

**RECENT THAI SKILLED MIGRATION
IN VICTORIA**

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God's Grace is sufficient for me, for God's power is made perfect in weakness.

I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.

For when I am weak, then I am strong.

~ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ~

SUMMARY

This thesis is an anthropological and sociological study of migration experience focusing on the transition period during which Thai overseas students become skilled migrants, as well as the way that Thai skilled migrants live in Australia. Twenty-five Thai skilled migrants in Victoria who initially came to Australia for further education and then applied for Australian permanent residence after graduating generated the core data for the study. The research highlights how a demand for overseas education by these former Thai students has traditionally been driven by the value Thai place on being more Western and knowing English as well as the expectation that study in Australia will temporarily liberate them from social stresses and raise their economic and social status in Thai social hierarchy. However, they have migrated to Australia after the completion of their overseas study rather than returning to Thailand. Their migration decision-making can be seen as a social product, not as the sole result of individual decisions but a matter which involved other family members. Non-economic factors relating to the independence of life were of considerable importance in the migration decision-making. The research findings show that the Australian-Thai community can be seen as a dynamic meta-network which has many sub-networks interconnecting within it; ranging from interpersonal ties to social organisational ties, from virtual encounters to real-life interactions. Participants had Thai social networks that could be used to connect them with other Thais for various reasons at various times. They have used these networks since the time of their arrival to construct their own personal world and livelihood. Although networks might be concentrated on other Thais, participants also had external contacts that could connect them to broader Australian society. The Thai community is neither a closed nor exclusive community. The awareness of social pluralism which both Australia and Thailand have taken into account creates a space for Thai culture within Australian society. Integration into Australian-Thai community networks as well as ties to the homeland was central to the migration, settlement, and adjustment that provided opportunities for meaningful social engagement and identity development. These Thai transmigrants live dual lives; speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and continuing to have regular contact across international borders and between different cultures and social systems.

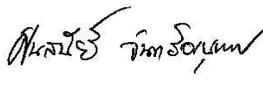
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in this thesis were approved by the University Human Ethics Committee, Approval Number UHEC 07-16.

Signature: 

Date: 7/12/2010

Chapter One

Introduction

Background of the study

In February 2007, I came to Australia for further education. I expected that overseas education in the Western world would be an eye-opening experience, and one I could utilise to the advantage of my academic career in back in Thailand. During my stay in this foreign country, from the first day to the present, there has been a common question I have been asked consistently by people in Australia (both Thais and non-Thais, and both locals and migrants). In schools, restaurants, and worship places a question along the lines of, “Would you like to stay here after graduation?” frequently appears in my conversations. This is especially so among international students. I entered to Australia without giving any thought to this question as permanent emigration from Thailand has never been in my mind. However, the pervasiveness of such a question piqued my scholarly curiosity, as time and time again I heard overseas students talking and discussing the issue of applying for Australian permanent residence after graduation.

Accordingly, the professional and personal rationales for this research project lie, to a significant degree, in my own background. My interest in Thai skilled migration to Australia stem from two main sources. The first is a very direct experience of becoming a Thai international student in Australia who will ultimately be qualified to apply for Australian permanent residency after graduating. This autobiographical journey thus provides access to fragments of only partly visible information, giving a more nuanced understanding of the primary sources of data that are incorporated into this thesis. It provides a basis of anthropological reflections about the experiences of Thai students and a personal insight into the Australian tertiary educational systems requirements and constraints. The second source is the generative nature of my social networks; my connections with the Australian-Thai community, including other Thai international students, Thai migrant families and Thai organisations in Australia, have indelibly printed themselves on this project.

This research highlights the transition period during which Thai overseas students become skilled migrants, as well as the way that Thai skilled migrants live in Australia. I focus on Thai skilled migrants in Victoria who initially came to Australia for study and then applied for Australian permanent residence after graduating. The research investigates their way of life in Australian multicultural society, as well as the extent to which they maintain connections with their country and families of origin.

These investigations are clarified by focusing on the following core issues:

1. The transition to become an international student in Australia
2. The transition to become an Australian permanent resident
3. Settlement and adjustment into Australian multicultural society
4. Ties to the homeland

Obviously enough, these core issues are linked in various ways, some as antecedents to later choices and relationships, and some as consequential to the decisions made. How these chains of events and decisions have been perceived by the skilled migrants and their friends, family and acquaintances within their Thai networks and elsewhere are of interest to this study.

Theoretical orientation

In investigating recent Thai skilled migration in Australia, my theoretical perspective is framed around the notion of ‘transnationalism’. I view transnational activities as involving the flows of ideas, information, people and culture which transcend one or more nation-states. The lives of many individuals in the contemporary world increasingly transcend single localities and single nations. International migration mostly takes place within transnational social networks that link families and communities across long distances (Faist, 2000). The concept of transnationalism emerges from the realisation that migrants maintain

ties with their countries of origin, making their home and host societies a single arena of social action. This perspective departs from static conceptualisations of migration as a one time event spanning place A and place B, instead emphasising interdependence and reciprocity. Transnational mobility has established dense political, social, and economic relations across national borders, contributing to the constitution of hybrid and flexible cultural phenomena (Faist, 2000).

Transnationalism broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across borders of nation-states. In *Nations Unbound*, Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc define transnationalism as the processes by which migrants “forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (1994, p. 7). Transnationalism emphasises the fact that many migrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Migrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political – that span borders are called ‘transmigrants’ (Basch *et al.*, 1994, p. 7). Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states. Not all dual citizens are transmigrants, and not all cross-border moves are transnational. Migrants are understood to be transmigrants when they develop and maintain multiple relations that span international borders (Glick-Schiller *et al.*, 1992, p. ix). However, Guarnzo and Smith (1998) have insisted on the continuing significance of nation-states in understanding transnationalism. Questioning the concept of transmigrants as unbounded, free-floating social actors, Guarnzo and Smith suggest that we underline the boundedness of transnationalism by reference to the opportunities and constraints found in particular localities where transnational practices occur. Transnational practices cannot be construed as if they were free from the constraints and opportunities that contextuality imposes.

International migration transnationalises both sending and receiving societies by extending relevant forms of membership beyond the boundaries of territories. The concept of transnationalism points to a growing and ever more routinised recognition of a people’s multiple attachments. The assumption that a person will live his or her life in one place,

according to one set of national and cultural norms, in countries with impermeable national borders, no longer holds. When settling in a new city, many migrants rely on mutual links and sustain strong ethnic networks across borders, while establishing social and economic ties with their local community. Many migrants end up belonging simultaneously to two societies as ‘transmigrants’. In fact, ethnic and community networks represent one of the most innovative and interesting features of present-day international migration patterns. Transnational relationships between migrant communities and their homelands are seen as part of wider international networks (Levitt, 2004).

In the age of globalisation the diversity driven by transnational migration and ongoing transnational ties is now coming to be regarded as unsurprising, commonplace and unquestioned. Growing multidimensional diversity, increasing social complexity and migrant transnationalism are being broadly acknowledged as ordinary facets of contemporary globalised society (Vertovec, 2009). Faist (1999, p. 5), however, insists that there is a marked difference between the concepts of globalisation and transnationalisation. The term ‘transnationalisation’ may partly overlap ‘globalisation’, but typically it has a more limited purview. Whereas global processes are largely decentred from specific nation-state territories and take place in a world context ‘above’ and ‘below’ states, transnational processes are anchored in and span two or more nation-states, involving actors – including their networks of social relations and communities – from the spheres of both states and civil societies. The new intensity of exchange and ties across the borders of nation-states is made possible by economic globalisation, together with advances in technology, as well as broader affordability of telecommunications, media and not least mass travel opportunities. The ready availability of air transport, long-distance telephone, facsimile communication, internet, and electronic mail have made both travel and communications across national borders rapid and easy (Portes, 1997, pp. 223-225).

In sum, the transnational perspective used in this thesis focuses on two issues. First, transnational processes need to be understood beyond the borders of a particular nation-state and transnational activities involve the flows of ideas, information, people and culture that transcend one or more nation-states. Many Thai skilled migrants living in Australia maintain

trans-border connections through networks of families and friends, and continue to consume cultural artifacts produced from across the international borders. Some continue to travel back and forth between Thailand and Australia. This thesis explores the way that Thai skilled migrants live in Australia, as well as their ongoing ties to Thailand to understand the maintenance of Thai sociality throughout the migration experience. Second, while transnational processes extend beyond the borders of a particular nation-state, these processes are shaped by the socio-cultural and institutional practices of a particular nation-state. In other words, transnationalism draws attention to what it negates – that is, the continued significance of the nation-state. Given the prevalence of great mobility among many populations, scholars of transnationalism have insisted on the idea that nationalisms on the part of both sending and receiving states have been re-ignited to strengthen or reconfigure the nation-state in the processes of transnationalism (Kearney, 1995; Jirattikorn, 2007; Smith, 2001; 2003). By using the transnational as a conceptual framework, this research discusses the formation of Thai ethnic community in Australia and how Thai-ness is presented as members of a transnational community, collectively and individually, construct themselves in the new environment. 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 (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998). Thus, my theoretical approach is framed around a dialectical connection that links transmigrants with their locality of origin and the locality to which they migrate to produce a synthesis that requires the researcher to understand the enduring influence of ‘home’ and ‘away’ in the transnational experience.

