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Decision-Making, Acculturation, and Future Residence Plans of Koreans in Vietnam: A Mixed Methods Pilot Study

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Abstract: Vietnam has become an important destination in intra-Asian North–South mobility. However, little is known about how South Koreans' reasons for moving to Vietnam relate to their later acculturation and residence plans. This pilot study examines why Koreans choose Vietnam, how they experience acculturation, and what shapes their plans to stay, return, or move on. Combining the push–pull–mooring perspective with Berry's acculturation framework, we conducted an exploratory mixed-methods study consisting of a questionnaire survey (N = 31, all respondents living in Hanoi) and six narrative life-history interviews. The findings show that work and career opportunities and having family in Vietnam (45.2% each) were the most frequently selected reasons for choosing Vietnam, and future opportunities and lifestyle were rated as the most important factors; push factors in Korea were not measured directly and did not feature prominently in participants' accounts. Respondents rated participation in both Korean and Vietnamese cultural activities as important but took part only occasionally, and language proficiency and cultural differences were the main perceived barriers to integration. In total, 35.5% planned to return to Korea, 35.5% were undecided, 29.0% planned to stay, and none planned onward migration. Interviewees' accounts pointed toward integration-like orientations even though they perceived their integration as incomplete; we treat this divergence from the survey pattern as a substantive finding rather than an inconsistency. The study extends push–pull–mooring and acculturation research to a privileged intra-Asian mobility corridor. The findings suggest that language support and opportunities for

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regular contact with local people may be worth prioritizing for institutions serving Korean residents in Hanoi, although this needs to be tested in larger samples.
Keywords: decision-making, acculturation, future residence plans, intra-Asian migration, push–pull–mooring

When Mo, a 34-year-old South Korean entrepreneur, relocated with his family to Hanoi to establish a small traditional rice cake business, he quickly realized that long-term social and commercial survival required active language and cultural understanding. Navigating his introversion and fear at the beginning, Mo trained himself in Vietnamese by reading bilingual literature and taking advantage of similarities between Sino-Vietnamese cognates and Korean vocabulary, viewing language learning not as a mechanical obligation but as an affective connection to the host society. Reflecting on his journey, Mo said: "If we like and actively embrace Vietnamese culture, it makes learning easier and encourages us to learn more. If you learn Vietnamese without liking living in Vietnam, you simply won't want to learn it anymore" (Field Interview, 2023). Mo's life in Vietnam, driven by family mobility, small-scale entrepreneurship, and language acculturation, is not an isolated case. Rather, it illustrates the lived reality of an expanding South Korean population navigating daily life, work, and identity transformation in contemporary Vietnam.

Over the past three decades, Vietnam has become an increasingly important destination for South Korean mobility. Since Vietnam and South Korea established diplomatic relations in 1992, expanding economic, educational, and cultural exchanges have driven the growth and diversification of the Korean population in Vietnam (Bui & Heo, 2026). In particular, academic and language exchanges between the two nations have expanded significantly, laying an institutional foundation for Korean students and researchers moving to Vietnam (H. W. Lee, 2019). The relationship was upgraded to a Strategic Cooperative Partnership in 2009, and Korea is now the largest source of foreign capital in Vietnam, with accumulated investment of more than US$92 billion by December 2024 (Bui & Heo, 2026). As of December 2022, 178,122 Koreans lived in Vietnam, making it the fifth-largest overseas Korean population in the world and 207% of the 2013 figure (Bui & Heo, 2026). This population includes corporate expatriates, entrepreneurs, students, accompanying family members, and other individuals pursuing educational, professional, and personal opportunities. The growing presence of Koreans in Vietnam reflects not only the development of bilateral relations but also broader shifts in mobility patterns across Asia.

The Korean presence in Vietnam is particularly relevant to emerging discussions of intra-Asian mobility. Research to date has traditionally focused on movements from lower-income regions toward economically developed destinations. Mobility in other directions within Asia has received comparatively little attention. Recent research has begun to explore South Korean migration to Vietnam as a form of intra-Asian North–South migration, drawing attention to Vietnam as an increasingly attractive destination for migrants from a more economically developed Asian country (Bui & Heo, 2026). Bui and Heo's (2026) notion of a "bustling South" stresses that privileged migrants from a wealthier Asian society may nonetheless move because of pressures at home, such as economic crisis, an intense work culture, and educational competition, and that their post-migration lives may have both advantages and disadvantages. This pattern complicates conventional assumptions about the direction of international migration and provides an important context for examining why migrants choose particular destinations, how they negotiate everyday life after migration, and how these experiences subsequently shape their future mobility intentions.

Existing studies have examined different dimensions of Korean mobility and settlement in Vietnam. T. G. Nguyen (2020, 2021), for example, documented the demographic

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characteristics, livelihoods, social networks, and community relations of Koreans in Hanoi. This research demonstrates that Korean residents maintain strong ties within their co-ethnic community while also developing varying forms of interaction with Vietnamese society. From the perspective of international education, Le Ha et al. (2022) examined Korean students pursuing Vietnamese Studies in Vietnam and identified institutional, professional, personal, and religious factors underlying their educational mobility. Their study situates Korean students' experiences within the broader context of inter-Asian student mobility and the internationalization of higher education beyond predominantly English-speaking destinations.

Current research has further broadened this emerging field. Bui and Heo (2026) examine the motivations underlying South Korean migration to Vietnam within the context of intra-Asian North–South mobility and highlight the importance of employment and business opportunities, bilateral economic relations, and changing socioeconomic circumstances. Research on Korean immigrants in Ho Chi Minh City (e.g., Tu et al., 2024) has highlighted the post-migration dimension of mobility, demonstrating that social integration and life satisfaction are strongly shaped by cognitive cultural intelligence, cross-cultural adaptation, religious community involvement, and awareness of cultural differences. Taken together, these studies suggest that Korean mobility to Vietnam involves not simply the decision to relocate but an ongoing process of negotiating cultural, social, professional, and personal life in the destination society.

Existing studies have provided valuable insights into migration motivations, student mobility, community formation, and social integration, but less is known about how migrants' initial decisions to move to Vietnam connect with their acculturation experiences and intentions regarding future residence. Migration decision-making does not necessarily end upon arrival. Experiences involving language use, cultural interaction, social relationships, employment, family, and everyday life in the host society may reshape migrants' assessments of their original decisions and influence whether they intend to remain in Vietnam, return to South Korea, or consider further mobility. Examining these processes together therefore offers a more dynamic understanding of migration as an evolving trajectory rather than a single act of relocation.

To examine these processes, the present study brings together the push–pull–mooring perspective on migration decision-making and an acculturation framework. Push, pull, and mooring factors provide a means of examining the economic, professional, social, familial, and personal considerations that influence mobility decisions, whereas the acculturation framework offers a lens for understanding migrants' engagement with both their heritage culture and the host society. Rather than treating destination choice, post-migration adaptation, and future residence intentions as independent outcomes, the present study considers them as interconnected dimensions of migrants' experiences. Bringing these perspectives together makes it possible to examine how initial migration motivations interact with subsequent cultural and social experiences and how these, in turn, may shape future mobility intentions.

The present study fills this gap by addressing the following research questions:

1. What factors shape Koreans' decisions to move to and reside in Vietnam?
2. How do Koreans living in Vietnam experience and negotiate acculturation?
3. What factors shape their intentions regarding future residence, including staying in Vietnam or returning to South Korea?

This exploratory mixed-methods study addresses these questions using survey data from 31 Korean participants and narrative interviews with six Koreans residing in Vietnam. Given the small Hanoi-based sample, the study does not seek to generalize its findings to the broader Korean population in Vietnam. Rather, the combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence enables an exploratory examination of how migration motivations, acculturation experiences, and future residence intentions intersect. Empirically, the study contributes to the still limited

literature on Korean migration to Vietnam. Conceptually, it connects migration decision-making with post-migration acculturation and future mobility intentions. More broadly, by examining mobility between two Asian societies with different levels of economic development but substantial historical, cultural, and economic connections, the study contributes to emerging discussions of intra-Asian mobility and illustrates how economic opportunities, family ties, perceived cultural proximity, language competence, and everyday quality of life may interact in shaping migrants' mobility trajectories.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section reviews the existing literature on South Korean mobility to Vietnam, examining migration waves, community structures, and adaptation dynamics. To systematically analyze these phenomena, it explores the push–pull–mooring framework regarding migration decision-making and re-migration trajectories, alongside theories of acculturation and psychological and sociocultural adaptation within intra-Asian contexts.

Research on Korean mobility to Vietnam

Extending beyond traditional Western destinations, South Korean educational and labor mobility has increasingly expanded across Asia. Recent scholarship has documented Korean degree-seeking students in China (Ma, 2018) and India (Lipura, 2021), transmigrant families in Singapore (Park, 2014), as well as regional academic exchanges under the CAMPUS Asia framework (Hanada & Horie, 2021). Within this intra-Asian network, Vietnam has emerged as a destination of choice (Bui & Heo, 2026).

