

# The dual roles of transnational daughters and transnational wives: monetary intentions, expectations and dilemmas

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**Abstract** *Utilizing in-depth interview data from a larger study of Vietnamese transnational marriages, in this article I focus on how Vietnamese transnationally married daughters talk about their plans to provide financially for their elderly parents in the homeland. While single adult daughters from Vietnam are equally likely as single adult sons to provide financially for their parents, married daughters are much less likely to do so than married sons. Yet, paradoxically, a transnational marriage with the prospect of eventual international migration positions daughters as important potential financial providers, not because they are daughters, but because they are transnational daughters. When they eventually migrate, however, they will not only become transnational migrant daughters but also transnational migrant wives. These transnational daughters must, therefore, negotiate their intentions to provide monetary support, expected from them because they will become migrants, against their husbands' objections to the fact that their wives are daughters, and therefore, not responsible for monetary support to ageing parents according to traditional Vietnamese kinship practices.*

**Keywords** CARE, VIETNAM, MARRIAGE MIGRATION, DAUGHTERS, TRANSNATIONALISM

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Like many countries of the developing world, Vietnam receives a significant amount of money from relatives living abroad that is vital to the organization and maintenance of many households. One in four Vietnamese citizens relies on international remittances for their livelihood (Anh 2005). In 2006, these citizens received nearly US\$ 5 billion from migrant family members living in the diaspora, accounting for about 8 per cent of Vietnam's GDP (World Bank 2006). This amount grew dramatically from the US\$ 35 million sent in 1991 (Nguyen 2002). Weak employment opportunities, a repressed economy and a vulnerable welfare state in the homeland compel many migrant family members to send money, even

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among those with severely precarious employment situations abroad (Thai 2006). Policy makers, development researchers and state officials tend to view such financial help from overseas relatives as a positive aspect of transnational families in the new global order. While such remittances may have unequal distributive consequences and stratifying problems, they no doubt change the quality of life for left-behind family members by providing disposable income that could not otherwise be earned in the local economy and, more importantly, by reducing the level and severity of poverty for families in the developing world (Adams and Page 2005).

In this article, I spotlight the social and cultural meanings of money sent and money received from transnational family members, adding to the enormous body of studies and public discussions about remittances that tend to emphasize the numerical and economic impact of financial flows. I revisit data from my study of transnational marriages in the Vietnamese diaspora (Thai 2008) to emphasize how people conceptualize money as a form of care in the organization of transnational families. I focus on the situation of women in Vietnam who married overseas Vietnamese men, and who, while waiting for paperwork to clear in order to join their husbands overseas, talked about their intentions to provide monetary support to their parents in the homeland. In addition to data on the transnational wives, I examine interview data derived from their husbands in the United States and their parents in Vietnam. I focus on how these family members talk about the relationship between money, care, migration and kinship in Vietnamese society, for such families are beginning to form and take part in transnational family ties. I demonstrate that the link between money, migration and family relations – themes of central importance to research on care mobility and transnational families – can help engender new insights into how scholars frame discussions about remittances in global capitalism.

Providing monetary support across generations is not a new practice that simply emerges from the international migration of family members to high-income countries, a process that generally makes earnings much greater than earnings in the home country. While there are wide regional variations in the gender of recipient and provider as well as in the different types of family support (Belanger 2000), monetary support to elderly parents has always been a central familial practice in Vietnamese society. Money, in short, is pivotal to how families maintain their sense of belonging to each other, whether at home or abroad (Cuong et al. 2000; Knodel et al. 2000). Here, however, I focus on a central paradox confronting Vietnamese transnationally married daughters. That is, while single adult daughters are equally likely as single adult sons to contribute financially to their households before marriage, they are much less likely to do so after they exit their natal families through marriage. Yet, a transnational marriage introduces financial obligations and expectations from the transnationally married daughters. Research by Friedman et al. (2003) shows that co-residence among elderly parents and their adult children in Vietnam is highly associated with financial and other kinds of care, and that roughly three-quarters of elderly Vietnamese co-reside with an adult child. Among non-co-resident adult sons and daughters, they found that

