Transnational Mobilities of Australia-Educated and Domiciled Professional Migrants from Vietnam

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School of Education
Abstract

Within a global discourse of increasing human capital for competitive advantage, skilled migration following international education – known as two-step migration – has been used by governments as a human capacity building strategy. In government-commissioned reports and studies, the dominant use of economic frameworks describes two-step migrants as rational choice makers. Such approaches have the effect of disembodying transnational mobilities as homogeneous ‘brain flows’ across borders. In contrast, migrants have their own pursuits and experience circumstances affecting their subjectivities in transnational mobilities. By building on extant research on transnationalism, this thesis provides a more holistic picture of education-related and professional migration. It acknowledges the embodiment of transnational mobilities through the relational aspects of migrants’ everyday lives, from forming decisions to migrate, to relocating to the host society and planning for the future. Therefore, understanding the relationality of transnational mobilities requires researchers to attend to skilled migrants’ engagement with the world across multiple spaces and temporalities.

In this study, I examine education-related migration from Vietnam to Australia, portrayed in policy discourse as a human capacity building strategy (Vietnam), and a dual national project of education export and skilled migration (Australia). While acknowledging the discursive influences of a global ‘race for talent’, I argue that migrants always share the world with others and things in intersecting social domains. Their transnational mobilities, reflective of their entwinement with the world, are characterised by open-ended possibilities.

Interpretative conversations were used in exploring how professional migrants in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, Australia, negotiated transnational mobilities. By using a snowball sampling technique, I recruited 15 participants who had been former international students in Australia from Vietnam, and who had obtained at least a Bachelor’s degree conferred by onshore Australian universities and acquired Permanent Residence since 1999.

Negotiation of transnational mobilities by the participants is explored in four major areas: decisions to migrate, relocation experiences, work and life aspirations, and uses of transnational ties. Drawing on Heidegger’s phenomenology, I examine these four areas using the concept of being-in-the-world in terms of these migrants’ interactions with others and things, the ways they followed and/or broke with public norms, as well as what mattered to them in their mobilities in relation to the surrounding world.
This thesis contributes further understandings and elaborates distinctive features of two-step migration from Vietnam to Australia in place of earlier research which has analysed Asian migratory flows. The concept of being-in-the-world enables me to argue that two-step migrants from Vietnam in Australia negotiate transnational mobilities through their embeddedness in the socio-political, economic, educational and cultural structures in both countries in relation to their personal concerns and circumstances. Thus, I challenge the assumptions present in ‘race for talent’ policies that disembodies professional migrants as homogeneous flows of human capital from one nation to another. Exploring migrants’ entwinement with the world in intersecting domains enables me to add nuances to previous understandings of binaries in migration, including ‘routes’ and ‘roots’, agency and structure, and spatiality and temporality. I also extend my critique to approaches adopted in skilled migration research that examine separate influences from migrants’ interactions with the world on their negotiations of mobilities.

By re-conceptualising transnational mobilities as reflective of migrants’ being-in-the-world, I make interrelated theoretical and methodological contributions to research on education-related migration. The Heideggerian perspective allows me to demonstrate how two-step migration trajectories are produced in and through migrants’ engagement with others and things in heterogeneous times and spaces. I argue that migration is not simply an autonomous choice made by two-step migrants in fragmented events, but is entwined in the politico-economic and sociocultural structures, spanning the historical, the contemporary and the projected future. Two-step migrants’ mobilities are shaped by their involvement in interrelated aspects of their lives, ranging from personal and family concerns, as well as state policies adopted to re-make Vietnam into a market socialist country, and education-related migration policies in Australia. In and through their entwinement with the world, two-step migrants encounter the interconnection of time and space as intersubjective domains in their experiences of mobilities. Their entwinement with the world constrains and opens up possibilities for migrants to negotiate transnational mobilities in achieving the lives to which they aspire. Situating the negotiation of transnational mobilities within migrants’ being-in-the-world addresses the relationality of their everyday practices and decisions, which are not simply confined to experiences in fixed territories, but are parts of multiple spatial networks and temporal linkages.

This study provides a timely response to calls for research that goes beyond economic instrumentality as a motive for skilled migration through exploring migrants’ embodiment of their experiences in interrelated domains. The study contributes innovative approaches and insights to understanding education migrants as mediators of global, national and local processes, with personal motivations.
Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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**Publications included in this thesis**


**Contributions by others to the thesis**

This thesis received professional editorial services provided by Grant Dobinson.

**Statement of parts of the thesis submitted to qualify for the award of another degree**

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international education, brain drain, being-in-the-world, phenomenology, skilled migration, transnationalism, transnational mobilities, Vietnam’s diasporas

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEI</td>
<td>Australian Education International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUD</td>
<td>Australian dollar (currency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSOL</td>
<td>Consolidated Sponsored Occupation List (Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIAC</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Citizenship (Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBP</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Border Protection (Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOET</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Training (Vietnam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOJ</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice (Vietnam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Permanent Residency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D</td>
<td>Research and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESOL</td>
<td>Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>US dollar (currency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCP</td>
<td>Vietnam Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIED</td>
<td>Vietnam International Education Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>VND</td>
<td>Vietnamese dong (currency)</td>
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Chapter 1. Two-Step Migration in the Global ‘Race for Talent’

This thesis examines the transnational mobilities of professional migrants from Vietnam who had obtained Australian undergraduate and/or postgraduate degrees and were residing in Australia. The process of migration after completion of international education is referred to as two-step migration. It is facilitated through national strategies to participate in a global competition for attaining highly skilled people for the development of a knowledge economy. This study is contextualised within this global ‘race for talent’, which has contributed to a growth in skilled migrants with tertiary qualifications that reached 40 million around the world in 2014 (International Organization for Migration, 2014, p. 11). This large number is constituted by several forms of education-related migration, including two-step migration. This thesis situates transnational mobilities of two-step migrants within the global war for talent that may “reshape the world in the coming decades” (Florida, 2005, p. 3). It also takes into account political agendas of human capital development in national scales, as well as migrants’ personal circumstances in which they negotiate their mobilities with other people and things in the surrounding world.

1.1 A global ‘race for talent’

Like globalisation, the idea of the knowledge-based economy has taken particular forms and has been supported by particular actors. The dominant discourse of the global knowledge economy has argued for greater emphasis on highly skilled workers who are believed to increase economic productivity through their “production, distribution and use of knowledge and information” in high-technology industries, which lead to economic growth (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 1996, p. 7). It is claimed that the earning and labour capacities of individuals collectively increase the total accumulation of productivity gains that can “make growth more sustainable, which, in return, support poverty reduction” (Son, 2010, p. 2). Thus, governments consider human capital as contributing to competitive advantage in the global economy, creating a global race for talent.

Prior to the most recent global financial crisis, governments, often in developed countries, attempted to create a reservoir of talent to address skill shortages in specified fields, which, it was claimed, were detrimental to economic growth. In OECD countries, life expectancy is increasingly longer (82 years for women and 77 for men), whereas birth rates are decreasing (OECD, 2013a, p. 26). At the turn of the 21st century, 15 per cent of people in the OECD countries were aged over 65, and it is forecast to reach 25 per cent by 2030 (OECD, 2007, p. 12). As a result, the size of working-age population in these countries grows slowly, being projected at 4 per cent in the first half of the 21st century, compared with 76 per cent in the last half of the previous century. In addition, foreign
talent now enters global and national political agendas. Talent is expected to increase national competitive advantage through innovation and creativity, especially locally trained people who are able to adapt to and integrate in local labour markets (Chellaraj, Maskus, & Mattoo, 2005, p. ii). Foreign skilled people can also address skilled labour needs in regional areas and enable “the right mix of skills to help keep wealth creation” (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC]1, 2006; see also UK Stationery Office, 2008). In the US, demands for the knowledge economy development can be met through the recruitment of foreign workers on H-1B visas who possess “theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge” in special fields. This visa program, which allows many international graduates and skilled migrants to work in the US and later apply for the Green Card, can be seen as the US Government’s attempt to attract and retain skilled migrants for economic growth (US Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2015, p. 1). Further, the attraction of talent is also enacted to achieve national political agendas in the global economic integration. Permission for freer transnational mobilities from and to some communist countries than during the Cold War shows these governments’ efforts in changing their political images from ‘unfriendly’ to democratic countries, with Vietnam and China as typical examples (see Biao, 2011; Nguyen, 2014).

In general, foreign talent is attracted to enrich national human capacity for national competition in the global knowledge economy, creating a race among countries around the world in which the UK Economist Intelligence Unit (2015) evaluated the US as the best performer and Australia as the sixth. Despite differences in human talent attraction strategies, East and Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, China, Thailand, Malaysia and India, as well as Algeria and Nigeria in Africa also gain high rankings in this Global Talent Index (p. 4). The global governance of talent through migration with a focus on migrants’ educational qualifications refers to a “talent-for-citizenship exchange” (Shachar, 2006, p. 159), viewing skilled migrants as economic agents with potential contributions to the economy.

Foreign talent is attracted through several methods. The most significant strategy to increase the quantity and quality of foreign skilled people is done through two-step migration, which articulates the dual projects of international education and skilled immigration. The objective of these projects is to expand higher education after which international students are allowed to apply for permanent residency. Globally, the dual projects of international education and skilled migration have partly

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1 The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) has changed its name to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) since September 2013. Therefore, for citations referring to this department, this thesis uses DIAC from 2006 to 2013 and DIBP since 2014.
contributed to the increasing global number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship from 0.8 million in 1975 to 1.64 million in 1999 and 4.3 million in 2011 (OECD, 2011, p. 1 & 2013b, p. 1). In 2013, OECD countries hosted 77 per cent of international students, and almost half of them were enrolled in the US (17 per cent), the UK (13 per cent), Australia and Germany (7.6 and 6 per cent respectively) (OECD, 2013b, p. 2). Asia is traditionally the biggest source area of foreign students, accounting for more than 51 per cent of the total, although there are variations in international student enrolments between countries (Bashir, 2007, p. 14). In some sense, while human capital theory assumes a linear relationship between “learning” and “earning” (Brown & Tannock, 2009, p. 381; see also Tan, 2014), the global race for talent has constructed a new relationship between studying overseas and migrating.

The articulation of international education and skilled migration schemes is not commonplace practices in some developing countries, because of domestic incapacity to provide world-class education to attract foreign students, and probably political intentions to retain existing political ideologies. Governments of these countries run foreign talent attraction programs by offering financial benefits and status recognition to skilled foreigners. For example, Vietnam has issued a decree (Number 87/2014/ND-CP) which is an amendment of other similar previous decrees, to attract talent from abroad (The Central Government, 2014a). South Korea will relax its visa rules and current points-based system to allow international students and foreign skilled workers to obtain permanent residence, as far as they meet the requirements for income, business investment and/or high educational qualifications (The Korea Herald, 2014, p. 1). In addition, diaspora strategies are enacted to call for former nationals’ contributions through technology and knowledge transfers, remittances and professional networks.

Some developing countries in Asia, such as China, can be seen as typical examples of using diaspora strategies as “rituals” to attract former nationals (Biao, 2011, p. 821). Different strategies are also drafted and employed to retain students by expanding domestic provision of higher education programs. Other strategies such as bonded state-sponsored scholarships are directed at sending students overseas. States are known for drawing engagement plans for returning students and diasporic populations to secure contributions, including financial remittances, technology transfer, entrepreneurial cooperation and professional networks (Gribble, 2008, pp. 27-34). By doing this, governments of these countries hope to turn ‘brain drain’ into ‘brain gain’, because returning students and migrants bring practical benefits to national development. Some source countries like Vietnam and China are relaxing requirements for return by allowing students to remain in destination countries for a longer period after graduation to gain international experience and extend professional relationships. Governments of these countries also encourage contributions
of diasporic communities, without having to return home physically. Their engagement with diasporic networks are seen as signs of progress and improvement of their standings not only in relation to the global trade, but also enabling civil and political rights of individuals (Biao, 2011; Nguyen, 2014).

Within these global discourses of human capital, highly skilled people appear to have more access, rights and ability to move across borders. However, state control to retain skilled labour force also creates constraints to transnational mobilities. Communist countries are even stricter in selecting and forbidding or limiting who can go because of their attempt to retain communist ideologies. For example, students from families with ‘contributions to the revolution’ or war martyrs and veterans, and those with close connections to the Vietnam Communist Party (VCP) are given more priority in studying and going overseas than others. Mobilities become a “resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship” (Skeggs, 2004, p. 49). In this sense, possibilities of international education and migrating, as well as possibly transiting in another country, returning and re-migrating make transnational mobilities of two-step migrants fluid, rather than linear, trajectories.

1.2 Two-step migration from Vietnam to Australia in the global race for talent

I now discuss how two-step migration is enacted from the global to national by focusing on Vietnam and Australia as the source and destination countries in this study, which employ different strategies for talent attraction because of their own socio-economic and political features. Despite the differences, I argue that the transnational mobilities of two-step migrants from Vietnam to Australia are embedded in both national and global scapes. This argument also enables me to further situate my study within the global race for talent in relation to national political and socio-economic structures.

Within global two-step migration, international student mobility and skilled migration from Vietnam to Australia has been increasing. While there were only 335 Vietnamese students (mostly from the South of Vietnam) studying in Australia under the Colombo Plan in 1975 (Andressen, 1993, p. 228), Australia has recently received a large number of Vietnamese students from 1,851 in 2003, to 8,376 in 2011. In 2013, the total number of Vietnamese students in Australia was 26,015, making Vietnam one of the top four source countries in Australian education (Australian Education International [AEI], 2013, p. 1). In the period between 2012 and 2013, there were 1,592 skilled visas granted to Vietnamese nationals, accounting for 30 per cent of all permanent visas granted in

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2 The Vietnamese phrase is ‘có công với cách mạng’, which means the Government’s recognition of their or close relatives’ participation in or support for the resistance wars against France and the US.
Australia (DIBP, 2013a, p. 3). The current reports of the Australian Government on these numbers do not show how many Vietnamese students apply for PR after education, but the record of skilled visas granted to Vietnamese nationals suggests some links between international education and migration. However, there is currently very little research on the link between Vietnamese student mobility and skilled migration in general, and to Australia in particular. Reports by AEI and DIAC primarily aim to provide statistical information for immigration management purposes. A few research reports have addressed popular determinants of Vietnamese international mobility by analysing statistical data published by relevant agencies, without explicating possible links between Vietnamese international mobility to Australia and subsequent skilled migration (e.g. Gribble, 2011; Nguyen, 2013 & 2014; Tran & Nyland, 2011). As such, my study provides a timely response to this research gap.

1.2.1 Vietnam’s human capital improvement project

After the Vietnam War\(^3\) ended in 1975, like all wars, this one ruined the economy, causing mass poverty and starvation. Poverty was exacerbated by the Vietnamese Government’s attempt to develop heavy industry for subsequent wars first with China in the North from February to March in 1979, and then against Khmer Rouge in the Western South from 1975 to 1989. These events created conditions for super-inflation, reaching its peak of 774.7 per cent in 1986 (The Central Government, 2014b, p. 4). Rates of unemployment ranged between 20 and 30 per cent in the same year (Cima, 1989, p. 786). The 1977 income per capita was only 70 US dollars (USD), and rice production fell 4.5 million tons short of domestic requirements due to lack of fertilisers and insecticides (Nguyen, 1983, pp. 27-28).

In terms of political life, from 1975 to the early 1990s, former professionals, politicians, and militants working for the former American-backed administration in the South were imprisoned in ‘re-education camps’ (trại cải tạo) in mountainous or forested areas to ‘cleanse their brain’ of Western capitalist ideologies. Owners of private enterprises who were classified as ‘bourgeoisies’ (tư sản) were sent to ‘new economic zones’ (vùng kinh tế mới) in uninhabited forested areas to clear land for agricultural production. After 1975, the Vietnamese Government established ‘new economic zones’ in remote and infertile land to ‘tame’ professional officials working for the Saigon Government (Hardy, 2000, p. 24). Their property was confiscated and transferred to military officers and members of the VCP. Their children were not admitted to university, because the government screened their political and family histories within three immediate generations using a

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\(^3\) While the term ‘Vietnam War’ is used by Westerners, it is referred to as the ‘Resistance against America’ (Kháng chiến chống Mỹ) in Vietnam with the implication of an invasion by the US.
“class-based principle” (Vasavakul, 1994, p. 343). This principle discriminated those with political involvement in the former Saigon regime, ‘bourgeoisies’ and Chinese-heritage citizens 

The incoming communist leadership and ideology produced dramatic changes in the circumstances of those who were connected with the former political and administrative regime in the South before 1975 (Hardy, 2000, p. 24). Many decided to leave the country in fear of Northern communists and poverty resulting from changes enforced by the new communist government (Viviani, 1984, pp. 5-7). Those who initially departed were army officers, business people, administrative workers, and academics who had worked for the former regime in the South. Later, a broader section of the population joined this exodus, “ranging from the educated urban elite to farmers and ethnic minorities” (Thomas, 1999a, p. 6). This exodus left agricultural land unattended, causing further starvation and impacting the economy (see also Thomas, 1999a; Viviani, 1984).

To deal with the economic crisis, the Vietnamese Government ‘opened’ the door with the Đổi Mới Policy in 1986. Perhaps by mimicking China’s economic reform focusing on privatisation and foreign investment in the late 1970s, the Đổi Mới Policy shifted the centrally planned model of socialism to a “market-oriented socialist economy under the state guidance” (VCP, 1986, p. 3). The target of this policy was to industrialise the country by developing a market economy with the participation of multi-economic sectors and economic ownership types, maintaining the substantial control of the state in economic operation towards social equality, and participating in the international market (VCP, 1986, pp. 3-10). Like China, Vietnam resisted political reforms towards a democratic multi-party state. Instead, the country embarked on the path to market socialism with the leadership of the VCP and cooperated with the communist bloc as an ally (Beresford, 2008, p. 221).

After the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR resulting in the withdrawal of financial and technical support, Vietnam adopted a multilateralism policy in foreign relations to seek economic opportunities in the global market. Politburo Resolution Number 13 issued in 1988 is viewed as an important landmark in Vietnam’s foreign relations by withdrawing army troops from Cambodia in 1989, normalising the foreign relations with China in 1991, and establishing foreign relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as well as other Western, Northern European countries and Japan. This resolution aimed to “expand Vietnam’s relations to more developing countries and private enterprises in the capitalist world” (Politburo Resolution Number 13 in 1988 as cited in Thayer, 1999, p. 11). Western capitalist countries were no longer seen as “enemies” but “friends”.
The 1996 Economic and Social Development Plan announced the government’s project for industrialisation and modernisation by 2020 (VCP, 1996, pp. 2-3). To prepare for this process, the government expected to increase applications of science and technology in economic production by considering human capacity as the “foremost priority for development to advance the country in the international arena, integrate globally and stabilize the society” (The Central Government, 2013, pp. 1 & 13). The subsequent 2001 Plan for Socio-economic Development from 2001 to 2006 set targets to improve the quality of the workforce to 30 per cent with formal training to “meet with the global technological revolution and build a solid foundation for industrialisation by 2020” (VCP, 2001, p. 18). Attainment of a highly skilled workforce has become important for the success of the government’s plans for industrialisation and modernisation.

To improve the quality of the workforce, the government issued Decision Number 579/QD-TTg on Vietnam’s Human Capacity Building Strategy. This decision specified the government’s plans to train 2,170,500 highly skilled workers and tertiary lecturers in public administration, policy planning, international law, science, technology, healthcare, finance, banking and IT from 2010 to 2020 (The Central Government, 2011, p. 3). To achieve the target of this decision, the government expanded the number of higher education institutions from 103 in 1993 to 322 in 2007 (Hayden & Lam, 2010, pp. 16-17; Ministry of Education and Training [MOET], 2009, p. 9) with 212 twinning training programs with foreign universities (Vietnam International Education Development [VIED], 2013). Further, expenditures on education have been prioritised as the third largest social investment from less than 10,000 billion Vietnamese dong (VND) before 1996 to 12,677 billion VND in 2000 and 63,547 billion VND in 2008 (V.C. Nguyen, 2008, p. 6; The Central Government, 2012, p. 1). By utilising the expansion of diplomatic ties with 176 countries and trade ties with more than 120 countries (M.C. Nguyen, 2008, p. 1), the government has also employed a “go” approach (Nguyen, 2014, p. 186) by encouraging students and lecturers to study abroad.

The door to study overseas is now open, and this is deemed a strategic measure to improve the quality of the future workforce. Recent Vietnamese international student mobility can be partly explained in terms of Vietnam’s expansion of foreign relations, and economic achievements with an average growth rate of 8 per cent and increasing GDP per capita from $97.8 in 1987 to $1,168 in 2010 (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2011, p. 3). In addition, with the government’s efforts in universalising basic education, the completion rates of high school in Vietnam increased from 1.2 million students in 2005 to 2.8 million high school students in 2010 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2011). As such, demands for tertiary education grew stronger. While the access to higher

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4 At the time of this thesis writing, one VND = 0.00006 Australian dollar (AUD) and 0.00004 euro.
education within Vietnam is limited, studying overseas becomes an emerging option for some students. The government has reported that the number of students studying overseas was 60,000 in 2008 and anticipated to increase to approximately 100,000 in 2011 in 49 countries (Foreign Press Centre, 2008; MOET, 2009). The estimated number of 100,000 Vietnamese students approximately accounts for 2.7 per cent of the global number of 3.7 million tertiary students studying overseas (OECD, 2011, p. 318). This proportion is large in this developing country with low accessibility to higher education.

Another strategy that the Vietnamese Government has practiced is to send unskilled labour surplus and skilled workers to other countries as a measure to participate in the global market and improve the quality of the workforce after labourers return (The Central Government, 2011, p. 2). Decree 152/1999/ND-CP described sending labourers and skilled workers to work overseas as a “social and economic activity” which contributes to human capital development, employment solution, increasing national revenues, and enhancing bilateral relations between Vietnam and the world (Ministry of Justice [MOJ], 1999, p. 1). Encouragement for professionals to seek employment overseas on a self-initiation basis was also included in the later part of this decree as a strategy for the government to “go deeper in the multilateral relations with other international friends” (p. 5).

Among 191 million Asian labour migrants, Vietnam has recently become one of the source countries of labour (Asis & Piper, 2008, p. 426). In the year 2000, unskilled and skilled labour export earned Vietnam from 1.5 billion to two billion USD, equivalent to six per cent of the country’s total export value (Dang, Tacoli, & Hoang, 2003, p. i). In 2011, Vietnam received a total amount of nine billion USD from international remittances generated by both Vietnamese refugees and migrants, accounting for eight per cent of the GDP (DIAC, 2012, p. 1). While international mobilities were associated with betrayal to the nation after the war, recent movements of students as well as skilled and unskilled people have been directed under the government’s dual project for improving the quality of the workforce and changing the political image of a communist “trouble-maker” in the international arena (Thayer, 1999, p. 11). This project is enacted for regional and global integration.

In this context, current professional migration has taken place through designated labour export programs and personal initiatives. In the latter tendency, skilled workers with their foreign language proficiency, usually English, and professional knowledge can migrate to another country which has bilateral relations with Vietnam, such as Australia, the US, the UK, Italy, Sweden, New Zealand and Canada (Dang, 2007, p. 8). This group also includes students who have studied overseas but do not return after graduation, or return but migrate again for work (Nguyen, 2013). However, the number of self-initiated professional migrants is not properly recorded due to the separate
management mechanisms between three ministries: Ministry of Labour – Invalids and Social Affairs (responsible for work contracts and arrangements), Ministry of Public Security (responsible for issuing passports and recording arrivals and departures), and MOET (responsible for student scholarship management). In some sense, the unrecorded (or perhaps, unpublished) number of self-initiated skilled migrants shows the Vietnamese Government’s ambivalent governance of talent. On the one hand, this governance represents the VCP’s efforts in improving democracy for global integration in which mobilities are internationally recognised as a part of human rights. On the other hand, the government may attempt to conceal the outflows of skilled people that could be judged as one of the failures of the nation in the global race for talent. This failure, which is commonly referred to as ‘brain drain’, is often seen as ineffective socio-political governance.

This ambivalent governance of human capital is also reflected in the ways brain drain is created as a political discourse for national development projects. Since 2000, references to brain drain have become ubiquitous in official Vietnamese media coverage (e.g. Duong, 2002; Huynh, 2004; Kotze, 2012; Song, 2007; The, 2011). The government has taken a “carrot and stick” approach (Nguyen, 2014, p. 187). On the one hand, skilled and unskilled labourers are encouraged and supported to work overseas as a strategy to increase national revenues and ease domestic employment pressures. Decision 365/2004/QĐ-NHNN issued in 2004 has enabled prospective labourers who are children of war martyrs, veterans, and poor households with certification by local people’s committees⁵ to receive loans from the Vietnam Bank for Social Policies to support emigration (MOJ, 2004, pp. 1-4). Students are encouraged to seek national, institutional and international scholarships to study overseas (VIED, 2011). Professional migrants can also apply for work permits and migrate to countries that have bilateral relations with Vietnam. On the other hand, in order to mitigate the non-return of students and migrant workers, the government issued several decrees (e.g. Decrees 81/2003/ND-CP and 144/2007/ND-CP), which impose financial penalties to their families in Vietnam, confiscating the deposit fees and prohibiting them from working abroad for five years if they return later (MOJ, 2003, p. 15). In terms of students studying overseas through international and Vietnamese scholarships, MOET requires them to sign a contract of work in Vietnam after return for three times longer than the students’ study durations in foreign countries. A violation of this contract may lead to prosecution and confiscation of their relatives’ properties (e.g. VIED, 2011).

⁵ The poverty line in rural areas in the period between 2011 and 2015 is set as an annual household income of less than 250 USD.
The government has also reached out to Vietnamese expatriate communities for their economic and intellectual contributions. Decision 40/2004/QH11 in 2004 proposed favourable conditions for Vietnamese expatriates to return and contribute to Vietnam (Vu, 2005). In particular, Vietnamese people residing overseas (known as “Việt kiều”) are now able to rent houses in Vietnam on a long-term basis, set up branches for their foreign based companies, secure income tax reduction, and expedite processing of business operations. In addition to their temporary status in Vietnam, Vietnamese expatriates can, by retaining their Vietnamese citizenship since 1 July 2009, stay as long as they want and are entitled to full rights accorded to other Vietnam-domiciled citizens. Their Vietnamese citizenship can be retained in case they live in countries that allow dual citizenship (MOJ, 2009, p. 2). Further, Decree Number 87/2014/ND-CP announced specific talent improvement agendas by attracting Vietnamese people living overseas and foreigners who have patents in agriculture and technology, “excellent” international publications and research projects, and doctoral degrees (The Central Government, 2014a, pp. 1-2). Similar to foreign talent attraction programs in other countries, such as the US as I mentioned in Section 1.1, this decree seems to evaluate skills and knowledge through the tangible outcomes of human capital productivity. In these strategies, these outcomes are exchanged with financial rewards, accommodation and employment for family settlement.

This study was situated in the time when the Vietnamese Government encouraged students to study overseas, labour mobility of both skilled and unskilled, as well as engagement with the diaspora to further national development (Gribble, 2008; Nguyen, 2013 & 2014). The large outflows without return were portrayed as ‘brain drain’ in Vietnam (Duong, 2002; Huynh, 2004; Kotze, 2012; Song, 2007; The, 2011). At the same time, Australia embarked on a policy of increasing international student recruitment by linking study and migration options, leading to an increasing number of students-turned-migrants (see Section 1.2.2).

So far, I have presented how Vietnam participates in the global race for talent with its position as a communist country undergoing some socio-economic changes. Vietnam’s participation in the competition for talent has been shaped by its internal socio-economic transformations after the Vietnam War and collapse of the communist bloc, which has urged the government to take a farther step into the international community for economic and labour market integration. In this sense, transnational mobilities of two-step migrants from Vietnam are shaped by these socio-economic transformations that are enacted in accordance with the global discourse of human capital.
1.2.2 Australia’s discourse of human capital: The international education – migration nexus

Australia’s engagement with globalising discourses of human capital is quite different from Vietnam. Australia is following some similar trends as other OECD countries (see Section 1.1) in improving human capacity to diversify its economy, which has traditionally relied on mineral and agricultural commodities. Since 1983, Australia has restructured the economy to respond to the challenges of the global market and competing against Asian economies with cheap labour. A high-quality base of human skills is in demand to develop the new economy (Houghton & Sheehan, 2000, p. 11).

While the need for a highly skilled workforce to sustain the knowledge economy has been soaring, the Australian population is ageing. The proportion of the Australian population aged over 65 has increased from 8 per cent in 1970 to 15 per cent in 2010, and this number is projected to 23 per cent in 2050. In addition, average life expectancy has increased from 68 years in 1960 to 78 years in 2010 and 83 in 2042. However, fertility rates are low, fluctuating between 1.73 babies per woman in 2001 and 1.96 in 2008 (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011; The Treasury, 2010).

Overall, although Australia’s workforce participation rate has slightly increased from 61.3 per cent in 1980 to 64.4 per cent in 2005, it fell below that of some other OECD countries (Abhayaratna & Lattimore, 2006, p. 23). An ageing population and relatively low rates of workforce participation are found to affect Australia’s economic growth (ABS, 2011). In addition, globalisation forces including expansion of goods, capital and services have enabled the growth of Australian knowledge economy that has required the government to “pick” skilled migrants to meet with the demands for highly skilled workforce for “success” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 663).

One of the measures to promptly fill in the skilled labour shortage and strengthen national competitive edge in building the knowledge economy was to increase the number of professional migrants and retain Australia-educated international graduates to work on a permanent basis (Shah & Burke, 2005, p. 5). Prior to 1998, former international students could apply for PR within a period of three years after graduation from offshore. The then skilled migration policy was employed as the Australian Government’s strategy to meet “supply-driven” migration posed from skilled applicants’ demands for Permanent Residency (PR) in Australia (Cully, 2011, p. 4). However, since 2001, former international students have been allowed to apply onshore immediately after graduation (Ziguras, 2012, p. 41). This selection method was expected to meet Australian employers’ demands for foreign workers’ quick and effective adjustment to the labour market (Cully, 2011, p. 4). The prospect of migration through international education gave Australia a marketing advantage in recruiting fee-paying overseas students from 187 countries,
making international education its third largest export industry with a 19.1 billion AUD revenue in 2009-2010 (Adams, Banks, & Olsen, 2011, p. 23).

The link between Australian international education and skilled migration schemes has been explicitly manifest in the skilled migration policy put in effect since July 1999 (Koleth, 2010, p. 5). The Australian Government expected to recruit skilled migrants who are presumably proficient in English, locally trained, and have adjusted to Australian social and cultural life (Ziguras & Law, 2006, p. 64). Accordingly, Australia-educated applicants have been given priority over other skilled foreigners (Koleth, 2010, p. 8). This priority was expressed in the points test – a mechanism used to select skilled migrants who are expected to fill in skilled labour shortages in Australia (DIAC, 2011, p. 1). This test has awarded additional points to applicants who obtained their diplomas or degrees from Australian institutions, plus 15 points for a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree and 20 points for a doctoral degree (DIAC, 2011).

The priority given to Australia-educated PR applicants enhanced the ability of eligible former and current overseas students to migrate to Australia from 1999 to 2009 (Koleth, 2010, p. 8). The number of Australia-educated migrants accounted for more than half of the number of skilled migrants during the period from 2001 to 2003 (Koleth, 2010, p. 8) with 283,000 students-turned-migrants from 2001 to 2010 (DIAC, 2010, p. 49). Due to the high demand for PR from international students, since 2003 the Australian Government has required student applicants to complete a minimum two-year stay in Australia to qualify for five points in the points test, and allowed them to be exempted from work experience requirements (DIAC, 2011, p. 5). Again, this reflected the government favour given to Australia-educated migrants. In addition, before November 2011, those who did not meet the criteria for a Permanent General Skilled migration visa could apply for Skilled Graduate Temporary visa (Subclass 485). This visa allowed international graduates from Australian institutions to remain in Australia for 18 months following graduation to gain work experience and improve their English skills.

Since 2007, the Australian Government has tightened the Skilled Occupation List (called as the Consolidated Sponsored Occupation List [CSOL] since then) to enhance the quality and brand of Australian higher education. The narrowing of this occupation list also aimed to prevent some tertiary education providers from utilizing it to attract international students to take low quality programs for migration outcomes (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014, p. 210). In addition, from 2011 (after the Knight Review), PR applicants have been asked to obtain Australian employer sponsorship, so that their skills and knowledge could be suitably used in the labour market (Phillips & Spinks, 2012, p 4). Accordingly, DIBP (2013b) has introduced new types of skilled visas,
including Employer Nominated Scheme (subclass 186) and Regional Sponsored Migrations Scheme (subclass 187). Applicants for Subclasses 186 and 187 are now required to be nominated by Australian employers and state or territory government agency respectively to fill in occupations that are demanded in the CSOL. Those whose first student visas were granted after 5 November 2011 can now be allowed to stay on in Australia up to four years after graduation with Temporary Graduate Work visas (subclass 457), depending on their qualifications (DIBP, 2014a). Knight (2011) proposed that this temporary stay could help graduates obtain “practical experience in Australia” which made their qualifications “more valuable” (p. viii) in their home countries, another third country, and particularly foster the possibility of PR in Australia. The general objectives of these changes are to ensure that skilled migrants with suitable skills can be selected to work in occupations that are demanded in the labour market (DIBP, 2013b).

Despite constant shifts in the skilled migration policies, the Australian Government has embraced a dual national project of education export and skilled immigration for economic growth. The higher points that applicants are awarded for their higher degrees, as well as study, work and life relations to Australia express the Australian Government’s attempt to construct a highly skilled labour force through two-step immigration. With the priority given in Australia’s skilled migration policies, international students may choose to study in Australia first, and apply for PR after graduation by achieving the passing score in the points test.

Two-step migration is also viewed as an ongoing process bringing significant changes to Australian society. International students arriving in Australia interact with structures and practices shaped by earlier histories of migration. In the recent past, migrants were considered as permanent settlers whom receiving states treated as assimilated subjects through immigration policies. However, since the 1970s, the growth of transnational networks and ethnic community formation has led to a more fluid multicultural approach in immigration schemes (Jupp, 2007, p. 67), allowing migrants to owe allegiance to more than one state (Castles, 2004, p. 863). Thus, multiculturalism has facilitated ethnic pluralism, but also challenged social cohesion (Castles, Cope, Kalantzis, & Morrissey, 1987, p. 2).

A large body of research on Australian multiculturalism has examined its influence on politics, demography, cultural identity, transnationalism, and labour market outcomes (e.g. Castles, 2004; Levey, 2008; Moran, 2011; Vertovec, 2007; see also Blunt, 2007, pp. 685-686 for a review of transnational mobilities with implications for multiculturalism). For example, key studies in the 1990s acknowledged that Australians supported the federal government in designing multiculturalist platform for enabling migrants’ adjustment into society after the White Australia
Policy of “Anglo-conformity” (Levey, 2008, p. 5) was dismantled, but concurrently opposed policies that encouraged uses of ethnic languages and cultures (Chiswick & Miller, 1999). Other studies have reported historical changes in the governance of multiculturalism to support cultural pluralism, leading to services for ethnic language instruction and translation (with Vietnamese as one of the six most popular ethnic languages in Australia) and delivery of ethnic broadcasting services. In place of assimilation, policy has focused on integration. For example, the recognition of overseas educational credentials has also been supported (e.g. Bastian, 2012; Jakubowicz & Monani, 2010; Jupp, 2007; Levey, 2008). In Australia, multiculturalism has become an issue of social justice in nation-building, rather than a set of cultural policies that immigrants were required to follow (Jakubowicz & Monani, 2010, p. 22). In general, Australia has encountered a “changing face” (Bastian, 2012, p. 55). It has been argued that uniformity in ethnicity and identity in the population will not serve Australia, as it requires new skills to face a changing global context in which the diversity of languages, cultures, and religions are viewed as productive forces (Jupp, 2007).

The growth of international students is both an effect of the changes introduced through multiculturalism and a contributor to changes in how multiculturalism is understood and practiced. Two-step migration contributes to further socio-political and cultural changes (Rizvi, 2005a; Robertson, 2013). For example, the education-migration nexus has raised questions about the human and citizenship rights of international students (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). In response to international students’ demands for PR, some tertiary education providers became “PR factories” (Baas, 2006, p. 12 & 2014, p. 213) by designing cheap and low-quality vocational programs, prioritizing corporate profits ahead of their duty of care to international students (see also Baas, 2006 & 2014). To deal with “migration corruption” (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014, p. 210), along with concerns about student welfare, and following the Baird Review (Baird, 2010), in 2011, the Australian Government amended the Education Services for Overseas Students Legislation. This legislation amendment required education providers to demonstrate capacity in providing quality education, reducing risks posed to international students who took low quality courses for a migration outcome, as well as enhancing the brand of Australian higher education industry. Later, in response to the Knight Review in 2011, DIBP (2013b) has introduced other types of skilled visas giving priorities to PR applicants with state and employer sponsorship to strengthen the match between migration and labour market needs (see Section 1.2.3).

Situating two-step migrants before and within this period, some research has explored the precariousness and fragile existence of their temporary status, labour exploitation, unemployment, as well as lostness and loneliness in Australia. These studies highlight scandals around the
exploitation of student migrants, by co-ethnic entrepreneurs, and migration-related corruption in education prior to the considerable shifts of migration policies narrowing occupations in demands after 2007 and focusing on employer sponsorship since 2009 (e.g. Biao, 2007; Rizvi, 2005a; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). Australia’s skilled immigration policies certainly have significant influences on students-turned-migrants’ lives. This rich corpus of research raises questions of how two-step migrants from Vietnam, whose migration journeys have received little attention in research, experience multiculturalism in their everyday lives.

In the context of the global ‘race for talent’, my study examines transnational mobilities of professional migrants from Vietnam who were residing in Australia in the period from 2001 to 2009. Within this period, the points test system became effective, whereas the new skilled visa schemes with state and employer sponsorship, and visa Subclass 457 were not drafted yet. This period observed an increase in the number of international students in the Australian higher education sector from 124,666 in 2006 to the peak at 226,011 in 2009 (Knight, 2011, p. 9). As the Knight Review (2011) posited, “there will always be a link between study and migration – even if only in the minds of prospective migrants” (p. 4). My study explores the motives of students-turned-migrants from Vietnam in Australia, by paying attention to how they framed their decision to migrate, their lives during relocation and extending to their aspirations for the future. As such, this thesis is in tune with an increasing body of research in transnational mobilities of two-step migrants (e.g. Robertson, 2008, 2011a & b; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014) that have investigated the link between skilled migration and international education in Australia, viewing migration as an ongoing process shaped by migrants’ interactions with the world.

In this study, I explore a largely overlooked group of students-turned-migrants, those from Vietnam who studied in Australia, while adopting a phenomenological approach that emphasises these migrants’ negotiations of the multiple times and spaces that they are embedded in. I examine this relationality of mobilities using the Heideggerian concept of ‘Being-in-the-world’ in the following sections of this chapter, as well as the chapters that follow. By exploring migrants’ being-in-the-world, I unpack migrants’ interactions with a multitude of socio-political structures, actors and things in different aspects of their lives. By developing such a relational understanding of mobilities, I attempt to capture the “holistic character of migration as a happening in the world”

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This peak was followed by a sharp decline caused by the Global Financial Crisis, the strength of the Australian dollar, and stricter migration policies that decreased students’ demands for international education (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014, p. 210).
(Collins & Shubin, 2015, p. 96), rather than positioning migrants as objects of government policies and socio-cultural norms.

1.3 Relationality of transnational mobilities

Migrants’ beings unfold in expected and unexpected ways that are affected by their multiple pasts, presents and futures through their engagement with the world. Their involvement in the world with others and things goes beyond the calculative rationality of migrants that policy-makers often portray (see also Collins, Sidhu, Lewis, & Yeoh, 2014, p. 665). The ambiguous aspects of migrants’ lives are often neglected in the policy discourse. In this section, I outline how the negotiation of transnational mobilities with multiple forces and influences shape decisions to move and the migration outcomes for migrants.

Two-step migrants’ mobilities are said to be influenced by intra-national policies of international education and skilled migration. For example, international students’ decisions to study in Australia may be shaped by their aspirations to apply for PR, making some educational providers produce degree programs that are prioritised in the Skilled Occupations Lists7 (Baas, 2006; Tran & Nyland, 2011; Ziguras & Law, 2006). Many international students “migrate to learn” and “learn to migrate” by considering their international education journeys as the first step to obtain PR, which creates a “PR industry” (Baas, 2006; Li, Findlay, Jowett, & Skeldon, 1996; Rizvi, 2005a & b). International students’ decisions to study overseas for subsequent skilled migration are also influenced by ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors such as wage differentials between home and host societies (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Nguyen, 2006). However, many studies in demography and international education policy, as well as government-commissioned reports often associate two-step migration as a linear process from international education to skilled immigration in which migration policies influence international students’ choices of study programs and decisions to migrate (e.g. Birrell, Hawthorne, & Richardson, 2006; Birrell & Perry, 2009; Cully, 2011; Hawthorne, 2005 & 2010). Transnational mobilities are treated as disembodied in homogeneous ‘brain flows’ from home to host societies. If these ‘brains’ cannot perform their knowledge and skills in host societies, they are considered as being incompetent individuals (Knight, 2011; Nelson, 2003; OECD, 2014).

In contrast, transnationalism studies consider mobilities as embodied practices of migrants’ embeddedness in transnational spaces in a range of scales, producing heterogeneous experiences of mobilities. For example, the negotiation of transnational mobilities within intra-national legal domains shapes their decisions to migrate and transnational practices, unsettling their belonging and

7 Its former name is Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL).
membership in more than one society (Baas, 2010; Collins, 2009; Robertson, 2008; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). Two-step migrants also negotiate their mobilities with national agendas of human capital with their own circumstances through diaspora strategies, visa restrictions and citizenship rights (Biao, 2011; Ong, 1993; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). The negotiation of transnational mobilities is known to extend to cosmopolitan lifestyle and infrastructure in global cities that influence two-step migrants’ aspirations for self-development and exploration (Ho, 2011a & b; Tseng, 2011). Some two-step migrants’ transnational mobilities are shaped by the influences of intermediary agents’ services in luring potential students for the prospect of migration (Baas, 2010; Biao, 2001, 2005 & 2007). In addition, some migrants decide to migrate under the influences of their involvement in familial and communal domains that also influence the ways they sustain their transnational practices across borders (Biao, 2005 & 2007; Robertson, 2008; Waters, 2006).

As further discussed in Chapter 2, transnational mobilities are embodied through two-step migrants’ engagement with socio-economic and political structures in global, national and local scales, as well as familial and personal situations. International student mobility and subsequent migration are stimulated by not only the increasingly global interdependent nature of political, economic and educational systems, but also migrants’ “social imaginaries” with “consumer desire and subjective awareness of global opportunities” (Rizvi, 2009; p. 269) shaped by their engagement with many stakeholders.

Transnationalism studies also acknowledge that two-step migrants negotiate their mobilities within interactions with other people and things in many aspects of their lives, producing constraints and possibilities. Some skilled migrants straddle their lives and shuttle between two countries to juggle their transnational businesses for economic reasons at the stage of early career, seek educational purposes for their children, and earn a better quality of life at retirement in Western countries (Ley & Kobayashi, 2005; Waters, 2006). Asian parents also influence children’s international education and decisions to migrate after graduation (Ho & Bedford, 2008; Waters, 2006). Migrants’ interactions with others also involve the ways they follow communal norms and practices of mobilities that influence students’ imaginations of studying overseas for migration (Biao, 2005 & 2007). Their mobilities are shaped by and shape the relative immobilities and mobilities of others.

Some of their engagements with others are experienced through their interactions with things. For example, some two-step migrants use Australian education credentials as “tickets” (Rizvi, 2005b, p. 177) to apply for PR to meet their desires, which are shaped by their families and communities in home societies, as well as friends in Australia (Baas, 2006). Some use their new citizenship to achieve pragmatic pursuits offered in the host society, whereas failures to obtain ostensible achievements in migration may impede them from returning to countries of origin for a visit (Teo,
Transnational spaces with particular places and things such as expatriate clubs, houses and souvenirs also affect migrants’ emotions and belonging (Liu-Farrer, 2011). Their interactions with others and things through their involvement with public norms and regularities also lead to constraints and possibilities for their mobilities. Some are known to use cultural practices of marriage to enable skilled migration through international education (Biao, 2005 & 2007), whereas others have to suffer employment precariousness in confronting ethnic discrimination in seeking employment and waiting for the grant of legal status from PR to citizenship (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). Through their encounters with other people and things, they experience the influences of their past on their present lives and plans for the future (Baas, 2010; Biao, 2007; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). In transnational spaces, migrants contemplate further mobilities or navigate in the destination society within “social-cultural-political matrices” (Yeoh & Huang, 2011, p. 684) in which things and people matter to the meanings of mobilities. The meanings of mobilities are shaped and re-shaped through migrants’ embeddedness in and across spaces which “[allow] people to be themselves and validate their distinct identities” (Florida, 2005, p. 7). The embodiment of their mobilities is constituted by and constitutes their embeddedness in the world in a range of scales.

As mentioned above, some studies on two-step migration tend to examine the negotiation of transnational mobilities in terms of migrants’ responses to global and national schemes for talent attraction, thus disemboding migrants from their involvement in intersecting scales and domains. In contrast, other research on two-step migration suggests that transnational mobilities are embodied through migrants’ interrelated interactions with others and things. Migrants experience confluences from their engagements with other people and things in various interrelated scales and domains, which I refer to as migrants’ ‘entwinement with the world’ (Dall’Alba, 2009, pp. 35-37; see also Dall’Alba & Sandberg; 2010, p. 107). Thus, addressing the relationality of transnational mobilities requires a relevant theoretical and methodological approach that allows attending to confluences of two-step migrants’ entwinement with the world. Exploring the relationality of transnational mobilities in and through migrants’ entwinement with the world enables us to understand the complex articulations of their hopes, desires, aspirations and formation of hybrid selves, as well as negotiations of belonging at various intersecting social scales. Attending to the migrants’ entwinement with the world also broadens understandings of spatial and temporal linkages in migration in which migrants exercise choices and make decisions through their experiences of multiple times and spaces.

This thesis draws on Heidegger’s (1962) concept of being-in-the-world, which delineates our entwinement with the world which we share with others and things. I employ the subsidiary
concepts of *equipment, being with others* and *care-structure* to examine the relationality of transnational mobilities. In a Heideggerian perspective, we are always already intertwined with our world through specific ways of being by sharing our world with others and things (Sandberg & Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 1354). We do not exist in the world by simply being contained or located alongside a system of objects in space. Rather, we live our everyday lives in the world with familiarity through our interactions with things and others by following routines and public practices, which Heidegger (1962) describes as “publicness” and “norms” (p. 127). In sharing our lives with others and things, things take on meanings through our engagement with them to achieve our purposes as *equipment*, or “something ‘in-order-to’” (p. 97). Our interactions with things are not limited to a particular piece of equipment, as there is “no such thing as an equipment” (p. 97). Instead, things are related in a “totality” (p. 99) in which we can find things are related to other things and people. In other words, we are always absorbed in the world. Our absorption is the world is spatial in that we move across and towards space with certain purposes to achieve our everyday lives. The ways we involve in the world are simultaneously temporal, because we always project into the future in revealing possibilities grounded in space. We are not confined to the present, but we live our lives through an opening of possibilities and imposition of constraints that are made by our past involvement in the world and enabled by our present activities to accomplish something for the future (Guignon, 1993, pp. 229-230). In this sense, we share the world with others and things in various relational aspects of our lives. By relating the concept of being-in-the-world in this study (see Chapter 3), I show that transnational mobilities of two-step migrants are embodied through the relationality of their engagement with the world in intersecting social domains.

### 1.4 Research questions in this thesis

By using Heidegger’s phenomenology in this study, I argue that the negotiation of transnational mobilities is an expression of two-step migrants’ entwinement with the world. Their entwinement with the world is expressed through their interactions with things and others across time and space, which allow them to encounter constraints and possibilities (Dall’Alba, 2009) for their mobilities. This study responds to Yeoh and Huang’s (2011) call for studies using “the lens of the everyday” (p. 688) to understand migrants who navigate their transnational mobilities within “professional, social and cultural” worlds (Beaverstock, 2011, p. 710). The negotiation of transnational mobilities as reflective of two-step migrants’ entwinement with the world is explored through the overarching research question:

- How do recent Australia-educated and domiciled professional migrants from Vietnam negotiate their transnational mobilities?
This primary question is addressed through the following sub-questions:

- What are the key political, social, and economic transformations that have shaped the mobilities of these migrants?
- Why did they relocate to Australia?
- What changes has their relocation meant for them?
- What are their current aspirations for their lives?
- How are they attempting to achieve these aspirations?
- In what ways, if any, do they make use of transnational ties?

Through this study, I expect to add understandings to the paucity of research on Vietnamese professional migration. As an innovative framework, Heidegger’s phenomenology allows me to offer a theoretical and methodological approach for understanding transnational mobilities through migrants’ entwinement with the world. Doing this enables me to unsettle the conceptualisation of transnational mobilities as disembodied ‘brain flows’ across borders for national economic benefits. Further, while much of the existing literature on transnationalism has paid close attention to the lived experiences of individual migrants across multiple scales and spatialities, my study with its focus on being-in-the-world highlights the significance of a relational understanding of the effects of both space and time in shaping migrants’ experiences. The participants of my study were situated with others and things in temporal and spatial worlds that were both familiar and unfamiliar. They were ‘dwelling’ in the world sometimes not of their choosing, and sometimes exceeding their awareness. Their past concerns and relations with others and things offered both possibilities and constraints for their current lives and future aspirations. By uncovering the multiple spatialities and temporalities which shaped their existence, my study offers a more complex reading of education and professional migration, namely one that delineates the confusions and ambiguities of migrants’ experiences and life aspirations.

1.5 Defining two-step migrants in this thesis

Although two-step migrants are usually referred to as former international students who obtain permanent residency visas in the country where they have studied (see also Hawthorne, 2005 & 2010; Iredale, 2000), this concept has a somewhat narrower focus in this study. The participants in this study include Vietnamese former students at Australian universities who were either sponsored or privately funded, and who have successfully applied for PR either onshore or offshore since
1999, the time when the points test system for Australian PR was made effective. I limit the definition of professional migrants to those who hold at least a university degree and work in white-collar fields. As mentioned in Section 1.2.2, the Australian Government has valued potential migrants with university degrees in order to improve the quality of the labour force in the global competition for talent. The linear relationship between learning, migrating and earning as implied in global and national governance of mobility and human capital has been challenged through the findings of previous research (e.g. Lowell & Batalova, 2005, p. 2; Rizvi, 2005b; Robertson, 2008). Selecting study participants with university qualifications allows me to re-examine this linearity in the case of education-related migration from Vietnam.

