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ABSTRACT

Purpose. Integrating identity theory and role theory, this study examines the re-expatriation inclinations of highly-skilled professional female self-initiated repatriates (SIRs) in an Asian rapidly emerging market (REM), and the reasons underlying these inclinations.

Design/methodology/approach. The authors conducted a survey on a sample of highly-skilled professional female SIRs in Vietnam (N=248). Structural equation modelling was used to evaluate the model.

Findings. The study found that female SIRs' career identity, family identity and social identity have a significant influence on their inclinations to re-expatriate. Attitude towards re-expatriation fully mediates the influence of family identity and career identity on re-expatriation inclinations.

Research Limitations. This research was limited to female SIRs in one REM, namely Vietnam, and may lack generalisability in countries and contexts.

Originality/value. By delineating the identity-related factors that contribute to skilled female SIRs' inclinations to re-expatriate and recognising gender as a complex, multifaceted social construct, the authors broaden the way expatriation is conceptualised and isolate factors that can inform practices for recruitment and retention of this important sub-set of international talent.

Keywords: Identity; highly-skilled professional female self-initiated repatriates; rapidly emerging markets; attitudes; re-expatriation inclination

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to examine the extent to which and how identity influences the re-expatriation inclinations of skilled female self-initiated repatriates (SIRs) from one rapidly emerging market (REM), Vietnam. In recent years, with many REMs experiencing faster economic growth than developed ones, self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), comprising people who go abroad to seek opportunities on their own volition rather than being assigned to a host country (Ellis *et al.*, 2020), are increasingly returning to their countries of origin (i.e. repatriating) (Ho *et al.*, 2018). However, relative to expatriation, less empirical evidence exists on individuals who repatriate without the support of an employer (hereafter referred to as SIRs) (Andresen, 2021). Specifically, there is a dearth of research on skilled SIRs from REMs , and skilled female SIRs from REMs in particular (Shao *et al.*, 2022), with extant literature focused on Western expatriate women from developed economies (e.g. Haak-Saheem *et al.*, 2022).

There is even less empirical research on re-expatriation inclinations defined as SIRs' intentions to work abroad again (Ho *et al.*, 2016). The limited empirical evidence on re-expatriation inclinations of SIRs from developing economies focuses on SIRs in general (i.e., males and females) (Ho *et al*., 2018). However, as SIRs–including female SIRs–are not a homogenous group (Haak-Saheem *et al.*, 2022) and in order to accurately identify the factors that influence their inclination to re-expatriate, research needs to disaggregate SIRs.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to answer the research question: *To what extent and how does identity influence re-expatriation inclinations of skilled female SIRs from an Asian REM?*

Vietnam is one of a number of Asian REMs that is seeing its education system struggling to keep up with its economic development to meet its rising demand for skilled labour (Ho *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, an increasing proportion of Vietnamese people study and work overseas with a view to acquiring international knowledge, skills and experience in developed nations .

Vietnamese SIRs face both government and non-government factors in moving abroad. The government uses financial penalties and work prohibitions for returning SIRs and incentives for returning refugees and privately-funded students to reduce brain drain (Nguyen, 2018).

However, anecdotal evidence indicates that SIRs working in the Vietnamese research ecosystem are going back abroad after returning to work in Vietnam (Tran and Marginson, 2018). Furthermore, the country has been struggling with the side effects of its rapid economic growth such as environment problems, traffic congestion and unsafe food (Ho *et al.*, 2018) which may also encourage Vietnamese SIRs to consider to re-expatriation.

This study on skilled professional female SIRs in Vietnam makes a two-fold contribution to expatriation literature. First, it extends a model, which was originally applied predominantly to expatriation and repatriation inclinations (Tharenou, 2010), to re-expatriation motivations of female SIRs from one Asian REM, Vietnam. It quantifies the impact of identity-related factors on the intentions of repatriates from Vietnam to re-expatriate. Second, this study advances the understanding of motivations of female SIRs from Vietnam to re-expatriate, specifically addressing a gap in research on specific subpopulations of SIEs (Haak-Saheem *et al.*, 2022).

KEY THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Identity-related theories provide a useful framework to understand the different motives because identity can include diverse individual self-meanings and roles (Stryker,

2008). This is relevant, given the conceptualisation of self is many-sided (Dahm *et al.*, 2019), comprising career (a personal identity), family (a role identity) and cultural (a collective or social identity) selves, that differ in how they affect mobility (Tharenou, 2010). Role theory (Markham, 1987) provides a basis for understanding how gender influence women's inclination to re-expatriate.

Identity theory and global mobility

Identity represents "the set of meanings that define who one is" (Burke and Stets, 2009, p.1). Identity theory (Stryker, 1987) contends that an individual has role identities as a result of the positions they occupy in society, and which society and culture shape.