both groups give food and clothing with equal prevalence. However, non-co-resident adult sons are more likely to give money to their elderly parents than are non-co-resident adult daughters. In terms of regional differences, they found that the southern region of Vietnam, where I conducted my fieldwork, exhibits the highest level of co-residence. Moreover, they found that there is nearly the same prevalence of elderly parents who co-reside with single adult sons and single adult daughters. In contrast, elderly Vietnamese are *four* times more likely to co-reside with a married son than with a married daughter. The important question for this article, then, is what happens in terms of financial obligations to their parents when daughters marry transnationally. My data suggest that transnational marriages position adult daughters of the Vietnamese diaspora as important financial providers to the homeland, not because they are daughters but because they are transnationally married daughters with the prospect for international migration. While they are transnationally married daughters, they are also transnational wives. These women must therefore negotiate their dual roles as transnational daughters and transnational wives. They intend to provide monetary support as a form of filial piety, expected from them because they are transnationally married, against their husbands' objections to the fact that their wives are daughters, and therefore, not responsible for monetary support to ageing parents. I note at the outset that since I am dealing with these women's pre-migration experiences and their intentions of providing for their parents, as well as their husbands and parents' future expectations of monetary flows, the present analysis does not directly confront my informants' actual remittance behaviour. Nonetheless, I believe that an examination of people's intentions during the pre-migration period of their transnational lives can contribute to our understanding of monetary exchanges in transnational families. The relative lack of systematic empirical investigations of transnational family formations across the Vietnamese diaspora enhances the importance of this study.

More specifically, I provide empirical evidence on the shifting and simultaneous roles of transnational daughters and transnational wives in a global context. Understanding homeland views and practices concerning financial responsibility for family care is tremendously important, especially to those who traverse transnational boundaries between countries with hugely discrepant earning powers and worldviews of family life. Identifying the ways, if any, in which transnational families retain, reconfigure, or simply globalize traditional approaches to financial responsibility for care practices may provide new insights into familial practices of monetary flows in transnational families. Furthermore, in this article I expand the care chain concept, which at present focuses mainly on migrant mothers and their left-behind dependent children (Yeates 2004). As Yeates aptly suggests, scholars can greatly expand understandings of care mobilities by broadening the care chain concept to include migrants' care obligations towards different family/kin members (such as grandparents, parents, siblings) and to include the health, educational, sexual, religious and social spheres of care. I echo Singh's (2006: 375) assertion that, among transnational families, 'remittances are one of the ways families negotiate shifting arrangements of care, responsibility and security for the young, for women and for the elderly'.

### **Remittances in the new global order**

In general, two types of migrants send money to Asia (Hugo 2005) – diasporic subjects permanently settled in OECD nations, and contract labourers who make up the migrant labour pool for most of the world’s migrant labour market. As Hugo (2005: 343) succinctly reports, ‘it is difficult to estimate the numbers involved in both types because of limited migration data collection systems in Asia, as well as the large scale of undocumented mobility out of Asian nations.’ Yet, we know that although most studies focus on the remittances migrant workers send to their left-behind spouses and children (Agarwal and Horowitz 2002; Åkesson 2009; Funkhouser 1995; Jones 1998; Russell 1986; Wucker 2004), most remittances flowing to Vietnam come from family members living abroad with permanent residence or citizenship who constitute a visibly ageing diaspora (Anh 2005). Unlike most Latin American and Asian countries, where remittances tend to come from short-term labour migrants (Fajnzylber and Lopez 2007), the vast majority of Vietnamese remittances come from the nearly three million overseas Vietnamese, known as *Viet Kieu*, who live abroad permanently (Committee for Overseas Vietnamese 2005). Over 40 per cent of these *Viet Kieu* reside in the United States and they account for more than 50 per cent of all remittances sent to Vietnam (Pham 2008). Unlike labour migrants, who tend to migrate without their children and spouses (Anh 2005), the Vietnamese diaspora is composed of the many variants of transnational family members who have migrated since the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975.