In addition, diverse experiences of migrants with different qualifications can become topics for many studies or a large-scale study beyond the scope of this thesis. For example, some studies have shown that some migrants with university qualifications experience job precariousness when some of them work in less skilled occupations due to the non-transferability of their credentials received elsewhere (Lowell & Batalova, 2005, p. 2; Rizvi, 2005b). Other studies explore the transnational mobilities of migrants with vocational degrees who encounter difficulties in labour market integration in host countries (e.g. Birrell, Healy, & Kinnaird, 2009; Tran & Nyland, 2011). Some studies posit that the transnational mobilities of socio-economically advantaged migrants such as business migrants are enacted almost without friction given their experiences of ‘flexible citizenship’ (e.g. Ong, 1993). Thus, diverse experiences of migrants with different qualifications can potentially lead to a diversity of experiences (see e.g. Lowell & Batalova, 2005; Rizvi, 2005b; Yeoh & Eng, 2008). Further, some of these studies examine the employment of migrants who have received their educational credentials in countries other than the country of immigration. While I acknowledge the relevance of education-related migrants’ employment experiences to this study, I focus on the two-step migration process from Vietnam to Australia, in which the participants had studied in Australia. Therefore, instead of looking at migrants’ qualifications received in countries other than the country of immigration, or diverse types of qualifications, I focus on those with university degrees from Australia.

In this study, I do not solely select or focus on elite migrants with socio-economic capacities, linguistic and cultural capital who can move seamlessly across borders as some previous research has approached. I also include those who are enmeshed in constant negotiations with structural processes and personal circumstances as “middling transnational actors” (Smith, 2005, p. 242) by diversifying my study sample, as discussed in Chapter 4. Although this thesis focuses on the transnational mobilities of two-step migrants, I occasionally refer to skilled or professional, as well
as unskilled and marriage migrants, to make relevant references to mobilities through migrants’ entwinement with the world.

1.6 The structure of the thesis

In this chapter, I traced links between international education, education-related migration and the global discourse of talent. Government practices of human capital investment in Vietnam through the encouragement of international education, and in Australia through two-step migration schemes were used to illustrate how transnational mobilities are embedded in global and national socio-economic and political contexts. Viewing skilled migrants as human beings with concerns about the course of their lives – including their aspirations, emotions and affections – I argue that transnational mobilities are reflective of migrants’ entwinement with the world. In Chapter 2, I move onto demonstrating skilled and two-step migrants’ involvement in the world, in which transnational mobilities are influenced by migrants’ interactions with others and things in the surrounding world. Their engagement with the world is relational in terms of their interactions with others and things. In this chapter, I also identify gaps in the literature with regards to the relationality of transnational mobilities. I argue that understanding transnational mobilities should be attended to migrants’ relational interactions with the world. This argument raises the theoretical and methodological questions of how to understand what transnational mobilities mean for two-step migrants. Accordingly, Chapter 3 introduces phenomenology as a relevant theoretical framework for this study, which allowed me to seek to understand migrants’ interactions with others and things. An analysis of socio-political and cultural practices is also presented in the examples of Chapter 3 and the later chapters.

A phenomenological approach was used in this study to inform the ways I generated and analysed the empirical material, from research conversations to observations, as I explain in Chapter 4. This chapter also provides the details of my sampling technique and the rationales for choosing this sample. As I further explain in Chapter 4, I chose 15 participants, former Australia-educated students who had PR granted in the period between 2001 and 2009, and worked in a range of white-collar employment. This chapter is followed by the analysis included in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. By following Heidegger’s (1962) care-structure, I present an entwinement of time and space in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. In these chapters, I show that the study’s participants encountered an intersection of multiple times and spaces that involved their experiences of living and working in Vietnam and other countries before departure for Australia. Their accounts show that their relocation experiences and aspirations for future work and lives were also shaped through this relationality of past, present and future. This is why I organize the data analysis chapters in an
orderly structure, so that readers can find it easy to follow their accounts from the past to present and future. Each of these analysis chapters addresses the ways the participants negotiated transnational mobilities, through their decisions to migrate, relocation strategies, and aspirations for work and life, respectively. Finally, theoretical and methodological contributions of the thesis are discussed in Chapter 8, which also includes some recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2. The (Dis)embodiment of Transnational Mobilities

This chapter reviews the literature on transnational mobilities. In policy discourse, transnational mobilities are implicitly situated within global and national narratives of talent flows for competitive advantage (‘race for talent’). While acknowledging the broader influences of this discourse on transnational mobilities, I argue that migrants share the world with others and things, so their transnational mobilities are always reflective of their entwinement with the world. Using government reports and extant literature on migration and transnationalism, the first section in this chapter examines the influences of global and national regimes of human capital on transnational mobilities, in which development and talent policies disembody migrants as ‘brain flows’. In the next section, I present several critiques of the political perspectives which imply a homogeneity of brain flows by highlighting influences of multi-level processes on mobilities through a transnationalism lens which foregrounds migrants’ entwinement with the world. Then, I re-conceptualise transnational mobilities as being reflective of migrants’ embeddedness in the world with others and things across space and time.

2.1 The disembodiment of transnational mobilities in political discourse

In political discourse, transnational mobilities are often presented as disembodied, homogeneous brain flows critical for national survival, development, and competitive advantage. Accordingly, education-related emigration is said to lead to ‘brain drain’, whereas an influx of skilled immigrants creates ‘brain gain’ for economic development. In this section, I present a critique of this view by examining government-commissioned reports and some studies in migration and international education.

Attracting education migrants is one of the strategies that governments have used to create competitive advantage in the global race for talent. In receiving nations, skilled migrants are often considered as ‘engines’ for economic growth. The operation of such engines is evaluated through capabilities of innovation, earnings of remittances, and labour market outcomes. For example, a study commissioned by the World Bank shows that skilled immigrants contribute a “significant and positive impact” (Chellaraj, Maskus, & Mattoo, 2005, p. ii) on patent applications and innovations in the US. The OECD has reported that migrants accounted for 47 per cent of the increase in the US workforce and 70 per cent in Europe in the 2000s, filling “important niches both in fast-growing and declining sectors of the economy” (OECD, 2014, p. 1). Accordingly, skilled migration is said to boost the working-age population, as well as contribute to human capital development and technological advances.
In countries of origin, the return of skilled people is similarly associated with dynamism, bringing possibilities of “technological entrepreneurship, access to leading clusters of research and innovation” (Guellec & Cervantes, 2002, p. 71) and “social remittances” of ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital (Levitt, 1998, p. 927). The effectiveness of ‘brains’ contributed by expatriates are evaluated through technological transfers, remittances and numbers of returnees. For example, remittances sent by skilled and unskilled migrants as well as former refugees account for 8 per cent of the GDP in Vietnam (DIAC, 2012, p. 1). The league of countries receiving remittances such as Albania with 8.5 per cent, Armenia with 21 per cent, or the Philippines with 9.8 per cent in 2013 has emerged as a sign of development (World Bank, 2014), and of achievements of intergovernmental negotiations between brain drain and brain gain. These contributions are often translated into financial values or numbers of technological innovations per (im)migrant. Skilled migrants seem to be quantified, as if they were brains generating technological and financial contributions to national economic development.

Urged by the need to attract brains as a resource for national survival and economic development, governments attempt to attract highly educated human capital through skilled immigration and return migration schemes. For example, Singapore’s Prime Ministers Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong are known to have associated ‘foreign talent’ with “a matter of life and death” in the “competition” for talent to construct this country as a “global city” (Pang, 2006, p. 155). Foreign talent has been attracted to confront Singapore’s core population growth rate of less than two per cent each year, and the lack of a domestic skilled workforce to meet the demand for skills arising from the economic shift towards the knowledge economy (p. 156). A number of countries such as the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, are known to link international education to subsequent skilled migration as measures to confront demographic problems and increase stocks of human capital. In Australia, for example, skilled migration policies with an emphasis on qualifications offered by onshore institutions are known to have significant impact on students-turned-migrants’ initial choices of study programs and decisions to migrate (e.g. Baas, 2014; Birrell & Perry, 2009; Gribble, 2011; Hawthorne, 2005 & 2010; Rizvi, 2005a & b; Tran & Nyland, 2011; Ziguras & Law, 2006). Many international students are reported to consume Australian international education as an “investment” or “ticket” for subsequent skilled migration (Rizvi, 2005b, p. 177). Some of these studies are critical of seeing two-step migrants as ‘brains’. Yet, they perpetuate the conventional conceptualisation of migrants as rational choice-makers who

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8 Since 2011, Singapore’s skilled immigration scheme has been suspended for an internal review to tighten immigration laws.
respond to economic opportunities, without calling into questions of the confluences of migrants’ embeddedness in the world on their life course concerns.

Aiming to compete in the ‘race for talent’, governments in countries of origin rush into training and retaining human capital, as well as attracting foreign nationals including former citizens residing overseas, through the “retain, return, and engage” strategies as described by Gribble (2011, p. 296). For example, some source countries are taking ambivalent approaches in governing inbound and outbound mobilities as a political and economic means to participate in the global race for talent and increase domestic economic growth. China is trying to encourage students to study overseas, and concurrently lures skilled migrants and students to return for economic and technological contributions by offering skilled returnees generous financial rewards (Biao, 2011, p 821).

Similarly, the Vietnamese Government has encouraged an outflow of students to study overseas as well as called for expatriates’ contributions (see Section 1.2.1). In addition to the practice of diasporic policies, the Vietnamese Government also uses public media to tell stories about ‘successful returnees’ including high-ranking officials working for the former American-backed administration before 1975, entertainers who left as boat refugees or in family reunion programs, academics who have won international prizes, successful entrepreneurs, and tycoons residing overseas (Nguyen, 2013, p. 130). Yet, there is an absence of stories about ordinary people such as student-returnees and other former citizens. On the one hand, the Vietnamese Government uses the media as a tool to discipline the internal population by perpetuating nationalism and patriotism to discourage people from leaving the country for work and residency. This rhetoric can serve as a strategy to retain the domestic skilled workforce to prevent brain drain. On the other hand, aiming to become a modern and democratic country, the Government seeks to discard its former image as a “communist trouble-maker” (Thayer, 1999, p. 8). Attracting diasporic contributions as ‘brain gain’ for development is one strategy.

However, some migration researchers have argued that migration may lead to development, particularly in terms of labour export migration from developing nations, but an increasing level of development may also initiate migration (e.g. Nguyen, 2014; Papademetriou & Martin, 1991; Piper, 2009; Skeldon, 2008). As “agents of development” with national loyalties and engagement (Piper, 2009, p. 94), a large number of migrants with their contributions may promote economic development that, in turn, enables further mobilities (Skeldon, 2008, p. 14). However, de Haas (2010a & b) and Portes (2009) caution about drawing a causal relationship between migration and development, because migrants’ contributions in terms of ideas or remittances are usually at micro-levels such as families or institutions. Given that development is a “complex and multifaceted process” (de Haas, 2010a, p. 255), diasporic contributions are difficult to capture and are
constrained by familial, institutional and communal influences, as well as legal complexities and local norms (Levitt, 1998). Although migrants are viewed as ‘agents of development’, de Haas (2010a, p. 255; see also Portes, 2009) posits that migrants’ contributions are always contingent on influences of structural constraints and the vital roles of the state which intersect with those at communal, familial and personal levels. The literature that views migrants as ‘agents of development’ “from below” (de Haas, 2010a, p. 227) acknowledges that migrants are not simply ‘rational brains’ but rather, human beings with concerns about how they live their lives under socio-political and economic structures.

Conceptualising two-step migration as disembodied, homogenous brain flows reduces understanding of the totality of their migrant experience and opens up other problems. For example, when two-step migration is portrayed as fixed, linear patterns from sending to receiving countries, little information can be obtained about migrants’ capacities to respond to these structures and conditions. Australian Government reports provide statistical information on numbers and trends of international students and skilled migrants in Australia with little explanation on how international students may switch their temporary student visas into bridging or PR visas (e.g. ABS, 2009; Birrell, Hawthorne, & Richardson, 2006; Cully, 2011; DIBP, 2014b; Knight, 2011; Nelson, 2003). For example, Nelson’s (2003) ministerial statement on Australian international education stressed the importance of diversifying recruitment of students into a range of academic disciplines to reduce current concentration on business and IT degrees for PR purposes after graduation. Students-turned-migrants are treated as policy objects who are moved and shifted from developing to developed countries, and from international education to migration and return. Their difficulties in employment search and performance are regarded as “handicaps”, as indicated in the OECD’s most recent report (OECD, 2014, p. 9). This report noted that educated immigrants in OECD countries “don’t always have a successful story to tell” because their failures in labour integration are caused by a “language handicap” (p. 9). I was struck with the language in this report. Should we see migrants as handicapped people? As competent individuals who have completed higher education and are exposed to different systems of economic politics and employment, migrants have to negotiate their mobilities through their engagement in the world with their families, communities, employers and the broader socio-political and economic contexts. How could transnational mobilities be classified into linear patterns that were directed by policies?

The portrayal of two-step migration as a linear process tends to examine separate geographical locales in fixed points of time. Most of these reports and studies I have mentioned above situate migration as physical movements from one locale to another, without explicating how migrants may sustain transnational ties and practices across space and how their past influences the ways they
experience their present lives and into the future. As such, migration is often examined at either the initiation or arrival in host societies. There are some studies focusing on migrants’ relocation. However, by perpetuating migrants as assimilationists who attempt to anchor within the host society, these studies examine skilled migrants’ language use, employment patterns, intermarriages, naturalisation, and residential location separately from each other (e.g. Chiswick & Lee, 2005; Chiswick & Miller, 2006; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; McDonald & Worswick, 1999; Syed, 2008). These studies tend to assume a sequential adaptation of migration in receiving societies as a “norm to which migrants should aspire” (Nagel, 2009, pp. 400-401). Migrants are depicted as rationally making a choice out of this norm by gradually shedding their cultural and ethnic practices as well as political loyalties with the home country (Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003, p. 1215). As such, migrants’ ongoing relations with their countries of origin, particularly with regard to migrants’ socio-cultural positioning in transnational spaces between home and host societies are neglected (Walton-Roberts, 2004, p. 99). Migrants’ relocation is seen as a transition after arrival that comprises of separate movements in separate stages. These studies also neglect migrants’ negotiations of identity and belonging, transnational practices, and management for further mobilities across space and time.

In addition, by situating transnational mobilities as policy objects in a broader global discourse of human capital (talent) most government commissioned studies consider migrants’ motivations for migration as being shaped under separate influences, mostly by economic drives. Take studies on Vietnamese skilled migration as an example. There are a number of policy-driven and government commissioned studies focusing on the effects of the Đổi Mới Policy on Vietnamese professional emigration to the US, European countries, and emerging economies in Asia (e.g. Cu, 2001; Dang, Tacoli, & Hoang, 2003; Dang, Tran, Nguyen, & Dao, 2010; Nguyen, 2003). For example, Dang, Tacoli and Hoang (2003) trace the past and current trends of skilled and unskilled migration in Vietnam under the influences of labour export policy changes since 1986. This comprehensive report is able to present significant features of Vietnamese labour migration and provide appropriate recommendations to the Government. Yet, it consolidates the view that the main motive for international labour migration in Vietnam is the economic attractions on offer in receiving countries that the Vietnamese Government is informed to encourage more labour migration for development. Except very few studies on examining subsequent migration policy evolution as the Vietnamese Government’s strategy to integrate into the global market (e.g. Ishizuka, 2013; Nguyen, 2014), current studies consider the growth of professional migration as a result of the Đổi Mới Policy. In contrast, as I show in Section 2.2, migrants’ embeddedness in the world enables them to experience
confluences of their interactions with other people and things in intersecting social domains on the ways they initiate and sustain their mobilities.

Another critique arises from the dominant perspective on economic instrumentality of two-step migrants which views two-step migrants as ‘rational brains’ who fulfil the meaning of their lives by economic pursuits and are passively affected by social structures. However, skilled migrants are always “embodied bearers of culture, ethnicity, class and gender” (Yeoh & Huang, 2011, p. 682). They experience different life and family circumstances. Even when some share similar circumstances such as poverty, the ways they experience this challenge leading to migration may not be the same. Further, migrants are not always free-floating elites who can travel freely in pursuit of employment and life prospects in the global race for talent. Not all two-step migrants are socio-economically advantaged people who can hold “flexible citizenship” and invest financial capital through strategies of flexible entrepreneurial and financial accumulation overseas as described by Ong (1993 & 1999). Instead, their movements reflect a multitude of negotiations ranging from personal and family concerns to professional practices and social lives, occasionally encountering constraints posed from their interactions with the world. Some might be rational in calculating costs and benefits of mobilities for their children’s educational prospects (Teo, 2011). Others might be attracted to cosmopolitan cities that provide them and their children developed country infrastructure and a lifestyle suitable for international families (Tseng, 2011). Migrants have to negotiate socio-cultural norms, gender issues, as well as ethnic features and traits to go about with their daily life activities in host societies and transnational practices with home countries (e.g. Biao, 2005 & 2007; Ho, 2011b; Yeoh & Huang, 2011). Their mobilities are thus “negotiated moves” which are shaped not just in response to corporate logic or economic rationalities alone, but also “social-cultural-political considerations operative at family–community–country scales” (Yeoh & Huang, 2011, p. 683). Importantly, migrants are human beings who are always embedded in wider relations to other people and things in the surrounding world. They experience their mobilities through their embodied practices, meanings, and emotions. As I present in Section 2.2 and throughout this thesis, two-step migrants may face challenges in labour integration in host societies and re-integration in home countries because of personal and familial reasons, as well as constraints posed from social norms. Their mobilities are diversely formed and reformed by their immersion in the intersection of social, familial, political, cultural and even religious networks (Glick-Schiller, 2008, pp. 4-5).

In short, this section has shown that transnational mobilities are constructed as homogeneous brain flows for national survival and competitive advantage in the global race for talent. Education-related migrants are seen as engines potentially generating innovation and remittances, and
simultaneously creating brain gain and brain drain to development. Brain flows are said to be pushed and pulled by national development and diaspora engagement strategies. Two-step migration, is seen as discrete events of being uprooted from sending countries and then anchored in destination societies by “economic pushes and pulls” (Silvey, 2004, pp. 495-496) with migrants’ agency and autonomy being removed. By conceiving migrants as “disembodied actors responding rationally to economic forces”, government reports and commissioned studies do not address the questions of political and gender-specific processes that construct the scales of mobilities (p. 492). In contrast, migrants are always embedded in a web of interactions with others at various social scales, from family and community to broader society-level contexts. Contact with other people at a range of scales potentially leads to challenges and possibilities that influence the ways migrants experience mobilities. This is why Silvey (2004, p. 495) calls for a radical examination of migration as a political and social process that happens through migrants’ embeddedness in the world with families, communities and societies.

2.2 The embodiment of transnational mobilities through relational aspects of life

By acknowledging that two-step migrants have their own desires, which affect and are affected by their circumstances, I argue that transnational mobilities are embodied through relational aspects of their everyday lives, making two-step migration a heterogeneous process. Their mobilities are shaped and reshaped by the influences of the surrounding world including their families, communities and fellow professionals, as well as things such as the availability of academic programs and skilled immigration policies. Their negotiations of these influences shape the forms, meanings, and embodied practices of their mobilities. Not all skilled or two-step migrants embrace economic choices as the ultimate motivation for migration, nor do they lack agency in response to social structures and migration mechanisms (Rizvi, 2005b, pp. 176-177). Influences of non-economic factors such as cultural determinants and social ideologies (see also Arango, 2004; Massey et al., 1993) and migrants’ encounters with the surrounding world through transnational practices should be considered in addition to macro-contextual influences. In this section, I highlight the embodiment of transnational mobilities in relational aspects of migrants’ encounters with the world. This section is organised in two parts. I first situate transnational mobilities within two-step migrants’ embeddedness in transnational spaces in which their interactions with the surrounding world influence their negotiations of transnational mobilities. Then, I elaborate how their engagement with the world enables them to experience transnational mobilities through interrelated aspects of life.
2.2.1 Education-related migrants’ embeddedness in transnational spaces

Migrants’ interactions with the world influence the ways they experience migration. At the macro-level, their mobilities are influenced by political, economic and social forces on global and national scales (Castles, 2010). At a micro-level, migrants live their lives in relation to other people such as families and friends. They may employ various strategies for relocation, influenced not only by family members, but also by socio-economic, cultural and political conditions in both home and host societies (see Baas, 2010; Biao, 2007; Robertson, 2008; Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012). Such influences may arise from more than one domain within the national scale. Examining confluences of macro-contextual conditions, as well as family and personal circumstances in various social and geographical settings becomes significant in unpacking the embodied mobilities of two-step migrants. Instead of perceiving two-step migrants as being ‘pushed’ and ‘pulled’ by socio-political structures in a single place as implied in government reports, a transnational lens acknowledges the embodiment of migrants’ relations to the world. It provides insights into how migrants embody transnational mobilities through their embeddedness in transnational spaces.

Transnationalism refers to processes in which migrants “forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Blanc-Szanton, 1996, p. 7). Transnational practices are materialised through “sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations that are said to cross “the borders [of] multiple nation-states” (Faist, 2000a, p. 189). Through daily life activities, migrants are said to maintain familial, economic, political and cultural ties across international borders, making “the home and host societies a single arena of social action” (Foner, 1997, p. 335). Transnationalism is not a novel phenomenon evident in multiple histories of migration journeys, with examples of early European migration to Australia or Asian migrants to the US and other parts of Asia (p. 355). However, it is increasingly facilitated by global advances of communication and transportation technologies, as well as practices of migration and diaspora policies, creating “new processes and dynamics” (p. 356) involved in transnational connections and practices.

Migration is not a discrete event constituted by a permanent move from one nation to another, but involves multiple links between two or more settings (Gold, 1997, p. 410). Transnationalism views migration as an ongoing process shaped by multi-level influences from migrants’ interactions in demographic, political, economic, cultural and familial domains. It is studied through mixed scales of analysis involving individual migrants, networks of social relations, communities in host and home societies, and broader institutionalised structures such as local and national governments, economic enterprises and political parties (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Blanc-Szanton, 1996;
Some studies also look into activities of state-sponsored transnational organisations that influence migrants’ mobilities, as governments realise the importance of expatriate communities for contributions as well as political support (Smith, 1996 as cited in Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999, p. 220). Other research explores transnational activities that immigrants and their descendants are involved, such as the sending of remittances, communication and political engagement (e.g. Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Blanc-Szanton, 1996; Yeoh, Leng, Dung, & Yi’en, 2013). Some studies engage with migrants and their descendants’ cultural transfer from the West to the East and vice versa (e.g. Gowricharn, 2009).

Studies on transnationalism conducted in different geographical settings and times, provide various insights into migrants’ experiences of mobilities. A similarity among these studies is that particular transnational practices are found to be enabled and constrained by institutionalised transnationalism enacted through state regulations and ethnic organisations. Migrants’ incorporation into civil society through transnational practices, rather than objects of development, reflects global, national and local relations of power (Yeoh & Huang, 1999). Other studies (e.g. Biao, 2011; Guarnizo & Smith, 1998; Portes, 2001; Teo, 2011; Tseng, 2011) assert that transnationalism is conditioned by global capitalism with destabilising effects on developing economies, technological advances, global political transformations, such as decolonisation and universalisation of human rights, and expansion of social networks. These global transformations facilitate the growth of transnational businesses and opportunities for labour migration. Transnational mobilities are also fashioned by communal practices, as well as family conditions and traditions (e.g. Biao, 2005 & 2007; Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012; Yeoh & Willis, 2005a). In this sense, transnational mobilities are seen as migrants’ negotiations of their complex relations to the world, rather than brain flows, unanchored by affections and emotions.

Despite different foci and research settings, most studies on transnational connections and practices examine “everyday practices” of mobilities through the history and activities of individual migrants (Conradson & Latham, 2005, p. 228). By placing central emphasis on unpacking the diversity and complexity in migration, studies informed by transnationalism view migrants as active selves who manoeuvre within the state regulation and policy landscapes, as well as cross-border relations with others (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998, p. 7). Research on transnationalism often takes an embodied perspective by engaging the settings and contexts where migrants lives their lives in relation to others. The embodied approach to understanding transnational mobilities can provide insights into complex desires, experiences and emotions of migrants, challenging research that relies on statistics alone (Dunn, 2010, pp. 1-2). This approach looks into migrants’ webs of interactions with others.
across various scales and geographical settings. Migrants are embedded in interconnected “social complexities” (Piper, 2009, p. 95) featuring actors and institutions on scales that constitute a global migration industry, as well as social influences of gender, ethnicity, religion and family issues.

2.2.2 Relational aspects of transnational mobilities

Research on transnational mobilities has shown that skilled migrants experience confluences from their embeddedness in transnational spaces. Here, I unpack their interactions with others and things, some of which are also manifest through their encounter with public norms. Then, I discuss constraints and possibilities arising from migrants’ interactions with the world. Finally, I point out that the ways they negotiate transnational mobilities are grounded in time and space. In this discussion, I refer to research on skilled and two-step migration, and occasionally other types of migration.

2.2.2.1. Engagement with others

Skilled migrants always share the world with other people who are close to them and those with whom they may be not in direct contact. Their engagement with these people in various social domains creates significant confluences on their decisions to migrate, relocation experiences and aspirations for the future. Research has shown that professional environments and practices, as well as social-political conditions in home and host societies shape skilled migrants’ social positioning, authentic choice making, and re-subjectification. For example, some skilled migrants are sent to work and reside in foreign countries by transnational corporations (Beaverstock, 2005), while others self-initiate their migration to global cities for career building aspirations (Ho, 2011a & b). Some are known to migrate to look for jobs through family connections (Nagel, 2005), or pursue academic opportunities offered by the growth of research universities that create the center/periphery intellectual relationships between the North and South (Kim, 2010). Others are described as looking for employment opportunities facilitated by “foreign talent” attraction policies, aspiring to relocate to these “air-conditioned nations” such as Singapore with modern infrastructures, architectures and comfortable living facilities (George, 2000, p. 18). In contrast, some skilled migrants face precariousness in employment that limits their family responsibilities and social prestige in their home communities while they are waiting for legal status of citizenship, labour exploitation, insecurity, racial discrimination, unemployment, social inequality and conflicts in cultural norms (Baas, 2010 & 2014; Goldring & Landolt, 2011; Nonini, 2002; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014; Yeoh & Khoo, 1998).
These current studies have some implications for the ways I unpack transnational mobilities in my study. For example, these studies show that migrants interact with other people at various socio-political, economic and cultural, as well as familial scales in negotiating their mobilities. It is also acknowledged by some studies that migrants’ encounters with other people produce an imagination of mobility (e.g. Baas, 2010; Biao, 2007). Further, as discussed in Section 2.2.2.2, migrants’ interactions with others need to be understood in relation to their engagements with things, to which current research has paid little attention. They encounter things in relation to other things, as well as to other people. Migrants are always absorbed in the world. By always sharing the world with others and things, migrants tend not to encounter each of the possibilities and constraints separately. Finally, by living in the world, which is shared inter-subjectively with others at various scales, migrants experience “multiply-located sense and affects” (Shubin, 2015, p. 351; see also Conradson & McKay, 2007). Like Shubin’s (2015) study, this thesis also aims to examine migrants’ emotions arising from their interrelated interactions with others, and affecting their mobilities, as I address in the rest of this section.

In these studies, skilled migrants are often described as having capacity to deal with constraints in employment in host societies by using possibilities arising from their encounter with the world. For example, Yeoh and Khoo (1998) have revealed that skilled female migrants, who follow their husbands for work in Singapore, participate in community work, in addition to taking professional employment, as a strategy to obtain social positioning in the community. While they are able to maintain family responsibilities as housewives in a private sphere, their participation in community work enables them to earn better social positioning in a public sphere in the new place. In this sense, their transnational mobilities are experienced as a balanced standing among professional, familial and social domains. In these studies, skilled migrants are generally depicted as performing social interactions with those that they may not be in direct contact such as politicians, government officials, university administrators, colleagues and senior managers in transnational corporations or even policy and infrastructure architects. Direct encounters with others also matter to how skilled migrants experience transnational mobilities. Skilled migrants’ interactions with others are not contained in a single space. Rather, within a multiplicity of spaces, they encounter interrelated influences in professional and social aspects in relation to familial spheres and the broader socio-political, cultural and economic contexts.

Socio-economic transformations in home societies also affect return and transnational practices of skilled migrants, shaping their choices and aspirations for mobilities (e.g. Biao, 2011; Dang, 2003; Saxenian, 2002; Yeoh & Willis, 2005a). Saxenian (2002) has argued that new economic opportunities in emerging Asian economies such as Taiwan, India and China, attracted the return of
transnational entrepreneur migrants back from the US to their origin countries. In an attempt to call for returning overseas Chinese professionals for economic and technological contributions, the Chinese Government has employed many policies to offer financial rewards to prospective returning migrants (Biao, 2011). These policies represent an economistic-technologically determinist approach, politically aligning the subjectivities of returning migrants into the Chinese Communist Party’s ideologies. Similarly, in relation to Vietnam’s recent economic transformations, Dang (2003) explores the motivations for Vietnamese expatriates’ return by addressing material attractions expressed in the government’s diaspora strategies, including high-salary offers, better research facilities, income tax reduction and increasing freedom of speech. These studies have implicitly referred to the influences of socio-economic changes, skilled migration and diaspora strategies and transnational connections on skilled migrants’ experiences of belonging.

Skilled migrants also interact with those who are close to them, especially in families, affecting the mobilities and immobilities of themselves and others. At the family level, influences of migrants’ domestic roles and interactions with family members may constrain or open up opportunities for their negotiations of transnational mobilities. For example, Biao (2005 & 2007) shows that the costs for education-related migration are offset by male Indian skilled migrants and their ability to call upon the value of dowries to fund their studies in Western countries. This not only guarantees the migration of their spouses, but also brings status to the bridal families in home communities. Through their interactions with people in familial and communal aspects, skilled migrants experience possibilities and constraints emerging from their encounter with gender relations. While male migrants initiate transnational mobilities for economic pursuit as breadwinners, women migrants are portrayed as dependent spouses. In fact, a strand of research, often before the 2000s, has portrayed the notions of females moving as “secondary” or “tied” (Yeoh & Willis, 2005a, p. 211) migrants whose employment prospects and practices are constrained by domestic responsibilities. Paying little heed to female migrants’ social identities and professional aspects, some studies conceptualise female migration as being included in family migration which is initiated by the search for higher household (or family) incomes. Female migrants are often described as agreeing to “sacrifice” their career prospects, so that the family can “reap the post-migration benefits obtained by the “male breadwinner” (Boyle, Halfacree & Smith, 1999, p. 114). The migrant image as a male who is seen as being “disembodied and disembedded from contexts such as familial or household relationships” (Kofman, 2000, p. 53) narrows the focus of migration studies to an exploration of cost–benefit rationality of migrants.

In interactions with others, migrants are embodied subjects with affections, a less studied aspect of the skilled migratory process. Conradson and Mckay (2007) have emphasised that emotions as the
“felt dimensions” are inseparable from mobilities, as migrants are always embedded in relations with other people, events and things, whether these constellations are geographically proximate or distant, and “located in the present or past” (p. 167). Skilled migrants may experience fidelity and commitment towards families, friends and communities, or guilt when they are unable to fulfil communal or familial obligations (Biao, 2005 & 2007; Robertson, 2011a; Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012; Yeoh & Willis, 2005a). For example, Robertson’s (2011a) research on international students awaiting their PR outcomes in Australia has shown that would-be two-step migrants experience mixed feelings including anxiety, disappointment, happiness and hopelessness arising from their interactions with families. These feelings arise not only through their encounter with the state regime, but also their interactions with families at home and friends in Australia. Robertson (2011a) describes a PR applicant’s precariousness while awaiting her PR outcome. By ending up with an unexpected tax debt caused by lack of clear advice on the change of her tax status, this woman was refused to go back to her country to attend a family funeral, making her feel guilty and sad. Therefore, emotions should not be seen as a “convenient and occasional resource” that researchers can call upon to explain events that migrants encounter, but a “constitutive part” of migrants’ experiences of mobilities (Skrbiš, 2008, p. 236). Emotions express migrants’ very existence and draw attention to relations between migrants and others in the surrounding world, producing certain costs for mobilities (Dunn, 2010, p. 5; Yeoh, 2005a, p. 412).

In this thesis, I discuss migrants’ emotions by attending to their relational engagement with the world to produce transnational subjectivities. Shubin (2015) writes about attending to the “sensuous and expressive being of mobile people […] in relation to migration timespaces” (p. 351) (see also Conradson & McKay, 2007). Following this, I pay attention to the participants’ experiences of their engagement with others and things in “multiple (and not just social) timespaces of movement” (Shubin, 2015, p. 351). Through their encounters with the world, they face challenges, experience precariousness, and reach out for opportunities, all of which influence emotions. Emotions reveal the complexity of migrants being in the world. In short, migrants’ transnational practices are not “a set of abstracted or dematerialised” flows, but are grounded in the “multiplicity of involvements” (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Blanc-Szanton, 1996, p. 7) with others sustained at the everyday level (Conradson & Latham, 2005). Skilled and two-step migrants are always embedded in the world with others in a context that features household structures, work, community and wider socio-political networks.
2.2.2.2. Relations with things

The relationality of transnational mobilities is also expressed through migrants’ interactions with things that influence their inter-subjectification, as well as spatial and temporal existence. Uses of tools such as education credentials, English language capital, working experiences and ethnic networks in transnational activities (e.g. Baas, 2006; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; McDonald & Worswick, 1999; Syed, 2008) become a central theme in migration literatures. Migrants’ relations with things may create constraints and enablers to their mobilities. For example, Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) employ two UK surveys to explore the determinants of language proficiency and the effects of language on earning and employment probabilities of non-white immigrants. They conclude that language proficiency has a positive effect on employment and earning capacities of skilled immigrants, and low skilled immigrants’ lack of English fluency causes earning problems (see also McDonald & Worswick, 1999 for similar findings in Australia). Other studies have also examined migrants’ uses of social media such as email and the Internet to facilitate transnational lives (e.g. Holmes & Janson, 2008; Robertson, 2008). Apart from a few exceptions that explore migrants’ uses of things in relation to other people (e.g. Baas, 2006; Robertson, 2008; Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012; Yeoh et al., 2013), most studies examine migrants’ relations with things in isolation. However, the latter perspective can limit understandings of how things are possibly related to each other and to other people in constituting transnational mobilities. For example, while migrants’ limited English language capacity is known to pose a constraint to their integration in labour markets, less is written about the uses of their mother tongues for jobs in ethnic industries.

In contrast, other studies have mapped things and their uses in relation to other things and people in familial, social, educational and legal domains. For example, Singh, Robertson and Cabraal’s (2012) research on professional Indian migrants in Australia shows that while remittances and gifts are an expression of caring, they have less weight than physical care. In this sense, transnational flows of money are used to fulfil migrants’ obligations and families’ expectations of care, enabling them to reproduce family relationships through transnational spaces. In terms of marriage, some have their mobilities initiated (and constrained) by a romance relationship and marriage bonding in host countries either by choice or cultural practices (Biao, 2005 & 2007; King, 2002; Willis & Yeoh, 2003). These relationships are sometimes experienced in relation to ethnic features retrieved in castes that value relationships based on the same race (Biao, 2005 & 2007). Social media are also used as tools by migrants to sustain transnational practices (Robertson, 2008; Vertovec, 2004). For example, low-cost phone calls are served as “a kind of social glue” (Vertovec, 2004, p. 219)
connecting migrants’ small-scale social formations with their kin in distant parts of the world, enabling them to encounter propinquity in the intersecting personal and social aspects of their lives.

Some research shows that migrants use things to acquire other things to meet their expectations by overcoming constraints posed from their encounter with political regimes of migration and the global race for talent. For example, the growing demands for IT professionals in the US and Australia enable the boom of Indian “body shops” which recruit Indian IT engineers and then farm them out for particular projects (Biao, 2005 & 2007). Body shops which can be based in India or foreign countries are established and operated by Indians, mainly recruiting Indian IT professionals for projects in other countries, without using formal employment relationships between employers and recruited IT professionals. Applicants can then meet the prescribed requirements for the Green Card in the US or PR in Australia by getting work contracts with potential employers without facing financial constraints in applying for PR visas in these countries. Some Indian professionals use their education credentials in IT in combination with the services provided by these labour migration brokers to migrate. Biao’s work (2007) also shows that some migrants further utilise the cultural caste practice of dowries from families with daughters wanting to marry them to increase the likelihood of achieving the Green Card or PR.

Further, with regard to social interactions, Robertson’s (2008) doctoral thesis on transnational mobilities of students-turned-migrants in Australia shows that the uses of communication technologies are enacted as a means for them to negotiate memberships by balancing their personal desires for mobilities and obligations to friends and families between home and host societies. Emails, text messaging, online messaging, letters, webcam chats and the social media are linked to the ways these migrants negotiate belonging. Their uses of these interrelated technologies are found to include their interactions with their families and friends from a distance. Two-step migrants’ uses of things are also related to their involvement in the broader society-level contexts. For example, considering PR as the “holy grail” (Robertson, 2011a, p. 107; see also Lindquist, Biao, & Yeoh, 2012), some international students pay high fees for recruitment and documentation services provided by licensed and unlicensed migration agents, or use (transnational) social networks to migrate after education. Some international students who expect to migrate after completion of their international education programs deliberately choose degree programs that are in demand in host societies, and accordingly provided by some institutions which are associated with “PR factories” (Baas, 2006, p. 12 & 2014, p. 213). Some opportunity-seeking international students rush into applying for PR by utilising various illegal ways, such as fraud marriages and documents or even cheating in exams to complete the degree requirements. Their strategies of using tools in relation to other things and people to migrate cause governments and the media to portray them as “backdoor
migrants”, bringing a threat to the state in terms of selecting the most appropriate skills for the labour market (Robertson, 2011b, p. 2196; also Baas, 2014).

In legal aspects, migrants use citizenship as a tool to inter-subjectify their belonging with the nation-state and others. Citizenship is desired as a tool for migrants to acquire legal residency status, but the meanings of citizenship are usually manifest through the ways they negotiate their belonging. While governments may express that becoming a citizen represents a commitment to the nation and gives a sense of belonging when migrants can fully participate in all aspects of life (DIBP, 2015), not all migrants may feel that they belong to host societies. They may maintain dual citizenship, and participate in transnational networks and organisations for transnational socio-economic, political, cultural and religious practices. Even when they do not participate in any transnational activities, they may not feel that they belong to host countries in terms of commitment and loyalty.

In Australian context, two-step migrants may choose to apply for citizenship with full rights to vote, as well as hold permanent positions in public sectors, and an Australian passport (Robertson, 2013, p. 106). What further facilitates two-step migrants’ mobilities to be more transnational is the right to apply for dual citizenship if their countries of origin allow them to do so. Dual citizenship offers significant benefits to naturalization and the increased ease of international mobility. However, as noted by Robertson (2013, p. 105), migrants can also face some difficulties in applying for dual citizenships due to complex paper requirements imposed from home societies, and laws on this issue vary from country to country. Instead, some two-step migrants may choose to remain PR to maintain their socio-political and economic rights in home countries.

The ways migrants experience the uses of citizenship for their mobilities are related to how they construct and reconstruct belonging in home and host societies. A growing body of research (e.g. Blunt & Willis, 2000; Conradson & Mckay, 2007; Nagel, 2005; Ong, 1993 & 1999; Staeheli & Nagel, 2006) has looked into how migrants’ mobilities influence and are influenced by their subjective experiences of being legal residents as “homemaking” (Staeheli & Nagel, 2006, p. 1600). These studies have primarily pointed out that migrants’ sense of belonging offered by citizenship is negotiated through intersecting and overlapping social divisions and roles, as well as socio-political, cultural, and professional practices and norms. For example, by looking at how Arab managerial migrants working for transnational corporations in London navigate themselves in the local politics of multiculturalism, Nagel (2005) reveals that these migrants maintain ethnic links to other Arab communities in London as a strategy to maintain their cultural ties. However, while the public often construes them as foreigners, especially after the September 11 event, their participation in Arab
political organisations in the UK is experienced as a way to contest the public bias towards the Arab foreignness. In so doing, their uses of citizenship become a tool for them to secure political alliances and social positioning in the UK. In this sense, migrants’ sense of belonging may become congruent, or ambiguous and opposite to their status as residents. The ways migrants make “home” are constructed by external relationships as much as internal relations when they are located in a place (Staeheli & Nagel, 2006, p. 1601; see also Conradson & Mckay, 2007). In general, the ways migrants use citizenship as a tool for their belonging are negotiated through their encounter with others in intersecting social domains in response to the mobility regimes in skilled migration schemes.

With regards to migration from Vietnam to Australia, there are some studies that focus on migrants’ uses of things in relation to others (e.g. Dang et al., 2010; Dang, Tacoli, & Hoang, 2003; Thomas, 1998, 1999a & b, & 2004). For example, Dang and his colleagues (2010) examine the social impacts of remittances generated by both skilled and unskilled temporary migrants working in foreign countries, although they collapse statistics from migrants in Australia into a generic group. Their study discusses the relation of remittances to other essential things that migrants’ relatives in Vietnam tend to consume and lead to wider social stratification in migrants’ communes of origin. Thomas (1999b & 2004) explores changing migrant identities of Vietnamese boat refugees in Australia through their relationships with food and gift-giving. Both Dang and his colleagues, and Thomas capture the socio-economic changes in Vietnam after 1986. For example, by comparing food preferences and styles of eating between Vietnamese people and migrants from Vietnam in Australia, Thomas (2004) reveals that consuming exotic food is a marker of distinction among Vietnamese people in ‘post-socialist’ Vietnam. In contrast, she finds that the Vietnamese diaspora in Australia tends to combine both Australianness as a marker of socio-cultural integration in the host society, and Vietnameseness as a way to maintain identity. The intercultural engagement of these two groups of people in the two different settings shows that socio-political and economic transformations have significant influences on how migrants share their lives with others. Things that migrants encounter in their everyday lives are shown to be connected to other things and places, for example, food and cafes and restaurants in Australia that feature the mix of the two cultures.

Most of these studies on migration from Vietnam generally acknowledge that migrants’ transnational practices are influenced by the broader socio-political and economic structures. The series of studies by Thomas (1998, 1999a & b, & 2004), which focus only on Vietnamese diaspora in Australia, particularly engage with migrants’ encounters with macro-contextual conditions and familial circumstances, showing their embeddedness in the world at intersecting scales. However,
the other studies in this research corpus tend to explore these interactions separately from migrants’ engagement with the world “as a whole” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 53). This means these studies view migrants’ transnational practices, such as sending remittances, as fragmented events in their lives. Migrants’ transnational activities are often examined within the socio-political and economic transformations in Vietnam without engagement with their everyday lives. Thus, they are unable to explain how migrants from Vietnam may have to negotiate influences from these macro-contextual conditions with their personal circumstances. In contrast, I argue that migrants’ transnational practices are situated within their embeddedness in the world with other things and people in multiple locales across time. By adding empirical evidence from the study’s participants, I situate their embeddedness in these structures across time and space: from the economic crisis after the Vietnam War to the contemporary market-oriented socialism in Vietnam, and from the introduction of the points test since 1999 to other changes in migration policies in Australia. Their embeddedness in these events frames their two-step migration trajectories, and is concurrently explored in relation to their familial and personal situations. Further, through an examination of migrants’ transnational practices in their entwinement with the world, I expect to explicitly point out the interrelation of their uses of things in relation to other people and things. This approach enables me to contribute further knowledge of how transnational practices among skilled migrants from Vietnam – a subgroup researched within the generic type of Vietnamese diaspora – are negotiated under influences of social conditions in relation to their personal circumstances. The exploration of their entwinement with the world can contribute to an understanding of the multiplicity of times and spaces in shaping the lived experience of Vietnamese migrants – an issue that has received little attention in transnationalism studies.

As mentioned above, current studies have shown that migrants interact with a variety of tangible things, such as social media, remittances and educational credentials to name but a few, that influence their decisions to migrate, relocate, and sustain transnational practices. Attention is also given to the influences of non-material tools (such as the values of educational qualifications, ethnic language competence, and legal rights from citizenship) that migrants have at hand. Despite a distinction between tangible objects and intangible things, there is a commonality between these two types in terms of functions or meanings that things can bring to migrants, and that Heidegger (1962) considers as equipment. In a Heideggerian perspective on equipment which I specify in Section 3.2, I aim to unpack the relationality of migrants’ uses of things that current research tends to neglect or only implicitly acknowledge. Migrants do not use one particular thing, such as educational credentials or proof of age shown in their birth certificates for PR applications, in isolation. Instead, educational qualifications can be used in combination with evidence of English
language proficiency (for example, IELTS report) for two-step migrants to achieve scores on the points test. Their educational degrees and IELTS report may be concurrently used with dependent spouses’ educational qualifications and proof of age shown in the birth certificates, so that they can have a higher score for their PR applications. In this sense, things are used in relation to other things and people. Then, through their interactions with things in relation to others, migrants may experience an opening of possibilities and imposition of constraints emerging from their ambiguous relations to the world. Because things only show themselves in usages (Heidegger, 1962, p. 97), through migrants’ involvement in the world at various intersecting scales, things may manifest different functions from the original or socially assigned meanings. In this study, I expect to add further understandings of the relationality of things, which potentially influences the openness and complexities of migrants’ lives. Their uses of things in relation to other things and people show the embodiment of their mobilities with emotions and attempts to seek authentic belonging.

2.2.2.3. Encounter with public norms

Migrants are always immersed in the world with others and things, as mentioned above. In their absorption in the world, they follow sets of routines, public practices, as well as state regulations. As later specified in Chapter 3, I refer these regularities to norms – a term that Heidegger (1962) uses to imply our (in)authentic mode of being in the world with others and things. These norms can include state laws such as emigration/immigration policies, socio-political policies, laws on citizenship, as well as cultural and communal practices, and family traditions. Migrants are always embedded in the world with norms through the ways they interact with others and things, which open up possibilities and/or impose constraints for them to follow what others do, or choose not to do so.

Some skilled migrants’ interactions with others and things are grounded in how they enact communal, socio-cultural and political norms. Their achievements or failures in practices of public norms transmit certain meanings to their transnational mobilities (Lee & LiPuma, 2002, p. 192), enabling them to experience existential opening and respond to social structures. For example, as I have discussed earlier about technological transferability, professional networks and social capital that skilled migrants may contribute to their countries of origin, Levitt (1998) has revealed that these ‘social remittances’ can enhance mutual social ties in communities, which are then adjusted in accordance with communal practices. Communal practices of marriage and mobilities for status are also found to influence skilled migrants’ decisions to migrate and relocation (Biao, 2005 & 2007). Similarly, transnational kinship and practices on migrants’ remittances influence migrants’ negotiations of familial obligations and migration expectations. By following kinship practices,
migrants negotiate social and symbolic ties that enhance and/or corrode family solidarity across borders (Faist, 2000b; Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012; Yeoh et al., 2013). In their study of Vietnamese bridal migrants in Singapore through a transnationalism perspective, Yeoh and colleagues (2013) extend understandings of development by highlighting the meanings of cultural practices and family duties included in remittances and gifts. They show complex emotions in reconciling economic pressures in these migrants’ marital families to send remittances and gifts to their natal families in accordance with cultural practices of filial piety. While these migrants strive to re-construct their position in their families as “dutiful” (p. 451) daughters and sisters and produce status for their families in the community, they have to negotiate conflicts with their husbands in terms of accessing the financial resources in Singapore. Through their uses of remittances and gifts, they reposition themselves in relation to others in interrelated familial and social domains. In addition, Willis and Yeoh’s (2000) work on Singaporean migration to China reveal that some migration decisions are made by the husbands and for the husbands’ employment, whereas wives are given little voice in this process. They may follow their husbands to China, stay in Singapore, or accompany as housewives as household strategies. In this vein, through their interactions with family members, female migrants may face patriarchy as a socio-cultural norm that affects their career aspirations and possibilities.

Further, interactions with socio-political norms also influence their transnational mobilities, shaping their and even others’ mobilities into different forms and meanings (e.g. Favell, 2003; Ho & Bedford, 2008; Levitt, 1998). For example, Favell (2003) identifies political norms in receiving countries such as France and the UK that insist on migrants’ integration, whereas the emergence of transnational Muslim networks forebodes a strong resistance to mainstream integration pressures. These migrants’ practices of religious norms must be negotiated in accordance with the inclusionary stress on turning migrants into citizens in the mainstream politics. Transnational mobilities are also influenced by the ways two-step migrants follow or break with public norms, which can lead to possibilities and constraints, as shown in Ho and Bedford’s (2008) study of Hong Kong migrants. The parents of some Hong Kong students who undertake secondary and tertiary education in New Zealand and subsequently apply for PR decide to move back and forth between Hong Kong and New Zealand as “astronaut” (p. 41) parents to take care of their children in the two locations. Some respondents’ intentions to return to Hong Kong or move to a third country for work are later shaped by their parents’ settlement in Hong Kong or relocation to another country to follow other siblings’ international education journeys. By contextualising these students-turned-migrants’ mobilities within the migration governance regime, Ho and Bedford (2008) also mention the influences of relaxing conditions for skilled immigration that facilitate Hong Kong students to apply for PR, but
tightening requirements for family reunion immigration that impedes their parents from joining them in New Zealand. The physical proximity these parents aspire to sustain for their care of their loved ones is constrained by the political norm of migration which also opens up the possibility – though it is not their favourite option – for them to migrate to another country.

By situating skilled migrants as active selves in responding to social structures, rather than seeing them as objects of policies and norms, some studies addressing migrants’ agency implicitly employ the structuration theory. Studies following this theoretical perspective have been successful in portraying skilled migrants as neither “independent actors behaving in a voluntarist fashion”, nor “puppets whose actions are entirely determined by structural mechanisms” (Findlay & Li, 1999, p. 53). These studies argue that migrants’ mobilities influence and are influenced by social structures, as Findlay and Li (1997) have captured this binary:

A useful starting point for qualitative research on migration issues is the recognition of human beings as pro-active, socially embedded, intentional agents who influence and are influenced by the social worlds in which they are located. (p. 34)

Studies that perpetuate the duality between agency and structure usually consider public norms and socio-political and economic conditions as located in stasis within one location, and migrants’ mobilities influence and are affected by these structures. However, this conventional understanding raises several issues. First, social structures can only be influential if the number of migrants and their impacts on the community are significant enough to produce changes to the social mechanism. Second, this binary assumes that migrants are situated in the locale of social structures, considering the former as mobile subjects and the latter as immobile objects. This understanding impedes the analysis of the interrelationship between fixity and mobility (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 183). Yet, migrants are always in the world with social and cultural norms and political ideologies in home and host societies that potentially influence their mobilities (see also Baas, 2014; Biao, 2005 & 2007; Koehne, 2005; Waters, 2005 & 2006). Even when they break with or follow some social norms, they may follow other norms such as social fashions of seeking PR or family responsibilities. In other words, skilled migrants are always embedded in multiple and intersecting social structures neither by complete agency nor lack of choices.

