

## ‘การศึกษา’ ช่องทางสู่การย้ายถิ่น

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ เรื่องการย้ายถิ่นของนักเรียนไทยในประเทศออสเตรเลีย และมุ่งศึกษากระบวนการเปลี่ยนผ่านจากการเป็นนักเรียนต่างชาติสู่การเป็นคนไทยย้ายถิ่น โดยเก็บข้อมูลด้วยวิธีสังเกตการณ์อย่างมีส่วนร่วมและการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกในช่วงปี ค.ศ. 2007-2009 ผู้มีส่วนร่วมในการวิจัยเป็นนักเรียนไทยย้ายถิ่นในนครเมลเบิร์น จำนวน 25 คน ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การย้ายถิ่นของนักเรียนไทยในประเทศออสเตรเลียมีกระบวนการที่เกี่ยวข้องอยู่ 6 กระบวนการ ได้แก่ 1) การเปลี่ยนผ่านสู่การเป็นนักเรียนต่างชาติในออสเตรเลีย 2) การต่อรองกับการตะลึงงันทางวัฒนธรรม 3) กระบวนการตัดสินใจย้ายถิ่นฐานภายหลังสำเร็จการศึกษา 4) การตั้งถิ่นฐานถาวรในประเทศออสเตรเลีย 5) การเป็นคนสองถิ่น 6) การยึดมั่นผูกพันกับถิ่นฐานบ้านเกิด

**คำสำคัญ:** การตัดสินใจย้ายถิ่นฐาน, การย้ายถิ่น, นักเรียนต่างชาติ, นักศึกษานานาชาติ, ผู้ย้ายถิ่น,

## Migration by Means of ‘Education’

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### Abstract

This paper is based on a qualitative study of Thai skilled migration to Australia focusing on the transition period during which Thai overseas students become skilled migrants. The research employed two major qualitative techniques in the fieldwork: participant observation and in-depth interviewing from the Year 2007 to 2009. Twenty-five Thai skilled migrants in Melbourne who initially came to Australia for further education and then applied for Australian permanent residence after graduation generated the core data for the study. This paper addresses six major steps in the process of Thai skilled migration to Australia: 1) Transition to be an overseas student in Australia 2) Coping with culture shock 3) Migration decision making after graduation 4) Thai settlement in Australia 5) Dual ways of life 6) Ties to homeland.

**Keywords:** migrant, migration, overseas student, international student, migration decision making

## Introduction

In the early 1950s the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific occupied a prominent place in Australia's relations with Asia, where it is best remembered for sponsoring thousands of Asian students, including Thais, to study or train in Australian tertiary institutions. They were only allowed temporary residence with some exceptions, such as for those who married Australians. However, since 1984 Australian governmental policies have gradually moved from education-as-aid to education-as-trade in dealings with overseas students (Andressen & Kumagai, 1996). Australian tertiary education institutions have been encouraged by the Commonwealth Government to recruit fee-paying overseas students. The International Development Program (IDP), a university owned agency that promotes Australian education overseas, also reflects the reality of international education. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD indicated in *The Growth of Cross-Border Education* (2002) that Australia is now generally regarded as an aggressive exporter of education services.

In this shift to a more corporatized form of education provision the majority of new arrivals from Thailand to Australia have continued to be students (Table 1). Recently Thailand has become the seventh most significant source country for overseas students in Australia (Table 2). Since 1980s a new range of onshore Australia's General Skilled Migration (GSM) visa categories have been designed to attract young, highly skilled people, with a good level of English language ability and skills in particular occupations that are required in Australia. International students are able to apply for, and be granted, permanent

residence following the completion of their studies, without the need to leave Australia. Consequently, applying for Australian permanent residence has become a major talking point among international students. The possibility of Australian permanent residency has influenced many Thai international students to stay in Australia after graduating and the Thai community in Australia has been increasing significantly as a result (Table 3). According to the 2006 Australian Census of Population and Housing, the Thai community showed a relatively young age profile: 27.6 per cent were aged 19-25 years; and 41.6 per cent were aged 26-44 years; the median age was 27 years. Sydney and Melbourne are the premier Thai migrant gateways in the contemporary Australia.

**Table 1 Time series of Thai student enrolments in Australia**

Year	Numbers	Year	Numbers	Year	Numbers
1994	5,076	2000	8,179	2006	17,865
1995	6,667	2001	11,125	2007	19,987
1996	8,224	2002	15,738	2008	22,278
1997	7,395	2003	17,094	2009	26,460
1998	6,299	2004	16,320	2010	24,790
1999	6,709	2005	16,525	2011	21,701

Source: Australian Education International

**Table 2 International student enrolments in Australia March 2012  
by top 10 nationalities**

Rank	Nationality	Rank	Nationality
1	China	6	Indonesia
2	India	7	Thailand
3	Korea, Republic of (South)	8	Nepal
4	Malaysia	9	Saudi Arabia
5	Viet Nam	10	Singapore

Source: Australian Education International

**Table 3 Distribution within Australia of Thailand-born people, 2001  
and 2006 Census**

State	Thailand-born		
	2006	2001	Per cent change
New South Wales (Sydney)	12,285 (10,827)	9,773 (8,648)	25.7
Victoria (Melbourne)	7,056 (6,431)	5,487 (5,045)	28.6
Queensland (Brisbane)	4,508 (2,437)	3,036 (1,639)	48.5
Western Australia (Perth)	3,420 (2,873)	2,582 (2,183)	32.5
South Australia (Adelaide)	1,692 (1,500)	1,324 (1,211)	27.8
Australia Capital Territory (Canberra)	774 (768)	700 (696)	10.6
Northern Territory (Darwin)	512 (422)	441 (382)	16.1
Tasmania (Hobart)	307 (179)	257 (164)	19.5
Australia	30,554	23,600	29.5

