

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Chain Migration through Social Networks: Case Study of Vietnamese Migrants in Thailand

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Abstract. The paper aims to investigate the relationship between the recent increasingly pattern of Vietnamese migrants in Thailand and migration networks. By surveying 50 Vietnamese migrants in Bangkok, Thailand, the study confirms that migration networks have played a critical role in facilitating migration flows, especially irregular flows from Vietnam to Thailand over the years. It can be reflected by reducing the cost of migration, coping with new working environment and risks during working in Thailand and ensuring the return process for Vietnamese migrants. Moreover, forms of social networks includes personal networks (kinship and friendship networks), and community network (*người dẫn đường's* network, social media) has been also discussed. The study also implies that the *người dẫn đường's* networks might contribute to recently emerging issues such as human trafficking and smugglings, which require further research.

Keywords: *social networks, Vietnamese migrants, international migration, Thailand*

1. Introduction

According to the Department of Labor – Invalid and Social Affairs in Ha Tinh Province, Vietnam, the number of Ha Tinh inhabitant emigrated to Thailand might reach 10,000. Surprisingly, there are communes where almost all of the working-age people have been working in Thailand. My Loc commune in Can Loc district, Ha Tinh province, is a stark example, where more than 1,000 inhabitants have been

working in Thailand among its total population of 7,800.¹ Similar situations can also be found in other Northern Central region of Vietnam such as Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, and Quang Tri provinces, which are very close to the borderline with Lao PDR. In fact, there has no formal statistic existence on the number of Vietnamese migrants in Thailand since most of them are irregular migrants.² The fact, thus, raises questions why and how Vietnamese migrants migrate to Thailand and how they can adapt with a new environment since there has many differences in language and culture between two countries.

In explaining reasons people migration, various theories have been given such as neo-classical economic theory, the new economics of migration theory, and the network theory, etc. Of which, social networks can be considered a central component in migration system analysis (Boyd 1989). The study, thus, is expected to figure out the role of social network in facilitating people movements from Vietnam to Thailand in recent years in order to understand more the patterns of Vietnamese migrants in Thailand.

2. Literature review

There has been a number of studies, both theoretically and empirically, which affirmed the role of social network in facilitating international migration.

Theoretically, social networks has been considered as a form of social capital that the non-migrants can rely on their interpersonal ties of kinship, friendship or shared community in looking for abroad employment (Massey et al. 1993, Boyd 1989). According to Massey (1993), the role of social networks can be manifested clearly in lowering the costs and risks of migration process as well as ensuring higher possibilities of returning. Particularly, the costs and risks relate to travelling, employment search, settlement and adaptation a new culture, arrest

1 There are nearly 100% of the working age people in Nhat Tan ward, a ward in Can Loc commune of Ha Tinh province who have been working in Thailand. Source: Tran Long (2015), *Lao dong chuitrendat Thai – Con sot chua ha nhiet* (Working illegally in Thailand – The fever has not been cooled down). Ha Tinh online. January 15 2015. Retrieved from: <http://baohatinh.vn/news/lao-dong-viec-lam/lao-dong-chui-tren-dat-thai-con-sot-chua-ha-nhiet/91432>.

2 An estimation that Vietnamese Ambassador in Bangkok Nguyen Tat Thanh cited from the Royal Thai Police in an interview were nearly 50,000 Vietnamese migrant workers for the period of 2012-2014. The interview with Vietnamese Ambassador Nguyen Tat Thanh can be founded at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1dLK8fvkWM>

and deportation, etc. The study applied the Massey's approach in exploring whether or not social networks of Vietnamese migrants in Thailand are able to reduce costs and risks for migration process.

There has been various empirical studies which has been primarily explored Mexican migrants' networks in United States (Deléchat 2001, McKenzie and Rapoport 2007, Winters, De Janvry, and Sadoulet 2001, Choldin 1973, Palloni et al. 2001, Dolfin and Genicot 2010). Studies on social networks, in addition, has also been conducted for the case of Bangladesh immigrants (Rashid 2012), immigrants in Kuwait (Shah and Menon 1999), Srilanka immigrants (Gunatilleke 1998), Nepalis migrant in India (Thieme 2006). Generally, the above empirical researches consistently recognized the importance of social networks and connections in motivating non-migrants' decision to migrate (Winters, De Janvry, and Sadoulet 2001), contributing to reduce costs of migration process and then easing the inequality among migrant's groups (McKenzie and Rapoport 2007).