Individual identity is linked to self-interest, the implication being that highly-skilled individuals will likely re-expatriate in order to satisfy their needs for achievement, and advance their career with concomitant financial benefits (Inkson *et al.*, 2004). A relational identity is linked to concern for others (Evans *et al.*, 2022), thus highly-skilled individuals with a strong family identity are unlikely to re-expatriate if it disrupts their partner's career, children's education, or other caregiving roles. Highly-skilled individuals from emerging markets may re-expatriate for better education opportunities for their children. A collective identity is linked to concern for group or community welfare (Minbaeva *et al.*, 2021), and explains why a highly-skilled individual holding a strong patriotic, national identity might be discouraged from re-expatriating.

According to Brewer and Gardner (1996), the self-concept is multifaceted, consisting of three primary loci of self-definition: the self as an individual, as an interpersonal being, and as a group or collective member. Each identity orientation is related to a particular primary motivation among individuals: the desire to enhance their own, their family's or their wider group's well-being (Brickson, 2000). In addition, Brickson (2000) argues that dynamic, multiple identities exist in the same individual, with a highly-skilled person's identity

comprising a career (individual), family (relational), and culture (collective). The role-identity salience theory defines "the relative importance or centrality of a given role-identity for defining oneself" (Hoelter, 1983, p.141). Under this perspective, some role identities may be more relevant or salient than others, with salient roles influencing an individual's behavioural decisions, including global mobility (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010).

A multifaceted identity can also lead to tensions when different facets of an individual's identity conflict or compete with each other. Given the influence of a society's culture on role behaviour (Stryker, 1987), a highly-skilled female's career identity is most likely to compete with their family identity (e.g., partner or wife, parent or daughter) particularly in REMs, and specifically in Vietnam.

Global mobility: A gendered perspective

According to role theory, men and women's socialisation mean they view relocation for work differently (Tharenou, 2008, Markham, 1987). Social role theory maintains that women and men follow prescribed gender roles, which are developed through socialisation, as they internalise their society's normative gender beliefs. In line with traditional gender roles, men tend to have a strong career identity, and women tend to have a strong family identity. Family roles or obligations may even be more different between genders in the Vietnamese context, which has been identified in the GLOBE studies as a Confucian society which has practices that are highly embedded in societal norms, values and beliefs (Truong *et al*., 2017). As a consequence, women experience role conflict and social pressure not to relocate (Tharenou, 2008) or re-expatriate.

Gender differences in expectations may also be evolving (Hermans *et al.*, 2017) as roles of men and women transition to a more egalitarian position in many societies. However, the extent to which gender roles are evolving in Vietnam is less straightforward as mothers in traditional societies often have low full-time workforce participation and are

disproportionately represented in part-time and casual work (Seet *et al.*, 2022). This is because intensive maternity and gender expectations for child care create difficulties for women balancing work and caregiving roles. Research also indicates Vietnamese values, similar to those of other transitional Asian economies, tend towards economic conservatism and collectivism, with women's decisions often driven by the needs of the extended family rather than their own interests (Carr *et al.*, 2005). Attitudes and norms in Vietnam dictate that women occupy a lower social status than men, with women expected to shoulder more unpaid care work on a daily basis. Also, women are not seen as being able to access employment opportunities as readily as men because the Vietnamese society views these women as deviating from the ideal Vietnamese woman who stays at home and is responsible for non-work duties (Coxhead *et al.*, 2019).

Arguably, Vietnamese female SIRs depart from their domestic counterparts as they have already started the transition away from this role and family identity, to emphasise a career identity, as they are highly skilled and have moved offshore before. As highly-skilled women holding a multifaceted identity, deciding whether to re-expatriate will lead to tensions as their roles as both a professional and as a caregiver compete. However, the salience of career identity vis-à-vis other identities and their influence on re-expatriation patterns is currently not well understood.

Hypothesis development

In reviewing re-expatriation inclinations research, identity changes can motivate professionals to move countries, and the ability to transfer cultural identity is linked to global mobility among SIEs (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010, Tharenou and Seet, 2014).

Family identity and re-expatriation inclinations

As indicated above, a salient relational identity, particularly a family identity based on the roles of wife or parent or daughter (Tharenou, 2010), underpinned by concern for significant

others, may influence re-expatriation inclinations of highly-skilled female SIRs, especially those from collectivist cultures (Carr *et al.*, 2005) in Asia, given that their societies place emphasis on family.

Family identity also supports re-expatriation inclinations when it enables highly-skilled female SIRs from emerging markets, including Vietnam, to remit money back home to support family (Tharenou, 2010). Similarly, re-expatriation may result in a superior outlook for the entire family, particularly children and descendants (Carr *et al.*, 2005), if it provides better educational opportunities and more generally, better financial outcomes in the long run in the host country.