In general, current research has collectively presented skilled migrants’ embeddedness in a web of social interactions grounded in familial practices as well as communal and socio-political norms. In some instances, migrants’ encounter with these norms occurs in the intersection of family issues, employment practices and broader socio-political conditions, creating constraints and opportunities for the initiation and sustainment of transnational mobilities. In this study, migrants’ experiences of
the intersection of public norms are examined through their engagement with the world in various aspects of their lives. As mentioned above, I look into how students-turned-migrants follow or break with public norms in relation to other norms through their interactions with others and things. Further details on this approach are provided in Section 3.3.

2.2.2.4. Constraints and possibilities beyond actualities

Two-step migrants’ interactions with the world may create constraints, and the ways they deal with constraints may lead to possibilities or further constraints, shaping their authentic selves. For example, by knowing that Australia’s skilled migration policies would tighten the requirements on occupations in demands, some international students chose academic programs that met these requirements and rushed to graduate before the immigration policy changes became effective in the mid-2000s (Baas, 2006). Their decisions to select academic programs in alignment with the skilled immigration policies and taking additional courses per semester to graduate sooner than initial schedules enabled them to meet the PR application requirements. Yet, some Master’s level students were unable to meet the PR requirement of a two-year period of residence in Australia by reducing their study duration to 1.5 years. Then, they decided to switch to universities which provided two-year programs but were known as marketing education for migration. These institutions targeted to recruit international students with desires for PR by offering courses with which attendance seemed “simply up for sale” (Baas, 2007, pp. 50 & 58). In this sense, some international students’ strategies used to confront the constraints posed from the socio-political structures were also grounded in their interactions with others such as those in educational institutions, and things such as academic courses and requirements. In addition, some strategies to deal with constraints posed from socio-political structures are employed through the ways migrants follow a crowd to negotiate power relations with the state. For example, some Indian skilled migrants who worked as taxi drivers and suffered from violent attacks were found to gain their voices by joining street rallies organised in collaboration with Indian students in Melbourne as a joint strategy to deal with racial discrimination and public portrayal of them as “profiteers” (Baas, 2014, p. 212; see also Robertson, 2011b).

Although such public demonstrations enabled them to reshape the public perception of Indian migrants and students as peripheral residents with little voice in civic participation, the Australian Government seemed to, from 2009, suppress these reactions by tightening regulations on skills and employer sponsorship ostensibly to prevent skill waste in the labour market (Phillips & Spinks, 2012, p 4).

Migrants may also encounter constraints on their mobilities which arise from their everyday interactions with others, conflicts with colleagues, family conditions, cultural and socio-political
circumstances (e.g. Ho, 2006; King, 2012; Mountford, 1997; Nagel, 2005; Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012; Yeoh et al., 2013; Yeoh & Willis, 2005a). For example, in a study on female skilled migrants from China to Australia, Christina Ho (2006) reveals that many female migrants give up their career or limit themselves to part-time work to fulfil mothering roles, whereas male migrants experience little change in their household duties. The female migrants in Ho’s study encounter the limited support for their family responsibilities in Australia in relation to their economic constraints on hiring domestic helpers. They experience these difficulties in relation to the cultural imposition on the “appropriate role for a woman” requiring them to “take care of the children and the house” (p. 505). They are seen as “ever-available generous carers” whom the “cultural constructions” of Chinese female roles dictate to be “proper carers” (p. 506). Their limited access to earnings in Australia forces them to carry out this role in their households, creating gender inequalities within migration. In this sense, the constraint posed from this cultural norm is experienced in close relation to these migrants’ engagement with employment environment and familial aspects. With regard to employment practices, some studies have described migrants’ constraints in labour and social integration on their mobilities (e.g. Chiswick & Miller, 2006). Skilled migrants do not always successfully translate their skills to the new labour market because of confluences of social and cultural conditions and family responsibilities. Skilled female migrants may encounter downward occupational mobility and re-orientate away from paid employment to the domestic spheres (Ho, 2006).

Some studies explore how migrants confront constraints can lead to possibilities in decisions to migrate and relocation (e.g. Biao, 2005 & 2007; Cresswell, 2013; Lam, Yeoh, & Law, 2002; Nagel, 2005). For example, Biao (2005 & 2007) illustrates an opening of possibilities from constraints in employment application that some IT Indian female migrants encounter. They suffer from sexual harassment while waiting “on the bench” for “body shops” to farm them out for projects (2005, p. 364). While they are not protected or supported by other Indian male friends at the ‘body shops’ after their stories are revealed, these women decide to migrate to New Zealand through another body shop. Their interactions with other female migrants in New Zealand and the employment-educated migration services available in the ‘global body shopping’ industry enable them to temporarily escape the trauma, and concurrently achieve migration expectations for employment. Similarly, Nagel (2005) describes mixed tensions that a skilled Egyptian female migrant suffered when she left her paid employment in the UK after having three children and ended her marriage in a divorce. However, a new marriage and career as a social worker for Arabic-speaking patients, doctors and the Arab embassies in London enabled her to raise her self-esteem and formulate a new identity. Another example is related to how skilled migrants deal with worries and depression
caused by geographical separation from their spouses and children, who live in home countries. In examining how Chinese–Malaysian professionals sustain family relationships and care from Singapore, Lam, Yeoh and Law (2002) find that some male migrants arrange their wives and children to live with their natal parents in Malaysia, and communicate with their families through telephone calls and chats every day. Others try to get accustomed to the feeling of being “incomplete” parents (p. 130), because they realise that their children’s schooling might be better in the home country while their relocation to Singapore can earn a stable income for their families. The ways they confront geographical distances in professional migration reveal possibilities opened up from employment to families’ economic stability and children’s educational security. In general, constraints may occur through migrants’ interactions with others before migration and during relocation. Dealing with constraints through interactions with the world enables migrants to realise opening of possibilities that affects the meanings of their transnational mobilities. Cresswell (2013) has referred opening of possibilities to “heat”, a “by-product” (p. 5) of friction, which can change the meanings of mobilities.

As presented above, current transnationalism studies have outlined the constraints and possibilities arising from migrants’ encounter with others in various social domains. However, as migrants are always embedded in the world at intersecting scales, how do they experience one set of possibilities in relation to other sets, and to constraints? How do they deal with this openness and constraining of their lives? What methodology can be used to unpack this relationality? I aim to explore these issues through the rest of the thesis, so that I can contribute further understandings of the relations between opportunities and challenges that influence two-step migrants’ dynamic and changing lives.

2.2.2.5. Embeddedness in the world across time and space

A rich body of work across disciplines (geography, development studies, transnationalism, and migration studies) has focused on spatialities in several instances, such as focusing on migrants’ negotiations of sovereignty and territory through citizenship. These studies generally state that migrants encounter spatiality as an extension of their social relations across borders (Massey, 1993, p. 60). While acknowledging these contributions and by taking a Heideggerian perspective on board, I argue that migrants experience space through their embeddedness in place with others and things over time. Space is experienced and embodied through migrants’ involvement in the world which they share with others and things. For example, in a study on the Vietnamese diaspora in Australia and their gifts sent to their relatives in Vietnam in the late 1990s, Thomas (1999b) reveals that these migrants use gifts to compensate their absence, fulfil their nostalgia, as well as expect to
offer their relatives a sense of foreignness from Australia. In contrast, those who receive the gifts express their disappointment, because they want to receive money instead of consumption products. Here, the contradiction in gift giving and receiving shows that these migrants experience spatiality across Australia and Vietnam, from the past with memories about their relatives and hardship after the war to their present extension of familial relationships. They experience dislocations when knowing that their relatives are not happy to receive the gifts and later sell them for money. The space the Vietnamese diaspora experience involves their interactions with their relatives, material objects, past memories, as well as affections. In other words, not only does space manifest itself in measurable distances, but it also is negotiated through migrants’ interrelated interactions with others and things in a multiplicity of spaces and times. Space does not exist externally from migrants, but within “their intersubjective-making of places with others and things” (see also Shubin, 2015, pp. 352-353).

Migrants’ interactions with the world are embedded through time and space, opening up possibilities to experience transnational mobilities in relation to their authentic selves, and making transnational mobilities a fluid process. For example, by looking at Singaporean economic migrants in China, Yeoh and Willis’s (1999) study shows that the decisions to migrate of these professionals are made in relation to place-based cultural practices of marriage and marriage plans, which both foster and impede their decisions to migrate, and later influence their professional and social mobility in the host society. In their later research on Singaporean and British business migrants in China, Yeoh and Willis (2005b) also highlight cultural challenges in the host society that these migrants face in relation to their interpretation of their ethnicities. Specifically, by sharing a similar ethnic background, some Singaporean migrants find cultural differences intrinsically attractive and want to follow similar cultural practices in China instead of challenging themselves in other countries as they used to face in previous business trips. In contrast, British migrants expect to avoid cultural familiarity in Anglo-Saxon countries by seeking out culturally different environments such as those offered by China, challenging themselves in the new professional environment with different cultural practices. Yeoh and Willis’s (2005b) findings show how business migrants embody the historical specificity of place-based cultures and ethnicities in their mobilities, which are linked to their present adaptation to the new professional environment. These migrants’ mobilities are dependent on their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as their previous history of movements. In quite a similar vein, as mentioned earlier, Biao’s (2005 & 2007) work shows how IT Indian professionals’ skilled labour mobility is managed by cultural practices grounded in the home castes in India that influence their migration to the US and Australia. These influences shape their uses of dowries in their home communities at present, choices of IT programs in Western
countries and migration prospects after future graduation. Their negotiations of this socio-cultural norm in India illustrate how they are embedded in current time that shapes their decisions to migrate and expectations of future migration to Western countries.

In migration research, temporality has been defined as a “staged chronology of migration” (Shubin, 2015, p. 350): from deciding to migrate to relocating, or completion of migration after arrival in host countries (Cwerner, 2001; see also my critiques of some studies viewing two-step migration as a linear process in Section 2.1). By following this perspective, some current studies examine how migrants experience time when they deal with mobility governance that shapes their decisions to migrate. Others explore migrants’ lived experience and duration of their stay in host countries. Migration is then seen as fragmented events happening in temporal order (from departure to arrival and relocation) in defined locations (from home societies to host destinations).

In contrast, as mentioned earlier in this section, some studies taking transnationalism perspectives have conceptualized temporality as lived time which manifests itself in migrants’ experiences. However, there are some problems in theorizing temporality in these studies of this strand. According to Robertson (2014), time tends to be examined separately from space when the former is seen as a “subordinate element” to the latter (p. 1917). Time and space are then considered as objective domains in which migrants are said to respond in separate events of their lives (see also Shubin, 2015, pp. 350-351, for a critique of timespaces as “mind-dependent entities”). By focusing on migrants’ responses to social structures and influences of others, some studies tend to conceptualize spatiality and temporality within the frame of agency and structure that exist within migrants’ consciousness (Shubin, 2015, p. 350; see also Section 2.2.2.3). However, like Shubin (2015), I argue that time and space are encountered both internally in and externally from migrants’ minds. Time and space involve migrants’ interactions with “multiple and heterogeneous” actions shaped by their engagement with the world in “different and divergent directions across an uneven social field” (May & Thrift, 2001, p. 5, as cited in Shubin, 2005, p. 350). In addition, migrants’ present engagement with the world and aspirations for the future are shaped by and through their interpretation of their past. In other words, migrants’ interactions with others and things are not simply fixed within a specific time or space. Rather, they experience the world in non-linear time across spaces. By adopting the theoretical perspective on migrants’ entwinement with the world across heterogeneous timespaces, my study responds to Shubin’s (2015) call for further studies that “better reflect the multiplicity of migrant futures created along with the past and present and conditioning present’s fullness” (p. 360).
Migration is not contained in a single space or time, but is “the geographical stretching of social relations” with others over time (Massey, 1993, p. 60), constructing and reconstructing migrants’ belonging. Migrants’ fixities in host societies, which are associated with roots, may affect their further mobilities as negotiations of routes. While ‘roots’ signify emotional bonds with the physical environment, shared culture and locality as local anchorage into place, ‘routes’ refer to ways that migrants are mobile yet attached to place as “culturally mediated experiences of dwelling and travelling” (Clifford, 1997, p. 5). While some argue that these two concepts are intertwined (Clifford, 1997, p. 4; Gustafson, 2001; p. 670), others acknowledge that cultural and ethnic attachment as well as a sense of belonging may distract migrants from making roots in host societies (e.g. Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Blanc-Szanton, 1996; Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Nagel, 2002 & 2009; Smith, 2001).

These two notions are debated around the issue of belonging to place that migrants negotiate during their relocation and forming aspirations for future lives. As mentioned above, these studies have presented various findings on migrants’ attachment to place, generally suggesting that place attachment and mobility as contradictory and/or complementary. My study expects to add empirical weight to this debate by providing an account of two-step migrants from Vietnam whose negotiations of ‘roots’ and ‘routes’ are rarely researched independently. In addition, most current studies on transnationalism have explored migrants’ attachment to place through ethnic and cultural attachments, as well as transnational practices. This approach raises a question of how migrants experience time through their embeddedness in place. While transnational mobilities involve an extension of space from one place to another, migrants concurrently encounter intersecting influences of their duty, responsibility, and desire which are shaped by their past experiences and future projection (King, Thomson, Fielding, & Warnes, 2006; Robertson, 2011a; Yeoh, Huang, & Lam, 2005; Yeoh et al., 2013). By adopting the perspective of migrants’ entwinement with the world, this study aims to explore the negotiations of migrants’ ‘roots’ and ‘routes’ through their embeddedness in the interconnection of time and space. The methodological approach used to unpack this interconnection, which sheds light on ‘roots’ and ‘routes’, is introduced in Section 3.3.

In negotiating ‘roots’ and ‘routes’ in transnational social fields, migrants may have to face disparities, inequalities, religious and racial issues that facilitate and legitimise mobility and fixity (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 183). Smith (2001), for example, argues that transnational practices enabled by the governance of dual citizenship limit migrants from assimilating in host societies. Instead, some migrants may incorporate in the new society and concurrently maintain their roots with the countries of origin, whereas others do not participate in transnational activities at all. Integration in host societies and commitment to home countries are not necessarily exclusive,
but can be complementary (de Haas, 2010a, 247). Sustained transnational contacts, relationships and practices are experienced as the routes they are making to maintain their roots which, in some cases, may not be necessarily grounded in receiving countries. “Dwelling-mobility” is seen as an emergent theme of research. As Chaney (1979) noted on the flows of Caribbean peoples to the United States during the 1970s, similarly, there are now people who experience having their “feet in two societies” (p. 209). In other words, through dwelling-mobility, migrants experience interconnected space, in which distances are experienced only through their interactions with others and things over time. Their dwelling in the world with others and things across space and time makes transnational mobilities fluid and complex, rather than fixed and linear.

When taking time and space together, research on mobilities postulates that movement is constituted by the “spatialization of time and temporalization of space” (Cresswell, 2006, p. 4). Mobilities are not seen as a “function” of time and space, but produce time and space (p. 6) in terms of migrants’ experiences of their relations to the world. Mobilities are not simply movements from one place to another, but rather, strategies that migrants use and meanings they embed in their movements affect how they experience mobilities. In other words, migrants experience space through their directedness towards a place where they encounter their interactions with others and things, as well as the meanings they assign for this directedness. In directing themselves and being directed towards that place, they may arrive at the intended destination through the intended itinerary, change the routes and meanings, or even arrive at another destination as they find possibilities opening up in their routes (see also Baas, 2010). In this sense, mobilities involve migrants’ stretching of social relationships across space from the initiation of migration to present lives and future aspirations. Time is embedded in how migrants experience space.

As argued so far, studies taking political and economic frameworks commonly depict space as existing separately from migrants’ lives, and time through fixed end points of migration with departures and arrivals. In contrast, studies on transnationalism highlight the importance of social networks that shape and re-shape mobilities of skilled migrants, focusing on “interdependent interpretation of lives” (Shubin, 2015, p. 351) through social links and shared relationships. In other words, these current studies in transnationalism have acknowledged migrants’ engagement with the world across borders. I take on board this perspective and go beyond by analysing the intersections of migrants’ involvement in the world, which produce interrelated possibilities and constraints. My study views migrants’ lives as open and unfolding into a diversity of experiences (Horschelmann, 2011, p. 378), rather than being confined to a particular mode, place or time (see also Shubin, 2015, for a similar argument).
Following Shubin’s (2015) phenomenological approach in understanding spatialities and temporalities of mobilities, I show that time and space are experienced through migrants’ multiple and heterogeneous involvements with the world. My thesis responds to the need to develop a critical approach to understanding time and space as a “conjunction of separate phenomena” (Shubin, 2015, p. 351; see also Collins & Shubin, 2015; Smith & King, 2012, p. 130). By responding to Smith and King’s (2012) call for “more critical conceptualisations of space and time” (p. 130), my thesis critiques the separation of time as past and present, and of space as place and placelessness. Instead, I examine time and space as being interconnected. As I mention in the next chapter, in a Heideggerian perspective, time and space are encountered as happenings and incompleteness of migrants’ lives. Migrants keep projecting themselves into the future based on their experiences of living across the past and present in various social and geographical spaces.

2.3 Concluding comments

In this chapter, I firstly discussed the disembodiment of transnational mobilities in practices of state governance that depict migrants as brain flows in global discourse of competition for talent. Transnational mobilities are conceptualised as homogeneous products of human capital management. However, by using transnationalism literature, I argued that transnational mobilities are embodied through relational aspects of migrants’ lives. This relationality is experienced through professional migrants’ embeddedness in social interactions with not only the global and national regimes of talent and development, but also communities, work environments and families. They participate in interactions that span multiple scales. Forms, meanings and experiences of transnational mobilities are then embodied through migrants’ interactions with others and things across space and time. Accordingly, understanding the embodiment of transnational mobilities is to attend to migrants’ entwinement with the world.

This chapter also outlined several ways in which transnational mobilities are negotiated through skilled migrants’ entwinement with the world. Migrants negotiate transnational mobilities in intersecting social domains, rather than responding to policy influences in isolated ways. In this study, I acknowledge that two-step migrants’ mobilities may be shaped and reshaped by political and social changes in both home and host societies. States and supranational organisations play significant roles in formulating mechanisms and control over migration through migration schemes, policies and legal regimes that both support and constrain mobilities. In addition, I argue that migrants experience mobilities in close relation to others and things in transnational spaces, making the negotiation of transnational mobilities a complex and relational process, as Yeoh (2005b) describes:
Mobilities often no longer take the form of permanent ruptures, uprooting and settlement, but are more likely to be transient and complex, ridden with disruptions, detours, multi-destinations and founded on interconnections and multiple chains of movement… with multi-stranded linkages across space. (p. 60)

The need to attend to confluences of macro-contextual influences in home and host societies including migration policies, socio-economic and political conditions, social and communal practices, and family ties, as well as migrants’ interactions with things is important in understanding how migrants are entwined with the world. Migrants may experience a transformation of their mobilities through possibilities and constraints. Some may achieve what they have set out before migration, whereas others fail to do so but realise alternative possibilities opened up. In this vein, migration processes and outcomes are shaped not only by their imaginations of migration before departure, but also by their specific and particular relocation experiences and their aspirations for the future. Migration is about feelings of in-betweenness, alienation, grief and anxiety as well as feelings of happiness and empowerment (see also Baas, 2010).

In addition, while most current studies have attended to two-step migrants’ engagement with the world in one way or another, some studies focus on migrants’ uses of things separately from interactions with others, considering migrants as responsive to social structures. Other studies show the influences of migrants’ embeddedness in the world with others and things at different social scales. However, research following the latter trend is often limited to postulating the relationality of mobilities. They seem to focus on migrants’ interactions with others and things in separate social structures and domains of migrants’ lives, such as their responses to skilled migration policies, uses of educational credentials for migration outcomes, or integration into host societies. In contrast, seeing migrants as always being embedded in multiple aspects of their lives, I examine how transnational mobilities of two-step migrants are negotiated through intersecting influences of their involvement in the world. Doing this enables me to argue that transnational mobilities are shaped in and through their entwinement with the world.

Migrants’ encounters with the surrounding world may lead to constraints and possibilities. What unifies the complexities of two-step migrants’ interactions with the world is the manner in which they care about how to live their lives as migrants with others. In other words, the heterogeneity of transnational mobilities is embodied through migrants’ encounter with the world in relational aspects of their everyday lives. Their subjectivities of transnational mobilities are shaped through their multiple connections to people, things and events across space and time. Thus, understanding
the relationality of migrants’ everyday practices of transnational mobilities enables us to examine how they mediate global, national and local processes with personal motivations.

A theoretical perspective that attends to the relationality of transnational mobilities challenges the assumptions in the policy discourse which portray two-step migration reductively in economic terms as the flows of human capital between discrete nations, disregarding transnational ties. This theoretical lens has the potential to bring a more dynamic perspective to current migration research methodologies by contextualising two-step migration within a frame of interrelated interactions occurring among different social scales and domains, as well as lived experiences of migrants. Using this theory also enables me to address some binaries in migration studies including roots and routes, agency and structures, and spatiality and temporality, as mentioned in Section 2.2.2.

As Asis and Piper (2008) have suggested for research on Asian migration, research on Vietnamese professional migration needs to “advance from the descriptive to the more theoretical level of explanation” (p. 432) through the exposure to theoretical grounding that attends to the ways that migrants experience transnational mobilities. Following Asis and Piper’s argument, the theoretical framework I am using in this study advances understandings of the decision-making and migration experiences of skilled migrants, as I present in the next chapter.
Chapter 3. The Theoretical Framework

By looking at two-step migrants’ relation to policy discourses and multi-level processes in Chapter 2, I argued that negotiations of transnational mobilities are reflected in their embeddedness in the world with others and things. Therefore, a relevant theoretical framework must allow for attending to this embeddedness from pre-departure to the journey of relocation and future aspirations. This chapter introduces phenomenology as a theoretical framework for this study, which allows investigation of migrants as being always embedded in the world with others and things (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 97-100). They experience mobilities within and through these relations with others and things. Migrants’ interactions in the world are also shaped by the ways they experience their past circumstances, present ways of being and future expectations.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, phenomenology is explained as a way of inquiring in which the relation between people and things is revealed through the way they live in the world. This chapter highlights the importance of everyday activities in how we live in the world, which is captured in Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world. The concept of being-in-the-world is analysed with reference to Heidegger’s subsidiary concepts of equipment, being with others and the care-structure. Finally, the relevance of being-in-the-world to this study is discussed in the remainder of the chapter.

3.1 Phenomenology as a way of inquiring

In the ‘natural attitude’, we appear to exist independently of a physical world that comprises things and others. Our knowledge about the world appears to be constructed through an objective stance in which we position ourselves as knowers who understand things as they are. In contrast to the ‘natural attitude’ in which we understand our relation to the world in an objective sense, Husserl developed phenomenology from using the works of earlier philosophers such as Hegel, Kant and Lambert (Moran & Cohen, 2012, pp. 244-246). Husserl asserts that there is always a connection between us and things through our engagement with them (p. 217). Our acts of consciousness such as judging, perceiving or imagining enable us to engage with objects by relating to them as something with particular meanings (Dall’Alba & Sandberg, 2014, p. 285). In this sense, Husserlian phenomenology is the study of ways in which consciousness is directed towards objects (Gorner, 2007, pp. 27-28): “an object is not present to itself, it is only present to a subject” (Barnacle, 2001, p. 7). From a Husserlian perspective, phenomenology is the descriptive study of things as they are experienced (Moran & Cohen, 2012, p. 3). It is a way of inquiring into our lived experience of the world through the relation between consciousness and objects of knowledge. According to Husserl (1970 as cited in Sandberg & Dall’Alba, 2009, pp. 1353-1354), we are inextricably related to the
world through lived experience. In this sense, our world is not a world in itself, but it is an experienced world (Sandberg, 2005, p. 43).

As a way of inquiring, phenomenology places central emphasis on examining the world as lived by us, not as a separate or independent world (Laverty, 2003, p. 23). Things are not present in themselves, but become meaningful through our engagement with them in specific contexts. For example, migration policies are artefacts without particular meaning for a Vietnamese farmer who might not consider residing overseas. However, for potential migrants (possibly this farmer as well) who attempt to migrate, these policies become meaningful, appearing as constraints and/or opportunities for their mobilities. Therefore, knowledge about the role of migration policies relies on how they are manifest through migrants’ engagement with them to achieve migration goals in specific contexts.

As mentioned above, we live our lives embedded in our interactions with the surrounding environment. Our engagement with things becomes the condition for us to perceive them as having significant qualities. For example, a PR visa may be observed as a government document with an identifying code and label, but this artefact also creates and/or closes possibilities for migratory trajectories. As Moran (2000) notes, “the world comes to appearance in and through humans” (p. 15). A “phenomenon” can be defined then as “that which shows itself in itself, the manifest” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 51) or, in other words, how something is manifest via our engagement with it. In this vein, phenomenology explores the meaning of manifestation of entities that appear to us (p. 58).

Phenomenological inquiry examines the ways things are experienced, without imposing predetermined structures onto them in advance (Barnacle, 2001, p. 4). As Barnacle notes, “phenomenology begins with wonder” as “a starting place, an origin, a beginning” (2001, p. 3). This wonder encourages us to examine how things are experienced through “open receptivity” towards the “unknown” (p. 4). When we are receptive to the world, we do not understand it “as it is,” but “as it is to us… both historically and culturally” (p. 7). Our wonder is, then, related to the context where things are experienced. Engaging with a phenomenon in specific contexts allows us to go beyond the presentation of the phenomenon to what it means to us (Moran, 2000, p. 15). Therefore, to investigate the meaning of a phenomenon, it is important for us to go beyond its mere occurrence by examining people’s lived experience of engaging with it in a relevant context (van Manen, 1997, p. 90). For instance, migrants’ flows are known to be situated in contexts that enable, constrain or navigate their mobilities (see e.g. Biao, 2005 & 2007; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). In exploring how transnational mobilities are negotiated in concrete contexts, we must attend
to significant relationships over time, as well as social, political, and economic conditions that shape migrants’ decisions to relocate to another country.

To understand human experiences, we must look at the way people live their lives through their engagement with surrounding environments. Our lived experience in engaging with the world is captured in the Husserlian term *life-world*, which refers to both “my world and a world shared with others and things” (Sandberg & Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 1354). The concept of the life-world is used to describe the everyday world “with which we are inevitably intertwined and which we take for granted” (p. 1353). The concept of the life-world is seen as central to various branches of phenomenology, although it has been elaborated in different ways by various scholars (p. 1353).

### 3.2 Our relation to others and things as being-in-the-world

While the Husserlian concept of the life-world stipulates that we are related to the world through consciousness, Heidegger asserts that we are already intertwined with our world through our specific ways of being-in-the-world (Sandberg & Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 1354). For example, expecting to be a dutiful daughter, Anh Ngoc, a female participant in this study, attempted to send remittances to her parents. In order to earn money, she acquired a part-time job in Australia by folding paper flowers for sale, an activity that she had previously considered a hobby. Her attempt to send remittances to her parents to overcome their poverty showed how she interpreted the cultural practice of filial piety in Vietnam. This meaning was shaped by the history of her family’s poverty before her migration, and her expectation to share financial responsibilities with her parents in Vietnam as a dutiful child. As a migrant, she shared the world with her parents, siblings, those in the flower shop in Australia and those who bought her flowers, as well as objects such as paper flowers for earning money. She lived in a world shared with others and things. According to Heidegger (1962, p. 100), our interactions with the world constitute the basic feature of the relation between us and the world. Our ways of being-in-the-world enable us to make sense of our interactions with people and things in and through our everyday activities (Sandberg & Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 1354). Heidegger’s most important book, *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962), is an inquiry into the meaning of our being as being-in-the-world.

Heidegger emphasises that being-in-the-world must be examined “as a whole” and “cannot be broken up into contents which may be pieced together” (1962, p. 53). This section introduces some key concepts that elaborate being-in-the-world, simultaneously showing how these concepts are interrelated ‘as a whole’ in shaping how we live in the world with others and things. It can be noted that being-in-the-world is deliberately written with hyphens in between, showing the interconnectedness of its parts. Yet, before we proceed, we may need to understand what Heidegger
means in each component within this concept, because they have different meanings from everyday language.

According to Heidegger (1962, p. 80), the “being-in” does not necessarily denote the location of an object in a defined space as water in a glass. Heidegger points out that “in” of the “being-in” comes from the German root “innan”. The part “an” in “innan” signifies familiarity, and “being-in” is the way that we are involved in the world with familiarity (p. 80). We are not simply included or located alongside a system of objects in a place (Blattner, 2006, p. 42). Instead, things make sense to us through the ways we interact with them by following routines and norms or taken-for-granted knowledge. Our knowledge of going about in the world through following public norms consists of “dispositions to respond to situations in appropriate ways” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 117). We “dwell” with others and things (Heidegger, 1962, p. 80). We live in the world with familiarity in the way we go about our business and make sense of our lives as “being-in” (Blattner, 2006, p. 43). “Being-in” means our involvement with the world where we know “[our] way about in [the] public environment” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 405). In this manner, “being-at-home” sustains a “taken-for-granted involvement” between us and the world (p. 233). We “flee into the ‘at-home’ of publicness” (p. 234).

However, when we encounter new things, or things are broken, we find them “strange or different” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, in press). An uneasy feeling may appear when we are placed in an unfamiliar situation or locale with unknown people. We “flee in the face of uncanniness” or being “not-at-home” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 234). In the case of migration, for example, migrants may face the feeling of loneliness or strangeness in the new place (Robertson, 2008; Zachariah, Mathew, & Rajan, 2001). Even in the same locale interacting with the same people, they sometimes face an uneasy feeling, as they need to act in ways they cannot predict or plan. Urged by the need to be grounded in a place with familiarity, we may either pursue things in our own way or fall into “going along with what everyone else is doing” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, in press). Being at-home and not-at-home shows our absorption in the world in the way we live our lives in relation to others and things in the world.

What does Heidegger mean then by “world” in being-in-the-world? For him, the ‘world’ includes a specific context or milieu in which we live and make sense of things through our involvement with others and things that matter to us. This local milieu also points to a larger world in which things or people are related to other things and people. For example, when Thanh Huong, a participant in this study, encountered corruption in Vietnam, her husband contacted someone of whom she had no knowledge to give a bribe to get someone else to issue her passport. These unknown people were
then connected to other people in the political system in the city where she lived. She was immersed in the broader political system of Vietnam, which is widely known for low transparency in public management and high risks of corruption (Transparency International, 2013). In this sense, Thanh Huong was immersed in both the immediate and broader social and political worlds.

By being involved in the world, we do not experience space as a container of objects. According to Heidegger (1962, pp. 138-148 & 346), we exist spatially. The concept of being-in-the-world includes this sense of spatiality. In everyday activities, we move from one location to another for certain purposes. Our movements, which may include imaginations or be enacted through communications technologies, are embedded with meanings. Space shapes the possibilities of our activities. It is “space-of-action”, which is embedded with a “referential organization with respect to our context of activities” (Arisaka, 1996, p. 37), or as a “field of potential action” (Harrison, 2007, p. 635). When we engage with our activities, we make “the farness vanish” and “the remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 139). The notions of ‘farness’ or ‘nearness’ are geographical, but address our involvement with the world. By using the example of a craftsman working in his workshop, Heidegger (1962, p. 100) points out that the work produced by this worker is intended to entail useability for consumers whom he may know or never meet, but who nonetheless influence his work. The assignment in this handiwork expresses “an immeasurable distance” (Harrison, 2007, p. 631) when this craftsman’s relation to space makes sense through his interactions with the handiwork. In this vein, our interactions with things and people show how we are immersed in space.

Our absorption in space is temporal. According to Heidegger (1962, pp. 418-423), because we always project into the future in realising possibilities grounded in space, our relations to space are temporal. For example, in the period between 1999 and 2009, the Australian Government used the points test system in the Skilled Migration Policy to select skilled migrants. Since 2009, this policy has shifted to employer sponsorship (Koleth, 2010, p. 8; Phillips & Spinks, 2012, p 4). Applicants in the period before 2009 might have prioritised the possession of Australian credentials with the minimum two-year continuous stay in Australia, IELTS (International English Language Testing System) scores or ethnic language translation certificates to secure PR. Presently, prospective migrants tend to seek employer sponsorship as one of the most important criteria to meet. This change in the policy over time matters for PR applications to Australia. The temporal dimension has practical implications when migrants encounter this migration policy in forming aspirations to migrate. Their absorption in space and time extends from their encounter with the migration policy itself to other related things, such as language test certificates, educational qualifications obtained in Australia or the home country, potential employers in Australia and so on. Through involvement
with these things, they also extend their interactions with people, from those they are directly in contact with such as their family members, colleagues and potential employers, to those they may never meet but who influence their aspirations and prospects for migration such as migration policy-makers or visa officers. Prospective migrants’ interactions with others and things in space and time constitute their world, which is shared with others.

In sharing the world with others, we encounter it through rituals and habits. Things become so familiar for us that we do not even recognise their significance (Heidegger, 1962, p. 97). Instead, we focus on the task (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 64). However, when something goes wrong, we immediately realise the function of something we take for granted. We may choose to replace it with something else, try to fix it, or simply use it in a different way for another purpose. In other words, what concerns us is not the thing itself, but the purpose that it fulfils for our lives (Blattner, 2006, p. 50). Things take on meanings through our engagement with them as equipment. Heidegger defines equipment as things with which we engage as “something ‘in-order-to’” (1962, p. 97). The encountering of equipment expresses “human agency” and “purposiveness” (Sandberg & Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 1359) in our ways of being. For example, immigration authorities consider skilled migration policies as a government device to control migration by selecting those who are seen as appropriate for fulfilling particular purposes such as meeting domestic skill shortages. Migrants interact with these policies as equipment in the sense that they fulfil the requirements of these policies to secure favourable migration prospects. This kind of equipment entails “a system of references” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 93), so that potential migrants use these policies to migrate to another country for a better job or a better living, for example. Yet, attempting to fulfil the requirements of the migration policies does not fully enable them to migrate. Prospective migrants have to relate these requirements to other things such as IELTS reports, educational credentials and so on.

The use of equipment is not limited to a single piece of equipment, but a “totality in which the equipment is encountered” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 99). One thing that is useful can never show itself without relation to other things and those who use it. Things that we use are related to other useful things. Things only gain significance from concrete contexts (Harman, 2010, p. 3). Migration policies, IELTS reports and educational qualifications are not “individual solid objects” (p. 19). Rather, things are already interconnected as “belonging to” (p. 19) other things in the world. The interconnection of equipment we use makes up a totality, which is constituted by a system of “reference of something to something”, such as “serviceability, conduciveness, usability, manipulability” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 97).
The use of equipment in a totality highlights two interrelated issues. First, in retrieving the pragmatic usage of things for certain purposes, we can find that one thing may fulfil different functions, depending on specific contexts and usage by people. For example, migrants may use their Australian educational credentials to obtain scores on the points test, and to apply for jobs in the labour market. In this sense, our relation to things is ambiguous when we relate one thing to another in practical usage in a totality (Heidegger, 1962, p. 217). In other words, things show other meanings in our interactions with equipment in a totality. Our interactions with things often carry more than one meaning that opens up some possible ways for us to act in interrelation with the ways we want to be (Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 38). Our ambiguous relation to the world enables an opening of possibilities about the ways we may live our lives. Second, in achieving our purposes, we deal with equipment in relation to other equipment for “the sake of being” who we are and what we do (Heidegger, 1962, p. 236). Our uses of equipment are also interrelated to our interactions with people (p. 154). We may use equipment in ways assigned by social norms, or find our relation to it ambiguous, through the purposes we want to pursue in relation to people. Others can include those we are in direct contact with, as well as those we indirectly encounter in their absence. In using the IELTS report, migrants indirectly interact with those in the IELTS examination, immigration officials who review PR applications, and directly with family members who matter their decisions to migrate. In this sense, we “dwell” (pp. 89 & 155) in the world through the web of interactions with things and people.

As we dwell with others in the world, we “fall into the at-home of publicness” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 234), where we do what other people do by conforming to social norms and routines with familiarity. We tend to use equipment in “standardized ways and drift into the socially approved slots laid out in the public world” (Guignon, 1984, p. 329). This anonymous public normativity plays a significant role as a “social structure” in shaping our everyday life as we “go with the flow” (Cerbone, 2006, p. 57), although it fails to acknowledge “the full range of our existential freedom” (Blattner, 2006, p. 128). Through our involvement with the world, we may emulate others in engaging with the world without being aware of the ways we follow the crowd. “We act as anyone does” (Guignon, 1984, p. 329). By simply conforming to public norms, we lead an inauthentic life where we do not own our lives (Heidegger, 1962, p. 220). We tend to “succumb to tradition, to accept inherited concepts, doctrines, and ways of looking at things without subjecting them to adequate independent scrutiny” (Inwood, 2000, p. 52). We “do, say, feel, and think” as others do (pp. 51-52). The public context, then, provides us a means of intelligibility that we use to make sense of our activities (Guignon, 1993, p. 226). Being inauthentic is the normal living condition for
most of us through our immersion in the world with others (Blattner, 2006, p. 39; Inwood, 2000, p. 27).

However, in our absorption in the “turbulence of day-to-day chores” (Guignon, 1993, p. 229), we are sometimes faced with a situation where we are challenged to take responsibility for our ways of being (Heidegger, 1962, p. 346). For example, we may find following some social norms strange or problematic to our circumstances and aspirations. We need to find possibilities to deal with such a situation. We break with public rituals by taking a stand on our being by following other public norms, or looking for possibilities opened up from our interactions with others and things. Possibilities are not “abstract thoughts”, but are recognised in specific activities we do to take responsibility for our lives (Hoy, 1993, p. 178). We need to be responsible for doing something for ourselves, and are faced with the need to own our lives. This is the time when we hear a call to live an authentic life (Heidegger, 1962, p. 313). We focus on what we desire and attempt to become by forming our own ways of being. Yet, we cannot detach ourselves from others and things, because we always share the world with them. In our interactions with others, we can choose how and with whom we associate for what purposes (Inwood, 2000, p. 94).

While we tend to lead an inauthentic life by being dispersed in routines and public norms for everyday activities, our authentic life is lived as a “unified flow” characterised by future directedness (Guignon, 1993, p. 229). We take up possibilities opened by the past in order to achieve something for the future at the present point. We can decide how to be and take up certain possibilities in being responsible for our lives, no matter how our lives are lived in the world shared with others. For example, being urged to earn money for her poor parents in Vietnam, Anh Ngoc, the flower maker, attempted to apply for PR in Australia after graduation without returning to Vietnam, as required by the Vietnamese scholarship program. She was in a situation of violating the scholarship condition and having nowhere to live in Australia. She perceived her marriage to an Australian man, whom she had not loved, as pragmatic in the sense that it provided “material support” for her relocation. She cared about her relationship with others including her parents, Vietnamese scholarship managers, and her Australian husband. In other words, although we exist amidst others “in the womb of externalized and public existence” (Barret, 1964, p. 196), we care about our being, which is “an issue” for us (Heidegger, 1962, p. 69).

Through engagement with the world, others and things matter to us as well, as they shape our being. Therefore, care is not only directed towards the “I” as the self, but as we are immersed in the world with others, care directs the “I” towards others and things (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 84 & 235). When we speak of the “self” in care, this “self” is always “already socialised into public practices”
(Dreyfus, 1991, p. 240), as we are never detached from the world with others. The ways Anh Ngoc made sense of her part-time job of folding paper flowers expressed how she cared about her life as a dutiful daughter. Her act of sending remittances reflected a cultural practice of filial piety, where Vietnamese people are expected to support their retired parents financially. Her decision to violate the return requirement of the Vietnamese Government scholarship program depicted how she cared about the ways she lived her life by negotiating the influences of her past experiences with poverty, the cultural norm and her expectation to improve her parents’ financial condition. As this example shows, in terms of our existence with others, our actions in the present are influenced by what has already happened to us up to the present point and what we expect to fulfil in the future (Heidegger, 1962, p. 435).

Our past, present and future matter to us in the care-structure, which Heidegger considers as having a “temporal” dimension (1962, p. 329). According to Heidegger, the care-structure consists of three elements: ahead-of-itself, already-in-the-world, and being-alongside-within-the-world (p. 236). The first component ‘ahead-of-itself’ is seen as our projection into the future in terms of our possibilities, which are not yet actualised. Yet, our future is shaped by who we have been and what we have done in the past. We cannot choose to be born or to be born in a particular circumstance, but our past experiences and conditions as being ‘already-in-the-world’ shape who we are at present. We are always already thrown into a situation where we realise ourselves as “being-alongside-within-the-world”. Our present ways of being are shaped by our past as well as what we want to become in the future. We make sense of our present lives through this temporal continuity in relation to others and things, as I have discussed above. As Dall’Alba argues, “We are the persons we were yesterday and will be tomorrow, but also not the same” (2009, p. 39). Our present and future ways of being are shaped by our past, and we may find that possibilities opened up through our interactions with the world impact on who we are and want to become.

In projecting ourselves onto possibilities, we look to the future while we are already involved with the world, rather than being confined to the present. Our lives are lived as “possibilities made accessible by the past and acting in the present in order to accomplish something for the future” (Guignon, 1993, pp. 229-230). We encounter our past not because it is what it is, but because of the possibilities it presents for continuing our lives (Inwood, 2000, p. 95). What we are doing is related to our self-understanding “for the sake of our being” in the future (Heidegger, 1962, p. 236). But when we are faced with our everyday life-projects, our past shapes our present activities and aspirations through interactions with others and things, forming the “future which makes present in the process of having-been” (p. 374). It is “the past we forget and the future we expect, all without
decisiveness and resolute understanding” (Arisaka, 1996, p. 38). In Inwood’s (2000, p. 68) words, we run “ahead into the future and [reach] back into the past.”

In short, for Heidegger, being-in-the-world is the way we share the world with others and things. The ‘being-in’ of this concept shows how we engage in the world with familiarity by following social norms and taken-for-granted knowledge. The ‘world’ implies concrete contexts where we interact with things and others. The ways we interact with things and others by inauthentically conforming to public norms enable us to accomplish everyday activities. However, when following some social norms becomes problematic to us, we may take responsibility for our lives. We authentically take a stand on who we are and define our ‘self’ by seeking possibilities opened up from our interactions with the world or other social norms. As such, we are not contained in a world with a totality of entities but rather, the world where we dwell as we make sense of our interactions with things and others. In being-in-the-world, we are never detached from the world. Our entwinement with others and things allows us to make sense of our everyday activities in relation to who we are and what we want to be. As Heidegger (1962, p. 58) claims, being immersed in interactions with things and people in the world through our specific ways of being-in-the-world constitutes the life-world.

3.3 Relating ‘being-in-the-world’ to this study

The concepts identified above collectively elaborate being-in-the-world, so they are interconnected, rather than standing alone. In this study, I analyse this interconnectedness through the participants’ interactions with people and things in specific contexts from the initiation of their decisions to migrate, to relocation and future aspirations, as stated in the research questions of this study. Against the background of Chapters 1 and 2, the focus of the inquiry in this study includes socio-economic and political conditions influencing the participants’ decisions to migrate, relocation experiences, efforts to meet life and career aspirations, and transnational ties. These were not experienced as unrelated life events, so I examine their interrelations as reflected in the participants’ “entwinement with the world” (Dall’Alba & Sandberg, 2010, p. 107; see also Dall’Alba, 2009).

By considering the participants as active selves who share the world with others through being-in-the-world, this study goes beyond the dominant economic approaches employed in current research on Vietnamese professional migration. As mentioned in Chapter 2, current policy-driven research (e.g. Cu, 2001; Dang, 2007 & 2008; Dang, Tacoli, & Hoang, 2003; Dang et al., 2010; Nguyen, 2003; Nguyen, Tran, Nguyen, & Oostendorp, 2008) tends to examine influences of socio-political transformations in Vietnam on professional migration separately from community, household and individual circumstances. These studies have foregrounded that international migration from
Vietnam is influenced by political and economic changes arising from the Đổi Mới Policy. Due to this focus, they tend to neglect how confluences of migrants’ interactions with social and familial structures may influence migration experiences. Further, the theoretical framework adopted in this study can also challenge conceptualisations disembodying migrants as ‘brain flows’, perpetuating migrants’ responses to the global race for talent as economic calculations.

In contrast, I examine the participants’ transnational mobilities as reflective of their entwinement with the world through confluences of various scales. As mentioned in Chapter 2, education-related migrants’ mobilities are embedded in global, national, communal and familial contexts. While I acknowledge that transnational mobilities are influenced by migrants’ interactions at each of these scales, I explore how one set of influences is related to others across these scales. The intersection of the various scales may mean some migrants have a more intense set of experiences and influences compared with others. These confluences are explored through influences of economic, social and political transformations in the host and home societies on migrants’ decisions to migrate, as shown in some previous research (e.g. Baas, 2010; Biao, 2005 & 2007; Castles, 2010). I also examine influences of the participants’ involvement at other scales, where relevant. For example, research has shown that transnational mobilities are affected by migration infrastructure in host countries, such as migration policies and influences of other actors such as migration brokers on recruitment and documentation (e.g. Biao, 2005 & 2007; Collins, 2008; Hawthorne, 2005 & 2010; Lindquist, Biao, & Yeoh, 2012), social and cultural norms (e.g. Biao, 2005 & 2007; Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012; Yeoh et al., 2013), and political ideologies (e.g. Ho & Bedford, 2008; Levitt, 1998; Nguyen, 2013 & 2014). Family traditions and parents’ choice for mobilities as well as personal circumstances (Biao, 2005 & 2007; Li, Findlay, Jowett, & Skeldon, 1996; Waters, 2005 & 2006) are also taken into consideration. Locating migration experiences as part of migrants’ entwinement with the world enables a fuller description of the complexity of their migratory life trajectories. Adopting a research perspective that focuses on migrants’ entwinement with the world can also help explore transformative changes associated with their migration from pre-departure to relocation and future aspirations.

As mentioned above, we interact with others and things in a shared world. As such, this study explores the participants’ uses of equipment in a totality while being with others, which constrained and opened up possibilities for their transnational mobilities. In particular, the totality of equipment that I investigate includes their uses of educational credentials (Baas, 2010; Cobb-Clark, Connolly, & Worswick, 2005; Waters, 2005 & 2006), IELTS band scores (Birrell & Healy, 2008), and ethnic linguistic capital in host societies (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Dustmann & van Soet, 2002; Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001). I also look at ethnic features (Biao, 2005 & 2007), work
skills and workplace experiences (Syed, 2008; Syed & Özbilgin, 2007), citizenship (Ong, 1993 & 1999; Nagel, 2005; Staeheli & Nagel, 2006), and remittances and gifts in transnational practices (Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012; Yeoh et al., 2013). Migrants use various tools to initiate their migration, settle into new lives, address obligations from their past and present lives, and aspire for the future, while actively participating in transnational social fields mediated by “cultural politics of moving and belonging” (Yeoh & Huang, 2011, p. 683). By doing phenomenology with “wonder” (Barnacle, 2001, p. 4; see Section 4.1), I also explore other tools the participants used aside from those cited in previous research, as well as looking at how the participants used these tools in relation to other tools, rather than as things encountered in isolation. The notion of equipment in a totality contributes to an understanding of how things become meaningful and are interconnected in two-step migrants’ negotiations of transnational mobilities.

Education-related migrants’ transnational mobilities are also influenced by their interactions with others, as I have shown in Chapter 2. Previous research has examined influences of other people such as parents, friends, employers in host countries and community on decisions to migrate and relocation strategies (e.g. Baas, 2010; Biao, 2005 & 2007; Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012; Waters, 2005 & 2006). These studies have also demonstrated the relationality of migrants’ interactions with others and practical uses of things. For example, Biao’s (2005 & 2007) work has shown that by aspiring to seek overseas residency, some Indian male students utilise their ethnicity belonging to the Kamma and Reddy castes, to increase the monetary values of the dowries offered by future bridal families. These students then transfer the dowries into a means to support their pursuit of IT programs in Western countries with a migration purpose in mind.

In this study, I explore how the participants’ being with others was reflected in their negotiations of transnational mobilities. I investigate who and how the participants interacted with in their uses of equipment. The people with whom they interacted may include family members, colleagues, friends, and people they had never met but who nonetheless influenced their mobilities. Similar to the way I look at their uses of equipment in a totality, I do not solely explore with whom they interacted, but include how the participants understood such interactions to achieve what they aspired to achieve. As mentioned in Section 3.2, we always carry on our lives with a “history that has always already been influenced by the other” (Smith & Hyde, 1991, p. 448). Therefore, I further look at the participants’ past experiences, present activities, and future aspirations that involved their interactions with other people.

Migrants’ interactions with things and others include the ways they follow and/or break with social norms. In sharing the world with others, how professional migrants negotiate public norms to live
their migratory lives leaves space for an exploration of the Heideggerian concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity. The social norms I look at in the participants’ experiences may include political ideologies, their engagements with official objectives of migration policies, ethnic, socio-cultural and communal values and practices, workplace practices, and family traditions. Some studies examine influences of social norms on migrants’ agency in an objectivist stance, or emphasise migrants’ agency in responding to social structures in a subjectivist perspective. For example, international students are described as being ‘pulled’ by skilled migration schemes and salary structures offered by the employment system in host countries (e.g. Baruch, Budhwar, & Khatri, 2007; Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). Other studies examine separate influences from migrants’ interactions with social structures such as skilled migration policies and communal practices of mobility (as mentioned in the second paragraph in this section). However, the concept of being-in-the-world postulates that migrants are always already immersed in the world. We are always already involved in the world with taken-for-granted knowledge about going about with public norms. In this study, the concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity enable me to investigate what social norms migrants follow or break through entwinement with the world. Rather than investigating how the participants experienced themselves as “subjects standing over against an object” (Blatter, 2006, p. 12) such as social structures, I examine the extent to which they were immersed in the world in which they sometimes felt at-home with social norms and not-at-home with other norms.