There has been also a need in distinguishing on specific effects of forms of social networks on migration (Boyd 1989). The forms of social networks, thus, have been also studies separately. Of which, several empirical studies on the importance of personal networks, kinship in particular, in the migration behavior and process can be listed such as (Choldin 1973, Shah and Menon 1999, Boyd 1989). Several other studies, in contrast, favours the role of community network (Winters, De Janvry, and Sadoulet 2001, Dolfin and Genicot 2010). For example, Winters, De Janvry, and Sadoulet (2001) distinguishes the effects of family and community networks on the Mexican migrant's decision and level of migration. The study finds that the community network would play more important role for migration than the former when a migration is well-established in the destination. Moreover, individuals' migratory decision will be strongly influenced by a sound community network rather than their family background.

There are very few studies exploring the patterns of Vietnamese migrants in general and the role of Vietnamese immigrants' networks in Thailand in particular. A study of (SRIKHAM 2012) argued that community network which has been formed by a long standing oversea Vietnamese in Thailand, namely *Youn Kao* and *Youn Op PhaYop* has offered employment for younger Vietnamese generation due to the mutual nationalistic sympathy. Moreover, newly Vietnamese migrants are usually received better treatments from the Vietnamese Thai employers such as free accommodation, foods, training, visa extension fees,

etc. (Nguyen and Walsh 2014, SRIKHAM 2012). However, it is noted that Srikham's case study which is conducted in Ubon Rachathani, where a large original group of Vietnamese entering Thailand during the Vietnam war, would not be able to comprehensively cover the pattern of Vietnamese immigrants in Thailand, particularly in Bangkok. The role of kinship and friendship networks have still been received less attention in studies of migration networks from Vietnam to Thailand. Therefore, the study is expected to fill in the gaps, which results in contributing to more empirical evidences in exploring the importance of migration networks of Vietnamese in Thailand.

3. Research Methodology

The study involved a combination both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research procedure includes the following steps.

Desk Research

At the first step, secondary data and information was gathered from related studies and newspapers. Moreover, data and information will be also collected and analyzed from sources of social media such as Facebook which has been established by the migrants themselves.

Fieldwork

Sampling Method

The study choose Bangkok, Thailand as a case study in order to collect primary data. The size of the sample is 50 workers. The surveyed migrants have been chosen based on the following criteria: (i) They are not oversea Vietnamese; (ii) The migrants have been working in Thailand for at least 2 months; and (iii) The surveyed respondents are both employed and self-employed migrants. Accordingly, the sample includes 12 garment workers, 13 waiters/waitress, 1 domestic helper, 4 salespersons, 1 IT staff, and 19 street vendors.

Data Collection

The purposive and snowball sampling techniques were applied to choose the respondents since the approach to Vietnamese migrants became the most challenge due mainly to their illegal status. Some of migrants refused to provide information about their situation because they think these information would put them into danger as Thai police define their illegal situation. Thus, the study used the techniques and referral from the

migrant workers to locate his counterpart who meet the requirements of the study.

The primary data collection was collected based on face-to-face discussions and structured interviews. Besides, in-depth interviews were also conducted of 9 key interviewees from the fieldwork.

The fieldwork was conducted from 8th December 2015 to 26th January 2016. Many interviews were undertaken either on Sunday or evenings when the migrants finished their work. Especially, interviews with some garment workers were conducted as they were working because they did not have time for interviewing outside the working place.

The surveys and interviews were undertaken in Vietnamese because it used as mother tongue of the researcher and the respondents. The advantage helped the researcher to get better information and save the time. However, it is noted that some elderly migrants who come from rural area in Ha Tinh province speak Vietnamese with their local dialect so that it took time for the researcher to ask again to make sure the exact of information.

4. Research findings

Background of the surveyed migrants

Age and gender

The age of the surveyed migrants is ranged from 21 to 51 years old. As shown in Figure 1, more than half of the migrants surveyed (54%) were in the 25-34 age group, followed by the 34-44 group, the 15-24 group and the oldest age group (45-54 years old), respectively. Apart from the 34-44 age group, there were more male than female migrants in almost other age groups (Figure 1).

Place of origin

The surveyed migrants come from various provinces and cities of Vietnam. However, the majority of them came from rural regions in Northern Central Coast provinces, namely Ha Tinh and Thanh Hoa, accounting for 84 per cent of the sample. Notably, some 10 per cent came from periphery areas of big cities of Vietnam, including Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh and Vung Tau that its economic development also based mainly on agricultural sector (Table 1).

