

## Acculturation of Vietnamese immigrants in Northeastern Thailand: An Analysis of Multiple Determining Factors

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### Abstract

This article presents acculturation of Vietnamese immigrants who arrived in Northeastern Thailand between 1945 and 1946 and their descendants. To understand the acculturation of Vietnamese immigrants into Thai society and preservation of their Vietnamese culture, this paper examines factors both prior and during the process of acculturation. These factors include migration motivations, migration age, education, socio-economic status, social support, social attitude, occupation adjustment, cultural distance, and length of residence. The qualitative case study method was used to discover nuance and rich details about the acculturation and other related experiences of the Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants. The methodological technique of thematic analysis and pattern matching were used to analyse information collected from 15 in-depth interviews and secondary document sources. The research findings showed that integration was an outcome of the acculturation of the Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants. Adaptation to Thai culture and inheritance took place along with preservation of Vietnamese culture, resulting in Thai-Vietnamese combined behaviors of Vietnamese Thais. Such combination was displayed via language uses, appearance, and lifestyle. Once integrated, the Vietnamese Thais showed various contributions to regional development and became a bridge and strengthen the relationship between Thailand and Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Acculturation, Vietnamese, Northeastern Thailand

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Received: January 8, B.E.2564 Revised: February 17, B.E.2564 Accepted: February 25, B.E.2564

## การรับวัฒนธรรมอื่นของผู้อพยพชาวเวียดนามและลูกหลานในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทย: การวิเคราะห์ปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อการรับวัฒนธรรมอื่น

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้นำเสนองานวิจัยเกี่ยวกับการรับวัฒนธรรมอื่นของผู้อพยพชาวเวียดนาม ที่อพยพเข้ามาในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทยในช่วงปี ค.ศ. 1945 - 1946 และลูกหลานรุ่นต่อมาหรือชาวไทยเชื้อสายเวียดนาม งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อทำความเข้าใจต่อกระบวนการรับวัฒนธรรมอื่นและการคงไว้ซึ่งวัฒนธรรมเวียดนามของกลุ่มผู้อพยพชาวเวียดนาม โดยได้ศึกษาปัจจัยต่าง ๆ ที่มีผลต่อการรับวัฒนธรรมอื่นของผู้อพยพชาวเวียดนามและลูกหลานที่เกิดขึ้นก่อนการอพยพและที่เกิดขึ้นในระหว่างกระบวนการรับวัฒนธรรมอื่น ปัจจัยที่ศึกษาได้แก่ แรงจูงใจในการย้ายถิ่น อายุ การศึกษา สถานะทางเศรษฐกิจและสังคม การสนับสนุนทางสังคม ทักษะคิดทางสังคม การปรับเปลี่ยนอาชีพ ระยะห่างทางวัฒนธรรม และระยะเวลาที่อาศัยอยู่ในประเทศไทย วิจัยเชิงคุณภาพได้ถูกนำมาใช้ในการวิจัยนี้เพื่อเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลเชิงลึกและข้อมูลใหม่เกี่ยวกับกระบวนการรับวัฒนธรรมอื่นและประสบการณ์อื่น ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้อง ของผู้อพยพชาวเวียดนามและลูกหลาน จำนวน 15 คน ข้อมูลวิจัยเหล่านี้ได้ถูกนำมาวิเคราะห์โดยใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์แบบแก่นสาระ ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่า ผู้อพยพชาวเวียดนามและลูกหลานสามารถผสมผสานทางวัฒนธรรมได้ และการรับวัฒนธรรมไทยสามารถอยู่ร่วมกับการคงไว้ซึ่งวัฒนธรรมเวียดนามได้ การผสมผสานของวัฒนธรรมทั้งสองแสดงออกในพฤติกรรมของลูกหลานชาวเวียดนามหรือชาวไทยเชื้อสายเวียดนาม เช่น ภาษาที่ใช้ การแต่งตัว และรูปแบบการใช้ชีวิต เมื่อสามารถผสมรวมทางวัฒนธรรมได้แล้ว ชาวไทยเชื้อสายเวียดนามเหล่านี้จึงเป็นส่วนสำคัญที่ช่วยสนับสนุนการพัฒนาระดับภูมิภาค และทำหน้าที่เป็นสะพานเชื่อมความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างไทยและเวียดนามได้

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วันที่รับบทความ: 8 มกราคม 2564 วันที่แก้ไขบทความล่าสุด: 17 กุมภาพันธ์ 2564 วันที่อนุมัติการตีพิมพ์: 25 กุมภาพันธ์ 2564

## Introduction

The history of Vietnamese migration to Thailand consists of three main periods. This first period was during the early-17th century of the Ayutthaya dynasty, when many Vietnamese were recruited by Western clergy to leave Vietnam to Thailand when the Vietnamese government banned and deported Western clergy out of Vietnam. Second, between the late-19th and the early-20th century of Rama V (1868-1910), when lower class Vietnamese ran away from oppression by the French colonial government and feudal Vietnam with hope of a better life in Thailand. The third period was between 1945 and 1946, when French colonists returned to Indochina after the 2nd World War. Vietnamese immigrants fled the war in Indochina and moved to Thailand.