Source: Victorian Community Profiles: 2006 Census Thailand-Born, p. 1

### **Theoretical orientation**

#### **Push – Pull Theory**

The pattern of Thai students studying overseas could be explained by a combination of ‘push and pull’ factors. ‘Push’ factors operate within the source country and initiate a student’s decision to undertake international study. ‘Pull’ factors operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students. Some of these factors are inherent in the source country, some in the host country and others in the students themselves. The decision making process of Thai students selecting a final study destination appears to involve at least three distinct stages. In the first stage, students decide to study internationally rather than locally. This can be influenced by a series of push factors within the home country. It is important to note that only students who have the potential or ability to meet requirements of living and studying in overseas are able to make their ‘dreams come true’. Once the decision to study abroad has been made the next decision is the selection of a host country. In this next stage, pull factors become important, making one host country relatively more attractive than another. In the last stage, the student selects an educational institution. A variety of additional pull factors make a particular institution more attractive than its competitors. The first of these three stages is highlighted in this paper, which investigates the major push factors which effectively stimulate Thai students to study overseas.

#### **Transnational Migration**

International migration transnationalises both sending and receiving societies by extending relevant forms of membership beyond

the boundaries of territories (Faist, 2000). The concept of transnationalism points to a growing recognition of people's multiple attachments (Pries, 2001). When settling in a new city, many Thai migrants sustain strong ethnic networks across borders, while establishing social and economic ties with their local community. Many Thai migrants end up belonging simultaneously to two societies. Transnational relationships between migrant communities and their homelands are seen as part of wider international networks. However, this does not mean that transnational practices such as flows of Thai people and culture can be construed as if they were free from the constraints and opportunities that the Australian context influences. Transnational practices, while connecting collectivities located in more than one national territory, are built within the confines of specific socio-cultural, economic, and political relations at historically determined times (Vertovec, 2010).

It should be noted here that I consider ethnicity to be a social construction formed from the interface of material conditions, history, the structure of the political economy, and social practice. My take on ethnicity emphasizes the fluidity and contingency of identity which is constructed in a specific socio-cultural context. Ethnic identity is a dialogical process; the making and re-making of ethnic groups has always been part of the way people define themselves and are defined by others who connect with them. Thai graduates are skilled migrants and the Thai ethnic community is not an isolated or exclusive community in Australia. Their lives have been shaped by global and Australian environments, particularly the Australian multicultural context. This situation provides an interesting case to look at how Thai

cultural forms and practices can serve as a way Thai migrant community assert, maintain and comment upon their identity relative to both the Australian and the Thai.

### **Networking Community**

Since the age of globalisation, community has arguably become understood as networks of interpersonal ties in which ‘place’ is less permanent and meaningful. Community is still present but in new forms. People continue to connect for a purpose. There is a basic need to belong, which includes the need for frequent personal contacts and for bonds with others that provide stability and emotional support. In more recent decades, most social ties are not local neighbourhood ties as they were in the past decades (Bruhn, 2005). According to this perspective, a shared territory is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to define the existence of community.

I argue that the residential decentralization of Thai migrants has shaped the character of Thai community in Australia: it is a community that is not constrained by geography. While the Thai community in Victoria is maintained independently of a territorial context the dispersed social networks operate to an intensity that sustains a quality of interaction and association that is unequivocally a community. In short, the Australian-Thai community is defined by what Thai people do with each other, not where they live. The presence of a Thai community was made plain by the mapping of Thai social networks. These networks manifest in the hundreds of Thai restaurants, a variety of Thai community organisations, various Thai cultural and religious festivals throughout the year and other occasions when Thais gather and celebrate their culture in a public space, making the otherwise



invisible Thai community visible. Thai migrants have portfolios of Thai social networks that could be used to connect them with others for various reasons and at various times. While they have been connected to Thai social networks since the time of their arrival; they have increasingly used these networks to construct their own personal world and livelihoods.

### Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology and engages primarily with ethnographic perspectives. It is crucial to note that ‘ethnography’ is difficult to define because it is used in different ways according to different disciplines and traditions. For this study, however, ethnography refers to

*an iterative-inductive research process, drawing on a family of methods that involve direct and sustained contact with human agents within the context of their daily lives (and cultures), watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, and aiming to produce a richly written account that respects the irreducibility of human experience, that acknowledges the role of theory, and that views humans as both an object and subject of study (O’Reilly, 2005, p. 3).*

I employed two major qualitative research techniques in my fieldwork: participant observation and in-depth interviewing from the Year 2007 to 2009. Twenty-five Thai skilled migrants in Melbourne

who initially came to Australia for further education and then applied for Australian permanent residence after graduating generated the core data for the study. Participants of diverse age, gender, place of birth, occupation, and marital status are involved. Almost all participants hold Bachelor degrees from Thailand before arriving to Australia. The majority had worked in Thailand while the others were newly graduated and unemployed before seeking for international education in Australia. All participants were overseas Thai students for at least two years before migrating to Australia.

The chief way that I seek to protect research participants from the accidental breaking of confidentiality is through the process of anonymisation. Ethical guidelines all note the importance of anonymising research participants through the use of pseudonyms.

In order to develop a deeper understanding of my participants’ lives, I have tried to immerse myself in the day-to-day lives of my Thai informants as much as possible. Also, I have found that general observation and social interaction in the broader Thai community in Australia can help to contribute a much greater understanding of migration experiences. In addition to the Australian-based research I also undertook interview of seven families of key informants in Thailand to investigate the migration experience across the geographic range of this diasporic sociality.