Korean migration to Vietnam has unfolded in several waves. The first businesspeople arrived in the early 1990s, after diplomatic relations were established, and set up textile factories in southern Vietnam; many companies and expatriates withdrew after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, but some expatriates stayed and became the first generation of self-initiated entrepreneurs. A second wave (2000–2010) followed the entry of chaebols such as Samsung and small and medium-sized suppliers. Since the 2010s, younger Koreans have arrived through government-sponsored employment support programs such as K-MOVE (Oh & Jang, 2021). Therefore, the Korean community in Vietnam is not homogeneous, comprising corporate expatriates and their families, subcontractors, service-sector entrepreneurs, students, and spouses. They reside in Korean neighborhoods such as Phú Mỹ Hưng in Ho Chi Minh City and Trung Hòa–Nhân Chính in Hanoi (Bui & Heo, 2026).

Ethnographic research on Hanoi's Korean community (T. G. Nguyen, 2021) distinguishes three groups - a "nomination" group, a freelance business group, and students - and examines their relationships within the community, with local society, and with Korea. The nomination group tends to bring families to Hanoi because of welfare benefits and enjoys relatively stable family lives, whereas the freelance business group lacks institutional support and has fewer stable lives. KakaoTalk chat groups and hometown, interest-based, and religious associations sustain co-ethnic networks and business activity. Relations with Vietnamese colleagues, employees, and the local government are generally positive. Students, who often live in local dormitories or neighborhoods, develop closer bonds with Vietnamese society than the other groups. All groups remain closely connected to Korea through family, travel, and civic participation.

Research on student mobility adds another perspective. Le Ha et al. (2022) interviewed Vietnamese teachers about the growing number of Korean students enrolled in Vietnamese Studies and described an "accidental internationalization" driven by policy changes, institutional responses, personal reasons, and religious interests, in which Vietnam appears as

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a land of promise offering career opportunities, a tolerant environment, and relief from the pressure of Korea's competitive education system. Kim Khanh and Ngoc (2023), in a mixed-methods study of 94 international students, most of them Korean, identified push factors such as the desire for new experiences and limited economic and employment prospects at home, alongside pull factors such as Vietnam's economic outlook, employment after graduation, and the reputation of Vietnamese language and culture programs.

Focusing on classroom dynamics and language pedagogy, Tran et al. (2024) examined how Korean undergraduate students at a university in Hanoi learned Vietnamese compliments and appropriate responses. They proposed an experimental teaching unit based on explicit pragmatic instruction and an intercultural approach, aiming to foster intercultural competence and learners' confidence in cross-cultural social interactions.

Studies of the second generation show how living in Korean enclaves shapes belonging. Lim and Yoon (2025) found that most Korean-Vietnamese adolescents in Vietnam identified more strongly as Korean because of Korean schools, the Korean community, and transnational ties; from Vietnam's perspective this is separation from the mainstream, whereas from Korea's perspective it may be a form of preliminary assimilation. They also note that many Korean residents in Vietnam are temporary residents with limited incentives to assimilate.

Push–Pull–Mooring Perspective on Decision-Making

The push–pull framework is fundamental to understanding decision-making among mobile populations. Grounded in early migration scholarship by Ravenstein (1885) and formally conceptualized by E. S. Lee (1966), the framework posits that individuals leave origin areas because of adverse circumstances ("push" factors) and are attracted to host destinations by favorable opportunities ("pull" factors). Traditional applications focused on labor movements from lower-income to highly developed regions (Van Hear et al., 2018). However, recent scholarship demonstrates its utility in explaining voluntary intra-Asian North–South mobilities, where young self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) move toward emerging Asian markets in search of career growth and professional opportunities (Oh & Jang, 2023).

Decision-making within this framework often reflects a human capital investment perspective (Becker, 1964), wherein individuals weigh perceived migration costs against prospective returns, such as career advancement and educational opportunities. In the context of student mobility to Vietnam, strong bilateral diplomatic and trade relations, along with expanding Korean FDI, serve as significant national-level pull factors that lower perceived risks and improve post-graduation employment prospects (Bui & Heo, 2026; Kim Khanh & Ngoc, 2023; Le Ha et al., 2022).

The decision to relocate is influenced not solely by economic factors, but also by other motivations. Van Hear et al. (2018) expanded upon this concept through the modified *push-pull plus* theory, which emphasizes a holistic approach encompassing social, political, cultural, environmental, health, education, and transportation elements.

Along with push-pull factors, certain mooring factors also significantly impact the migration process. These mooring factors (E. S. Lee, 1966; Moon, 1995) encompass psychological or cultural elements that either motivate individuals to remain in a specific location or prompt them to relocate elsewhere. For example, mooring factors could include strong family ties, cultural traditions, a sense of belonging to a particular community, or emotional attachment to a specific place. These factors provide stability and emotional security, making individuals hesitant to move even when push factors encourage them to leave or pull factors attract them elsewhere. Mooring factors therefore play a crucial role in migration decision-making by adding complexity to push-pull dynamics.

The push-pull theory has also been used to understand the motivations behind returning to one's home country, moving to other nations, and re-migrating. Kelly and Hedman's (2016) study on Iranians in Sweden revealed that immigrants might need to explore unconventional routes to overcome employment obstacles. One such strategy involves leaving the host country for third-country destinations where labor market prospects are perceived to be better (Kelly & Hedman, 2016). Another option is to return to the home country in search of a suitable position, serving as an alternative pathway (Özkan et al., 2023, citing Syrians in Turkey who chose to move back home). Like migration to other countries, the decision to return is also highly complex. Early structural approaches to return migration categorized returnees into distinct typologies such as failure, conservatism, retirement, and innovation, highlighting how origin-country institutional constraints affect reintegration (Cerase, 1974). Building upon this, Cassarino (2004) emphasized that the success of return or long-term mobility is fundamentally contingent upon migrants' level of preparedness and resource mobilization. This readiness entails accumulating adequate resources for the return and employing them effectively afterward.

The relationship between duration of residence and long-term settlement remains highly dynamic. As Constant (2020) highlights in a comprehensive synthesis of return and circular mobility, length of stay alone does not determine whether migrants settle or return; rather, evolving economic opportunities, career prospects, and family circumstances continuously reshape mobility trajectories. This perspective aligns with findings by Steiner (2019) and Czeranowska et al. (2023), who demonstrate that return and re-emigration intentions are negotiated through a complex interplay of professional aspirations, life-stage transitions, and social moorings. In the context of intra-Asian North–South mobility, these decisions are further moderated by strong bilateral diplomatic relations, co-ethnic enclaves, and flexible visa arrangements that lower perceived relocation risks (Bui & Heo, 2026; Kim Khanh & Ngoc, 2023).

Acculturation and Its Process in Asian Host Contexts

Acculturation refers to the psychological and sociocultural adaptation that occurs when individuals engage with a new cultural environment (Berry, 2005). Berry's (2005) bidimensional framework describes migrants as navigating two independent dimensions: heritage-culture maintenance and host-culture engagement. Their combination yields four orientations: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. A. M. D. Nguyen and Benet-Martínez's (2013) meta-analysis supports integration as the most adaptive orientation, showing that biculturalism predicts significantly better psychological and sociocultural adjustment than adherence to a single cultural stream.

However, in intra-Asian migration contexts such as Korean migration to Vietnam, this benefit unfolds within distinct structural conditions. Migrants may endorse an integration-like attitude, yet their actual contact with the host society remains bounded by co-ethnic enclave infrastructure (Korean schools, shops, churches, associations) and a sojourner mindset, so that reliance on such infrastructure often reflects convenience rather than exclusion, though it can still make separation a feasible default (Acar, 2023; Lim & Yoon, 2025; Ranabahu & De Silva, 2024; Williams Veazey, 2019). Recent scholarship therefore cautions against classifying migrants into fixed Berry-type categories in non-Western settings (Lim & Yoon, 2025).

Several factors shape this process. Language proficiency is central: a strong grasp of the host language eases daily interaction and deepens cultural understanding (Kim, 2001), while greater cultural distance between home and host cultures tends to increase adaptation difficulty (Pesthy et al., 2026; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999) and perceived stress (Demes & Geeraert, 2014). Diverse friendship networks that include both co-nationals and locals ease the process

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further (Ward & Kennedy, 2001), and among students, intergroup anxiety and a shared "common ingroup" identity mediate the relationship between contact modality (direct, mediated, or online) and willingness to interact (Gao et al., 2024). Although classic cultural-distance frameworks have long influenced this literature, their explanatory power remains debated; in international business, for instance, Beugelsdijk et al. (2018) found no consistent relationship between cultural distance and outcomes such as market-entry mode or performance, underscoring that cultural proximity is only one of many contributors to successful acculturation alongside individual attitudes, social support, and mutual willingness to engage.