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 (Kerney & Nagengast, 1990). My take on ethnicity emphasises 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 skilled migrants redefine and re-imagine their identity out of their transnational existence and 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.

The historical background of Thai community in Australia

Thai people have been in Australia since 1861, but there is little tangible evidence of their presence in the late 19th century (see Figure 1.1) (Thompson, n.d.). Their numbers were so small that they were included in the grouping of Indo Chinese, Korean and other Asian settlers in the New South Wales (NSW) census until 1901, when 37 Siamese¹ were counted in the first Commonwealth Census. After Federation, migration to Australia was strictly governed by the Immigration Restriction Act 1901. There were fewer than 50 Thais officially counted in NSW until the 1950s, and the numbers did not rise substantially until the Immigration Restriction Act was repealed in 1973.

¹ Siam was the official name of Thailand and the Thai people were called Siamese...

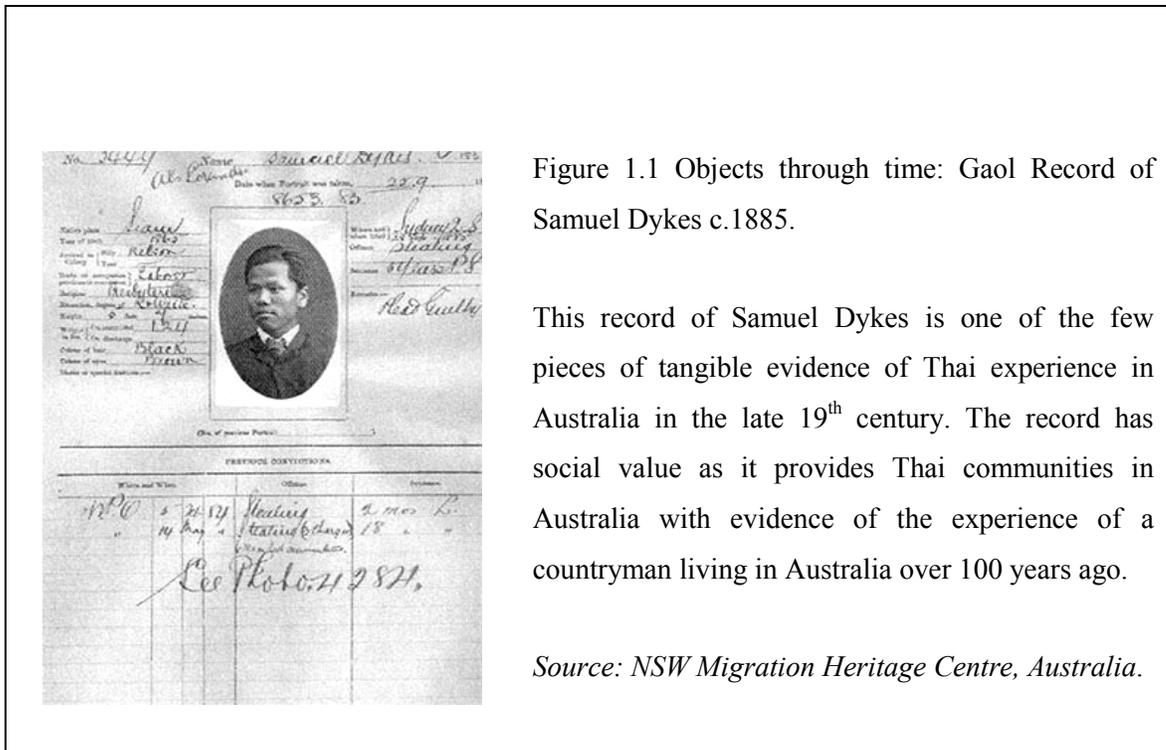


Figure 1.1 Objects through time: Gaoi Record of Samuel Dykes c.1885.

This record of Samuel Dykes is one of the few pieces of tangible evidence of Thai experience in Australia in the late 19th century. The record has social value as it provides Thai communities in Australia with evidence of the experience of a countryman living in Australia over 100 years ago.

Source: NSW Migration Heritage Centre, Australia.

According to Museum Victoria Australia, during the early 1920s a notable Thai to arrive in Australia was Butra Mahindra who was sent as a representative of His Majesty King Phra Mongkut Klao Chaoyuhua of Thailand (King Rama VI) for the purpose of purchasing racehorses. His mission was successful and the King rewarded him with the higher title of Phra Naivai (“History of immigration from Thailand”, <http://museumvictoria.com.au/origins/history.aspx?pid=63> accessed May 14, 2009). Due to the desire of well-to-do Thais to acquire more horses, there were other horse purchasing trips from Thailand to Australia. These horse buying expeditions would become the first significant link of Thailand to Australia and so it seems appropriate that one of the most famous and best-known racehorses in Australasia, Phar Lap, has a name from the Thai language which means ‘lightning’ (“Phar Lap”, <http://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre/infosheets/phar-lap/> accessed May 14, 2009). Phar Lap, stuffed and preserved, now stands proudly inside the entrance to the Melbourne Museum.

Connections between Australia and Thailand developed further with the arrival of the Thai Royal family members such as H.R.H. Prince Purachatra Jayakar of Kambaengbejra for a group tour of Australian agriculture and infrastructure in 1927 (“Australian Thailand directory”, <http://thaiworld.50webs.com/authai.html> accessed May 14, 2009). H.E. Phya Chaovananusathiti also led a student group to study in Australian educational institutions in 1928, and the current crown prince of Thailand, H.R.H Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, the only son of the King Rama IX, received his education in Australia at the King’s School, Sydney in 1970 (“The King’s school: brief history of the school”, <http://www.kings.edu.au/about/briefHistory.html> accessed May 18, 2009) and at the Royal Military College Duntroon, Canberra in 1972 (“The biography of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn”, <http://www.saiyairak.com/History/904.aspx> accessed May 18, 2009).

It is also recorded in *Pai Nai Ma: Thai-Australian Experiences* that the royal state visits from Thailand to Australia particularly in 1962 (see Figure 1.2) inspired Australian interest in Thailand and its culture (NSW Migration Heritage Centre, <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/painaima/community.shtml> accessed May 18, 2009). Since the early 1970s Thailand has become of increasing cultural and economic importance to Australia, and the rise in prominence of Thailand in Australia’s international trade has been matched by an increase in the level of permanent emigration from Thailand to Australia (Coughlan, 1999).

Following the visit of King Bhumibol (the current King) and Queen Sirikit to Sydney, Australia in 1962², a group of Thai-born academics in Australia formed the first Australian-Thai community organisation, the Thai-Australian Association of New South Wales (TAA). The focus has been on cultural, social and educational activities. The objective of the association remains “to maintain good relationships between the Australians and the Thai people” (NSW Migration Heritage Centre, <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/painaima/community.shtml> accessed May 18, 2009). The Thai Welfare Association (TWA) is the second Australian-Thai community organisation, with a completely different emphasis. Thai migrants required culturally specific welfare resources

² See *King and Queen of Thailand visit Sydney* video newsreel film at <http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=69261>

but none were readily available at that time. TWA was established in Sydney in August 1990 by a group of Thai migrants and had a welfare focus aimed at assisting Thai people with their settlement issues, particularly women. The founding members were motivated by the isolation of many Thai women in the community, married to Australian-born men and facing problems ranging from cross-cultural communication to domestic violence (NSW Migration Heritage Centre, <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/painaima/community.shtml> accessed May 18, 2009).



Figure 1.2 A royal state visit from Thailand to Sydney, Australia on 26 August 1962 to 12 September 1962

This picture shows Her Majesty Sirikit admiring a New Guinea dog and a koala bear brought to Government House in Sydney by Sir Edward Halstrom of the Taronga Park Zoo.