To do this, I look at the ways the participants dwelled in places, and enacted public norms and understandings of cultural and communal practices (Gieryn, 2000, p. 473). Simultaneously, I examine how the participants related these social norms to their own circumstances, when they authentically took a stand to become who they wanted to be. Specifically, I explore how social norms, such as marriage practices (Biao, 2005 & 2007) or cultural practices of filial piety (Yeoh et al., 2013), possibly posed constraints on the ways the participants negotiated transnational mobilities. I also pay attention to the ways they followed and/or broke with social norms might lead to possibilities which opened up their interactions with the world. I also look at how the participants mediated changes in the surrounding environment, such as family reorganisation arising from their physical relocation or changes in the employment context in Australia. Through seeking to grasp an understanding of the situations they encountered, I analyse how the participants took responsibility for their being through their specific actions.

Although migrants’ interactions with the world can lead to further possibilities, these possibilities are not endless. Constraints and resistances can present as “stickiness” (Latham, 2002, p. 123) or “friction” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 5) that may occur along the way as migrants live their lives. Yet,
Cresswell (2013, p. 5) has also argued that the “by-product” of friction is “heat”, which can increase mobility. How do I understand friction as constraints and heat as strategies migrants use to deal with constraints? I begin by examining the constraints in both Vietnam and Australia that the participants were faced with, as migrants may face everyday constraints in the home and host societies as well as in transnational practices. Constraints while in the home country may appear in the form of socio-economic exclusion posed by an “increasingly stringent regime of migration control imposed by the rich countries of the global north” (King, 2012, p. 136), poverty, cultural and socio-political impositions, family difficulties or even personal limits (Nguyen, 2013 & 2014; Nguyen et al., 2008; Yeoh et al., 2013). Constraints in the destination country may include labour exploitation and insecurity, and vulnerabilities arising from transition such as deskilling, racial discrimination, unemployment, lack of language skills and networks, and precariousness in obtaining legal migrant status (e.g. Baas, 2010 & 2014; Goldring & Landolt, 2011; Nonini, 2002; Robertson, 2011a; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). Because their participation in transnational social fields is infected by power differentials, migrants may face disparities, inequalities, as well as religious and racial issues that may facilitate, legitimise, and/or constrain mobility and fixity (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 183; Nagel, 2009, p. 405).

I explore the participants’ enactment of possibilities through their specific activities in following and/or breaking with public rituals and then following other social norms, as outlined above. I also pay close attention to the participants’ responses to constraints and/or possibilities through their interactions in the social milieu, which acknowledge ambiguity in their relations to the world. I examine how the participants used specific tools with different meanings from the ways they often encountered, and what such ambiguous relations meant for them. For example, as shown in Chapter 5, bribery practices which Thanh Huong previously considered an “ethically wrong action” were later experienced as an enabler to smooth her migration process. She used bribes as equipment by falling in line with socially assigned meanings of bribery practices.

So far, I have discussed the ways I examine the various features of the participants’ engagement with the world influencing their negotiations of transnational mobilities. For Heidegger (1962), our engagement with the world is “temporal and also […] spatial co-ordinately” (p. 418). I examine how the participants experienced transnational mobilities in space through time, particularly with a focus on transnational practices. In their engagement with the world, migrants encounter distances and directionality in space through their specific activities. As such, this conceptualization brings together the different notions of space that previous literature has mentioned, enabling me to examine how migrants experience the relationality of spatiality, particularly in relation to temporality.
In terms of spatiality, I examine how the participants were immersed in the world as they sought to feel “at-home” through familiarity, possibly making the “unfamiliar” land “familiar” (Armstrong, 2004, p. 237) or the other way around. I investigate how the participants encountered ‘farness’ or ‘nearness’ through their specific activities in making decisions to migrate, relocating and forming aspirations for the future. Similar to previous studies on transnationalism (e.g. Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Szanton-Blanc, 1996; Faist, 2010; Vertovec, 2009), I look into the participants’ experiences of space as they engage in transnational practices. These practices include sustainment of (transnational) family relationships, receiving family support or giving support to their families in Vietnam, transnational business activities, and transnational communication. Not only do I point out what these practices were, but I also engage in a deep exploration of how and why the participants were participating in them. This means I pay close attention to how the participants interacted with others and things, and for what purposes, in order to obtain an understanding of their belonging to places. In this sense, distances are experienced in relation to their interactions with others and things that mattered to them.

An examination of the participants feeling at-home is related to the way I understand what dwelling-mobility meant for them. As noted in Chapter 2, dwelling is not sedentarism or the stability of staying peacefully in a place. Instead, migrants initiate and maintain “dwelling-mobility” (Todres & Galvin, 2010, p. 3) through transnational relationships among the home, host and even transit societies. In some instances, influences of others in host and home societies who are relatively immobile shaped how the participants experienced dwelling-mobility with regards to transnational activities, imagined returns or sustainment of ethnic identities (see also Baas, 2010; Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Szanton-Blanc, 1996; Cresswell, 2010; Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006 & 2008; Todres & Galvin, 2010). Therefore, I examine the extent to which transnational mobilities were influenced by the relative immobility of others (Cresswell, 2006, p. 739) and of themselves in interactions with families, friends and colleagues, as well as others who mattered to their mobilities.

Not only do transnational mobilities involve the stretching of space from one locale to another, they also entail temporal features revealed as intersecting considerations of duty, responsibility, ambition and hope which are both retrospective and prospective (King, Thomson, Fielding, & Warnes, 2006; Robertson, 2011a; Yeoh, Huang, & Lam, 2005; Yeoh et al., 2013). In my study, I examine how the participants experienced temporality with regard to their past experiences as already-in-the-world, present lives as being-alongside, and aspirations for the future as ahead-of-itsel. As I have discussed above, my consideration of the participants’ past experiences includes confluences of socio-economic, political, cultural, communal and familial contexts that shaped who they were prior to migration. I also examine how these confluences opened up possibilities for them during the
initiation of migration and relocation by investigating what specific actions the participants took and what their activities meant for them. How their past and present lives shaped their aspirations for the future is explored through the ways they interacted with others and things and for what purposes. Drawing on their past, their engagement in the world opened possibilities in the present that potentially influenced their expectations of the future. The entwinement of the participants’ past, present and future is explored through an opening of possibilities arising from their interactions with others and things at intersecting scales. The confluences of the social and personal from Vietnam to Australia, and from the past to present and future, can “transcend particular periods and places [which] encompass their past trajectories and future continuities” (Yeoh, Huang, & Lam, 2005, p. 308).

My thesis draws on a small number of earlier studies using a Heideggerian framework in exploring the relationality of spatiality and temporality in mobilities (e.g. Collins & Shubin, 2015; Shubin, 2015). As mentioned in Chapter 2, I challenge some common perspectives on space and time as separate “sequential and geometrically measurable forms” (Shubin, 2015, p. 350) that reduce migrants’ experiences to separate events. Drawing on the Heideggerian care-structure, I explore the non-linearity of time that migrants experience in their specific engagements with the world that make their lives incomplete and projective as an ongoing process. I do this by exploring how migrants’ present lives are shaped by their past and future, and their aspirations for future work and lives are formed through their past and present engagement with the world in specific locales. Migrants’ involvement with the world across space over time potentially presents constraints and possibilities that can make their unfolding lives complex. Attending to the relationality of space and time allows me to challenge the notions of time and space as objective entities which exist separate from migrants’ interactions with the world, as commonly conceptualized in some current studies. At the same time, I can also examine how migrants experience emotions such as lostness (Shubin, 2015, p. 353) or incompleteness arising from their attempts to live their lives in Australia. Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world enables me to examine migrants’ encounters of time and space as being not simply constructed by the acts of migrants themselves but rather, their interactions with the world, making time and space intersubjective domains in their experiences.

In general, the concept of being-in-the-world allows me to explore the participants’ negotiations of transnational mobilities through the ways they cared about how they live in the world shared with others and things. Transnational mobilities are then enacted through two-step migrants’ interactions with the surrounding world, as this thesis argues. By examining their entwinement with the world, this study offers methodological advances for understanding the confluences of a range of scales from “family/household, community, national and the constellation of countries linked by migration.
flows” (King & Skeldon, 2010, p. 1640). Through the exploration of multi-scalar influences, this study challenges some studies taking neoclassical approaches that portray Vietnamese professional migration as being driven by influences of economic and political transformations in Vietnam without relating these influences to those of migrants’ interactions at the various scales. Within the broader research corpus on education-related migration, the concept of being-in-the-world also unsettles conventional understandings of ‘brain drain’ in conceptualising two-step migration as unidirectional flows enabled by ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors (see Chapter 2).

An understanding of migrants’ immersion in the world at multiple scales informs how diasporic lives are constituted through the hybrid self-formations in relation to others and things through space and time. The exploration of time and space in this study particularly advances current research approaches in addressing the myriad ways in which migrants’ everyday practices are not confined to fixed territories, but are “parts of multiple spatial networks and temporal linkages” (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 186). By examining the dynamics of transnational mobilities shaped by migrants’ interactions with the world at multiple intersecting scales, this study adds nuances on understandings of “categorical opposites” (p. 188) including routes and roots, agency and structure, and spatiality and temporality, as I have discussed in Chapter 2. Finally, yet importantly, the theoretical concept of being-in-the-world informed my research design and the co-production and analysis of empirical material, as I discuss in the next chapter.
Chapter 4. Methodology

The Heideggerian tradition points out that the interpretation of a phenomenon within research emerges from the convergence of perspectives of the researcher, participants and relevant literature. This places Heideggerian research in the interpretative school of research. The interpretative approach views knowledge as being produced through the researcher’s interactions with the participants and interpretation of the research material (Welch, 2001, p. 68), as the researcher always shares the world with the participants. In this vein, my interpretations of the research material were informed by my positionality in the research, which shaped the ways I obtained the empirical material, and constructed knowledge in this study. By acknowledging that intersubjectivity is integral to this study, this chapter presents how my positionality in this research shaped how I co-constructed knowledge with my participants. I will first describe my positionality, as it influenced the ways I built rapport with the participants and co-constructed the research material with them. In the next parts in this chapter, I will discuss the research material co-construction process and will expand into a description of the use of spontaneous interpretative conversations. In building relationships with the participants prior to and during the research material co-construction phase, trust was seen as practical and important in contributing to the quality of the research material, analysis, validity and reliability of the study. With my position as both an insider and outsider in this research, I frame validity and reliability in the remainder of this chapter in terms of the agreed meaning between the perspectives of participants and me.

4.1 The researcher’s positionality

My experiences of mobility span through being an international student in Australia, as well as relocation within Vietnam and the international migration of my sister and relatives. I was born after the Vietnam War, when Vietnamese people were struggling with social, political and economic chaos, as I have mentioned in Section 1.2.1. These economic difficulties and socio-political injustices shaped our desire for mobility. One typical example reflecting our desire is to imagine a different life through taking photographs. A photographer in my neighbourhood attracted customers (including my family) to have photos taken with his old bicycle, broken watch, and external case of a radio (without a radio inside). With the photos, we wanted to show our relatives living in remote areas that we possessed ‘luxury’ goods. These goods deceitfully assured us, as well as boasted to them that we had means of transportation (the bicycle), professional jobs (the watch indicating working schedules in factories) and knowledge (the radio updating us with the latest news). The fashion of taking photos with the bicycle, watch and radio represented our desire for
materialism which, to some extent, referred to our thirst for better material and spiritual lives. It also was true of our aspirations for mobility.

I grew up at a time when a large number of Vietnamese people attempted to cross the border to other countries to avoid poverty and possible revenge from the communists (see also Section 1.2.1). Many of my neighbours tried to buy boat trips to cross the ocean as a way to seek “freedom” in Western countries instead of “waiting for death” in Vietnam (Bui & Nguyen, 1994, p. 1). Driven by the need to ‘escape’ from the new government, some even dared to take risks and face predictable dangers, believing that “if electricity poles could walk, they would go [leave Vietnam] too” (Nguyen, 2012, p. 2). My observation of my former neighbours’ secretive escapes plus the reading of articles and books on these movements (as mentioned in Section 1.2.1) helped me better understand some of my research participants’ narratives of their family conditions in the past and parents’ expectations of their safe “ocean-crossing” (Tuong Vu’s word) to Australia after international education.

My passion in exploring the world outside my hometown was also influenced by domestic and international mobilities by my family members. My great, great maternal grandmother was a princess in the Nguyễn dynasty\(^9\) in the Central Region of Vietnam at the end of the 19\(^{th}\) century. Her marriage was arranged with my great, great grandfather as the son of an affluent mandarin living in the South of Vietnam. Through her internal migration, which brought her out of the royal background and exposed her to the worldly life of social advancement, she decided to send her children to study in France, hoping to convert her status and economic capital into cultural and social capital for her children, and secure social status for her family. As a result, some of my great uncles were the first in my family to experience transnational mobilities as international students and migrants towards the end of the Second World War. Their mobilities were shaped by the influences of social, political and economic changes in Vietnam and the world, their family background, as well as their personal aspirations and desires.

As a medical doctor, my father was sent to the US and Philippines for professional training supported by funding from the Saigon Government in the 1960s. His international education journeys, though short, seemed to have opened a new horizon to another world. Being proud of his international mobility, he kept talking about the ‘Western’ world – topics of which were severely prohibited in Vietnam after 1975. After 1975, the new communist government sent my father to a ‘new economic zone’ for several months to “teach [him] to do manual work” [my father’s words].

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\(^9\) The last feudalistic ruling dynasty in Vietnam from 1802 to 1945
As my father was not allowed to work for any public hospitals or open his own clinic after his release, and all of my mother’s inherited assets, land, and money were confiscated, we starved as a family. I soon observed unfair treatment and social discrimination resulting from conflicts in political power and ideologies in the district where I was living at that time.

I also realised that socio-political and economic structures influence the forms and meanings of transnational mobilities. Some of my neighbours managed to move overseas in different ways. For example, those who had political connections to the VCP (Vietnam’s Communist Party) were proud to be sent to the USSR or Eastern European countries in labour cooperation programs. They were seen as ‘elites’ in our society at that time. Other people illegally crossed the South China Sea (called the East Sea in Vietnam) or travelled by road to neighbouring countries for settlement, leaving their relatives and friends to shame and stigma. I overheard many people secretly talk ill about the ruling government and discuss ways to cross the borders to other countries. Stories about people’s crossing borders illegally flooded our district, as in many parts of Vietnam from 1975 to the early 1990s (see also Section 1.2.1).

Together with my father’s stories about life in the US and the news we secretly listened to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Voice of America (VOA) at night, I visited foreign countries in my “imaginative travel” passion (Urry, 2008, p. 14). The desire to experience life in another part of the world as “corporeal proximity” (p. 14) grew larger in my heart. The image of life existing outside my district and imagination of turning my life to a new chapter became central to my aspiration to study abroad. These imaginings were not simply my fantasy. They became the basis for my projection into an imagined future with an opening of possibilities, which materialised in 2004 and 2011 through my international education journeys to Australia.

I have come to Australia within the contexts of Vietnam’s global integration and wider accessibility to international education since the 2000s, and the growth of Australian universities’ marketisation practices in South East Asia. After I completed my Master’s degree in 2004, some of my friends chose to apply for PR in Australia. They advised me to do the same when Australia’s immigration policy placed a focus on skilled migration as a measure to improve nation-building capacity in the global market (Hawthorne, 2005). Yet, I returned, expecting to use knowledge I obtained in Australia to improve my work performance in Vietnam.

In 2011, I returned to Australia for the second time for my doctoral studies, after several struggles with the bureaucratic power issues. Earlier in 2007, I had been awarded an international student scholarship by an Australian university. However, the public university in Vietnam where I was working did not allow me to take up the scholarship, withholding my passport. By using the “class-
based principle” (St George, 2010, p. 34; Vasavakul, 1994, p. 343) to check my family history within the three most recent generations, they dictated that I was not “deserving” [their oral decision passed to me] of the scholarship. I was told that I had many relatives who had worked for the Sai Gon administration before 1975 and were currently living in Western countries. I initiated the intention for mobility, but it was constrained by different factors and people, including the immediate political regime which I was facing, and even my very distant relatives, whom I had never met. Yet, the dream to pursue knowledge was pervasive in me. I decided to ‘secretly’ apply for the international student scholarship program at another Australian university. With luck, I was awarded this scholarship in 2011. Then, I quit my job by giving the rector of my university a fake reason that I had opened a company, expecting that an official agreement for my resignation would be issued. With his official decision, I re-applied for a new passport (the university finally returned my passport to me after it had expired), and later applied for an Australian student visa. I experienced my second international education journey as a ‘secret’ escape to Australia for knowledge pursuit and passion in seeing the other side of the world. I was both proud of my success in taking this step back to Australia as a scholarship recipient and offended at being perceived as a ‘criminal’ within my country. From this, I realised that meanings and experiences of mobilities are shaped by our interactions with the world across space and time.

My story reflects mobilities as an “ongoing openness without a fixed telos” (Wentzer, 2012, p. 313) which influenced the ways I positioned myself in this study. I used my personal stories from a Heideggerian perspective to inform the ways I approached the participants, conducted the conversations with them and analysed the empirical material. The ways I immersed myself in co-constructing, analysing and interpreting the material showed how I lived the life-world with the participants and the broader contexts as an insider and outsider. As an insider, I was a “peripheral member” (Adler & Adler, 1987 as cited in Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55), who shared with the participants a similar ethnic identity and language background. My ethnicity and language enabled me to probe the participants’ flows of thoughts. This ethnic similarity also helped me interpret cultural and social values and their impact on international mobility experiences that the participants expressed. This insider perspective allowed me to gain acceptance by the participants,

St George (2010) and Vasavakul (1994) briefly mention this principle when the Vietnamese government used it to select students to study at university and overseas in the North of Vietnam from 1954 to 1975 and in the whole country after 1975. This practice has been no longer applied, but it is still hidden in staff selection practices for the state sectors, and my scholarship application experiences in 2007 and 2011 were the embodiment of this practice. I have also noticed that there are no clear-cut, explicit policies on this practice, and current literature remains silent on this issue.
and potentially obtain a greater depth to the research material (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 56) by being able to establish trust with them. I also shared with them experiences of being a citizen growing up during the transitional period after the Vietnam War and Đổi Mới Policy, former professional and Vietnamese student.

In terms of sharing these lived experiences with the participants, I have specifically observed the following points. First, I understand that mobilities are influenced by the broader socio-economic and political forces, and family circumstances. Then, motives for migration possibly appear the same among migrants, but the ways they respond are variable, depending on how they care about the ways they live their lives in response to their own contexts. They may do and/or not do what other people do by relating to whom they are and what they want to achieve. For example, to ensure the security of their seven small children which they reasoned they would face, my parents decided to move to rural and remote places with less social discrimination, but not to a foreign country like their friends and neighbours. I also noticed that after we arrive in a new place, we might not feel anchored. During my relocation to a new province at the age of 10, I could not make friends with schoolmates because they seemed to dislike people without an ‘origin’. Facing unfamiliarity in the new place and the feeling of return to the old place may challenge our initial expectations of migration. Relocation does not simply mean change of places, but it involves physical, mental and emotional adjustments. In addition, through interactions with the surrounding world, migrants may find possibilities open up as challenges and opportunities. For example, when my passport was withheld for political reasons, I focused on publishing journal articles as a way to relieve my disappointment. Later, I found my publications, though still limited in terms of quantity and quality, helpful as a tool adding credits to my doctoral scholarship application in the second attempt. In this sense, I entered the research field with some understandings of mobilities based on my lived experiences. I could understand the broader influences of Vietnam’s socio-economic and political structures and familial circumstances on transnational mobilities, as well as how people experience their movements. The positionality of the insider also means that I was not a “neutral, objective observer” (Welch, 2001, p. 68), who attempted to prove or disprove a viewpoint.

However, my lived experience of mobility as an international student may not be the same as the participants’ experiences as professional migrants, though we might have some similar experiences such as lack of political patronage. From an outsider perspective, I was a non-immigrant researcher who entered the research site with “wonder” (Barnacle, 2001, p. 3). I became interested in understanding how the participants experienced transnational mobilities by attempting to set aside my own pre-suppositions based on the domestic and international mobilities I had experienced. In line with the theoretical concept of being-in-the-world, I looked for information about the concrete
contexts in which the participants were embedded. Each participant experienced mobilities under different conditions. Being an outsider enabled me to step into the research with curiosity about how the participants initiated and experienced their mobilities.

My insider/outsider status did not consist of separate moments in which one positionality was taken before the other. Rather, through the rapport I had built with the participants and our shared ethnicity, understanding of socio-cultural norms and similar lived experience as an insider, I entered the field as an outsider with ‘wonder’ about how they negotiated transnational mobilities under interactions with the surrounding environment. I was involved in the process of exploring the participants’ lived world with “richness and depth” (Welch, 2001, p. 68) facilitated by a shared ethnicity and initial understandings of transnational mobilities. Instead of using my lived experience and knowledge of the literature on transnational mobilities to dictate the ways I conducted the conversations and analysed the empirical material, I followed this process with ‘wonder’ as guided by phenomenology. The richness and depth of the material were then enhanced by my outsider stance, which allowed me to curiously engage in the conversations with them. This insider/outsider positionality enabled me to nurture spontaneity in my conversations with the participants. In the following sections, I describe in detail how this researcher’s positionality informed the ways I obtained and analysed the empirical material.

4.2 Research sites and participant recruitment

The cities of Brisbane in the state of Queensland, Sydney in New South Wales, and Melbourne in Victoria were chosen as the study sites for several reasons. First, at the time when I began to conduct this study in 2011, there were 212,070 Vietnam-born people living in Australia, accounting for 0.9 per cent of the Australian population of more than 23 million (ABS, 2013, p. 1). In the same year, 39 per cent of Vietnam-born residents were reported to live in New South Wales, followed by Victoria with 37 per cent. In addition, New South Wales and Victoria are the popular residence destinations for permanent skilled migrants from Vietnam, with a 25 per cent share in New South Wales and 38 per cent in Victoria (DIAC, 2012, p. 5). In addition to offering convenience in sampling, I found that the density of migrants from Vietnam in these locations would possibly enable me to examine if there were any links between recent two-step migration and other types of migration from Vietnam to Australia, particularly through practices relating to ethnicity. The density of migrants in these cities was potentially influenced by advertisements for two-step migration in the webpages of education and migration agents, and the media in Vietnam and Australia from 1999 to 2009 (e.g. Alouc, 2006; Eduviet Global, 2009; Forum for students of the National Economics University in Ho Chi Minh City, 2009). These advertisements often posted
opportunities for migration after education by advising prospective students to take vocational and degree courses that articulated with Australia’s Skilled Occupations List to increase their scores in the points test. An examination of influences of these marketing agencies in addition to the Australian education industry per se (see also Baas, 2006) contributes to contextualising the participants’ engagement with the world in various social domains and scales.

Second, Brisbane, the third largest city in Australia with two established Vietnamese communities, is the location where I was living at the time of the study. This location also offered the convenience of conducting trial conversations prior to the main study. Finally, global cities like Sydney and Melbourne are known to attract professional migrants drawn to employment prospects and dynamic lifestyles which they offer in order to enrich social and cultural capital (Findlay, Li, Jowett, & Skeldon, 1996; Waters, 2007). Selecting participants residing in these cities enabled me to explore how they realised and experienced possibilities emerging from dwelling in these globally attractive cities. As such, in addition to two participants living in Brisbane selected for trial conversations, 15 other participants with five living in each of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne were selected for the main study.

In the phenomenological approach employed in a range of disciplines such as health, economics, psychology and education, the number of five to ten participants is recommended (e.g. Cope, 2011, pp. 608-609; Dukes, 1984, p. 200; Smith, 2004, p. 42), so that phenomenological researchers can “see the logic or meaning of an experience […] rather than to discover causal connections or patterns of correlation” (Dukes, 1984, p. 197). Another reason for the small sample size is that researchers can reflect on the complexities of the participants’ lives, as well as examine the connections and contradictions between different aspects of their accounts. In my study, I included more than the suggested number of participants to ensure I explored the experiences of a broad range of students-turned-migrants.

The 15 professional migrants from Vietnam were in the 29–42 years age range. I was able to include a balanced representation of demographic characteristics with seven female and eight male migrants, among whom one was divorced, four were single, and the rest were married with and without children. The participants in this study were professional migrants from Vietnam who held Bachelor’s, Master’s and doctoral degrees in different fields conferred onshore by different Australian universities. All worked in various white-collar employment sectors. While 13 participants had their PR granted onshore since 2001, the other two applied for PR from Vietnam. Table 4.1 on the next pages summarises the demographic profiles of the participants, who are assigned pseudonyms.
### Table 4.1 Brief demographic description of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Qualifications obtained in Australia</th>
<th>Year PR granted</th>
<th>Current occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Thanh Huong</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Divorced with one child</td>
<td>Master of Education and Master of International Business Management</td>
<td>2009 onshore</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Xuan Hong</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married with one child</td>
<td>Master of Education (Advanced)</td>
<td>2009 offshore</td>
<td>University administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ngoc Linh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Married with two children</td>
<td>Master of IT</td>
<td>2006 onshore</td>
<td>Musician, owner of a music teaching centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tuong Vu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Bachelor of IT</td>
<td>2007 onshore</td>
<td>Owner of a phone shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anh Ngoc</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Married with two children</td>
<td>Master of Public Relations and Master of International Business Management</td>
<td>2008 onshore</td>
<td>School administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Quynh Thy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married with two children</td>
<td>Master of Finance and Master of Accounting</td>
<td>2004 onshore</td>
<td>Manager of a clothes shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Highest Degree</td>
<td>Year of Graduation</td>
<td>Current Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ngoc Dai</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>PhD in IT</td>
<td>2009 onshore</td>
<td>IT technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Van Minh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Master of IT</td>
<td>2005 onshore</td>
<td>IT technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Minh Thanh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married with two children</td>
<td>Master of Commerce (plus Aviation Engineering Diploma)</td>
<td>2008 offshore</td>
<td>Aviation engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tran Minh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married with three children</td>
<td>PhD in Environmental Engineering</td>
<td>2001 onshore</td>
<td>Postdoctoral fellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Quynh Hoa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Bachelor and PhD in Food Technology</td>
<td>2008 onshore</td>
<td>Food inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mai Hue</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Bachelor of Pharmacy</td>
<td>2003 onshore</td>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Yen Xuan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Married with one child</td>
<td>Master of Education and Bachelor of Economics</td>
<td>2005 onshore</td>
<td>Manager of a toy shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Thanh Binh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Married with one child</td>
<td>Master of Accounting</td>
<td>2004 onshore</td>
<td>Manager of a migration agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Thai Duong</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married with two children</td>
<td>Bachelor in Chemical Engineering and Doctor of Medicine</td>
<td>2004 onshore</td>
<td>Medical doctor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I used a purposive snowballing for participant recruitment. Snowball sampling or chain referral sampling is a method used to recruit a study sample through referrals among initial participants who know of other participants meeting the study criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). This purposive sampling method was used for several reasons. First, it enabled me to reach targeted participants with expected “necessary knowledge and experience” (Flick, 2009, p. 123) of transnational mobilities for providing insightful responses in the conversations. Second, I was an international student in Australia, who did not have a wide source of acquaintances among professional migrants. Snowball sampling was used to take advantage of social networks of identified informants to provide me with a large pool of potential participants (Atkinson & Flint, 2001, p. 1; Browne, 2005, p. 48).

This sampling technique helped me identify other potential participants through my existing relationships with some initial participants. In this study, due to the scattered geographical locations of potential participants, I utilised the relationships between the initial participants and referred participants. In practice, six potential participants, who were known to me, were asked to refer me to other potential participants who met the selection criteria. With the wider population and brief information on the potential participants provided by the initial participants, I purposively selected nine referred participants to obtain a balanced representation of gender, educational backgrounds, occupations, marital status, and duration of residence in Australia. After identifying the referred potential participants, I contacted them by email and phone to inform them of the research and seek their agreement to participate in the study.

An advantage for me in recruiting and familiarizing myself with the research milieus and participants was that I was acquainted with some migrants who were willing to participate in my study and introduced me to others. For those to whom I was referred, I spent a longer time with them in their homes, talking with them as well as members of their families. Further, the rapport with the participants and their perception of my status as a co-ethnic member who spoke the same language also smoothed my access to them. As a former and current international student from Vietnam, who had lived in Australia for more than four years, I was familiar with the two Vietnamese communities in Brisbane (located in Inala and Darra). Prior to the research material collection phase, I also made occasional visits to my friends living in and close to Vietnamese communities in Sydney and Melbourne.

In addition to acquaintances I made among Vietnamese migrants through my social connections, I also gained some general knowledge of how Vietnamese Australians lived their lives in Australia. My knowledge of Vietnamese diaspora also included some socio-political norms and cultural
practices they followed and perceived. For example, I was aware that some migrants might feel hesitant to receive me as a researcher, as ‘brain drain’ was a sensitive topic that could potentially affect their political status because they might assume the Vietnamese Government considered them a “betrayer” (Anh Ngoc’s word). Paying regular visits to their homes and spending time talking to them at weekends and times they preferred allowed me to gain entry to the research sites. For instance, before and after I conducted the conversations for my research, Yen Xuan invited me to go shopping with her and her children, Thanh Huong and I went to a café in Inala to have a coffee afterwards, and I did some gardening with Minh Thanh. These activities, among many others, offered me a chance to get to know the participants better, ‘break the ice’ by being friendly with them, extend sympathy, and especially enabled them to be aware I was not a “spy” for the VCP (Minh Thanh’s word).

4.3 Research conversations

I used interviews in the form of interpretative conversations with the participants. Before the main study, I organised trial conversations with two professional migrants living in Brisbane. Although these conversations were not included in the analysis of the empirical material, they were helpful in three ways. First, I wanted to ‘train’ myself as a researcher in the field, because it was the first time I was engaging in interpretative research. Second, I aimed to check the fluency and logical flow of my questions. Third, I wanted to test if the questions enabled the participants to provide rich information to the research questions. After the trial conversations, I learned that in conversing with the participants, I should deeply engage with them by asking them follow-up questions for clarification, including issues that challenged my thinking to quench my ‘wonder’.

After revising some phrases in the conversation question guide, I began the main study. I first arranged times and venues with the participants, and then conducted the conversations in Brisbane, and then Sydney and Melbourne on weekends either at their homes, community libraries, or cafes. The question guide was used as a signpost to remind me of the important aspects of the study inquiry. These conversations were guided by two sets of questions (see the Appendix). The first set of questions enabled me to obtain an initial understanding of the participants’ backgrounds and contexts. Through their introduction on who they were, I could make sure that I had reached the participants who met the study’s criteria. Obtaining contextual information also enabled me to ‘break the ice’ with the participants, especially those who had been referred to me by others. I explored the participants’ experiences as former international students in Australia and professional migrants through their daily lives and work.
The second set of questions explored issues related to the research questions on the negotiation of transnational mobilities. In this part of the conversation, I aimed to examine the links between social transformations and transnational mobilities that involved the complexity, contextuality and interconnectedness of multi-level meditations of migration processes in Vietnam and Australia (Castles, 2010, p. 1565). A social transformation perspective recognises that negotiations of mobilities are influenced by the politics of the “international migration regime” which include norms, laws and institutions established by states in dealing with a particular international and national migration issue (Rogers, 1992, p. 45). I also explored how the participants encountered and interacted with these influences from the socio-political structures, effects on their professional, and familial lives, as well as how these shaped their decisions to migrate. I examined how the participants experienced relocation, and how their experiences were transformed over time. My questions continued to unpack the ways the participants formed aspirations for work and life after relocating to Australia that were shaped through their engagement with the world. Discussions on the use of transnational ties were also included in this part of the conversation. I conducted each conversation with ‘wonder’ about how the participants negotiated transnational mobilities through their embeddedness in the world.

By creating an informal atmosphere in the conversations, I encouraged the participants to feel comfortable to talk about their experiences. I engaged in the conversations with them by asking questions, sharing empathy with their sad stories of losses and sadness, expressing interest in their experiences, and responding to their questions about my daily life as an international student. Influenced by the theoretical framework of being-in-the-world, I paid close attention to the participants’ interactions with people and things in intersecting social domains in both Vietnam and Australia. I attempted to explore the participants’ contexts and the ways they interacted with their surrounding environments, those which were distant and/or proximate to them. Field notes during my visits to their places and the research conversations were also recorded to enable me to clarify the participants’ experiences of contradictions and ambiguities, as well as confirm findings arising from the conversations. The research conversations were audiotaped, lasting within an average duration of one hour, 50 minutes as the shortest and 1.5 hours as the longest. When conducting the conversations, I paid attention to spontaneity (see Section 4.4 below) while relating my questions to their lives in Australia, as well as obtaining sufficient detail for the study inquiry. As I mentioned above, the time I spent with most of the referred participants prior to and after the conversations, my observations of their daily lives during my visits, as well as friendly relations I developed with them during the course of the research enabled me to build trust and obtain necessary material for my study.
4.4 Spontaneity in the interpretative conversations

The interpretative conversations were conducted in line with the research questions for the study with the four major foci on influences on migration decisions, relocation experiences, life and work aspirations and transnational ties. Paying careful attention to my own participation in the conversations, the flows of my questions, while responding to the participants’ emotions and interactions with me, I nurtured spontaneity. These points were interrelated. Each conversation was unique, reflecting the multiple realities and complexities of transnational mobilities. To grasp such complexities, I was attentive and open to variations and complexities of the participants’ lived experience (Barnacle, 2001, p. 3), using my own background to understand but without imposing my pre-suppositions in forging the conversations. For example, Tuong Vu began his story by talking about his parents and their business interests in Vietnam. I joined this conversation by asking him about his parents’ business and partners. The reason for me to raise these questions was because Tuong Vu enthusiastically mentioned how his father perceived success in business. I noticed through the conversation that his father equated success with social status. I then asked him questions about how his father defined this social status, which led to information of how he decided to send Tuong Vu to Australia for education and later encouraged his migration. In other words, engaging in the conversations did not mean that I let the talk go on without being anchored. Instead, after seeing that I had obtained sufficient knowledge of the participants’ accounts in each of the study’s inquiries, I moved to another aspect. I managed the flow of the conversations by using the conversation question guide, following up and allowing the participants to complete their points of view (Sharkey, 2001, p. 23).

I used my personal experiences of mobilities in both domestic migration and international education as an insider. The purpose of using my experiences was not to impose them on the conversations, but to guide the flow of the questions in order to explore the participants’ understanding of transnational mobilities. As the phenomenological maxim says, “to the things themselves” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 50), the task of this study was to let the phenomenon “be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (p. 58). In particular, I initiated each conversation with questions about their previous personal, familial and professional backgrounds. The participants tended to speak about their lives prior to their international education in Australia, which later evolved to the influences that shaped their migration decisions. After obtaining a clear grasp of their motivations for migration, I continued to further investigate the ways they experienced their relocation and ways to achieve aspirations for the future. Through the immersion in their past, present and future, the stories of the participants were able to shed light on the care-
structure, in which they showed how they were both influenced by and responded to the surrounding environment.

In order to encourage the participants to describe their experiences in detail, I asked questions that were open in nature, followed by discussions of important points introduced by the participants (Laverty, 2003, p. 29). The participants and I engaged in the conversations, where both of us saw ourselves as “persons” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 69) with empathy and a shared cultural understanding. For example, Anh Ngoc, a female secondary school administrator, told me her emotional story about her struggles assembling the paperwork for the Vietnamese Government’s scholarship that she had been awarded. Despite having an insider perspective as a scholarship recipient, I was surprised to know that academic regimentation and bureaucracy could “ruin” [her own word] students’ aspirations for a bright future and desire to contribute to Vietnam’s development. Her story then led to the reasons why she still decided to apply for the scholarship. I also became curious to know why she did not study in Vietnam, and discovered that she expected to improve her family’s economic circumstance through her overseas study and later migration to Australia. The academic regimentation and bureaucracy became secondary to her main reason for migration, but they added tensions to her decision to escape from poverty. Through my own similar experiences, I immediately understood how she felt when she suffered from financial difficulties in leading her life.

When participating in the conversations with the participants, I constantly paid attention to silences, facial expressions and even gestures of the participants (van Manen, 1997, p. 99). For example, Quynh Hoa halted the conversation with tears when she mentioned the death of her boyfriend in Vietnam. I could not directly ask her how this sorrow influenced her decision to migrate, because in Vietnamese culture we are not allowed to ask others about their friends or relatives’ death. Yet, I had the impression that the loss of her beloved had influenced her decision to migrate. To check if this interpretation was correct, I asked her questions about her work in Vietnam at that time. When she was talking about her disappointment with corruption at her workplace, she occasionally referred to the loss of her boyfriend. I could eventually find that her intention to escape from this psychological trauma was the main reason for her migration. Paying attention to the participants’ non-verbal gestures was to enable me to join the conversations with empathy (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 69). In short, working towards spontaneity throughout the conversations enabled me to obtain rich material. I was able to achieve and maintain spontaneity because I had established trust with the participants by practicing micro-ethical conduct in my research.
4.5 ‘Micro-ethical’ research conduct

In a communist country like Vietnam, issues of ‘brain drain’ are politically sensitive to those who choose international migration to further their individual betterment (Zweig, 1997, p. 93). As a Vietnamese national, I anticipated that the participants, especially the referred participants, might hesitate in expressing themselves honestly and openly if they did not trust me. I was well aware of the ‘macro-ethics’ as institutional ethics guidelines should be practised as the researcher’s respect for participants, confidentiality, and anonymity (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007). Yet, in practice, building trust with the participants was more important in this study. In order to practice “micro-ethics” (Honan, Hamid, Alhamdan, Phommalangsy, & Lingard, 2012, pp. 387-388), I paid close attention to the “everyday ethical dilemmas that arise from specific roles and responsibilities” (p. 388) in this study. To build trust with the participants as a conduct of “micro-ethics”, I took some interrelated ‘micro-ethical’ issues into consideration: the participants’ consent, my respect for the participants, the participants’ confidentiality and anonymity, and building trust through the conversations. I considered building relationships with them as the thread that connected these four aspects together, as I explain below.

4.5.1 Participants’ consent and the researcher’s respect

The interpretative conversations were conducted after I had obtained the participants’ consent to participate in the study. To gain their consent, I contacted them by phone, email, and later in person to explain the study and the research procedure. I informed them that participation was voluntary, and that they had the right to know that they were being researched without any harm or risk, the right to be informed about the research (Ryen, 2011, p. 418; Seidman, 1991, p. 48), and the right to withdraw at any time (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011, p. 63; Seidman, 1991, p. 48). Although no participant withdrew, one conversation was stopped before completion because this participant had another commitment, and she declined to resume it another time. I recruited another participant from the available contact list to compensate for the attrition.

Meetings with the participants took place at the venues they requested. I was often invited to their homes. As a cultural practice, I brought some toys for their children and fruit for their families. Some male participants requested the conversations to be organised at cafes. Going to have a talk at cafes is a popular social practice among Vietnamese men. In this study, these male participants also stated that at cafes they could freely express themselves without interruptions to their routines. Two conversations were conducted at community libraries because these female participants preferred to have a quiet space.
At the meetings, I spent some time talking informally with the participants about social topics. Small talk about social topics and their families is a cultural practice that Vietnamese people often do when they see each other again after a while. With the referred participants, I first introduced myself and then began to ‘break the ice’ by asking them about their homes and families in Vietnam and Australia. I also told them that we could talk either in English or Vietnamese at their request. In addition, addressing them with the appropriate pronouns was also another consideration, because in Vietnamese, the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’ are used differently with implications about social distance. By aiming to bridge the distance in relationships, we both asked each other’s age and then mutually agreed on suitable pronouns to address each other.

Then, I informed them of the general information relating to the research and ways to obtain material before they confirmed their agreement to participate. All of them preferred to use Vietnamese, as they believed that by using the mother tongue, they would confidently express their views and feelings. The use of Vietnamese enabled me to establish good rapport with them as well. The insider position helped me gain their agreement to participate in the project as well as their confidence to communicate with me. For example, Yen Xuan expressed that she felt comfortable as she shared a Vietnamese ethnic background with me, and through this, enabling her confidence in expression, empathy and linguistic ease:

Yeah, because you are Vietnamese, and at least you used to work for Vietnamese state sectors. I suppose you can understand what I say, and you can sympathise with me. It’s also easier for me to tell my memories in Vietnamese. – Yen Xuan

The participants’ initial consent was the point of departure for me to conduct the conversations. I respected their decision to participate in the research on a voluntary basis after they had received sufficient information on the study, which encouraged them to comfortably express their views. In the conversations with them, I used non-technical language for effective communication and as a way of respecting them. The participants and I were able to transform our relationship, which verged on a “we” relationship (Seidman, 1991, p. 73). In this relationship, I equally became a participant in the conversations – rather than an interviewer. Yet, I still maintained a distance to allow them to openly express their views independently from mine by listening to them and eliciting them to elaborate their own ideas and feelings without my imposition on what they had to say.
4.5.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

To further encourage them to openly express themselves, I understood that the participants should feel free from worries about their identities being disclosed. I took issues of anonymity and confidentiality into account. While snowball sampling enabled me to purposively select participants meeting the sample selection criteria, it entails some drawbacks. For example, this sampling technique may result in the identity revelation of the targeted participants because some individuals are known to one another. Further, it is likely that the participants can identify others from demographic information as they have the right to access a report of the study. As a result, this recruitment strategy might increase the risk of disclosing sensitive information to other members of the same network and affect the relationships between them.

While anonymity cannot always be guaranteed with snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 149), arrangements of confidentiality could prevent the risk of disclosing the participants’ identities to the community. To do this, I first sent them a consent form and information sheet and explained the anonymity and confidentiality practice in the research. I took care that all research material was treated with confidentiality at all times. I conducted the conversations with the participants once they felt satisfied with the procedure to keep the information they provided confidential. During the conversations, I did not require the participants to refer to real names of the people they knew, or other details which might reveal their identities. Further, I did not discuss details of the interpretative conversations in the study with others. Each conversation was organised on a private basis without presence of other adults. One female participant requested the presence of her 4-year-old child, whom she had to take care of at home, where our conversation was being conducted.

To ensure both confidentiality and anonymity in the analysis of the research material and report, in addition to changing the names of institutions where the participants had worked and were working, and people that they had mentioned, I replaced the participants’ names with pseudonyms. In addition, I carefully edited any possible identifying statements relating to their demographic details. Any information about the participants was not disclosed to any other person, except the supervisory team. I informed all of these practices prior to and occasionally during our conversations. The purpose of protecting the participants’ identities was to ethically protect the participants’ privacy and confidentiality.
4.5.3 Trust building in the conversations

As mentioned earlier, professional migration could be seen as betrayal in Vietnam (Huynh, 2004; Zweig, 1997). Therefore, of particular importance in maintaining the ethical code of conduct in research was to be “honest in the negotiations of relations between the researcher and the researched” (Honan et al., 2012, p. 396). Our negotiations for the conversations including initial contacts, information about the planned conversations, conversation venues, and ways of addressing each other enabled us to achieve mutual trust. These negotiations were embodied in how we interacted with each other during the research.

In interactions with the participants, I realised that my identity and positionality intersected with the participants’ social identities. This intersection of our identities and positions in the research enabled us to build “situated solidarities” (Nagar & Geiger, 2007, p. 269). By encouraging the participants to speak, I shared my emotions with their stories because I had already had some similar experiences of living through Vietnam’s social, economic and political transformations prior to and after 1986, and participating in Australian international education. Our ‘situated solidarities’ allowed me to join the conversations with them and co-produce knowledge based on our specific contexts and place-based locations. My engagement in the conversations allowed me to gain rich material for the research.

When engaging in the conversations with them, I also responded to their questions related to the scope of the study and their concerns with confidentiality and anonymity when revealing some personal accounts. For example, some participants initially appeared reluctant when talking about their negative experiences with corruption in the Vietnamese political system, and asked me if what they were going to say was kept fully confidential. I understood that such topics would have endangered their safety if their identities had been released publicly. I confirmed that all of their information was treated with strict confidentiality as indicated in the consent form. By using my insider perspective, I further explained to them how I understood this situation because I had experienced my second international education journey to Australia as an escape. In these cases, we saw ourselves as “comrades in the same boat” [Yen Xuan’s words]. In short, the rapport I established with the participants enabled me to gain their trust.

4.6 Analysing the research material in line with interpretative phenomenology

After returning from the conversations, I first listened to the recordings several times to gain a thorough understanding. After transcribing the interviews, I checked if the recordings were accurately transcribed. I also sent their own transcript to each participant to read, but none took the
opportunity to ask for changes. As mentioned in Chapter 2, migrants negotiate transnational mobilities through the initiation of migration, relocation and aspirations. Their present lives and aspirations are influenced by their past and the ways they interact with the surrounding environment, as captured in Heidegger’s concept of the care-structure (see Section 3.2), which I explore in the next chapters. In this vein, I analysed the empirical material in accordance with this notion of temporality by exploring the participants’ decisions to migrate, experiences of relocation in Australia, future aspirations and uses of transnational ties. In doing so, I used the theoretical concept of being-in-the-world to examine the participants’ transnational mobilities as reflective of their entwinement with the world through their uses of equipment, interactions with others, the ways they followed and/or broke with public norms, constraints and possibilities, feelings of ‘being-at-home’ and ‘not-at-home’, and care. These aspects are identified in Table 4.2 (on the next page) as the areas of the inquiry.

The material was analysed through a two-way approach of individual to cross-case analysis and back again based on the areas of the inquiry. In analysing the individual transcripts, I first took a holistic approach. A phenomenological approach to analysing empirical material is holistic and begins by seeking to gain a “global sense of the data” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 245). In particular, I read and re-read each transcript with “wonder about what the outcome [would] be” (Giorgi, 1994, p. 213) to thoroughly understand how each participant interpreted their experience. Then, I summarised the main ideas in each transcript into a vignette as the “soul” (Sharkey, 2001, p. 34) of each participant’s account. The ‘soul’ of each transcript captured the broad meanings of the participant’s experience in relation to the four areas of the inquiry. For example, after reading Quynh Thy’s account, I noticed that her experience of transnational mobilities included her expectations to continue leading a nomadic lifestyle as the wife of a former diplomat. However, after arriving in Australia, she attempted to stabilise her life for her children’s education and social benefits, and put her aspirations for a continued nomadic life on hold into the future. I composed a vignette to capture her experience as shown on the page after Table 4.2.

Quynh Thy studied two Master’s programs in Accounting and Finance in Australia by using funds from her parents. After graduation, she married a commercial attaché working for the Vietnamese Government, and lived in many countries during her husband’s missions. Before her husband’s mission in an African country was terminated in 2003, they anticipated that he would be asked to return to Vietnam to work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By getting used to the nomadic lifestyle, she wanted to live overseas rather than returning to Vietnam. Her aspiration to live in a foreign country was also shaped by influences of Western films shown in TV in Vietnam when she was younger. She decided to apply for PR in Australia to
Table 4.2: Focus of the inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of inquiry</th>
<th>Theoretical lens</th>
<th>Questions exploring the participants’ transnational mobilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decisions to migrate</td>
<td></td>
<td>• How was their migration decision influenced by political, social, and economic conditions in Australia and/or Vietnam?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses of equipment</td>
<td>• How did they respond to public norms, if any?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactions with others</td>
<td>• What influences did they encounter on forming decisions to migrate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influences of public norms</td>
<td>• How did they experience any possibilities and/or constraints in forming their decisions to migrate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constraints and possibilities</td>
<td>• How did their interactions with others in various domains influence their decisions to migrate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being ‘at-home’</td>
<td>• Did they use relationships with people living in other countries to shape their decisions to migrate? If so, what did their uses of these transnational relationships mean for them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spatiality and temporality</td>
<td>• What things did they use in various domains in forming their decisions to migrate? How did their interactions with things influence their decisions to migrate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>• How did they reach the decision to migrate to Australia?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What meanings did they embed in their decisions to migrate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of relocation to Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>• How did they relocate to Australia?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses of equipment</td>
<td>• How did they experience the influence of their Australian education and background as professional migrants from Vietnam on their migration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences of public norms</td>
<td>• How did their interactions with others and things in various social domains shape their relocation experiences?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constraints and possibilities</td>
<td>• What possibilities and/or constraints did they experience in relocating? How did they deal with these possibilities and/or constraints?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being ‘at-home’</td>
<td>• How did their transnational relationships and practices influence their relocation? What did their uses of these transnational relationships and practices mean for them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatiality and temporality</td>
<td>• How did they think their present lives in Australia were different from and/or similar to their lives before migration?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>• What did their migration mean for them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efforts to meet life and career aspirations</th>
<th>Uses of equipment</th>
<th>• What did they aspire to achieve in Australia in terms of personal life and career?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactions with others</td>
<td>• How were they achieving these aspirations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influences of public norms</td>
<td>• How did their interactions with the world influence the ways they formed these aspirations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constraints and possibilities</td>
<td>• How did their transnational relationships and practices, if any, influence the ways they formed these aspirations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being ‘at-home’</td>
<td>• What did these aspirations mean for them?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spatiality and temporality</td>
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retain the nomadic lifestyle. However, after she had children, she began to stabilise her life in Australia, buying a house and running a clothes shop. Then, she realised that transnational mobilities opened access to benefits including social welfare and healthcare system as well as education opportunities that she had not noticed before. In the future, when her children grew up, she expected to live either in Vietnam as an emotional attachment to her Vietnamese identity or in Australia with her children.

The vignette of Quynh Thy’s transcript enabled me to obtain a general understanding of her experiences. The other participants’ accounts were similarly summarised into vignettes in this way.

From each vignette, I took a detailed analysis approach within single cases. Specifically, I examined the ways each participant experienced their negotiations of transnational mobilities through the lens of the four study aspects in Table 4.2 by going back to each transcript and reading for details. I used these questions to look into each account through the theoretical lens of being-in-the-world. To help me explore how each participant negotiated transnational mobilities through entwinement with the world, I used the questions in the right column of Table 4.2 as a ‘spotlight’. By using the study inquiry as the ‘spotlight’, I could look for evidence to ensure if the broad meanings of the participants’ experiences in transnational mobilities as expressed in the vignettes were correct and consistent with the details. When examining each transcript in detail, I followed a “detailed” reading approach (van Manen, 1997, p. 93) by reading every sentence cluster “line-by-line” (p. 94) to examine how the participants experienced the phenomenon.