Highly-qualified female SIRs may also be motivated to re-expatriate to benefit their family in terms of an enhanced quality of life, including improved social welfare, personal safety and a better physical environment, especially highly-skilled individuals who are from emerging markets (Wadhwa *et al.*, 2009), including Vietnam. This is an important consideration because the trade-off to economic growth in many REMs (e.g. China, India, and Vietnam) is pollution, traffic chaos and relatively unsafe environments (Zweig *et al.*, 2021). Hence, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1: Family-oriented identity is positively related to inclination to re-expatriate amongst highly-skilled female SIRs.

Career identity and re-expatriation inclinations

Highly-skilled female SIRs who consider that their career is salient – or of primary importance – will, motivated by self-interest and a high need to achieve, be more likely to pursue opportunities abroad for career-related opportunities (e.g., job and development opportunities) and outcomes (e.g., career advancement, pay and other financial benefits and working conditions) (Inkson *et al.*, 2004). If repatriation has not met their expectations, female SIRs may more likely re-expatriate.

SIRs from less-developed countries in particular are motivated by enhanced career outcomes available from re-expatriating to more advanced economies, given the low wages and level of human capital development characteristic of employing firms and institutions in emerging markets. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Career salient identity is positively related to inclination to re-expatriate amongst highly-skilled female SIRs.

Social identity and re-expatriation inclinations

Social identity refers to someone's perception about whether significant others believe that he/she should re-expatriate, leaving his\her current country. The choice of highly-skilled female SIRs to re-expatriate in collectivist cultures is expected to be heavily impacted by social groups that they interact with, particularly their family (e.g., spouses, children, and parents) or other individuals who they consider important (e.g., close friends and colleagues). Highly-skilled female SIRs are motivated to re-expatriate if their family members or significant others think that going abroad again leads to better future prospects for the SIRs and family members, particularly their children (Carr *et al*., 2005).

While Vietnamese societal values, attitudes and norms still prescribe traditional gender roles, it is possible that some family members and significant others think that going abroad again leads to better future prospects for the highly-skilled SIRs career-wise too. On this basis, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H3: Salient social identity is positively related to inclination to re-expatriate amongst highly-skilled female SIRs.

Attitude towards re-expatriation inclinations

Highly-skilled SIRs' international mobility inclinations are also influenced by their personal attitudes (Ferro, 2006). Attitude defines the extent to which repatriates have a favourable assessment of re-expatriation. Hall (2005) contends that favourable attitudes to re-expatriation

may result from highly-skilled SIRs' personal interests, motivations, and desires. Research show dissatisfaction with their job or life circumstances can lead professionals to develop negative attitudes towards their home country and consider moving (Myers and Pringle, 2005). Hence, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H4: Favourable attitude toward re-expatriation is positively related to inclination to re-expatriate amongst highly-skilled female SIRs.

The mediating role of attitudes toward re-expatriation.

We hypothesise that a favourable attitude toward re-expatriation can mediate the links through which family identity, career identity and social identity influence highly-skilled female SIRs' inclination to re-expatriate.

First, we argue that career identity, family identity and social identity are related to favourable attitude towards re-expatriation. Family identity is associated with favourable attitude towards re-expatriation when highly-skilled female SIRs' families benefit from better job opportunities and quality of life in their new country, or when Vietnam-based family members are the beneficiaries of remittances. Similarly, career identity and favourable attitude to re-expatriation are related, when female SIRs perceive that better career-related opportunities (e.g., job and development opportunities) and outcomes (e.g., career advancement and financial rewards) (Tharenou, 2010) will result from re-expatriation. Finally, social identity is related to favourable attitudes to re-expatriation when family members or significant others believe that re-expatriation brings an enhanced future for highly-skilled female SIRs and their whole families.

According to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), the three predictors: attitudes toward behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control can explain inclination. As personal identities are considered background factors and only indirectly affect inclination for this study, we focus on the attitude towards re-expatriation. Armitage

and Conner (2001) found that inclination depends on attitudes and subjective norms rather than on their control. In addition, Lounsbury *et al.* (2004)'s research showed that individuals' attitudes are influenced by pressures from other people that are important to them (subjective norms). Furthermore, as outlined above, the identities are related to favourable attitudes towards re-expatriation, which, in turn, influence the inclination to re-expatriate. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 5:** Favourable attitude toward re-expatriation mediates the links of a) family identity, b) career identity and c) social identity with inclination to re-expatriate amongst highly-skilled female SIRs.

