repatriation contribute to the mixture of Thai and Vietnamese cultures. This process further enhances a progressive mindset that aligns with the evolving Vietnamese identity and the influence of Confucian ideals. The subsequent section will demonstrate the process of cultural remittance and the resulting cultural hybridization that contributed to the formation of the significance associated with a place known as Lang Thai Lan.

## Cultural remittance and hybridization of Confucian practices in placemaking

Lang Thai Lan has become a significant destination for migrants seeking employment in Thailand since the 1990s. Their presence has profoundly impacted the economic, social, and cultural fabric of Lang Thai Lan and the surrounding villages, giving rise to a mixture of cultures and forming new identities. Over time, the perception of this place has changed meanings. It was initially perceived as a *lang van minh sang tao* [creative and modern village]

for repatriated Vietnamese from Thailand. However, it was then acknowledged as a village predominantly inhabited by migrant workers known as *lang lao dong Thai Lan* [Thai labor village]. It is commonly known as *Lang Thai Lan* [Thai village].

Interestingly, these migrants have managed to maintain strong ties to their roots in Thailand, resulting in a coexistence of multiple places and cultures. Escobar (2001) highlighted that the interplay between global and local forces gives rise to the localization of power and knowledge. This process of transculturality is evident in the preservation of local distinctiveness through the amalgamation of different cultural elements, the construction of new identities, and the creation of place identity.

The transnational migration network of voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese has fostered deep-seated social connections between Lang Thai Lan in Vietnam and Thailand, facilitating the movement of people and goods. The close geographical proximity of the two countries, combined with the presence of informal local labor brokers, has made it relatively easy for Vietnamese workers to extend their stay in Thailand by entering as tourists every 30 days at Thai and neighboring country border checkpoints. Private companies provide this service. These workers can also return to Vietnam whenever they wish, enhancing their mobility and flexibility (Choowonglert & Ton, 2022). The convenience of this arrangement allows Vietnamese workers to enter and exit Thailand comfortably, resulting in frequent visits to their home country every year. Some workers even choose to temporarily reside in Vietnam before returning to Thailand. As a result of these movements, new cultural practices and identities have emerged, shaped by the experiences of migration, living, and working between the two countries. These dual lives have contributed to the economic and cultural remittance, making Lang Thai Lan and nearby villages distinct. Migrants have accumulated economic, cultural, and social capital and exchanged these resources, ultimately constructing their new identities.

Vietnamese migrants employed in Thailand reside and labor in close-knit communities, simultaneously upholding their traditional cultural values rooted in Confucian principles and embracing Thai culture, thereby fostering cultural hybridity. The phenomenon of cultural hybridity plays a pivotal role in the development of a distinctive sense of place identity. In the context of Lang Thai Lan, this cultural hybridity has engendered a unique essence that distinguishes it from other places. It serves as a means of forging a novel collective identity for the inhabitants of this particular area. Examples of cultural hybridity practices that contribute to forming place identities include changing gender roles, becoming a bilingual community, managing Thai food and product retail establishments and restaurants, promoting clean places, practicing Thai culture in community celebrations, and blending Vietnamese and Thai architectural elements. These practices will be discussed in detail as follows.

## Changing the gender power and roles

The migration of Vietnamese individuals to Thailand has profoundly impacted the dynamics of gender power and roles. The authors examine the transformation of gender power and roles among a group of migrants employed in the garment manufacturing industry, covering a period of nearly three decades from 1991 to 2022. Before 2007, the majority of workers in Thai garment factories were women. However, a noticeable shift in gender composition occurred as more men began accompanying their wives and working as seamstresses. This

resulted in women assuming the role of primary breadwinners, remitting money back to their families, and acquiring greater economic influence. Additionally, women took on traditionally male responsibilities, such as investing in house repairs and construction. These changes highlight the significant shifts in traditional gender power and roles within the Vietnamese migrant community in Thailand.