The Thai government had applied varying policies on immigrants since then, depending on national, regional, and global political situations. Around the end of 1940s, Vietnamese immigrants could still maintain the Vietnamese language in their families, and keep practicing Vietnamese tradition and culture. This was because the Thai government had created favorable conditions that allowed immigrants to maintain their culture and identity (Critchley,1970). Vietnamese immigrants in northeastern Thailand were made up of those who migrated between 1945 and 1946. They moved from Laos after “the collapse of Thakhek.” This wave of Vietnamese migration was a result of conflict between the French colonial regime and the Vietnamese people. Vietnamese immigrants to Thailand were put under strict control from the period of 1946 to 1990. They were isolated and discriminated against because the Thai government considered them to be illegal, and harmful to national security (Paulle, 2016). However, after Thailand and Vietnam had officially established diplomatic relations in 1990, Vietnamese immigrants were finally granted Thai nationality. Many Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants have had significant success in Thai society and have lived peacefully with Thai people and other ethnic communities in Thailand.

To understand the process of acculturation for Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants, this study examines factors both prior and during the process of acculturation. To begin to explore factors that could potentially affect a Vietnamese immigrant’s acculturation, this study focuses on migration motive, age, education, socio-economic status, social support, occupational adjustment, social attitude, length of residence time,

and cultural distance. It employed a case study method and the qualitative research instrument of an in-depth interview to gather information from fifteen interviewees. A semi-structured interview questionnaire was used to extract stories and experiences of Vietnamese immigrants who settled in northeastern Thailand. The information then was analyzed with a thematic analysis strategy. Pattern matching was employed to link theoretical patterns and observed patterns, which in this case was language use, appearance, and lifestyle of Vietnamese immigrants and descendants.

This paper comprises three sections. First, based on the definition of acculturation, we explore the outcome of the Vietnamese Thai people's acculturation through the shift in the behavior of Vietnamese Thai people. This includes language, appearance, and lifestyle. We also show the contributions these behaviors had on Thai society. Second, we point out some main factors that affect Vietnamese immigrant's acculturation. Then, we use those factors to compare the acculturation between Vietnamese immigrants to Thailand and Vietnamese immigrants in some Western countries. Third, we conclude by suggesting some solutions for policy and research improvement.

## **Acculturation**

Acculturation is the process by which immigrants adapt to a new culture in the receiving society while preserving their own original culture. These days, acculturation is a complex conceptualization, indicating that both cultures shift under the influence of each other, and are affected by a variety of contextual factors. The acculturation process is a multidimensional process that produces multiple conclusive outcomes, related to shifts in behavior (language, appearance, lifestyle), which occur prior to and during interaction as a result of the contributions and influences.

Vietnamese Thai people are influenced by the two cultures of Vietnam and Thailand, which causes a mixture of the two cultures in life. This creates distinctive cultural features of the Vietnamese Thai people in northeastern Thailand. In addition, this study also showed their contributions to the formation and growth of the northeastern economy, socio-culture and the relationship between Thailand and Vietnam.

**Language:**

Vietnamese Thais speak Vietnamese in Thai grammatical ways, which is the characteristic of using the Vietnamese language in Thailand. For example, using the phrase “Pardon, please”: Vietnamese say “Vui lòng nói lại” (Please, speak again) while Vietnamese Thais speak Vietnamese “Vui lòng nói mới” (please, speak new).

**Appearance:**

It's difficult to display the distinctive appearance of Vietnamese Thais. This could only be illustrated in using Vietnamese costumes, namely “Ao Dai” and Thai costumes of Vietnamese Thais in special events. In addition, they used dyed fabric products from the province of Sakon Nakhon to sew Vietnamese Ao Dai.

**Life-style:**

*Religion:* Vietnamese families in Thailand have an ancestor altar like those in Vietnam. They usually gather all members of the family and set up a food tray to worship ancestors on occasions such as the full moon day, ancestral death anniversary, and the 30th of Lunar New Year. In addition, some families set up Buddhist altars or hang pictures of some of the kings they respected. Buddhist worship rituals of the Vietnamese have been integrated with Thai Buddhism, such as Buddhist altars of Vietnamese families decorated with a Thai style. On the occasion of the traditional New Year, Vietnamese Thai people often wear Vietnamese traditional dresses and invite monks to conduct a praying ceremony. While praying, they give small packages to the monks to receive blessings. After the ceremony, they bring rice soup to the temple to treat the monks. Vietnamese immigrants learn to pay respect to the King and the royal family. They show respect by memorizing the Thai National Anthem, wearing Thai clothes to welcome them, and respectfully offering flowers.

*Human nature:* The harmonious combination of cultural values between Vietnam and Thailand has become the typical human nature of the Vietnamese Thai people. They combine the virtue of diligence, hard work, thrift, and brotherhood of Vietnamese and virtue of meekness, honesty, and merit of Thais.

*Making merit:* The culture of making merit also spread to the thoughts and actions of the Vietnamese Thai people. They engaged actively in merit activities such as becoming members of the provincial Red Cross Association, making donations to build temples, roads, bridges, parks, etc.

*Wedding customs:* Wedding customs consist of a mixture of Vietnamese, Thai, and Western cultural integration. The Vietnamese perform a ritual at an ancestor-worshiping ceremony and the procession of the bride in conjunction with the Thai Buddhist ritual of inviting the monks to pray for the couple, while holding the wedding ceremony in a European style.

*Funeral customs:* Vietnamese often wear bandanas on their heads while worshipping and mourning to express their grief in the perpetual death of their loved ones, and bury their dead in cemeteries. In combination with Thai customs, the monks are invited to pray for the merits of the deceased. The monks also protect the homeowner against the return of the dead and becoming a demon.