Although influential works in diasporic and transnational studies have looked at the nature of monetary and social remittances, care, and consumption in transnational families (Gamburd 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Levitt 1998; Parreñas 2001), there is very little discussion on the cultural meanings of money and on the significance of the money sent and received. This is because there is a general assumption that attitudes towards money are universal. Simply put, scholars assume that money is solely a medium of exchange on the market for the purchase of goods and services. However, different cultures and societies imbue money with different constructions and meanings, which include its use as a medium of sociality, reciprocity and obligations of care. As Zelizer (1989: 343) succinctly points out in her seminal work, ‘not all dollars are equal.’ She argues that ‘culture and social structure set inevitable limits to the monetization process by introducing profound controls and restrictions on the flow and liquidity of money’ (Zelizer 1989: 351). Indeed, non-economic factors that shape and constrain the use of money include its allocation, control, users and sources. Thus, while money is a medium of exchange on the market, it is not entirely a market phenomenon. Furthermore, ‘money is not homogenous. There are multiple monies, existing in different contexts, and not all of them are the same’ (Singh 2006: 379). Money is, in many cases, social in nature and culturally specific, embedded in relations of power, including gender, class and generations. When money is not simply fungible, it is only appropriate for specific uses. Money received from inheritances or a wedding, for example, falls into the category of ‘special money’, that is, money earmarked for specific use (Zelizer 1997).

## **Methods**

During 14 months of fieldwork in Vietnam and the United States, I came across 69 arranged marriages between women in Vietnam and overseas Vietnamese men. The process of arranging these marriages varies widely and is more flexible than traditional arrangements among local residents, a topic I cover elsewhere (Thai 2008). That very few overseas women return to Vietnam in search of husbands, as I discovered from my case studies and from checking marriage registration lists at the Department of Justice in Vietnam, the transnational marriage market is demographically gendered. The high male mortality rate during the Vietnam War and the larger number of men than women who emigrated during the last quarter of the twentieth century produced what demographer Daniel Goodkind (1997) calls the 'Vietnamese double marriage squeeze'. This situation resulted in a 'surplus' of women of marriageable age in Vietnam and a 'surplus' of men of marriageable age in Vietnamese overseas communities, especially in Australia and the United States. Vietnamese immigrant men are much less likely than Vietnamese immigrant women to marry interracially. Because this reduces the men's chances of finding marital partners in immigrant-receiving societies, it exacerbates the double marriage squeeze (Qian 1997, 1999; Qian et al. 2001).

In this transnational marriage market, overseas Vietnamese men typically return to Vietnam to marry by arrangement and subsequently return to their places of residence in the diaspora (most are from the United States, Canada, France or Australia) to initiate paperwork to sponsor the migration of their wives, who, in the meantime, are waiting in Vietnam. The couples I encountered in these marriages were undergoing their 'migration waiting period'. I first met the transnationally separated wives during their waiting period in Vietnam, and later met their US-based husbands. For the most part, because I did not interview transnational couples – wives *and* husbands – when they were in one place, I am providing an analysis about a specific period, a 'snapshot' of marriage and migration during the waiting period. The data analysis presented here accordingly centres on people's intentions and expectations about transnational marriage before taking up shared residence. Since most of the couples had not known each other before marriage, they were just beginning to form opinions and expectations about each other and about what marriage might mean to them in local and projected future contexts. In this article, therefore, I examine how respondents foreshadow their intentions to handle family money within marriage and within Vietnamese kinship systems. While a limitation of this study rests on the fact that I have not interviewed wives as migrants, it contributes to our understanding of transnational marriages generally by focusing on how transnational couples plan or project the future use of money in marital life, and also the general expectations of the wives' parents.

In 1999, the Vietnamese Department of Justice provided two randomly generated lists of 200 names of couples whose marriages were registered in Saigon and 120 names of couples whose marriages were registered in a Mekong Delta province I call Se Long (220 kilometres southwest of Saigon). These lists contained names of both

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husbands and wives who registered their marriages between September and December 1999. Although a few of the transnational wives do not eventually migrate abroad to join their husbands for various reasons that I detail elsewhere (Thai 2008), marriage registration at the Department of Justice in Vietnam is the first step a transnational couple must make to begin the paperwork to sponsor the wife as an immigrant. From the two lists of names, I systematically selected every fourth name from top to bottom of each list and literally went to the wives' houses, knocked on their doors and invited them to participate in the study. For the scope and feasibility of this project, once I captured the experiences of wives in Vietnam, I was only able to interview the US-based husbands in the metropolitan areas of San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle and Boston. In the wife phase in Vietnam, I conducted multiple formal tape-recorded in-depth interviews with 93 individuals, including 66 wives and 27 of their family members. I did not meet three of the wives who were included in my sample because I discovered that they had already left Vietnam to join their husbands abroad. I decided, nevertheless, to include the marriages of the three women whom I did not meet in my analysis because interviews with their families who were still in Vietnam gave me extensive information about their marriages. Thus, it is important to consider that each marriage in this study is the unit of analysis. In the groom phase in the United States, I interviewed 36 individuals, including 28 husbands and 8 of their family members. In other words, I did not interview all the husbands of the wives I met in Vietnam. I based the final analysis on 181 interviews with 129 individuals across the Vietnamese diaspora. See Thai (2008) for an in-depth discussion of the methodological procedures.