Insert Figure 1 about here

METHODS

Sample and procedures

This research is premised on empirical data to investigate the hypotheses developed in the research model; therefore, a quantitative survey methodology approach is appropriate to test the causal relationships in the model (Cooper and Schindler, 2011). The sample included Vietnamese female SIRs who had studied and/or obtained work experience overseas for at least one year before returning home and are currently working in roles requiring higher skills in Vietnam. The sample did not include repatriates who were sent overseas by their organisation to fulfil overseas assignment tasks. We conducted both paper-based and online surveys. We directly contacted the human resource (HR) departments of twenty-seven organisations, including large multinational companies (> 100 employees), universities and research institutes where there might be a high density of highly-skilled female SIRs, and asked them to send emails with a link to an online survey or directly distribute the paper questionnaire to target respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity of responses was maintained by asking respondents to return completed surveys in a sealed envelope to sealed

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mailboxes in the HR departments. Seventy-seven responses were collected from these sources. Additionally, we approached the heads or administrators of seven Vietnamese overseas alumni associations from different countries (USA, United Kingdom [UK], Australia, New Zealand, France, Japan and China), and asked them to post the link of our online questionnaire via email or on their group's Facebook pages/web sites. Two hundred and three responses were collected by these means. From 280 questionnaires received, 32 were unusable due to missing data for important constructs or unreliable answers. Finally, 248 fully completed responses from highly-skilled female SIRs were used for analysis. Table 1 presents respondent profiles.

Insert Table 1 about here

Of the 248 female SIRs, 73% were aged between 26 and 35 years, and 68% were married. Over two-thirds had lived overseas for between 1 and 3 years and a large number (81%) had returned to Vietnam within the previous five years. Two-thirds (66%) had returned to Vietnam from the USA, Australia, or the UK. Regarding the respondents' current work life, nearly two-thirds of female SIRs had worked with their current employers for five years or less. About one-third of female SIRs were finance/accounting professionals, 20% were from other highly-skilled professions, one-third were lecturers/researchers, and 14% were managers. Officially, 5.3 million Vietnamese are living abroad in 130 countries, with 80% in developed countries (Luong, 2022). There is no official data on Vietnamese women expatriates or repatriates, but in countries that do collect data such as Australia, most post-Vietnam war era SIEs are in white-collar professions (ABS, 2016). Moreover, the approach for data collection and the characteristics of our sample are similar to previous studies on self-initiate repatriates (e.g. Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010).

Measures

Family identity

Three items from previous studies (Zweig, 1997, Tharenou, 2010) measured the family identity of SIRs. The items were assessed on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 1 *(completely not expect)* to 7 *(completely expect)*. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.90.

Career identity

Six items from previous research (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010) measured the career identity of SIRs. The items were assessed on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 1 *(completely not expect)* to 7 *(completely expect)*. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.86.

Social identity

For this construct, all three items were adopted from Park and Smith (2007) and were assessed on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 1 *(strongly disagree)* to 7 *(strongly agree)*. The Cronbach's alpha for this construct was 0.91.

Attitude toward re-expatriation

We adopted four items with seven-point Likert-type scale, comprising the adjectives "pleasant–unpleasant", "unfavourable–favourable", "annoying–nice" and "good–bad" from Van Breukelen *et al.*'s (2004) attitude toward behaviour. Two items (first and fourth) were reverse scored. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.83.

Inclination to re-expatriate

Three items adapted from Tharenou and Caulfield (2010) and two items adapted from Ho et al. (2016) were used to measure this construct. All five items were assessed on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 *(strongly disagree)* to 7 *(strongly agree)*. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.82.

Control variables

This study controlled for tenure as people who work in an organisation for a longer period of time may be more embedded in that organisation; hence, it is less likely that they will re-expatriate (Tharenou, 2010). Age was controlled as younger SIRs may be more likely to re-

expatriate. Further, this study controlled for total time abroad and total time since return as we expect that SIRs who have spent more time studying or working abroad or those who have just returned home are more likely to re-expatriate.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Confirmatory factor analysis

The descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables are shown in Table 2 and the measurements are in Table 3. To assess the measurement models and check the validity of the study's constructs, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. The models should meet the following criteria for good model fit indices, including: $\chi^2/df \leq 3$; goodness of fit index (GFI) ≥ 0.9; comparative fit index (CFI) ≥ 0.9; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) ≥ 0.9; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.08 and standardised root mean residual (SRMR) ≤ 0.08 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). However, the value for GFI is still acceptable if it is above 0.8 as suggested by Doll *et al.* (1994). The results found that our hypothesised five-factor measurement model fit the data well (χ^2/df = 2.1, GFI = 0.88, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.066 and SRMR = 0.064).