I have attempted to make the project as methodologically sound as possible; however, it is not without its limitations. As I am Thai living among Thai communities, I am inevitably situated in the world I study. Rather than attempting to step outside the arena of practice and to distance myself from the research setting in order to claim a

more impartial objectivity, I am speaking from within it, involved in and part of the world I am researching. However, I have realised that the experience of being an outsider, an insider and on the boundary between these two roles can cause some strain. Thus, while I have tried to get as close as possible to the action, I have balanced this by stepping back so my eye is cast on how everyday realities are experienced, attempting to 'flow' with my participant's perspectives while being reflexive about my own meanings. Also, it is suggested that data which is naturally occurring exists independently of the researcher's intervention, so to some extent this data has a degree of objectivity in that it is not 'researcher provoked' data (Arber, 2006). Accordingly, the combined approach to data collection would enable a balance between closeness and distance, incorporating a degree of subjectivity by participating and observing in the field. This is one of the ways of enabling reflexivity (Arber, 2006).

### **Research findings**

This study addresses six major steps in the process of Thai skilled migration to Australia.

#### **Transition to be an overseas student**

The first step was to answer the question "Why, in the first place, do many Thai students come to Australia for further education?" This research suggests that a demand for overseas education by participants does not foundationally stem from a desire for international migration nor is it derived from limited access to higher education in Thailand. Most learnt of the possibility of Australian permanent

residency only after arrival to Australia. Additionally, the study courses which almost all of my participants had pursued in Australian educational institutions had actually been available in educational institutions in Thailand. Instead, for participants, the demand for overseas education has been driven by the traditional value Thai place on being ‘more western’ and knowing ‘more English’. Thailand has never been colonized. However, the national development toward modernization and westernization has together over a century ingrained a general desirability to be more western and know English in Thai society (Rapp & Wee, 2006). Additional factors include the expectation of temporary liberation from social stresses, and also the chance to raise their economic and social status in Thai social hierarchy. These factors feed into the growing prestige of international tertiary study, fluency in English language, and life experience in English-speaking western countries.

*Studying a master’s degree overseas is a dream of Thai students (Somjit, aged 33, female).*

*My parents sent me to an international school in Thailand which used English as a medium of instruction. Most students in these kinds of schools expected to have further study in overseas especially in the U.S. or the U.K. (Sumitra, aged 27, female).  
If you graduate from overseas institutions, you could easily access a better job with a higher salary and have more occupational mobility. Also, you could*

*generally find social acceptance in a wider network of Thai social groups (Sureeporn, aged 30, female).*

*Before arriving in Australia I only knew that student visas and working visas allow us to stay in Australia temporarily but a spouse visa would allow us to stay in Australia permanently. Before, I didn't know that Australia allows graduates to apply for Australian permanent residency after graduation (Jamnong, aged 32, male).*

*My class was full of overseas students from China, India, and Latin America. One of the most common talking points was the question of whether you want to apply for Australian permanent residency after graduation (Bimra, aged 26, female).*

However, recent data collected after doing the interviews showed that the possibility of Australian permanent residency (often called PR) was mentioned in some Australian Education Expo held both in Thailand and Australia, and study courses for PR purpose were discussed. From this it is likely that nowadays some Thai international students will have a desire to immigrate to Australia prior to coming to Australia.

*Why choose Australia?* Participants seemed to trust in the standard of study programs offered by any developed country in the West. However, they chose Australia because, they believed, it was

affordable due to favourable exchange rates. Compared with the US and the UK, Australia was cheaper (cost for study and living), closer (distance to Thailand), and easier to obtain a student visa. They realised that there were already large numbers of Thai people in Australia, though some students did not want to meet up with many Thais as they thought it would hamper their English language acquisition. For these students, financial considerations were their top priority.

Participants also discussed that Australia was well known and seen as the most aggressive player in the educational market. The information accessibility and administrative process for prospective students was readily available and students were able to gain entry somewhere because of the large number of educational institutions. Moreover, the direct entry English language course offered by many Australian institutions was attractive. Almost all of my participants made an initial decision by themselves to study abroad prior to approaching their family asking for the permission even though many claimed that their family partially inspired them to pursue an overseas academic qualification. This finding appeared to be that the decision to study overseas was more student-based; however parents appeared to be influential in the choice of destination and educational institution. Friends were generally seen as an emotional support to overcome fear when making decision to study abroad. Educational agents appeared to be important for providing information, particularly in the choices of institution and academic course and assisting with administrative issues because they were the most up-to-date and reliable source.

### Negotiating culture shock

It is clear that participants have changed from being tertiary students in Australia to skilled migrants to Australia after the completion of their study. Accordingly, life as a Thai international student in Australia is examined to understand how these participants come to the decision to seek permanent residence, and subsequently become skilled migrants in Australia despite their initial plans to return to Thailand after graduation. Life as Thai overseas students in Australia was considered from two aspects: the academically challenging experiences and the personally challenging dimensions. The interviews showed that the initial shock influenced participants to seek companionship from fellow Thais and other international students. The initial phases of integration were conducted mainly through the formal and informal Thai networks.

Sureeporn (aged 30, female) said,

*Generally Thai students might need time to translate conversations from English into their native tongue, formulate sentences in Thai, translate them back into English, and muster the courage to speak. Some students might feel embarrassed when they need more time for communication, which in turn might encourage them to group themselves according to language and cultural background which made it difficult for an outsider to join in.*

*I felt hesitant to speak up in the class unless requested by the teacher. I was afraid of losing face if my classmates could not understand my pronunciation or I might use the wrong words, although people were generally friendly and, I never experienced a direct racist incident. I preferred to say nothing and escape from embarrassing situations (Bimra, aged 26, female).*

*When group work was assigned I often worked with other international students especially Asian students. I felt more comfortable working with them (Pennapa, aged 30, female).*

Today there is a general acknowledgement that overseas students require an advisor or counsellor to lessen their burden, and there are a number of student support services throughout Australian educational institutions just for international students looking to get further help. However, participants were not familiar with seeking professional help. The overall implication of these patterns is that student support services seem to be more useful particularly when students need to negotiate with the university about academic problems but such services may not be taken up when dealing with personal issues.