(Source:<http://3armyarea-rta.com/wpmu/kindness/2009/11/> Posted in Uncategorized by Aekphop on November 27, 2009 accessed 19 July, 2010)

The 1996 Australian Census of Population and Housing counted 18,935 Thai-born people in Australia, compared to only 3,346 in mid-1981. The main corpus of Coughlan and McNamara's paper provides an analysis of 1996 Census data on the demographic, social and economic characteristics of the Thailand-born community in Australia as of mid-1996 (1997,

pp. 199-242). The paper concludes with a general discussion of the data presented, and suggests future possible developments in the nature and composition of the Thailand-born community in Australia. For example, the vast majority of Thai migrants in Australia are Buddhist. Most came to Australia as spouses of Australians or former students. Many of the students had been sponsored under various schemes, notably the Colombo Plan and military traineeships. Marital separation and divorce are prevalent in the Thailand-born community based in Australia and females are more likely than males to be separated or divorced. Coughlan and McNamara (1997, pp. 199-242) indicated that this figure does not necessarily imply that marriages involving Thai women and Australian men are most likely to end in divorce, as the women may have been divorced or separated prior to migrating to Australia. While proficiency in English, the dominant language of Australia, is one of the essential keys to effective integration, the 1996 census shows that Thailand-born community is the least proficient in English compared with other Asian migrants. Therefore, it is probable that members of the Thailand-born community will have greater difficulty in using what qualifications they may have in Australia. Typically they tend to receive lower incomes and primarily work in restaurants due to the rapid growth in the popularity of Thai food across Australia since the mid-1980s (Coughlan & McNamara, 1997, pp. 199-242).

The 2001 and 2006 Australian Census of Population and Housing reveals that the Thai community in Australia has been increasing significantly. Sydney and Melbourne are the premier Thai migrant gateways in the contemporary Australia (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Distribution within Australia of Thailand-born people, 2001 and 2006

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*,
<http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/stories/pdf/thailand-2006-census.pdf> accessed May 18, 2009

There is little research focused on Thai migration to Australia and there seems to be none on the area of Thai skilled migration. Nonetheless, some significant research which is relevant to this project will be discussed below, and from this review the potential value of the present research, and hence the need for this study, becomes apparent.

Jiraratwatana's (1999) study is based on interviews with people from most sections of the Sydney Thai-Australian community including Thai immigrants, Thai students, children of Thai immigrants, Australian friends or partners of Thai immigrants, community and social workers and government officers. It shows that despite the diversity of people in Thailand, there are society-wide norms, values and behaviours that differ from the norms of Western communities such as those found in Australia. While Thai people are typically patient, flexible and good at sharing they are also respectful of seniority and very group oriented. In Thailand itself society is constantly changing to adapt to new ideas and the pressures of globalization, media, and mass tourism, but many values and behaviours remain unchanged. These same Thai norms, with varying degrees of modification, are present in the new Thai community in Sydney.

The areas of similarity in how Thai people act and interact in both Thailand and Sydney are identified in Jiraratwatana's paper. She discusses the way Thai values are reflected in Sydney through many formal and informal groups. There is for example, a Thai Welfare Association where community members volunteer to help others and the association is used to illustrate how various norms are retained and expressed in Sydney. According to Jiraratwatana, some Thai people in Sydney tend to retain the values and memories of the Thailand that they left ten years ago. Thais often become more aware and appreciative of their own culture when they are away from it. They seek out the company of other Thai people in Sydney and celebrate traditional Thai and Buddhist festivals more than they did in Thailand. A recurring theme was of Thai people 'being more Thai' in Sydney than they were in Thailand (Jiraratwatana, 1999). Some Thai-born women in Sydney do report, however, that they often avoid telling people that they are Thai because of a discomfort about the negative stereotypes relating to Thai women which flow from regular and widespread sensationalist media reports on Thai sex workers. This discomfort was not described as a

serious problem but was typically reported as an annoyance. Meanwhile, even though society in Thailand is constantly changing many ideas of Thai migrants remain the same, caught in a kind of ‘time warp’. For example, the idea of ‘*Jai Yen*’ (a calm and polite disposition known as a good manner), the idea of ‘*Nam Jai*’ (showing concern for others), the practice of attending temples, wearing traditional Thai dress to Thai festival occasions, the desire to meet other Thais, to speak in Thai and to have Thai food together in a friendly atmosphere. The Thai migrants spoken to in Jiraratwatana’s study were also in the process of adjusting to the new world of Australian freedoms, environments and seniority-respect systems. For example, they dislike the Thai hierarchy system and like that it is absent in Australia. They enjoy the removal of many former restraints, and they learn to express their views and to stand up for their rights. They recognise this change in their behaviour and they value the new freedoms and equality (Jiraratwatana, 1999).

Thai international students in Australia

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. About seven per cent of all students at Australian universities in 1993 were from overseas (Nesdale *et al.*, 1995). The far-reaching implications of this initiative have been the subject of much inquiry and public discussion. ‘Foreign’ education services have become the third largest Australian export in dollar terms (Crean, 2009). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD indicated in *The Growth of Cross-Border Education* (2002) that the international trade in education services has grown at a faster rate in Australia than in any other country and Australia is now generally regarded as an aggressive exporter of education services (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Australia's top five exports of goods and services (A\$ million)

Rank	Commodity/service activity	2007	2008
1	Coal	20,760	46,620
2	Iron ore & concentrates	16,258	30,144
3	<u>Education services</u>	12,567	15,507
4	Gold	11,570	14,710
5	Personal travel (excl. education) services	11,845	11,661

*Sources: ABS trade data on DFAT STARS database & ABS catalogue 5368,
http://www.trademinister.gov.au/releases/2009/sc_090724-tis.html accessed May 18, 2009*

The International Development Program (IDP), a university owned agency that promotes Australian education overseas, also reflects the reality of international education. The majority of international students are no longer 'aid assisted' but are full fee paying students. In 2007-08 there were over 278,184 foreign students studying at Australian universities ("Department of Immigration and Citizenship Annual Report 2007-08", <http://www.immi.gov.au/about/reports/annual/2007-08> accessed May 18, 2009). Overseas students are required to pay the cost of their education, and the subsidy for overseas students has steadily decreased. A country quota still applies to subsidised overseas students, while for those paying full-fees there are no limitations on student numbers. Under the earlier subsidised policy, which operated a country quota, overseas students, students were accepted on the basis of academic merit and there was strong competition for places within the universities. Under the new policy, overseas students only have to meet the minimum

criteria for entry, which means that gaining admission is much easier than it was previously. This policy also favours students who are relatively affluent (Andressen & Kumagai, 1996).

Over the decades the majority of new arrivals from Thailand to Australia have continued to be students (see Table 1.3). This has occurred as a result of increasing wealth in Thailand, and the growing prestige of international tertiary study and the marketing of Australian education in Thailand.

Table 1.3 Time series of Thai student enrolments in Australia

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

Source: Australian Education International,

<http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/MIP/Statistics/StudentEnrolmentAndVisaStatistics/Default.htm>

accessed May 18, 2009

Recently Thailand has become a main source country for international students in Australia (see Table 1.4). It would be appropriate to say that a large number of Thai international students in Australia play an important role in transferring knowledge and skills and in acting as a liaison to promote bilateral relations between Thailand and Australia (“Pai Nai Ma: Thai-Australian Experiences”, <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/painaima/community.shtml> accessed May 18, 2009).

Table 1.4 Student visas granted by citizenship for the top 10 countries 2007–08

Citizenship	Visas
1. People’s Republic of China	49,763
2. India	47,639
3. Republic of Korea	19,350
<u>4. Thailand</u>	11,576
5. Brazil	11,096
6. Malaysia	10,661
7. Nepal	10,247
8. United States of America	9,969
9. Indonesia	8,246
10. Japan	7,669

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship Annual Report 2007-08, p. 58, <http://www.immi.gov.au/about/reports/annual/2007-08> accessed May 18, 2009

The flow of international students – not just Thai students – to Australia has resulted in a significantly altered Australian tertiary education system. The most obvious change is the influx of numbers of students from cultural and educational backgrounds different from those of most Australian students. This cultural and demographic change has created a need for additional and different accommodation and support services to cater for the new students. Changes have been required in course content, delivery and assessment to meet differences in interests and learning styles of students from different educational traditions. Socio-cultural differences in student populations have increased, creating opportunities for promoting intercultural awareness and increased comfort with and acceptance of diversity.

Since the 1980s Australia's General Skilled Migration (GSM) visa categories (which is but one part of Australia's Skilled Migration Program) 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. After a new range of onshore GSM visa categories had been established international students were able to apply for and be granted permanent residence following the completion of their studies without the need to leave Australia, whereas in the past full-fee paying overseas graduates had to leave Australia and stay away for two years before applying to migrate to Australia. The possibility of Australian permanent residency has influenced many international students (including Thai students) to stay in Australia after graduating. Since 1990s it has become apparent that international students have become an important factor in permanent migration in Australia (Nesdale *et al.*, 1995). International students have not been content to simply return to their home countries but have become part of a global movement of labour, skills, capital and knowledge. The possibility that former international student graduates may choose to become migrants, given the increasing numbers of international students in Australia, has important implications for migration policy, the labour market, education, and relations between Australia and its neighbours especially in the Asian-Pacific region.