I have divided the following data analysis into three sections. Based on interview data with transnational wives and their parents, the first part examines the relationship between money and family relations in contemporary Vietnam, making the case that, given a weak welfare state and recent rapid economic changes, most parents in Vietnam expect their adult children, both sons and daughters, to provide monetary support to them. The second part, also based on interview data with transnational wives and their parents, examines the viewpoints of family members on the role of financial obligations to parents. The third part, which relies on the interviews with transnational wives and transnational husbands, examines the husbands' and wives' different views on monetary support to elderly parents, showing that while transnational wives intend to provide financially for their parents, their transnational husbands undermine their wives' responsibility as financial providers because of their roles as daughters.

#### **The common purse: household money in Vietnamese cultural repertoires**

In Western societies, money generally flows *only* within the nuclear family. Parents typically give money to children, but not the other way around; furthermore, there is generally very little or no circulation of money at all to and from adult children, parents and other kin members (Singh 1997). In contrast, one of the most important features of Vietnamese society is that money holds families together and maintains

bonds of intimacy and care across generations (Cuong et al. 2000; Johnson 2003; Knodel et al. 2000). The exchange of money in the forms of gifts, loans, and favours is a reflection of a larger system of kinship practices based on obligations and reciprocity. Most unmarried adult children generally live at home before marriage and contribute to household expenses by turning over a significant portion of their incomes to their parents. Among the elderly in Vietnam, as is the case in much of Asia, it is common, and in most cases necessary, to rely on adult children for money to pay for daily expenses, and for care in the later years of life. This is especially true in the light of the recent privatization of health care in Vietnam. As Knodel et al. (2000: 101–2) point out in their research on ageing in Vietnam, the family is ‘a far more pervasive and important source of financial and material support than state assistance’. Furthermore, Friedman et al. (2003: 608) report that, despite living in a socialist country, for the elderly ‘the most important source of support is through the family and especially from assistance provided by adult children.’

Survey data shows that only a modest percentage of elders receive any form of pensions or social welfare from the state. In contrast, nearly 70 per cent of the elderly population relies on their adult children as a main source of income for their daily household needs. Such patterns of financial responsibility and exchange are part of a larger belief system in collectivism premised on reciprocity and obligations to members within a family (Johnson 2003). Thus, in Vietnamese society, ‘private transfers’, as economists call it (Cox et al. 1998), or money given by family members, are crucial sources of care, where an inadequate social and care infrastructure translates into few provisions for care from the state. Simply put, most parents of adult children assume that as they age, their children will provide for them financially, as pointed out by Mr Thong, the father of My-Xuan, a woman from Se Long who was waiting for paperwork to clear so she could join her husband in San Jose, California. Mr Thong had two daughters and a son, who was the eldest child. When I asked Mr Thong about the extent that he and his wife relied on their children for financial help, he explained:

Right now, we are not really depending on our children except occasionally our son gives us some money so my wife can spend on extra food and expenses. Our youngest daughter is still young. She is only 18 years old and does not make much money. She works for a friend of ours in the city at his electronic store and she sends us all of her income, but we just save it for her. My son just got married not too long ago, so we try not to burden him much right now. He is just starting out with his family. And, my wife and I are still capable of supporting ourselves. We will probably go live with our son in about ten years and when we do that, we will depend on our son for everything. And, our middle daughter is moving to America with her husband, so she will help out, too.