*It was great to have these support services for international students. These could be introduced to develop cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity*



*among staff but the institution should recognise that its staff could not be able to afford the time to continue the close attention. Students were expected to learn to be effective individuals and organise their own lives. People who once were so willing to do something for you or took you somewhere could then appear more distant and suggested that you should start doing things for yourself. When that attention started to drop away, students should know that the honeymoon was over (Jamnong, aged 32, male).*

The typical way that participants adjusted themselves to Australian society was to integrate into a network of Thai people in Australia making use of the Thai community as part of an Australian multicultural society. Even though they did not run away back to their comfort zones in Thailand when experiencing difficulties, they were most likely to integrate into a network of Thai people in Australia which could then be their new comfort zones in Australia. These patterns of interaction affected students' sense of life satisfaction. While the window of opportunity to form international associations in Australia was opened widely, their eagerness to develop a better understanding of English and Western lifestyle, which had previously driven them from Thailand to Australia, seemed to assume less importance in the students' daily lives. My participants revealed clearly that the issue of integrating into Australian-Thai networks did not stem from a desire to preserve Thai culture and reject contact with host members or participation in Australian culture. Instead, Thai student group formation can be seen

as ‘today’s integration’ in the particular Australian multicultural context. In Australia a range of different international student communities can readily be seen, so that Thai overseas students from this perspective are simply one more international group. The benefit to Thai students in initially grouping with fellow Thais is the confidence and comfort they could develop, in order to forge links with other student groups and the wider multicultural milieu. This process caused them to consider that Australia is a stimulating and desirable place to live, and this became a key ingredient in the decision to seek Australian permanent residence after graduation.

It is important to note that most of my participants used Thai restaurants to get in contact with other Thais in Australia. Working in Thai restaurants is the main target for Thai international students who are looking for casual jobs. Thai students work in restaurants as waiters or waitresses, kitchen hands, dish washers and chefs. Almost all of my participants had not worked part time in Thailand prior to starting their Australian sojourn. It was not common in Thailand for students (from middle class family background) to have paid work as their parents would supply all their necessities. However, almost all of my participants had work part time while studying in Australia. Certainly, to obtain an Australian student visa students are required to show they have the financial ability to live and study in Australia until the end of their study course. Nevertheless, many participants stated that they looked for a casual job because they thought that all other students did this. It could then be argued that during their studies in Australia they had been socialised to accept this as one of the new things they should do in their lives. Moreover, many indicated that they had too

much free time during studying in Australia. Their free time made them feel lonely and homesick. Many also believed that doing paid work could lessen their family's financial burden or give them extra money to spend.

Namtip (aged 32, female) said,

*I had classes only a few days a week. When I was in Thailand, I hung out with my friends around the shopping malls almost everyday. In Australia after school I had nothing to do and no place to go. The shopping mall here closed at 5.30 pm. Also, many people around me worked a part-time job. I chose to work part-time at Thai restaurants to enjoying a better social life. Going to the restaurant was like going to catch up with friends. The money I earned was of secondary importance.*

Eighteen participants who worked in Thai restaurants revealed that after linking into Thai restaurant networks they knew more about Thai festivals or Thai gatherings throughout the year, who was who in the Australian-Thai community, what was happening in the Thai community, where to find products and entertainment newly released from Thailand, where to find Buddhist temples and Thai night clubs, and even who they could borrow money from. Thai restaurants also provided news about happenings in Thailand, particularly information on the latest Thai music, TV programs, movies, politics and daily news. They were also seen as social spaces for empowering Thai culture in

Australia, especially the culture of respect to seniority and authority. In many cases, participants begin working in one place for only one or two shifts per week. For those who had never worked in Thailand before, their sense of independence was kindled and they were happy to receive money for their labour which they were free to save or spend in whatever manner they saw fit. Those who had worked in Thailand and spent their own savings to get to Australia for overseas study often preferred to spend that money more carefully. It was common across all eighteen participants who worked in Thai restaurants that they extended their working hours over time. Eventually, they met the cost of all other expenses involved in living in Australia while their parents supported them for tuition fees.

So, after my participants had made the initial adjustments to life as an international student in Australia, their lives settled into a steady rhythm and some stability was established. My participants made new and true friends and were able to become involved with social activities they liked in Australia. Those who were able to swim over the river of unfamiliarity learned how culture shock was important for self-development and personal growth (Sonn, 2002). Early feelings of disorientation were replaced by new-found strength; fear of being alone was replaced by a new capacity to withstand stress and enjoy a feeling of independence (Ward *et al.*, 2001). Independence, stress and strength were positively linked; studying overseas was now viewed as a testing yet life-changing event. It was common to hear participants say they became stronger because of their improved capacity to manage stress. Accordingly, the period after the initial culture shock was viewed as a positive phase. It was an experience of greater self-

understanding, intercultural understanding and change. As their confidence and comfort developed they now had a solid platform from which to consider the possibility of migration after graduation.