Of natural and immediate interest to researchers have been topics such as the overall economic impact of international students, and investigating the consequences of their presence for educational institutions, collectively and individually. Also of concern have

been the labour market effects of permitting international students to work in Australia. However, so far one neglected aspect of research has been the possible connection between a period as an international student and subsequent migration to Australia. This research project is designed to examine the evolving relationship between international students and migration, and address this research gap. In doing so, the results of the present study have the potential to provide a valuable source of information for both Australian and Thai agencies in planning, managing and dealing with transnational migration, particularly migration generated by, and focussed around, higher education. One of the key issues this thesis sets out to investigate is the basic question: Why in the first place do many Thai young people come to Australia as tertiary students, and then subsequently make a decision to migrate to Australia after graduation? Moreover, although these modern Thai skilled migrants tend to have a higher educational degree and appropriate skill-sets for modern industrialised society, it does not follow that they will find it easy to integrate into Australian society. In this context then the research is interested in increasing understanding of how these Thai skilled migrants construct belonging and their understanding of 'home', and how they articulate this concept in their daily lives in Australia.

Research on international students and migration

Steadman and Daagwell (1990) studied, although not in great depth, the relationship between international students and migration. The research methodology used a questionnaire which contained twenty-seven questions divided into the following broad classifications: personal information; family background; study choices; expenditure patterns in Australia; and the student's assessment of the cost/benefit of studying in Australia. The researchers sought to sample students studying in Queensland by selecting representative institutions: Griffith University; the Brisbane College of Advanced Education; James Cook University of North Queensland; the University College of Central Queensland; and Queensland University of Technology. A total of 178 responses were received. The respondents came from twenty different countries with those in South-East Asia dominating. The youngest student was aged 17 and the oldest 40, but 86.7 per cent of respondents were aged 25 or less. Females made up 44.9 per cent of the respondents. Only 5.1 per cent of the

students were married but over half of those married had brought their spouses to Australia with them. Among other findings, 30 per cent of the respondents indicated that they were determined to migrate to Australia within six years. A further 25 per cent of the sample revealed they had no such intention, while 45 per cent indicated that they were uncertain of their future plans.

Another study, carried out by Nesdale, Simkin, Sang, Burke and Fraser (1995), surveyed the attitudes, experiences, and future plans of international students studying in Australian educational institutions. The research consisted of four studies conducted over an eighteen month period between the second half of 1992 and early 1994. For university students (2,019 were surveyed from New South Wales, Victoria, and Western Australia), a majority indicated that they had experienced some difficulties with the English language, teaching and learning styles, finances and accommodation, social and personal life, and contacts with Australians. However, 50 per cent of respondents said they had somewhat enjoyed their education in Australia. Most students reported living with other students from their own country. Almost three-quarters of respondents said their contact with Australians had been superficial. Only 10 per cent rated their contacts as intimate, involving for example frequent contact and an ability to form close relationships and discuss most things. The most frequent contact was reported to be in class time. Almost one-half of the respondents said they planned to migrate to Australia at a later time. The data indicated that up to half of all international students seriously considered settling in Australia as migrants. All nationality groups emphasised the importance of their experiences as students in Australia for their decision to migrate to Australia, regardless of sex, fee status, level and field of study.

The literature cited above suggested that even though international students are voluntarily located in the host country, they may still encounter significant difficulties during cross-cultural transitions as a result of culture shock and academic pressures. These studies reveal a paradox. Although terms like 'superficial' and 'living with students from their own country' suggest relatively shallow contact with Australian society, clearly the experience of being an international student in Australia exerts a significant impact on the decision to permanently migrate. This present research contributes to explaining both of

these aspects of the migrant experience, thinking particularly of international students, by bringing them together to provide a fuller explanation of the decision making of Thai students in Australia.

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).

At one extreme, ethnography pursues an inductive approach to research and applies as open a mind as possible, allowing the data to speak for itself as far as possible, or allowing theory to emerge from the data. At the other extreme it starts with some research questions that guide the design and process of the study, providing some structure but remaining open and flexible, unlike other methodologies that employ hypotheses to test more intermediate methodological stances. By employing an iterative-inductive research process, ethnography has to leave space for fluidity and flexibility even though it still needs to be carefully planned and carried out (and re-planned and redesigned as it develops).

Ethnography attempts to explicate structured patterns of action that are cultural and/or social rather than merely cognitive, behavioural or affective. Ethnographers aim to look beyond what people say to understand the shared system of meanings. The goal of ethnographic research is to understand a way of life from the insider’s emic perspective, and to provide a description that is etic, or comprehensible to individuals outside the society. To

accomplish this goal, ethnography focuses on learning from people rather than studying people (Spradley, 1979). Fieldwork, where the researcher stays at the research site for a considerable amount of time and tries to be immersed in the culture, is a fundamental part of ethnographic research. The voices of participants are an important source of data; the researcher must balance insider and outsider perspectives.

The researcher is the key data collection instrument; he or she documents people's own perspectives about their beliefs and practices through participant observation, interviews, and the review of relevant records and reports. But ethnographers never rely solely on a single instrument. The strength of fieldwork lies in its 'triangulation', or obtaining information in many ways. Triangulation promotes the validity of data findings by showing that independent measures (checking with different sources, applying different methods, corroborating reports by different researchers, and examining through different theorists) support them, or at least do not contradict them (Wolcott, 1988; Maggs-Rapport, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

However, there are no 'pure' qualitative methods (Johnson *et al.*, 2001). I found myself challenged by the relationship between ethnographic and phenomenological perspectives in the study human experiences. While ethnography has its roots in the discipline of anthropology, phenomenology is grounded in early 20th century continental philosophy. Ethnography concentrates on the shared views and values of a particular culture and aims to describe the cultural knowledge of the participants, whilst phenomenology tries to uncover the concealed meaning in the phenomenon, embedded in the words of the narrative (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995). Both perspectives are based on the concept of intersubjectivity and centre on an understanding that reality is socially constructed by individuals' interactions (Davis, 1995; Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Both perspectives look for meaning in narratives. They are both exploratory; they both use the researcher as the data collection instrument, and emphasise the need to take a self-conscious approach to research (Maggs-Rapport, 2000).

According to Cresswell (1998, p. 51), a phenomenological study describes the meaning of a concept or phenomena for several individuals. Linking ethnographic

experience with lived experience is important for current ethnographic research; some of my inquiries have been centred on investigating the ‘lived experience’ of Thai skilled migrants in Australia. In addition to focusing on the culture in the manner that classic ethnographers normally do, I also seek to describe the lived experiences of individuals as contemporary and active members of a social system or group. Besides studying relevant theories, I also attempt to briefly disrupt them so that a phenomenon can be described as it is initially experienced.

Arguments about pluralism in qualitative research, particularly a combination of phenomenology and ethnography within the same study, have recently been mainstreamed in the much-discussed crisis of ethnography. It is difficult to strike the correct balance between participant dialogue and researcher interpretation as data can always have more than one interpretation. There is also the danger of searching for non-existent meaning within the data. Any given interpretation might be rigorously criticised at a secondary level, and it should be transparent enough to challenge (Johnson *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, it is sometimes argued that the researcher seeking reflexivity may concentrate on the theory behind methods to the detriment of ‘doing’ or applying the method itself. Maggs-Rapport (2000) points out that the product derived from violating the assumption of data collection techniques of all the methods used may not be good science; even though, there are no ‘real’ natural laws concerning socially derived knowledge and therefore no possibility for a ‘pure’ method for the social or interpersonal sciences. In spite of these criticisms, the effect of combining phenomenological and ethnographical perspectives is to provide an innovative way of analysing the experience of Thais transitioning between gaining education qualifications and staying longer term in Australia.

Research techniques

I employed two major qualitative research techniques in my fieldwork: participant observation and in-depth interviewing. Participant observation involves living among the people under study for a lengthy period and gathering data through continuous involvement in their lives and activities; it is appropriate for collecting data on naturally occurring behaviours in their usual contexts (O’Reilly, 2005). In-depth interviews are optimal for

collecting data on the personal histories, perspectives, and experiences of individuals particularly when sensitive topics are being explored. Several other informal research methods were utilised, including informal interviewing and general observation.

One advantage of qualitative methods is that use of open-ended questions and probing gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses. Open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, unanticipated by the investigator, and rich and explanatory in nature (O'Reilly, 2005). Another advantage of qualitative methods is that the participants allow the investigator the flexibility to probe their initial responses; that is, to ask why or how. The investigator will listen carefully to what participants say, engage with them according to their individual personalities and styles, and use further 'probe' questions or comments to encourage them to elaborate on their answers.

In this research project, twenty-five Thai skilled migrants of diverse age, gender, place of birth, occupation, and marital status are involved (see Table 1.5 and Appendix 3). They initially came to Australia for further education and then applied for Australian permanent residence after graduating.

Table 1.5 Key participants' characteristic

Years of age	Number	Gender	Number	Marital status	Number	Place of Birth	Number
26-30	9	Female	15	Single	15	North Thailand	4
31-35	9	Male	10	Married	8	South Thailand	1
36-41	7			Widow	2	North/East Thailand	5
						Central & Bangkok	15

Almost all participants received basic education from Thailand before arriving in Australia (twenty participants hold Bachelor degrees from Thailand). The majority (seventeen participants) had worked in Thailand while eight participants were newly graduated and unemployed before seeking for international education in Australia (see Appendix 3).