All the parents of adult children I interviewed shared Mr Thong’s view on the financial obligation of adult children to their parents. This was true when I

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interviewed the parents of transnational wives in Vietnam as well as the parents of transnational husbands in the United States. However, given that daughters typically do not support their parents financially upon marriage, I enquired about the situations of transnationally married daughters, who will eventually become international migrants. Studies have shown that throughout Asia, young adult unmarried daughters often leave their hometowns to seek work in factories in order to send money back to their families (Ong 1991; Wolf 1992). We know less about the situations of transnational daughters, especially among those in transnational marriages. I asked the parents of the women I studied about their views on a migrant daughter's financial responsibility to her natal family. Mrs Le, a mother of a transnational wife and two other daughters living abroad, despite being solidly well off as a jewellery store owner from Saigon, explained to me that those who leave Vietnam should help out their families in the homeland simply because of the disparities in earning power between Vietnam and the West.

I think for most Vietnamese families, if they have a child living abroad, they expect financial support from their children. I think there is nothing wrong with that. They [the daughters] should understand that they make much more money than my husband and me. They know that. That is why my two other daughters send us money regularly. Even though they know we do not need the money, it shows they care for us, because they are not able to be near us and take care of us physically. Like one of my daughters, she sends money to pay for the maid in the house. We don't even have to ask. I don't think it is that much for them anyway. So I think when my daughter, the one who married the *Viet Kieu*, when she goes abroad, she will help us financially. I think she and her husband will figure it out. They know they have to take care of their families in Vietnam.

Mr Thong very lucidly echoed Mrs Le's explanations: 'if you have children overseas, they *have* to help their families.' Indeed, the transnational wives I interviewed shared their parents' views about financial responsibilities among adult children. When I spoke with the transnational wives about how they arrange and organize monetary exchanges with family members prior to their marriages, virtually every woman told me that they gave a significant portion, if not all, of their income to their parents. As Trang, a woman from a rural village whose parents owned a raisin factory, explained, 'I do not really think that I have my own money even though I work and my parents give me some money for the time I spend working for them. I know that I can always ask my parents for money if I need to and it is the same way. They can tell me whenever they need me to give them money.' Trang's explanation seems fair since she was living at home with her parents at the age of 27, relying on them for most of her daily needs like food, healthcare and daily expenditures. Like Trang, most of the women in my study were living with their parents before marriage and they had continued to do so while waiting for the migration paperwork to clear so they could join their husbands overseas. Co-residence with parents before marriage



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means that most of the women in my study are socialized into pooling and sharing financial resources with their family members early on in their lives. Although Trang worked for her parents, most of the women in my study were earning wages outside the family and used them as part of the family's 'common purse'. As Hien, a 34-year-old teacher from Saigon, explained:

It has always been the case that in my family we put money together to help pay for expenses. My brother helps the most because he makes the most money, but I give my parents all of my money except for about 20 per cent of what I earn. In some months if we are short of money, my brother and I would borrow money from other people and we make sure that our parents have enough money to manage the house. Somehow, we always manage to meet all the expenses.

Because of a weak welfare state in Vietnam, many families rely on private incomes to pay for caring needs like healthcare and educational expenses, often comparing the welfare states from where their overseas families reside. As Trieu, a 26-year-old woman from Se Long, explained:

I know my family in America told me that if you get sick or you get into accident, the government there could help you or you can rely on insurance that you buy or other benefits you can get from your employers. I also know that over there, if you have children and you don't have enough money to live on, the government will take care of you. But you can see that Vietnam is a very poor country. It will take a long time before the government of Vietnam can provide financially for its people. That is why most of the people I know here give all their money to their parents so that they can help out in case of an emergency, like if someone gets sick or if there was an emergency in the house, our parents can take that money and help out the person in need.

### **The warmth of cold hard cash**

In advanced capitalist countries, money is often considered an inferior gift object because it implies that gift givers do not take time to think about the gift. As Cheal (1987: 164) noted, 'it is generally felt that there should be "a little bit more behind" (the act of giving) than just simply taking money out of your wallet.' While in some cases money is seen as a gift, it is also symbolically and materially represented in a range of care practices in Vietnamese society, and is therefore often not articulated as a gift form. Thus, between adult children and elderly parents, the transfer of money is not simply a gift. It is a currency of care. Even the smallest amount of money symbolizes a large filial contribution to the well-being of a family. As Truitt (2006) notes, since Vietnam expanded its market economy in the late 1980s, money has become a medium of sociality in a country where the vast majority of its population operates on a cash economy. While the exchange value of money may not matter in