As a result, men in various occupations, such as welding or mobile phone sales, experienced a decline in their economic power, earning significantly less than their female counterparts. Men began acquiring sewing skills and joining their wives in Thai garment factories to regain status. Conversations with male migrants from different backgrounds revealed that although women's work was lighter and more comfortable, it still required patience and endurance, which was unfamiliar to Vietnamese men. Additionally, it was observed that Thai male workers and workers from other countries also engaged in seamstress jobs traditionally associated with females. Importantly, this work took place indoors, reducing the risk of government intervention.

Consequently, male workers received on-the-job training, leading to a steady increase in male sewists, eventually reaching parity with female workers by the early 2010s. This shift in labor distribution challenges the traditional Confucian perspective on gender roles, which mandated strict occupational segregation. The cultural acceptance and integration of Vietnamese migrants in Thailand have played a significant role in facilitating this change. As a result, male migrants have developed hybrid identities, combining traditional values with contemporary ideals.

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

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

*Despite the COVID-19 outbreak, I recognized a lucrative opportunity due to the closure of numerous vegetable stores, resulting in a six-fold increase*

*in customers at my vegetable stall. I emphasized the significant financial loss that would have occurred if I had closed my stall. Consequently, I made the decision for him (her husband) to return home while I remained in Thailand, believing that returning home would be straightforward but re-entering Thailand would be challenging. He (her husband) concurred with my assessment. Our decision to have him (her husband) return to Vietnam while I stayed in Thailand proved to be correct.*

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

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

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

Thus, the female entrepreneur cases mentioned above delve into the shifting gender roles and the transformation of identities among migrants. Female migrant workers exhibit qualities of endurance and sacrifice, traditionally associated with women, as they contribute to the economic well-being of their families. This exemplifies the four tu duc [virtues] and the creation of phuc [blessings] for their families. On the other hand, the male individual who changed careers to become a seamstress and achieved economic success was commended for his tai [skill] and tri [intelligence]. He also received recognition for valuing his wife's opinions and assisting with household chores, demonstrating his moral duc [virtue]. Consequently, the household thrived and experienced phuc, leading to loc [prosperity].

Moreover, the fact that both men and women work in the same occupation promotes equality, such as being primary earners and sharing household responsibilities. This enables them to accumulate economic capital, particularly in constructing large, spacious concrete houses, rather than solely relying on a single breadwinner. This reflects the tai of men and underscores the tai of women. The presence of these expansive concrete houses makes Lang Thai Lan a symbol of wealth, which is evident from the grandeur of its architecture.

## Becoming bilingual community

Lang Thai Lan is a remarkable bilingual community, with its residents proficiently speaking Vietnamese and Thai. During our field survey in Lang Thai Lan, the authors observed that people fluidly utilize both languages daily. They often combine Thai words such as *nee le, nan le, nun, khap, dai, mai dai, leu* [here, therefore, those, yes, can, cannot, so] into their sentences. This bilingual proficiency has become common among local Vietnamese individuals who have never visited Thailand. They are familiar with Thai words and common phrases like *thao rai pi* [How much does it cost?] and *khop khun mak* [Thank you very much]. However, the practice of bilingual communication has been embraced by repatriated Vietnamese since the mid-1960s. It has become a crucial asset for them to establish and expand their labor network in Thailand since the 1990s, enabling the people of Lang Thai Lan to seek employment opportunities in Thailand. This implies that they possess the capacity to generate economic prospects.

In Thailand, Vietnamese migrants exhibit a distinct approach compared to foreign workers in neighboring countries, as they actively strive to assimilate into Thai society to avoid the feeling among the Thai that they are outsiders. They employ various strategies, such as attaining fluency in the Thai language, adopting Thai attire, embracing Thai cuisine, and even adopting Thai names. These practices are crucial for securing long-term employment and gaining acceptance from Thai contractors and residents. Within the initial years of working for Thai employers, most migrant workers become proficient in Thai and develop a more harmonious and calming speech pattern, distinct from the nasal, assertive, and rapid tone commonly associated with native Vietnamese speakers. By embracing Thai culture and language, these migrants can seamlessly integrate into Thai society, maintain job stability, and avoid conflicts with Thai locals.

Furthermore, this enables them to expand their professional network within Thailand. This strategic approach greatly aids Vietnamese migrants in Thailand in terms of their survival, accumulation of cultural capital, conversion of cultural capital into economic capital, and creation of opportunities to become self-employed contractors with their employees. This also reflects the Confucian practices of accumulating tai.