In addition to the interpretative conversations, my research material is supported by the ways I spent time observing and participating in some of the participants’ everyday lives to obtain necessary understandings of their familial contexts as well as socio-cultural practices, as described above. This corpus of material is further enhanced by how I contextualise the participants’ accounts within their entwinement with the world. In doing this, I pay attention to how they negotiated transnational mobilities in relation to the broader socio-political contexts in Australia and Vietnam. In particular, I examine if and how the participants’ decisions to study and migrate to Australia were shaped by the human capacity building project of the Vietnamese Government as specified in the 1996 Economic and Social Development Plan (VCP, 2001). Their decisions to migrate are concurrently examined in relation to Australia’s skilled migration policies with priorities given to Australia-educated PR applicants, as well as influences of Vietnamese communities in Australia, if any. I also explore if these students-turned migrants were affected by possible influences of Decision Number 579/QD-TTg on Vietnam’s Human Capacity Building Strategy in 2011, which stated human capacity as the foundation and the most important priority for the industrialization and
modernization process (The Central Government, 2011, p. 1, see also Section 1.2.1), on their intentions to return and contribute to Vietnam. Their intentions to do transnational activities and return, if any, are also examined in relation to not only their circumstances and those of their families and relatives, but also to Article 8 in Decree 152/1999/ND-CP (MOJ, 1999, p. 5), as well as laws that allowed dual citizenships in Vietnam and Australia (DIBP, 2015; MOJ, 2009). In the analysis of the research material, I explore if and how the participants were possibly embedded in these socio-political structures, rather than rigidly investigating how each of these macro-level conditions affected them.

By returning to the focus of the study and the set of questions in Table 4.2, I then took a cross-case analysis in which each participant’s account was analysed in relation to other participants’ accounts. I looked at the commonalities and differences in the participants’ migration decisions, relocation experiences, aspirations, and transnational ties through the theoretical lens. Through their entwinement with the world, some participants experienced overlapping issues in their own lives as well as with others. Based on the major issues that they repeatedly mentioned in the conversations with me, I analysed their experiences in line with these issues while also paying attention to their experiences in other interrelated domains. For example, while Quynh Hoa decided to migrate as an escape from interrelated constraints posed from her professional and familial domains, she also experienced lack of research and learning facilities in Vietnam’s education that constrained her aspiration for knowledge. Although I deal with her experiences with reference to other participants, I also emphasise that Quynh Hoa did not encounter these constraints as unrelated aspects of her life. Rather, when I discuss her decisions to migrate for knowledge pursuit, I refer back to her experiences in these professional, familial and educational domains, showing that two-step migrants are always already entwined with the world in intersecting domains (see Sections 5.1 & 5.4).

During this phase, all aspects of the participants’ experiences were treated equally in order to allow differences or variations in the experiences to appear (Giorgi, 1997, p. 246). When carrying out this cross-case analysis, I paid close attention to similar and different ways of experiencing the same issue by re-reading the transcripts to identify any possible shared and/or different responses (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000, p. 72). The individual to cross-case analysis allowed me to examine each participant’s experiences in relation to their own contexts and identify “particular” or “incidental” aspects (van Manen, 1997, p. 106) which were associated with other participants in different contexts. I examined the diversity and commonality of the participants’ experiences based on their contexts and responses to these contextual features. Then, I went back to the transcripts with a
“selective” approach (p. 93), in which I selected typical quotes that illustrated the aspects of the study inquiry. These selected quotes were translated into English and used in Chapters 5 to 7.

By using Table 4.2 as a guide to unpack transnational mobilities, I constructed each area of inquiry into a chapter focusing on decisions to migrate, relocation experiences, and aspirations for work and life. Because some participants occasionally mentioned transnational ties through the ways they encountered their past, present and future, I included the inquiry on transnational ties in these three chapters where relevant. In each chapter, I attempted to explore how transnational mobilities were reflective of the participants’ entwinement with the world through the ways they encountered confluences of their interactions with others and things, rather than seeing each set of influence separately from the others. In particular, I examined their uses of equipment and interactions with those whom they directly and indirectly contacted in negotiating transnational mobilities. In examining their interactions with others, I also looked for how they followed and/or broke with socio-cultural norms and their uses of things, which led to constraints and opening of possibilities through their dwelling in space over time. Concurrently, I explored how they encountered spatiality through familiarity, directedness, and purposes they embedded in dwelling in space over time. Each chapter examined how the participants cared about the ways they lived with others through space and time.

In short, I used a phenomenological, iterative analysis approach to analyse the participants’ negotiation of transnational mobilities. The procedures used to obtain and analyse the research material influenced the validity and reliability of this research, which contributed to the quality of the findings, as discussed below.

4.7 Validity and reliability

In traditional research, validity measures the extent to which theories and research instruments are employed to “correspond to objective reality” (Sandberg, 2005, p. 43). Validity is seen as having internal and external forms. Internal validity refers to the credibility of research findings which is expected to match reality. External validity measures the transferability of the findings to other situations. Reliability is concerned with the extent to which research findings can be replicated with consistency if the study is repeated (Merriam, 2009, pp. 213-223). By recognising that the replication of a qualitative study may not always yield the same results, conventional research emphasises the extent to which research results are consistent with the material obtained to increase reliability (p. 221). In general, traditional qualitative research tends to emphasise an “objective reality” that can be known by following a set of criteria of truth (Sandberg, 2005, p. 43).
In contrast, interpretative research approaches view us and our world as “inextricably related through lived experience” (Sandberg, 2005, p. 43). Because we cannot separate ourselves from what we know, there is “no understanding without interpretation” (Angen, 2000, p. 385). This is because our reality is inter-subjectively constructed through the meanings and understandings embedded in our interactions with the social world. In other words, our world is an “inter-subjective world” (Sandberg, 2005, p. 47) which we share with other people as the life-world. Therefore, inter-subjectivity is integral to our understanding of ourselves and others. For this reason, criteria for justifying validity and reliability in interpretative research are different from some other qualitative approaches (p. 43).

I attempted to achieve validity through Sandberg’s (2005) concepts of communicative, pragmatic, and transgressive validity. Communicative validity refers to both the coherence and varied manifestations of the experience structure (pp. 54-56). Communicative validity can be gained through a shared understanding between the researcher and participants (p. 54). To achieve shared understanding, I took my insider/outsider stance on board during the research material co-construction phase. Positioning myself as an insider, I participated in the conversations, sharing my emotions and experiences with the participants. As an outsider, I attempted to avoid imposing my knowledge and experiences in mobilities as “privileged possessor of expert knowledge” (Angen, 2000, p. 389). Instead of moulding the conversations in the light of my subjectivity, I strived to allow the participants’ voices to be heard as the central focus of the research. In the conversations, I asked the participants follow-up questions such as “What do you mean by...?” or “So, did you mean that...?”, to clarify the points they had raised, and to encourage them to elaborate on any experiences that they thought were important to them. Doing this enabled me to further achieve “ethical validation” (Angen, 2000, p. 389). Ethical validation mainly refers to the ways the researcher is able to let all participants’ voices be heard without being deliberately excluded or demeaned, so that the study can gain a rich analysis and open new fruitful directions for further research.

Further, to ensure the participants had fully and openly expressed their ideas, near the end of each conversation I summarised some key points that they had mentioned. I also asked the participants if the summary of what and how they experienced the phenomenon was accurate to achieve inter-subjective understanding. In the analysis, I enhanced communicative validity by interpreting the material through a “circular relation between parts and whole” of the transcripts (Sandberg, 2005, p. 55). I went back and forth between the transcripts, from understanding the broad meanings of each transcript to looking for details to clarify these broad meanings. Then, I analysed these individual
cases in relation to other cases by using the study inquiry areas as the ‘spotlight’ for the interpretation of the material.

In addition to enhancing communicative validity and ‘ethical validation’, I also made every effort in maintaining pragmatic validity. While there is a risk that what participants tell the researcher might be different from what they actually experience, pragmatic validity can improve this discrepancy by “testing knowledge” in action, using other sources of research material (Sandberg, 2005, p. 56). One source of material is commonly derived from observations. However, I did not conduct observations of the participants’ everyday life for two reasons. First, migration is an ongoing process which happens from the initiation of migration decisions to relocation and future intentions. Conducting a longitudinal study of potential participants with motivations for migration, observing the ways they reach migration decisions and experience relocation, and returning to them after a period of time to explore how they are living migrant lives, were not possible within the time frame of my PhD candidature. Second, given the constraints, as my study mainly focused on exploring how professional migrants experienced transnational mobilities, their experiences of migration in the past, current lives, and future intentions could be expressed through interpretative conversations. In promoting pragmatic validity, I maximised the chance to check what they said with what they did or might do by encouraging them to elaborate their experiences and give concrete examples. For example, when Thanh Huong said that she had to “live with bribery in Vietnam”, I asked her to give examples to clarify this point. She mentioned two incidents when at one time she had to “give somebody an envelope” [with money inside] to get the official permission for her study in Australia and, at another, get her passport issued quickly. The trust that I had built produced rich interpretative conversations that allowed me to engage in a genuine exchange of information and empathy.

While in my efforts to achieve communicative and pragmatic validity, I searched for consistent and coherent interpretations of the phenomenon, the notion of transgressive validity in analysing the empirical material was important in uncovering “contradictions and tensions” arising from the interpretations (Sandberg, 2005, p. 57). To achieve transgressive validity, in line with Lather (1993 as cited in Sandberg, 2005, p. 58), I used irony to “interrupt and disturb” my interpretations in such a way that I could ensure that I had appropriately interpreted the participants’ experience. For example, Minh Thanh constantly and explicitly said that his migration to Australia was an adventure borne out of his curiosity. Yet, at a later stage in his migration, he indicated that he was concerned with his children’s security and saw Australia differently from a site for an adventure, although he did not mention it explicitly in the conversation. When reading through this transcript
with an understanding that transnational mobilities were a process, rather than simply an outcome (King, 2002, p. 91), I looked for details to examine the evolvement of his experience from the initiation of migration to aspirations for life in Australia. I raised some questions to challenge this thinking. For example, “Imagine I were a father of two small children with a meagre income for the family of four. Would I want to take an adventure trip to the Sahara Desert for fun and leave my children behind?” Self-questioning like this enabled me to search for different interpretations and contradictions rather than merely seek coherence in the participants’ understandings of their experiences. To do this, I had to go back and forth between the transcripts and analysis to crosscheck from different perspectives until a stable understanding of the phenomenon was obtained (Sandberg, 2005, p. 58).

While validity in interpretative research confirms if the researcher’s interpretations are true to the participants’ lived experience within the theoretical perspective, reliability concerns the procedure to achieve such truthful interpretations (Sandberg, 2005, p. 58). In this vein, the way the material is obtained and interpreted plays a significant role in ensuring reliability (p. 59). In the research material co-construction and interpretation in this study, I used my positionality as a peripheral insider to handle my subjectivity. Sandberg (1997, p. 209) recommends that the researcher should explicitly acknowledge and deal with subjectivity through demonstrating how interpretations are controlled and checked throughout the research process. In order to deal with my subjectivity, Sandberg (2005) suggests maintaining an “interpretative awareness” by using “perspectival subjectivity” (p. 59). Specifically, in this study, I attempted to bracket my pre-suppositions about mobility experiences by avoiding a fixed mindset about what the participants would have to say. Instead, I came into the field with ‘wonder’. I also placed myself as an outsider who had not been involved in the professional migration process, and encouraged the participants to speak about their own experiences. During the transcribing and analysis process, I was also concerned with maintaining “fidelity to the phenomenon” to capture the truthful expressions of their experiences (Giorgi, 1994, p. 207). To ensure the fidelity of the material, I accurately transcribed the conversations, as mentioned earlier. In the analysis, I made an effort to capture the most central dimensions of the ways the participants experienced their mobilities. I remained honest to the transcripts when analysing their accounts and citing their quotes for illustration. In short, validity and reliability of this research were taken into careful consideration from the research design, obtainment and analysis of the empirical material, and they were conveyed through this study report.
4.8 Concluding comments

This chapter has presented the ways the research material was obtained and analysed in line with the interpretative research paradigm. I first described my position as a researcher, which shaped the ways the empirical material was constructed and later analysed. My position as an insider and outsider influenced the spontaneity of the conversations, which influenced the quality of the material. To maintain the spontaneity in these conversations, I considered the process of practicing ‘micro-ethical’ research conduct as important in contributing to building trust with the participants. These processes of material obtainment and analysis were carefully described as they influenced the enhancement of validity and reliability of this study, which improved the quality of the findings. The chapters that follow will present in detail how the findings were presented and conceptualised in terms of the theoretical framework and methodology described in Chapters 3 and 4.
Chapter 5. Deciding to Migrate

As shown in Section 3.2, we are engaged with the world by projecting ourselves into the future and reaching back to our past. As such, to understand how the participants experienced their present lives as being-alongside and aspirations for the future as ahead-of-itself, we need to examine how they had encountered their decisions to migrate in the past as already-in-the-world, the focus of this chapter. In the chapters that follow, I occasionally refer back to the participants’ past experiences to show the importance for opening of possibilities that presented themselves for continuing present and future lives.

In this study, the concept of being-in-the-world situates migrants’ negotiations of transnational mobilities within their entwinement with the world across space and time. Using the approaches described in Chapter 4, this study focuses on the participants’ decisions to migrate, relocation experiences, and aspirations for work and life in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively. Each of these chapters describes the relationality of transnational mobilities as illuminated through the participants’ entwinement with the world. To do this, I look into the ways they used equipment, interacted with others, and cared about how they lived their lives with others and things in intersecting domains. I also examine how the participants took a stand or fell in line with public norms which created constraints and possibilities in their negotiations of transnational mobilities.

In this chapter, I analyse the participants’ decisions to migrate which were shaped in and through their being-in-the-world. By reading the transcripts carefully and taking an iterative approach as mentioned in Chapter 4, I found that there were various reasons for migrating among the participants: migrating as an escape, to follow social ‘fashions’ of international mobility, for economic improvement, and knowledge pursuit. As they were entwined with the world, some participants experienced overlaps in forming their decisions to migrate.

5.1 Migrating as an escape

Among the 15 participants, four females (Thanh Huong, Yen Xuan, Xuan Hong and Quynh Hoa), who had been former professionals in Vietnam, were quite emotional in telling their stories. I found their decisions to migrate were shaped by interrelated constraint and possibilities. I examined what constraints they faced and how these constraints influenced their decisions to migrate, as well as possibilities that emerged for migration from their entwinement with the world. I would also like to note that during the conversation with me, Quynh Hoa placed strong emphasis on two interrelated decisions: migration as an escape and for knowledge pursuit.
5.1.1 Interrelated constraints before deciding to migrate

These migrants faced some interrelated constraints in their interactions with people and things in their entwinement with the professional world, social and familial aspects. By looking into their professional environment, I found that lack of political patronage limited their professional practice and career development, influencing the ways they interacted with others and things in other aspects. As non-members of the VCP, Thanh Huong, Quynh Hoa and Yen Xuan associated political patronage with ‘umbrellas’ (ô dù) without which they found their professional development was limited. In Vietnamese society, the concept ‘umbrella’ refers to a type of shelter that takes the form of hidden power gained from political and social connections that protect one’s interest and security. The ‘umbrella’ concept is often associated with one’s familial background or deliberate connections with those in power for protection. It shows a widespread recognition of the instrumental quality of political connections with the VCP for practical support, although this kind of support tends to be utilised for short-term purposes. The ‘umbrella’ is a kind of equipment believed to enable professionals to:

*Secure your jobs, because you can have someone protect you from being looked down and dismissed. ‘Umbrellas’ can also make you go higher in your career…. In order to become a director or chairperson of an office or division, you need to be a member of the VCP and have an ‘umbrella’. – Yen Xuan*

The ‘umbrella’ can provide security in terms of prestige and career advancement which enable some professionals to reach managerial positions. In contrast, as non-members of the VCP, these participants experienced a lack of this equipment as constraining their professional practice in terms of unfair treatment at work and limited professional development:

*Other teachers copied the lesson plans from the internet or somewhere else, and considered them as the standard. I designed the lesson plans by myself and ended up being criticised for not following the standard. The point is I didn’t have any ‘umbrella’ there! – Thanh Huong*

*What I need to tell you here is that without having a big ‘umbrella’, we will work as ordinary employees in state sectors forever, earning humble salaries forever. – Quynh Hoa*

*I had no ‘umbrella’ to protect me, no matter how hard I had tried to do different things for the English Department and the Youth Union*.11 I had no voice in arranging schedules for

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11 The Ho Chi Minh Youth Union is the socio-political organisation of Vietnamese youth led by the VCP.
teaching, I had to teach what I was told to teach, and I had to do what I was asked to do. – Yen Xuan

The absence of the ‘umbrella’ as equipment in relation to other equipment negatively constrained their professional practice in several ways. According to their experiences, the ‘umbrella’ was related to other equipment in forms of tools for everyday professional practice and life such as lesson plans, schedules for teaching and salaries. The lack of the ‘umbrella’ created disorders in their uses of equipment for professional practice. Creativity at work that they expected to demonstrate was not nurtured or allowed to flourish, impeding their work performance. For example, Thanh Huong was a teacher of English at a public high school in Vietnam before migration. Her perceived lack of political capital suggested that work practices she was required to perform were based on ‘standards’ which, in her view, were related to political power. She experienced the requirement to follow these ‘standards’ as unjust management. She believed that the lack of an ‘umbrella’ impeded her social and professional advancement, as she had no protection to advance her career prospect and possibly increase her professional autonomy.

Similarly, as an energetic young lecturer with a Master’s degree obtained in Australia, Yen Xuan was expected to organise workshops on testing for the English Department and several social campaigns for the Youth Union where she was working. Young professionals working for the state sector are often required to join the Youth Union, which supervises young professionals’ political ideology and practices in accordance with the VCP’s ideology. Active participation in the Youth Union is a critical stepping-stone for career advancement, bringing an ‘umbrella’ in terms of higher status and smoother professional advancement. In contrast, Yen Xuan stated that the lack of political patronage as a non-member of the VCP impeded her participation in the Youth Union and limited her professional autonomy.

These participants also experienced constraints emerging from their interactions with others who had ‘umbrellas’. Their interactions with others, some of which were manifest in social norms and uses of equipment, intensified the constraints they faced. For example, without an ‘umbrella’, these participants experienced public disrespect of their knowledge and degrees obtained from the international education journeys. After returning from international study, Thanh Huong divorced her husband and moved to another city with her daughter to ‘forget’ her past unsuccessful marriage. Although she officially passed the job interview and exam, she was not appointed to become a teacher of English as she had expected:
Again, connections, always connections! I had no way to sort it out! I passed the job exam. Then, I got a job at a secondary school, but was appointed to work as a librarian. – Thanh Huong

For Thanh Huong, her lack of political connections in the form of an ‘umbrella’ caused a mismatch between her expertise as an English teacher and librarian work. In the conversation, she expressed an angry attitude toward this librarian position, although she did not want to change to another job or school. She accepted the librarian job because she wanted to send her daughter to a reputable school in this city. The interwoven demands of her work and family responsibilities made her feel not-at-home, uneasy with the lack of an ‘umbrella’.

The ‘umbrella’ as equipment for social and political protection also affected these participants’ interactions with other people and the ways they followed public norms. These participants’ accounts revealed that they experienced colleagues’ jealousy through existing social hierarchies as a cultural norm and the need obtain political patronage as a socio-political practice. For example:

*Other teachers did not show a big welcome with my presence. In their eyes, we [young lecturers returning from Western international education] are small and young people. If you want your voice to be heard, you must be a person with a big voice! My Master’s degree from Australia, it’s like a thorn in their sides! – Yen Xuan*

*My supervisors did not like me to make any changes at the workplace, because they didn’t want me to show that I had a better education than them. – Xuan Hong*

Vietnamese culture foregrounds an age-based social hierarchy with respect and obedience from youth. The combination of relative youth, Western educational credentials, and international education experience was viewed as potentially disruptive and transgressive. These migrants encountered constraints with these socio-political and cultural norms, which entailed discipline over returning international graduates. They experienced this jealousy through the limited space allowed for innovation and the social bias between domestic and international educational credentials. In this vein, Western educational credentials were viewed as entailing both symbolic and material capital that could create new professional stratifications while unsettling established social hierarchies.

These participants’ interactions with others and things, including public norms, in their entwinement with the professional, social and familial aspects posed further constraints to them. For example, ruptures in familial aspects that included divorces, loss of a beloved and conflicts in familial
practices of marriage and cultural gender norms, created tensions within their professional practice and family life. In particular, Thanh Huong had never thought that she would have lived in a foreign country as a migrant because she was enjoying the happiness of being close to her family:

After my studies, I returned, expecting to work for a high school where I would have a better social position, I would earn some respect and have a better salary. Importantly, I chose to return because I wanted to be with my family and have a stable life with my family. I think my family is always important. If we had lived happily there, I would have accepted that way of working for the rest of my life. – Thanh Huong

Yet, her marriage break-up after her return marked a sad milestone in her life. She experienced constraints posed from her interactions with a totality of things including her Australian qualification, requirements for professional development, public recognition and salary. These things were encountered in relation to her involvement in her family. However, the lack of an ‘umbrella’ at workplace made her feel not-at-home, which was exacerbated by the failure of family reunion. Her sense of belonging was negotiated as a trade-off between the lack of political patronage and personal happiness. In this case, Thanh Huong’s relationship difficulties were encountered in close relation to the broader working environment and political system that did not give sufficient regard to her Australian qualifications.

These participants’ interactions with others through public norms also led to constraints, further making the place where they dwelled ‘unfamiliar’ to them. For example, Xuan Hong’s return from her first international education sojourn for a two-year Master of Education program in Australia brought her an emotional trauma when her marriage, too, ended in a divorce. She angrily expressed:

If you lived like my ex-husband, who just cared about his parents and social advancement as a man is told to do, you should have married a toy or someone who was deaf and dumb. Above all, I am a person. I am a woman who craves for love and care. – Xuan Hong

Xuan Hong’s anger and disappointment with her family conflict implied her resistance to the traditional patriarchal role of the husband who “cared about […] social advancement” as a breadwinner of the household, whereas the wife was accorded a subservient role as the primary caregiver. Xuan Hong’s rejection of the perceived cultural norms of traditional gender and familial power roles stemmed from her desires for an egalitarian, loving relationship and gender equality. The cultural norms and the lack of political patronage appeared as constraints to her professional practice and sustainment of family happiness.
Yen Xuan also experienced conflicts in following cultural norms after her return from the international education journey in Australia, when her parents asked her to marry a man working in an international bank in Vietnam. They thought that this arranged marriage could become a “good match” for her, because Yen Xuan and that man had both studied overseas, and their families were of “suitable marriage alliances” (môn đăng hộ đối). She later explained that her parents’ marriage had been arranged by her grandparents as an intergenerational tradition, and they wanted her to follow this family tradition. However, she found it difficult to marry someone she did not love while she was expecting to obtain social and professional promotion:

*I didn’t love him. I didn’t want to get married at that time. I wanted to work harder for society, using my knowledge to develop my career.* – Yen Xuan

Like Xuan Hong, who resisted the cultural norm of patriarchy, Yen Xuan found that she was not a “traditional woman” by attempting to challenge the unfairness in power relations formed by social and traditional impositions on females to obtain social positioning and personal freedom (Goodkind, 1997, pp. 109-111). However, as Pratt and Yeoh (2003, p. 159) point out about effects of transformation of gender relations in migration, these “gains” were uneven and hard fought for Xuan Hong and Yen Xuan. The “gains” they aspired to obtain might entail conflict and confrontation posed from the ways they took a stand against these social and cultural norms.

In addition, memories about those who had passed away also mattered to the ways they lived their present lives. For example, after having completed a Bachelor of Biotechnology in Vietnam, Quynh Hoa was retained to become a lecturer at a public university. Then, she took an Honours Bachelor’s degree in Food Technology under an Australian Government scholarship. After the completion of this program, she returned and worked for that Vietnamese university, where she had met her boyfriend. However, after her boyfriend was killed in a traffic accident, she was depressed and decided to return to Australia to pursue a doctoral program and subsequent migration. She perceived the loss of her fiancé as one of the strongest motives for her to migrate to Australia as an escape from her sorrow:

*How could I live in Vietnam while I always saw him wherever I went [in that city]? I just wanted to fly back to Australia as soon as possible to forget this misery!* – Quynh Hoa

In general, these participants encountered interrelated constraints emerging from their interactions with things and others. Lack of an ‘umbrella’ limited their everyday professional practice and career development. This equipment was encountered through their relationships with others with whom they were both directly and indirectly in contact. Those who influenced the ways these participants
experienced constraints included colleagues, administrators, parents, husbands, children and a lover who had passed away. They also indirectly experienced constraints through leaders of the VCP and Youth Union, whose political ideologies created the widespread demand for political patronage. These constraints were also reflected in the ways they failed and rejected to follow the socio-political, cultural norms of ‘umbrellas’ and social hierarchy, as well as traditional practices of marriage and gender-related issues. Their interactions with the surrounding world created interrelated constraints in professional, educational and familial domains. These participants’ interactions with others and things, including public norms shaped the ways they cared about how to live their lives. Constraints that emerged from their interactions with the world influenced their decisions to migrate in order to escape.

5.1.2 Possibilities in deciding to migrate

While these four participants experienced some interrelated constraints in their professional and familial lives, their interactions with the surrounding world opened up possibilities at the same time. They encountered these possibilities through their uses of equipment, ambiguous relations to things, interactions with others and participation in other social norms. They experienced these aspects in interconnection to each other, as illustrated below.

To deal with these constraints, these participants used international education and subsequent skilled migration in combination with bribes as equipment. Their uses of bribes were informed by their ambiguous relations to this equipment, their participation in the socio-political norm of bribery, as well as interactions with other things and people. Thanh Huong and Quynh Hoa dealt with the constraints posed from the lack of political patronage by committing bribery, which they had perceived as unacceptable. Following this political norm, which had constrained their professional practice, opened up a possibility for mobilities through their ambiguous relation with this norm. The ways they understood the socio-political norm of bribery enabled them to realise the instrumentality of bribery for the initiation of mobilities. After the conversation with me, Thanh Huong commented that she felt “desperate” to use bribery because she “hate[d] bribery in Vietnam”. She referred to those receiving bribes as people who did “nothing but [spent] money fallen from the sky [from someone whom they might or might not know well]”. By this, she meant that people with power could obtain financial benefits given by those with little power wanting to use socio-political connections for their economic purposes. Seeing this practice as “unethical” conduct, Thanh Huong had initially rejected participating in bribery practices, but accepted to become a contracted librarian instead of an English teacher. However, when she attempted to study
in Australia in the second time, she used bribes to tackle her constraint in political patronage in renewing her passport:

_When I submitted my passport application, my [ex-]husband asked me to send it through a broker, who would take care of everything for me. I paid him 100 USD, and then I received my passport 30 hours later! Fast, hey? – Thanh Huong_

Being introduced to a broker unknown to her through the social relationship of her ex-husband (who did it because he wanted to “compensate losses that the divorce caused to [her]”, as she later commented), she followed this socio-political norm to confront the challenges of obtaining permissions to study overseas. It is noted that before 2005, Vietnamese citizens were required to fill in an application form and submit a resume certified by the public security section (similar to a police station) of the area where they lived in order to apply for and renew passports. Those working for state organisations were further asked to obtain legal permissions to go overseas from their employers and departments or ministries to which their divisions belonged. Independent people were required to get permissions from the people’s committee and public security section where they lived. Thanh Huong encountered a problem in obtaining a permission from the Department of Education and Training in the city where she worked, because they wanted to “choose those whom they wanted to let go [study overseas]”, but not “a person without any umbrella” like her. In practicing the socio-political norm of bribe giving, Thanh Huong found it helpful as “grease” (Kaufman & Wei, 1999, p. 1) to smoothen and hasten the administrative process. Her use of this equipment enabled her to compensate the lack of political patronage to obtain her passport to initiate her education mobility. In this sense, she used bribes in relation to her passport, and permissions from the authorities, as well as interacting with the passport broker, those in authority and her ex-husband.

Another participant had a similar story of dealing with bribery. By acknowledging accepting and giving bribes as common strategies to acquire individual benefits in Vietnam, Quynh Hoa realised the importance of committing bribery as a way to compensate her lack of political patronage. The strategy she mentioned included giving money in an “envelope” as a bribe, and accepting the authority of those with power without argument:

_Those who don’t have an umbrella have to carry out different strategies. They flatter their boss, nod their heads and say “yes, yes, yes”, or give bribes in an envelope through the back door. – Quynh Hoa_
She related to her experience in following bribery practices when the university where she had studied her first Bachelor’s degree wanted to retain her as a lecturer. After graduation from that university with an excellent academic result, she was invited to become a lecturer. Her parents were proud of her future job. However, they were afraid that their past affiliation to the American-backed administration before 1975 might fail her from that university’s screening of her resume based on the “class-based principle” (see Section 4.1). They decided to give bribes in the form of donation to that university:

As smart business people, my parents donated ten computers for the university and money as scholarships for poor students before my family’s history was checked. My parents said that in order to gain something, we all had to sacrifice. They said, “Leave a baby shrimp to catch a bigger one.” – Quynh Hoa

In associating her parents’ practice of giving bribes to that university as a “smart” business practice, Quynh Hoa perceived that in Vietnam’s economic transition, bribery became a strategy for entrepreneurs and professionals with insufficient power relations to gain “additional resources” (de Jong, Tu, & van Ees, 2012, p. 339), or getting a “bigger shrimp” by accepting to lose a “baby shrimp”. In Vietnam, the proverb “leave a baby shrimp to catch a bigger one” (“thả con tép, bắt con tôm”) refers to those who achieve something by calculating costs and benefits. As Thayer (2009, pp. 61-62) argues, Vietnam’s patronage networks are important in shaping leadership and factional alignments. Through their political networks, the VCP can continuously enhance its domestic status by supporting the interests and security of individuals selected for advancement, economically and politically. In contrast, a lack of political patronage causes insecurity that stems from the official approach of demanding collective accountability for alleged misdemeanours, for example when family members are persecuted for the actions of individuals. However, these participants’ familiarity with the socio-political practices of bribery as former professionals in Vietnam enabled them to use things such as bribes and their Australian credentials in combination with social relationships to facilitate their mobilities. By again following the social practice of giving bribes, Quynh Hoa attained the permission from the rector of that university for her to take up the doctoral scholarship offered by the Australian Government:

My parents advised me to do the same thing [as they had done for the university when she was retained to become a lecturer]. I went to the rector’s house with my uncle. You know what I did, right? Money talks before we can receive any permission! – Quynh Hoa
These participants’ experience of confronting the constraints posed by the lack of ‘umbrellas’ by giving bribes reflected their ambiguous relation to bribery practices. Despite current rapid economic development, Vietnam is currently ranked 116 for corruption out of 175 countries in 2013 (Transparency International, 2013). Since 2005, the VCP has announced a campaign against corruption. The Vietnamese Government issued the 55/2005/QH11 Anti-Corruption Law in 2005, Article 3 of which specifies 12 “behaviours of corruption” and severe punishment (The Central Government, 2005, p. 2). However, doubts about the political will to tackle this problem have been constantly reported by public media (e.g. Hiep, 2012; Mi, 2013; Thanh, 2013; Vu, 2013). In Vietnam, there is a popular saying, “If there are those who eat, there will be those who give”, which means bribery and corruption tend to be framed within the demand and supply rule. Bribery and corruption are often assumed as the two interrelated sides of misconduct in civil service management caused by poor salaries (Segon & Booth, 2010, p. 581). While corruption is suggestive of poor conduct, the corrupt often equip themselves with different strategies to protect themselves, oppressing informants, and using their political power and social connections to disguise their misconduct (Caiden, 2013, p. 93). Those with aspirations for social advancement may choose to get involved in corruption and bribery practices as a way to achieve their goals. Further, in Vietnam “law on paper” is often less effective than “law in reality” (de Jong, Tu, & van Ees, 2012, p. 328) when forms of power organization and local knowledge prevail. The reality of bribery and corruption is partly reflected through these participants’ experiences.

According to Quynh Hoa and Thanh Huong, the powerless could minimise unjust treatment and increase opportunities for career and professional development by using bribery. These participants’ experiences in dealing with the lack of the ‘umbrella’ by giving bribes showed that bribery appeared as ethically unacceptable on the one hand, but by giving bribes they could deal with the lack of political patronage and initiate their international mobilities on the other. In this sense, their relation to bribery practices was ambiguous. Their understandings of how to follow the socio-political norm of bribery enabled them to use bribery to compensate the lack of the ‘umbrella’ for mobilities.

Things were used in relation to other things informed by cultural norms and interactions with others. In particular, bribes were used in combination with transnational familial relationships based on a cultural practice of kinship in Vietnam. Thanh Huong used financial and material support from her sister in Australia to initiate her second international education journey for later migration:

*My sister phoned me and said that she could help me. She paid living expenses for me and my daughter after we moved to Australia. She encouraged me to stand up again.* – Thanh Huong
She later commented that this transnational support was practiced as “blood is thicker than water” (Một giọt máu đào hơn ao nước lã). In this sense, after following the political norm of bribery to deal with the lack of political patronage, Thanh Huong used the cultural norm of kinship for support to initiate her migration.

In addition, these participants used their previous Australian degrees and relatives’ support as equipment, in combination with their familiarity with studying and living in Australia to enable their mobilities. For example, by using her previous experiences of studying and living in Australia, Xuan Hong decided to apply for PR in Australia from Vietnam:

> Because I had studied in Australia, I knew this country better than other countries. I also took my Master’s program for two years in Australia. I thought that I could meet the requirements [of the Australian skilled migration policy]. – Yen Xuan

Yen Xuan mobilised her parents’ funding for her Bachelor’s degree in Australia as a way to escape from the interwoven constraints at work and the family tradition of arranged marriage in addition to utilising her familiarity with living in Australia:

> I had studied in Australia before, so at that time I thought that the only way to escape from this silly marriage was to escape from my family and Vietnam. So, I asked my parents to study in Australia again, promising them that I would marry that man [laughing], but that has never happened! They probably had their own reason, but I told them that, OK, mom and dad, I will marry him, OK? But I want to study more before I get married, OK? – Yen Xuan

These participants later specified their familiarity with Australia as including their knowledge of the application procedures for admission at Australian universities which could reduce their efforts of seeking consultancy from overseas study consultancy brokers, as well as their adjustability to the weather and ease of seeking accommodation. The initiation of their mobilities from Vietnam to Australia demonstrated that interactions with others including those who were close to them such as family members and colleagues, and those who indirectly affected them such as someone they had never met and the broader cultural and political and employment systems, were significant. Their interactions with things such as the weather conditions, accommodation and paperwork procedures, as well as interrelated equipment such as bribes, parents’ money and transnational material support were also important in forming and initiating their decisions to migrate. Their mobilities entailed more than just the physical movement between places in terms of pushing or pulling them, but they presented a traceable history of the migrants’ interactions with the surrounding world embedded in their movements. The influences from these migrants’ personal histories and the relative
immobilities of their professional communities and families intersected with each other, shaping their decisions to migrate through their “dealings in the world and with entities within-the-world” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 95).

This section has explored some participants’ decisions to migrate shaped by their entwinement with professional, socio-political and familial domains to negotiate the “politics of moving and belonging” (Yeoh & Huang, 2011, p. 683; see also Nagel, 2005; Silvey, 2004). Their decisions to migrate were shaped by interrelated constraints at the workplace in relation to the lack of political patronage as ‘umbrellas’. As a result, these participants encountered limited professional development in terms of creativity and autonomy in work performance. Their lack of ‘umbrellas’ also led to public disrespect of their Western educational qualifications and peer envy. These constraints were compounded by tensions in familial aspects and socio-cultural norms of marriages and gender issues. Forming aspirations for mobilities became a socio-political and cultural negotiation in which the lack of political patronage was perceived as making access to mobilities a “resource” to which not everyone could gain an equal relationship (Skeggs, 2004, p. 49). By following the socio-political norm of bribery and cultural practices of kinship support, as well as using their previous Australian degrees and familiarity with studying and living in Australia, these participants initiated migration to Australia. Transnational mobilities are then enmeshed in migrants’ lives and the socio-cultural and political forces that control mobilities.

Their accounts have several implications for understanding mobilities through migrants’ interactions with others and things. First, because these migrants were embedded in cross-border spaces between Vietnam and Australia within non-linear time, their present actions were shaped by their past experiences with projections into the future. Further, the challenges posed from these students-turned-migrants’ entwinement with the socio-political aspects were dealt with through their encounters with others and things. For example, their attempts to mobilize political patronage by using social relationships and bribes in combination with their educational credentials opened up new possibilities. Finally, these migrants’ mobilities were both regulated and enabled by the Vietnamese Government’s governance of mobility. Their mobilities were controlled and impeded by the political patronage that excluded those without socio-political relationships with the VCP. However, the participants’ utilization of things such as financial capital in the form of bribes, and interactions with others for socio-political connections enabled them to gain legal permission for mobilities.
5.2 Migrating to follow social ‘fashions’ of mobilities

In this section, I argue that some of the remaining participants’ interactions with others and things mattered to them in taking a stand on who they wanted to be through following public norms of international mobility. This section presents the decisions to migrate of six participants who had been privately funded students in Australia (Mai Hue, Tuong Vu, Van Minh, Quynh Thy, Minh Thanh and Ngoc Linh). As they had studied in Australia with their parents’ sponsorship and had limited work experience, I explore how their embeddedness in familial aspects was related to other aspects.

Their interactions with parents, those in communities in Vietnam from the past to present, and international friends in Australia influenced their decisions to migrate to follow social trends in several ways. Tuong Vu, Mai Hue, and Van Minh’s parents had financed their international education journeys as an expression of following a social ‘fashion’ of international mobility in their home communities. These participants’ experiences showed that this fashion was shaped by Vietnam’s economic transformations in the 1990s, in which international mobility was used as a tool to display social status and business achievements. For example, understanding that being a teacher brought little prosperity for his family, Tuong Vu’s father attempted to make some changes in pursuit of a sudden fortune. During the Đổi Mới period, he became a dealer of stationery, and later the director of a private cosmetics company. Following the advice of other wealthy business friends, he sent Tuong Vu to New Zealand for high school and Australia for a Bachelor’s degree later. Tuong Vu’s education journeys to New Zealand and Australia were initiated to ‘show off’ the family’s affluence:

My parents’ business partners sent their children to the USA, New Zealand, and Singapore. They kept talking about their children’s overseas education at the tennis court [in the city where he had lived]. I think my parents just did as others did! This is the way they show off how much money they have in their wallets... After graduation, I remembered that my parents always wanted me to live overseas, so I said to myself that, OK, PR could be a “reward” that I wanted to offer them. – Tuong Vu

Similarly, Mai Hue’s decision to migrate after graduation in Australia was affected by following her parents’ advice. Her father was a chairperson of his private bank, and her mother owned several boutiques and motorbike shops. They used their economic resources as equipment to initiate Mai Hue’s international education in Australia from high school to university to “create a better image of business people”. She added that in the city in Vietnam where she had lived, many business
people sent their children to study overseas as a “social trend to show that they [were] rich”. She followed her parents’ advice:

*This [applying for PR] is what other people do... My parents said that in our family, there must be somebody living overseas like other families.* – Mai Hue

Although she admitted that her parents’ expectation of having “somebody living overseas like other families” was “funny”, she explained that her mobilities to Australia for education and migration could bring her parents “happiness” which could “raise their faces up when talking with other business friends”. The phrase ‘faces up’ implied her parents’ and her satisfaction of using international mobility as equipment to achieve social status. Similarly, Van Minh’s postgraduate program in Australia was sponsored by his parents, who owned a garment factory in Vietnam. His subsequent skilled migration was then enacted as a joint effort between his parents, who aspired to receive social status, and his efforts to please them as an obedient son. These participants’ interactions with their parents reflected their parents’ interactions with others in the community, which were related to the social norm of using economic resources as equipment to pursue international mobility. Their mobilities were then viewed as equipment that their families could use to acquire social status as other people in the communities did. In this sense, their mobilities were initiated within a “wider family project of capital accumulation” (Waters, 2005, p. 359) between their parents’ financial investment and their efforts to gain social prestige.

Tuong Vu and Mai Hue’s motives for migration gestured to changing socio-economic conditions in Vietnam. As mentioned in Section 1.2.1, economic reforms in Vietnam created a new middle class, similar to other Southeast Asian countries. The “new urban middle class” in Southeast Asia (King, 2008, p. 73) includes those in positions of political power, those who have administrative influence, entrepreneurs who have access to economic capital and political power, professionals with education and skills supported by political patronage. Within the ‘new urban middle class’ is an “ambiguous class” (p. 73). The ‘ambiguous class’ is known to comprise former state employees with educational qualifications and political power, who later left to partake in entrepreneurial activities, seizing opportunities offered by policies to privatize the state-controlled economy. In the cases of Tuong Vu and Mai Hue’s families, their parents’ status as members of what King describes as ‘ambiguous class’ was formed by the Vietnamese Government’s economic reforms (see also Sections 1.2.1 & 4.1). Their consumption of international education was an indicator of their newly acquired social status enabled by state policies to develop human capital.
These participants’ decisions to migrate through the consumption of international education in Australia were shaped by their parents’ “imagination”, a reason for migration that tends to be neglected in migration studies (Baas, 2010, p. 169). In my study, these parents with their socio-economic advantages created by economic opportunities after the 1986 Doi Moi Policy allowed them to form their imagination of the Western world, materialism, and the quality of life outside Vietnam. This finding is similar to what Baas (2010) finds with his sample of Indian students in Australia whose decisions to migrate are influenced by families and communities’ aspirations for migration. The accounts of some of the participants in my study further revealed that their imagination was also drafted by their parents’ aspirations for social status through their children’s international education journeys to Australia – a translation of these parents’ “mentality of migration” (Tsuda, 1999, p. 2) into actual mobility. These parents and their children’s imagination was further formed by the business community’s aspirations for social status that could be gained through international mobility. In this case, those who did not move still had impacts on those who were aspiring to move. Those who moved were expected to bring back social values and recognition for those who were left behind. This imagination created a “culture of migration” (Kandel & Massey, 2002, p. 981) as a social norm that these people followed. These participants’ engagement with the people who were close to them and who were in the community was operated within the public normativity of mobility, which Fernandes (2000) mentions as a “desire for class-based privilege” (p. 612). The desire of mobility for social status in this ‘culture of migration’ was jointly made and enacted through the participants’ involvement at intersecting familial, communal, and national scales.

In addition, their parents’ past interactions with others influenced their decisions to migrate. In particular, Tuong Vu and Mai Hue’s parents’ strategies to follow the fashion of mobilities for social status were also informed by boat refugee movements from Vietnam between 1975 and the early 1990s (see also Sections 1.2.1 & 4.1), although they had not attempted to cross the border due to fear of insecurity. Having observed Vietnam’s political and economic turmoil after the Vietnam War and an exodus of their neighbours to other countries, these parents expected their children to obtain international mobility with “safety and pride”:

*My parents told me that many Vietnamese people had taken a risk of their lives to cross the ocean to look for better lives in Western countries. Instead of risking my life, I could go with safety and pride, being proud that I could study in a foreign country!* – Tuong Vu

*There were so many people escaping the country [back in the 1980s], Hardship and starvation they had to suffer from sea trips. Even worse, they had to suffer from losses of their...*
families... My parents said that I didn’t have to suffer like them at all. My trip to Australia was safe and at the same time brought them some status. – Mai Hue

Their narratives showed that international education might be used as a stepping-stone towards ‘safe’ border crossing to secure residency. The confluences of these parents’ observations of boat refugee outflows and uses of their economic resources were experienced through the ways these parents and migrants related to the historicity of others in their communities. As noted by Heidegger (1962, p. 434) on how our lives are temporal, historicity became important in how these parents lived their lives with their children and the community. Their understandings of the past opened possibilities for them to acquire social status through their children’s international mobility in the present. The temporal feature embedded in these participants’ decisions to migrate related to what had already happened to their parents and what they had observed, as well as their current aspirations for social status, safety and pride they expected to acquire in relation to their parents.

These participants’ interactions with international friends also influenced their decisions to migrate as joining the social ‘fashion’ of PR in Australia. They decided to apply for PR as taking “the next step after graduation as other students did” (Van Minh’s words). It should be noted that these participants had not planned to apply for PR before their international education journeys because “information about PR was very limited in Vietnam at that time [before 2008]” (Minh Thanh’s words). They only knew about PR during their studies through social exchanges with friends in Australia, and decided to follow what other international students did after graduation. For example:

*Just a year before my graduation, they [his international friends] began to talk about future lives. Everybody did it [applied for PR], so I did it too.* – Tuong Vu

*During my studies, my friends kept talking about PR. Then, I thought OK, I would apply for it after graduation. It was just the next step after graduation as other students did.* – Van Minh

I further found that some participants’ interactions with international friends in Australia were related to their interactions with the media and friends in Vietnam. For example, Minh Thanh and Quynh Thy decided to take international education journeys to Australia by themselves as being drawn by the material attractions of the Western world shown in the media in Vietnam:

*When I was young [back in the 1990s], I watched MTV [Music Television], Discovery Channel. I was very impressed with cars and skyscrapers... By watching foreign channels, I knew that there were other peoples from other countries. I realised that I didn’t know*
anything about the world out there. I didn’t really know what I exactly wanted to see. Maybe the world. Maybe people. Maybe sceneries. Maybe cars! – Minh Thanh

Before I met Nghia [pseudonym for her current husband] in Australia, I had dreamt of going overseas. We watched many films from Australia and other countries… I think the most important thing was that I began to imagine about another country [beyond my hometown]. – Quynh Thy

When I asked them whether such influences further shaped their decisions to migrate after graduation from Australian universities, they responded:

At that time, I was still impressed with the Western world. Sydney was big, and I had seen a lot of it already. But I spent only two years in Australia. There could be more things that I wanted to see. As I’ve told you, I did as other students did [in Australia]. – Minh Thanh

At that time, I thought, wow, I could tell my high school and university friends in Vietnam about what I saw in reality instead of things on films! – Quynh Thy

These quotes suggested that their mobilities were shaped by their interactions with others and things across space and time. Quynh Thy expected to tell her friends in Vietnam about the material attractions in Australia that she corporeally experienced in comparison with what she had imagined through the media. Minh Thanh wanted to spend more time exploring Australia after his study program to quench his curiosity about the Western world. Their decisions to migrate under the confluences of the media and friends were related to the broader socio-cultural changes in Vietnam during the post-Open-Door Policy period. Since the US lifted the trade embargo against Vietnam in 1994, the Vietnamese Government has adopted an “outward-looking policy” that favours integration into the global economy and openness to capitalist ideologies (Cao, 2001, pp. 1039-1040). The Government has opened the door to importing foreign media and entertainment products as a sign of their willingness to improve democracy and participation into the international community (Thayer, 1999, p. 3). Because of the Government’s strict control over international travel from 1975 to mid-1990s, we only knew about a world ‘out there’ through the media. In my memory, the early 1990s saw an inundated influx of videos and films from Hong Kong and Western countries. My neighbourhood friends and I used to talk about ‘foreigners’ and luxurious infrastructure such as cars and skyscrapers that we saw in the foreign films. Driven by a temptation to explore what was attractive but out of reach, we became curious about and interested in physically experiencing ‘foreign lands’.
Likewise, these two participants’ aspirations for international mobilities formed by curiosity to explore the new culture and people which engaged them in a world that extended beyond geographical boundaries through the media (Szerszynski & Urry, 2006, p. 117). By offering new resources for the “construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 3), electronic media influences how individuals translate their imagination into specific practices which Appadurai (1996) labels as the “work of imagination” (p. 3). The “work of imagination” for Minh Thanh and Quynh Thy was framed within the global flows of images embedded with “symbolic ingredients of imagined lives” (Smith, 1994, p. 16). Above, I presented the “symbolic ingredients” of mobilities as some migrants and their parents’ expectations of shared mobility capital. Here, this section suggested that these ‘symbolic’ values of the Western materialistic values were accumulated through the imaginaries of mobilities. Then, these participants’ interactions with friends in Vietnam and Australia and these imaginaries simultaneously formed their aspirations for mobilities.

These six participants’ interactions with others also mattered in their uses of equipment. In particular, their interactions with international friends in Australia influenced their choices of study programs to meet the occupations in demand lists for Australian skilled immigration. Some of these participants mentioned that through social interactions with international friends, they knew that Australia’s skilled migration policies might be tightened in the upcoming years by requiring PR applicants to have employer sponsorship and higher IELTS scores (see Section 1.2.2). They decided to apply for PR before “things might become more difficult in the future” (Van Minh), and they might “lose a chance to please [their] parents if PR requirements [became] more intense” (Tuong Vu). Academic programs, degrees and durations of study in Australia were then counted as equipment used in combination with their parents’ economic resources to initiate their migration.

These participants’ interactions with others and things showed the ways they were entwined with the broader socio-political regimes of talent for economic development. Through their interactions with the communities as mentioned above, these participants’ family project for the accumulation of mobility capital took place within Vietnam’s socio-economic transitions allowing greater access to education-related mobilities for the training of talent. These participants’ interactions with others and things also showed how they were entwined with Australia’s schemes for talent attraction. For example, through everyday conversations with Chinese, Indian and Vietnamese friends on campus, Ngoc Linh realised the potential of applying for PR with an Australian degree in Information Technology (IT), as it was listed in the occupations in demand lists. Then, he switched from a Master of Business Administration to a Master’s program in IT, expecting that this IT degree could be used to meet the skilled migration requirements. Similar experiences were also found in the
accounts of the other participants, who associated their academic programs with “a field in great demand” (with Mai Hue’s Pharmacy degree) or “a hot career” (for Quynh Thy’s second Master’s in Accounting). The Australian ‘race for talent’ expressed in the occupations in demand lists was embodied through these participants’ choices of academic programs which they used as equipment to lead to subsequent skilled migration (see also Baas, 2006 & 2010; Biao, 2005 & 2007). My research material further showed that the Australian Government’s apparatus for attracting talent through international education was used by prospective migrants in combination with their socio-economic advantage facilitated by economic transformations in the home country, influences of the historicity of others, their practices of social norms of international mobility and influences from friends.

In short, the ways these participants followed the social norms as ‘fashions’ were practised through their immersion in the communities. They lived in the world shared with their parents, business people in the communities in Vietnam, international friends in Australia, as well as things such as images shown on the media, economic resources, Australian academic programs and skilled migration schemes. The world in which these migrants lived stretched beyond Vietnam or Australia to the interwoven space where they were immersed in what the “they” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 268) did, negotiating their social relations in intersecting familial, communal, national and global landscapes. Their decisions were not made as discrete instrumental reasons in a place, but in a concert of spatial circuits.