To approach potential participants, I obtained some assistance from the following Thai formal and informal social organisations in the State of Victoria: Thai restaurants, Buddhist temples, Thai Christian congregations, Thai language schools, the Thai association of Victoria, and the Thai information and welfare association. In New South Wales, I was assisted by the Thai welfare association. At each stage of the contacting process it was important to be respectful of and responsive to the advice of local experts. The voluntary nature of participation in research studies was always emphasised. I explicitly considered the needs and concerns of the participants that appropriate oversight for the conduct of research took place, and a basis for trust was established between participants and me. When I conducted research on people, the well-being of research participants was of top priority. The research question was always of secondary importance. This ethical principle helped me to avoid the point where the research threatened to disrupt the lives of participants. Furthermore, my background as a Thai international PhD student with work experience as an academic in a public university in Thailand seemed to help me in receiving acceptance and support from participants. During 2008, in order to establish rapport and develop a deeper understanding of my participants' lives I shared the same house as some participants, worked casually with some participants in a Thai restaurant, attended and served in the same church as some participants. I also visited Buddhist temples with some participants, and worked for the Thai community as a volunteer on many occasions, working for the Thai Information and Welfare Association, and especially as a teacher in the Thai Language School of Melbourne. While I had already begun the thesis writing in May 2009, I nevertheless maintained ongoing contact with participants, and this has fed usefully into the overall project as it took shape in the write-up.

Thai people in Australia constitute a mixture of students, working people, housewives, and various other smaller demographic groupings, and I have found that general observation and social interaction with these groups can help to contribute a much greater understanding of migration experiences in the broader Thai community in Australia. All Thai migrants have opinions about Australian society and how fellow Thais are getting on. I have attempted to informally interact with other Thais and their Australian friends and partners and observe them when visiting Thai families, Thai restaurants, Buddhist temples, Thai DVD shops, Thai educational agencies, the Royal Thai consulates, Thai night clubs, and Thai festivals throughout the year, as well as when travelling on public transport. Moreover, I have gathered information from various forms of Thai media in Australia, such as the SBS radio's Thai language program, the Thai newsmagazines published in Victoria, and aussietip.com, an Australian Thai virtual community. I have tried to immerse myself in the day-to-day lives of my Thai informants as much as possible.

Strategies for enabling reflexivity

As anthropologists we get very close to our 'subjects'; yet we are not them. Ethnographic writing oscillates between 'writing about', which instrumentalises the culture of the other for its own ends to produce text and knowledge, and 'writing with', which is sensitive to the subjectivity of the written-about and sees itself as 'helping', 'supporting' or 'in sympathy with' the culture of the other (The 2009 annual meeting of the Australian Anthropological Society conference program, p. 105). This relationship between speaking for or about our research subjects throws up a number of questions: What strategies do we employ in the discipline of anthropology in order to represent our subjects through our methodologies? How can we strike a balance between allowing the individual to speak for themselves and analysis of what is being said and the context in which it is said in? And how can researchers ensure that anthropological insight reflects the voices of our participants?

According to Bourdieu, sociological reflexivity is a powerful form of self-criticism and a core dimension of social-scientific method (Marcus, 1998). The following quotations are revealing:

There are, for Bourdieu, two principal logics under which human beings negotiate fields and engage in practice: that is through the application, variously, of practical or reflexive knowledge. Practical knowledge refers to a 'feel for the game' [as there is always a game being played out between agents and the always changing objectivities of cultural fields], while reflexive knowledge is an extension and development of this practical sense away from automatic or habituated practice to a more aware and evaluative relation to oneself and one's contexts. Where the practical sense develops as a consequence of experience and practice, Bourdieu argues that reflexivity is capable of being taught and learned, and consciously incorporated into different levels of praxis (Schirato & Webb, 2002, p. 255).

This consideration of Bourdieu's work enables us to identify the specific grounds – the mechanisms, conditions, logics, and cultural ethos – that dispose agents to recontextualise their practical knowledge (regarding, says, the negotiation of fields) as reflexive knowledge (Schirato & Webb, 2002, p.267).

As I am the data collection instrument, it is important to note that my professional and personal rationales for this study lie in my own background – a Thai international student in Australia who will be qualified to apply for Australian permanent residency after graduating. As a result, I am inevitably situated in the world I study. Rather than attempting to step outside the arena of practice (which I believed is impossible) 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 (see Jackson (1987), Madden (1999) and Okely & Callaway (1992) for more on the insider/outsider relationship in anthropology).

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 (making field notes), while collecting naturally occurring data in an audio recorded fieldwork journal (Arber, 2006). This is one of the ways of enabling reflexivity (Arber, 2006). At various point in my field work I used this combined participation and audio recording data collecting approach as outlined by Arber (2006). An audio recording is not only for recording the setting but for recording the observer as well; by recording personal opinions and emotional responses to being an observer, the observer is able to keep track of events, which is useful later when looking for leads during analysis (Arber, 2006). This combined approach may ensure that reflexivity remains fundamental to the methodology.

Methodological Limitations

I have attempted to make the project as methodologically sound as possible; however, it is not without its limitations. Firstly, the numbers of key participants are limited to a small number of Thai skilled migrants and as such the research findings can only reflect the migration experience of this targeted group overall. However, the in-depth nature of project helps mitigate the limitation of the small sample size.

Secondly, the project used the snowball sampling method to find and recruit ‘hidden populations’; that is, groups not easily accessible for in-depth interviews. In this method, participants use their social networks to refer the investigator to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study (O’Reilly, 2005). This runs a risk of obtaining a sample representing participants who are very close in characteristics. However, by aggregating 25 key participant characteristics (see Appendix 3), I found some degree of diversity in the areas of gender, place of birth, marital status, last occupation in Thailand and current occupation in Australia. Indeed, most participants started engaging in the research at different times. They were chosen from a variety of networks from around the Thai community in Victoria.

Thirdly, it is argued that multi-sited research might not be able to provide ‘thick’ description of individual nodes (Falzon, 2009). Nevertheless, it does provide ‘thick’

description in terms of the network of people it is able to access, and the dynamics and the interplay of relations between a wide range of people, things, activities and meanings. Multi-sited research enables me to study the field as a network of localities which are linked to each other through various types of flows. Ideally, the researcher should be able to understand all the local contexts included in the research. In my case, I was clearly disadvantaged in that I did not know the Australian context well enough, and was not initially fluent enough in the English language. One obvious solution to this problem was to understand the Australian context from the perspectives of my participants and to build on personal knowledge of Thai socio-cultural contexts and the Thai language, helping me develop a deep contextual understanding of Thai people, Thai family and Thai social networks not only in Thailand but in Australia as well.

Finally, the investigation was to a considerable extent based on the *post hoc* reflections of the participants about their prior experiences. *Post hoc* reflections might easily lead to narratives justifying behaviour, which may not reflect the original motives of the participants. Due to timing limitations, this thesis could not be run as a longitudinal study to investigate the life experiences of participants before receiving Australian permanent residency. While these limitations are apparent, the study still provides an opportunity to create an in-depth portrait of a small group of Thai skilled migrants. This is a valuable contribution in light of the absence of any other directly comparative study in Australia.

Location of study

There are around 30,554 Thai people in Australia (Table 1.1, p. 6) and the 2006 Australian Census has indicated the major suburbs where Thai people live in each state. Despite this, the Thai community in Australia is not obviously visible. Thai migrants are quite isolated, adapting to life in Australia on their own. In general, settler arrivals from Thailand were not recognised as refugees escaping persecution from their homeland. Rather they were most likely seen as people voluntarily seeking a better life. When they arrived in Australia, they were not sent to sponsors, migrant centres or migrant hostels where essential services and facilities needed to adapt to the new environment might otherwise have been provided. Nonetheless, they were not without social networks as there are some major focal points of

Thai migrant location in Australia. For example, Thai restaurants (which employ a large number of Thai migrants), Buddhist temples and various festivals throughout the year serving as occasions when Thais gather and celebrate their culture.

While the historical link of Thailand to Australia and most of the literature cited above refers to Sydney, the principal location of this study is in Victoria, predominantly in Melbourne, where the number of Thai migrants is on a steady increase. Even though the percentage of change of Thai people in Queensland and Western Australia is higher than in Victoria (Table 1.1, p. 6), the number of Thai people in Victoria is nearly double that of Thai people in those two states. As such, Melbourne is a research site that can usefully be compared to Sydney to create a sense of a broader national picture in this study.