Due to their frequent travels between Vietnam and Thailand, they have a strong interest in news related to social, political, cultural, and economic changes in Thailand. Speaking both languages allows them to express their Thai identity. In Vietnam, they showcase their differences through Thai language practices. During the village's annual New Year party, they enjoy Thai-style food and drinks, sing songs, and perform Thai dances. They gather afterward to discuss their experiences living in Thailand and Vietnam. They closely follow news from Thailand, notably the transition from a military to a civilian government and the 2019 elections, which significantly impact their livelihoods. Their ability to seamlessly combine two languages showcases their linguistic prowess and defines Lang Thai Lan as a bilingual community with unique cultural hybridity.

## Managing Thai food and product retail establishments and restaurants

Lang Thai Lan, renowned in Thanh Hoa province and the surrounding districts for its extensive array of Thai restaurants and shops, is pivotal in promoting Thai culture and attracting Thai cuisine enthusiasts. Within this vibrant enclave, three prominent businesses specialize in Thai goods, 12 small grocery stores, and numerous market stalls offer an extensive selection of Thai products. Lang Thai Lan can be described as a mini Thai society, affectionately referred to as the Thai Village by the local Vietnamese community. This unique identity has emerged through cultural hybridization and the presence of Vietnamese individuals who have embraced Thai cuisine and upheld culinary traditions even after returning to Vietnam. These individuals also strongly prefer Thai skincare products, cosmetics, and other goods, leveraging their knowledge of Thai cuisine and trading networks to foster economic growth. As a result, Lang Thai Lan has earned a well-deserved reputation for offering authentic Thai products, distinguishing it from neighboring areas.

These goods are procured from wholesale supermarkets located in Thailand. They are then transported across the border with the assistance of local brokers who facilitate the movement of Vietnamese migrants to Bangkok. Upon returning to Vietnam, these brokers manage the transportation of the goods to Lang Thai Lan. Subsequently, the goods are distributed to multiple shops and stalls within that area. During their stay in the village, the authors had the opportunity to relish authentic Thai cuisine and partake in consuming Thai products, which created an experience that evoked a sense of being in Thailand. Thai delicacies such as *lap moo* [pork chop salad], *som tam* [papaya salad], *tom yum* [spicy Thai curry], and *lod chong* [a type of Thai dessert] are readily available.

Consequently, the number of shops selling Thai goods has witnessed a steady rise, extending to the surrounding areas of Ben Sung town. Many residents express that visiting Lang Thai Lan is synonymous with visiting Thailand. This reflects the diverse professional development abilities [having tai] by combining Thai and commonly available Vietnamese culinary products.

## Promoting clean place

People prioritize environmental protection in Lang Thai Lan, especially in Ben Sung municipality. Vietnamese individuals who have returned home have influenced the community with their cleanliness habits and the tradition of decorating homes and public spaces with flowers. This promotes good health, discourages littering, and enhances the beauty of homes and neighborhoods with trees and flowers. They go beyond government officials' requests to clean public spaces. The village and municipality stand out for their distinctive Thai-produced trash bins in front of each household, showcasing Thailand's cultural identity. This unique aspect can only be observed in Lang Thai Lan and Ben Sung towns compared to neighboring areas, which are exceptional in their pristine and visually pleasing living environment. The clean streets represent the community's distinct values and emerging cultural norms.

Since 2018, Saturday afternoons have been designated the day for communal cleaning in Lang Thai Lan and Ben Sung town. Every week at 5:15 p.m., all households gather to enhance street cleanliness through tidying efforts. This cultural practice showcases their responsibility and solidarity, contributing to the village's identity. The residents' conscientiousness in preserving the environment is impressive, especially in the rural upland regions where environmental awareness is often lacking. Both former inhabitants and migrants from Thailand exemplify their commitment to a clean, green, and beautiful community. The proactive involvement of individuals residing in such areas, as they collectively address the responsibility of maintaining cleanliness in public spaces, exemplifies their innate *duc* [moral principles]. Consequently, this collective endeavor actively contributes to the overall improvement of cleanliness within the community, thereby cultivating a profound sense of *phuc* [pride and contentment] amongst its inhabitants.