5.3 Migrating for economic improvement

In contrast to the section above, I show the influences of families’ socio-economic disadvantage on two other study participants’ decisions to migrate in this section. Their decisions to migrate were shaped by their lived experience of their families’ poverty and limited earning capacity as professionals in Vietnam, as well as possibilities of economic improvement in Australia through two-step migration. While this section is primarily concerned with economic reasons for migration, I point out that these participants’ decisions to migrate were also shaped by other drivers such as their professional and family concerns. Thus, I argue against common political discourse on economic drivers as causing ‘brain drain’. In this section, I show how their embeddedness in the world with others and things presented both constraints and possibilities for their mobilities to Australia before and after their international education sojourns.

Anh Ngoc had received a Vietnamese Government scholarship, and Thanh Binh had been awarded an Australian university tuition fee scholarship to study Master’s programs in Australia. Their
families in Vietnam were “very poor” (Anh Ngoc), and they expected to “make a big change” (Thanh Binh) by migrating to Australia after graduation. Similar to the previous study participants, their interactions with others and things showed intersecting familial, professional, educational and socio-political aspects. As they constantly mentioned their family conditions in Vietnam in the conversations with me, I looked closely at how these conditions affected their decisions to migrate in relation to their experiences in other aspects.

These two participants’ lived experience with their families’ poverty in the past mattered to their interactions with others and things in the present, which influenced their decisions to migrate. With her Bachelor’s degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) conferred by a public university in Vietnam, Anh Ngoc had been employed as a contracted teacher at a private English language centre for several months before she applied for a Vietnamese Government scholarship. She expected to obtain a Master’s degree in Educational Studies in Australia through this scholarship program in order to earn a higher salary in Vietnam:

*I have many brothers and sisters. I am the oldest. Just only me, who could study at university and support my parents… My mother lives a difficult life. My father is a heavy drinker. He can’t take care of the family. I remember once I didn’t have money to pay for the tuition fee at university, we had to sell a dog that we raised [for meat]. Since then, I have always been thinking about making money, making money.* – Anh Ngoc

Her interactions with those in the scholarship management, as well as things such as money from the sale of the dog, tuition fees, Vietnamese scholarships and Australian academic programs, presented both constraints and possibilities for her mobility. While her relationship with her parents, who were unable to improve the economic difficulty, placed her in a situation of confronting poverty, the Vietnamese scholarship program and Australian academic programs enabled her to pursue possibilities to expectedly deal with this economic difficulty.

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12 The current Vietnamese Government’s scholarship program includes several sub-programs allocated to separate ministries and regions, such as Project 911 (formerly known as Project 322), Program 165 (for those with leadership potentials), Biotechnology Program (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development), and Mekong 1000 Project (for human capital development in the Mekong Delta). Instead of giving the exact name of the scholarship that Anh Ngoc received, I refer to it as the Vietnamese Government’s scholarship for reasons of confidentiality.
These possibilities were further enhanced in Australia. Her social contact with Australian neighbours and friends influenced her perceptions and imaginations about a better economic prospect in Australia:

My [Australian] neighbours and friends often tell me that professionals in Australia can earn a yearly salary of 50,000 or 60,000 AUD. That’s a lot better than professionals’ salaries in Vietnam! – Anh Ngoc

By comparing her monthly salary in Vietnam of less than 200 AUD, she aspired to earn a bigger income by becoming a permanent resident and professional in Australia. Her interactions with her neighbours and friends in Australia shaped her imaginations about salaries. Although the scholarship management board in Vietnam did not allow her to study Education but another program, as outlined below, she tried to complete her first Master’s program. Then, she sought funding and support from her Australian boyfriend for a second Master’s program to meet the requirement of PR. By using PR, she expected to get a professional job to earn the salary that she had imagined under the influences from her Australian friends and neighbours. Her interactions with others and things across space (from Vietnam to Australia) and time (from the past to present and into the future) were not confined to familial aspects, but extended to professional environments in Vietnam and Australia.

Similarly, Thanh Binh experienced intersecting familial and professional influences on his decisions to study abroad and migrate. Under the requirements of his employing university in Vietnam, he was supposed acquire a Master’s degree within five years after the probation period and a doctoral degree in ten years afterwards to keep his tenure as a lecturer. After three years, he was awarded a tuition fee waiver scholarship at an Australian university. He expected to study in Australia in order to meet this requirement, so that he could secure his job with a reasonable income to support his economic life in Vietnam:

I hoped to have a Master’s degree and then a doctoral degree, return, and work as a senior lecturer and professor, maybe. I would get a good salary by being an academic. – Thanh Binh

His expectation to “get a good salary” was informed by his poor family in Vietnam in which “poverty and hunger seemed to be accompanying [them] wherever [they] went”. However, his immersion in the employment market in Australia changed his former expectation. By doing many part-time jobs during his study programs in Australia, he was able to send 15,000 AUD to his parents to buy a piece of land and “eat some good food”. Then, he wanted to remain in Australia to
make money, rather than “returning home and making enough money just for [himself]”. Similar to Anh Ngoc, Thanh Binh’s interactions spanned across space, from familial and professional aspects in Vietnam to educational and work aspects in Australia. His interactions with his parents, those in his employing university management and Australian employers also linked to his experience in interacting with things, such as educational qualifications, the scholarship and remittances. His interactions with the surrounding world was further informed by the way he followed the cultural practice of filial piety expressed in his remittances when he expected to provide his parents’ living essentials and accommodation.

In addition to their interactions with people and things in professional, familial and educational aspects, these two participants were also entwined with the socio-politics of Vietnam. In particular, Anh Ngoc and Thanh Binh encountered lack of political patronage as a negative influence on their salaries after graduation. Expecting to earn a better income in the future, Anh Ngoc accepted the Vietnamese Government’s scholarship to study in Australia. However, instead of being offered to study a major in her discipline of Education, she was asked to study Master of Public Relations, a major that she did not like:

Why was my fate decided that way? Where was my voice? If I had returned, I would have been assigned to work in a field that didn’t fit with my Education or Public Relations qualifications. In Vietnam, if the state asks you to do this job or that job, you will receive a salary at the level prescribed by the state. That also means I would receive very little money from it… If you have some power, you can do the job you want, or ask someone to give you the job you want. – Anh Ngoc

Similarly, Thanh Binh experienced lack of political patronage as a possible cause for low salaries:

If I had gone back [to Vietnam], I would have received a very little salary as a lecturer... You could be assigned to do many things for your faculty, the Youth Union, and so on. You are just a little man, and you have to do things for them! This is why you work a lot but receive very little money! – Thanh Binh

The Vietnamese Governments’ tools for talent training and Australia’s foreign talent attraction policies shaped their decisions to migrate. By experiencing the lack of political patronage, which the group of ‘escapees’ referred to as ‘umbrellas’ (see Section 5.1.1), they felt not-at-home with a mismatch between Vietnam’s human capital development and individual aspirations of becoming. Through her experience with the scholarship management, Anh Ngoc predicted that the lack of ‘voice’ would lead to the mismatch between her trained expertise and future job assignment, which
would earn her “very little money”. That is why she lamented how her “fate was decided that way”, whereas those with power could have freedom to do the jobs they liked. Instead, they used their Australian qualifications and material support from locals as equipment to achieve their economic desires through two-step migration.

In short, these two participants’ decisions to migrate were formed in relation to their families’ poverty in Vietnam, the political system in the cities where they had lived, the broader socio-political and educational environment in Vietnam, and Australian two-step migration politics. The initiation of their migration was influenced by how they cared about their interactions with the surrounding world. Through entwinement with the world, their interactions with others and things opened up possibilities for them to migrate for economic reasons. Their uses of this mobility equipment were also informed by the cultural practice of filial piety in Vietnam, which requires children to take care of their old-aged parents’ health and financial conditions after they are retired or unemployed. This cultural practice was reflected in Anh Ngoc’s expectations to support her parents because she was the oldest daughter in her family who had a university degree, and in Thanh Binh’s remittances sent to his retired parents. The ways they used two-step migration as equipment enabled them to practice “acts of recognition” in constructing the image of “dutiful” children (Yeoh et al., 2013, p. 451). The family backgrounds, cultural practices of filial piety and political system challenged and shaped their aspirations of mobilities for economic ends.

As stated in Section 1.2.1, the Vietnamese Government is ambivalent in its management of out-bound mobility by both encouraging and controlling mobility. The outflows of students and skilled workers are framed in political discourse as a supposed ‘brain drain’. Government controlled media have argued that wage differentials are the main reasons for the outflows (see e.g. Duong, 2002; Huynh, 2004, Song, 2007; The, 2011). Writing in the Lao Dong Newspaper (a national newspaper published by the Central VCP), The (2011) noted that wage attractions in Western countries were “the biggest reason that pulls students and skilled people to leave the homeland, depleting human resources and money in our country.” However, the participants’ stories in my study revealed that a host of non-economic reasons for their migration including migration as an ‘escape’, following the ‘fashion’ of mobility for social status, and for knowledge pursuit (see Section 5.4 below), shaped their desires to migrate. Some decided to migrate after they finished their international education programs as a way to follow what people in their communities in Vietnam tended to do within the culture of migration for social status, and what other international students did in Australia. Others wanted to develop their professional careers after having exposure to the research and learning facilities in Australian higher education. Their decisions to migrate were not entirely calculative or
economically driven. This finding challenges political views on the “calculative rationality” (Collins et al., 2014, p. 665) of skilled migrants acting for personal economic gains. Rather, these participants’ decisions to migrate were made through their entwinement with the political aspects and salary structures in their workplace contexts, socio-cultural practices, historical events, and family concerns.

5.4 Migrating for knowledge pursuit

In this section, I continue to argue that decisions to migrate were formed through the participants’ interactions with others and things across space and time in intersecting domains. By analysing the accounts of Thai Duong, Ngoc Dai, Tran Minh and Quynh Hoa (who also saw migration as an escape), I show how their interactions with the world in intersecting domains shaped their decisions to migrate for knowledge pursuit. In the conversations with me, these participants emphasised their aspirations for knowledge through their migration. For example, Tran Minh, a postdoctoral fellow, commented that he “was born to study, but not to do business”. I became curious about how their education experiences shaped their decisions to migrate in relation to other aspects of their lives.

Looking at their educational experiences before migration revealed that their experiences in Vietnam limited their aspirations for becoming professionals. In contrast, they considered that Australia opened up possibilities for them to achieve whom they wanted to be. For example, these participants’ experiences of university curricular and facilities for research and learning in Vietnam impeded their professional development and further studies. They commented on Vietnam’s higher education as being “limited for future professional practice because of the VCP’s ideologies”, having “many unnecessary subjects while having little focus on core subjects” and “poor equipment for laboratory research”. They perceived that if they worked in Vietnam, they could not have “enough knowledge and competence to perform work effectively” (Tran Minh), and most organisations tended to employ “working workers, but not learning workers” (Thai Duong). Quynh Hoa also noted that lack of “modern” research facilities could limit her professional practice, and what she had learned at university in Vietnam could become “completely theoretical as being written on papers”. Ngoc Dai had been offered a South Korean university scholarship to follow a Master’s program in IT taught in English in South Korea. However, because of his poor Korean language, he felt so socially and academically isolated that he thought he “could not continue studying there”. He was afraid that he “could not grasp sufficient knowledge for self-study and job performance in the future” because of his limited language. Then, with a good IELTS band score, he applied for an international postgraduate research scholarship in Australia to do his doctoral degree and migrated subsequently.
In contrast, these participants’ experiences in Australia enabled them to feel at-home in terms of knowledge pursuit. Through their encounter with Australian international education, they found that Australian education allowed creativity for intellectual development and offered domestic students lower tuition fees than international students. They used PR to achieve these benefits. For example, after completing his Bachelor’s degree in Chemical Engineering in Australia, Thai Duong applied for PR. Then, he enrolled in a medical program and became a medical doctor:

*With my PR, I could choose to study this medical program without worrying about studying Marxism [as in Vietnam] at all. Especially, the tuition fee is cheaper for international students.* – Thai Duong

Ngoc Dai similarly perceived the benefit of lower tuition fees by becoming a domestic student:

*When I become an Australian citizen, I can go back to university if I want to, without having to pay as much as international students.* – Ngoc Dai

In addition, they used Australian universities’ state-of-the-art research and learning facilities to develop their expertise, which nurtured their aspirations to learn. Quynh Hoa, Ngoc Dai and Tran Minh were particularly interested in talking about university libraries and state-of-the-art laboratory facilities at Australian universities:

*The library at this university [where he had studied and was working] is a huge world of knowledge! Coming here to live also means coming to gain access to knowledge of the world! My current position [his postdoctoral fellowship] enables me to study while working... If I can do research well, I can maintain this position. This position can help me obtain an academic job at this university or even somewhere else in Australia.* – Tran Minh

*Facilities for R&D [research and development] in Australia are excellent! I think R&D is encouraged in Australia. These facilities can help me do my job better and more precisely... I also need to mention this: during my Bachelor’s program, I published several articles which were counted in my PhD scholarship application. I was able to do this, because I had access to laboratory facilities for my experiments.* – Quynh Hoa

They perceived that their mobilities were enabled by the availability of and access to facilities for research and learning in Australia that they could use as equipment to acquire their knowledge pursuit and develop their expertise. This equipment was used in relation to other equipment to enhance their mobilities for knowledge pursuit. For example, in Ngoc Dai’s case, English added a practical value as another tool that shaped his decision to migrate. While his experiences in
linguistic difficulty in South Korea posing a constraint to his socialising and knowledge acquisition, his English language proficiency as shown in his IELTS report forms for his doctoral scholarship application and PR acting as the “ground floor of the world hierarchy of languages” (Williams, Balaz, & Wallace, 2004, p. 31). This English language proficiency opened up opportunities for him to initiate mobility to Australia. Quynh Hoa also mentioned using her academic publications for her second international education journey that led to migration at a later stage. Their uses of equipment of these kinds enabled them to experience the spatial relations from Vietnam (and South Korea) to Australia as meeting their desires of knowledge as “knowledge migrants” (Ackers, 2005, p. 102).

Their expectations to migrate for knowledge pursuit were also informed by their interactions with things and others in the past, as well as perceived social and familial norms:

*When I was young, I was a good student. Whenever I got a prize, my parents gave me some rewards such as a toy car or pen. I felt really motivated. Even when I have completed my medical degree here, I think I will keep learning more and more.* – Thai Duong

*My family is poor. The only way to escape from poverty is to study and look for jobs. In this modern society, we all have to learn. We have to learn so that we can do our jobs well to earn money.* – Ngoc Dai

Thai Duong and Ngoc Dai referred to their experiences of education as a way to get parents’ encouragement or “escape from poverty”. Their historicity involving family members and things such as toys or pens affected their aspirations for knowledge pursuit. They encountered these influences as a family practice of education (in Thai Duong’s case) and a perceived social norm of learning for employment (as Ngoc Dai expressed, “in this modern society, we all have to learn”). When they followed these norms, they experienced migration as opening up a possibility for them to achieve their aspirations.

I also found that their interactions with others and things extended from the educational and professional to familial domains. For example, as a former lecturer at a Vietnamese public university, Quynh Hoa stated:

*The salary [at the university where she had worked in Vietnam] is too low. After three years, we can get about 200 [Australian] dollars a month. How can I support my family? If I have children, how can I bring them up well and give them a good education?* – Quynh Hoa

As shown from this quote, Quynh Hoa experienced the constraint of low salary and the lack of R&D in Vietnam as challenges to her family duties. In this sense, her decision to migrate to
Australia for knowledge pursuit was formed through confluences of her personal upheavals and lack of political patronage in Vietnam (as mentioned in Section 5.1.1), as well as desires of knowledge acquisition, professional development and family responsibilities in Australia.

Also experiencing the possibilities of research and learning in Australia and the constraints of low salaries in Vietnam, Tran Minh and Thai Duong explicitly mentioned the interrelation of these two aspects:

*At the end of the day, doing science is to earn money. Money is a bowl of rice. You can’t do science when your family is hungry, and your children follow and beg you for money. I had to think about my family when deciding to apply for PR in Australia.* – Tran Minh

*Poor salaries! [in Vietnam] Every month I would get around 200 dollars. That would be enough for me to pay coffee in a month! What about my family? We couldn’t eat soil at all.* – Thai Duong

Their experience showed that professional and family lives were interwoven and influenced by the broader socio-political and educational environments across space. Tran Minh and Thai Duong associated high salaries in Australia with a “bowl of rice”, whereas low salaries in Vietnam were perceived as “soil”. They experienced the influences of these things on their families’ economic conditions.

In general, these participants cared about how to live their lives with others and things across space and time. Through their experience of studying and living in Vietnam and South Korea, they encountered the lack of facilities for research and learning, impractical university curricula and language barrier as constraints to their professional development. In contrast, their familiarity with Australian education enabled them to use PR as equipment to acquire professional development for livelihood. Their experiences of Vietnamese and Australian (and South Korean) education and future employment also reflected how they cared about their families and followed some perceived social and familial norms. These confluences were also shaped by their familiarity with living in Australia as the place where “science is respected and where their social status is esteemed” (Martin-Rovet, 2003, p. 1), and “dream of self-realization” (King, 2002, p. 95) could be achieved to meet the “drive of scientific curiosity” (Mahroum, 1998, p. 18 as cited in Ackers, 2005, p. 103).

5.5 Summary

So far, I have shown that these participants’ decisions to migrate reflected their embeddedness in the intra-national race for talent, as well as cultural, professional, educational and familial aspects.
These migrants’ transnational mobilities were enabled by Vietnam’s socio-economic transformations which encouraged international education through (inter)state and private sponsorships as a strategy to improve the quality of the workforce. At the same time, their mobilities were facilitated through the link between Australian international education and skilled migration, which aimed to develop a ‘talent reservoir’ for economic growth. International education was then used as equipment in achieving permanent skilled migration.

Their participation in the race for talent was interrelated with their interactions with others and things in other aspects, producing heterogeneous trajectories of mobilities. In professional aspects, some of them who had been employed in Vietnam before migration experienced lack of political patronage in the form of ‘umbrellas’ as unfair treatment at work, limiting creativity for work performance, and devaluing their Western educational qualifications and knowledge through peer envy. Other participants encountered lack of research and learning facilities for professional development in Vietnam’s higher education, and linguistic difficulties in a non-English speaking country that limited their intellectual curiosity and earning capacity. Some found the lack of ‘umbrellas’ intersecting with the low salary structures that would limit their career and social development, particularly for those who were socio-economically disadvantaged. In contrast, those who came from socio-economically advantaged families were able to secure funding and support from their business parents, who followed the social norm of international mobility for social status. These economically advantaged migrants also experienced the influences of the ‘fashion’ of PR in Australia in following what many international students did after graduation. The ways they followed this fashion in Australia were also supported by the influences of their parents in Vietnam, and informed by the media that shaped their imaginations about materialistic values in the West. These migrants’ experiences of interactions with the world extended to familial and personal domains. Some experienced conflicts in family ruptures, gender and marriage norms, and loss of a lover as constraints to their personal and work lives. Others expected to use migration to improve their families’ economic situation as a sign of filial piety, whereas some attempted to please their parents’ aspirations for social status through international mobility, or pursue knowledge to get stable jobs to meet family responsibilities. Their encounter with these confluences was not grounded solely in a fixed locality such as Vietnam, Australia or another country, but rather, across these spaces.

In entwinement with the world, interactions with things in forms of their uses of equipment influenced these participants in taking steps to migrate. Things which they encountered in the past such as toys or pens in forms of rewards, money from the sale of a dog, objects and money for
donations, global flows of images about the West shown on the media, and university tuition fees
influenced their aspirations for migration. They also interacted with things such as lesson plans and
research and learning facilities in their everyday professional lives, legal permissions, passports and
bribes in preparation for international mobility. In the initiation of migration, they used their
Australian qualifications to obtain PR. This equipment was also used in combination with other
equipment. For example, through their ambiguous relation to things, some used bribes, which they
had previously perceived as unethical social conduct, to confront the lack of political patronage as
following a socio-political norm in Vietnam. They combined the tool of bribes with transnational
emotional and material support based on the cultural practice of kinship to initiate their international
mobilities. Others considered Australian academic programs and study durations that met the skills
demands in Australia in addition to mobilising financial support from their parents in Vietnam or
from their Australian lovers. Some participants used government apparatuses for training talent in
the forms of national and international scholarships in combination with their English language
proficiency and academic publications.

These participants’ uses of equipment also reflected their interactions with others, which created
constraints or possibilities for the initiation of their mobilities. For example, in professional and
socio-political aspects, some of these migrants’ interactions with colleagues and those with power
who were jealous of their Western credentials caused tensions in their professional practice in
Vietnam due to their lack of ‘umbrellas’. In initiating their mobilities, they also interacted with
scholarship management boards and those in leadership roles who managed the race for talent in
Vietnam through cumbersome paperwork. They encountered these constraints in confluences of
their involvement in other domains. Those who mattered to their decisions to migrate included
parents who imposed traditional practices of marriage on them, or to whom some migrants
contributed financial support as following the practices of filial piety. Other participants’
relationships with their spouses, whose divorces ruptured their aspirations for family happiness in
Vietnam, made them feel not-at-home with dwelling in Vietnam. Their children, whose schooling
and upbringing they cared for, and their lovers whose affections influenced the ways they felt
attached to or detached from a locality, also influenced the initiation of their migration. These
participants did not experience each set of constraints in isolation, but rather in interrelation.

They also encountered interrelated constraints through the ways they took a stand on following
and/or breaking with public norms in intersecting domains. As mentioned above, the socio-political
norm of political patronage as ‘umbrellas’ posed difficulties for some migrants in limiting their
professional development and performance, as well as obtaining acceptance in professional practice
and permission to study overseas. Concurrently, they encountered challenges in following the cultural practice of social hierarchy based on ages and social positions that required respect and obedience. They also faced conflicts in the cultural norm of arranged marriages, impositions of females’ roles in families as caregivers rather than breadwinners, and practices of filial piety that required substantial support to old-age parents. In educational aspects, some sponsored migrants suffered from scholarship requirements forcing them to study majors that were not in their interest or related to their previous academic background. Some of them also faced professional requirements prioritising an accumulation of academic degrees to meet with the quotas assigned by the government without providing them useful support in doing so.

Despite these constraints, possibilities emerged from their entwinement with the world in several ways. For example, the ways these migrants took a stand on breaking with some public norms and following others led to opening of possibilities. Some participants broke with the social norm of obedience and respect to senior colleagues by using kinship practices to receive siblings’ support for their migration as part of the strategy to escape from the former norm. Following the socio-political practice of bribery, which had once constrained their professional practice, enabled them to smoothen bureaucratic paperwork procedures for international mobility. In addition, interactions with others also enabled them to break with public norms. Some violated the regulations of scholarships by failing to return to Vietnam, and they concurrently faced the constraint posed from the cultural practice of filial piety. When they faced these interrelated constraints compounded by these norms, their interactions with local people and employment environments through their familiarity with living in Australia opened up possibilities of migration as a way to pursue their expectations of economic improvement. These migrants did not follow each norm separately, but interrelated norms. For example, the traditional kinship practices in the forms of economically advantaged parents and siblings’ financial support were enacted in relation to the ways these participants followed the social ‘fashions’ of international mobility. The perceived social norm of learning for employment was encountered in combination with the family practice of learning enabled some migrants to migrate for knowledge pursuit.

Through their interactions with others and things, their decisions to migrate were not formed as a single event in their lives in a fixed locality. Rather, their embeddedness in the world across space and time mattered to their decisions. Some participants’ lived experience of the political norm of ‘umbrellas’ and family reorganisations challenged their sense of belonging in Vietnam. At the same time, their familiarity with Australian education and lifestyle enabled them to initiate their migration. In addition, they seemed to experience dwelling-mobility across borders instead of being
anchored as ‘pushes’ and ‘pulls’ between places. For example, Ngoc Dai’s decision to migrate to Australia upon the completion of his PhD program was made through his past encounter with the impracticality of higher education curricula, lack of R&D facilities and family’s poverty in Vietnam that together shaped his aspirations for learning. His decision was concurrently affected by the linguistic constraint he had experienced in South Korea prior to his relocation to Australia, the attractions of R&D facilities available at Australian universities, and the ways he followed the perceived social norm of learning for employment in Vietnam. These participants did not experience being contained in space but rather, encountering space through their entwinement with the world.

In their embeddedness in space with others and things, temporality mattered to their decisions. National historical events including boat refugee movements from Vietnam in between 1975 and the early 1990s, Vietnam’s socio-economic transformations allowing greater access to international education, as well as the Vietnamese Government’s ambivalent approach in training and retaining ‘talent’ through scholarship management affected how these participants negotiated their decisions to migrate. Simultaneously, events in Australia’s skilled migration schemes in the global race for talent, such as amendments to the occupations in demand lists over time and scholarship schemes enabled these migrants to initiate transnational mobilities. Further, the historicity of their families in terms of expectations to achieve social status through international mobility, aspirations to use international mobility to overcome poverty, as well as their previous encounter with professional practice and experiences of studying in Australia constrained and/or enabled their mobilities. Memories of those they had loved and things they had encountered also affected the ways they initiated transnational mobilities. In this sense, they experienced both “strange times” within their home community, as well as “remembered times” with their involvement in the world in the past (Cwerner, 2001, pp. 19-23).

Taken together, these participants’ decisions to migrate showed how they cared about living their lives with others and things. These migrants’ decisions to migrate were filled with mixed emotions, ranging from disappointment, discomfort and sorrow for the ‘escapees’, to excitement among the ‘fashion’ followers, sadness and feelings of betrayal to the homeland for the economic migrants, as well as eagerness, boredom and grief (in Quynh Hoa’s loss of her fiancé) for the knowledge pursuers. In other words, their decisions to migrate were embodied through their entwinement with the world.
Chapter 6. Being-in Australia: Experiencing transitions

By examining the participants’ relocation experiences after migrating to Australia, this chapter continues my argument that transnational mobilities are shaped in and through two-step migrants’ entwinement with the world. As mentioned in Section 3.2, we are not located in space through our being-in-the-world, but rather, experience how we live our lives in space with familiarity and unfamiliarity. Our familiarity enables us to achieve our lives in the ways we want. However, we sometimes feel not-at-home with what we think we know to do in everyday life. When we feel not-at-home with some of our interactions with the world, we may turn to what we know and often do, or remain being-not-at-home (see also Dall’Alba & Barnacle, in press). Our being-in a place leads to constraints and open-ended possibilities for our spatio-temporal existence. The notion of being-in sheds light on understanding the relationality of transnational mobilities that was expressed in the participants’ relocation. This required me to attend to how the participants experienced their interactions with others and things in intersecting aspects of their lives.

These participants’ accounts showed that their embeddedness in multiple spaces was temporal in the sense that their present relocation experiences were also shaped by their involvement with the world in the past. Therefore, I sometimes re-mention some of the events that these migrants encountered when they made the decisions to migrate, and illustrate how their experiences of the past influenced their current relocation strategies. Their experiences suggested that entwinement with the world unfolded possibilities and constraints for their transitions. I illustrate their experiences of transitions in the first two sections, and highlight the reflection of their being-in-the-world through relocation in the summary of this chapter.

6.1 Experiencing ‘smooth’ transitions

Tran Minh, Quynh Hoa, Ngoc Dai, Mai Hue and Thai Duong – who held doctoral, medical and pharmaceutical degrees – experienced direct entry to Australian labour market and settled their family lives after their PR visas were granted, enabling them to have “smooth” transitions (Tran Minh’s word). I revealed that their experiences of the ‘smoothness’ in transitions were reflective of their entwinement in the world with familiarity with living their public and personal lives across space and time. For example, these five participants perceived that their qualifications were demanded in Australia where degrees in technology, engineering, medicine and pharmacy were valued. The logic of this social norm was assumed in this way: once one got a degree in one of these fields, they would get a job directly. Ngoc Dai, Quynh Hoa, Tran Minh, Mai Hue and Thai Duong fell in line with this norm by using their qualifications to get employment:
I think Australia has always needed IT, especially those with higher degrees in IT. This is why I got this job easily. – Ngoc Dai

Everyone needs to eat, and this is why Food Technology is always needed [laughing]. So, with my degree, I could get this job faster than other students and migrants. – Quynh Hoa

When I asked them why they thought their degrees enabled them to get jobs “faster” than other skilled migrants, “Australia needs high qualifications” seemed to be consistent among their responses. Thai Duong and Mai Hue gave more specific explanations to the social norm of the ‘need’ for medical and pharmaceutical degrees. They both mentioned the difficulties of pursuing these academic programs and social recognition of the degrees in these fields. For example, Thai Duong got a job at a clinic in Australia after using his medical degree recognised as being “scarce” in Australia. For him, his degree was valued through intelligence and resilience:

With my Bachelor’s degree in Chemistry, I went directly to the Doctor of Medicine program. Other students have to take the Graduate Medical School Admissions Test and pass an interview. Above all, they must possess a very, very strong academic record…. The tuition fee is high. Selection is high. Yeah, the internship, when you spend a year at a hospital, you are being watched as well. We all learn how to communicate well with patients, being soft, practical and helpful. When you deal with an old patient, who is in pain, you have to show your sympathy on your face. The Doctor of Medicine program is too difficult. It has several themes in the curriculum. Yeah, in three stages. Yeah, English was a nightmare for me! You know, we are non-native speakers. My English was not too bad, but I was sometimes reminded of my English language. I also need to mention the technical language in the program. Not many students study this, so my degree is scarce! – Thai Duong

The difficulties of following medical and pharmaceutical programs that Thai Duong and Mai Hue mentioned included demanding requirements of academic records and intense competition for entrance. These programs also required students to take some difficult subjects, constantly pass examinations in different stages in specific specialisations and pay high tuition fees. Further, patience, resilience and social communication skills in English were perceived as necessary for medical and pharmaceutical students. From these, they concluded that the likelihood of employability from medical and pharmaceutical degrees was high, as they were “scarce” commodities in the labour market. Their experiences of following this norm showed the linear relationship of foreign talent flows expected as ‘learning-migrating-earning’ (see Section 1.1). This relationship was experienced through these participants’ embeddedness in the global and national
discourse of talent in which they used their educational qualifications in response to the skills demands in Australia.

The global growing skills demands have created an educational credential-for-migration discourse. From a global perspective, Iredale (2001) and Mahroum (2001) have mentioned that technology and medicine which are in scarcity in some developed countries create an acceleration of demands, fostering chances for foreign graduates with skills and degrees in these fields to obtain jobs in their disciplines in destination societies. Yet, the ways migrants use their qualifications may not always be in accord with the linearity between meritocracy and two-step migration. My research material showed that two-step migrants’ interactions with the world influenced the ways they use their educational qualifications for employment. For example, being informed by the perceived social norm in valuing degrees in technology, engineering, medicine and pharmacy, these participants used their qualifications in relation to their interactions with others and things across space. Tran Minh used his doctoral degree in Environmental Engineering to apply for a postdoctoral fellowship one month after his graduation:

*I was lucky because my former supervisor wanted to continue the collaboration with me at that time. We’ve been productive in terms of co-authorship for journal articles. It is easy to work with someone you have known both personally and professionally. Another thing, the project I have been working on is based in the Greater Mekong Subregion and parts of the Mekong Delta. I have some cultural, social, and environmental knowledge of this region. [Then he talked about technical issues involving in his current research.] But my PhD degree played the key role [in applying for this academic position].* – Tran Minh

When he was talking about the technical issues of pH levels on shrimp farms in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, he elaborated the importance of knowledge of the locality:

*Although I grew up in the North, I used to spend a lot of time working in the Mekong Delta. My knowledge about this delta is... good.... Doing research in a place includes knowledge about local people. You must know how they live, because their daily habits, work routines, and traditional practices on shrimp farms influence the ways they control pH scales on their farms.* – Tran Minh

His account suggested that his doctoral degree was used in combination with his academic publications, professional rapport in Australia, and knowledge of local people’s daily routines and

13 The Mekong Delta is in southwestern Vietnam where the Mekong River flows through to the East Sea.
traditional farming practices. His understandings of these local “conventions” (Gieryn, 2000, p. 473) enabled him to extend his professional practice from Australia to Vietnam. These academic achievements and social knowledge were seen as his familiarity with Australia’s academic environment and employment practices, as well as Vietnam’s social life and living routines as “cumulative” capital (Szelényi, 2003, p. 11). He also referred to his interactions with his Australian former supervisor, local people in Vietnam and potentially those involved in the transnational research projects.

Similarly, Quynh Hoa and Ngoc Dai used their doctoral qualifications in combination with other things and interacting with others to strengthen the likelihood of getting the jobs that matched their expertise:

*I think my [Australian] Bachelor’s and doctoral degrees were important for me to get the current position. My employer values not only the expertise that I have, but also my English language skills and exposure to this society for quite a long time. They may assume that I know how to behave with colleagues correctly and abide with safety and health regulations in the company.* – Quynh Hoa

*My PhD degree in IT [in programming] was important for me to get this job, but when I attended the job interview, I was required to perform skills in supporting customers, installing software programs and fixing computer parts.* – Ngoc Dai

These two participants used their doctoral qualifications in technology in combination with their English communication skills, tools for professional practice, as well as social knowledge and understandings of organisational practices in the host society. While Tran Minh used his Vietnamese social and geographical understandings to strengthen his job application, Quynh Hoa strategically used her lived experiences obtained from her exposure to Australian society, as well as English language capital in combination with her understandings of organisational practices of health and safety and social norms of behavioural conduct. Their interactions with things and others were enabled by their familiarity with studying and living in Australia.

In addition, these participants’ immersion in the employment aspect was experienced in relation to their involvement in other aspects of life. For example, some of these participants’ encounters with their life partners and children influenced their choices of accommodation locations:

*We decided to get married after we had both graduated. Then, I thought the postdoctoral program would best suit me because we are both living in Australia now.... In general, I am...*
happy with my job because it earns me a good salary to raise my children. My workplace is not too far from my home, so it’s convenient for me to drive my children to school in the morning. – Tran Minh

Likewise, Thai Duong’s involvement in employment and family life was experienced through the interrelation between his income and ability to “raise” his children, and the distance between his workplace and home that mattered to the ways he fulfilled family responsibilities. As a single migrant, Mai Hue experienced the interrelatedness between work and life in quite a different way. After receiving PR, she relocated to a city in Australia other than the one where she had studied. According to her, there were two main interrelated reasons for this relocation. First, after graduation, she found a job vacancy at the company where she was currently working and applied for it. Second, when she commenced her work, her parents in Vietnam bought her a house in Melbourne as a “meaningful way” to “stabilise” her life.

Further, these migrants’ immersion in the intersecting professional and familial domains was experienced through their embeddedness in social and environmental aspects, where they expressed concerns with intergenerational securities. For example, Mai Hue and Tran Minh mentioned the clean environment in Australia as a benefit for their health and children’s physical growth in contrast to the polluted environment in Vietnam. Thai Duong also stated the “generous” welfare system that living in Australia could offer him and his later generations, such as “access to education that [would] lead to stability in life” and “excellent healthcare services”. Ngoc Dai was interested in talking about social securities that he would have been unable to obtain if he had lived in Vietnam, where “robbery and pickpocketing [could] happen at any time”.

In short, these five participants’ experiences of their transitions reflected their being-in Australia with familiarity through their encounters with family members, local people and ways to follow social and workplace norms in Vietnam and Australia. With their familiarity of living and working in these two localities, they used their educational credentials in combination with relatives’ support, choices of accommodation and salaries to achieve their current lives. In this sense, these five participants experienced the ‘smoothness’ of their transitions through their entwinement with the world in intersecting professional, socio-economic and environmental, and familial domains across space and time. In terms of spatiality, they were not simply contained in Australia, but encountered confluences of place-based norms, transnational relationships and support, as well as macro-level conditions and structures. They also experienced multiple temporalities when their current relation was shaped by their past involvement in the multiple spatial linkages and future expectations of their lives.
6.2 Encountering interrelated constraints and possibilities in transitions

While the participants mentioned above mobilised the social recognition of their degrees, which were used together with other attributes and things, and interactions with others to enter Australian labour market directly and stabilise their family lives, other participants encountered constraints and possibilities in different pathways.

6.2.1 Being-not-at-home and experiences of interrelated constraints

Some participants faced several interrelated constraints emerged from their embeddedness in the world during the initial stage of relocation, which was largely caused by their being-not-at-home, making them encounter some sense of dislocation. I revealed that these participants were unfamiliar with workplace norms, ethnicity issues, and lack of social and professional relationships in Australia. For example, Quynh Thy, Tuong Vu, Ngoc Linh, Minh Thanh and Yen Xuan faced complex registration and licensing procedures as well as constraints posed from Australian employment practices requiring them to follow inflexible “routines” while leaving them with “too little freedom” (Tuong Vu’s words) in managing their public lives. I found similar experiences in other participants’ accounts expressing “routines” at work that involved monotonous working schedules, including repeated patterns of work and uses of tools over time. For example, with her two Master’s degrees in Finance and Accounting, Quynh Thy had worked as an accountant at an Australian food processing company and then an IT company. After having spent some years working for these two private companies, she felt bored with “working on balance sheets and invoices with numbers and numbers”. Tuong Vu found that his working schedules at one of Australia’s largest telephone companies had been so tight that he “could only hang out with friends during Christmas”, limiting his socialising with friends. He expected to change his job to one that could give him “more time with friends,” because he perceived that “fun from social relationships [enabled] fun at work and life”. Yen Xuan encountered some constraints posed from cumbersome registration procedures and “extra licences” to become a teacher at a secondary school in Australia. Having graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in TESOL in Vietnam, as well as a Master’s degree in Education with a major in Testing and Evaluation and a Bachelor of Economics degree in Australia, she found it difficult to apply for a teaching position in Australia, because she had possessed only experiences in teaching English in a non-English speaking country.

In addition, some of these participants experienced lack of familiarity with living among people of a different ethnicity. The ways they felt “isolated” at work (Van Minh’s experience) and “discriminated” (Thanh Huong’s word) in job applications made them face several difficulties:
I remember that I had applied for several positions, but maybe by looking at my Vietnamese names, they [potential employers] rejected my applications right away. I was very worried because I needed money to send my daughter to school. – Thanh Huong

While IT is always in demand, employers [in Australia] always look into your ethnicity. I mean they think that Vietnamese people like us can’t speak English well. – Van Minh

These participants’ experiences referred their perception of ethnicity to “stickiness” (Latham, 2002, p. 123) inherent to employment spaces where they were embedded. By being seen as “foreigners” (Xuan Hong’s word), they felt and anticipated (in Thanh Huong’s case with her use of the word “maybe”) that they were discriminated by their Asian names, English language competence and complexion, causing the ‘stickiness’ to their employment navigation. ‘Stickiness’ to obtaining professional employment has been well informed in studies on permanent and temporary skilled and two-step migrants’ integration in Australia (e.g. Biao, 2005 & 2007; Goldring & Landolt, 2011; Robertson, 2011a; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014; Velayutham, 2013). Some of these studies have revealed that two-step migrants waiting for the grant of citizenship may face precariousness of securing legal employment, because Australian employers tend to discriminate against their language competences, as well as lack of professional and social networks and familiarity with the professional milieu. Migrants tend to accept their precariousness as “lives in limbo” (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014, p. 221), but then look for strategies to deal with this constraint, such as doing part-time jobs with labour exploitation or accepting to wait “on the bench” at labour recruitment agents in host countries (Biao, 2005, p. 364).

Similarly, public media in Australia have also reported a number of cases in which migrants encounter perceived discrimination relating to their Asian appearance, language, and employment (e.g. ABC, 2014, January 8; The Sydney Morning Herald, 2014, April 6). For example, The Sydney Morning Herald (2014, April 6) reports that for migrants, “the worst things about Australia are the high taxes, cost of living, and the racism and discrimination.” In Australian context, some studies have noticed some difficulties that two-step migrants face in relation to employment, legal processes for their permanent residency, as well as emotional trauma that are caused by the intersecting influences of mobility restrictions imposed on their temporary status while awaiting citizenship and absence from their families in home countries (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). This also means that not all skilled migrants can experience a “true form of elite […] citizenship” (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014, p. 208), while these migrants are known as collectively contributing to nation-building in Australia (Jakubowicz & Monani, 2010, p. 22). As I show in this chapter and Chapter 7, the participants in this study did not highlight racism as one of the
challenges that they faced during relocation. Instead, they encountered some difficulties in employment, social positioning, and sense of belonging. By using Heidegger’s concept of being-at-home and not-at-home, I show that the ways these migrants experienced precariousness reflected their unfamiliarity with life and work in Australia, leading some of them to live their ‘lives in limbo’ (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014, p. 221).

The material in my study added that two-step and skilled migrants’ employment precariousness resulted from their feelings of being-not-at-home with their ethnicity among Australian people. Their unfamiliarity with this ‘norm’ was created by their lack of social and professional relationships with local people:

I had nobody in Australia to support me like other Australian people or migrants. I had to look for jobs by myself. Without references, I couldn’t get any good job. Actually, there were some kind of jobs [in a suburb] far from my place, but I didn’t have a car. If I had chosen to live near that workplace, I would have had to pay a higher rent. – Anh Ngo

I was alone in this country. I couldn’t get a job because I had nothing: no working experience, no car to go around, or no relationship with someone who could write a good reference letter. I felt like I was living in an island without anyone around, no family, no friend. – Thanh Binh

In addition, those participants who were married and had children encountered the ‘stickiness’ of workplace norms of discipline and routine, as well as perceived ‘ethnic discrimination’ causing constraints in their social and familial lives. For example, Ngoc Linh, Minh Thanh, and Thanh Huong were worried when they faced little likelihood of employment caused by ‘ethnic discrimination’ that would pose problems to their capacity to provide financial support for their children’s schooling. The other participants similarly expressed some interrelated constraints in their professional, social and familial domains by telling me how racial discrimination limited possibilities for them to get jobs with “decent incomes to support” their own families (Xuan Hong’s experience), while they had to “work really hard and sacrifice time [for work]” (Ngoc Linh’s words). Minh Thanh complained that as a salesperson, he had had to follow office hours, and been unable to “drive [his] children to school or take them home, play with them or even take care of the garden”. Instead, he had been concerned with “whether [he] was able to catch a train to work on time”. Ngoc Linh expressed worries about his family responsibilities if he had worked for a company. He stated, “Eight hours a day and five days a week could steal [his] time with [his] children and wife.” These tight working hours “made no sense at all” while he was trying to work
hard to maintain family happiness. Tuong Vu also found the pressures of working hours and sale orders limited his socialising with friends. Anh Ngoc and Thanh Binh were under pressure to send remittances to their parents in Vietnam, while they were “unable to find jobs right away after having PR granted” (Thanh Binh’s experience).

In short, these participants were immersed in intersecting social, professional and familial domains, in which constraints posed from their lack of familiarity with social and workplace practices impacted their family responsibilities and settlement. While they had studied and somehow felt at-home with life in Australia, their relocation as migrants made them feel uneasy with what they thought they had known and experienced. Through their engagements with others, they faced a multitude of times that seemed “strange and unfamiliar” (Cwerner, 2001, p. 19) with their exposure to Australian society, in which they had to learn how to deal with and adjust to new realities. Within their immersion in space, they encountered constraints that were largely caused by social structures that went beyond their reach. Facing the needs to feel at-home in the new society made them experience a complex range of feelings, from being sad and frustrated to bored, worried and even angry. Through the ambiguity of their relations to being-in Australia, they experienced temporalities not as a linear direction from ‘migrating’ and ‘adjusting’, but an ebb-and-flow process impacted by their entwinement with the world. The constraints posed from these migrants’ unfamiliarity with professional life in Australia led to constraints for their family settlement, disrupting the linear ‘learning-migrating-adjusting’ view on two-step migration.

6.2.2 Open-ended possibilities and opportunities in transitions

These participants’ feelings of being-not-at-home urged them to look for ways to feel at-home again. I revealed that they felt at-home with their interactions with local people in Australia, things and experiences they had encountered in the past, place-based norms, and social structures and conditions. However, some also faced further constraints emerging from their ambiguous relations to the world. In this section, I demonstrate how their familiarity and ambiguous relations to the world produced possibilities and further constraints for their relocation.

*Interactions with local people and co-nationals, and uses of equipment*

Several participants found possibilities open up in several ways for their employment and family settlement through their entwinement with intersecting social domains. For example, Quynh Thy decided to quit her job at the IT company and establish a clothes shop, because she did not want to be “dependent upon others”. She started to run her business through experiencing possibilities arising from her entwinement with the world in this way:
My Vietnamese friends here in Australia…. They are just young people like me. So, one day they advised me and my husband to do something for ourselves…. I spent a lot of money on inspecting the market, renting and fixing the shop, stocking, and so on. We need to be street-smart. The knowledge from my Australian education comes into play. What I’ve studied before is Australia-oriented, so I can use it in my business. But it’s not enough. When I run my business, I learn a lot from social communication with people. – Quynh Thy

Her communication with Vietnamese friends and local people in Australia enabled her to care about how pursue “a new life with freedom” by “working for [herself]”. To do this, she used her savings in combination with the knowledge she obtained in her Australian education and knowledge of the business environment shaped by her interactions with people in Australia. Quynh Thy also used her experiences of past mobility as the wife of a former Vietnamese commercial attaché to manage her employment relocation to Australia:

I am lucky because I have lived overseas with my husband for so many years in…more than four or five countries and visited more than 25 countries. We know exactly what we can and have to do in a foreign country. We are both street-smart. We are confident to deal with customers of different nationalities. We know their cultures as well, and what outfits they can wear suitably. We have had contact with many kinds of people, from extremely rich to poor people, from high-ranking officials to street vendors, and from the West to the East. I think all of these built a good start for us to run this business. – Quynh Thy

Her past contact with various people from many regions in the world became useful for her to approach and retain customers, as well as settle down her life in Australia quite smoothly in terms of both employment and personal life. In this sense, her Australian qualifications were used in relation to not only the mobilisation of her finance, but also knowledge and skills obtained through her past mobility.

Van Minh also experienced a possibility for employment opened up from his social exchanges with former lecturers whom he asked for advice and reference letters for jobs. He used the academic rapport in combination with his Master’s degree in IT to successful apply for an IT position at an Australian university. Although Xuan Hong did not face “many stressful moments” in seeking employment, she found it “urgent to earn money” after arrival, so that she could maintain her family life. She used her relationship with locals, particularly her Australian husband, to increase the likelihood of getting the job as an administrator at an Australian university:
Looking for a good job here is difficult if you don’t know much about the system. You can get to know about it if you know some local people. My husband is an academic at this university. He knows quite well about this university. Without his introduction to this job, I might have worked somewhere else. – Xuan Hong

In quite a similar vein, after having received his PR visa granted from Vietnam, Minh Thanh worked as a salesperson with his Master in Commerce in Australia for a year. Feeling frustrated with the workplace norm of discipline and routine, he expected to get a job that could “free” him from the tight working hours, so that he could take care of his children better. Some of his Australian colleagues had advised him to look for jobs in aviation that could offer him “more flexible time”. His social conversations with these local people enabled him to realise the potential of using his English language proficiency and previous working experiences to apply for a funded place in an aviation-training program. After graduation, he was assigned to work as a technician for an Australian airlines company, allowing him “more time to spend with [his] children and take care of the garden”. The ways he switched his career through his embeddedness in the world with others and things showed how he cared about living his professional life in relation to his involvement in the familial aspect. In this sense, Xuan Hong, Van Minh and Minh Thanh extended their social relationships to Australian people who were familiar with the professional environment. Through their immersion in space, the notion of “local people” became relatively dependent on where and how these participants experienced their social relationships. Space, in this sense, became the “geographical stretching-out of social relations” (Massey, 1993, p. 60).

Some participants were able to confront employment precariousness by securing their family settlement through international marriages. For example, Xuan Hong experienced:

At that time, Binh [pseudonym for her son] went to school. He was quite young at that time. I was lonely. I needed to get a job quickly. I needed a mental and material shelter right away. He [her Australian partner] had a stable financial condition... [laughing]. More importantly, he loves me and has gone with me through my difficult time after my divorce. – Xuan Hong

Her decision for the second marriage was shaped by not only her personal expectation of happiness, but also consideration over her son’s future and husband’s economic condition that supported her search for employment. In some sense, her marriage was for “convenience” (Piper, 2003, p. 462)

Similarly, Anh Ngoc and Thanh Binh decided to marry Australians because of their needs to obtain ‘shelter’ for their everyday lives, social integration and employment. In the conversation with me, Anh Ngoc described the ‘shelter’ as material support in terms of accommodation, daily expenses
and ‘mental support’ as her husband’s love to relieve her loneliness and sense of ‘betrayal’ to the Vietnamese Government. She further commented that her marriage also enabled her to “enter Australian society” through her access to “the stability in [her] life” to socialise with friends in Australia “without being looked down”. Anh Ngoc’s engagement with local people also enabled her to find a part-time job, which was supportive to her daily expenses and ability to send remittances to her natal family in Vietnam. She experienced this possibility in relation to the ‘shelter’ from her marriage:

*My husband is a good man. Very good man! During the first year after marriage, he gave me money to spend every day. I could go out to look for jobs, but was not successful. So, I often spent my time strolling around in a Vietnamese community for fun. This is why I made friends with some Vietnamese people here and was able to look for jobs around.* – Anh Ngoc

These Vietnamese friends suggested her do some ‘easy’ jobs that were suitable for women, such as folding paper flowers for sale at a newsagent in a Vietnamese community. She accepted this job while waiting for the result of an application for an administration position at a secondary school:

*When I was young, my mom taught me to do this [folding paper flowers]. At that time, I thought it was my hobby only. Then, I realised that it could help me make some money, a hundred bucks a week, enough money for food and some money I could save to send my parents.* – Anh Ngoc

Her engagement with the world across Australia and Vietnam, and from the past to present influenced the ways she cared about how to live her migrant life in relation to her parents in Vietnam. As mentioned in Section 5.3, her decision to migrate was formed as an economic pursuit. This expectation was maintained through her encounter with Australian labour market, which did not value her Master’s degrees in Public Relations and International Business Management, because her English language competence was “so weak that some employers thought [she] should study English again”. However, her interactions with Vietnamese people in Australia enabled her to confront the constraints of the perceived ‘ethnic discrimination’ and “poor English language ability”. This part-time job also allowed her to practise her filial piety to her parents through her remittances.