*Eating style:* Vietnamese Thai people are familiar with the way Thai people use a set consisting of a spoon, fork, plate, and sometimes chopsticks when eating Vietnamese style meals.

#### **Contributions:**

Vietnamese Thais had contributed in many fields such as the economy and culture to Thai society.

*Economic:* First, Vietnamese Thais had become the main workforce for contributing to the socio-economic development of northeastern Thailand. The northeast used to suffer from being underdeveloped, poor, and without infrastructure. The open door policy of the Thai government attracted a foreign workforce, which includes Vietnamese immigrants. The cheap workforce stepped up the reclamation of forests and infrastructure building in the northeast. For instance, Vietnamese Thais assisted in the construction of a road from the Tha Bo district through Nong Khai to Phon Vi Xua with a 20 baht/m<sup>3</sup> wage. They also contributed to the reclamation of forests in Nakhon Phanom and Ubon Ratchathani to become farms, which were called the Phu Ca Te farm and Ubon farm respectively. Second, Vietnamese Thais also created new types of jobs for Thai society. Intermediary jobs were the product of Vietnamese Thai people trying not to violate a list of 38 occupations forbidden<sup>1</sup> to stateless aliens in Thailand. In addition, when Vietnamese immigrants are about to repatriate to Vietnam, they pass on some traditional jobs such as carpentry, turning, cooling, casting and food processing onto their Thai relatives, friends, and neighbors. Third, the life of many Vietnamese Thais had positively changed from the poor life they

used to have. Now, they have become successful entrepreneurs specializing in the distribution and production of goods, creating jobs, contributing to the local budget, creating diverse culinary culture, and developing local tourism. For example, Mr. Lam in Udon Thani, whose VT Namnueng Company with 36 distribution agents has specialized in manufacturing and distributing Namnueng dishes, and a large conference center has attracted tourists and organized events related to culture, commerce, connecting trade of Udon Thani province. Mrs. La in Khonkaen has owned a workshop specializing in producing “Vietnamese porridge yarn” (เส้น ก๋วยจั๊บ เวียต นาม) and is distributing to retail companies networks such as Makro, Tesco Lotus, and BigC. She also manages a Vietnamese cuisine restaurant, namely Halongbay, and Mantra Varee hotel, which organizes events, destinations for tourism, and culinary activities for the Khonkaen province. Mrs. Thin in Bung Kan ran a 100-room hotel to contribute to the Bung Kan province's tourism development policy.

*Socio – Culture:*

*Culinary culture:* Vietnamese immigrants have diversified Thailand's culinary culture by introducing typical Vietnamese dishes and creating new northeastern dishes which combine Vietnamese and Thai culinary tastes. Some examples of these dishes are Namnueng, spring roll, fried spring rolls, porridge soup (เส้น ก๋วยจั๊บ เวียต นาม), noodle (Vietnamese Pho), fish sauce (pa la ปลา ร้า), etc.

*Human nature:* Thanks to the industriousness, agility existence, success and prosperity of Vietnamese Thais in Thai society. They learned Thai language themselves to access the Thai network of society and how to capture market opportunities in a timely manner. Such existence seemed to have more or less an impact on Thai mindset..

*Community culture:* Thais seemed to have respected the Vietnamese community's culture, as it has generated a power of national unity in the host country. Vietnamese have often visited each other in sickness, giving birth, and condolences.

*Belief culture:* Vietnamese Thais added to diversity of belief culture in Thailand. They established holy temples in provinces like Udon Thani, Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon to worship Hung Dao Lord (Lord Tran Hung Dao), "Mr. Tiger" in Sakon Nakhon and the holy temple in Nakhon Phanom.

Religious culture: There are 16 Vietnamese temples in some areas of Thailand (Man, 2001). The two Buddhist cultural characteristics united to form a unique feature in the northeast. For instance, setting up Buddhist altars of Vietnamese families is influenced by the Thai style with many different kinds of Buddhist statues.

Historical landmarks: Landmarks held the historic mark of the Vietnamese immigrants in the northeast has contributed to the region's infrastructure creation and growth. They include Vat Tham Pagoda Gate, Vat Phu-Khem-Thong, Vat O-Cam, Vat Mukdahan, and the Great Clock Head on the Crossroads of Nakhon Phanom City; maternity homes and a "Vietnam souvenir" street in Nongkhai province; reading room in Tha Bo; an open-cast stage made of reinforced concrete in Udon Thani provincial city park (Man, 2001), etc.

### **The Factors Determining the Acculturation of Vietnamese Immigrants and Their Descendants**

There are many factors that affect an immigrant's acculturation process in order to create the outcome of adaptation. Particular factors which affect the acculturation process will be looked at in this research. The study of Udahemuka and Pernice shows us that refugees are more likely to be integrationists, which means they follow their original culture and adapt to the culture of the host. This is because they did not 'choose' to leave their country. The research findings illustrated that the integration of Vietnamese Thai people was a result of acculturation. This statement also appeared to be highly compatible with the cases of Vietnamese immigrants in other countries. We will compare the acculturation between Vietnamese immigrants in Thailand and Vietnamese immigrants in Western countries, which are the main destinations of migration, in order to discover the similarities and differences in the process of acculturation for Vietnamese immigrants when affected by the same factors.