In addition to the Australian-based research this study makes use of the fact that the family is of fundamental importance to Thai people. It is a basic social unit of Thai society, and as such the relationship between Thai migrants and their families has implications for Thai society at 'home' and the integration outcomes for Thai migrants in Australia. As a result of the significance of family networks and participation in the lives of students, the research also undertook interviews of seven families of key informants in Thailand to investigate the migration experience across the geographic range of this diasporic sociality. This gives the research a multi-sited quality which is important in a transnational context.

Demographic background of the Thailand-Born Community in Victoria

According to the 2006 Census ("The Thailand-born community in Victoria 2006", [http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/Web24/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Thailand/\\$file/ThailandFS-c-24Apr08.pdf](http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/Web24/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Thailand/$file/ThailandFS-c-24Apr08.pdf) accessed May 18, 2008), the State of Victoria has been enriched by the presence of people from all over the world. The 2006 Census recorded that Victorians were born in over 200 countries, spoke over 200 languages and dialects, followed more than 130 religious faiths and were identified with over 200 ancestries; 43.8 per cent of Victorians were either born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas. Most of the overseas-born Victorians came to Australia as migrants hoping to find a better life for themselves and their children. The Victorian Government's Population Policy explains the government's

vision for growing Victoria's population in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner. It provides a framework for policies designed to increase migration, encourage family formation, increase regional population growth and respond to the challenges of demographic change.

The migration of Thais to Victoria starts from a very small base. Only three people from Thailand were recorded in the 1901 Victorian census. The 2006 Census found that there were 7,057 Thailand-born persons in Victoria (23.1 per cent of Australia's total), increasing by 28.6 per cent to 5,487 persons in 2001 (see Table 1.1, p. 6). Only 14.8 per cent of the Thailand-born population in Victoria had arrived in Australia prior to 1986; 54.1 per cent had arrived between 1996 and 2006. The community was well distributed throughout metropolitan Melbourne, with slight concentrations in Melbourne City (10.0 per cent) and Greater Dandenong (9.0 per cent). There were 6,339 persons who identified with Thai ancestry, indicating that the Thai community is a young community, with few second generation members. Thai-born people have sometimes also identified with other ancestries such as Chinese. A number of Thai-born refugees to Australia also had their origins from nearby Cambodia or Vietnam.

The Victorian-Thai community showed a relatively young age profile (see Table 1.6 – 1.10): 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, compared to 37 years for the total Victorian population. There was a distinct gender imbalance with 56 males to 100 females. Over half (58.8 per cent) spoke the Thai language at home; 8.1 per cent spoke Khmer (a Cambodian language) and 19.9 per cent spoke English only. A significant percentage (13.2 per cent) said that they did not think they spoke English well or not at all. Three-quarters (74.8 per cent) were Buddhist and there were small numbers following Christian faiths. About half (49.1 per cent) held Australian Citizenship, compared to 67.5 per cent for the total overseas-born population in Victoria.

Table 1.6 Persons born in Thailand in Victoria and Australia: 2006, 2001 and 1996 Census

	2006 Census		2001 Census		1996 Census		2001-2006 % change	1996-2001 % change
	Persons	%	Persons	%	Persons	%		
Melbourne	6,433	21.1	5,045	21.4	4,011	21.2	27.5	25.8
Rest of Victoria ¹	624	2.0	442	1.9	403	2.1	41.2	9.7
Total Victoria	7,057	23.1	5,487	23.3	4,414	23.3	28.6	24.3
Total Australia	30,550	100.0	23,600	100.0	18,936	100.0	29.4	24.6

Source: The Thailand-born community in Victoria 2006: Fact Sheet No. A-67

Table 1.7 Top 5 Languages spoken at home by Thailand-born: 2006, 2001 Census

Language	2006 Census		2001 Census		2001- 2006 % change
	Persons	%	Persons	%	
Thai	4,146	58.8	3,177	58.0	30.5
Khmer	571	8.1	616	11.2	-7.3
Vietnamese	184	2.6	192	3.5	-4.2
Karen	148	2.1	N/A	-	N/A
Cantonese	78	1.1	91	1.7	-14.3
English only	1,404	19.9	983	17.9	42.8
Other languages ¹	462	6.5	355	6.5	30.1
Not stated	63	0.9	68	1.2	-7.4
Total	7,056	100.0	5,482	100.0	28.7

Source: The Thailand-born community in Victoria 2006: Fact Sheet No. A-67

Table 1.8 Age and gender of distribution of Thai-born: 2006, 2001 Census

Age group (years)	2006 Census		2001 Census		2001-2006 % change
	Persons	%	Persons	%	
0-4	128	1.8	79	1.4	62.0
5-11	371	5.3	230	4.2	61.3
12-18	721	10.2	1,061	19.3	-32.0
19-25	1,949	27.6	1,542	28.1	26.4
26-44	2,935	41.6	1,949	35.5	50.6
45-64	866	12.3	539	9.8	60.7
65-74	53	0.8	57	1.0	-7.0
75+	29	0.4	28	0.5	3.6
Total	7,052	100.0	5,485	100.0	28.6
<i>Sex Ratio</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>males per 100 females</i>			

Source: *The Thailand-born community in Victoria 2006: Fact Sheet No. A-67*

Table 1.9 Proficiency in English of Thai-born: 2006, 2001 Census

Proficiency in English	2006 Census		2001 Census		2001-2006 % change
	Persons	%	Persons	%	
Speaks English only	1,416	20.0	994	18.1	42.5
<i>Speaks other language and speaks English</i>					
Very well	2,172	30.7	1,765	32.2	23.1
Well	2,437	34.5	1,906	34.7	27.9
Not well	829	11.7	681	12.4	21.7
Not at all	104	1.5	42	0.8	147.6
Not stated ¹	107	1.5	99	1.8	8.1
Total	7,065	100.0	5,487	100.0	28.8

Source: *The Thailand-born community in Victoria 2006: Fact Sheet No. A-67*

Table 1.10 Top 5 Religions of Thai-born: 2006, 2001 Census

Religion	2006 Census		2001 Census		2001-2006 % change
	Persons	%	Persons	%	
Buddhism	5,274	74.8	4,186	76.2	26.0
Western Catholic	369	5.2	291	5.3	26.8
Baptist	148	2.1	101	1.8	46.5
Anglican	145	2.1	67	1.2	116.4
Christian, nfd	95	1.3	59	1.1	61.0
Other religions	269	3.8	203	3.7	32.5
No religion	500	7.1	312	5.7	60.3
Not stated ¹	252	3.6	272	5.0	-7.4
Total	7,052	100.0	5,491	100.0	28.4

Source: *The Thailand-born community in Victoria 2006: Fact Sheet No. A-67*

Terminology and Clarification

The use of the term ‘skilled migration’ in this thesis needs some explanation. Since the 1980s, the Australian government has developed policies designed to target migrants with experience in areas where there is a skill shortfall through its general skilled migration program. This program, known as the General Skilled Migration program (GSM), is for people who are not sponsored by an employer and who have skills in particular occupations required in Australia. The current skills in demand are listed in Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMA)’s Skilled Occupation List (SKOL). Generally an applicant must be over 18 and under 45 year of age, with an occupation listed on the SKOL, with enough points to pass the points test and a proficient level of English. Under the skilled or independent migrant selection system, the Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) identifies occupations to be allocated extra points under the points test (See Appendix 2). Information Technology (IT) skills featured strongly in the past, and now health professionals and tradespeople are currently in demand.

The current skills points list shows occupations acceptable for permanent migration and the number of points allocated to these occupations.

There are a variety of relevant visas that potential migrants can apply for under the skilled migration program, depending on whether they are applying for an onshore visa, an offshore visa or for a skilled visa as a New Zealand resident. There are also specific requirements and visa to encourage successful business people to settle permanently in Australia and develop new or existing businesses (Philips, 2006).

The chapter outline

This anthropological and sociological study of migration experience is innovative because it focuses on the transition period during which Thai international students become skilled migrants, as well as the way that Thai skilled migrants live in Australia. The rest of the thesis is organised into seven chapters. The description of each chapter is as follows:

Chapter 2 reports on the major push factors which effectively stimulate Thai students to study abroad and the major pull factors which attract Thai students to choose Australia as the destination. Thailand has become a main source country for international students in Australia. Over the decades the majority of new arrivals from Thailand to Australia have continued to be students.

Chapter 3 examines life as a Thai international student in Australia to understand the critical process whereby they make their decision to migrate. Difficulties experienced during transitional life phases manifest as stressors resolved through different processes of adjustment. These transitions require the development of coping strategies before a comfortable state is attained, if adaptation is indeed ever achieved. This chapter explores two major life challenges of Thai international students and reveals how Thai international students negotiate them.

It was clear that the desire of Thai international students to permanently migrate to Australia after graduation from Australian territory institutions was stimulated during study abroad after making some successful adjustments to culture shock. Many Thai international students had made a decision to migrate to Australia after graduation.

Chapter 4 presents three factors which contribute to the decision to migrate and describes the process, such as who makes the decision, how significant is the timing of the decision, and how are negotiations with family back home undertaken.