For Koreans in Vietnam specifically, Korean social interactions remain strongly shaped by traditional norms emphasizing respect for elders, hierarchy, and co-ethnic community networking (Lim & Yoon, 2025). Consequently, developing cognitive cultural intelligence about local social norms is essential to mitigate these friction points and improve adaptation (Akinwande & Egbetola, 2026; Tu et al., 2024). Language learning here functions as lived intercultural experience rather than mere code-acquisition: among Korean undergraduates in Hanoi, differing pragmatic norms (e.g., giving and responding to compliments) hindered communication, pointing to a need for explicit intercultural language pedagogy (Tran et al., 2024). This discrepancy between symbolic orientations and daily behavior aligns with recent Asian host studies, which show that while integration remains the most endorsed orientation in principle, language limitations and structural reliance often restrict daily participation (Mao, 2024; Ranabahu & De Silva, 2024).

In conclusion, this literature suggests that acculturation orientation should not be inferred from a single indicator, that the frequency and type of contact matter as much as stated attitudes, and that orientations shift over time with language and context. Because the decision to migrate, the acculturation process, and future residency plans form a single, mutually shaping continuum, this study integrates push–pull and acculturation perspectives to examine how these three phases interact for Koreans in Vietnam.

Data and Methodology

Because individuals' decisions about moving to Vietnam, staying, moving onward, or returning are shaped by complex push–pull–mooring factors, quantitative or qualitative methods used separately cannot fully capture the interplay between individual decision-making and the broader context. We therefore combined a questionnaire survey with in-depth interviews. Quantitative approaches, even with limited sample sizes in pilot studies, can describe general patterns, providing insights into how individuals, on average, respond to decisions related to relocating to Vietnam, future planning, and cultural adaptation. Meanwhile, qualitative research provides valuable insights into individuals' decision-making processes, offering a nuanced understanding of overarching patterns.

This study is exploratory and used a concurrent (convergent) mixed-methods design. The questionnaire survey and the life-history interviews were collected in parallel between 2 and 11 October 2023, analyzed separately, and then integrated interpretively in the Discussion. The survey data were analyzed descriptively (frequencies and percentages) to describe general patterns in decision-making, acculturation, and future residence plans; no inferential tests were run because of the small sample. The interviews were analyzed thematically to explore how participants made sense of their migration decisions and acculturation experiences. Because of the small samples, the findings are not intended to be generalized statistically to all Koreans in Vietnam. The following sections describe the data collection and analysis for each component.

Quantitative Data and Method

For the statistical analysis, we used data collected through convenience and snowball sampling. We recruited Korean residents in Hanoi through the researchers' personal networks, and we invited additional participants through referrals from Korean acquaintances. Data were collected from October 2 to 11, 2023. The researchers contacted approximately 50 Korean residents in Vietnam, and 34 completed the questionnaire, for a response rate of 68%. After data cleaning, three responses were excluded because the participants were not residing in Hanoi at the time of the survey. Since the study focused on Koreans living in northern Vietnam, the final sample consisted of 31 valid questionnaires (62% of those contacted).

Participants were eligible if they were Korean citizens living or studying in Vietnam, with no restrictions on age or other demographic characteristics. Before the main survey, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with five participants to assess question clarity and estimated completion time.

The questionnaire comprised nine categories with 30 questions about: personal demographics; reasons for residing in Vietnam; maintenance of Korean culture in Vietnam; adaptation to Vietnamese culture; social interactions; intercultural experiences; future plans regarding staying in Vietnam, moving to other countries, or returning to Korea; satisfaction with their life in Vietnam; and their comments. Most items were multiple-choice or ordinal rating items (for example, from "not important" to "extremely important").

In the analyzed group, 17 individuals (54.8%) were female, 13 (41.9%) were male, and 1 person (3.2%) did not disclose gender information. Thus, the gender ratio of the participants was relatively balanced (with a slight female majority). Regarding age, the majority of respondents fell within the 23–33 age group (41.9%), followed by the 18–22 (22.6%) and 34–44 (19.4%) age groups; the 45–55 age group accounted for 12.9% and the 56–66 age group for 3.2% (n = 1). Consequently, young adults (18–33 years old) constituted the majority (64.5%).

Regarding their duration of stay in Vietnam, 38.7% of the respondents had lived in Vietnam for over 5 years, 29.0% had resided for 2-5 years, 25.8% had lived for 1-2 years, 3.2% had been in Vietnam for 6 months to 1 year, and 3.2% for less than 6 months. Therefore, the majority of participants had spent a considerable amount of time in Vietnam which may have provided opportunities to experience and adapt to aspects of Vietnamese social and cultural life.

All participants had studied Vietnamese: 74.2% for over 24 months, 9.7% for 13-24 months, 9.7% for 7-12 months, and 3.2% each for 3-6 months and 1-2 months. Consequently, despite immersion in an ideal environment for learning Vietnamese, most respondents undertook a relatively long learning process (over 2 years) to equip themselves with the language and cultural knowledge.

Regarding their occupations, 58.1% were university students, 29.0% were employed in companies, 22.6% were learning Vietnamese, 12.9% were engaged in business, 12.9% chose other options (homemakers, working in non-governmental organizations, etc.), and 3.2% (n = 1) were high school students. Although respondents could select multiple options, their answers focused on their reasons for studying and working in Vietnam.

Qualitative Data and Method

To understand migrants' motivations and acculturation experiences, we also analyzed qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and history-telling. These interviews, conducted online, provided a platform for one-on-one interactions with Koreans. We employed a narrative approach, initiating conversations with an open instruction: "Tell me why you chose to come to Vietnam?" Follow-up questions were posed only after participants had completed their sharing, ensuring minimal interviewer interference. This approach allowed

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participants to share their stories freely while enabling us, as researchers, to ask specific questions: *Why did they decide to move to Vietnam? How did they adapt to Vietnamese culture? What was their connection to their Korean heritage? How did they plan for the future, and how did their intercultural experiences influence their adaptation and future plans?*

The life history approach used in our study enabled us to explore the intricate interplay between individual subjectivity, experience, and the broader structural frameworks shaping their lives (Eastmond, 2007). By adopting this method, we could uncover the real-life events in participants' lives and understand how they interpreted these events from their current perspective. Life history interviews allowed us to contextualize each participant's migration decision within their life trajectory, providing insights into how they rationalized and made sense of their decision to migrate.

In our study, we conducted six mixed semi-structured and life history interviews with Koreans residing in Hanoi. Table 1 provides personal information about the interviewees.

Six interviews were conducted online between October 2 and 11, 2023 (Table 1). The first author conducted all interviews in Vietnamese, and each lasted approximately 30–40 minutes. Each interview was transcribed. The first author coded the transcripts manually and grouped the codes into themes corresponding to the three research questions (motivations for moving to Vietnam, acculturation experiences, and future residence plans); the second author reviewed the coding and themes. Because the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, quotations were translated into English by the authors.

Table 1
Personal Information of Interviewees

Participant	Gender	Age group	Duration in Vietnam	Vietnamese language learning duration	Occupation
Joy	Male	23–33	6 months	long time (but in Japan)	PhD student
Hien	Female	18–22	3 years	4 years	Student
Mo	Male	34–44	5 years	4 years	Student/ Businessman
Kim	Male	23–33	5 years	3 years	Student
Jung	Female	34–44	Over 5 years	3 years	Homemaker/ Student
Lee	Male	18–22	Over 5 years	3 years	Student

Note. The names provided are pseudonyms, and some were selected by the participants themselves to maintain anonymity.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Survey participants were informed about the purpose of the study at the beginning of the questionnaire, and completion of the questionnaire indicated their informed consent to the use of their responses solely for research purposes; no identifying information was collected. Interviewees were informed about the aims of the study and the intended uses of the data before the interview and gave their consent to participate and to be recorded; all quotations are reported under pseudonyms. Data were stored securely and were accessible to the research team only.