Figure 1 Age categories of surveyed migrants by gender

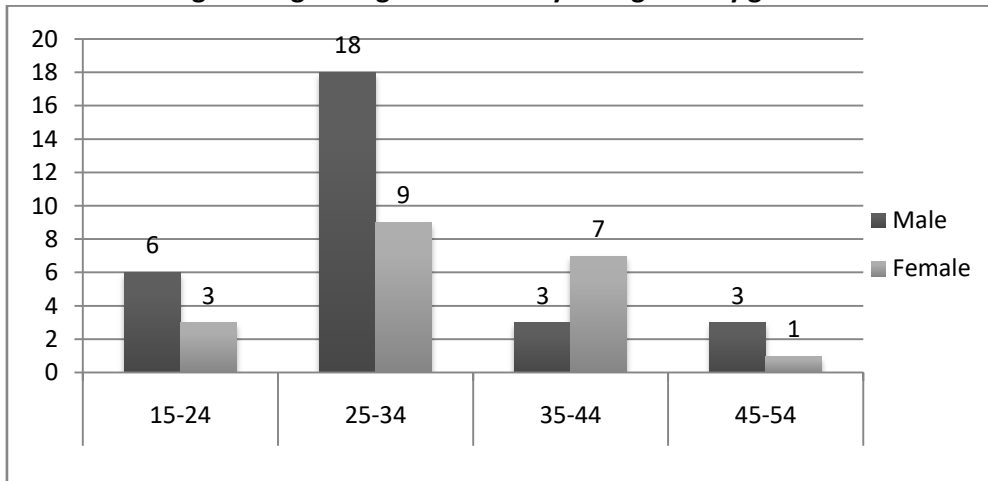


Table 1 Place of origin of surveyed migrants

Place of origin	Frequency	Percent
Ha Tinh	28	56.0
ThanhHoa	14	28.0
QuangBinh	1	2.0
Vung Tau	1	2.0
Ho Chi Minh city	1	2.0
Hanoi	3	6.0
Quang Tri	1	2.0
HoaBinh	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 2 Marital status of surveyed migrants

Marital status	Frequency	Percent
Single	9	18.0
Married	35	70.0
Divorced	6	12.0
Total	50	100.0

Family status

A majority (70 per cent) of the surveyed migrants reported that they got married. Of which, many young couple migrants are working either the same job or different job in Bangkok. The single group who are from 15 to 24 years old making up 18 per cent. The remaining 12 per cent of the surveyed migrants were

divorced (Table 2). Among the respondents, 70 per cent had at least one child. Notably, the shares of migrants who have three children also make up 10 per cent. This proves that almost the migrants have a number of dependent persons (Table 3).

Table 3 Number of children of surveyed migrants

Number of children	Frequency	Percent
0	15	30.0
1	13	26.0
2	17	34.0
3	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0

Education level

Of the 50 surveyed migrants, 64 per cent were at the lower levels of education attainment (none, primary and lower secondary education), followed by upper secondary and university education attainment, 34 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively. Mr. Thanh, 28 years old, from Quang Tri province work as a IT staff at a Thai computer company is the only respondent holding a university degree. He graduated from RajabhatUdonthani University in UdonThani province. Then, after graduation, with his Thai skills fluency, he applied for a job at a Thai computer company (Table 4).

Table 4 Education level of surveyed migrants

Education level	Frequency	Percent
None	2	4.0
Primary	7	14.0
Lower secondary	23	46.0
Upper secondary	17	34.0
University degree	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