Chapter 5 investigates Thai settlement in Australia and how housing patterns shape the character of the Thai community in Australia. This chapter indicates the character of the Thai community in Australia, focusing on boundaries and cohesion.

Thai community is about seeking and maintaining social ties with others who share a common culture. How Thai skilled migrants adjust themselves to Australian multicultural society depended primarily on the nature and extent of the ties that bind them to each other.

However, Chapter 6 scrutinises the formation of Thai migrant community in Australian multicultural society, as well as its connection to other cultures and social groups. The status of the Thai community is influenced significantly by globalisation and Australian multicultural context. This has led to a positive sense of belonging and an opportunity to present 'Thai-ness' in Australia.

Chapter 7 explores the dynamics between Thai skilled migrants and their homeland to understand the maintenance of Thai sociality throughout the migration experience.

Chapter 8 provides an overview of the research findings and conclusions.

Chapter Two

Becoming an overseas student

As Chapter One described, Thailand has recently become a main source country for international students in Australia. Over the decades the majority of new arrivals from Thailand to Australia have continued to be students. Accordingly, one of the research questions of this thesis is to understand why in the first place many Thai students come to Australia for further education. This question is the focus of the present chapter. It provides the context for understanding the subsequent decision to settle in Australia after the completion of tertiary studies.

The pattern of Thai students studying overseas may 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 (Mazzarol, 1998; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

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 chapter, which investigates the major push factors which effectively stimulate Thai students to study overseas.

Why study overseas?

The argument presented here is that a demand for overseas education by research respondents did not initially stem, as might be expected, from a desire for international migration; nor was it derived from limited access to higher education in Thailand. These apparently obvious push and pull factors did not explain satisfactorily the processes that motivated these young Thai people. Instead, the demand for overseas education has traditionally been driven by the Thai value placed on becoming more 'Western' and developing fluency in the English language, as well as the expectation that international study will temporarily liberate them from social stresses and raise their economic and social status in the Thai hierarchy. These motivations are indicative of the growing prestige of international tertiary study, fluency in English language and life experience in English speaking countries, especially western countries. However, despite these Thailand-centred push factors, research participants have permanently migrated to Australia after the completion of their study. Upon experiencing a new sense of life during their studies in Australia they have chosen not to 'cash in' their new-found social status back in Thailand, and instead remain resident in Australia.

The possibility of Australian permanent residency

All of my respondents were clear that before coming to Australia they did not have a desire to immigrate to Australia after the completion of their studies in Australian institutions. Their decision to undertake further study in Australia was not influenced by the possibility of immigrating to Australia. My investigation showed that most learnt of the possibility of Australian permanent residency only after arrival in Australia. It is suggested that the desire to immigrate to Australia was ignited by studying and living in Australia (this issue will be clarified in Chapter Four). Here are some statements made by respondents.

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, 32, male).

Most Thai people who live in other countries that I have ever heard about are the spouse of a foreigner. Other cases contract workers (Nattawut, 29, 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, 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.

Limited access to higher education

Higher education in Thailand is not so limited that it would lead to significant numbers of Thai students studying abroad. The Ministry of Education of Thailand (MOE) has given all universities a clear mandate to significantly increase access to higher education and to improve the participation rates for groups of people, including those who desired to study English programs or wish to improve their language skills, and those who historically found it difficult to access a university education (Ramsoot & Mosika, 2009). In this policy environment, a variety of new study and training programs have been launched in many public universities, private universities and open universities in Thailand. The aim has been to deliver a broader range of courses (both short term and long term) to meet the needs of a wider network of communities and individuals. Thai educational institutions have been encouraged to look at ways to strengthen their teaching and research so that the benefits of this effort flow to communities across Thailand.

Despite these efforts, the desire of Thai students to study abroad remains, particularly for those whose financial status and academic potential are ready for an opportunity when it comes. English speaking Western countries are preferred, even though there are other nearby non-Western English speaking countries, such as Singapore, a neighbour of Thailand. Also, Thai students tend not to be interested in Thailand-based distance education, even when organised by universities from English speaking countries. Almost all of my respondents were taking courses in Australian educational institutions that they knew were available to them in educational institutions in Thailand. *Thai Daily News* reported on December 6, 2007 that, according to the Office of the Basic Education Commission of Thailand (OBEC), Thais continue to value overseas study (http://news.sanook.com/education/education_220137.php accessed 18 May 2009).

Respondents indicated that they wish for the once in a lifetime opportunity to study overseas. Here is a series of examples from respondents describing how they felt about coming to study in an English speaking Western country:

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, 27, female).

I have been an English movie and music lover since I was young. I preferred to watch English films with subtitles in Thai. This inspired me to learn more about the English language and I had a desire to go overseas (Jinda, 35, female).

My friends and I dream of international experiences. Thai people favour those who are able to speak English. Many Thais who graduated from overseas or had an overseas experience seem to be successful in their professional career. Some 'Miss Thailand' and 'Miss Thailand World' who won beauty competitions to be a representative of the country were not fluent in the Thai language as they grew up overseas. Some Thai actors, actresses, singers and models were very famous in Thailand because they've got a 'half-blood' western appearance (Prakitch, 38, male).

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

The Thai value of being more 'Western' and knowing English

My interviews revealed clearly that a demand for overseas education by these former Thai students involved in this research project did not foundationally stem from a desire for international migration, nor was it motivated by limited access to higher education in Thailand. Instead, the decision to study overseas was influenced by the desire of Thai people to gain a better understanding of the 'West' as it has arguably represented an attractive form of 'modernity' since the arrival of the western colonisers in Southeast Asia.

The historical shaping of Thai desire for the English language and westernisation

Let us first consider that modernisation, the dominant development idea in the 1950s and early 1960s, has effectively influenced many aspects of the Thai people's way of life (Stockwell, 2000). Modernisation was introduced as public policy to putatively solve economic, social and political problems. A key characteristic of modernity is the rise and spread of the products of formal-rational activity. Modernity, and the 'scientific' method, is associated with the secular movement away from a god-centred universe to a man-centred one (in the form of the 'scientific' method). It was characterised by an emphasis on logical and secular thought and sought exploration, discovery, and controlled attempts to improve, develop and build upon the past (Rappa & Wee, 2006). To be seen as modern, a country had to undergo advances in science and technology which in turn were supposed to lead to an increased standard of living for all (Masavisut *et al.*, 1986).

In the Thai context, modernisation has been associated with 'westernisation'. Thailand could be said to have become exposed to the influence of modernisation by 1855, in the reign of King Mongkut (also known as 'Rama IV', reigned 1851-1868), when the Bowring Treaty was concluded with Britain. This, and subsequent treaties, opened the country to the West, making it more vulnerable to Western imperialism (Stockwell, 2000). Europeans imperialists and many Thais in positions of leadership and influence believed that

the West was the most advanced and developed of all societies, and that this supremacy resulted in the global dominance of the West in matters of scientific knowledge and technological development. The belief was that as other societies matured and grew, they would follow the same stages that were followed by the West, and eventually become like modern western societies (Rappa & Wee, 2006).

The Thai orientation towards the English language and Western society was manifest in the desire to ‘modernise’ Old Siam. However, the broader modernisation aim was based not only on emulation but was also in effect a proactive strategy of cultural defence. The avowed aims of English fluency and western innovation were not sought after in order that such acquisitions should erase distinctive Thai tradition and culture, but rather that such an engagement would safeguard tradition and culture by strengthening the country and preserving its independence vis-à-vis Western encroachment (Cohen, 1991). As Thailand was never colonised, the English language was not imposed on Thai people by an English speaking nation. However, the Kings of Thailand recognised the power of the British Empire and the threat to independence that colonial powers presented. Paradoxically, to protect the country from external influence they opened the country to the West in order to communicate with the foreign powers and to prove to them that Siam was a civilised nation, and the equal of any foreign powers (Masavisut *et al.*, 1986). The Kings of Thailand worked towards national progress in order to achieve equality with the West. Thailand’s appropriation of western ways and of the English language has indeed served the country well in allowing Thailand a place in modernity on the international scene (Vella, 1957). That this process was achieved with a Thai-controlled ‘assimilation’ of western ways marks Thailand off as distinctive in the story of national development in Southeast Asia.

Thus a two-pronged strategy had developed over time including both public policy and a broad cultural consciousness about Thailand’s way forward in an international social order. To avoid being colonised and to acquire the knowledge of Western sciences and modern technology, Siam chose to utilise the power of the English language and accepted the need to import certain western values to the advantage of the nation. The need to ‘know’ and to ‘learn’ about Western ways was critical and so the Thai rulers and elites decided to

import aspects of Western culture and modernity on their own terms (“Thai Junior Encyclopedia Project”, <http://kanchanapisek.or.th/kp6/BOOK20/chapter2/t20-2-l2.htm#sect1> accessed 20 July 2009). Subsequently, in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, Thailand experienced profound changes which have been characterised as a modernisation ‘revolution from above’ initiated by the monarchy, royal princes, and certain members of the nobility (Tambiah, 1999). By briefly sketching the history of Thailand’s interaction with the West over the last 150 years the changes in orientation in Thailand towards the valuing English fluency and adopting Western ways can be understood.