Findings

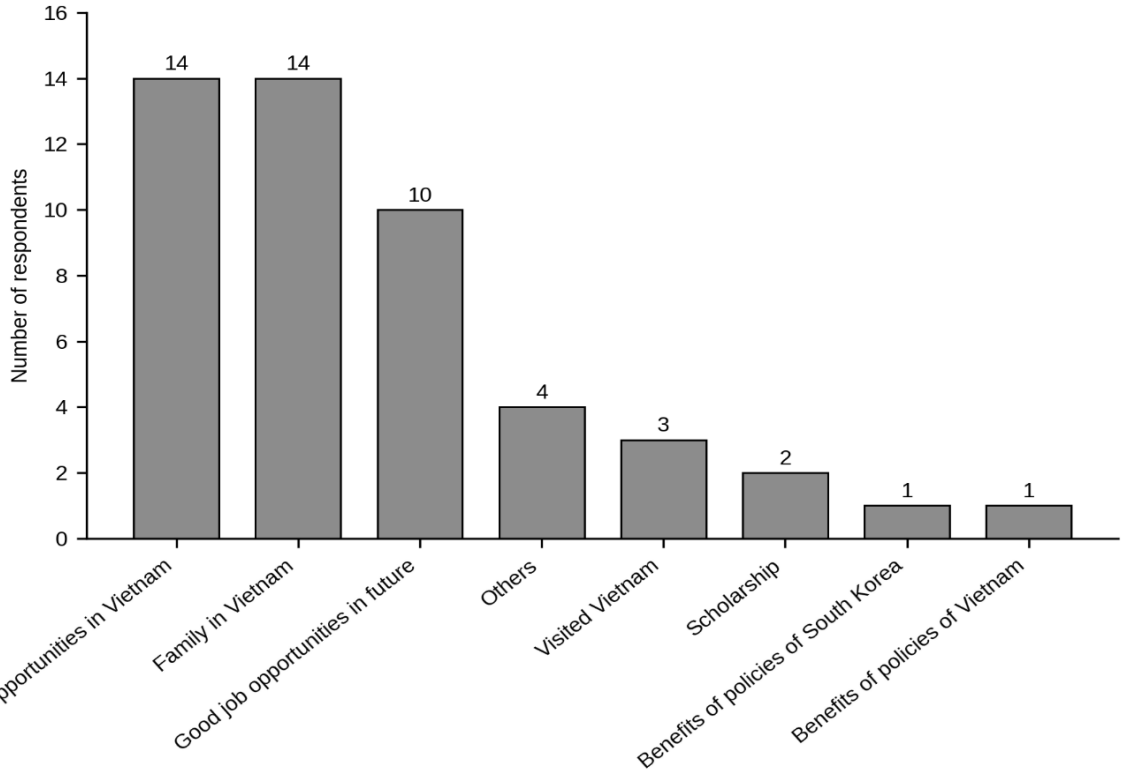
This section presents the findings of the two phases of the study in turn. The survey findings offer a descriptive overview of 31 Korean residents in Hanoi, organized around the study's three research questions: the reasons they chose to live, study, and work in Vietnam; their engagement with Korean and Vietnamese cultural practices and social interaction; and their plans for future residence. The interview findings then draw on the life stories of six participants, presented under pseudonyms, to show how migration motivations, acculturation experiences, and future residence plans unfold and connect within individual trajectories.

General Patterns from the Survey

Reasons for deciding to live, study, and work in Vietnam

The reasons for choosing to live, study, and work in Vietnam vary among individuals. Regarding the reasons for choosing Vietnam as a place to live, study, and work, many people have chosen the country due to the following fundamental factors: 45.2% of the respondents believe Vietnam offers excellent opportunities for work and career development; 45.2% have family living in Vietnam, and 32.3% see good job prospects. Additionally, a few individuals came to Vietnam because they had been here before (9.7%), received scholarships for studying abroad (6.5%), or benefited from favorable policies in either Korea (3.2%) or Vietnam (3.2%). Figure 1 shows the reasons respondents gave for choosing Vietnam.

Figure 1
Reasons for Deciding to Migrate to Vietnam



Note. N = 31. Respondents could select more than one reason. Source: authors' survey.

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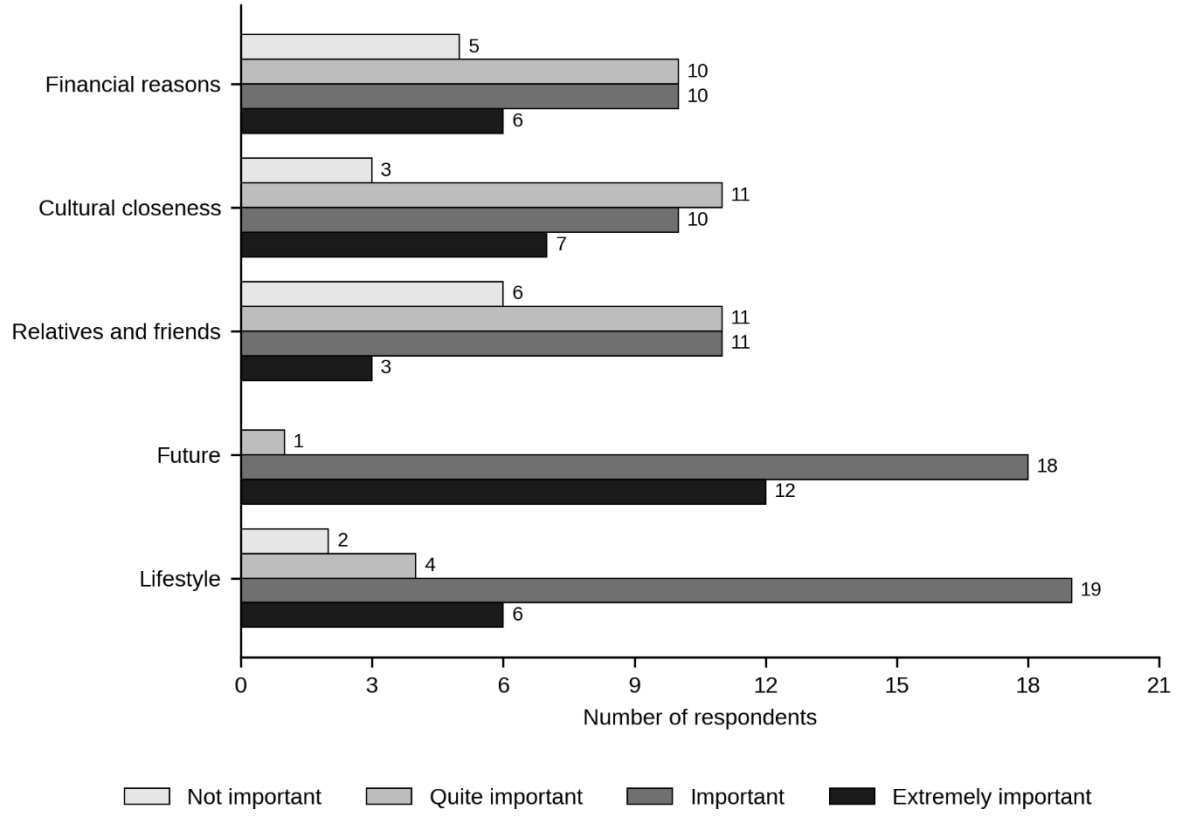
Although only four participants chose "Other" in the multiple-choice answers, many respondents (18/31) also shared and added other reasons for choosing Vietnam as their long-term residence, such as their love for Vietnamese culture and history; similarities between Vietnamese and Korean cultures; a safe, comfortable, and convenient life in Vietnam; and the low cost of living. Although respondents cite various reasons, the leading motivations, alongside family ties, remain abundant opportunities for work, career advancement, and self-affirmation in a developing country with open policies that facilitate foreign investment.

Furthermore, the study evaluates the importance of these five general decision factors: financial reasons, cultural closeness, relatives, future opportunities, and lifestyle, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Importance of Reasons for Choosing Vietnam



Note. N = 31. Source: authors' survey.

Figure 2 shows that future opportunities and lifestyle were the factors most often rated as important or extremely important: 30 of 31 respondents (96.8%) rated the future at these two levels (18 important, 12 extremely important), and 25 (80.6%) did so for lifestyle (19 important, 6 extremely important). The other three factors were rated more unevenly: 17 respondents (54.8%) rated cultural closeness, 16 (51.6%) financial reasons, and 14 (45.2%) relatives and friends as important or extremely important, and relatives and friends received the fewest "extremely important" ratings (3). This may seem at odds with Figure 1, in which family living in Vietnam was selected by 14 respondents (45.2%), as often as work opportunities. However, the two questions differ: Figure 1 records which specific reasons applied to each respondent, whereas Figure 2 asks respondents to rate the importance of five broad domains, and "relatives and friends" is a wider category than "family living in Vietnam." Family therefore appears to

matter strongly for a sizeable subgroup rather than being a motivation shared across the whole sample, whereas future prospects and lifestyle were broadly shared. Among these factors, future prospects emerge as the strongest motivation for choosing Vietnam, followed by lifestyle.

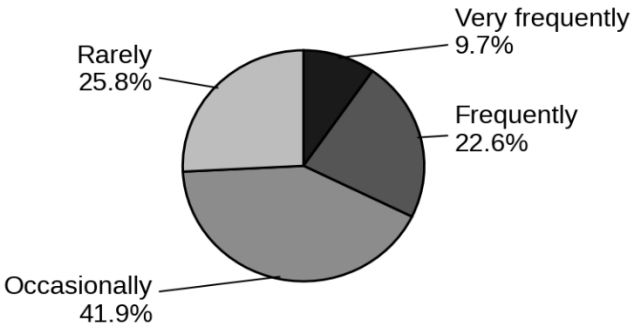
Engaging With Heritage and Host Cultural Practices and Social Activities

To assess the extent to which Korean people living in Vietnam practice their heritage culture and the host culture, two questions were posed: one about how frequently they engage in these activities and another about how they perceive the importance of participating in them.