## Practicing Thai culture in community celebrations

Arranging celebrations incorporating Thai culture has become common among both voluntarily repatriated Vietnamese and migrants in Thailand. They are strongly inclined to adopt the Thai dressing style to embrace the local culture. Similarly, they have grown accustomed to dressing in Thai fashion in Vietnam. Furthermore, during cultural events such as weddings, New Year celebrations, and village sports competitions, they actively opt to wear Thai-style clothing, indulge in Thai cuisine and beverages, listen to Thai music, and even practice *rum wong* [Thai dance forms], all to assert their distinct identity.

For migrants, adopting Thai dressing, eating, and drinking styles while residing in Thailand is perceived as a means to blend and integrate into the broader fabric of Thai society. As a result, a new cultural trait has emerged among Vietnamese migrants, who are gradually embracing Thailand's vibrant and breezy fashion style. Significantly, during the authors' observations at the New Year party in 2020, it was evident that only repatriated Vietnamese from Lang Thai Lan and other districts in Thanh Hoa province were given invitations. Notably, all repatriated individuals were observed donning costumes that intricately depicted the fashion styles they used to wear during their time in Thailand. Women often wore dresses adorned with bright white pearls, enhancing their beauty. Some even went as far as wearing luxurious fur hats combined with short, curly hairstyles, a departure from traditional Vietnamese costumes.

On the other hand, men opted for vests, ties, and prominent leather hats, showcasing their sophistication. Although viewed as unusual by the locals, this distinctive dressing style easily distinguishes the repatriated Vietnamese from other Vietnamese individuals. However, by embracing the Thai fashion style, repatriated Vietnamese can showcase their unique identity hybridity of Vietnamese and Thai cultures. This expression of uniqueness brings them a sense of pride, sometimes leading to a feeling of superiority towards the locals.

## Blending Vietnamese and Thai architectural elements

In the Lang Thai Lan, including Ben Sung municipality, it is common for villagers to construct houses that incorporate Vietnamese and Thai architectural elements. These houses combine the distinctive Vietnamese architectural framework with a Thai-style roof design featuring

open gables. Unlike traditional Vietnamese houses with concrete roofs, these houses reflect the villagers' preference for convenient and spacious living, reminiscent of their time in Thailand. For example, Thanh's (pseudonym) house splendidly exhibits a harmonious blend of Vietnamese and Thai architectural elements. While the first and second floors adhere to Vietnamese design principles, the roof adopts a Thai architectural style. Moreover, the 3rd floor is often left open, and the roof is typically made of steel frame and tiled, deviating from the concrete or corrugated iron roofs commonly found in local houses. The main characteristic of this design is the use of stacked tiles with a sloping structure.

Another notable example is Linh's house, named under the pseudonym, showcasing predominantly Thai-style architecture. The roof predominantly consists of materials sourced from Thailand and imported to Vietnam. Despite possessing sufficient financial means to construct a multi-story dwelling, Linh opted for a single-story house, deviating from the prevailing inclination of Vietnamese individuals who often choose multi-story residences when financial resources permit. Moreover, Linh's house encompasses a spacious garden, reflecting a preference for substantial land area akin to Thai cultural inclinations. Conversely, Vietnamese individuals prioritize investing in additional floors rather than acquiring expansive land.

Additionally, the house fence in this locality adopts a sliding design reminiscent of the Thai architectural style, in contrast to the open-design fences commonly observed in Vietnam. This amalgamation of contemporary Thai consumer preferences with local culture is evident in the architectural design of these Thai-inspired houses, distinguishing Lang Thai Lan from other places in Vietnam. When our friend from Hanoi visited this area, he was profoundly struck by its uniqueness, commenting that it stands apart from any other place in Vietnam.