### **Migration decision making**

It is clear that participants have changed from being tertiary students in Australia to skilled migrants to Australia after the completion of their study and after they experienced a new sense of life during their time in Australia. The third step focused on migration decision making. I argue that Thai international student migration is a socially produced outcome, not just a result of individual decisions made by individual actors or crude economic motivations. It is an outcome of the interaction between economic and socio-cultural factors. This paper highlights the importance of non-economic factors in a decision to migrate, particularly the sense of independence of life found that students cultivated in their time studying in Australia. I argue that this relatively greater sense of independence to be found within the host country can be seen as a critical component in directing Thai skilled migrant flow to Australia.

*I preferred to have an independent life even though this means I am far away from home. This doesn't mean that I didn't have freedom at home. It's hard to explain. In the Thai social context you still have a choice to make up your own mind, but at the same time when making a decision you may feel pressure to some degree, perhaps from family or cultural*

*expectations. When I was in Thailand I would say I was independent but the independence I experienced here is different. Here nothing will hold you back from what you want to do or not do. Also, here you don't need to engage much with problems which are not your own. In Thailand the life of your family members, relatives, and friends tends to be part of your business (Narong, aged 27, male).*

*I discovered how to play golf in Australia. Here, ordinary people like me are able to carry a golf bag and take a train to the golf course which is almost impossible to happen in Thailand. In Thailand golf is not only a sport but also seen as a symbolic of the high society. It's a culture of the rich, businessmen or politicians. I want to stay here because I feel that in Australia the sense of social class division is not strong compared with Thailand (Prasarn, aged 37, male).*

*I met my partner here. We were Thai international students. After courting for a period of time we have moved to stay together since studying. We were mature, not teenagers. I don't think I made a mistake. However, I don't think I would have done this if I stayed in Thailand because of Thai traditions. My parents knew about our relationship after we graduated. At the beginning they were reluctant to*

*welcome my partner. We decided to spend our post-study life together and build our own family in Australia (Somjit, aged 33, female).*

From interviews, it was common to hear participants commented on changes in their personal attitudes to life. The willingness to prioritise the individual over the group marked a fundamental shift. This was arguably because of the implications of discovering a new sense of self in their personal and professional relationships, and the potential impact of this sense of self on everyday life. Autonomy was one of the many achievements discussed by participants, particularly among those who had been under parental control at home. It is worth considering that awareness of re-entry problems seemed to be greater among those who came from highly conformist family backgrounds but later developed individualist tendencies while in Australia.

*Before coming to Australia I didn't think anything about migration. During study I went back home to Thailand once and found that I was more mature than other friends in Thailand. Sometimes I cannot understand why some of my friends at home live their own lives in that way. They didn't plan or manage their lives carefully. If I were in Thailand, I would have been like them. Also, by working part time in Australia I was able to earn more money than they did working full time in Thailand. This encouraged me to remain in Australia after graduation (Pimporn, aged 26, female).*

*My student life in Australia was not easy at all – hard working in the low skilled occupations. Look at my hands and skin – dry and full of burn scars! However, I didn’t want to return to Thailand. Even though I have a big family business in Thailand, I don’t want to live my life under family control (Najaree, aged 37, female).*

Although participants discovered an independent life during study in Australia, the value of an independent life did not cancel out respect to the family. Participants emphasized the ongoing importance of family ties and the Thai cultural values of respect for familial and state authority. They made the initial decision by themselves to apply for Australian permanent residency but it was rare that Thai individuals made the final migration decision alone. It was almost always a matter which involved other family members. This was not because their family members had a desire to move internationally with their children or participants wanted to move their parents to stay with them in Australia. Participants sought family advice and family permission due to the persistent strength of family ties in the international context and the normative aspects of Thai respect for authority.

In order to achieve their migration plan, participants negotiated carefully with the family, discussing the benefit of migration to Australia by relating to Thais’ perspectives on international migration as an action that channels affluence, status and a high standard of living to migrants and their family back home. Eventually, these participants all received permission from the family before migration to Australia. Here are two typical examples of the attitudes of overseas family



members to the decision of some of my participants to apply for permanent residence in Australia:

*Before going to Australia my daughter studied and worked in Bangkok (away from home) for many years. But I didn't feel that she was far away from me. We were connected. We talked on the phone almost every week. Distance did not matter. Also, she was reliable and able to take care herself well. I gave her full support to study further in Australia. I was surprised when she told me she wanted to find a job in Australia after graduation. However, it sounded reasonable to me and I didn't feel that I was going to lose my child. Working overseas is a good experience if you have a chance (Sureeporn's mother, interviewed in Thailand).*

*I sent my youngest child to Australia to study. I hoped this would channel her into a successful life. I agreed with her when she asked to remain in Australia after graduation. Due to her lifestyle and strong personality, it would be better for her to stay overseas. She would do well and be successful working with foreigners. Two of my children are in Australia and one of them is now the owner of a Thai restaurant (Phanid's mother, interviewed in Thailand).*

In addition, legal and social considerations about citizenship and nationality also positively affected participants' perspectives on migration to Australia. Participants and their families were most likely to understand that according to Australia's multiculturalism policy, Australia allows migrants to apply for Australian citizenship after they have been a lawful permanent resident of Australia for a certain period of time. Also, after achieving Australian citizenship migrants are also allowed to hold dual citizenship. From the Thai side, Thailand's Nationality Act B.E. 2508 as amended by Acts B.E. 2535 No. 2 and 3 (1992) has opened a possibility for a Thai migrants to not lose their Thai nationality after migration to another country. It is implied that after migration to Australia Thai migrants still retain their Thai nationality unless they declare their intention to renounce Thai nationality to the competent authority or their Thai nationality is revoked by the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand (The Thai Nationality Act 1992, Chapter 2). In this sense, then, Thai people can both 'have their cake and eat it'. This was a positive influence in migration decision-making for them and also made it easier for families to give permission to their children to become citizens of Australia, not only just a permanent resident.