***Wars as Migration Motivation:*** The waves of Vietnamese immigrants between 1945 and 1946 in the northeast were involuntary and caused by war. Vietnamese immigrants and descendants maintained the Vietnamese identity within their family because they hoped to return to Vietnam when the war ended. Interviewees shared that:

*When the French colonialists came back to rob Vietnam and the Indochina Peninsula, Vietnamese living in Laos jumped into the Mekong River to evacuate to Thailand. In Thailand, Vietnamese cultural activities were organized in Vietnamese communities, such as Vietnamese language lessons as well as Vietnamese cultural events. This was for the purpose of maintaining the language and culture in the Vietnamese community in order to quickly integrate back into Vietnamese society when returning to the country...*

The prime motivator of Vietnamese immigration to Thailand and other countries was the war in Indochina, which led to forced migration. In Thailand, Vietnamese immigrants fled the war and settled in Thailand with a hope to return to Vietnam when the war was over. As a result, these Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants maintained the original Vietnamese culture while slowly taking on the culture of the host country. Moreover, the Vietnamese Liberation on April 30, 1975 generated big waves of the Vietnamese immigration, mainly to the United States (US), Australia, Canada, Japan, Western countries, Northwestern Europe, the Philippines, Guam, and Wake Island. They were political refugees that did not wish to return to Vietnam. They were determined to stay in their host countries permanently and make their integration quick. In Australia, Ben-Moshe et al. (2012) established that most Vietnamese Australians who were adjusting to Australian life called themselves Vietnamese regardless of if they were born in Australia or Vietnam. The Vietnamese community wished to preserve Vietnamese identity through language usage, media development, religious practice, and political activities. Bankston III (n.d.) showed that Vietnamese Americans spoke English well and used it outside their homes, with the overwhelming majority retaining the Vietnamese language. About 80 percent of Vietnamese Americans identified as Vietnamese and used Vietnamese at home (in the 1990 U.S. census)

***Low Socio-Economic Status:*** Most Vietnamese immigrants had a low socio-economic status when they first arrived in Thailand, regardless of their education or economic background. After adjusting to a new life, some Vietnamese immigrants changed their career on the basis of their educational background to create a better life for themselves in Thailand. Interviewees knew that their parents came from poor farming families, except Mr. Hoa's mother, who came from a well off family in Ha Tinh, Vietnam. The socio-economic status of interviewees's family was very low when they had arrived in Thailand. They had

to stay temporarily under Thai stilt houses or Buddhist temples and worked as hired laborers to earn a living, such as a porter, road builder, fishermen, plowing man, farmer, peddler, etc... It seems that education and socio-economic status before immigrating to Thailand did not become advantageous factors for Vietnamese immigrants when seeking a good job when first arriving in Thailand. For example, Mr. Hoa's mother was from a middle-class educated family, and she was a civil servant in Laos. However, after arriving in Thailand, she worked as a laborer in harsh conditions to earn a living. The life of Vietnamese Thai people gradually stabilized by the end of 1947, and they started to integrate into Thailand (Man, 2001). Mr. Thang shared

*“After a period of hired labour, my parents accumulated some money... and switched to a small trader in the market. They sold food at a fair and exchanged goods for rice and necessities for the family.”*

Moreover, the educated Vietnamese immigrant group found better jobs. For instance, trained nurses quickly became rich by opening drug stores in provinces where hospitals and drug stores were rarely found; Vietnamese with English and French skills were admitted to the United Nations agency in Bangkok.

Simon (2013) said that most immigrant's first jobs are of low socio-economic status and low-paid, because it's more accessible to them when they reach the host country. This is why Vietnamese Thai workers get harsh, low-paying jobs regardless of their education background. Vietnamese Americans, the first immigration wave with high education and socio-economic status, and boat people who had low education and socio-economic status all started with low-paying jobs in small industries and services (Campi, 2005). Donnelly et al. (2009) showed that 57 percent of the 772 Vietnamese Canadians were working in low-paying jobs in Vancouver, British Columbia, such as laborers, dishwashers, kitchen helpers, cleaners, janitors, fruit and vegetable pickers, and sewing machine operators, regardless of their educational background or previous occupation in Vietnam.

**High Social Support:** The Thai community, Thai government and Vietnamese Thai people who immigrated earlier assisted recent Vietnamese immigrants in overcoming living difficulties to integrate into Thai society. During the period from 1946 to 1949, a group of early Vietnamese families as Mrs On's family, who had previously stayed in Thailand, set up an Evacuation Committee to arrange accommodation for Vietnamese immigrants. Mrs. Oanh shared her experience receiving help from friendly Thai people.

*“Friendly Thai people allowed my family to live in their house and created the conditions that allowed my parents to go fishing for them to earn a living...”*

In addition, Mr. Vuong said that the Thai government conducted projects to create jobs for Vietnamese Thai people

*“...my parents and some other Vietnamese Thai families had gotten the opportunity work as dike builders along the Mekong River from Thabo to Nong Khai, 25 km long - a dike had been built over 70 years, which is Inter-district roads with 4 widely paved lanes...”*

In the period from 1950 to 1990 the relationship between Vietnam and Thailand entered a state of conflict. Vietnamese Thai people were persecuted by harsh policies such as the Accrual Resident Policy, which gathered Vietnamese Thai people into a few poor provinces, and restricted Vietnamese Thai people’s right to travel between provinces. Mrs. Sau shared

*“My parents luckily got a “Travel Document2” thanks to the help of Thai people, so my family was not as restricted as other Vietnamese Thai people...”*

Consequently, social support as a motivating factor brought closer friendship between the Vietnamese Thai community. Vietnamese Thai people were also aware that they had to follow Thai rules and customs. They lived peacefully and were well treated by their surrounding neighbors.