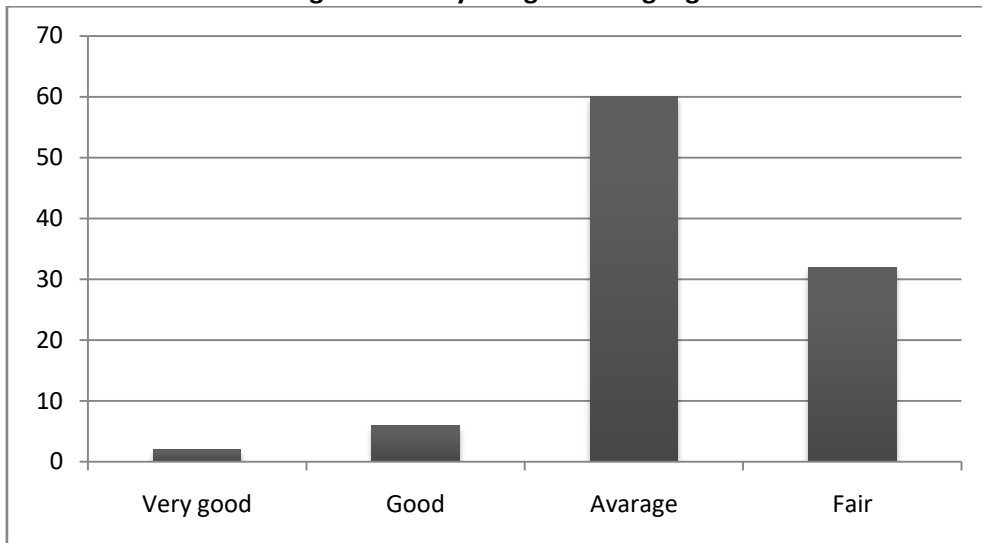
Documentation status and ability using Thai language

A majority (90 per cent) of the Vietnamese migrants have entered and stayed legally in Thailand. Some 8 per cent are currently staying illegally due to overstay. The remaining 2 per cent of respondents reports that they lost their passports during working here. However, all the respondents can be also arrested

since they have not been granted a working permit from the Thai government.

In term of Thai language, apart from the case of Mr. Thanh above, a number of the respondents (66 per cent) can be able to communicate basically with Thai people, but cannot write and read in Thai. The remaining respondents (32 per cent) just can be able to communicate limited words (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Ability using Thai Language



Migratory history

The respondents were able to engage various kinds of employments in Vietnam. Of which, a higher share of them used to work in agricultural sector, garment and textile industries, and construction. There are also some migrants who either unemployment or migrated to Thailand after upper secondary completion.

Among the respondents, 70 per cent had been migrated to work in other cities and provinces in Vietnam, focusing mainly on big cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Vung Tau and Binh Duong. Of which, 20 per cent of them had been working abroad, including Russia, Lao PDR, Malaysia and Cambodia.

Around 66 per cent of the surveyed migrants reported that they have been in Thailand for 1-5 years. Interestingly, 22 per cent of the respondents have been here for more than 5 years. Among the surveyed migrants, 72 per cent of them reported that Bangkok is the first working, focusing on those who are street vendors, waiters/waitress, or salespersons. However, garment workers indicated

that Phuket was the first working place since the province was supposed to be attract as many as orders from foreigners. The case of Mr. Thanh started his job in UdonThani. The other case is started from NakhonPhanom.

Assistance received prior to and during the first trip to Thailand

How to get to know employment information in Thailand?

According to the surveys, 83 per cent of surveyed migrants reported that they were informed information on employment in Bangkok through their relatives (41 per cent) and friends (42 per cent), followed by their own and facilitators or *người dẫn đường*³, 12 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively.

Who assisted you for the first trip to Thailand?

More than 80 per cent of the surveyed migrants indicated that their first trip to Thailand were escorted by their relatives and friends (50 per cent) and *người dẫn đường* (32 per cent). Among the respondents, garment workers and street vendors were more likely to receive assistance from their personal networks (Table 5). The remaining (18 per cent) migrants were went to Thailand without any assistance during the movement.

Table 5 Company during the first trip

Occupation	Relatives/Friend	Alone	Broker	Total
Garment	7	1	4	12
Waiter/Waitress	5	3	5	13
Domestic worker	0	1	0	1
Street vendors	11	3	5	19
Sale persons	2	0	2	4
Other	0	1	0	1
Total	25	9	16	50

3 According to the surveys, the migrants indicated that facilitators (*người dẫn đường*) are usually Vietnamese who had been in Thailand for a long time. They offer various services from assisting migrants to entry into Thailand, finding a job and settlement, handling visas and assisting migrants who either overstay or lost their passports to go back Vietnam. In this study, these formation of facilitators or *người dẫn đường*'s networks can be seen as a representative for community network.

Costs of the first trip

Those who were escorted by their relatives and friends would just be charged for travel cost including bus fees and meals during the movement. The surveys revealed that for several migrants whom their parents or brothers had been working in Thailand, their expenses were also fully covered by their relatives. As the case of Mr. Thai, 20 years old, from Thach That District, Hanoi. His parents have already worked in Nakhon Phanom province, Thailand for 15 years. After completing the undergraduate degree, he wanted to follow his parents to work in Thailand. His father went back Vietnam to pick him up to Thailand.