Further, on comparing this hypothesised model with potential alternative models, it was established that the hypothesised model was significantly superior (i.e. four-factor model when career identity and family identity are combined: χ^2/df = 4.4, GFI = 0.74, CFI = 0.78, TLI = 0.75, RMSEA = 0.12, SRMR = 0.11, or three-factor model when career identity, family identity and social identity are combined: χ^2/df = 6.7, GFI = 0.64, CFI = 0.62, TLI = 0.57, RMSEA = 0.15, SRMR = 0.14). The CFA also supported discriminant and convergent validity of all constructs.

The standardised factor loadings for all constructs were greater than 0.5 and were significant ($p < 0.01$) (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs

ranged from 0.65 to 0.89, exceeding the minimum requirement (0.6), the Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.8 to 0.9, exceeding 0.7, and the AVE values ranged from 0.536 to 0.773, exceeding 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2010) (see Table 3). Further, the discriminant validity of all constructs was supported since all AVE values were greater than the squared correlation estimate (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 and Table 3 about here

Common method bias

To assess common method bias (CMB), we used the following two tests. First, Harman's one-factor test indicated that the one-factor model was highly inadequate (χ^2/df = 9.92, GFI = 0.50, CFI = 0.40, TLI = 0.32, RMSEA = 0.19, SRMR = 0.17). Second, we applied the Marker Variable technique (Williams *et al.*, 2010) to assess common method bias by including a marker variable (perceived behavioural control). The marker variable was uncorrelated to the dependent variable (re-expatriation inclinations) (r = -0.05, p > 0.05) and other variables in the model (r ranged from -0.11 to 0.08 and *p* > 0.05). While controlling for the marker variable, the correlations between hypothesised constructs remained significant (Williams *et al.*, 2010). Overall, the two tests above suggest that CMB was not problematic in this study.

Test of hypotheses

The theoretical model (or the partially mediated model) in Figure 2 provided a reasonable fit ($\chi2$= 825.18, df = 303, χ^2/df = 2.72, GFI = 0.862, CFI = 0.918, TLI = 0.905, RMSEA = 0.062 and SRMR = 0.066). In the theoretical model, attitude toward re-expatriation was hypothesised as a partial mediator. We used the chi-square difference test to test if a construct was a partial or full mediator. We tested whether attitude toward re-expatriation partially mediated the link of career identity to re-expatriation inclination by comparing the fit of the theoretical model with that of the fully mediated model removing the direct paths of career identity with re-expatriation inclination. The partially mediated did not fit better than the fully

mediated model ($\triangle\chi^2(1) = 0.02$, $p > 0.05$). We then tested whether the mediators fully mediated the link of family identity to re-expatriation inclination. The partially mediated model having direct path between family identity and re-expatriation inclination did not fit better than the fully mediated model ($\triangle\chi^2(1) = 0.11$, $p > 0.05$). Finally, we tested whether the mediators fully mediated the link of social identity to re-expatriation inclination. The partially mediated model having direct path between social identity and re-expatriation inclination fitted better than the fully mediated model ($\triangle\chi^2(3) = 39.9$, $p < 0.05$).

Hence, we used the model that keeps the direct path from social identity to re-expatriation inclinations and drops the direct paths from career identity and for family identity to re-expatriation inclinations to assess Hypotheses 1 to 5. This model has an R-square of 0.43, indicating that the predictors explained 43% of the variance of re-expatriation inclination. Further, we applied the method of Cohen (1992) to test the effect size (Table 4). Our results show the significant power of the relationships.

Insert Table 4 about here

We used bias-corrected bootstrap (Hayes, 2009) with 2000 re-samples to test the significance of direct, indirect, and total effects, and mediating effects. The completely standardised structural coefficients of the theoretical model are shown in Figure 2 while the standardised direct, indirect, and total effects of factors on re-expatriation inclination are shown in Table 5.

Insert Figure 2 and Table 5 about here

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. Both family identity and career identity significantly affect re-expatriation inclination ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$, respectively) (see Table 5). Their effects on re-expatriation inclination fully resulted from indirect paths through the mediator of attitude toward re-expatriation.

Hypothesis 3 was supported as social identity directly affects re-expatriation inclinations ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and indirectly ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$, 95%CI = [0.044, 0.196]) affects re-expatriation inclinations. Hypothesis 4 was also supported as attitude toward re-expatriation significantly affects re-expatriation inclinations (($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$).

Finally, Hypothesis 5 was supported as family identity, career identity and social identity significantly affect attitude toward re-expatriation ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$, and $\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$, respectively) and they also significantly affect re-expatriation inclination ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) (Figure 3). Further, social identity directly affects re-expatriation inclinations ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$). The total effects of family identity, career identity and social identity on re-expatriation inclination were significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$, and $\beta = 0.57$, $p < 0.01$, respectively) (Tables 5 and 6). Thus, attitude toward re-expatriation fully mediates the links of family identity and career identity to re-expatriation inclination, and partially mediates the links of social identity to re-expatriation inclination.