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the offering of money to relatives, the amount is considered in relation to 'previous obligations, the nature of the relation, and the perceptions of status' (Truitt 2006: 295). In some instances, monetary support maintains civil relations among adult children and elderly parents, as well as among adult siblings, among whom the better off are expected to provide more for the collective needs of the family. Indeed, the respondents in this study frequently talked about the warmth of cold hard cash, especially when they have adult children living far away, as Mr Nguyen, a father of one of the transnational wives I interviewed explained:

There is nothing wrong with your children giving you money. It means they care for you and they think about how you are doing, especially if they live far from you. That is why they give you money so you can pay for things and pay for people to do things for you that they would do if they were living with you. They want you to buy whatever you want. When my wife and I get sick or when we are running short of money, we feel better when we receive money from our children because we know they are thinking of us and want us to use the money to get medicine or pay for good food. They take care of us that way. When children give money to their parents like that, they will benefit later on in life. They will get blessings and find prosperity for sharing their money with their families. The ones who are selfish like some of our friends' children who never give their parents money, they will find bad luck, because they are selfish and don't have a heart to take care of their parents.

Like Mr Nguyen, parents with adult children often spoke about the moral obligations of their children to support their families financially. Furthermore, as many respondents revealed, it is perceived that giving money to one's family will eventually bring enormous good luck to one's life. Mrs Tran, the mother of a transnational wife in a village in Se Long, explained the relationship between morality, care and good luck. Furthermore, Mrs Tran points out, family dysfunctions are often both the causes and consequences of limited monetary flows:

We know a family in our village whose adult children live in America, but we pity them because their children never sent them any money. Even when they visited, we never saw them giving their parents money because we know that the elderly couple always complained about not having enough money. Once they even borrowed money from my husband. You know they had many problems in their family. That is probably why their children in America did not care to send them money regularly. Then a few months ago, we found out that those children in America had problems. They were divorcing their spouses, their children were dropping out of school, and they were losing their business. They were having a very hard time probably because they did not send money to their parents. They got bad luck. And you know when you don't do good in life, when you don't take care for your parents, you will face a lot of bad luck like those people we know.

Frequently, as Mr Nguyen and Mrs Tran explained, parents of adult children associate morality and good luck with giving money to elderly parents. Furthermore, the parents in my study told me that they preferred their children to give them cash over other material items. As one mother of a transnational wife explained to me:

For the first few years when we had family members from Canada and America coming back to Vietnam, we got a lot of gifts from them. They gave us TVs, furniture, paintings, books and lots of other stuff. But that's what they do in the West. They give things to each other. Here, you know money is more important. People want money and not things because they can go buy things for themselves. When we have money we can go buy what we need, rather than getting things that we might not use. Like one year my husband was suffering from arthritis and we needed money to get him help with the doctor; none of our relatives gave us money for that even though they saw my husband suffering. They only gave us things. Most of the things we did not need. We just needed the money. We can do a lot more with the money.

As I have shown, monetary exchange is central to caring practices in Vietnamese society. Given a weak welfare state and recent rapid economic changes in Vietnam, most ageing parents expect their adult children to provide monetary support for daily expenditures. Furthermore, numerous moral and social evaluations are based on monetary exchanges within family life. In the next section, I discuss the global paradox confronting Vietnamese women who married transnationally, especially as they shift roles from non-married daughters with financial responsibilities to the dual role of transnational daughters and transnational wives.

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The allocation of money to the homeland is a source of potential conflict among transnational couples in the Vietnamese diaspora. Elsewhere I have elaborated on a number of conflicting points among transnational couples, including notions about women's participation in wage work, household labour and traditional practices of residential choice among couples (Thai 2008). The transnational couples had not discussed the topic of money with each other prior to sharing residence, partly because they had not yet developed 'marriage money', or money that spouses generally pool together in joint accounts after marriage (Singh 1997). In my separate interviews with them, the central discrepancy about money was between a woman's intention to support her elderly parents financially and the man's conflicting idea about his wife's responsibility. Some conflicts had to do with the men living in the West, which meant that they had taken on Western ideals about monetary exchanges with kin members. Others had to do with the men's fear about the appropriate use of remittances. For example, many men viewed money given to parents as a gift that is only appropriate on special occasions, while the women, who had not yet migrated abroad, felt that monetary transfers served as a form of care that they wanted to give regularly to

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parents as an expression of filial piety. One man, Quoc, a 34-year-old car mechanic in California, explained his ideas about future 'marriage money':

I think we will send money home to my wife's family for special occasions, like New Year's or if someone passes away and we need to help out. But I don't think we will send money all the time because my wife has a brother in Vietnam and he can take care of the family there. I don't have a problem with giving money to my in-laws if it is an emergency, but I don't think that they can expect us to send them money all the time. I know a lot of family members expect their *Viet Kieu* relatives to send money home regularly, but I don't think my wife's family is like that.