## Conclusion and discussion

For several decades, extensive research studies have examined the correlation between religion and remittance. These studies have primarily investigated various factors such as moral principles, reciprocal obligations, familial ties, and gender identity concerning remittance (Anh, 2016; Anh & Yeoh, 2011; Pfau & Giang, 2009; Phan & Coxhead, 2019; Stevanovic-Fenn, 2012; Yeoh et al., 2013). This article is intended to further explore these issues by delving deeper into the multifaceted identities of migrants influenced by Confucianism, thereby contributing to the emergence of a hybrid culture and the establishment of a distinctive place known as Lang Thai Lan. This study, grounded in comprehensive research, elucidates four pivotal concerns and derives significant findings.

Firstly, the Confucian practices of migrants encompass the notions of self-exploitation, diligent work, capital accumulation, and sending remittances to their hometowns. These practices not only reflect their economic capabilities [tai/tri], virtues [duc], and overall well-being [phuc] but also go beyond the mere obligation of monetary support for their families. Migrants also adopt Thai products, mindsets, and cultural practices in their home country, establishing a dynamic hybridization with the local culture. This cultural hybridity expands the boundaries of Confucian ideals, particularly in terms of prosperity [tai] and moral conduct [duc]. Consequently, the inhabitants of Lang Thai Lan exhibit a more distinctive way of life, cultural aspects, and mindset compared to other neighborhoods in the Nhu Thanh district and its surrounding areas.

Thus, Confucianism plays a pivotal role in preserving culture for migrants, enabling them to attain their social and cultural objectives through economic success in the informal sector. This aligns with Bourdieu's notion of capital (Erel, 2010) and reinforces the Vietnamese migrants' association with being *nguoï gioï* [good people]. In Vietnamese society, masculinity is dominant, motivating men to work diligently and exhibit leadership roles within the family by embodying specific qualities (Anh & Yeoh, 2011). Conversely, femininity in Vietnamese culture underscores moral and social obligations, prioritizing the family's well-being over individual desires (Anh, 2016). For the authors, these ideals and social norms, influenced by Confucianism, serve as the impetus for migrants' diligent efforts and self-exploitation, reflecting the moral fabric [*duc*] within their families.

Secondly, the continuous travel between Thailand and Vietnam by multiple generations since the late 1980s, as well as the back-and-forth travel within one's lifetime over a decade, has resulted in the inhabitants of Lang Thai Lan leading what can be described as dual lives. This phenomenon of dual living allows Vietnamese migrants to enhance their cultural identity and fosters transculturality, creating a space of multiple connections or hybridization between Thai and local cultures. This amalgamation of cultures highlights the Vietnamese people's unique characteristics, leading to a new cultural identity and a hybridized culture. Ultimately, by opting for transnational lives, Vietnamese migrants can uphold Confucian ideals and construct their new identities.

Thirdly, when examining the situation in its place of origin through the process of placemaking, it becomes evident that Lang Thai Lan is not a static or homogeneous place, consistent with Massey's (2001) concept of a progressive place. Even after Vietnamese migrants willingly returned, both they and their descendants continued to migrate to Thailand. This expands the scope of Lang Thai Lan beyond its physical boundaries, encompassing the movement of individuals and the circulation of ideas and objects (Cresswell, 2014; Kyle & Chick, 2007; Massey, 1994). The concept of transculturalism highlights the dynamic, progressive, and contested nature of Lang Thai Lan. The interaction between cultural remittance and the local culture has resulted in the hybridization of culture, leading to the emergence of new place identities in Vietnam, as observed in social and cultural aspects such as architecture (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2000) and symbolization (Juan, 2005; Kyle & Chick, 2007). Cultural identity is intricately linked to place, enabling people to distinguish themselves through everyday practices (Escobar, 2001).

Finally, politically, Lang Thai Lan has transformed from being perceived as a 'dwelling of traitors and outsiders' to a place where people actively shape a more outstanding, modern, and wealthy. Furthermore, the transculturality process also leads to a new gender identity that does not conflict with the traditional social order of Vietnam influenced by Confucianism, allowing voluntarily repatriated women and female migrants more power in expressing their opinions within the family and fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. This represents a contesting space of gender equality. However, women who have never stayed in Thailand find negotiating with the social order and cultural norms challenging to realize their power. This progressive shift expands the definition of what it means to be good people based on Confucian ideals.

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## Ethical approval

This study received certification from Naresuan University's Institutional Review Board (IRB No. P2-0191/2565, COA No. 223/2022).

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