Insert Table 6 about here

Among the four control variables, only tenure was significantly negatively related to re-expatriation inclination. SIRs having longer working experience with current companies were less inclined to re-expatriate (see Table 5).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical implications

To date, much research in expatriation has focused on the initial moving abroad phase and/or the repatriation phase. Moreover, while women, particularly highly-skilled women, account for an increasing proportion of skilled expatriates, there is limited empirical evidence on this important sub-set of expatriates (Haak-Saheem *et al.*, 2022), particularly SIRs from

developing countries. Our research on the impact of identity-related factors on the re-expatriation inclinations of highly-skilled female SIRs in Vietnam contributes to a better understanding of the factors and processes influencing their intentions and the varied roles and self-meanings of highly-skilled female expatriates and specifically, highly-skilled Vietnamese female SIRs.

Consistent with expectations, we find that there are significant positive direct relationships between career identity, family identity, and social identity, and inclination to re-expatriate. These results indicate that SIRs' inclinations to re-expatriate are multi-factorial, reflecting highly-skilled women's career orientations, and specifically, career opportunities and outcomes (Inkson *et al.*, 2004) and their non-career orientation or locus (Tharenou and Seet, 2014, Tharenou, 2010).

In particular, our analyses indicate that the most salient identity-related factor in the study influencing highly-skilled female SIRs' inclination to re-expatriate is their social identity which affects the decision both directly and indirectly, through favourable attitudes. The salience of opinions, perceptions or pressures of significant others to SIRs' inclination to re-expatriate is also likely unpinned by the collectivist nature of Vietnamese culture (Hofstede, 2001).

Family identity is a more salient predictor than career identity as women are primary caregivers to their partner, children, and extended family. Furthermore, Vietnamese societies expect women to emphasise family (Knodel *et al.*, 2005). Re-expatriating to more developed countries may provide better educational opportunities for SIRs' children and better financial outcomes for their families in the long run.

Hence, the study's focus on the re-expatriation phase extends Tharenou's (2010) model to explore expatriation and repatriation inclinations.

Implications for practice

To facilitate the retention of highly-skilled female SIRs who are an important source of talent in emerging countries, targeted measures that enable individual employers to meet their staffing needs are needed. Given the different factors affecting the inclinations of SIRs to re-expatriate, employers should adopt strategies that address the multi-dimensional nature of identity.

First, employers should develop programs that meet the career-related needs of highly-skilled female SIRs and provide relevant career development pathways based on their education and skill levels. This is especially so if employers value the overseas study and experiences of their prospective employees as they lead to the acquisition of important global skills (Tharenou, 2015). Work environments should also be appealing, so that SIRs are more likely to have their needs for achievement met, and thus are less likely to re-expatriate.

Second, to reduce the motivation for highly-skilled female SIRs to re-expatriate for better income opportunities, employers should offer sufficient financial rewards to meet the needs of their immediate and extended families. Differentiated family health benefit incentives based on where and how long they have lived abroad may also be necessary.

Finally, government policies that recognise the motivations of SIRs and alleviate their intention to re-expatriate are needed. For example, policies might be developed that directly address not only SIRs' career-related needs but also the needs of their family e.g. tax benefits and subsidized education and health-care for SIRs' family members.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This research has some limitations which can inform future research. First, the research is limited due to the sample size of highly-skilled female SIRs (N = 248). Furthermore, it investigates the inclination to re-expatriate as a cross-sectional study.

Second, we did not control for various factors like which countries SIRs studied and/or worked in and their different occupations on returning to Vietnam. Future research

could compare highly-skilled female SIRs incorporating some of these key differences.

Third, the research is confined to one country, Vietnam. REMs may differ widely in their trajectories of economy growth, hence generalising the research findings may be difficult, suggesting the need for further research in other similar contexts.

Fourth, future research should conduct in-depth interviews with Vietnamese SIRs to further explain the statistical results by investigating participants' views in more depth. For example, it can explore how the likelihood of highly skilled people working in low skilled jobs in host countries may affect their inclination to re-expatriate.

Finally, the focus in this paper is on women. A comparative analysis between female and male SIRs and how identity-related factors are similar or different also constitutes a direction for future research.