In quite a similar vein, after doing several part-time jobs, Thanh Binh felt “unstable with [his] life without having a place to live or a family to have dinner with”. He married a Vietnamese Australian woman, who was 10 years older than he, as a way to “settle down” his life. He was calculative with
his marriage decision by anticipating that this marriage would provide him stabilities in terms of ownership of her business, accommodation, living facilities and personal happiness:

_She owned a migration and travel service company here [a Vietnamese community]. She’s had almost everything, a house, a car and everything. To be honest, I wanted to have a family. I was lonely in Australia, so establishing a family in Australia was what I wanted at that time._

– Thanh Binh

These three participants’ international marriages showed that during relocation, they desired to be grounded in place for settlement. Yet, the ability to be emplaced was challenged by their involvement in the intersecting social and familial structures that they could not avoid or take separate responses to each of these. However, how Yen Xuan experienced the need to be emplaced was slightly different from the other participants. Her participation in her transnational business as an “astronaut” enabled her to live in “multi-local residence” (Ho, 2002, p. 145). She considered Facebook, mobile phones and Vietnam Airlines (Vietnam’s national air carrier) as “indispensable accessories in [her] life”. She used communications technology and air transportation as means to connect the multiple locations of her residence to achieve both professional and familial responsibilities. Despite her involvement in transnational spaces across borders, she felt it important to be grounded because of the inseparability between work and family life.

The ways some participants were embedded in the world across space also opened up possibilities for self-employment. For example, Ngoc Linh and Yen Xuan mobilised financial sources for their entrepreneurship in Australia by asking their parents in Vietnam for loans. Before migration, Ngoc Linh had spent five years studying music at a Vietnamese university. After facing some constraints of discipline and routine at his former workplace in Australia, he realised that self-employment would allow him to “pay more proper care to the children’s schooling and upbringing”. With his passion and background in music, he asked his parents and in-law parents in Vietnam for loans to establish two music-teaching centres in a Vietnamese community in Australia. The loans he used for the operation of the music centres were used in combination with his previous Vietnamese degree in music, and Vietnamese linguistic and cultural understandings:

_I found that many Vietnamese parents here want to have Vietnamese teachers teach their children music. With our parents’ loans, we opened these centres. I know what Vietnamese parents want for their children’s education. I can speak Vietnamese, and I am Vietnamese. Vietnamese parents here want to contact Vietnamese people because it’s easier for their communication._ – Ngoc Linh
His being-in-the-world with others and things enabled him to use his music knowledge together with the loans from his relatives, the location of his residence in Australia, Vietnamese ethnicity in terms of language and socio-cultural understanding and social interactions.

Similarly, Yen Xuan experienced an opening of possibilities that helped her establish her own transnational business through her interactions with others and things across space and time.

*Relationships with people in Vietnam are important for the establishment and operation of our business. We know both Australian and Vietnamese import and export laws. My husband [a Vietnamese skilled migrant who used to be a lecturer in law at an Australian university] deals with the legal documents for the business, and I deal with the production in Vietnam and sales in Australia.* – Yen Xuan

Her interactions with her parents and local people in Vietnam opened up the opportunity to run a transnational business in toy production. Through her familiarity with Vietnam and Australia in terms of socio-cultural and legal understandings, she was able to use cheap labour and materials for production in Vietnam, and opened a representative office and a shop in Australia.

*Familiarity with social norms*

Some participants’ uses of equipment and interactions with others were informed by socio-political and cultural norms that influenced their relocation. For example, Tuong Vu mobilised his parents’ investment to establish a mobile phone shop in Australia, which allowed him to “stay away from everyday boring patterns of work” at his former company, and “own something that [could] lead to stability in life”. His expectation of a stable life was influenced by the social stereotype of men’s successes, which his parents adopted:

*My parents were concerned. They said that men should have a career at the age of 30 and own a house at 40. They wanted me to have a stable life, so they sent me money to establish this phone shop…. Doing business can earn you a good income. The good income can earn you stability. The stability will earn you a life, buy a house, and get married. This stability can make them happy. Of course, they can tell it to their friends with pride [laughing].* – Tuong Vu

He followed this cultural norm through his interactions with his parents across space, and also informed by the transformation of his parents’ of social status through his mobility. As noted by Dall’Alba (2009, p. 39) on historicity that transforms us over time through entwinement with the world, the meaning of Tuong Vu’s parents’ support for his mobility was transformed through his
relocation. While their expectations of “pride” had been initially shaped by the social norm of international mobility (see Section 5.2), their financial support for his business in Australia was enacted through their practice of the stereotype of men’s successes. In this vein, not only was Tuong Vu’s relocation influenced by his parents, and the social practice of social status in his home community that were relatively immobile and rooted, but it also influenced the rootedness of these people in terms of reproducing social status across borders.

Thanh Huong’s interactions with her sister living in Australia were informed by the cultural practice of kinship that enabled her to achieve a “shelter” during relocation, and positively influenced the ways she entered the labour market:

My sister picked me up from my stressful moments. At that time, I shared a room with her family here [in Australia]. She cooked food for us [her and her daughter]. She helped me with everything from women’s tiny things to big things like renting this house and buying the car for me. Then, I could feel secured to go out to look for jobs. – Thanh Huong

With her sister’s material and emotional support, she was able to “feel secured”, relieve her sorrow from her previous unsuccessful marriage and “go out to look for jobs”. After the conversation with me, she also added that she felt thankful for her sister’s help with accommodation, because she was able to send her daughter to a school nearby and maintain a “stable family life”. Her sister’s support was explainable because in Vietnamese culture, siblings are often bonded to each other through mental and physical support throughout their lives. The practice of this cultural norm opened up a possibility for her to achieve professional and familial relocation, in which both of these aspects were experienced as closely interrelated.

Following a cultural norm of career stability also mattered to the ways Minh Thanh experienced his relocation. He acknowledged that stability in family life in terms of accommodation could “lead to stability in employment” that could make him feel “proud of being a caring father” in terms of social positioning. By believing in and following this cultural practice, he asked his parents in Vietnam to send him family inheritance to buy a house in Australia to pursue “stability”:

Our ancestors said, “Stability in accommodation can lead to stability in employment.” I believe that when my little family has a stable place to live, I can feel stable with my job. When I feel stable with my career, I can earn a good income and take good care of my family. Then, I feel proud of being a caring father. – Minh Thanh
In this sense, the stability in his professional practice was interrelated to his family settlement in terms of “stability in accommodation” through his uses of the inheritance. The way he followed the cultural norm of stability showed how he was entwined with intersecting employment, social and familial domains.

In general, these participants’ experiences of employment reflected various ways of their being-in-the-world with familiarity and the needs to feel familiar with the strangeness arising from their being-in Australia. Their interactions with their relatives in Vietnam, local people in Australia, and followed socio-cultural and political norms that had once constrained their mobilities, enabled them to settle their public and family lives. Their entwinement with others and things in the world made them experience various feelings and emotions that influenced their relocation. Their emotions were inherent to material realities that shaped their desires to be grounded in space. However, they were not fixed in space, but immersed in (transnational) spaces where their emplaced negotiations of responsibilities and obligations with their belonging produced some contradictory feelings of being between decisiveness and rationality, and underachievement and incompleteness.

**Familiarity with social structures and conditions**

Similar to the other participants who experienced possibilities for intergenerational benefits through their being-in Australia (see Section 6.1), these participants’ entwinement with the world spanned across national borders, enabling them to experience securities in several intersecting domains for them and their children’s future. For example, most married participants acknowledged that their relocation to Australia could give their children high-quality education for future employment, mobility and personal benefits:

*Education here is of high quality, very useful for my daughter! Students have access to the world’s knowledge such as libraries and the internet. I hope with the world’s knowledge she can obtain, she can find work easily anywhere in the future.* – Yen Xuan

*My children can absorb the civilisation of this society which will benefit their future when they can travel here and there in the world. English is their first language here, and they will be able to communicate if they go everywhere in the world.* – Ngoc Linh

*The knowledge you gain with your Australian degrees is internationally recognised. If my daughter has an Australian degree, she will be able to work for any company in the world easily. Then, she will have a better life.* – Thanh Huong
These examples showed that the “high quality” of Australian education was perceived as offering their children “world’s knowledge”, Western social ideologies (which Ngoc Linh termed as “civilisation”), English language ability and international recognition of Australian qualifications. These qualities were perceived as global commodities and representatives of cosmopolitan memberships that were expected to contribute to their children’s future employability, international mobilities and a “better life”.

Some expressed their concerns with insecurity in Vietnam because of the current political and military disputes between Vietnam and China over the South China Sea:

*The conflict between Vietnam and China has been going on for centuries, right? A war may happen tomorrow. Who knows? I think living in Australia is more secured. My daughters’ future can be secured, and they can study, work and have a good life.* – Yen Xuan

*I would feel insecure if I let my children grow up in Vietnam. A war with China may explode at any time. I want them to be safe in Australia, so that they can go to school, get a job, and establish their own families later.* – Ngoc Linh

Many participants also compared social and environmental issues between Vietnam and Australia that influenced their and their children’s educational and professional lives. For example, Ngoc Linh and Tran Minh mentioned the clean environment in Australia as a benefit for their health and children’s growth in contrast to the polluted environment in Vietnam. Ngoc Linh also mentioned some insecurities in Vietnam in forms of robberies, pickpocketing, murders and neighbours’ quarrels that made him feel so “tired and afraid” that affected his work and life. He told me that once, after he had been chased by a robber at midnight, he was “scared” of going to perform gigs at clubs in his hometown in Vietnam. Then, he had to quit this job, even though he loved doing it, and it could earn him “some money to pay for university tuition fees”. Similarly, other participants used adjectives describing worries such as “scary”, “afraid” or “dangerous” to mention social evils that they and their children might face and affect their employment and personal lives if living in Vietnam. In contrast, social welfare and healthcare systems in Australia were believed to secure their personal and professional lives, as well as children’s future education and health. For example, when Anh Ngoc decided to apply for PR, she did not realise that Australia might offer her better healthcare and social welfare services than Vietnam. After she gave birth to the first baby, she realised that her migration entailed more meanings than her previous economic expectations. Her

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14 The territorial dispute between Vietnam and China over the South China Sea has been happening since the late 19th century, and it has been escalating during the time when this research was carried out.
interactions with Australian healthcare and welfare systems enabled her to reveal that her relocation might benefit not only herself and her children’s educational and personal development, but also husband, who did not have to “take a day off work” to take care of her when she was sick.

These securities were perceived and experienced through their dwelling across space and time, in which they interacted with the international political regimes and those who were close to them such as their children, as well as things and places such as places to live, schools for their children to study and other essential items for everyday life. Their perceptions and experiences of these intergenerational securities showed that the formation of their “migrant selfhood” (Conradson & Mckay, 2007, p. 169) was negotiated through their relational engagements with others, rather than an abstract construction of nationhood as simply manifest in their Australian citizenship. The embodiment of their citizenship was encountered through their engagements with others and things across multiple spaces and times.

*Ambiguous relations with social norms*

Some participants experienced ambiguous relations to the world, which opened up possibilities and created constraints for their relocation. For example, the ways Yen Xuan followed the socio-political norm of bribery in Vietnam for her transnational business showed how she experienced ambiguous relation to this norm. In the past, she had encountered bribery practices as one of the constraints for her professional practice (see Section 5.1.1). However, she then realised a possibility of using the other side of this practice to facilitate her transnational business:

*To be honest, I spend a lot of money on obtaining permissions for export. I have to go through the Department of Planning and Investment and then the Department of Commerce [in Vietnam]. Lucky me, because my parents know a friend, whose son is working as the head of a division in the Department of Planning and Investment. You know what I do, right? Going to the back doors of a bunch of people that I never know under the guidance of this man! — Yen Xuan*

In this vein, her employment practices were experienced through her ambiguous relation to the socio-political practices of bribery. Through this ambiguity, she experienced the ambivalence of time when her experiences of bribery in the past enabled her to deal with paperwork issues in Vietnam in the present. In a Heideggerian perspective, she encountered her “being-alongside-within-the-world” in Australia with her knowledge and experiences of this norm as “already-in-the-world” in Vietnam, which shaped her projection into the future as “being-ahead-of-herself” through
the transnational business (Heidegger, 1962, p. 236). In this sense, she was immersed in the world across space and time.

Although Anh Ngoc and Thanh Binh felt at-home with life in Australia, they felt uneasy with some place-based cultural norms in Vietnam that they were following and had once felt familiar with. For example, Anh Ngoc mentioned that the “shelter” from her marriage enabled her to send some money for her mother to treat uterus cancer and buy a house in another city, so that they could “avoid the punishment from the [local] government” because of her violation of the scholarship conditions in the past. Her parents’ relocation to the new place also helped them avoid social judgment as “parents of a cheater to the [Vietnamese] Government”. By expecting to overcome her natal family’ economic difficulties and help her parents “keep face” in the new place, she used her husband’s financial support to send money and computers for her brothers to open a computer shop in Vietnam. However, her remittances and assistance for her natal family’s economic improvement were found ineffective:

They [her brothers] were suddenly given 20 computers. That means their lives were a lot better than before, but they were lazy. The shop was run for two years. Then the computers didn’t work well, but they didn’t know how to fix [them]. They asked me for more money. How can I have it? Then, they think that I am selfish and mean, but they never know that I have to save every single cent! I do different jobs, from folding paper flowers to seeking jobs at many schools. – Anh Ngoc

Anh Ngoc’s attempt to fulfil the family responsibilities in Vietnam was enhanced by her relocation shaped by an opening of possibilities for employment and marriage, providing some material opportunities which made her “sending dollars show feeling” (Mckay, 2007, p. 175) as a “sacrificial sister” (Yeoh et al., 2013, p. 441). Her relocation was affected by her negotiation of her obligations to keep sending remittances, family connections and belonging, with structural and legal obligations posed from the Vietnamese Government. In some sense, she was juggling between her belonging to the two localities, experiencing some dislocation through her negotiation of desires to being anchored in Australia for economic reasons with intimacies at home.

Thanh Binh’s remittances helped his parents pay the debt for his former international education journey, buy a new house and open a café for his sister, increasing family solidarity across borders. However, while his remittances were found useful for his natal family’s poverty reduction, he appeared shy when telling me that he sometimes had to use his wife’s savings for the remittances.
He had some arguments with his wife, who complained about his “over-expenditure” for his natal family. He felt:

*What a shame for a man like me, who is the manager of a company! I use a woman’s money! She is always right, but I am also right in doing what I have to do for my parents!* – Thanh Binh

He experienced the conflict in his marital family in relation to his natal family in Vietnam, professional practice as the “manager of a company”, and social values that made him feel shameful of his “transnational act of recognition” (Yeoh *et al.*, 2013, p. 441) as a filial son. Anh Ngoc and Thanh Binh’s experiences in sending remittances illustrated how their “acts of recognition” were informed by the cultural norms of filial piety and kinship support to fulfil familial responsibilities and obtain social positioning for their natal families in Vietnam. Thanh Binh’s act of generating remittances acquired from his employment and wife’s savings increased his natal family consolidation but created conflicts in his marital family. Yet, Anh Ngoc’s case showed that material giving disrupt family solidarity. Their acts of sending remittances carried material and symbolic meanings of cultural practices across spaces, which made them occasionally feel not-at-home with the ways they sustained their family relationships. In this sense, their experiences showed how they were embedded in Vietnam’s talent training program and Australia’s talent attraction schemes through which they had to negotiate their social relations and interactions with those in the community, their parents and things such as remittances and necessities for everyday life. Their embeddedness in the world was filled with emotions that connected their experiences in employment aspects for economic pursuit to familial and social positioning.

**6.3 Summary: Relocation through entwinement with the world**

In this chapter, I demonstrated various ways in which the participants’ relocation experiences were formed through their entwinement with the world, which shaped the relationality of their mobilities. With their familiarity with their present being-in Australia and past being-in Vietnam, some participants experienced direct entry to the labour market by using their qualifications in combination with other things such as academic publications, professional relationships, linguistic capital and knowledge of local people’s daily routines and practices. However, other participants experienced different pathways to the labour market, as they encountered interrelated constraints arising from their feelings of being-not-at-home with their being-in Australia. For example, some participants faced challenges in following professional norms requiring discipline and routine that affected their family responsibilities. Others confronted the influences of the lack of social
relationships that made them feel ‘discriminated’ against and always facing employment precariousness. These constraints produced other interrelated constraints for their involvement in other aspects.

Their interactions with others and things with some sense of familiarity opened up possibilities for them to enact strategies to set up businesses, get employment through social and ethnic networks, take vocational courses and do part-time jobs to deal with employment precariousness. Their uses of equipment and interactions with others were informed by social norms that constrained and opened up further possibilities for their relocation. These participants’ interactions with others and things influenced the ways they experienced employment in relation to other aspects of their lives. Some participants’ interactions with others, such as their life partners and children, mattered to their choices of types of jobs, locations of work, types of accommodation, and decisions for marriage and plans for family lives. Other participants’ international marriages offered them some security in their personal lives, which could make them feel confident in social integration and responding to their previous violation of national scholarship conditions. In this sense, these migrants were entwined with not only family, but also socio-political aspects that crossed national borders. Their entwinement with the world produced diverse feelings and emotions with particular effects on their relocation. Some were optimistic and happy, whereas others felt hopeless and lost in the present. In some sense, their emotions reflected the embodiment of their cognitive thinking and rationality about the needs to have their lives stabilised in place. Although most of them were able to stabilise their lives in Australia, their ambiguous relations to the world tended to show some confusion and tensions arising from their struggles to go outside usual obligations and responsibilities.

These participants’ entwinement with the world spanned across national borders, enabling them to experience tensions and securities in intersecting public, familial and personal domains in the present and future. Through their immersion in space, they encountered “strange and unfamiliar times” (Cwerner, 2001, p. 19) with their adjustment to Australia. The needs to feel at-home encouraged some of them to experience “asynchronous times” (p. 23) when their past influenced their future plans, whereas the present seemed to lead them nowhere. In this sense, their entwinement with the world across space and time showed that they were not contained in space in fixed time. Instead, their dwelling-mobility across Australia and Vietnam through their past encounter that shaped their current lives mattered to their relocation experiences, making places as “moments of encounter” (Conradson & Latham, 2007, p. 231) with various effects on their subjectivities in mobilities.
These two-step migrants formed their subjectivities of transnational mobilities through their desires to stabilise and anchor their lives within place, and experiences of ruptures to stability emerging from their embeddedness in intersecting social domains. Their mobilities were not rootless and free-floating within and under global and national demands for talent. Rather, their mobilities were negotiated through constraints and possibilities that occurred from their everyday encounters with those whom they often encountered and those with whom they were not in direct contact, as well as material things that they encountered in various aspects of their lives. In some sense, these migrants’ mobilities were derived from “multiple connections to others, things and events whether these were geographically close or distant, and located in the present or past” (Conradson & Mckay, 2007, p. 167), producing diverse emotions as “outcomes” of their emplaced encounters (Conradson & Latham, 2007, p. 231). Emotions were found relational to these migrants’ ways to sustain their mobilities through their care about pursuing material realities in relation to others, and their personal desires to be grounded in places. Those people who influenced these two-step migrants’ (re)subjectivities of mobilities were also connected to particular places with their own histories and circumstances, thus representing constellations of “social, material and natural” (Conradson & Mckay, 2007, p. 168) meanings of these migrants’ being-in Australia. In this sense, their embeddedness in multiple localities and temporalities enabled them to form their hybrid senses of selves, maintain their mobilities and enact multiple forms of ongoing emplacement.
Chapter 7.  Aspiring for work and life

As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, transnational mobilities are shaped through migrants’ relational interactions across space and time expressed as stretched out social relations. In Chapter 5, I showed how decisions to migrate are shaped through constraints and possibilities emerging from their being-in-the-world. Chapter 6 presented findings relating to their relocation to Australia, focusing on their employment experiences and family transitions. Their entwinement with the world of others and things opened up possibilities and constraints – some of their migration expectations could be achieved, while others could not. In this chapter, I similarly examine the participants’ aspirations for the future with a particular focus on ‘dwelling mobility’.

The participants’ accounts suggested that their multiple spatial and temporal linkages were experienced as simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, releasing a range of emotions from preoccupation with present concerns about everyday livelihood challenges to anxiety and fear about the prospects of not meeting their filial and familial responsibilities. To present their ‘dwelling mobility’ for the future, I looked into how they experienced their interactions with others and things across space and time, some of which constrained or opened up possibilities for their plans. In the conversations with them, I used the conversation question guide (see the Appendix) that prompted them to refer to what they expected to do in “the next few years”. They talked about specific plans for ‘the next few years’ as well as longer-term aspirations. While these time frames – short and longer-term – may suggest some sense of fragmentation in terms of temporality, I demonstrate that their aspirations for the future were partly shaped by both their past and present.

7.1 (Un)familiarity amidst entwinement with the world

In this section, I argue that migrants’ mobilities are reflective of their entwinement with the world, in which their feelings of being ‘at-home’ and ‘not-at-home’ created constraints and possibilities for their negotiation of their future dwelling-mobility. By analysing the participants’ accounts, I found that there were quite a number of goals which they anticipated for the near future, such as participating in transnational projects, undertaking philanthropic activities, remaining in their current jobs, changing jobs, returning to Vietnam for temporary work, holidays and marriage. While some participants planned to do several things, others had one or two intentions in the next few years. Their goals overlapped with and supported aspects of their being, while offering contradictions and complexities to other aspects. In this section, I elaborate some of these examples by looking closely at their interactions with others and things.
7.1.1 Being familiar with transnational worlds

Some participants’ embeddedness in space and time through their familiarity with interacting with people and things allowed them to envision the possibilities of conducting transnational activities between Australia and Vietnam, and remaining in their jobs for family stability in Australia. While these participants’ familiarity with living and working in Vietnam and Australia allowed them to feel at-home with their participation in transnational spaces, they experienced some ambiguous relations to the world through their mobilities, as I discuss below.

Participating in transnational activities

I found that some participants’ familiarity with living and working in Australia and Vietnam enabled them to feel at-home with their future transnational activities. Their feelings of being at-home influenced their negotiations of ‘routes’ and ‘roots’ in their future dwelling-mobility. For example, through his previous contact with scientists in Australia and Vietnam, as well as professionals and students in Vietnam, Tran Minh wanted to continue to conduct future research collaboration in Vietnam:

Vietnam is my home country... I know local people as well. In order to do this, I will have to get some funding, probably from the Australian Research Council or an industry producing animal feed who wants to expand their market to Vietnam. At present, I have some relationships with my Australian colleagues, and local people who are very nice to me... I also have access to research facilities such as lab equipment here thanks to my current position at this university [in Australia]. Going back to Vietnam for a research project will be fun as well, because this is the place where I was born and grew up. A good chance to be back with my parents and old friends. – Tran Minh

He perceived Vietnam as his root with his existing social and professional relationships with local people, friends and families. Yet, at the same time, he acknowledged that his current rapport with Australian colleagues and with educational and industry organisations, which was also influential for future research collaborations, enabled him to feel attached to Australia. His future participation in the transnational spaces appeared as a route that he planned to follow in negotiating the two roots. His ambiguous relation to these two localities as roots made him feel belonging to these two localities. In our conversations, he also mentioned that he had re-obtained the Vietnamese passport in order to “ease” his future movements between Australia and Vietnam. In this sense, his future mobility was facilitated by the migration regimes of Australia and Vietnam which have allowed dual citizenship since April 2002 and July 2009, respectively (DIBP, 2015; MOJ, 2009). Tran
Minh’s Vietnamese citizenship and sense of belonging were reproduced within the intersection of social, familial and professional networks that enabled him to feel familiar with his belonging to more than one state.

Similarly, Quynh Hoa, a former lecturer at a public university in Vietnam, was participating in joint student supervision with former colleagues, enabled by various modes of equipment such as social media to share intellectual resources and consolidate transnational ties:

> Some of my former colleagues have emailed and asked me on Facebook if I am happy to co-supervise some students’ graduation theses and send interesting articles and books to the library of the faculty. Of course, I am more than happy to do this. Our country is poor, and not everyone has a condition to study abroad like us. I can ask some of my former friends, who are now working at some Australian universities, to send me books and journal articles. I can use these to work with my colleagues and students in Vietnam. – Quynh Hoa

Her plans for future work emerged through her entwinement with the educational and social worlds she was part of. The future was both enabled by and consolidated further by her feelings of being at-home with things and people. In this sense, places were encountered as having material infrastructure that she used and sourced out for her negotiation of nationalism and intimacy as an expression of belonging to the two societies.

For other participants, their familiarity unfolded differently and opened different options. For example, Yen Xuan aspired to continue her transnational business in toy production between Australia and Vietnam, because she found that her relationships with local people in Vietnam could earn her “some money”:

> My relationships with people in Vietnam are helpful in conducting my work and earning me some money. This is what I need for my family and secure a good life for us... Another thing is that my parents are there. They know a lot of people and things we should do. I can listen to their advice. Another thing is that Vietnam is the place where I know what I should do... A good thing about my business is that wood and paint are quite cheap in Vietnam, good for my business. – Yen Xuan

The income she expected to earn to “secure a good life” for her family would be obtained through the exercise of her existing social and familial relationships and cheap materials for toy production that mattered to the formation of her instrumental goal. She also emphasised the importance of familiarity with social practices in Vietnam that opened up a possibility for her business. In this
sense, her interactions with family members and local people, as well as materials for production influenced the way she formed her short-term goal. In addition, to “feel more convenient to travel back and forth between Australia and Vietnam”, Yen Xuan used her Vietnamese passport for her transnational business and family reunion:

*My Vietnamese passport can make me feel like being there with my work and family right away. Doing business needs to be fast, and it can get me there with my family in the right time when necessary.* – Yen Xuan

Her Australian passport guaranteed her legal residency in Australia, which opened up possibilities for the ways she resettled her family and career, as well as intergenerational securities, as discussed in Chapter 6. Her Vietnamese passport was used to enhance her emotional ties with her family while facilitating her transnational business in Vietnam. Her dual passports enabled her to experience interconnections between work and other aspects, facilitating her negotiation of her root through the route of the transnational business. She seemed to be attached to the two places with her family members and material opportunities, feeling at-home with her “feet in [the] two societies” (Chaney, 1979, p. 209). Her interactions with the world, ranging from intra-national apparatus of mobility management via the passports, to professional and familial aspects, enabled her to be simultaneously mobile and emplaced.

Similar to Yen Xuan, Tuong Vu planned to manage his parents’ cosmetics business in Vietnam in the near future, combining it with his current business responsibilities in Australia. Through constant discussions with his parents over the phone, he decided to prepare for his frequent visits to Vietnam in order to “learn how to do business” in his home community:

*My parents are getting old, and my sister will get married. Their business has been prospering. It has given us enough money to live this comfortable life. We don’t want to stop it.* – Tuong Vu

His interactions with his parents, and his access to things such as legal documents and the businesses, allowed him to consider the prospect of participating in an arranged marriage, a culturally accepted practice in Vietnam. Tuong Vu’s parents had arranged his future marriage with “a beautiful girl with good personality”. By asking him to marry that woman, they wanted to use Tuong Vu’s future marriage to keep him as a “Vietnamese son”. After dating this woman for some time, he was happy and determined to marry her, and understood his ongoing mobility between Vietnam and Australia as important to fulfil family responsibilities in both locales:
We [he and his fiancée] think that after wedding, I will sponsor her to come here to get Australian citizenship. She will take care of the phone shop, and I will fly back and forth to take care of the business there and my family here. – Tuong Vu

Through his embeddedness in familial, professional and socio-political settings, Tuong Vu anticipated tangible, calculable possibilities for his future business. To enable his frequent travel between Australia and Vietnam, he intended to re-apply for the Vietnamese passport, so that he would not “have to fill in visa application forms”. He also emphasised that he had fallen in love with the girl whom his parents selected as his future bride, and wanted to show his “honest love” by using the Vietnamese passport as “evidence” that he intended to visit her regularly. As such, Tuong Vu’s use of the Vietnamese passport brought together his commercial activities with family responsibilities. The manifestation of his citizenships was not necessarily tied to residential status, but it carried “moral connotations of responsibility, respectability, legitimacy and quality” of his future transnational life (Yeoh & Huang, 1999, p. 1163). While Tran Minh and Yen Xuan used their Vietnamese passports for the ease of future transnational movements, Tuong Vu’s use of his Vietnamese passport was further manifest through his attempt to follow “social values and familial obligations” (Lucas & Purkayastha, 2007, p. 243) towards the cultural practices of arranged marriages. His use of the Vietnamese passport encompassed the common and formal notion of citizenship, as defined by the laws and regulations in the sending and receiving nations, and “substantive or participatory aspects of citizenship, lived practices and identities that shape[d] and [were] shaped by norms and values in both places” (Preston, Kobayashi, & Man, 2006, p. 1636). In this sense, his plan for the future entrepreneurial work was shaped through his involvement in professional, legal and familial aspects with things, people and socio-political processes.

Transnational philanthropic activities

By using the examples of philanthropic activities among some participants, I further demonstrate that these participants’ entwinement with the world with familiarity enabled them to experience their future dwelling-mobility in both similar and different ways. Some participants were doing and expected to continue to do philanthropic activities for Vietnam as a way to “help this poor country” (Xuan Hong’s words), enabling them to feel belonging to Vietnam, and Vietnamese communities in Australia at the same time. Their current and future philanthropic activities were influenced through their interactions with Vietnamese Australian people who were running charity organisations for disadvantaged people in Vietnam. Their willingness to do the charity work was also enhanced by their sense of belonging to Vietnam as the place where their “umbilical cord was buried” (Mai
Hue’s expression) and their empathy with disadvantaged people. The following quotes illustrate some of their interactions with the local people and media that they interacted:

*I am a mother. I understand how terrible it is when children go to school when their stomachs are empty. After reading some online newspapers, I want to do something for these children in Vietnam by either transferring money to the bank accounts suggested in these newspapers or giving money to some charity organisations here.* – Xuan Hong

*I want to do some charity work for poor people in Vietnam, as I have done so far. There are some charity organisations run by some Vietnamese Australian people in this community. I give a hand with them, because I don’t want to be seen as an alien living near the Vietnamese community.* – Quynh Thy

While some participants’ expectations to do charity work were shaped through their interactions with people in Australia, Ngoc Dai and Quynh Hoa’s communication with their parents, former colleagues and friends in Vietnam influenced their aspirations to help poor people in their home communities:

*I phone home very often, and have frequent contact with my friends on Facebook. They tell me very touching stories about poor people and their uneducated children living in my village. I hope that I can provide intellectual support for these people by providing books or computers and showing them the ways to learn how to use computers as well. I need to contact some nice people or organisations who can fund my intended project.* – Ngoc Dai

*I often have contact with my [former] colleagues through Facebook and emails for our future co-supervision. They also mention that they want to collect money for poor students in high schools and orphans living in temples in Vietnam.* – Quynh Hoa

Ngoc Dai’s ‘hope’ to do this philanthropic work was informed by his interactions with those whom he knew, as well as potential benefactors whom he had not met yet. Quynh Hoa also referred the charity work she wanted to participate to the professional community where she had already had some professional relationships, and expected to conduct future transnational co-supervision.

These participants’ sense of belonging to Vietnam was shaped through their familiarity with their encounter with local people and ethnic philanthropic organisations in Australia, as well as the media. These future activities were also enhanced by their familiarity with Vietnam’s socio-economic conditions that caused difficulties in life for some sections of the population. They also negotiated their belonging to ethnic communities in Australia, so that they would not be judged as
“aliens”. In this sense, these participants’ plans to participate in transnational philanthropic activities were shaped through their dwelling across space with their current being at-home, and even the needs to feel ‘at-home’ with social practices in both societies. They were not anchored in a fixed place, but mobile across places with their feelings of being grounded in-betweenness. Although their accounts suggested that they were familiar with their being-in Australia and Vietnam, their negotiations of roots and routes seemed to show some sense of ambiguous belonging, which urged them to participate in the transnational spaces as a way to feel grounded and attached to places.

As such, not only did places contain material things and infrastructure, but they also included these migrants’ stretched-out social relations, which were developed and reproduced from their past engagements with others and things. Concurrently, these migrants did not encounter time as a linear trajectory from deciding to migrate for knowledge pursuit, then achieving their desires and now returning for emotional ties. Instead, they experienced their past as providing accessibility to necessary relationships and resources, so that their engagement with these people and things created possibilities in the present time for them to project into the future. Through their dwelling-mobility, their involvement in the transnational spaces was negotiated through the ways they managed their roots as the ‘umbilical cord’ in Vietnam and roots as family settlement in Australia through the routes of conducting these transnational activities. In this sense, their experiences of routes were intertwined with roots by their familiarity with living and working in both societies.

Remaining in the current jobs for family stability in Australia

Migrants are embedded in the world with familiarity in diverse ways, producing heterogeneous experiences of future dwelling-mobility. For example, several participants expressed their satisfaction with their current professional jobs which could earn them “enough money” (Quynh Thy’s words) to take care of their families. Minh Thanh emphasised the stability of his family settlement through the “decent” income and flexible working hours which allowed him to fulfil family responsibilities. These participants’ interactions with others and things also mattered in the way they reproduced social relations. For example, Ngoc Linh planned to use his income earned from the two music-teaching centres to buy a new car for his wife as a way to express his “gratitude” for her “sacrifice in giving [him] two beautiful daughters”. Xuan Hong’s uses of Facebook as equipment to connect with friends from overseas enabled her to think about planning a tour for her marital family to gather with their friends in combination with her husband’s presentation in an international conference in Europe in the following month. She stated that this trip would help them “re-warm” their marital relationship after several years of being “too busy
with work”. For the other participants, the stable incomes from their current jobs enabled them to plan to buy necessary items for their natal and marital families, as well as attempt to settle their living:

*My job is good right now. It gives me a chance to become a filial son with my parents. In the past, I spent a lot of their money, and it’s now time for me to return... I want to buy my mom [in Vietnam] a tour to Europe.* – Minh Thanh

*No complaint with my job so far! I will continue to do it. I want to save a bit more from my salary to buy some more electronic products for my parents in Vietnam, and probably we will, oh no, we’ve planned to have another baby.* – Thanh Binh

*I am planning to buy a small garden in their [his parents’] village in the near future... We will use our savings to buy them a piece of land, so that they can raise some fish, plant some trees and enjoy the fresh air there.* – Thai Duong

Their expectations to buy things for their parents in Vietnam were informed by their practices of the cultural norm of filial piety, which were enabled by the incomes they received from their work. Therefore, things such as incomes or products and land they expected to buy were not encountered in isolation. In contrast, they were planned to be used in relation to each other, the cultural norm, and these participants’ family relationships, making their professional and familial aspects interconnected. Their experiences of being embedded in these intersecting aspects with “daily, banal and ordinary” lives (Dunn, 2010, p. 3) made them feel at-home. Material giving and receiving which seemed to be instrumental to their aspirations for work and life were negotiated through these migrants’ desires to feel belonging to places as roots, and places as routes with which they could give and receive material support.

### 7.1.2 The ambiguity of familiarity and unfamiliarity

Anh Ngoc and Thanh Huong experienced ambiguous relations to their embeddedness in the world with familiarity and unfamiliarity that influenced their goals to change jobs in the next few years. They faced some economic constraints from their current limited incomes that influenced their ability to fulfil family responsibilities. Anh Ngoc’s position as an administrator at a secondary school in Australia offered her a “good living” for only herself, but “never enough” for her to “share [economic] difficulties” with her natal family in Vietnam. Acknowledging the role as the oldest sister who was living overseas, she had to send regular remittances to her parents and siblings. She
admitted that she sometimes overspent her salary and had to use her husband’s money. The way she looked forward to changing her job was shaped through her interactions with others and things:

*Whenever I see an email from my brothers or sister, I am so afraid. How much are they going to ask me to give? How am I going to give them money while my pocket is running empty?* – Anh Ngoc

Her ‘empty pocket’ and communication with her natal family placed her in a situation where she had to take a stand on following the cultural practice of filial piety. In some sense, she was not-at-home with her familial and professional life in Australia. In addition, she was also not-at-home with her transnational ties with her relatives in Vietnam and worries about her previous violation of the Vietnamese Government scholarship. She always felt “afraid” that her violation of the Vietnamese Government scholarship would affect her family in Vietnam. As a consequence, she tried to limit her phone or Facebook contact with her parents and siblings, because she believed that there could be “spies who [could] overhear” her conversations and identify where she was in Australia. Her experiences of being not-at-home in Vietnam, with which she had been familiar, made her feel dislocated, as her “mobility entail[ed] a cost” (Yeoh, 2005a, p. 412). Her subjectivity in transnational mobilities was re-formed from economic rationality to failure to acquire this pursuit, which went beyond her choice. However, she concurrently felt at-home with her life in Australia as a professional and legal citizen, which opened up possibilities for her to negotiate her familial and socio-political relations with those in Vietnam. In order to complete her family responsibilities by following the norm of filial piety, she planned to look for a job which could earn her “a bit extra money”, so that she could “feel happy when reading [her] siblings’ messages”:

*I have lived here for quite a long time and known some ways to go around. Probably, I need to prepare a good CV including some experiences I have with this current job. I know that Australia wants to employ people with working experiences.* – Anh Ngoc

Possibilities for new jobs could stem from her familiarity with living and working in Australia in terms of working experiences and social understandings of employment practices in Australia, which would enable her to face with the present constraint. Further, being constrained by the Vietnamese Government’s legal punishment for her ‘betrayal’ that she was too worried to go back for a visit, and informed by the cultural norm of kinship, she intended to sponsor her sister to visit her in Australia. She aimed to sponsor her sister’s visit to Australia for two purposes:

*Getting Lan [pseudonym for her sister] to come here is a way that I can be with my siblings. I will have an excuse for not sending remittances to my [natal] family for a longer time. I think*
getting her to come here is cheaper than sending them money regularly... She helped me a lot in the past, and I should now give her something back. So, instead of going back to Vietnam with worries, I should sponsor her to come here because I am now Australian. I can sponsor her if I have money to prove with the [Australian] Consulate General. So, I have to look for a better job with a better salary to prepare for this. – Anh Ngoc

Although she was not entirely calculative whether sponsoring her sister to Australia for a visit was less expensive than sending remittances, she felt confident with her legal status in Australia, which could produce some material values for her circumstances. Her Australian citizenship with legal meanings and place attachment was perceived as carrying symbolic and pragmatic meanings for her to compensate her feeling of underachievement as a “daughter living overseas”. In this vein, she was embedded in multi-spatial linkages, ranging from her natal family and political contexts in Vietnam, in which she encountered pressures from following the cultural norm of filial piety and legal constraints from her past violation of the scholarship, her marital family in Australia and Australian professional aspect. Through her entwinement with the world across space, she felt not-at-home, but at the same time, at-home with socio-political and professional practices. Her ambiguous relations to (transnational) spaces influenced her route in Australia by seeking better-paid employment and avoiding the legal punishment of the Vietnamese Government, and root as being a dutiful daughter which potentially influenced her sister’s mobility.

Similarly, Thanh Huong experienced her ambiguous relations to space, which posed constraints and possibilities for her future dwelling-mobility. She said that her current “humble” income affected her family responsibilities in Australia. Although she felt grateful for her sister’s assistance since her arrival, she felt “shameful” and “sad” for being dependent upon her sister’s kindness. She wanted to change her job when her daughter completed her secondary school in the next two years:

*I want to buy a house. I have been attracted to a house in a very good location: near a bus stop to the high school my daughter will go to, and near grocery shops. I will have to change my job... I need to make more money to buy that house, or one like that, so that I won’t have to depend on my sister anymore. I think it’s time for me to help her back with something easy to do such as driving her daughter to school and even something bigger such as giving her some money to take a holiday in Europe or the US.* – Thanh Huong

Her expectation for job change showed her response to her feeling of being not-at-home with her current life shaped by her interactions with accommodation, social infrastructure and salary, as well as her daughter and sister. However, through her embeddedness in the professional and social
aspects, she perceived that her familiarity with living and working in Australia in terms of obtaining working experiences and understandings of social and professional “rules and conditions” enabled her to feel “a bit confident” to look for new jobs. When I met her several weeks after our conversation in the Vietnamese community where she lived nearby, she was happy to show her recent resume and asked me to comment on it. She said that her colleagues introduced her to some jobs in another suburb, and her sister advised her to look for Vietnamese-ethnicity-related jobs, as she was bilingual. The resume she had prepared showed a typical example of how she was familiar with social and professional practices in Australia through her immersion in the world with these things and people, making her face some confusions in feelings of being incomplete – but achieving.

In short, the ways Anh Ngoc and Thanh Huong formed their short-term goals for work and life illuminated how they were entwined with others and things in the world through their ambiguous relations to space, producing contradictory and confusing emotions and affections. While Anh Ngoc felt not-at-home with her transnational practices in familial and socio-political aspects, she concurrently was not-at-home with her transnational practices by the constraints posed from her ‘perceived’ lack of familiarity, constraining her route in Australia. However, she also found possibilities opened up from her interactions with local people and things, as well as political and legal processes in Australia in terms of the citizenship. Similarly, while Thanh Huong perceived lack of familiarity with living and working in Australia constrained the capacity of earning, her familiarity with her interactions with colleagues and relatives, understandings of how to write a resume for job applications, and use her ethnic linguistic capital, opened up possibilities for her to expect to change her job. Their aspirations to achieve these short-term goals reflected the influences of their past on their present lives and into the future in relation to others, things and their practices of public norms within these interactions. Through their being-in-the-world with the ambiguity of familiarity and unfamiliarity, they encountered mixed feelings, from underachievement and incompleteness to confidence and stability.

7.2 Experiencing constraints and open-ended possibilities across space and time

In this section, I further demonstrate how the participants experienced their dwelling-mobility across space and time, which produced various outcomes for their long-term aspirations. In the conversations with me, the participants tended to express longer-term aspirations for work and life that went beyond just “the next few years”. While most of them did not state the exact periods to achieve these aspirations, others mentioned their plans for a long-term period until retirement. I also found that some of these participants’ short-term goals overlapped with some of their long-term
goals for work and life. I revealed that their aspirations for long-term future were shaped through their entwinement with the world through spatial and temporal linkages, as well as ambiguous relations to space and time.

7.2.1 Embeddedness in the world through spatial and temporal linkages

Most participants’ aspirations for work were related to their involvement in social and familial aspects. Some expected to remain residing in Australia for jobs, and family settlement and intergenerational securities (see also Chapter 6). Others aspired to do transnational business activities between Vietnam and Australia while attempting to stabilise their families in Australia for intergenerational securities. Their experiences in forming these aspirations showed their embeddedness in and across space with familiarity, in which they encountered influences of their past and current lives on their plans. I demonstrate the linkages between spatiality and temporality as being reflected through these participants’ interactions with others and things.

Residing in Australia for employment and family stability

Here, I argue that some participants’ future dwelling-mobility was shaped through their immersion in space from the past to present, which enabled to form aspirations of residing in Australia for career and family stability. Space was experienced through their interactions with others and things with familiarity, in which temporality affected their future aspirations. For example, Tran Minh hoped to continue to work at an Australian university as a researcher or lecturer after he completed his postdoctoral fellowship:

*I love doing research, and this fellowship has given me a great opportunity to establish a solid background for me to enter the academic environment in Australia. I have had good professional relationships with Australian and international scientists and experts. These networks can create opportunities for research co-operation and employment as well... I also need to tell you that I have lived here for a long time, and my family is secured. My children were born here. They go to school here. I have my family here.* – Tran Minh

He mentioned several linkages of spatiality and temporality in this quote. First, he was at-home with professional practices in Australia, including his current relationships with colleagues and previous research projects from his academic position. The professional domain was encountered in relation to his familiarity with social processes in Australia, which enabled him to ‘secure’ his family. In encountering the linkages of professional and social domains, he was also embedded in educational aspect for his children. He experienced these spatial connections across time: from his
past interactions with colleagues and the educational institution where he was working, to his current job as well as education for his children in Australia. His immersion in these spatial and temporal linkages opened up the possibility of feeling at-home in the future that shaped his intention to reside in Australia.

Similarly, other participants expressed that they wanted to continue their current jobs “until retirement, if possible” (Minh Thanh’s expectation), and get promotion with higher salaries so that their families could be “stabilised” and their children’s education could be “guaranteed” (Thai Duong and Ngoc Linh’s words). Most of them stated that the stability in their work would affect how they could fulfil their family responsibilities, such as paying school tuition fees for their children, buying living essentials for their family members in Australia, and sending remittances to their families in Vietnam. These participants’ aspirations of residing in Australia and developing their careers for family stability showed that they were already embedded in various intersecting social domains with familiarity.

Migrants’ ambiguous relations to space across time through at-home-ness also mattered to their future dwelling. For example, while Anh Ngoc and Thanh Huong had experienced ambiguous relations to their at-home-ness in forming their short-term goals (see Section 7.1.2), they expressed some sense of familiarity with their engagement with the world across space. For example, Anh Ngoc wanted to look for jobs that could earn her “good salaries”, so that she would be able to maintain her marital family life and send remittances to her natal family in Vietnam:

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I \text{ hope to find jobs with good salaries. I think Australia needs those who have qualifications and working experiences, and language proficiency too. I have these, I think. My everyday conversations with my [Australian] husband have improved my English. And I can also speak Vietnamese. – Anh Ngoc}
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And similarly:

\[
I \text{ have two Master’s degrees and can speak both Vietnamese and English. They are quite enough for job applications, right? Ah, I also have some working experiences. I think I will ask some of my Australian friends here to introduce me some jobs if they know. It’s important that you need to have qualifications and know what people need you to have and be able to do as well. – Thanh Huong}
\]

Their encounter with local people and colleagues through familiarity with Australian professional environments over time, as well as uses of educational qualifications in combination with work
experience and bilingual capital, enabled them to feel confident in forming their aspirations. In this sense, through their immersion in the world in intersecting domains over time, their dwelling-mobility was affected by their ambiguous relations to space, which opened up possibilities for future employment.

In addition, some participants’ future dwelling-mobility was shaped through their embeddedness in space over time, which created constraints and opened up possibilities in various ways. For example, Thanh Huong found it necessary to keep changing jobs in the far future, so that she could get a salary as she expected:

*Inflation is increasing in Australia. That’s why even in the future, I will have to look for jobs that can earn me a good salary to raise my daughter and give her a good education.* – Thanh Huong

Her experience indicated that she was immersed with familiarity in not only the familial domain, but also Australia’s socio-economy. Through her familiarity with living in Australia, she anticipated that she could face constraints posed by Australia’s socio-economic instability, and the ability to change jobs to sustain her daughter’s education.

Constraints also emerged in other respects of life through migrants’ interactions with others and things in intersecting aspects. For example, as an adventurous person, Van Minh found it boring to do the same patterns of work by “hitting the keyboard [of the computer at the office]”, and meet “same people all the time”. This anticipated constraint enabled him to think about changing his job to a more interesting one with “opportunities to go here and there”. Anh Ngoc felt pressured with her “responsibility” as a caring and dutiful sister for sending remittances regularly, at least until when her siblings got married, so that her parents would feel pleased. Her past created some sense of uncertainty for her future aspirations.

However, possibilities also opened up from their entwinement with the world, and shaped their aspirations for work and life. For example, existing social relationships enabled some participants to look for jobs that would meet their expectations for family settlement. Thanh Huong’s relationships with her sister, local people in the Vietnamese community in Australia and current colleagues helped her feel confident that she would be able to secure a job with a high salary. Van Minh was influenced by what Minh Thanh, his friend in Australia, often described himself as an aviation technician who could “travel here and there and buy tickets on sale all the time”. He aspired to do some jobs that would allow him “freedom to move” as a strategy to confront the constraints posed from the “boring work” he was doing. He was thinking of using his Master’s degree and vocational
certificates in IT to apply for employment in aviation or travel agencies where he could find “opportunities to fly around the world, rather than sitting at a desk for eight hours a day”. Therefore, his aspiration for a new job with “freedom” was formed through possibilities arising from his existing social relationship with a co-national, uses of his educational qualifications, as well as his personality. Through his interactions with others and uses of things, which were informed by his familiarity with social relationships and employment requirements, he was able to shift his short-term expectation of remaining in his job to career change in the future.

In general, although these participants’ interactions with others and things were not the same, the similarity among their experiences was that they did not experience as space a “vacuum”, but rather “a web of cross-cutting social relations” which were formed at “multiple scales from the local to the global” (Secor, 2002, p. 7).

*Residing in Australia and doing transnational business*

Above, I pointed out that migrants’ familiarity and ambiguous relations to space mattered to their aspirations to reside in Australia. Here, I continue to illustrate how migrants’ embeddedness in the world across space over time influenced their future aspirations for becoming transnational business migrants. For example, Yen Xuan expected to continue her transnational business in the future to earn some “stability” for her life:

> When my daughter grows up, finishes university, and gets a job, my husband and I will return to Vietnam to run our business in terms of production. My daughter will be responsible for sales in Australia... I have had contact with so many people in Vietnam, and these relationships can help us develop our business. – Yen Xuan

Her intention to continue her current work was shaped by her existing social relationships with local people in Vietnam and current business. While she intended to remain her career, the meaning she ascribed to this intention was slightly different from her short-term goal in that she wanted to have a “stable career for the stability” of her life, rather than “earn some money” to “secure a good life” in her short-term goal (see Section 7.1.1). In this vein, her interactions with the world with familiarity across time transformed her experience of forming her aspirations for work and life.

Yen Xuan’s aspiration to reside in Australia and continue her transnational business in Vietnam in the future was an expression of her care about living her life with others and things under influences of the social structure intersecting with familial duties. In particular, Yen Xuan’s expectation of fulfilling her role as an Asian “proper mother” (Ho, 2006, p. 506) was extended from her past
encounter with the lack of political patronage in Vietnam (which could be compensated by bribery and social relationships) to her current transnational business supported by Vietnam’s economic privatization context. The way she expected her daughter to be responsible for their current business in the future showed a continuum of her past and present experiences of familiarity with living and working in Vietnam and Australia. Yen Xuan did not encounter her mobility to Australia and temporarily back to Vietnam as a “staged chronology” (Shubin, 2015, p. 350) with orderly events. Instead, she experienced the continuum of her past onto her present and future life, which she shared with her daughter and others in the intersection of the broader socio-economic environment and familial domain. In this sense, time was not confined within a particular period in her life, but stretched across this continuum and involved her care about living her life with others.

In addition, she experienced the temporal continuum in interconnection with divergent spaces: from her past professional milieu in Vietnam to the current transnational business field in both societies, and back to the socio-political scape in Vietnam as a temporary returning migrant. In her embeddedness across space and time, she cared about living her migrant life with her daughter, customers in Australia, material suppliers in Vietnam, as well as bribery practices, production materials, tax systems in both countries, and so on. Her involvement in the world made her experiences of the interconnection of time and space an intersubjective domain in her mobility.