Quoc's wife Ha, by contrast, a 31-year-old woman from Saigon, saw it as her duty to care for her parents by regularly providing monetary support for them. This was especially important to her because she viewed such remittances as an important substitute for the regular care she would be denying her parents because of her absence from the country.

I'll be living so far away so I won't be able to visit my parents very often. And, even though I have two brothers and my sister back in Vietnam to take care of my parents, I still want to be able to help them out regularly. If I live in Vietnam, I can come and visit them regularly. I know that for my parents, just being there, and doing household stuff around the house for them means a lot to them. You know in Vietnam, we put in our labour to show our love for our parents. So, when I am not there, I want to send money back so my parents can buy things they need like medicine or just have money so they can take care of themselves if they need to do anything that I can't do for them while I am [not] in Vietnam. I'll be the only person in my family to live abroad and, of course, it would be my responsibility to take care of my parents more than the other people in Vietnam because I'll have the opportunity to earn much more money than my brothers and sister in Vietnam.

Like Quoc, most of the men in this study revealed that they believed sons should bear the burden of providing monetary support to parents. With few exceptions, the transnational husbands in this study argued that they and their wives should not take on financial responsibility for their wives' parents in Vietnam because the husbands said they, as sons, had responsibilities to their own parents. This was especially pronounced among transnational husbands who noted that their wives had brothers in Vietnam to care for parents. As Trung, a 41-year-old accountant from Seattle, explained:

I can't imagine why my wife would think that we would be financially responsible for her parents. She has four brothers in Vietnam and although they are not wealthy, they can together help support their parents. Many people

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think that Vietnamese women marry *Viet Kieu* men to go abroad so they can make lots of money to send to their families. But, even if my wife makes a lot of money when she comes to live with me in America, it would be our money, which we will share. And, you see, I am the only son in my family; my parents in America are old and we'll have to take care of them. So I have that responsibility myself.

When I talked to Trung's wife, Thuy, a 36-year-old factory worker, her explanation shows how the prospect for international migration compels many transnational daughters to reconfigure traditional Vietnamese ideologies on financial responsibility to parents. As Thuy explained:

Everyone knows that if you live abroad, you should help your family financially in Vietnam. I plan to take care of my parents regularly by sending them money, hopefully every month. It might not be much, but it would be important for me to send them regular amounts, maybe \$200 or \$300 per month. It will help my parents out a lot because they do not make any money at all. Right now, they rely on my brothers for everything. And, before I got married I was living at home and so I gave my parents all my wages. Now that I am married, my father told me I should keep my own money. They won't take my money now, but I plan to send them money when I go to America. I think just being abroad, living overseas means that you should help family in Vietnam. I know that my brothers can adequately support my parents, but it would mean a lot to my parents and also to my brothers if I can send money back because I will be so far away. I can at least take care of them in that way.

One reason why many husbands expressed fear about sending money is because they had heard about family members in Vietnam using '*Viet Kieu money*' for goods that the *Viet Kieu* themselves would not buy. Indeed, a common observation among respondents was that foreign influences and *Viet Kieu money* created a new culture of consumption that encouraged some of their family in Vietnam to have unrealistic expectations about standards of living arising from monetary support from overseas. Indeed, I have found misunderstandings, disagreements, or disapproval arising between family members across national boundaries over how to spend remittances (Thai 2006). As Khai, a 29-year-old man from California expressed it:

If you have been in Vietnam you know that many people here with *Viet Kieu* family members all of a sudden think they can rely on money from overseas. I think it is fine if *Viet Kieu* have the revenue to spend on their families, but I see it all the time that these people here in Vietnam, they sit around and they wait for the cash flow here and all they do is spend it on things that they don't need. Many times I see it myself that they write letters to their families abroad saying they are ill and need money for medicine, but then you see them wearing fancy clothes and driving really nice motorbikes. For me, I just don't

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want that to happen to my wife and me. My wife will take some time to get a job and we won't make that much money. I really hate it when I hear of hard working families abroad who send money to lazy family members in Vietnam just so they can buy fancy things.

