

COMPLETION REPORT

Socio-economic re-adaptation of Vietnamese workers after returning from Japan

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Japan has become an important market for Vietnam labor export industry since the 1990s. Although labor export proves somehow as an effective way for Vietnamese labors to have good jobs to sustain and to increase their financial conditions as well as looking for an improvement in their careers, because of its temporality, what Vietnamese returnees have learned during their working time in Japan is still not able to ensure them a sustainable future. Instead, when returning to Vietnam, they simultaneously resume their search for a brighter future. Based on data from interviews and observations of various key stakeholders, mainly Vietnamese returnees from Japan and representatives of labor exporting companies in Ho Chi Minh city of Vietnam, this study finds that savings earned during their working time in Japan, level of education (including Japanese proficiency) and social networks in Japan are main factors that shape these returnees' livelihood strategies.

1. Vietnamese returnees from Japan have different backgrounds in terms of social networks, level of education and professions. There are two main groups: one group includes high-school graduates. They were recruited to Japan to do labor works which require no skills except being "industrious, diligent, clever, condescending, responsible, and healthy". They often work in the fields of garment, packaging and labeling, carpentry, agriculture, construction and the like. The other group is comprised of university graduates. They were recruited to Japan to work in those fields which are somewhat related to their trained professions in Vietnam. They work either as mechanical, informatics or electronic engineers who always try to improve their Japanese in order to develop their professions as well as social networks.

2. When returning to Vietnam, with their newly acquired body of knowledge, a sense of working discipline, and a worldview formed while they were working in Japan, these returnees have different livelihood strategies which can be classified into two groups: a) Skilled returnees resume works that are related to Japan. For example, they continue learning Japanese in order to find another chance to come back to Japan, or to work for Japanese restaurants as well as companies having connection with Japan (e.g., export companies), or to start new companies which specialize in the professions that they involved while in Japan (their social networks that they established with their direct Japanese supervisors help them in this process.) b) Low-skilled returnees normally start a way of living which has no connection to Japan. For example, women often come back to their rural areas, get married and become housewives; some start small business (grocery stores), or to pursue other labor works.

3. Vietnamese returnees form various groups which have specific social networks. These social networks were built while they were in Japan. These groups are established on the base of having the same "plight" or "profession". Low-skilled returnees form 'plight-based' subgroups, therefore, this kind of subgroups often includes close members. Their members were naturally grouped during the time they entered the process of training to become laborers in Japan and when they returned to Vietnam. During the time in Japan, shared experiences and feelings, a common condition of Japanese

incompetence and their being alien to Japanese culture linked them together. Moreover, thanks to the policy to give priority to remote, poor and specific areas in recruiting trainees to Japan, many trainees from some original provinces or districts come to work in the same companies or in the same areas in Japan. These shared characteristics consolidate these close groups. These low-skilled returnees when coming back to Vietnam, sustain their relations in the forms of visiting each other's house when it is convenient, calling each other to exchange ideas, memories, new opportunities, and feelings.

Contrarily, skilled returnees form "profession-based groups." Internal relations among this group are weak because each member just tried to develop his/her social relations with Japanese counterparts so that they can improve their professions and skills and opportunities when they come back to Vietnam. Moreover, their working conditions in Japan required much innovative ideas, therefore, they had to invest and spent much time with their Japanese supervisors. The situation remains when they come back to Vietnam. Given that, in Vietnam, these returnees could not use and apply the high-tech body of knowledge that they learned in Japan and their wish of developing it, some of these engineers must rely on those Japanese companies in their networks to open their own companies in Vietnam and recruit other returnees who used to work in Japan in that field. Besides, through the relations with these Japanese supervisors, they can become a manager of these Japanese supervisors' companies in Japan or a director of their branch companies in Vietnam. This way obviously benefits both parties.

4. These two groups are connected on the base of having shared common experiences in Japan. They knew each other by participating in various festivals, parties organized by some Vietnamese communities in Japan. Through social networks (e.g. the Facebook, or groups of Vietnamese working in the same region), in Japan, they shared their experiences and information about different areas of Japan. These social networks remain when they return to Vietnam as platforms for them to share business opportunities, memories, lifestyles, and/or simply to keep in touch with other returnees. In some cases, through these networks, they can be recruited to work in the companies established by other Vietnamese returnees.

5. The labor export policy of Vietnam to some extent brings opportunities for Vietnamese laborers to improve their financial situation and professions, to help them to create new social networks as a resource for their future livelihoods. This policy meets the demands of both laborers and the government in the process of modernization. However, during the implementation of this policy, in our study, we find that Vietnam has not had any proper policies to take advantage of what the returnees have accumulated during their working time in a developed country. In the case of skilled returnees, although they do apply their experiences and new body of knowledge learned in Japan in their hometowns, in fact, they build their future on their own without any further support from both governments. Confident with their new advanced capacities, they refused to work for Japanese companies in Vietnam either because of inappropriate benefits or because of their dream of becoming a boss themselves. As for Japanese government, the labor immigration policy helps to train Vietnamese laborers, however, the government has not had any policy to transfer various modern technologies that Vietnamese laborers involved during their time in Japan so that when they return to Vietnam they can resume those works. Moreover, those returnees might be a useful and valuable resource for effective implementation of the Japanese policy to develop this country's small and medium enterprises in Vietnam. Finally, these returnees diverse their new livelihood strategies which do not use effectively resources that they accumulated while working in Japan. They resume a search for their future which is different from what Vietnamese government expects for, "a high quality human resource for the process of becoming an industrial country".

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