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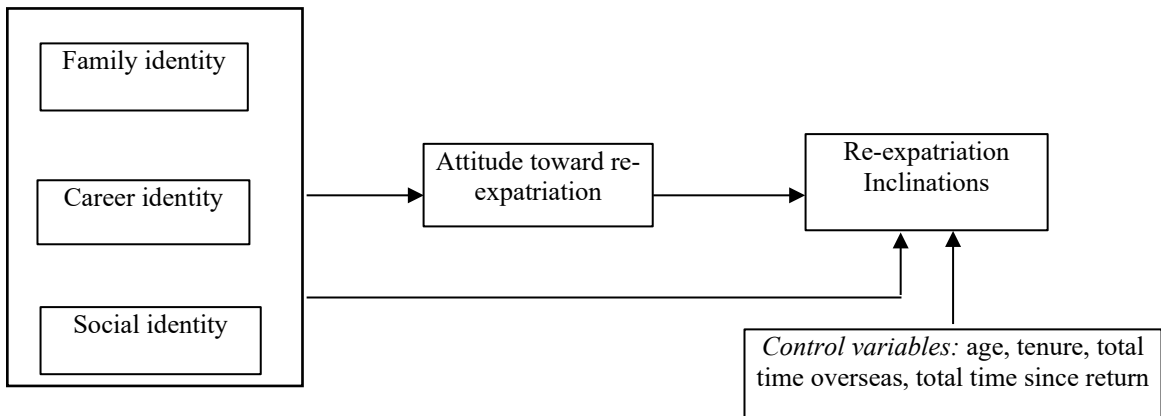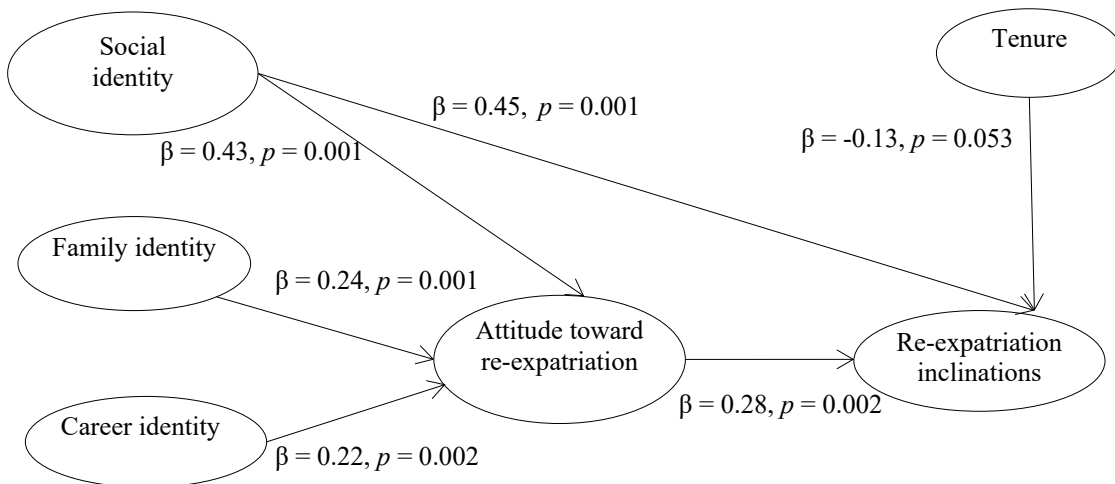
FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual model

Figure 2: Completely standardised structural coefficient for the theoretical model

Note: Non-significant paths were omitted.

Table 1. Respondents' profile

Description		N	Percent	Description		N	Percent
Age	20-25	30	12	**Returned from**	Australia	83	34
	26-30	85	34		United Kingdom	47	19
	31-35	96	39		USA	23	9
	Over 36	37	15		France	23	9
Marital status	Single	79	32		Japan	13	5
					New Zealand	11	4
	Married	169	68		Other	48	20
Overseas qualification	Below a bachelor's degree	3	1	**Occupation**	Accounting/ Finance professional	81	33
	Bachelor's degree	34	14		Academic/ Lecturer/ Researcher	83	33
	Masters degree or postgraduate diploma	187	75		Manager	35	14
	PhD	22	9		Other	49	20
	Missing	2	1	**Tenure**	< 2 years	91	37
Length of time overseas	1 to 2 years	148	60		2 to 5 years	68	27
	2 to 3 years	39	16		5 to 10 years	63	25
	3 to 4 years	18	7		>10 years	26	11
	4 to 5 years	18	7	**Length of time since returning home**	<1 year	88	36
	> 5 years	25	10		1 to 2 years	34	14
Currently work for	Vietnamese EMNEs	114	46		2 to 3 years	29	11
	Foreign-owned firms/international joint-ventures	64	26		3 to 4 years	20	8
	State-owned enterprises and non-government organisations	70	28		4 to 5 years	31	13
					> 5 years	46	19

Source: Authors' own work

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
Re-expatriate inclinations (V1)	0.579				
Attitude toward re-expatriation (V2)	0.422	0.565			
Social identity (V3)	0.524	0.382	0.773		
Career identity (V4)	0.133	0.331	0.082	0.536	
Family identity (V5)	0.198	0.369	0.200	0.320	0.596
Mean	3.679	5.340	4.288	5.165	6.119
Standard deviation	1.300	0.870	1.522	0.906	0.764

Notes: All correlations with absolute value larger than 0.133 are significant at the p < 0.05 level, except the correlation between career identity and social identity (not significant, p > 0.05). AVEs are shown on the diagonal.