Cohesion of the Vietnamese community combined with host country policy created positive and negative social support not only to help Vietnamese immigrants in overcoming difficulties and maintaining Vietnamese culture, but also to push integration into the host countries. Firstly, Vietnamese community villages established the power of national solidarity in host societies. In Thailand, Thai authorities applied the Accrual Resident policy to promote the management of the Vietnamese Thai people, thus establishing Vietnamese community villages in some provinces of Thailand. In Britain, Barber (2018) indicated that the British authorities implemented a dispersion strategy by moving Vietnamese refugees into the British countryside, where living conditions were closer to the farming communities

in Vietnam. This created the conditions for them to adjust to life in the UK. However, the dispersion policy was abolished in 1984 when the Vietnamese refugee influx rose from rural areas in the United Kingdom to major cities like London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, where they were eventually able to form small communities and built interpersonal networks that allowed them to improve their practical cultural life and society. In America, the US authorities had dispersed Vietnamese refugees in different areas to prevent refugees from forming ethnic areas, and minimized the impact on the local community. But for a few years, they built a Vietnamese community in California and Texas (Zhou & Bankston III, n.d.). Holding frequent cultural activities in Vietnamese community villages, including opening a Vietnamese language class, celebrating the Lunar New Year, and Vietnam's major holidays, etc., helped Vietnamese immigrants preserve Vietnam's cultural identity. Most Vietnamese overseas community had formed Vietnamese associations in the host countries, for example, Vietnamese Association whole Thailand in Thailand, and the Free Vietnamese Community of the Australian Federation in Australia.. The association's goal is to bind Vietnamese overseas community together, to organize activities for maintaining Vietnamese identity, and to establish good diplomatic relations between Vietnam with their host countries. Secondly, the policy of the host countries, which influenced the integration process of Vietnamese immigrants and descendants. In Thailand, strict policies made the first and second generations of Vietnamese immigrants stateless, and their rights were restricted for a long time. To avoid this harsh situation, the third generation of Vietnamese immigrants had hidden their Vietnamese origin by borrowing Thai surnames from Thai people when they were born. Mostly, Vietnamese immigrants/descendants' identity cards when granted Thai citizenship would change their names completely into Thai names without traces or clues that would reveal their Vietnamese origin. In America, Campi (2005) researched that the Indochina Migration and Refugee Act of 1975 and 1977 made Vietnamese refugees access the resettlement program and later become permanent citizens in the US. As a result, 44 percent of US-born Vietnamese had become U.S. citizens, the highest naturalization rate of all Asian groups as of 2000. The Vietnamese origin of immigrants in the US was shown by the name to be a mixture of Vietnamese name and American name, such as Jonny Nguyen or Peter Hong. This is a way to demonstrate the national origin of immigrants in the US. In Britain, Barber (2018) found that Vietnamese in the United Kingdom were supported by a resettlement program that included housing and social welfare assistance, but in

reality, implementation of the program was not as effective as intended. Under the UK government's dispersal policy of 1979, Vietnamese refugees were culturally isolated, and social support was rendered virtually impossible within the strained context of the public service sector. For example, the allocation of 10,000 Vietnamese refugees in the first wave of arrivals (1975-1982) luckily won government funds and were managed by voluntary organizations. The waves of immigrants arriving in the late 1970s, at a time of unemployment and shifts in public policy, were encouraged to stay with UK-based relatives, and missed key services that would help them adapt to British society including English courses, medical assistance, lessons about life in the UK, accommodation arrangements, enrollment of children in local schools, and childcare.

***Social Attitude (Prejudice or Discrimination):*** Unfortunately, Vietnamese Thai people fell into a state of being discriminated against and stigmatized by Thai authorities and the Thai community between 1950 and 1990. Discrimination and stigma were both factors of opportunity and obstacles for Vietnamese Thai people. The Thai government issued harsh management policies, such as the Accrual Resident Policy in the mid-1950s that gathered Vietnamese Thai people to live in 5 poorest provinces; "Decree 337" in the early 1970s that limited that human rights of Vietnamese Thai people, such as denial of Thai nationality, not being allowed to own land, no freedom of movement, not allowing enrollment into Thai schools, etc.; and a list of 38 occupations that did not provide work permits for non-Thai nationals. Mr. Vuong shared

*“My family and other Vietnamese were relocated from the riverside area adjacent to Laos to Phatthalung - a poor district of Thailand... We were banned and had our human rights restricted. We were not allowed to Thai school, not allowed to be let out of their residence, and we were often persecuted, arrested and detained without any evidence...”*