Acculturation is the process of adapting to the new culture while maintaining the heritage culture, as described in Berry's four-fold model (Berry, 2005). Therefore, we compared participation frequency in Korean cultural activities (representing the heritage culture) and Vietnamese cultural activities (representing the host culture). The results are presented in Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6 below.

Figure 3

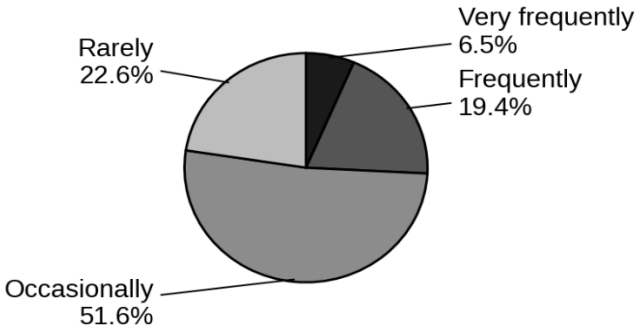
Frequency of Participation in Korean Cultural and Social Activities



Note. N = 31. Percentages are shares of respondents. Source: authors' survey.

Figure 4

Frequency of Participation in Vietnamese Cultural and Social Activities



Note. N = 31. Percentages are shares of respondents. Source: authors' survey.

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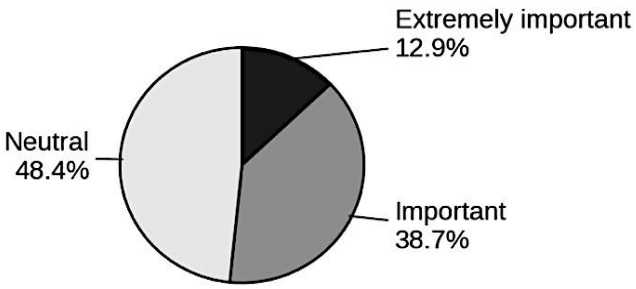
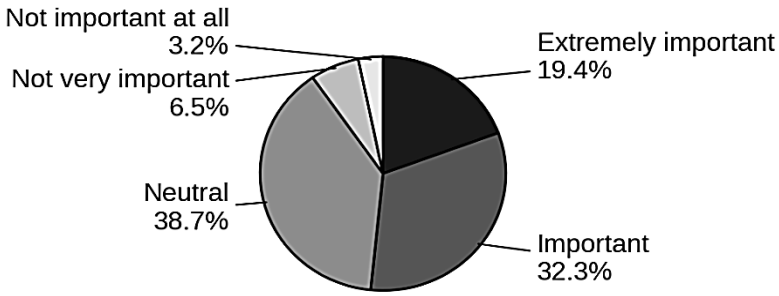
Figure 5
Importance of Maintaining Korean Culture and Social Activities



Note. N = 31. Percentages are shares of respondents. Source: authors' survey.

Figure 6
Importance of Participating in Vietnamese Cultural and Social Activities



Note. N = 31. Percentages are shares of respondents. Source: authors' survey.

Figures 3 and 4 show broadly similar patterns of participation in Korean and Vietnamese cultural and social activities. Occasional participation was the most common response for both (41.9% for Korean and 51.6% for Vietnamese activities). Regular or very frequent participation was reported by 32.3% of respondents for Korean activities and 25.9% for Vietnamese activities, while 25.8% and 22.6%, respectively, participated rarely. Overall, regular engagement in cultural and social activities, whether in the Korean community or in Vietnamese cultural events, was reported by only about a quarter to a third of respondents. This appears to be inconsistent with the responses regarding the importance of preserving Korean culture in Figure 5.

Around 52% of respondents (16 of 31) said preserving this culture is important or very important. A similar gap appears for Vietnamese activities (Figure 6): more than half of the respondents considered participation important or very important, but only about 26%

participated regularly or very frequently. In other words, respondents valued both cultures more than their behavior suggests.

Among activities related to South Korea, respondents most often took part in community cultural activities in Vietnam (festivals, dancing, etc.) and cooked Korean cuisine (38.7% each), followed by Korean cultural activities in Vietnamese institutions (25.8%) and Korean language classes (16.1%). Additionally, some individuals prepare for Korean university entrance exams (9.7%), engage in sports, and join Korean cultural clubs at schools. However, 22.6% still do not participate in any cultural or social activities within the Korean community in Vietnam. Among Vietnam-related activities, 80.6% of respondents attended Vietnamese language classes, making it the most popular activity. This is understandable as language is the most crucial tool for communication in their daily lives and work. The next most popular activity is cooking Vietnamese dishes, with 41.9% of respondents participating.

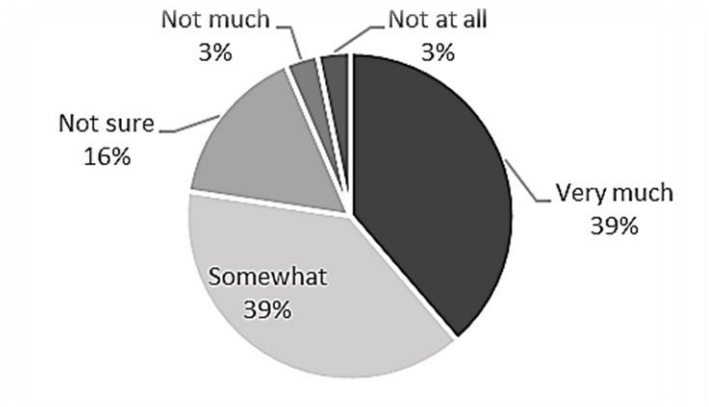
Social interaction and acculturation

In the survey, 54.8% of respondents shared that they communicate with both Vietnamese and Koreans. Meanwhile, 32.3% mainly communicate with Koreans, 6.5% mainly with Vietnamese, and 6.5% believe everyone is the same. Therefore, more than half of the respondents reported communicating with both groups, although a substantial portion (32.3%) communicates mainly with other Koreans.

During the acculturation process, the feeling of acceptance and integration into Vietnamese culture among the surveyed individuals varies, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Feeling of Integration into Vietnamese Society



Note. N = 31 (12 “very much”, 12 “somewhat”, 5 “not sure”, 1 “not much”, 1 “not at all”). Source: authors’ survey.

Figure 7 shows that respondents were equally divided between feeling completely (38.7%) and somewhat (38.7%) accepted and integrated; only two respondents (6.5%) felt hardly or not at all integrated, and about one in six (16.1%) were unsure. The pattern therefore points to partial rather than absent integration. What, then, hindered fuller integration?

Among the 12 respondents who felt completely integrated, the time needed to integrate varied: less than 6 months (6 of 12), from 6 months to 1 year (3 of 12), and over 5 years (3 of 12). The factors they believed had facilitated integration into life in Vietnam include: similarities between Vietnamese and Korean cultures (8 of 12); proficiency in the Vietnamese language and regular conversations and interactions with locals (7 of 12 each); having visited

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Vietnam, having read books about Vietnam, having friends or relatives living in Vietnam, and participating in volunteer activities within the local community (2 of 12 each); and having traveled to various countries (1 of 12). Other reasons included their interest in Vietnamese culture and the friendliness and kindness of Vietnamese people.

Regarding their positive cross-cultural experiences in Vietnam, many Koreans find it fascinating to experience and compare the similarities and differences between the two cultures. They enjoy exploring Vietnamese cuisine, traveling around Vietnam, witnessing traditional weddings, and observing performances by ethnic minorities. Many Koreans have a favorable impression of the Vietnamese people's hospitality, friendliness, and warmth. However, complex traffic conditions, slow work processes, and occasional difficulty in communicating with Vietnamese people contribute to their discomfort. Some actions and attitudes of the Vietnamese people, such as assuming foreigners are wealthy and trying to cheat them out of money, can make Koreans feel uncomfortable. (Survey's open-ended responses)