The ways these migrants expected to participate in transnational spaces through their past and current interactions with others and things influenced the forms and meanings of their future aspirations. For example, while Tuong Vu had initially wanted to stop his current business in Australia in order to manage his parents’ business in Vietnam in the short term (see Section 7.1.1), he aspired to gain stability for his family in Australia by leading a mobile life:

*Far, far in the future, I just want to have a stable business and a happy family. What I mean is I will work in Vietnam for this business [the cosmetics business in Vietnam], expand it to a transnational level so that my wife and I can manage more easily. But I will spend more time in Australia with my family, because of my children. But that also means I will have to travel a lot, right? Maybe it will not be easy.* – Tuong Vu

His dwelling-mobility was negotiated through his interactions with his parents, fiancée and, potentially, future children through his current immersion in transnational spaces including the intersecting professional and familial domains. In some sense, he encountered his embeddedness in these two localities as roots that were experienced as complementary to his route, as he expected to be involved in his marital family in Australia and business in Vietnam. His negotiations of these
two roots produced some contradictory feelings of being decisive (with his specific plans for managing his future business in Vietnam and family in Australia) and indecisive (with his hesitation in carrying out this plan as expressed in “maybe, it will not be easy”).

Yen Xuan and Tuong Vu’s immersion in the world with others and things enabled them to feel at-home with the business and social environments in both societies. The farness or nearness of Vietnam and Australia was not experienced in terms of mere physical distance, but spatiality was encountered through their practical involvement with things and others. Spaces in relation to their involvement in Australian and Vietnamese societies, in this sense, carried “referential functionality” (Arisaka, 1996, p. 38) for them to fulfil family responsibilities and pursue stabilities in terms of work and life. Their future mobilities were envisioned as entailing “back and forth” moves between Australia and Vietnam with an entwinement of professional, familial and residential purposes that spanned across two localities (Robertson, 2008, p. 239). The ways they formed their aspirations also indicated some temporal features in the sense that their embeddedness in the world with others and things across space transformed who they were and wanted to be. For example, Yen Xuan had initially decided to migrate to Australia as an escape from lack of political patronage and personal upheavals compounded by traditional practices of arranged marriage. However, after relocating to Australia for some years, she decided to temporarily return and settle her career in Vietnam in the far future. She found that her familiarity with living and working in Vietnam, such as her encounter with political patronage and bribery, enabled her to experience opening of possibilities for her transnational business and career stability.

7.2.2 Ambiguous relations to space and time

I found that despite envisioning immediate and future aspirations, some participants expressed uncertainty about the feasibility of their plans in the far future. When I further asked them to elaborate their intentions for a long-term future, they used some common phrases such as “I don’t know”, “I am not sure”, and “No idea” to express their uncertainty. I understand that it may be easy and interesting to talk about our past and present lives, rather than the future, which we have not experienced or seen yet. Therefore, instead of moving my inquiry to another issue, I wanted to know what they were unsure of in their long-term future, and if there were any influences that constrained the ways they formed their aspirations. Therefore, I examined whether their entwinement with the world affected their uncertainty in shaping their future dwelling-mobility and, if so, in what ways.
I revealed that migrants’ personality affected their uncertainty. For example, Mai Hue said that she was “not quite sure if everything [would] happen” as she planned, because she was a “passive and shy person”. In the past, she had been cared by her parents who had always provided her necessary items for life and given advice for her study, migration and life. Similarly, Van Minh expressed some doubt about his future aspiration to work in aviation or travel aspects, because he acknowledged that he was not a “strategic thinker”.

I also found that the influences from the participants’ ambiguous relations to space and time created constraints in forming and carrying out their long-term aspirations for dwelling-mobility. For example, while expecting to do business in Vietnam, Tuong Vu was uncertain with socio-economic changes in Vietnam that might create chaos and risks. His anticipation was formed through his unfamiliarity with Vietnam as the place with which he thought he was familiar:

We never know what is going to happen in Vietnam. Today everything is good, but tomorrow the opposite may happen. Look at my parents’ ebbs and flows so far, and I can’t tell you that I will do business there. I am not 100 per cent sure! – Tuong Vu

Research in political economics has shown that uncertainties and risks often incur in Vietnam’s current economy in terms of ineffective governance such as bureaucratic paperwork procedures, fragility and vulnerability with the world’s economic changes leading to constant inflation, corruption and consequences emerging from modernisation and industrialisation (see e.g. Gainsborough, 2003; Goujon, 2006; Nguyen, Le, & Freeman, 2006). Similarly, Tuong Vu’s uncertainty arose from his observations of his parents’ practices in doing business in Vietnam’s transitional economy with unpredictability, and possibly chaos and risk. In the conversation, he stated that while his parents’ current customers liked to buy foreign products, the growth of cosmetics producers in Vietnam would challenge his future business. His parents predicted that the number of customers who wanted to buy imported cosmetics would be reduced, as domestic products would dominate the market in the near future. However, selling domestic cosmetics would earn them less financial profits than foreign ones. In this sense, he was immersed in not only the business environment and family in his home community, but also the broader socio-economic context. His embeddedness across space was negotiated through the ways he confronted the “stickiness” (Latham, 2002, p. 123) of the place producing some sense of unpredictability and uncertainty.

Similar to Tuong Vu, Yen Xuan expressed her concern with changeable prices of wood, a production material for her transnational business, which could negatively influence her production
and sales. For her, the world’s unstable economy and “oil prices [could] go up, affecting US dollars”, could affect Vietnam’s economy, and this effect might go beyond her control and expectation. She was not entirely sure if her transnational business could be run in the current manner, or she would have to relocate her business to somewhere else or in another country. In this sense, her uncertainty about her future business prospect was influenced by her envision and imagination of global economic forces and Vietnam’s socio-economy. Her experience also showed that her familiarity with space and time was ambiguous. In the past, she felt unfamiliar with Vietnam because of the socio-political norm of political patronage, which was later encountered as enabling her transnational business when she was relocated to Australia. However, over time, she encountered some sense of unfamiliarity with her embeddedness in this place. Her ambiguous relations to space involved ambiguous relations to time that was developed through her immersion in both Australia and Vietnam, extending from the work and family domains to global and national contexts.

In this sense, Tuong Vu and Yen Xuan’s transnational mobilities were influenced by the state-sponsored changes to the governance of mobility. Their unfamiliarity with the socio-political structures in Vietnam, which they had encountered as challenges for social and professional advancement, was experienced as space for them to re-invent aspirations for intergenerational security and social status. In this sense, the ways these participants cared about living their lives with their children and parents enabled them to experience ambiguous relations to the economic and political governance, reproducing social relationships and seizing business opportunities.

In addition, these migrants’ embeddedness in transnational spaces by following different place-based norms also made them feel not-at-home instead of being at-home as in the past. For example, Van Minh stated that his plan for marriage might “disrupt” what he aspired to do in the future:

What if I get married one day? Then, I will have my family, children and more responsibilities. I will have to earn money, buy a house, think about food for my children, rather than flying and travelling all the time. – Van Minh

When I asked him if he planned to get married soon, he said:

I am not sure, but I am 31 now. Too old for a man to get married. Our ancestor said that men get married at the age of 30, and buy a house at 40, right? – Van Minh

His (quite uncertain) plan for marriage, which was informed by a Vietnamese cultural practice of marriage and expectation of men’s successes, influenced his uncertainty with his aspiration for
long-term future work. I also found that migrants’ embeddedness in space with social norms also made them feel not-at-home with the place with which they had felt at-home. For example, when Anh Ngoc wanted to look for a new job with a higher salary, she was constrained by her family responsibilities as a mother by the gender norm that portrayed men as breadwinners, whereas women were associated with mothering roles in the family:

*If I change my job to get more money, I will be busier. How can I take care of my two daughters? My husband is not going to do that because he often says that he is a breadwinner for the family, but in fact, I am too.* – Anh Ngoc

Similarly, Ngoc Linh’s experiences showed that his lack of familiarity with following public norms in Australia affected his perception about the accomplishment of his future work and life:

*“When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” But I am not a Roman yet! I am not sure if I really know what to do in Australia.* – Ngoc Linh

Among the participants, Ngoc Linh seemed to face fewer constraints in initiating and maintaining his mobilities because of his familiarity with living, studying and working in both Australia and Vietnam, which enabled him to find an opening of possibilities. However, his immersion in Australia over time challenged his familiarity. His uncertainty about not knowing “what to do in Australia” showed that to some extent, he was not entirely assimilated to Australia. In this sense, his route of relocating to Australia and aspiring to be settled in this country did not mean that he could navigate his root as a finished journey, but instead, he was still negotiating his dwelling-mobility through his ambiguous relations to space and time with some sense of incompleteness.

### 7.3 Summary: Forming aspirations through the entwinement with the world

This chapter examined the participants’ aspirations for work and life, more specifically, as their future dwelling-mobility. By looking into the time indicators in their accounts, I found that they held several immediate goals, such as plans to undertake transnational activities such as various cross border teaching, learning and research collaborations and various philanthropic activities. For at least one person, marriage and starting a family formed an important immediate concern. The participants were also engaged in and planned to further their entrepreneurial activities along with plans to support career development either by remaining in current positions, or leaving to seek other opportunities. Desires for economic betterment were always linked to their commitment to their families. Material giving for an important aspect of demonstrating love, care and affection for family members – both in Vietnam and in Australia. For some participants, their desires to meet
their filial and financial responsibilities to their families invoked anxiety and fear for their own security and future aspirations.

I also found that these participants’ experienced some uncertainty with the feasibility of their future aspirations. They recognised constraints arising from their interactions with others and things. These constraints manifested through the influences of public norms, through their lack of familiarity with social practices and the wider socio-economic structures. As Yeoh (2005a) notes, not all migrants are free-floating “harbingers of cosmopolitan ideals” or can be disentangled from “discursive or material webs spun by the state, capital or powerful others” (p. 409). The participants’ stories showed that they were always enmeshed in not only global and national agendas of attracting talent (e.g. Tran Minh’s transnational research collaboration project), which opened up possibilities for their dwelling-mobility, but also constant negotiations with their family issues. Global flows did not randomly ‘pull’ or ‘push’ these migrants, who were neither entirely footloose as portrayed in Ong’s (1993 & 1999) work on elite migrants, nor completely “anchored in places” as described by Vertovec (1999, p. 445). These migrants’ being-in-the-world created the ambiguity of their mobile lives, the complexity and messiness which defy orderly linear patterns as indicated in some government commissioned reports and studies on human capital flows (see Section 2.1).

Overall, the participants’ everyday lives depicted a transnational texture – their incorporation in Australia and aspirations for the future – became “interrelated” through their embeddedness in space and time (Kivisto, 2003, p. 19). They were not embedded not in a single space. Neither was time experienced as linear time with one event happening first, and other separate events following suit. The participants were embedded in multiple spatial and temporal linkages or networks, feeling both at-home and not-at-home with their interactions with others and things over time. Their aspirations showed their embeddedness in the world from the past to present and into the future, which enabled them to enact and plan their transnational mobilities as a “continuous, rather than completed” sojourn (Ley & Kobayashi, 2005, p. 111). Their embeddedness in the world with their (ambiguous) relations to space and time produced heterogeneous experiences of future dwelling-mobility. These participants experienced some ambiguous understandings of their temporal being-in Australia in that the future seemed uncertain, while the present led them to diverse arrays of life concerns and the past was not experienced as a single indicator for their embeddedness in the world (see also Cwerner, 2001).

In these migrants’ embeddedness across space and time, their routes and roots were negotiated through confusions and ambiguities that produce diverse emotions for their dwelling in Australia.
Some encountered tensions arising from the needs to feel attached to the homeland, but confront the obligations to send remittances that exceeded their abilities. Others felt uncertain about their future intentions for work because of their suspicion of socio-economic vulnerability affected by global economic conditions. These people never felt stable and anchored to places because of their sense of belonging to “here and there” (Piper, 2009, p. 98), but they always had the needs to be grounded in place as being at-home. They had to negotiate their obligations, responsibilities and care with others within and across borders, which were continued from the past and reformed in the present and future. Put another way, their experiences of routes and roots were influenced by and reflected through their being-in-the-world, in which space and time was encountered through the work and life projects they expected to carry out, producing the needs to feel emplaced through mobilities.

This chapter completes the analysis. As with Chapters 5 and 6, I used Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world to highlight the significance of adopting a relational understanding of space and time. Such a conceptual approach has helped to broaden understandings of migrant lives and to overcome simplistic understandings of talent flows and brain drain. I showed how migrant lives cannot be understood simply as rational choices and decisions undertaken to serve careers, or seek economic betterment. Two-step migrants, like the participants in this study, are constantly developing their lives and existence, which are always in the making. Their emotions discussed in this and previous chapters highlight the complexity of their being and the existential openness of life’s options. The potentialities of their lives defies policy prescriptions that seek to evaluate and portray migrants as objects of human capital.
Chapter 8. Contributions of the Study

This study is contextualised around national agendas for human capital development which, in recent times, have broadened to incorporate a rapidly globalising discourse – the ‘race for talent’. Such agendas can construct transnational mobilities as disembodied ‘brain flows’. In contrast, as this study has shown, two-step migrants constantly negotiate their mobilities with their relational involvement in the world. Through interpretative conversations with the participants, I unpacked the relationality of transnational mobilities through exploring their entwinement with the world. Using Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world, I highlighted the complex spatial and temporal worlds that constitute their experiences of transnational mobilities.

In this final chapter, I begin by reviewing the study and its focus of inquiry. I then discuss the theoretical and methodological contributions of this study to education-related migration research in terms of understanding the relationality of two-step migrants’ experiences in negotiating transnational mobilities. The final section includes my recommendations for some future research directions that can be conducted by using Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world to explore the fluidities and complexities of migration.

8.1 Overview of the study

Global knowledge economy discourses have recently broadened to claims about a global race for talent, and have provided the discursive foundation for national competitive advantage. In addition to improving and retaining human capital through expansion and internationalising of domestic higher education, some countries have sought out talent through skilled immigration schemes that are linked to international education, creating a two-step migration phenomenon. Completion of international education allows international students to experience not only possibilities for education-related migration in host countries, but also gives them options for later return through the practice of diaspora strategies in home countries.

Within this global discourse of human capital development, Vietnam has encouraged and, in some cases, financed a large outflow of students to study in Western countries, including Australia, currently the second largest study destination. The Vietnamese Government has anticipated and encouraged their return, as well as attracted diaspora contributions for human capacity building. The ambivalent ‘go and return’ approach of human capital management of the Vietnamese Government shows their attempts to participate in the global labour market and improve their political image as an ‘open’ and progressive communist country. At the same time, aiming to diversify its traditional economy reliant on mineral and agricultural production, Australia has
exported international education and attempted to retain foreign graduates as permanent residents. Since 1999, Australia has allowed immigration following international education to address the ageing workforce and increase national advantage for the development of the knowledge economy. In this vein, the transnational mobilities of two-step migrants from Vietnam to Australia are situated within national socio-economic and political agendas that are also linked to wider global forces and processes.

In economic and political discourses, transnational mobilities of two-step migration manifest as disembodied flows, imagined in homogeneous terms wherein people can be governed by states as human capital. Two-step migrants are often considered as policy objects whose mobilities are directed by state governance, their migration portrayed as a linear relationship between ‘learning’ and ‘migrating’. However, education-related migrants have their own desires and are enmeshed in circumstances that influence their subjectivities in transnational mobilities. They participate in everyday activities through their engagement with other people and things in various social domains, ranging from global, national and communal to familial and personal contexts, all of which shape the negotiation of their mobilities. Their embeddedness in the world enables them to enact specific activities in relation to other activities to pursue expectations of their mobilities.

By building on the findings of existing transnationalism studies, this study contributes to deepening understanding of the embodiment of transnational mobilities through relational aspects of migrants’ lives across space and time. Their engagement with the world influences their aspirations and experiences of mobilities prior to migration, during relocating and in planning for the future. This study inquires into the question of how two-step migrants negotiate their mobilities within the global discourse of human capital, and national socio-economic and political structures that both enable and impede international movements, by adopting their own positions in these processes.

By using Heidegger’s phenomenology and, in particular, the concept of being-in-the-world, I examined how two-step migrants from Vietnam in Australia negotiated transnational mobilities through their decisions to migrate, relocation experiences, aspirations for work and life and uses of transnational ties. These areas of inquiry were investigated through subsidiary concepts of being-in-the-world, including equipment, being with others and the care-structure. The analysis of the research material shows the relationality of transnational mobilities, that is, these mobilities are encountered in and through migrants’ interactions with others and things in intersecting social domains, which create constraints and open up possibilities for their lives.
The relationality between space and time, between scales and spaces, between and past, present and future that is constitutive of transnational mobilities is expressed in the participants’ entwinement with the world. Being-in-the-world challenges the political view on transnational mobilities as disembodied and homogenous cross border ‘brain flows’ for economic instrumentality. Instead, two-step migrants negotiate both possibilities and constraints posed from their entwinement with global, national and local structures and conditions, which are experienced in relation to their own situations. Migrants’ being-in-the-world across space and time makes transnational mobilities complex and heterogeneous in trajectories and outcomes. Through the re-conceptualisation of transnational mobilities as an expression of two-step migrants’ being-in-the-world, I make an original contribution to education-related research. This contribution includes several interrelated theoretical and methodological contributions, as outlined below.

8.2 Being-in-the-world: A lens to capture the relationality of transnational mobilities

The concept of being-in-the-world allowed me to add further understandings on the relationality of two-step migrants’ transnational mobilities through their interrelated engagements with others and things, producing multiple effects on their negotiations of mobilities.

Interrelated effects of market socialism on transnational mobilities

This thesis offers an empirical account of negotiated transnational mobilities by students-turned-migrants from Vietnam, a socialist transitional economy, a context less well known for its education related skilled migration. Relatedly, by offering an analysis of key policy statements by the VCP, I highlight the ambivalent role of the state in its management of education-related migration. The policy readings reveal that the social and economic transformations undertaken in the name of Doi Moi to modernize Vietnam’s economy encouraged foreign remittances and engagements with its diaspora as well as development of human resources. The state thus opens up opportunities for mobility through international education and skilled migration. However, eligibility for mobility depends on political patronage that limits and excludes those without political connections to the VCP. While expatriates are framed as patriots, and contributors to development, the non-return of students and skilled migrants is associated with ‘brain drain’. In this ambivalent discourse of mobility, students and skilled migrants are depicted as objects of the state governance with prescribed freedom and control.

In this section, I summarize the primary influences of ‘changing’ Vietnam with its ambivalent governance of mobility opening possibilities for the transnational mobilities of the study’s participants. Socio-political and economic transformations after 1986 in Vietnam were found
influential to the participants’ decisions to migrate, relocation, and aspirations for future their work and lives. In particular, to confront the economic crisis after the Vietnam War, as well as aiming to industrialize and modernize the country by 2020, the Vietnamese Government considered skilled human capital as the most important priority for development. To do this, the government changed economic governance from a state-control mode before 1986 to embracing a type of market-socialism sustained by multilateralism. Vietnam’s foreign relations have been extended beyond the communist bloc to Western capitalist countries, once seen as ‘enemies’ (see also Section 1.2.1). International education and return migration have been seen to contribute to national development, and thus encouraged. At the same time, requirements and restrictions on mobilities have also been introduced to retain skilled human resources.

Students are allowed to study in Australia through sponsorship and self-funding to meet human resource development targets. The accounts of the study’s participants show that while the government expects skilled and knowledgeable workers from international student mobility and skilled migration, students-turned-migrants have other plans. For example, in this study, some wanted to ‘escape’ from a system where political patronage determines professional practice, and from personal upheavals. Other participants expected to improve economic conditions and pursued further chances for professional development. Therefore, this finding challenges political views on the outflows of students and people with high skills to other countries, considering them as the cause of ‘brain drain’. Students-turned-migrants are human beings with their own complex circumstances, which are concurrently affected by the state governance in human resources. They are not merely “puppets” of the state (Findlay & Li, 1999, p. 53) whose mobilities are ‘pushed’ and ‘pulled’ by political ideologies. They may not want to reciprocate the government investment in their ‘brain power’, but seek individual pursuits. The state’s mobility governance structure presented itself as one of the many aspects that these migrants negotiated in relation to their own circumstances.

The participants’ intentions to temporarily return to Vietnam for recreation and business activities showed their ambiguous relations to the state’s socio-political and economic governance in the sense that they foresaw both opportunities and challenges. Economic opportunities have contributed to the emergence of the new ‘ambiguous middle class’ (King, 2008, p. 73) which was comprised of former professionals who had worked in the state sectors, but found entrepreneurial benefits brought by market socialism, could open up possibilities for their economic stability. Once their economic lives were secured, they aspired for social status to enhance their social positioning. For example, the parents of some participants embarked on entrepreneurship supported by political
patronage to initiate their children’s education-related mobilities. They mobilized financial
resources to acquire foreign citizenship which was seen as a means towards improved social status,
a mentality shaped by the historical boat refugee movements after the Vietnam War. Thus, these
participants’ mobilities were facilitated by Vietnam’s experiments with market socialism and
shaped by a shared community imagination associating migration with social status. In this sense,
migration decisions spanned across the scales of state, community, family, and individual.

Constraints posed from migrants’ interactions with the world at various scales also influenced and
initiated many migration journeys. For example, some encountered the lack of political patronage.
As professionals working in public sectors in Vietnam, others were disappointed with the low
wages, and confronted the difficulties in pursuing research and further learning, an expectation they
had after living and studying in Australia. Even those who were socio-economically advantaged
experienced a sense of economic insecurity arising from the intense economic competition and
corruption that made them reluctant to live permanently in Vietnam. The research participants both
followed and broke with socio-political and cultural norms, such as following the social practice of
bribery as a compensation for the lack of an ‘umbrella’, and breaking with the traditional practice of
marriage. Their being-in-the-world captures the ambiguity of their lives and aspirations which were
not congruent with the Vietnamese Government’s dictation of skilled human capital as public
assets.

*Interrelated effects in migrants’ being-in-the-world*

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, many studies focus on separate influences on transnational
mobilities by situating these mobilities in separate geographical localities in fixed points of time.
These studies also gesture to economic instrumentality as a motive for skilled and two-step
migration without probing how migrants’ involvement in other aspects of their lives influences
transnational mobilities. Migrants are often depicted as being driven by global and national regimes
arising from human capital logics with their focus on ‘economic’ attractions. By adopting largely an
economic rationale, these studies associate skilled migration with ‘brain drain’ and ‘brain gain’.
Transnational mobilities are subsequently disembodied as unidirectional brain flows from one
country to another country. Other studies have looked into migrants’ relocation, but without
exploring how migrants’ personal histories and decisions to migrate shape their mobilities. They
often examine migrants’ interactions with others and things as separate processes from their
entwining with the world, such as language use, employment performance, intermarriages and
residential management. In addition, these studies tend to explore migrants’ responses to separate
influences of their interactions with the world, impeding understandings of how transnational
Mobilities are embodied in and through migrants’ everyday lives. Some studies examine the relationality between employment skills and workplace experiences (e.g. Syed, 2008; Syed & Özbilgin, 2007), or migration trajectories of emigration, arrival, temporary movement and visitation (e.g. Dunn, 2005). However, these studies pay little attention to how skilled migrants’ skills and experiences are used in relation to other things and people through relational aspects of their lives. Due to a focus on separate influences, these studies often neglect how migrants’ immersion in the world influences their mobilities. They also neglect influences of migrants’ past on their current attempts to achieve their lives and form aspirations for the future. As such, skilled migration, and particularly two-step migration, is conceptualised in these studies as separate events in migrants’ lives, depicting transnational mobilities as a linear process from decisions to migrate to relocation.

In contrast, I found that two-step migrants encounter interrelated effects from their complex relations with people and things across spatial and temporal linkages on their transnational mobilities from the initiation of migration to relocation and into the future. Their interactions with the world include their engagement with global and national regimes of human capital, which manifests in their consumption of international education and subsequent skilled migration, in addition to everyday engagements with local processes in work environments, communities and families. Some participate in national human capital development projects through financial sponsorship or self-funding for international education from the home country, while concurrently following schemes for attracting desired skills in the host society. Yet, they also negotiate their participation in these global landscapes of talent through their engagement with their family members, colleagues, friends, administrative officers, as well as those with whom they are not in direct contact. Two-step migrants’ transnational mobilities are also shaped through their encounter with place-based norms and other things. Migrants do not encounter each domain separately from others, but are always embedded in these interrelated domains. Their embeddedness in the world in intersecting aspects of their lives creates constraints and possibilities for their mobilities. Furthermore, constraints and possibilities are usually encountered in relation to other constraints and possibilities, which produce further challenges or opportunities. In their interactions with the world in intersecting domains, two-step migrants use things in relation to other things to shape and sustain their mobilities, as well as form aspirations for work and life, as discussed below. Through their uses of things, they also encounter people in relation to other people and things to achieve the lives to which they aspire. It is these confluences arising from migrants’ embeddedness in the world produce heterogeneous experiences of transnational mobilities.
In examining two-step migrants’ entwinement with the world, this study highlights the interrelations of their interactions with others and things. As I mentioned in Section 2.2, while there are several studies focusing on migrants’ uses of things as tools to initiate and sustain their mobilities, they usually examine these tools in isolation. Such approaches, which perpetuate migrants as being responsive to social structures, consider migrants as subjects and things as objects. Migrants are described as either having or lacking absolute power in using things for their migration. In contrast, there are some studies exploring migrants’ interactions with things in relation to other people (see e.g. Baas, 2010; Biao, 2005 & 2007; Robertson, 2008; Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012). Some of these studies have also shown the influences of skilled and two-step migrants’ engagement with others on the embodiment of transnational mobilities whether through their engagements with family members, colleagues, co-nationals or people in authority. Some of these studies also point out the influences of skilled migrants’ engagement with public norms in different scales, such as the dowry practices in communal levels (Biao, 2005 & 2007), PR ‘fashions’ driven by national skills demands (Baas, 2010), gender impositions on females’ domestic roles in familial domains (Yeoh & Willis, 2005a), and diaspora strategies in home countries (Biao, 2011; Saxenian, 2002).

Skilled migrants’ interactions with others in multiple socio-political linkages enable them to formulate their subjectivity-making and negotiate power relations with others. These studies shed light on understanding how transnational mobilities are initiated, enhanced and constrained by influences of migrants’ encounter with things in relation to their involvement in a range of social domains, from educational to socio-political aspects across borders. The negotiation of transnational mobilities through migrants’ uses of things in relation to people influences power relations in their spatio-temporal existence. However, for the greater part, these studies are limited to examining one or two aspects of migrants’ lives, such as their familial or professional, political and social, or educational and professional aspects. Migrants’ participation in these intersecting domains, particularly in relation to global and national projects regarding skilled migration and diasporas, is either implicit or unattended, thus limiting understandings of the relationality of migrants’ embeddedness in the world.

While acknowledging that two-step migrants’ interactions with others and things in various scales and domains are influential to their mobilities, I postulate that these interactions are relational, as migrants are always entwined with the world. Migrants interact with things in relation to other things in intersecting professional, educational, socio-political and familial spheres, rather than
things in isolation. Some things are engaged at international and national levels such as passports and educational degrees, while others are encountered at familial levels such as receiving rewards for academic achievements. Migrants’ engagements with things in a range of domains reflect their spatio-temporal embeddedness in the world. In addition, their interactions with things are related to their encounter with other people across space and time, creating interrelated constraints and possibilities, as I present below. Some of migrants’ interactions with others and things are informed by public norms in intersecting social domains. For example, the socio-political norm of using political patronage as ‘umbrellas’ posed challenges for some study participants’ professional development, which was exacerbated by the cultural norm of social hierarchy that required respect for authority and obedience. Migrants’ negotiations of belonging, power relations and re-subjectification occur within the relationality between their uses of things and interactions with others. Migrants’ interactions with others and things show how they are entwined with the world in intersecting social domains, through which transnational mobilities are negotiated.

**Interrelated constraints and possibilities in intersecting social domains**

The analyses in my study add several contributions to the understandings of constraints and possibilities in transnational mobilities, which emerge from two-step migrants’ interactions with others and things. First, constraints and possibilities are interrelated and experienced in intersecting social domains across space, because migrants are never immersed in only one single aspect of their lives. For example, some migrants in this study experienced challenges in interacting with colleagues in professional environments in Vietnam, with these constraints intensified by personal upheavals in their families and lack of facilities for research and learning in the workplace. These people also encountered influences from their embeddedness in the national socio-political regime that valued political affiliation with the VCP. At the same time, they faced constraints in employment posed from their lack of familiarity with living and working in Australia, which affected their capacity to fulfil responsibilities for their natal families in Vietnam and marital families in Australia. Yet, possibilities emerging from the ways migrants follow or break with public norms are also enacted in relation to other possibilities, which may lead to further constraints. For example, some participants followed the social ‘fashions’ of international mobility for social status in their home communities that opened up the possibility of migration as a way to achieve their desires. They concurrently followed the cultural practice of career stability in relation to family life settlement. By falling in line with the latter cultural norm, they were able to mobilise parental economic support for establishing their own businesses and buying houses in Australia. In general, constraints and possibilities arise from migrants’ entwinement with the world, ranging from
intra-national and national discourses of skills demands, to transnational spaces of capital and cultural practices, and familial domains.

In addition, through migrants’ embeddedness in the world, constraints and possibilities are experienced in ambiguous relations to the world. For example, some participants in this study experienced employment precariousness posed by their unfamiliarity with life in Australia, which they had previously perceived as familiar through their past international education experiences. At the same time, they also faced pressures from their participation in transnational spaces with their relatives in Vietnam through the cultural practice of filial piety in sending remittances. These pressures made them feel not-at-home, whereas their contact with local people in Australia enabled them to feel at-home when they were able to get work or marry Australians. Migrants’ interactions with others and things through (un)familiarity influence their social positioning, requiring them to negotiate their belonging through the “geographical stretching of social relations” (Massey, 1993, p. 60). Their production and reproduction of social relationships shape their belonging across space and time, rather than in a fixed location and time. Situating the negotiation of transnational mobilities within migrants’ interactions with others and things through interrelated constraints and possibilities can address the relationality of their experiences in multiple spatial networks and temporal linkages.

Understanding constraints and possibilities in transnational mobilities as offered by my study adds further contributions to literature on globalisation and migration in that migrants mediate global, national and local processes with and through their personal desires. Within the context of globalisation, the role of the various nation-states in controlling and managing mobilities allows transnational mobilities to be diverse, fluid and complex. Yet, Favell, Feldblum, and Smith (2006; see also Cresswell, 2013) affirm that highly skilled mobilities are not frictionless, but rather they entail costs and constraints through migrants’ encounters with the global and national governance regimes. The “globalization of human capital” through international skilled migration (Khadria, 2001, p. 47) is not simply limited to transnational movements of skilled migrants but also migrants’ embodied practices of using their skills in their everyday lives in specific places. In my study, I found that migrants are not solely the objects of state policies manoeuvring freely or being entirely affected by global and national regimes of talent in relation to communal and familial conditions. The skills and knowledge they obtained in their international education are not always enacted in line with the global human capital models of a linear relationship between “learning” and “earning” (Brown & Tannock, 2009, p. 378). Conflicts between global linkages and local enactments of norms and regularities can deter two-step migrants from becoming full members in a society. They
have to negotiate tensions from global ideologies and local practices that are informed by place-based norms and regularities. Yet, as active selves through their immersion in the world, education-related migrants respond to these constraints seeking out possibilities and opportunities to shape their mobilities. They interact with global and national regimes of mobility governance using dual citizenships for their own purposes, in ways that address their circumstances in local places. Their encounter with the opening of possibilities entails neither territorialisation nor deterritorialisation in “borderless space of flows” (Brenner, 2004, p. 64). Instead, they are located across geographical settings with the negotiations of their social relations with others and uses of things that open up possibilities for their mobilities, producing heterogeneous responses to these forces. Migrants are “small-actors” who are “the very fabric of globalization” (Freeman, 2001, p. 1009) by enacting global processes on local ground. In this sense, the relation between globalisation and localisation can be better understood through migrants’ interactions with the world in intersecting domains, which create constraints and possibilities for their mobilities.

Further, in terms of migrants’ relations to social norms, my study contributes to unsettling the binary of agency and structures implied in some policy-driven studies and studies adopting economic frameworks (see Section 2.1). Some existing studies describe migrants as being affected by socio-political structures with their agency weakened. Studies on transnationalism present a critique of this portrayal by considering skilled migrants as neither “independent actors” from socio-political and cultural structures, nor “puppets” in these structural mechanisms (Findlay & Li, 1999, p. 53). However, some transnationalism studies tend to perpetuate migrants’ agency as their ability to choose or not to choose to live with social structures. They also analyse migrants’ agency as active responses to distinct structures, thus separating migrants’ interactions from their holistic involvement with the world. In contrast, an approach that addresses being-in-the-world shows that migrants are always embedded in interrelated social domains, rather than choosing and responding to each social condition separately from the others. Their entwinement with social domains enables them to experience interrelated constraints and possibilities that complicate conventional understandings of agency. For example, some study participants were entwined with professional norms that required discipline and routine, constraining their desires to fulfil family responsibilities. They did not respond to each of these professional and familial structures separately, but were immersed in these interrelated domains and responded accordingly. In other words, although I acknowledge that migrants are active selves in managing their lives in relation to social structures, they are embedded in these interrelated conditions and processes, some not of their choosing through which they negotiate their mobilities.
This study also contributes to understanding of emotions in education-related migration. Similar to some previous studies viewing migrants’ emotions as a “constitutive part” of mobilities (Skrbiš, 2008, p. 236; see also Section 2.2.2), the findings in my study acknowledge that emotions play an important role in shaping two-step migrants’ mobilities through their encounter with others and things in intersecting social structures. Constraints and possibilities arising from these migrants’ engagement with socio-cultural norms such as marriage or filial piety contribute to the (dis)continuity of social reproduction that extends beyond the familial to larger political, socio-economic and cultural contexts. Migrants’ encounter with constraints and possibilities produces a mix of feelings and emotions. In this study, by unpacking the constraints and possibilities created through migrants’ ambiguous relations to the world, I examined how their complex emotions and affections attributed to the negotiation of transnational mobilities. In and through their engagement with the world, some of these migrants experienced contradictory emotions, such as feeling achievement in marital life but failure in enhancing natal family solidarity, incompleteness in acquiring to be grounded in a place but security in being already attached to another place. Although not all the participants encountered contradictory feelings that affected their dwelling-mobility, this study addresses the importance of emotionality in understanding mobilities through migrants’ ambiguous relations to their engagement with the world.

A further contribution of the thesis is to unsettle the notion of the “rational, instrumentally driven calculating migrant” (Collins et al., 2014, p. 665) by attending to emotive events that shape migration – trauma, loss, grief and unfulfilled love. As mentioned in Section 2.1, some previous studies have explored migrants’ choices and calculations of costs and benefits of migration, thus depicting migrants as rational decision-makers. My thesis adds nuance as captured by other phenomenological studies (e.g Collins & Shubin, 2015; Shubin, 2015) that critique the assumption of migrants’ rationality as “internal to consciousness and subject to different mechanisms of ordering and manipulation” (Shubin, 2015, p. 350). Shubin (2015) observes that migrants’ interactions with the world produce mixed emotions and feelings, as well as make their lives unfolding, instead of simply “flowing” (p. 351) from one place in a particular time to another. Similarly, this thesis conceptualizes migrants as embodied subjects manoeuvring in their life-course, rather than disembodied objects of state policies and political projects. In addition, the concept of being-in-the-world adds further understandings of the interconnection of time and space, rather than seeing them as two distinct measureable entities existing within migrants’ consciousness. Migrants are embedded in a world in which they share their lives with others and things. As such, timespaces can be conceptualized as “intersubjective” domains in which migrants
may face “unpredictability and precariousness” (Horschelmann, 2011, p. 379) that makes their lives unfold in complex ways.

*Negotiation of ‘routes’ and ‘roots’ through dwelling-mobility*

As mentioned so far, government commissioned studies that employ economic frameworks often examine migration as separate events in migrants’ lives. In this vein, transnational mobilities are depicted as uprooting from one nation and anchoring roots in another (see Section 2.1). However, studies on transnationalism acknowledge migration as an ongoing process from the initiation to relocation (see Section 2.2). In relocation, some migrants are known to mobilise transnational ties and practices, so that their navigations in social relations across borders enable them to sustain their routes and roots. Debates between routes and roots have emerged in migration research. These debates tend to focus on either migrants’ uprooting in migration or their transnational practices. In the former case, migrants are described as experiencing lack of ethnic ties with home countries as well as power due to state governance of mobility. In the latter, they are portrayed as autonomous selves who manoeuvre within global forces and conditions facilitated by technological advances and global economic integration. I concur with the view in studies on transnationalism that acknowledges that migrants are always embedded in various domains across space and time. They are not contained in a single location, but negotiate their relations to others and things through their dwelling-mobility (Todres & Galvin, 2010, p. 3).

The use of Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world and, in particular, our ambiguous relations to the world, can advance our understanding of migrants’ dwelling-mobility by examining their interactions with the world, as well as constraints and possibilities they experience. In this study, social relationships were also found to be important in shaping the participants’ mobilities to Australia and back to Vietnam. They sustained transnational family relationships, professional contacts and friendship to further enhance social reproduction and intergenerational security, as well as pursue business activities. While Vietnamese ethnic networks in Australia were found to be less significant for most of the participants, emotional ties to their relatives and entrepreneurial opportunities in Vietnam shaped their expectations of temporary return. Their plans for return were facilitated by the VCP’s attempts to practise democracy and calls for diaspora contributions to national development. The economic reforms in Vietnam’s market socialism with a focus on privatization also opened up opportunities for transnational entrepreneurial activities and social recognition for expatriates’ return and contributions. The state’s openness toward returning migration, either temporary (through visits) or permanent (through dual citizenship), allowed these participants to experience multiple possibilities for their life trajectories and aspirations, as
discussed above. As such, despite having ‘escaped’ from Vietnam, some participants in this study (for example, Yen Xuan and Anh Ngoc) expected to return to Vietnam for recreational and entrepreneurial purposes, as well as participating in transnational philanthropic activities as ways to maintain their ‘roots’.

Through migrants’ dwelling-mobility, their routes and roots are ambiguous. For example, Anh Ngoc strove to overcome her natal family’s economic difficulty in fulfilling her responsibility as a dutiful daughter and caring sister by doing part-time work and marrying an Australian for the associated benefits. Her root was evident in her attempt to follow the cultural practice of filial piety in Vietnam. Her attempt to maintain her root was also perceived as her route to improve the economic condition for her natal family while she was in Australia. Concurrently, her efforts in seeking employment and material support in Australia were experienced as her route to settlement and root for maintaining her legal residency status. Her route and root became ambiguous through her dwelling-mobility, which was shaped through the constraints and possibilities created by her embeddedness in political, cultural, economic and familial domains with others and things. The ambiguity of migrants’ dwelling in transnational spaces challenges the debated issues on roots and routes, especially raising questions about issues of perceived racial discrimination. Do migrants encounter racial discrimination? Do they experience ambiguous relations when they feel at-home in the places where they dwell, while also feeling not-at-home? Alternatively, do they experience both of these cases? In other words, two-step migrants experience their dwelling-mobility in relation to others and things, making transnational mobilities relational, ambiguous and complex, rather than fixed, linear and clear-cut.

*Migrants’ embeddedness in the world across space and time*

As mentioned in Section 2.2.5, most studies on transnationalism emphasise the intersection of spatiality and temporality through migrants’ transnational practices over time. The notions of spatiality and temporality are recognised as complementary to each other in that migrants encounter space in relation to time. In other words, temporality is spatialised, and spatiality is temporalised (Cresswell, 2006, p. 4), as mobilities always involve traversal of space across a passage of time. In this study, time is encountered through these migrants’ past, which remains an important concern in structuring their current lives and future aspirations. Their construction of their present lives and aspiration is also affected by the temporalities of other people, such as their parents’ observations of boat refugee movements after the Vietnam War. Time is experienced as non-linear, and in close relation to space. Space is not experienced as places containing these migrants, but where they dwell with others and things through non-linear time. When taken together, time and space are
experienced through the ways these migrants care about living their lives in relation to others and things within and across national borders, from the past to present and into the future. Through their caring about their lives, these migrants move towards a place with purposes they want to achieve, which are shaped by who they were in the past, and what they want to achieve in the present and future. The complexity and relationality constituted by these migrants’ various modes of being-in-the-world across space and time frames their transnational mobilities as heterogeneous experiences.

The concept of being-in-the-world highlights the importance of a relational understanding between objective time and space (that migrants can measure and identify in terms of clock time and calendar dates, and geographical distances) and intersubjective timespaces (in which migrants share the world with others and things through the multiple pasts, presents and futures across spaces). Echoing Shubin’s (2015) approach in using a Heideggerian framework to explore timespaces in migration, this study challenges some views on timespaces as a “framework structuring their movements” (p. 359) in the sense that time and space are seen as objects regulated within the measureable structures. In contrast, Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world shows that migrants are embedded in multiple times and spaces in which they share the world with others and things. Migrants’ mobilities are formed and affected by their involvements with their past experiences, present activities, and future aspirations in intersecting domains of their lives in various locales and milieus. By situating migrants’ embeddedness in multiple timespaces, this finding goes beyond the “descriptions of static presentnesss” or “staged chronology” of migrants’ mobilities, which tends to depict an “orderable and measurable spatio-temporal structure” (Shubin, 2015, p. 359). Migrants’ mobilities are always in the process of “journeying” (p. 359) or put another way, happenings with complexities, messiness, ambiguities, as well as challenges and possibilities. Drawing on the concept of being-in-the-world in relation to timespaces, this study positions migrants as active people whose lives are always projective and unfolding, rather than objects of political discourse for ‘brain flows’ from one country to another in a fixed period of time.

8.3 A methodological contribution to understanding migrants’ being-in-the-world

This study responds to calls for research that attends to the geographies of migrants’ everyday lives that influence the negotiation of transnational mobilities (see e.g. Bailey, 2009; Collins et al., 2014, Collins & Shubin, 2015; Conradson & Latham, 2005; Favell, Feldblum, & Smith, 2006; Glick-Schiller, 2008; Horschelmann, 2011; Shubin, 2015; Yeoh & Huang, 2011). Migrants’ involvement in the world is usually complex, because of their multiple interactions with others and things in various social domains across space and time. Understanding this complex relationality requires
researchers to adopt a theoretical framework that allows methodological approaches for unpack these interrelated issues.

As an innovative framework, Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world allows investigation of the relational aspects of transnational mobilities that reflect migrants’ entwinement with the world in intersecting domains. The exploration of migrants’ interactions with others includes who migrants interact with and how they do so, as well as what these interactions mean for them in shaping their mobilities and their ways of being. Migrants’ interactions with others are also related to their encounter with things. In looking into their interactions with things, we can attend to the relationality among the things migrants use as equipment. Some of their interactions with things and others are also informed by the ways they follow or break with public norms in various social domains. Examining the influences of public norms is to look into migrants’ interactions with other people and things, allowing us to examine interrelated constraints and possibilities that influence (re)production of social relations. Exploring two-step migrants’ entwinement with the world which creates constraints and open-ended possibilities enables us to examine the complementariness of space and time through the (re)production of social relations and (re)subjectification in mobilities. Paying attention to migrants’ existence in relation to others also allows us to understand how they experience emotions as they navigate the present and construct their future lives. In this sense, the relationality of transnational mobilities is expressed in the interrelations in migrants’ interactions with others and things in various intersecting social domains.

8.4 Future research directions

Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world with its emphasis on the relationality of transnational mobilities, which I examined as migrants’ entwinement with the world, opens up other areas for research. Working within the time constraints of a PhD, I investigated the participants’ experiences of what they had done in the past and were doing in the present for their mobilities, as well as their aspirations for the future. Further research could examine transformations of their experiences over a longer period of time through longitudinal studies of how two-step migrants’ mobilities are shaped by their entwinement with the world across time. In addition, other issues emerging from this thesis, such as uses of dual citizenships and intermarriages, also deserve space for further research. A large body of research has examined motivations for intermarriages in different spatial settings and their impact on individual lives. This work could be extended further by using Heidegger’s work with a particular focus on dwelling-mobility, bringing greater complexity to how the entanglements of roots with routes matters to marriage migrants’ negotiations of social relations and transnational practices. A similar approach can be taken to explore how the use of dual
citizenships affects transnational mobilities. For example, some participants in this study used dual
citizenships for various interrelated purposes, such as Tuong Vu’s use of a Vietnamese passport as ‘evidence for transnational love’ with his fiancée, and to facilitate frequent future transnational movements for his business in Vietnam and family settlement in Australia. This issue raises a question of how dual citizenships are used in other forms of forced and voluntary migration, an issue that is relatively under-researched. Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world has the potential to unpack the multiple possibilities and constraints that confront forced and marriage migrants’ in their uses of dual citizenships. This approach has the potential to address the relationality and ambiguities of transnational mobilities through the multiple embodiments of citizenship.

Being-in-the-world can also be used in other research directions such as return migration, particularly, in the Asian and Pacific region. This research area is particularly relevant in a context where source countries are striving to attract contributions of diasporas and their presence in the country through government “rituals” and incentives (Biao, 2011, p. 821), whereas prospective returning migrants may consider if “the moon back home is brighter” (Teo, 2011, p. 805). In addition, in the context of regional and global labour market integration, labour migration is enacted as one of the development strategies in developing nations (Nguyen, 2014; Piper, 2004) in which unskilled female migrants are known as the largest and most vulnerable group (Piper, 2004, p. 71). Issues such as socio-economic benefits and conflicts in civil rights are of particular concern. Using the concept of being-in-the-world to understand how migrants negotiate opportunities and constraints opens up ideas for how state and non-state practices might protect migrants from social injustice. Finally, in the global age of migration, advances in transportation and communication enable movements of commodities and capital, as well as mobilities of people (Castles & Miller, 2009, p. 5). Under these global influences, mobilities become fluid in forms, when one form of migration may lead to another, such as from temporary international education to permanent residence, or from tourist migration to healthcare or sex migration. An understanding of migrants’ experiences of transnational mobilities through their entwinement with the world can contribute to research on the complexities, relationalities and fluidities of transnational mobilities in contemporary times.

8.5 Conclusion

This study provides a timely response to further research on education migration from Vietnam. The Vietnamese Government has assumed an ambivalent approach in sending out ‘brains’ for development, while claiming that the outflows of two-step migrants are associated with ‘brain
drain’. At the same time, Australia’s dual project for human capital development links international education to skilled migration, considering transnational mobilities of two-step migrants as linear flows from learning to migrating. This notion is reflected in a globalising discourse of increasing human capital for competitive advantage. Education migrants are often depicted as rational choice makers whose mobilities are shaped by economic attractions to host countries, with international education used as a tool to achieve this end. However, migrants’ transnational mobilities are negotiated through their relations with other people and things across space and time. By attending to the relationality of migrants’ everyday lives and building on extant research on transnationalism, this thesis contributes to a more holistic picture of education-related and professional migration.

The use of the theoretical concept of being-in-the-world in this study highlights that migrants always share the world with others and things in intersecting social domains, so that their transnational mobilities, reflective of their entwinement with the world, must be read as always becoming and existentially open.

Through this study, I also point to directions for further research on transnational mobilities that goes beyond economic instrumentality to explore migrants’ embodied experiences in interrelated domains. Migrants’ lives defy simple evaluations of their assimilative potential or the value of their human capital as linear outcomes of education and migration policies. Further understandings on transnational mobilities as reflective of migrants’ entwinement with the world can yield useful insights to migration scholars, policymakers and migrants themselves in relation to education migration and diaspora policies in terms of providing protection and (re)integration measures for migrants. Addressing these implications can be expected to increase benefits from international mobilities that can be made accessible to all parties, including the states, communities, families and migrants themselves.
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Appendix  Conversation Question Guide

This conversation guide consisted of two parts. Part 1, which aimed to obtain demographic information about the participants, ensured that I had reached the participants who met the study criteria and enabled me to obtain an understanding of their contexts. In Part 2, I explored issues related to the negotiations of transnational mobilities through the specific questions. Not all of the questions were asked in each conversation or followed the same order. Flexibility was the main principle in conducting the conversations (see also Section 4.4).

The overarching research question:

How do recent Australia-educated and domiciled professional migrants from Vietnam negotiate their transnational mobilities?

PART 1: Demographic information

Section A: As a former international student in Australia

- In Vietnam, where did you originally come from?
- Could you please tell me on what occasion you first came to Australia?
- What Australian university did you study at? How long did the study program last? What degree program was that? How was your study funded?
- Have you completed any other degree programs since you had PR granted? If so, which programs?
- How many times had you studied or visited in Australia before you had permanent residency (PR) granted?

Section B: As a professional migrant in Australia

- When did you have PR granted?
- Other than Vietnam as your country of origin, did you live anywhere else before you came to Australia?
- Are you married? If so, were you married before or after you have resided in Australia? Do you have any children? What is your spouse’s occupation? Is he/she Australian?
• What work have you done since you had PR?

• What is your current occupation? Where do you work?

PART 2: Research questions

Section A: The influences of political, social, and economic transformations

Research question: What are the key political, social, and economic conditions that have shaped your transnational mobilities?

Sub-questions:

• Could you please tell me what made you reach the decision to migrate to Australia?

• Was your decision influenced by any social, familial or personal events? If so, how did you feel about the influences of these events?

• Have you attempted to go back to Vietnam or go to another country since you had PR in Australia? Why or why not?

• What events have encouraged (or discouraged) you to go back to Vietnam temporarily or go to another country for work or residence?

• How do you think these events have influenced your mobility decision?

Section B: Relocation

Research question: Why did you relocate to Australia? What changes has your relocation meant for you?

Sub-questions:

• How did you decide to live in Australia?

• What did you expect life in Australia could offer you when you decided to apply for PR? To what extent were your expectations met in the first instance?

• How have you managed your relocation to Australia?

• To what extent has your Australian international education enabled you to relocate to Australia?
• How does your background as a professional migrant from Vietnam influence your relocation to Australia?

• How do you think your current life is different from your life before migration to Australia?

• What does your relocation to Australia mean for you?

Section C: Life and career aspirations

Research questions: What are your current life and career aspirations? How are you attempting to achieve your aspirations?

Sub-questions:

• What do you aim to achieve with your present life in Australia with regards to your personal life and work?

• What do these aspirations mean for you?

• What are you doing specifically to achieve your dreams?

• To what extent have your expectations of your new life in Australia been met?

• What are your plans for your life and career for the next few years?

Section D: The use of transnational ties

Research question: In what ways, if any, do you make use of transnational ties?

Sub-questions:

• How do you sustain the relationships with your relatives or friends living in Vietnam, Australia or other countries?

• What does the sustainment of these relationships mean for you?

• How do you feel about remaining these contacts?

• What responsibilities or duties do you feel to Australia and Vietnam?

• How do you plan for your permanent residence in the future?
• To what extent are you involved with Vietnamese or ethnic associations such as migration or alumni associations in Australia?

• If you get involved in these associations, what does your participation in these associations mean for you? (If you don’t, why not?)