A majority of the migrant who migrated to Thailand by themselves were received assistance from their relatives and friends upon their arrival. Meanwhile, those who were assisted by *người dẫn đường's network* reported that they had been charged an extra money as a service fee apart from the travel costs. They usually had to pay fully the amount of money in advance.

Ms. Tam, 34 years old, from Ha Tinh province. She is currently a street vendor at Hua Lam Phong temple area. She has already been worked in Bangkok for over 4 years.

You are also able to pay partially prior to the first trip, then the rest of the money would be paid after one month arrival. Otherwise, it would becomes a loan which you will be charged an interest that similar to the bank's interest.

These migrants usually were either little connection or do not have any friends or relatives in Thailand.

Assistance received upon arrival

Upon their arrival, the newly migrants are supposed to face various difficulties and challenges since communication language are completely different. The section sheds light the role of social networks in searching accommodation and jobs as well as helping them to adapt with the new environment.

Accommodation

A majority of the respondents (88 per cent) reported that they stay with their relatives or friends (88 per cent), the remaining of the sample who assisted by *người dẫn đường's network* were usually arranged to stay with other Vietnamese migrants coming from the same province in Vietnam. In several cases, *người dẫn*

đường's network helped the newly arrived migrants who want stay alone to communicate with the owner of apartment for hiring a room. Among the migrants, the garment and domestic workers reported that they had not experienced struggles in the issue since their accommodation are often provided freely within their employers' house. Meanwhile, normally, the other newly migrants, particularly street vendors and salespersons were previously arranged to stay with their relatives or friends.

Job search

All the surveyed migrants whom either their relatives or friends were working in Thailand said that they had been arranged a job upon arrival. Their job were either their relatives and friends' jobs, particularly street vending and garment work or other jobs that working location are not far from their living location such as salespersons. The migration networks, kinship and friendship networks in particular, thus, usually results in the concentration of migrants at the same occupations or establishments. In the study, the surveyed garment workers have been found mainly in Phetchaburi and Sukhumvit areas, while a majority of the street vendors converged around Silom and Hua Lam Phong areas and the surveyed salespersons at Samyan markets. Meanwhile, the remaining migrants usually wait for few days till a week to get a job from *người dẫn đường*. The migrants were usually introduced to work as waiters/waitress at food stalls or restaurants.

Integrating into the new environment

Upon the initial settlements, the newly migrants would take time to adapt with working environment as well as life style of Thai people. Their adaptation ability depends on various factors such as their learning skills, assistance from social networks, previous migration experience, etc. It is, however, noted that those who are self-employed migrants are more likely to quickly adapt to the environment than other migrants since their working location are extremely exposed to police. The surveys indicated that in order to become a street vendor, they were consistently received guidance from their personal networks, especially from their relatives. Due to the job's characteristic, they have to know where to buy materials, how to communicate with buyers in Thai, and how to cope with risks of arrest during selling.

Ms. Tam said:

The hotter it is, the more buyers come. I can withstand the heat on the street. But I am afraid of raining because I would not able to have customers. Moreover, finding a

good selling place is not easy because there are also Thai and other nationals sellers. I usually sell at Silom area. Each month I have to pay 1,000 THB for that selling area. At the weekends, I usually move to sell at the Hua Lam Phong temple because there are more people coming that area for visit the temple. But, I have also pay for a security guard 500 THB per day.

Ms. Mai, 36 years old, a street vendor at Silom area for more than 10 years said:

I was arrested many times since I have sold here. But I was not deported to Vietnam because thanks to her brother in law. He got married with my fourth young sister. He has been living in Bangkok more than 20 years and has made acquaintance with local police. We just gave 5,000 THB for them in order to being released. So each time when I was arrested, I just call him coming for ransom. For the others, they would get more trouble. They have to ask a Thai an advance payment of 50,000 THB for ransom, called “Pa kan”. Otherwise, they would be confined for 48 days before being trial at court. Then, they would be deported to Vietnam.

The study also revealed that many cases of the surveyed vendors, a monthly fee 3,000-4,000 THB per person will be collected and submitted to Ms. Mai’s brother in law. He is responsible for working with local police, getting small stamps provided by them as a sign for ensuring their rights for selling, and distributing these stamps to vendors. Besides, the surveyed vendors also said that their ice-cream material is also imported from his own ice-cream establishment.