For many transnational husbands, like Khai, the prospect of sending remittances was embedded in fears of a rise in consumer culture in Vietnam. Some transnational wives shared this fear, but at the same time noted the necessity of sending remittances to their soon-to-be left-behind family members, for such remittances represented an obligation to elderly parents, whether at home or abroad. As a case in point, Khai's wife, Duong, a 28-year-old teacher from Se Long, explained to me:

Yes, of course people in Vietnam rely so much on *Viet Kieu* money, and some of them use the money to buy unnecessary things, and not really knowing how hard their families work abroad. I think you just have to be careful, and with some families that's going to always be the case. I know my neighbours here, they always receive money from their relatives abroad, and they use it on things that I don't think they need, like they buy fancy jewellery and big televisions and other electronics for the house. They really don't save it for an emergency. It's hard to really know unless you go through the process. For my husband and me, I think we will have to wait and see. But, regardless of what happens, I'll just send money directly to my parents every month and hope they use it wisely. You can't live abroad and not send money back home because it is hard to visit your parents often and you need to be sure they can have money to buy what they need.

## **Conclusion**

Over the past two decades, women have established a range of migration flows from Vietnam. Transnational marriages among women in Vietnam and men from diverse countries and ethnicities have become a major source of media and public discussions in the diaspora. Undoubtedly, variants of kinship practices undergo immense changes with such transnational marriages. The focus on remittances as a form of care to relatives in the homeland is an important area in which transnational couples develop new ideologies and practices concerning kinship. In this article, I have analysed the significance of monetary support in Vietnamese transnational families as part of a wider discussion on transnational care. My contribution here is to provide an analysis of the dilemmas faced by Vietnamese women trying to 'globalize' care practices from the homeland in terms of monetary support to their family members, for it entails negotiating their dual roles of transnational daughters and transnational wives. Although in Vietnamese society married daughters are much less likely to contribute financially to their natal families than married sons, transnational wives want to provide for their families when they eventually migrate abroad because of the expectation that all migrants contribute to households in the homeland. I have argued

that *transnationally married daughters* are under pressure to remit, whereas their husbands, in seeing no need for them to bear the financial burdens of their soon-to-be left-behind families, undermine their roles as daughters. In addition, these husbands, in their role as sons, already bear financial responsibility for their own parents.

The study of transnational marriages reveals a complicated link between monetary exchange and kinship. It broadens our understanding of traditional practices of filial piety as they are globalized in the Vietnamese diaspora. Vietnamese transnational marriages constitute one variation in the structural and personal organization of kinship in global capitalism. Transnational wives and transnational daughters from Asia increasingly have to confront a global paradox to caring practices on the global stage. In the case of Vietnamese transnational wives, the issue of monetary support to elderly parents is central to their marriages in that they are expected to provide because they will become migrants, but not necessarily because they are daughters. Transnationally married daughters face personal and social dilemmas concerning the obligations, reciprocity and social changes that occur through their global marriage option. On the one hand, while single adult men and single adult women in Vietnamese society contribute to the common purse of their households, women are much less obligated to provide monetary support to their elderly parents once they marry and leave their natal family. On the other hand, families with adult children who migrate abroad, especially since the end of the Vietnam War, regardless of gender, expect monetary support in the form of international remittances to maintain households in the homeland. Transnational wives are one social group among many Vietnamese female migrants who face this dilemma in globalization.

Women from Vietnam who have globalized their marriage options thus inhabit contradictory social positions in their dual roles as transnational daughters and transnational wives. They intend to send money back to family as an expression of care, extending care practices of providing financial support to natal families. As the Vietnamese diaspora matures, remittances will continue to play a key role in Vietnam's development. Indeed, in popular discourses, most people in Vietnam today recognize that there are only three ways of procuring large amounts of cash in Vietnam – corruption, gambling, or from overseas relatives (Truitt 2006). Clearly, money flows from family living abroad significantly transforms the homeland. This article addresses a central paradox confronting Vietnamese women who have emerged as a key social group among senders because they have to negotiate their dual roles of transnational daughters and transnational wives. Focusing on this paradox offers an important window into gender and generational dynamics and the social contradictions confronting transnational families in global capitalism.

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