#### **Thai settlement in Australia**

After Thai students became Australian permanent residents, their cross-cultural contacts opened much more widely. These Thai skilled migrants associated with non-Thais because of activities in their professional lives as well as residential decentralization of Thai migrants. Thai skilled migrants who participated in this study chose accommodation that was located close to their workplace or was in

an affordable area from which it was easy to travel to their workplace. For those who rented a shared house or flat, the majority had other Thais as their house or flat mates. After migration, the research interestingly showed that participants chose to continue to be integrated into Thai community networks. They did not withdraw from the Thai community. Even though they did not live in the same physical location, they were connected intimately with at least some other Thais in Australia. Although Thai migrants did not live in the same physical location as other Thais, the networks that bound the Thai community still presented opportunities to be connected.

Thai community is about seeking and maintaining social ties with one another and sharing a common purpose, even though this was through extended networks rather than residential locality. Having ties to others fosters a sense of community, which, in turn, serves a protective and integrative function for its members and also facilitates the settlement process. I argue that connections to Thai ethnic networks at this stage do not persist as a result of lack of language proficiency or failure to adjust to life in the new environment. Thai skilled migrants do not coalesce around an inability to associate with the mainstream society. Rather, their participation in the Thai community is both strategic in them getting established in Australia, but also reflects mobility between the Thai world and the wider Australian society. Although networks of many Thais might be concentrated among other Thais, Thai skilled migrants also have external contacts that could connect them to broader Australian society. The Thai community in Australia is not closed or exclusive community. This non-exclusive characteristic of the Thai community has two aspects: first, it does not

exclude non-Thais from participating in the Thai networks and community organisations. Second, it means that the experience of most Thais of Australian society is generally welcoming, even though they still have to work through the tricky social business of being migrants in a new country.

Thai skilled migrants are connected to multiple networks interwoven in complex patterns, because in this way their needs could be met. The Australian-Thai community is regarded as an access to considerable social and economic resources in Australian society, such as accommodation, jobs, place of worship, and many other resources they need. These Thai community networks provide the different degree of accessibility, accountability, availability, intimacy, confidentiality, and rewards.

*I rented out some rooms in my house to students. I posted the advert on the Thai virtual community web board. Some Thai international students looking for accommodation contacted me and rented a room. From this Thai community web board I also knew a Thai couple who I bought baby bedding sets from (Kamra, aged 38, female).*

*My Thai housemate engaged in Thai virtual community. He posted an advert to invite people to a BBQ. Many Thais replied to him asking for more details. There were around 20 or 30 Thais on that day. I was there*

*too. Many brought food and drinks along. Some became friends (Sureeporn, aged 30, female).*

*If you go to the temple regularly, you will know some diverse Thais and non-Thais who have different professional, education, and financial backgrounds. But we live like a family. We are willing to help one another (Jinda, aged 35, female).*

*The owner of this store is a Thai lady. I had worked for her as a chef in her Thai restaurant when I was a student. She offered me this new job because I was sick of working in the restaurant and looking for other jobs (Jamnong, aged 32, male).*

*The room manager is a Thai guy. I was introduced to him by a Thai friend. He offered me a fulltime job. There are some other Thais working in this factory too. We are colleagues and some have become closed friends whom we can share almost all areas of our lives (Natwadee, aged 33, female).*

*After graduating from the university in Australia, I was unemployed for a period of time. I tried to apply for a job but couldn't find one. I took another diploma course in order to get some more connections in the*

*area of my profession. Finally, I found a fulltime job recommended by a Thai who I met during attending that course (Pitak, aged 32, male).*

Thai skilled migrants have portfolios of Thai social networks that could be used to connect them with others for various reasons at various times. Thai skilled migrants tend to be satisfied when they believe that they can receive and give something of value. This is essential to the willingness to cooperate voluntarily and encourages behaviours that facilitate productive social interaction. It encourages Thai skilled migrants to invest themselves in groups, networks and institutions. Thai skilled migrants have been connected to Thai social networks since the time of their arrival; they have used these networks to construct their personal world and livelihood.

### **Dual ways of life**

Australia’s approach to immigration from federation until the latter part of the 20th century, in effect, excluded non-European immigration. The ‘White Australia’ policy as it was commonly described was progressively dismantled by the Australian Government after World War II. The prevailing attitude to migrant settlement up until this time was based on the expectation of assimilation - that is, that migrants should shed their cultures and languages and rapidly become indistinguishable from the host population. From the mid-1960s until 1973, when the final vestiges of the ‘White Australia’ policy were removed, policies started to examine assumptions about assimilation. They recognized that large numbers of migrants, especially those

whose first language was not English, experienced hardships as they settled in Australia, and required more direct assistance. They also recognized the importance of ethnic organizations in helping with migrant settlement. Expenditure on migrant assistance and welfare increased in the early 1970s in response to these needs (DIAC Fact Sheet 8, 2009).

By 1973, the term 'multiculturalism' had been introduced and migrant groups were forming ethnic associations to maintain their cultures, and promote the sustainability of their languages and heritages within mainstream institutions. Multicultural is a term that describes the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society. Cultural and linguistic diversity was a feature of life for the first Australians, well before European settlement. It remains a feature of modern Australian life, and it continues to give all Australians distinct social, cultural and economic advantages. Australia's multicultural policy acknowledges that government services and programs must be responsive to the needs of all culturally and linguistically diverse communities. It commits to an access and equity framework to ensure that the onus is on government to provide equitable services to Australians from all backgrounds (DIAC Fact Sheet 6, 2007).