Stigma and discrimination had created a cohesion for the ethnic minority society and the next generation to have the opportunity to approach and maintain their original culture. The Accrual Resident Policy gathered Vietnamese living in the 5 poorest provinces to create clusters of Vietnamese villages in Thailand. They organized many Vietnamese cultural activities, such as cultural exchange, teaching Vietnamese, listening to Vietnamese news, visiting each other, and celebrating Vietnam's special holidays. These aims not only

enhanced the spiritual life of Vietnamese Thai people, but also united together to overcome difficulties. On the other hand, stigma and discrimination affected the acculturation process of Vietnamese Thai people to integrate Thai society. Firstly, Vietnamese Thai people always lived in peace, building a neighborly relationship with the surrounding Thai community, closing the distance of prejudice, and earning the Thai community's trust. Therefore, they had blended into the cultural life of the Thai people. Secondly, the "Decree 337" allowed Vietnamese Thai children who borrowed the surnames of Thai people to be granted Thai citizenship, and they were even sent to grow up in a Thai family. The children of this generation integrated into Thai society naturally. Mrs. La also shared that

*"My three children had to borrow the surname of three Thai families upon birth, and I did not tell them they were Vietnamese..."*

Additionally, a list of 38 occupations prohibited for stateless Vietnamese had limited the job opportunities for stateless Vietnamese, making it harder to earn a living. However, they turned this into an opportunity for them to explore intermediary jobs without violating Thailand's prohibition law. For example, Vietnamese Thai people worked as contractors because they could not work as construction workers; Vietnamese turned to fabric trade when dressmaking was banned.

**Young Adult Age:** Most Vietnamese immigrants evacuating to Thailand were young adults. Interviewees identified that their parents immigrated when they were about 15 years or older, for example, Mr Lam's father and mother immigrated at the age of 21 and 15; Mr Hoa's father and mother came to Udon Thani at the age of 22 and 20, etc... At these ages, they were old enough to be deeply rooted in Vietnamese lifestyle but could also understand the necessity to adapt quickly into the host society for ensuring more favorable living conditions. Interviewees inherited and preserved the Vietnamese culture from their parents despite being born and growing up in Thailand, such as using Vietnamese at home with their families, cooking their favourite Vietnamese meals. and setting up a Vietnamese food tray to worship ancestors on occasions. On the other hand, Vietnamese Thai people taught themselves the Thai language through daily interaction with Thai people, because language proficiency had been shown to be a key driver of immigrant integration and increased job opportunities. In Thailand, Thai language limitations were the greatest obstacle to the adaptation to a Thai lifestyle, since Vietnamese immigrants had no permission to Thai school. Mr. Hoa said

*“My parents were not allowed to study in the Thai language, but their ability to speak and listen in Thai was fine. However, they were not good at reading and writing Thai”*

Thai proficiency created opportunities closer to Thai people, and allowed Vietnamese immigrants to observe the Thai way of life, from which they accessed jobs by meeting the demands of Thai people. For example, Mr. Lam shared that

*“Thais needed plenty of water for their daily life, so my parents took the water from the Mekong River into the town to sell to Thai customers.”*

Mr. Vuong also said

*“My parents took necessary items, for instance, incense, candles, matches, pots, thread and needles to the town about 10 km away from the village in exchange for rice and food from Thai people...”*

**Occupation Adjustment:** Interviewees commonly said that Vietnamese Thai people faced difficulties. However, they continuously make an effort to find jobs and accumulate wealth for themselves, contributing to the economic development of Thailand. Vietnamese Thai people started to work hard labour jobs with low salaries at an early stage. They figured out that Thai proficiency helped them access Thai social networks, understand Thai social needs, and find better jobs. Vietnamese immigrants thus learned the Thai language themselves through everyday contact with the indigenous people in order to quickly approach Thai society and discover the typical Thai lifestyle, such as eating habits. From that, Vietnamese Thais succeed in the culinary business. Mrs. Sau told

*“...I have run a little restaurant in Khonkaen for over 35 years. I inherited this job from my parents, who used to run a restaurant in Udon Thani to raise us...”*

Mrs. La shared also her success in manufacturing and distributing instant porridge noodles products to supermarkets in Thailand, such as Big C, Tesco Lotus, and Marko for over 30 years. Moreover, Vietnamese Thai people succeeded in making a difference in the appetite of Thai people. They promote Vietnamese traditional food in Thailand by bringing in differences from the traditional Thai appetite, which consists of fried food with higher fat content, less vegetables, and is hot and spicy. Mr. Lam, who has been a prosperous businessman in the food supply chain in Nem Nuong said

*“...Our family had been very successful selling low-fat food, with ingredients that are a combination of many kinds of vegetables and pork. We also changed the flavor to suit the Thai palate...”*

In addition, accessing Thai social networks helped Vietnamese Thai people catch business opportunities. For example, Mrs. La, Mrs. Thin and Mrs. Hong said that they used to run a pawnshop, and profited a lot from this company when Thais increased cash demand for labor exports. Mrs. Hong recounted the success of her business:

*When Laotians rushed through Tha Bo of Nong Khai province in crisis around 1977, we quickly opened a store selling necessities to serve the needs of Laotians, and we had accumulated a lot of profit from this business. Next, we opened the pawn shop to fulfil Thai’s need for the money to export... In 2002, we bought land to build apartments for rent to meet the needs of renting apartments for students at Khonkaen University...*

As a result, the continuous effort of Vietnamese Thais not only enriched their families, but also made them big business owners with good economic status, contributing to the socio-economic development of northeast Thailand.