Visa extension

Since Vietnamese migrants entry into Thailand as a tourist, they need to leave the country after 30 days.⁴ According to the surveys, there is a Thai company offering visa extension services (“tò” visa) for migrants. Instead coming back Vietnam, they just need to leave the country at Cambodia or Laos border gates and then make a reentry in order to stay legally in Thailand. The costs for the service depend on frequencies of entries into Thailand. For those who has the first passport stamp or “new passport”, they just have to pay around 700-1,000 THB. The cost will be 2-3 times higher than the first time for those who has more than two stamps in their passport or “old passport”. Normally, it usually took them about 1-2 days before going back Bangkok.

A majority of the surveyed migrants reported that they do not want to stay

4 Under the tourist visa exemption scheme, Vietnamese nationals are allowed visit to Thailand without a visa with stay period up to 30 days. Source: Department of Consular Affairs, <http://www.immigration.go.th/nov2004/doc/services.pdf>

illegally because they would be able to face many risks such as being arrested by police, etc. Some of the surveyed employed migrants has been given either fully or partly the cost by their employers.

Returning

Of the surveyed migrants, a majority (76 per cent) of them travel back to Vietnam 1-2 times a year. There were 10 per cent of respondents go back Vietnam from 3-5 times. These migrants reported that no matter how busy they are, they would still go back with family and friends to celebrate Lunar New Year (traditional or “Tết” new year) and death anniversaries of their family members. Meanwhile, the remaining (14 per cent) of the migrants said that they did not travel back. The surveys indicated that those who do “tò” visa monthly would be easy for return process, while the opposite is true for migrants who either overstayed in Thailand or do not any documentation. It is, however, noted that such migrants are still be able to travel back and forth by assistance of *ngườidẫndường’s* network. The costs such migrants paid for *ngườidẫndường’s* network usually 4- 5 times higher than that of the other migrants (around 10,000 Baht).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the above findings, the section provides the main following discussion. Firstly, it is argued that the role of social networks has been manifested differently among the migration process and the employment types of migrants. As mentioned above, the migration process can be divided into three main steps: prior and during the movement, upon arrival, and returning. In general, a majority of the surveyed migrants have been supported by kinship or friendship networks at the initial migration process. It is, however, noted that those who are street vendors are more likely to depend much on community network upon their arrival due to their business operation. Moreover, the *ngườidẫndường’s* network has also played an important role in addressing risks of arrests and deportation as well as ensuring the return process for migrants. Importantly, the surveys also revealed that the *ngườidẫndường’s* network has helped remittances transfer for migrants. The cost for transferring each 10,000 Baht is 300 Baht.

Secondly, it is possible that those with a higher level of education are less likely to be assisted by social networks, probably because the possibilities of such

migrants getting a job directly from the employers are greater. The case of Mr. Thanh was the only case holding a university degree. After graduation from Rajabhat Udonthani University in Udon Thani province, with his Thai skills fluency, he himself applied for a job at a Thai computer company in Bangkok, then has been directly recruited with a IT staff position. Meanwhile, on the other hand, those with low education attainment and social capital are more likely to be charged much more others, or even possibly become victims of tricks, human trafficking, or abuses from many unreliable *người dẫn đường's* network.

Thirdly, the role of community network has also been manifested by social media, especially Facebook that provide a convenience channel for migrants in referencing employment, sharing their homesickness, or even learning Thai language, etc. However, it remains potential risks since there has been no guaranteed on such information.

In conclusion, it is undeniable that social networks have played a critical role in ensuring successful migration from Vietnam to Thailand. The role can be clearly manifested in facilitating Vietnamese migrants for the first trip as well as helping them to cope with new working environment and risks during working in Bangkok and ensuring the return process. It is believed that with limited education background and Thai language skills, newly Vietnamese migrants would be difficult to adapt with a new lifestyle of Bangkok people as well as cope with challenges and risks under their illegal status without the guidance and assistance of the formal migrants. Forms of social networks includes personal networks (kinship and friendship networks), and community network (*người dẫn đường's* network, social media) has played different roles in facilitating migration flows between Vietnam and Thailand. It is, however, expected that the negative impacts of *người dẫn đường's* network would be explored in the future research that eliminates the issues of human trafficking and smuggling between two countries.

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