These official government policy positions do not correspond to the sentiments of some sections of the dominant Anglo-Celtic Australian population (Healey, 2005). There are a range of negative responses to immigration, from dislike to passive resistance, to in some instances, open hostility. Nevertheless, despite these oppositional views and the complexities of shifting long enculturated beliefs and attitudes about ethnicity, the Australian Government formally reaffirmed to ensuring

that all Australians have the opportunity to be active and equal participants in Australian society, free to live their lives and maintain their cultural traditions. Immigrants are therefore not assimilating by force, but forming ethnic communities, in which the language and culture of origin can be maintained and transferred to the next generation. This right to pluralism and social equity is enshrined in Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation.

*As a nation Australia recognises, accepts, respects and celebrates linguistic and cultural diversity. Australia accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian society. All Australians have a reciprocal obligation to respect the right of others to do the same. These overriding principles are the Constitution, parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language, the rule of law, tolerance, acceptance and equality including equality of the sexes (DIMA, Fact Sheet 6: the evolution of Australia’s multicultural policy).*

Multiculturalism is about all Australians. This vision is reflected in the four principles that underpin this multicultural policy: (1) The Australian Government celebrates the benefits of cultural diversity for all Australians, within the broader aims of national unity, community



harmony and maintenance of democratic values; (2) The Australian Government is committed to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; (3) The Australian Government welcomes the economic, trade and investment benefits, which arise from successful multicultural nation; (4) The Australian Government will act to promote understanding and acceptance while responding to expressions of intolerance and discrimination with strength, and where necessary, with the force of the law.

The fifth step of Thai skilled migration discussed how the awareness of social pluralism creates a space for Thai culture within Australian society. Thai-ness that was constructed and internalized in Thailand provided much of the basis for the production of Thai-ness in Australian contexts. However, the production of Thai-ness in Australia is not simply the re-production of Thai culture, but rather the complex process of selection and modification within the new setting. Thai-ness in Australia is partly shaped by local national experiences and transnational as well as global processes. As participants settled down in Australia, held dual citizenship and were bilingual, they had to learn what was called code-switching in linguistics and cultural practices to speak and behave appropriately in a number of different arenas, and to switch codes as appropriate. Attachment to Thai-ness was to give participants the self-confidence to interact much more dynamically and creatively within an Australian multicultural society. Participants were also, for example, speaking English, wearing modern clothes, paying tax, obeying the law of the land, and respecting the

elected parliamentary representatives, democratic political structures and traditional values of mutual tolerance and concern to integrate themselves to mainstream society. These ‘multiple belongings’ and ‘flexible cultural identities’ were expressed in the way participants used their ‘Thai-Australian-ness’ in the local setting and transnational context.

*I believe that it should be our own responsibility to improve our English because English is the language to unify elements of Australian society (Francis, aged 35, female).*

*In Thailand there are regional linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences, but most Thais speak Thai as a common language. In Australia many spoke other languages in their daily lives, not only English. I often spoke Thai when communicating to Thai people too. When I brought my non-Thai friends to Thai gatherings I needed to be aware of not speaking Thai but speaking English. I expected my non-Thai friends to do likewise, so that we can understand what people are talking about (Sureeporn, aged 30, female).*

*To lie the baby down on the bed, Thai people believe that the baby should be placed on its tummy and the mother will then put the baby’s face in the position that the baby can breathe from. This is for the good shape of the baby’s head. My Australian husband*

*strongly disagreed with me. He said the parents won't keep an eye to the baby all the time. The baby may not be able to take a breath as the baby will move a lot when sleeping. Another situation occurred when I brought my baby to a Chinese traditional doctor to heal the baby from allergic diseases. Due to the bitterness of the medicine that always made my baby cry, my husband defined it as a psychological damage. I'm just wondering how much I will be able to pass on my Thai-ness to my children. At least, my children should be able to speak Thai (Kamra, aged 38, female).*

*I've learned to make a plan almost every time I travel here. I look at my Melways (a popular street directory) or search the Google map website to find the place I want to go. I look at the Journey Planner from Metlink (Melbourne's public transport website) to find the way to get there by public transport. The most important is that I need to be punctual if I do not want to miss the bus or train. Planning, well-organising, and being punctual - all these challenged my old Thai habits (Jinda, aged 35, female).*

Under the pluralistic name of Australian multicultural society the presentation of Thai-ness was seen to be balanced against behaving in a way deemed acceptable to Australians. The freedom of expression

to be a Thai and community sustainability in Australian society was joined in the consideration whether or not actions are desirable or undesirable. Thai-ness presented in Australia was not a matter of fixed and stable truth about Thais, Thailand or Thai culture. Thai people who live overseas have a space to negotiate their Thai-ness; they can have different layers of Thai-ness without contradictions. A Thai-Australian can be proud of his or her Thai nationality which they can define in many ways. This negotiated Thai-ness brought significant cultural layers to the fabric of Australian multicultural society.

### **Ties to homeland**

The last step investigates how these Thai skilled migrants maintained their relationships to Thailand. Homeland attachment can take many forms. It was generally the case that my participants did not engage directly in significant economic, religious and political activities across borders. In this research most participants did not seem to regularly send the money back home. Economic remittances seemed to be not a major mode of transnationalism for these Thai skilled migrants. This was not because the majority of participants were free from family obligations, but mainly because of the comfortable financial status of their families. Their families had other sources of financial support, especially from their Thailand-based children. In some cases, money flowed the other way and participants received financial support from their families in Thailand. In terms of religious engagements, it can be argued that religion is something that plays an important role in maintaining the links between Thai people who share the same beliefs while they are in the Australian-Thai community.