**Cultural Distance:** The similarity of the agricultural economy and Buddhist religion has allowed Vietnamese Thais to quickly integrate into the social and cultural life of Thailand. Firstly, the northeastern region is a plateau in which agriculture is the main economic activity. Vietnamese Thai people were from poor rural families and are familiar with farming. The similarity in agricultural culture was a favorable factor for Vietnamese Thai people to quickly find labor jobs in agriculture such as plowing, farming, and breeding when they migrated to the region. Moreover, the familiarity in the Buddhist religion helped Vietnamese Thai people easily mix in with Thai religious beliefs, making the spiritual life of Vietnamese Thai people satisfying. Vietnamese Buddhism is called Annam-nikai Buddhism, and it is different from the rules and customs of worship of Buddhism in Thailand - namely Theravada Buddhism. Vietnamese Thai people adapted to Thai Buddhism and changed their style of worship to Thai Buddhism. However, the Thai language was the biggest cultural gap of Vietnamese Thai people when evacuating to Thailand. All interviewees mostly learned Thai at the elementary school level because their right to go to school was

restricted. Vietnamese Thai people tried their best to overcome this gap by teaching themselves the Thai language through daily communication with Thai people. Thai language proficiency created opportunities for Vietnamese Thai people to access Thai social networks, understand Thai culture and find better jobs. Learning the Thai language helped push the integration process of Vietnamese Thai people into Thai society.

***Length of Residence:*** It has been more than 75 years since Vietnamese Thai people have come to Thailand during the period of 1945-1946 up until now. Nowadays, Vietnamese Thai people have been a positive minority community, each of them becoming elements into Thai society. The degree of integration between generations rises incrementally over the length of residence in Thailand, and they become Thai citizens to join their society. The first generation, who were the grandparents and parents of the interviewees, retained their Vietnamese cultural identity in their daily life with their families. Mrs. Sau told

*“My mother kept her daily habit of reading Vietnamese books at the age of 97, and using Vietnamese in frequent communication with me”*

Mrs. La shared the traditional daughter-in-law Vietnamese rules that her parent taught her when she lived in the home of her husband. Her mother told her that:

*A daughter-in-law needs to have four positive qualities: good housework; good looks combined with kindness; standard speech; and good morals. No matter what happens, the daughter-in-law must endure without being able to return to biological parents...*

Interviewees, who represent the second generation, were born and raised in Thailand. They not only inherited cultural traditions from grandparents and parents but also integrated into Thai culture much more easily because they are greatly influenced by the Thai social environment in their life. For instance, the Thai language was used more than the Vietnamese language at monthly community meetings. Ms. On shared

*“I often use Thai for communication in family and society, so I had limited Vietnamese skills...”*

The second generation group still retains the culinary culture of family meals. Vietnamese food is still cooked in their households, and everyone in the family expresses the warmth, which is a tradition in Vietnamese families. Ms. Hong shared

*“My husband only eats Vietnamese food. He is not familiar with Thai food so my family often cooks Vietnamese food at meals...”*

Nowadays, descendants are integrated into Thai society quickly in terms of their behavior and attitudes. This generation has few opportunities to interact with Vietnamese culture because they had to hide their Vietnamese origin, could not learn Vietnamese, and could not participate in Vietnamese community activities. So, interviewees revealed their descendants did not know any Vietnamese or hear very little Vietnamese at home, but they are good at listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the Thai language. Moreover, their descendants are accustomed to Thai ready made food, and less accustomed to cooking. The current Vietnamese Thai population have almost granted Thai nationality and have the right to vote, supporting some of the Thai Party when Thailand conducts elections.

It seems that Vietnamese immigrants do not lose their original Vietnamese culture over time. At a younger migration age, they have a longer length of residence in their host country, and are able to increase the proficiency of the host language, allowing them to adapt to a new life. Moreover, the agility nature and the virtue of hard work, which was a unique ability of the Vietnamese, had helped them find better job opportunities and achieve successes in their host society. Firstly, the preservation of Vietnamese heritage can be demonstrated by several factors, such as (1) Vietnamese proficiency, (2) the choice of a spouse in host society, and (3) connection to Vietnam through remittances and the younger generation's contribution to Vietnam today. Vietnamese proficiency indicates how well Vietnamese immigrants could preserve their heritage and culture. In Thailand, the Thai language was used more than the Vietnamese language at monthly community meetings, and interviewees revealed their descendants did not know any Vietnamese or hear very little Vietnamese at home. Interestingly, descendants of Vietnamese Americans and Vietnamese Canadians use Vietnamese more than Vietnamese Thais. A survey conducted in 2000 found that 1,009,627 people aged 5 and up said they spoke Vietnamese at home, making Vietnamese the 7th most popular language in the United States. According to the Canadian Census, the number of Vietnamese Canadians using the Vietnamese language increased from 13,754 people in 2011 to 166,830 people in 2016. Vietnamese ranks fourteenth among immigrant languages in Canada (Joy, 2018). The option of a spouse was affected by most previous generations of Vietnamese immigrants with the ideology of marrying a partner of the same Vietnamese origin. This ideology has shifted and is no