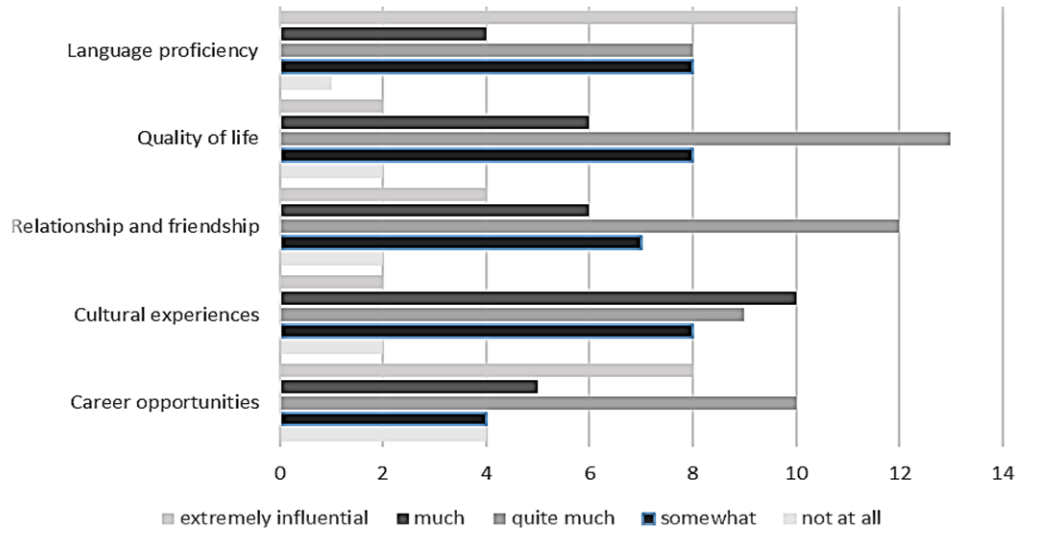
Among the 19 respondents who did not feel completely integrated, the reasons that make them feel challenged to integrate into Vietnamese life and society include: cultural and lifestyle differences (12 of 19), inadequate proficiency in the Vietnamese language (10 of 19), introverted personality (4 of 19), and never having left Korea before (2 of 19). Other reasons mentioned include Vietnamese people being hesitant to talk to Koreans and differences in the social system and policies. In a separate question answered by all 31 respondents, they propose several ways to integrate better into Vietnamese society: interact and make friends with Vietnamese people more often (93.5%); participate in cultural and social activities related to Vietnam (38.7%); read more books (16.1%). Other suggestions include finding a Vietnamese partner, organizing group meetings (for example, for Bible study), learning Vietnamese, watching programs introducing Vietnam, and so on.

Future Residence Plans

To understand how various factors influence future residence decisions, Figure 8 illustrates the perspectives of surveyed participants.

Figure 8

Impact of Factors on Future Residence Choices of Koreans Living in Vietnam



Note. N = 31. Ratings ranged from "not at all" to "extremely influential." Source: authors' survey

If we combine the three highest levels (extremely influential, much, and quite much) as "influential", then the distribution is relatively even across all five factors: job opportunities, cultural experiences, relationships, quality of life, and language proficiency, indicating that all five factors were perceived as influential. However, when examining each level individually, language proficiency is chosen most frequently (10/31 = 32.3%) as an extremely influential factor; at the level of much impact, cultural experiences are chosen most frequently (10/31 = 32.3%); at the level of quite much impact, quality of life is chosen most frequently (13/31 = 41.9%); at the level of not very impactful (somewhat), cultural experiences, quality of life, and language proficiency are chosen most frequently (8/31 = 25.8% each); and at the level of no impact, career is chosen most frequently (4/31 = 12.9%).

Figure 9 below illustrates decisions to stay in Vietnam, return to Korea, or move to another country after experiencing life and culture in Vietnam.

Figure 9

Future Residence Plans of Koreans Living in Vietnam

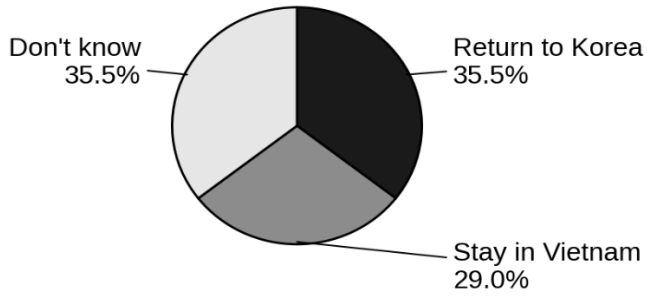


Figure 9 shows that 35.5% of respondents plan to return to Korea. Another 35.5% are undecided or do not know; 29.0% plan to stay in Vietnam and not return to Korea. No respondent chose onward migration to another country. Although many Koreans decided to return, Vietnam is quite appealing to Koreans as 64.5% of respondents either plan to stay long-term or have not decided to return to Korea.

Among the 11 respondents planning to return to Korea, 5 intend to stay in Vietnam for over 24 months, 2 plan to stay for 7-12 months, 2 plan to stay for 4-6 months, 1 plan to stay for 13-24 months, and 1 plan to stay for 1-3 months. Therefore, nearly half of those planning to return (5 of 11) intend to stay in Vietnam for more than 24 months before doing so.

The main reasons Koreans want or have to return home are family reunification and work-related factors (expiration of work contracts in Vietnam, graduation from university, etc.). One respondent also said they do not want to return, but must go back because of work obligations.

The reasons given by the nine respondents who plan to stay in Vietnam long term include: the lifestyle in Vietnam is very comfortable, free, and flexible (5 of 9); living costs in Vietnam are low (4 of 9); Vietnamese culture is closely related to Korean culture, Vietnamese people are very friendly, the landscapes in Vietnam are beautiful, and their families are in Vietnam (3 of 9 each); there are good job opportunities in Vietnam and a partner living there (2 of 9 each); Vietnamese cuisine is delicious, and income is high (1 of 9 each). Additionally, other reasons include good job prospects and a desire to learn more about Vietnamese culture.

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Summary

The survey offers an exploratory picture of a small, Hanoi-based sample. Respondents came to Vietnam primarily for work and career opportunities, with their families, or to study. They valued both Korean and Vietnamese cultures, but participated in cultural activities occasionally. About one in three respondents (35.5%) planned to return to Korea, nearly half of them after more than two years, mainly for family and work-related reasons; approximately 30% planned to stay, and a similar share remained undecided. Despite difficulties with traffic, work practices, and perceptions of foreigners, respondents also reported many positive experiences.

In-depth Perspectives from the Interviews

To understand more deeply how deciding to migrate, navigating acculturation, and shaping future residence plans are connected, we selected six participants currently living in Hanoi, Vietnam. Each participant's life story illustrates a unique set of factors that motivate their move to Vietnam, their acculturation experiences, and their future residency plans; these accounts enrich the discussion.

Joy's Journey: Big Ambitions in Vietnamese History

Joy, with significant ambitions in Vietnamese history, has been in Vietnam for only 6 months to learn Vietnamese and gather materials for his doctoral thesis, which he is conducting in Japan. Despite his limited Vietnamese proficiency due to a lack of practical opportunities, he feels quite comfortable living in Vietnam. His passion for history is evident in his research on 17th- and 18th-century Vietnam, which began in high school.

Joy questioned why, despite Han cultural influence, Koreans often study Chinese and Japanese history but neglect Vietnamese history. To explore Vietnamese history, Joy moved to Japan, driven by a clear goal and a determined plan that included coming to Vietnam without hesitation.

Despite his small social circle, Joy has successfully immersed himself in his research. Even with limited friends, he finds the environment comfortable. "In Japan, I didn't have any friend," he said. After just six months in Vietnam, Joy gained deep insights into the country. He plans to return to Korea to present his comprehensive research on Vietnamese history. While he prefers Korea, he is open to opportunities in Vietnam or Japan that align with his career objectives. For Joy, career goals are the primary factor in deciding where to live next.

Hien's Journey: Embracing and Celebrating Vietnamese Culture

Hien, a third-year university student in Hanoi, Vietnam, embarked on a transformative journey to study Vietnamese. While she enjoys communicating with her peers, university subjects are challenging because of their specialized nature and large class sizes. Despite these hurdles, Hien's intercultural experience has been positive, thanks to supportive Vietnamese friends. She appreciates the safe, attractive learning environment, which fosters a positive attitude toward embracing Vietnamese culture. Now more open-minded, Hien balances Korean and Vietnamese cultures and finds joy in exploring linguistic similarities. With an excellent job, friendly locals, a comfortable lifestyle, delicious food, and low living costs, Hien has decided to stay in Vietnam, eager to discover unexplored cultural aspects. Her choice is driven by job satisfaction and a sense of integration, comfort, and ease in society.

Kim's Journey: Navigating the Path Ahead

In 2017, Kim applied for a South Korean government program that helps young people find overseas employment. After two months of preparing by learning basic Vietnamese, he came to Hanoi in January 2018 to study the language for five months, then worked in Hai Phong for three years. During that time, he didn't have time to keep learning Vietnamese. He said:

> Working at the South Korean company was very stressful and exhausting, so I decided to quit my job. What could I do after leaving my job? I decided to study Vietnamese language and culture, preparing for the future while taking a break from work.

Kim shared his private life and acculturation journey, including a 4-year relationship with a Vietnamese girlfriend that recently ended. Before, he diligently learned Vietnamese, but his ex-girlfriend discouraged him from interacting with locals. Now living alone, Kim attempts to learn Vietnamese independently to communicate with neighbors and landlords. The more he learns, the better he understands the lessons. Nevertheless, he still encounters difficulties because of his incorrect pronunciation. He stated, "When I go to the market to buy vegetables, the sellers don't fully understand me 100%."

Kim also participated in a festival in Yen Bai (a mountainous province in North Vietnam), and he found that: "Talking with people in rural areas, meeting strangers, and having conversations over drinks are very enjoyable."