In contrast to this, religion may have some influence, but not a strong impact on, promoting the transnational ties to their homeland. Another interesting pattern that emerged is that almost all participants had diminished political engagements across borders even though they held dual citizenship. A Thai voter who resides outside the Kingdom of Thailand has the right to cast a ballot in an election. Overseas voters can vote in person at Thai embassies, consulates or designated central polling stations in the countries where they reside. However, almost all participants had never registered as overseas voters to exercise their political rights across borders. Moreover, the current political conflict in Thailand seemed to be a Thailand-based situation; it was not a transnational phenomenon that brought social conflict to the Thai community in Australia.

This research revealed two the most important elements of transnational social engagements. The research suggests that Thai skilled migrants continue to retain strong bonds of emotion, loyalty and affiliation with the homeland especially toward their significant others in Thailand. The institution of monarchy of Thailand as well as the family members in the home country were seen by participants as their significant others. The monarchy of Thailand continued to provide for these participants a powerful focal point bringing them together even while overseas. King's birthday was considered as the more important gathering days for Thai people in Australia. Some continued to show the pictures of the King in their Australian accommodation in the same way that many Thais normally do in Thailand.

In addition to this, the advance in communication and telephony

technologies, especially mobile phones and the internet, has allowed participants to have continuous and real time communication within transnational networks. The proliferation of cheap international telephone calls has enabled the maintenance of the most fundamental social aspects of transnational life. The real-time communications allowed by cheap international telephone calls served as a kind of social glue connecting Thai skilled migrants with family members across the world. Even though this mode of intermittent communication could not bridge all the gaps in information and expression endemic to long distance separation, cheap international telephone calls joined migrants in Australia with their significant others in Thailand in ways that were deeply meaningful to people on both ends of the line. Low cost and frequent plane travel between Thailand and Australia is also readily available and almost all of my participants made regular visits to Thailand. Although no participants actually lived in two countries in the course of their routine daily activities, back-and-forth movements by participants was a constant aspect of their lives.

In sum, participants in this study maintained regular contact across international borders and between different cultures and social systems. They experienced cultural differences through their connections to both Australian and Thai societies. As a consequence, they needed to select diverse strategies of action on a day-to-day and situation-by-situation basis, adapting to particular circumstances. Ties to Thailand have led these Thai ‘transmigrants’ to live dual belonging, speak two languages, and have homes in two countries. Thailand still remained an ‘eternal home’. Meanwhile, Australia was seen as a ‘second home’, a home of residence where they lived their lives

independently. Participants revealed that when they were in their initial phase as international students in Australia, they mostly regarded Thailand as their only home. However, after my participants have lived independently in Australia and become attached to it, they began to see Australia as more than just the place where they studied and worked. The argument for this is that home is not necessarily a singular place. Belonging, loyalty, and sense of attachment are not parts of a zero-sum game based on a single place. Identifying a new place as a 'second home' beyond just a house one lives in takes time. Home may be lived in the tension between the given (where they were born) and the chosen (where they migrated), then and now, here and there.

### Discussion

In the politics of social integration, this study has suggested that: *Firstly*, Social integration could be established through extended networks rather than residential locality. Thai community in Australia is conceived as a dynamic meta-network, an ongoing process of social networking ranging from interpersonal to organisation ties, from virtual encounters to real-life interactions. Thai skilled migrants have portfolios of Thai social networks that could be used to connect them with others for various reasons at various times. Thai skilled migrants have been connected to Thai social networks since the time of their arrival; they have used these networks to construct their personal world and livelihood.

*Next*, in a diverse society, the populations have different traditions but also share a common space together. It is therefore necessary to have a 'shared' understanding of what 'integration' is or what it means

to live in a society where people come from different backgrounds. If we agree that integration is not about assimilation into a single homogenous culture nor living in a society of separate enclaves, and then between those two extremes there is a great range and diversity of types of integration. This research has proposed a picture of integration. It revealed that how Thais show that they have integrated into Australian society is primarily to share some common values while not abandoning what differentiates one from others. The cultural expectations of the Australian-Thai community are negotiable, flexible and open to compromise. The individual or community assessment of whether or not actions were acceptable or unacceptable, desirable or undesirable is most likely negotiated in the space that is formed between Thai and Australian social values.

*Finally*, multiple attachments tend to not hamper integration in the country of settlement. When migrants live their lives across national borders, they may challenge a long-held assumption about membership and belonging. Some might ask; if people stay active in their homeland, how will these migrants contribute to the country where they settle? The lived experiences of Thai skilled migrants suggest that migrants will not simply cut their ties to their eternal home, nor does it take away from migrants' ability to contribute to and be loyal to their host country. Participants have multiple attachments that modern technology has facilitated. Rather than a problematic dual loyalty, this research showed that multiple attachments tend to not hamper integration in the country of settlement. Attachment to Thai-ness was to give participants the self-confidence to interact much more dynamically and creatively within an Australian multicultural society. The integration of



Thai skilled migrants into Australian society, while maintaining their Thai-ness and ties to Thailand, are a salutary corrective to the calls for a 'one nation, one culture, one language, one state, one citizenship'.

These skilled migrants do not arguably pose a category of risk or crisis for Australia. To them, Australian multiculturalism did not lead to social fragmentation or segregation. The Thai community in Australia is neither an overly closed nor exclusive community. Again, to them, Australian multiculturalism did not produce the mobilisation or a claim to group rights as if standing outside a common set of values (i.e. universal human rights and democratic concepts). They are not an example that defines group rights as sovereign rights. They are an example that recognises the unalterably multi-ethnic character of Australia and secures enough in its multicultural values, not just to tolerate but to enjoy variety. This study has suggested that Australia can continue to move towards more robust anti-discrimination policies, and develop policies that tend to see multiculturalism as a condition of social order and security. Calling for improving opportunity and greater interaction between people of different backgrounds as the strategy would lead the country towards an Australia where our ethnic origin does not determine our destiny.

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