Source: Authors' own work

Table 3: Measurements

Constructs and item wording	λ	α	CR
Re-expatriate inclinations		0.87	0.65
1. I intend to return abroad to live for a long period.	0.91		
2. I intend to stay in Vietnam for a long period. (Reversed)	0.87		
3. I plan to return abroad to live within the next two years.	0.50		
4. Even I have opportunities to return abroad to live, I will stay in Vietnam. (Reversed)	0.69		
5. If the opportunity arises, I will return abroad to live.[a]	-		
Attitude toward re-expatriation		0.80	0.79
1. According to me, returning abroad to live is (Strongly pleasant → Strongly un-pleasant) (Reversed)	0.63		
2. According to me, returning abroad to live is (Strongly un-favorable → Strongly favourable)	0.73		
3. According to me, returning abroad to live is (Very annoying → Very nice)	0.67		
4. According to me, returning abroad to live is (Very good → Very bad) (Reversed)	0.84		
Social identity (subjective norm)		0.90	0.78
1. Most people who are important to me think that I should return abroad to live.	0.87		
2. Most people whose opinion I value consider that I should return abroad to live.	0.89		
3. It is expected of me that I return abroad to live.	0.84		
Career identity		0.85	0.83
1. Better career opportunities	0.67		
2. Higher salaries/income	0.50		
3. Further development	0.79		
4. More opportunities for career advancement	0.89		
5. Broader career choices	0.74		
6. Better working environment	0.71		
Family identity		0.89	0.89
1. Better social welfare (health care, pensions...)	0.50		
2. Safety and security	0.71		
3. Lifestyle	0.61		
4. Better opportunities for children's future	0.87		
5. Better education for children	0.97		
6. Better place to bring up children	0.89		

Note: [a] We deleted this item for reliability reasons; λ = standardized factor loadings (CFA); α = Cronbach's alpha; CR = Composite reliability; Goodness-of-fit statistics for CFA: $\chi^2(215)$ = 449.638, GFI = 0.88, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92 and RMSEA = 0.066.

Source: Authors' own work

Table 4: Effect size

	R_E^2		$R_I^2 - R_E^2$		$(R_I^2 - R_E^2)/(1 - R_I^2)$		Effect size	
	Attitude	**Intention**	**Attitude**	**Intention**	**Attitude**	**Intention**	**Attitude**	**Intention**
Family identity	0.327		0.045		0.071656		Medium	
Career identity	0.328		0.044		0.070064		Medium	
Social identity	0.195	0.319	0.177	0.113	0.281847	0.198944	Medium	Medium
Attitude		0.39		0.042		0.073944		Medium

Source: Authors' own work

Table 5: Standardized direct, indirect and total effects of factors on re-expatriation inclination

Variable	Indirect effect		Direct effect		Total effect		Results
	Coefficient	*p*	Coefficient	*p*	Coefficient	*p*	
Family identity	0.07	0.001	-		0.07	0.001	H1: Supported[a]
Career identity	0.06	0.002	-		0.06	0.002	H2: Supported[a]
Social identity	0.12	0.001	0.45	0.000	0.57	0.001	H3: Supported
Attitude toward re-expatriation			0.28	0.002	0.28	0.002	H4: Supported
Control variables							
Age			-0.01	0.959	-0.01	0.959	
Years abroad			0.04	0.479	0.04	0.479	
Years since return			0.05	0.443	0.05	0.443	
Tenure			-0.13	0.053	-0.13	0.053	

Notes: Supported[a] : results include indirect effects, the significance was from the bias-corrected bootstrap with 2000 re-samples.

Table 6: Mediation effects

Hypotheses	Standardized indirect effects		95% Confidence interval for mediation effects	Results
	Coefficient	*p*		
H5a: Family identity → Attitude toward re-expatriation → Re-expatriation inclination	0.07	0.001	(0.019, 0.129)	Supported
H5b: Career identity → Attitude toward re-expatriation → Re-expatriation inclination	0.06	0.002	(0.017, 0.124)	Supported
H5c: Social identity → Attitude toward re-expatriation → Re-expatriation inclination	0.12	0.001	(0.044, 0.196)	Supported

Source: Authors' own work