Kim's life in Vietnam seems good, and he is still preparing for the future. Currently, Kim is studying at university and has not decided on a future destination.

Jung's Journey: Homemaking in Vietnam

Jung, a Korean homemaker in Vietnam, relocated with her husband. She thought that both cultures were different from each other. Because of her inadequate Vietnamese proficiency, she decided to attend university to improve. Despite ongoing challenges, she enjoys studying, acknowledging the similarities between Vietnamese and Korean cultures influenced by Confucianism. She thought:

> Prior to studying, I perceived Vietnamese and Korean cultures as vastly different, but upon learning, I discovered their striking similarities influenced by Confucianism. Both languages, Vietnamese and Korean, incorporate numerous Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Korean words, leading me to believe that the two cultures are more alike than I had initially thought.

With a helper, Jung strives to improve her language skills. She plans to stay in Vietnam due to family ties and her husband's job.

Mo's Culinary Odyssey: Bringing Korean Flavors to Vietnam

Five years ago, driven by the strong relationship between Vietnam and South Korea, many Koreans and families, including Mo's, relocated to Vietnam to seize opportunities from increased investment. Another crucial factor for Mo and his parents was having relatives already living in Vietnam. He commented, "The family of my father's older brother has been in Vietnam for over 20 years. This was one of the main reasons for our family's decision to move to Vietnam."

He shared that his family currently operates a small business in Hanoi where they sell traditional Korean rice cakes (similar to Japanese mochi). His family still faces challenges using

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Vietnamese. “When it comes to communicating with employees and customers, both my parents and I still face many difficulties.”

For 4 years, Mo has been studying Vietnamese. Although he finds the language challenging and doubts his own aptitude, he believes the research and learning resources on Vietnamese for foreigners are limited. Preferring books and news for learning, Mo, though shy, is highly motivated to communicate effectively with employees and customers in his family's business.

Despite the challenges, Mo acknowledges that Vietnamese and Korean share vocabulary and similar idioms rooted in Chinese. Becoming more open-minded, Mo intends to stay and work in Vietnam due to the family's business and residence.

Lee's Journey: From High School to College in Vietnam

Lee arrived in Vietnam at the age of 14 with his parents and older brother. He went to a Korean school in Vietnam. In this school, he had one Vietnamese class, but the primary language of instruction was Korean. Lee began studying Vietnamese at 18 or 19 and earned a Vietnamese language certificate. With this certificate, he could enroll in university. During the process of integrating into Vietnamese culture, Lee felt:

> Communicating with Vietnamese people is enjoyable, although learning Vietnamese is quite challenging. As I don't have many Vietnamese friends, I usually learn at school and from teachers. I aspire to improve and hope to make Vietnamese friends to enhance my language skills.

Having lived abroad for a long time, Lee is accustomed to communicating with people from diverse backgrounds. However, he aims to improve his understanding of Southern and Central Vietnamese accents, which can be challenging. Currently in his third year of university, Lee is undecided about returning to Korea, staying in Vietnam, or moving elsewhere depending on his future career prospects.

In summary, the six interviewees arrived in Vietnam for diverse reasons, including learning Vietnamese, work, and family. Although they did not feel fully integrated, they enjoyed living in Vietnam. Kim and Lee are undecided about their plans, contingent on their careers, while Joy plans to return to Korea but remains open to opportunities in Vietnam or Japan. Meanwhile, Hien, Mo, and Jung are certain they will stay in Vietnam because of work, family, and the comfort they find here.

Discussion

This section discusses these results in relation to the push–pull–mooring perspective and previous research on Korean mobility and acculturation in Asian host contexts. It first considers the decision to reside in Vietnam, then the acculturation process, and then decisions about future residence. It concludes by outlining the study’s contributions to theory, its limitations, and directions for future research.

Decision making to reside in Vietnam

Quantitative analysis shows that several respondents chose Vietnam as their residence because of promising work and career prospects. Mo and Kim's interviews affirm this trend, as both sought better job opportunities and a secure future in Vietnam. Hien, Joy, and Lee did not explicitly address this, although their focus on Vietnamese language study and research

suggests that career considerations may also have played a role; Joy, for instance, named career goals as the primary consideration for his future residence.

These findings align with existing research on Koreans in Vietnam (Le Ha et al., 2022; T. G. Nguyen, 2021). Notably, pull factors such as the attractiveness of Vietnam, which offers opportunities to enhance earnings and secure the future, were far more prominent in our data than push factors. This should not be read as evidence that push factors were irrelevant. Our survey asked why participants chose Vietnam and did not systematically ask about conditions in Korea, and Le Ha et al. (2022) reported push factors for Korean students in Vietnam, such as Korea's rigorous education system and strict religious constraints. Kim Khanh and Ngoc (2023) likewise found push factors, including limited economic and employment prospects at home, among predominantly Korean students, and Bui and Heo (2026) show that Korean migrants' pull towards Vietnam is interpreted in relation to pressures in Korea, including the 1997 financial crisis, competitive education, and an intense work culture. Kim's decision to quit his job at a Korean firm reflects the broader reality documented among young Korean self-initiated expatriates in Vietnam, who often find that the demanding, hierarchical work culture in Korean subsidiaries closely mirrors the high-stress environment of their home country (Oh & Jang, 2021). The absence of push factors in our data therefore more likely reflects instrument design and sample composition than the irrelevance of conditions in Korea, and future studies should measure push, pull, and mooring factors explicitly.

Family, selected as often as employment (45.2% each), stands out as a significant reason for Koreans choosing Vietnam, aligning with several previous studies. In this context, family acts as a mooring factor, suggesting that decisions are influenced by others' needs rather than being purely self-determined (E. S. Lee, 1966; Moon, 1995). Although T. G. Nguyen's (2021) study on Koreans in Vietnam does not explicitly mention family as a migration reason, descriptions of family dynamics within business groups emphasize its role in Koreans' lives. This shows the pivotal role of family ties in the decision-making process for Koreans relocating to Vietnam. Family considerations also align with Bui and Heo's (2026) finding that the "promising South" allows Korean middle-class families to stay together and pursue their children's education. The accounts of Jung, who relocated with her husband, Mo, whose family joined relatives already in Vietnam, and Lee, who arrived at 14 with his parents, illustrate family and ethnic networks operating as facilitators of mobility as well as anchors.

Regarding the factors influencing Koreans' decisions to move to Vietnam, prospects and quality of life matter greatly. Prospects involve readiness for the future, including career training, and the aspiration to find a secure and joyful living environment, among other elements. However, this factor is complex and abstract and may require further clarification and in-depth investigation. This appreciation for quality of life aligns with the findings documented by Le Ha et al. (2022), which highlighted how Korean educational migrants view Vietnam as a welcoming, hospitable, and open-minded environment that offers relief from the pressure of Korea's competitive education system. The emphasis that respondents planning to stay placed on a comfortable, free, and flexible lifestyle and low living costs also echoes the "warm South" described by Bui and Heo (2026), in which Vietnam offers respite from Korea's fast-paced work culture. However, Bui and Heo also report that this warmth fades as practical difficulties accumulate.

Acculturation Process

The analysis suggests that Koreans residing in Vietnam infrequently participate in cultural and social activities from both Korean and Vietnamese perspectives. Most respondents did not feel fully integrated, but only two (6.5%) felt hardly or not at all integrated. At first sight, low participation in both Korean and Vietnamese activities might suggest Berry's (2005)

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"marginalization" category. However, marginalization implies low interest in both cultures, whereas more than half of the respondents rated participation in Vietnamese activities, and around 52% rated the maintenance of Korean culture, as important. The survey therefore reveals a gap between valued and actual cultural engagement rather than a marginalized orientation, and because it did not use a validated acculturation-orientation measure, we do not assign respondents to Berry's categories. This gap is consistent with Mao's (2024) finding that expected and actual acculturation strategies diverge when language and local contact are limited, and with Ranabahu and De Silva's (2024) argument that regular informal contact, rather than occasional participation, drives integration. T. G. Nguyen's (2021) ethnographic research on Koreans in Hanoi paints a somewhat different picture, highlighting close-knit relations within the Korean community alongside successful integration with Vietnamese people.

The interviews and qualitative analysis show that, despite expressing satisfaction with their lives in Vietnam, the interviewed Koreans evaluate their Vietnamese proficiency as inadequate and feel they lack a full understanding of Vietnamese society. In contrast, the six interviewees' narratives show integration-like orientations: they value Vietnamese culture, are learning the language, and enjoy their lives in Vietnam, yet they perceive themselves as not fully integrated. We do not treat this survey difference as an inconsistency that must be resolved. It may reflect small, heterogeneous samples; differences between attitudes and behavior; the high standards participants set for their own Vietnamese proficiency; and the dynamic nature of acculturation, in which orientations shift as language and contacts develop (Mao, 2024). It also illustrates the limits of assigning individuals to fixed Berry categories (Lim & Yoon, 2025). Constraints such as limited Vietnamese proficiency, few Vietnamese friends (Lee), and a partner who discouraged interaction with locals (Kim) show that circumstances, not just attitudes, shape engagement.