longer suitable to today's generation. Mai and Diem also pointed out a similar story that Vietnamese in America's second generation choose spouses of Vietnamese origin, while the third generation choose a native one. In Thailand, while Vietnamese immigrants of the previous generation had often married Vietnamese spouses, today's Vietnamese Thai generation marries Thai or Chinese Thai. The connection of Vietnamese overseas forward Vietnam would be demonstrated by remittances and the contribution of the young Vietnamese overseas generation to Vietnam. In Thailand, Vietnamese immigrants always turned to the Vietnamese homeland when war still ravaged Vietnam. For example, they joined movements such as the "Bloom Movement" to raise money to send back to Vietnam. The sad thing is that the degree of Vietnamese Thai contributions to Vietnam has decreased with the length of time living in Thailand. It is possible that the Vietnamese Thai community mostly have little to no relationship with their relatives in Vietnam. In other nations, however, the Vietnamese community still maintains the relationships with their Vietnamese relatives. This would be displayed through international remittances data to Vietnam. For example, international remittances in the United States accounted for 41.1 percent of the overseas total in 1992/93 and 57.7 percent in 1997/98. By contrast, international remittances in Thailand accounted for 0.3 percent of the overseas total in 1992/93, and 0.4 percent in 1997/98. By continents, North America leads with the most remittances with 47.3 percent in 1992/93, and 63.8 percent in 1997/98, followed by Europe, Australia, and Asia (Pfau & Giang, 2010). The contribution of the next generation is also an indication of the Vietnamese link. In Thailand, Vietnamese Thai communities have no record of forming a group of Vietnamese Thai intellectuals. Vietnamese immigrants in other nations, on the other hand, had intellectual potential, were educated at universities, and accessed lots of modern knowledge of culture, science, technology, and economic management. Mrs. Nguyen Phu Binh, who is the former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs in Vietnam, identified that a new generation of expatriates of Vietnamese origin concentrated in North America, Western Europe, and Oceania have been forming and developing. This new generation is involved in many key scientific and economic fields such as informatics, telecommunications and electricity, new materials, machine building, cybernetics, biology, economic management, and security. Secondly, the importance of learning the host language created the ability to communicate in order to get well-paid jobs, and to access community services. In Thailand, Vietnamese Thai people improved Thai proficiency by themselves, as they had limited

access to schooling. In America, Simon (2013) also pointed out that the development of English proficiency and knowledge of American behavioral standards would give immigrants access to better jobs that could provide a better quality of life. In Canada, Vu indicated English proficiency would provide the basis for obtaining employment opportunities and quality of life after the arrival of immigrants to Canada. For example, Lan, a Vietnamese Canadian who was isolated and possessed limited English fluency, lacked access to the resources that would enhance her adaptation and acculturation experience in Canada during her years of resettlement. Thirdly, the agility nature and the virtue of hard work of the Vietnamese had affected the process of constantly finding occupation opportunities in host society in order to improve their life. In Thailand, the Vietnamese Thai community has become one of the region's dominant ethnic minority groups, which are major business owners and affect the socio-economic growth of northeastern Thailand. According to a 2002 Census survey of Vietnamese-owned businesses in the U.S., more than 50 percent of businesses were personal service, or repair and maintenance, and between 1997 and 2002 the number of Vietnamese American-owned enterprises increased significantly.

## Conclusion

The research findings are likely to become a reference for the formation and development of the Vietnamese community in Thailand, and improve our understanding about how to ensure peaceful coexistence between the ethnic Thai majority and other ethnic minorities in Thailand.

Finally, here are some suggestions for solutions for policy and research improvement, especially the future generation of Vietnamese Thai. Our objective is to pay attention to the young Vietnamese Thai generation who are an educated, dynamic, and creative resource. To promote this inherent potential human resource, I propose specific recommendations that are as follows: (1) including Vietnamese language courses in Thai primary schools; (2) inheriting and sustaining the Vietnamese community's Association activities; (3) gathering and promoting the contributions of young intellectuals and young businessmen in the Vietnamese Thai community to the development of Vietnam and Thailand. Firstly, the reality is that the Vietnamese language is fading among the younger generations of Vietnamese Thai, and they hardly understand or speak Vietnamese. To grasp Vietnam's economic growth potential, the Vietnamese language has been taught in many major universities in Thailand

such as Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, and Mahidol, but has not been included as a subject at primary schools like English, Chinese and Japanese. Faced with the current situation, I hope that the two governments of Thailand and Vietnam will set up programs for both Thai and Vietnamese Thai children to learn Vietnamese from their primary school. Secondly, it is important to make the younger generations understand the value of engaging actively in the Vietnamese community's Association activities, which are (1) preserving Vietnamese culture, and (2) diversifying the community's cultural identities in order to co-promote cultural tourism of Thailand and Vietnam. Thirdly, the governments of Thailand and Vietnam should coordinate to encourage and honor the excellent Vietnamese Thai intellectuals and enterprises. Creating favorable conditions for the participation of good Vietnamese Thai intellectuals and entrepreneurs in forums to link young Vietnamese overseas resources among countries for the exchange of experiences and advanced technologies each other.. Moreover, this study focuses mainly on evaluating the factors determining the acculturation of the generation who was born and raised during wartime, and the duration of a sensitive diplomatic relationship between Thailand and Vietnam. This way of doing that can lead to misleading findings when reflecting on the future generations of Vietnamese Thai people, and their level of integration. Therefore, it is necessary to have other research focusing on directly interviewing subjects who are descendants of Vietnamese Thai people. From there, the outcome of acculturation that the younger generation want to be while living in Thailand is possible to evaluate; and research findings serve as a foundation for Thailand-Vietnam policy makers to develop a clear orientation in managing and promoting this human resource in the time of global integration.

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Walsh (2011, cited from Royal Decree of BE 2522) issued a list of 38 occupations that did not provide work permits for non-Thai nationals.

<sup>2</sup> Travel Document was for stateless persons who were granted permanent residence in Thailand and have been denied by their own government in issuing passports.

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