When assessing key factors in destination choice, respondents did not heavily prioritize cultural similarity. However, in the cultural integration process, cultural similarity appears to influence their adaptation to the new culture. Among the small group who self-assessed as fully integrated into Vietnamese culture, 8 of 12 (66.7%) believed that cultural similarities played a crucial role in their quick adaptation to Vietnamese society. Notably, in interviews, although interviewees likewise didn't openly admit to being well integrated, they acknowledged discovering that Vietnamese culture and language shared many similarities with Korean ones. The common influence of Confucianism in Vietnamese and Korean cultures may foster surface-level understanding but could potentially lead to deeper misunderstandings. This complexity suggests that cultural distance theory may not fully explain this issue.

Decision-Making for Future Residence

Decisions on whether to return, move onward, or stay are common challenges for immigrant communities, including the Korean community in Vietnam. Respondents planning to return to Korea (35.5%, 11 of 31) were as numerous as those who were undecided, although fewer than half of the returners (5 of 11) intended to stay in Vietnam for more than 24 months first. Only Joy's plan to return to present his research and continue his career loosely resembles Cerase's (1974) "return of innovation"; our data do not allow us to classify other returners in Cerase's categories. One respondent prefers to stay but has to return because of work and family obligations. The reasons given for returning were mainly family reunification and work-related or structural factors such as contract expiry and graduation, which point to mooring and institutional constraints rather than to a simple pull of economic conditions in Korea. The reasons given for returning were mainly family reunification and work-related or structural

factors such as contract expiry and graduation, which point to mooring and institutional constraints rather than to a simple pull of economic conditions in Korea. This is consistent with evidence that social moorings often take precedence in return decisions (Czeranowska et al., 2023; Steiner, 2019). Our survey did not measure returnees' preparedness or resource mobilization, which Cassarino (2004) treats as central to return decisions, so we cannot assess that aspect; future studies could examine it directly. Notably, unlike forced or refugee populations who utilize onward migration to overcome labor market or security constraints (Kelly & Hedman, 2016; Özkan et al., 2023), none of our participants planned onward migration. Given their strong passport mobility and the "sojourner" orientation characteristic of Korean enclaves in Vietnam, respondents navigate their future residence plans as an open-ended process rather than a permanent relocation (Bui & Heo, 2026; Lim & Yoon, 2025).

While fewer than a third (29.0%) are definitively committed to staying, a larger share (35.5%) of the participants remain undecided. This hesitation may reflect satisfaction with life in Vietnam, but the interviews suggest that it is also contingent on career prospects (Joy, Kim, and Lee). Unlike Syrians in Turkey (Özkan et al., 2023) or Iranians in Sweden (Kelly & Hedman, 2016), among whom onward migration is a way of overcoming employment or security constraints, none of our respondents planned onward migration. This difference is unsurprising given that Korean migrants hold a strong passport and can move between Korea and Vietnam with relative ease (Bui & Heo, 2026), and that Vietnam offers limited routes to permanent residence or naturalization (Lim & Yoon, 2025); many Koreans therefore treat their stay as a long-term business trip (Bui & Heo, 2026) rather than as settlement.

Contributions to theory

The findings confirm several expectations of the push–pull–mooring perspective. Career and employment prospects were the most frequently selected pull factors and family was the most frequent mooring factor, as in previous research on Koreans in Vietnam (Bui & Heo, 2026; Kim Khanh & Ngoc, 2023; Le Ha et al., 2022). They also confirm that language matters: Vietnamese proficiency was the factor most often rated as extremely influential for future residence and a difficulty mentioned by most interviewees, in line with the language difficulties reported for Korean entrepreneurs and young employees in Vietnam (Bui & Heo, 2026) and for international students in China and Japan (Mao, 2024; Ranabahu & De Silva, 2024).

The findings extend existing frameworks in three ways. First, they suggest that in an intra-Asian North–South corridor, mooring is not only an anchor but also a facilitator: family and co-ethnic networks, Korean schools, and enclaves lower the cost of moving to Vietnam and of remaining Korean-oriented, which may help to explain why push factors are less visible and why onward migration is absent. Second, by linking motives, acculturation, and plans in one study, they suggest that language proficiency, relationships, and cultural experiences matter at both the acculturation and future-residence stages. However, our small sample does not allow us to test these links statistically. Third, the mismatch between the perceived importance and the frequency of cultural participation, together with the interviewees' integration-like accounts, supports the argument that the type and regularity of contact, not only attitudes, shape integration (Ranabahu & De Silva, 2024) and that orientations are dynamic (Mao, 2024).

The findings also challenge some assumptions. They challenge the picture of migrants from wealthier Asian societies as uniformly privileged and settled: like the "middling" migrants discussed by Bui and Heo (2026), our participants reported language difficulties, uncertain belonging, and undecided futures. They challenge the idea that Berry's four categories can be assigned to individuals based on survey indicators of participation or of narrative accounts of integration. Our respondents combined a high valuation of both cultures with occasional

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participation, and communication mainly with other Koreans (32.3% of respondents) cannot be interpreted as rejection of Vietnamese culture, because it may equally reflect the structural conditions of enclave life and sojourner status (Lim & Yoon, 2025). In this corridor, push and pull may be relative and often intertwined (Bui & Heo, 2026).

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. The survey (N = 31) and the interviews (six participants) are small, were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling, and are concentrated in Hanoi, where all 31 respondents lived. More than half of the respondents were university students, all had studied Vietnamese, and only 12.9% were engaged in business, so the results should not be considered representative of all Koreans in Vietnam and probably under-represent corporate expatriates and small-business owners, who are prominent in current scholarship (Bui & Heo, 2026). The survey did not systematically ask about push factors or use a validated acculturation-orientation scale, the data are self-reported and cross-sectional, and some interviews involved language barriers. Because the survey and the interviews involved different participants and the interview sample is small, differences between them should not be read as a test of one against the other.

Future research should use larger, multi-city samples that include Ho Chi Minh City, emerging Korean destinations, and corporate and business subgroups; adopt validated bidimensional acculturation measures alongside ecological and contact-based indicators (Lim & Yoon, 2025; Ranabahu & De Silva, 2024); follow the same individuals over time to capture changing acculturation strategies and residence plans (Mao, 2024); compare Koreans with other groups from wealthier Asian societies in Vietnam and with Koreans in other Southeast Asian host countries; and examine gender, class, and second-generation experiences (Bui & Heo, 2026; Lim & Yoon, 2025).

Conclusion

This exploratory study examined why Koreans choose Vietnam, how they experience acculturation, and what shapes their future residence plans, using a survey of 31 respondents and six life-history interviews. Returning to the three research questions set out in the Introduction, the findings support the following conclusions. First, Koreans' choice of Vietnam reflects a combination of career-related pull (45.2% cited work and career opportunities), family-related mooring (45.2% had family living in Vietnam), and lifestyle considerations. At the same time, push factors in Korea were not prominent in our data, probably because they were not measured directly, although recent studies show that they matter (Bui & Heo, 2026; Kim Khanh & Ngoc, 2023). Second, acculturation is better characterized as a gap between the value placed on both cultures and actual engagement with them than as a fixed Berry category: respondents rated participation in Korean and Vietnamese activities as important. Still, they took part only occasionally, only two felt hardly or not at all integrated, and interviewees described integration-like orientations while perceiving their integration as incomplete. We treat the divergence between survey and interviews as a finding that reflects language constraints, limited regular contact, and the dynamic nature of acculturation. Third, future residence intentions remained open: 35.5% planned to return to Korea (nearly half of them after more than two years), 35.5% were undecided, 29.0% planned to stay, and none planned onward migration. Reasons for returning were mainly family-related, work-related, or structural; undecided respondents and interviewees linked their futures to career prospects, and language proficiency, relationships, and cultural experiences were all rated as influential. By linking

push–pull–mooring and acculturation perspectives in an intra-Asian North–South corridor, the study suggests that frameworks developed in Western destinations should be adapted to contexts in which migrants are relatively privileged, enclave-supported, and that, for the Hanoi-based Korean residents studied here, language learning support and opportunities for regular contact with local people appear to be relevant priorities for institutions serving them.

Declaration

Author Contributions

Tran Thi Minh and ***Pham Thi Ha*** contributed to the conceptualization and methodology of the study. ***Tran Thi Minh*** took primary responsibility for drafting, developing, and revising the manuscript. ***Pham Thi Ha*** contributed to drafting and revising the manuscript and served as the corresponding author. ***Ngo Thi Diem Hang*** was responsible for data collection and manuscript revision. ***Luong Thi Hien*** contributed to data collection and survey implementation. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Ethics Statement

This study involves non-interventional research based on survey and interview data. According to local regulations and institutional guidelines, ethical approval was not required for this type of study. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. All data were anonymized to ensure participants' confidentiality and privacy.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial competing interests.

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