For example, King Rama IV (Mongkut, reigned 1851 - 1868) took the first step toward the westernisation of Siam. He employed an English woman, Anna Leonowens (the famous Anna of *Anna and the King of Siam*, a 1944 fictionalised biographical novel by Margaret Landon), and later Chandler, an American missionary, to teach English to his children. Missionary wives were also asked to come to the palace to teach English to women of the royal household. In addition, the King employed Europeans in government service – among them military officers, a harbourmaster and the head of the police force. Road building, canal digging, ship building, the reorganisation of the Thai army and administration, and the minting of money to meet demands of a growing monetary economy were the main developments during the King’s reign. King Rama IV serves in Thai history as a preparer of the path for Siam’s major transformation in the Chulalongkorn epoch. (“King Mongkut of Siam”, <http://www.royalty.nu/Asia/Thailand/Mongkut.html> accessed 20 July 2009).

King Rama V (Chulalongkorn, reigned 1868 - 1910) continued the trend of westernisation, visiting many Western countries and British colonies where he gained many ideas and methods for modernising Siam. He sent his princes to study in different fields in various European countries such as Russia and Germany. These princes then returned to Thailand and were responsible for reforms in a wide range of fields, such as education, health care, military, public administration, transportation, communication, and laws and justice, adopting and adapting Western technology. During his reign, slavery was abolished,

public utilities such as water, electricity, public health, and telegram and telephone services were introduced, and transportation linkages comprising railways, tram tracks and automobile roads were built. Thai attire was also deliberately evolved, mixing traditional clothing with the Western styles (see Figure 2.1 compared with Figure 2.2) (“Royal policy of King Rama V on the reform of the Thai way of life 2005”, [http://www.kanjanaphisek-museum .go.th/eng_p04_1.html](http://www.kanjanaphisek-museum.go.th/eng_p04_1.html) accessed 20 July 2009).



Figure 2.1 examples of Thai dress in the reign of King Rama I-III (1782-1851)

Source: Thai Life Insurance, “Thai Wisdom”, http://www.thailife.com/thaiwisdom/poompunya/book2/images/eng144_145.pdf accessed 20 July 2009



Figure 2.2 examples of Thai dress in the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910)

Source: Reurnthai at VCharkarn.com, “Thailand in the history”, <http://www.reurnthai.com/index.php?PHPSESSID=d5ff62a8c5e2f9f290e52985d4a49a74&topic=1476.30> accessed 20 July 2009

During King Rama VI's reign (1910-1925) the use of surnames was introduced, the national flag was refashioned, and a new dynastic name was adopted in order to draw on Western models of nationalistic pride. He was the first Thai King to have been educated abroad, in his case at Harrow School and Oxford in England. He was notable in the modernisation of the educational system. He set up Vajiravudh College, the first English public school style boarding school, and Chulalongkorn University ("His Majesty King Vajiravudh Rama VI of the Chakri Dynasty", <http://www.soravij.com/rama6.html> accessed 20 July 2009).

Westernisation developed further during King Rama VII's reign (1925-1934). The King was also well aware of the desirability of establishing Siam in the international political community as a country with a modern and liberal constitutional system of government. After the 'Kana Raj' political revolution, the King ceded to a system of constitutional monarchy and abdicated the throne in 1932, ending hundreds of years of absolute monarchy in Siam. He lived quietly in England until his death in 1941 ("King Rama VII", <http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/chakri/rama7.html> accessed 20 July 2009).

After the political revolution, the new ruling class wanted government officials to adopt westernisation. To encourage the adoption of western style clothing, for example, a dress code bill was passed specifically for government officials. The Cultural Revolution, though, actually took place in the next reign (Rama VIII, 1934-1946) under the administration of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram. He deemed it the duty of citizens to follow the state's preference. A 15 January 1941 decree promoted the 'civilised' dress code for all occasions (see Figure 2.3), stressing the Western ideas of wearing hats and eating with a fork and spoon (rather than hands, as was traditional).

Figure 2.3 A Thai government poster from the Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram era (1938-1945) promoting the ‘civilised’ form of dress. Note the prohibited ‘uncivilised’ dress on the left, and proper western dress on the right



Source: Government of Thailand, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Thai_culture_poster.PNG accessed 20 July 2009

The Phibun regime’s Cultural Mandates (*ratthaniyom*) had the effect of subordinating local or folk cultures (which hitherto had enjoyed more freedom of expression) by placing them in a subordinate position in a hierarchy of importance with the state-defined ‘national’ culture at its apex (Reynolds, 1991). The Western concept of nation was a product of the territorially-bounded states (or the ‘geo-body’ as Thongchai³ calls it) in which elites had been obliged by the nature of the bounded unit to rule over diverse people (Wijeyewardene, 1991). The Thai ruling elites of a country that had never been a colony came to insist on Western tastes, fashion, and deportment as a one way of unifying a diverse nation. However, the cultural traffic was not all in one direction, as after Phibun’s government, people in rural areas discarded hats and socks and went back to the former dress style they preferred, while in the cities women tended to wear long robes and kept their

³ Thongchai Winichakul at the International Conference on Thai Studies in 1987 entitled ‘Siam mapped: A History of the Geo-body of Siam’.

teeth white and men wore western-style clothes. This trend continued into the beginning of the reign of the current King (“Thai Junior Encyclopedia Project”, <http://kanchanapisek.or.th/kp6/GENERAL/encyclopedia/saranugrom.htm#book18> accessed 20 July 2009).

While the formative cultural influence was largely British, after World War II the key foreign influence was predominantly from the United States which was an aggressive anti-communist player in the region (Masavisut *et al.*, 1986). During the Vietnam War when United States military personnel were stationed in Thailand, the impact of American culture was felt in large segments of the Thai population. In official publications and propaganda the Thai government even added ‘democracy’ as the forth pillar of Thailand’s national identity beside ‘monarchy’, ‘Buddhism’, and ‘nation’ (Bechstedt, 1991). As United States airbases were scattered throughout the country, thousands of Thais recognised that, by gaining a familiarity with the English language and by familiarising themselves with American ways, they could profit from what the military personnel brought. Thousands of Thais during this period depended upon the American presence for their livelihood. Since the Americans spoke English, the study of English was taken up in earnest by a wide range of pragmatic Thai people (Wyatt, 1984). The influence of the United States and the United Kingdom meant that English was seen as the language of modernity and it has become a significant symbol of the West, rather than Dutch, Spanish, German, Italian or French.

With the rapid expansion of foreign cultural and social exchange since 1851 a wave of changes swept over Thailand, but especially in Bangkok, which was the only international trade point in the country and a domestic transportation hub. Previous economic and social development plans for Thailand (Plans I to V, 1961-1986) had also enhanced urban-based industries and led to a high concentration of economic and social activities in Bangkok. Up until the 1960s, Thailand and Bangkok had been on the receiving end of Western culture. Western influences were seen in almost every aspect of Thai life (Wyatt, 1984). The development of the three cultural discourses outlined above – curiosity/respect, a desire to emulate, and a strategy of adaptation as a defensive move – have together over a century ingrained a general desire to be more western and to use the English language in Thai society.

A number of criticisms have been made against the idea that westernisation is a natural process and a desirable policy (Marx, 1975; Durkheim, 1984; Weber, 1971). The revision of the value of westernisation has informed the discussion in Thailand. Such debates have been significant since the time of Thailand's 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan, 1997-2001, to the present 10th National Economic and Social development Plan, 2007-2011). One area of criticism was the assumption in westernisation that societies can be placed on points along a scale of linear progression from underdeveloped to developed status, and that Western societies are paradigmatic examples of the endpoint of such development. Westernisation implies that the only way in which societies can become developed is to eliminate indigenous traits, and to adopt as faithfully as possible Western institutions and social structures. Such a system of classification tends to ignore the important cultural differences that exist between various countries, and it also subordinates cultural values to purely economic forces (Rappa & Wee, 2006).

Although Thailand's national economic and social development plan has changed over time, the desire of Thai people to gain fluency in English remains. Since the end of World War II, the world has become increasingly interdependent, yet the West continues to play an important role. Evidence of the Western imprint, on at least a superficial level, has spread out into cosmopolitan cultures in all the corners of the earth. Cosmopolitan culture, in Appadurai's usage, is a transcultural phenomenon where the production and consumption of particular goods across cultures is the major process by which the other is experienced (Appadurai, 1986, p. 27). Today, the common cosmopolitan civilisation that marks modernity is to a large extent an extension of the West (Gordon, 1989). No one would challenge the fact that English is now the preeminent language of global communication. It is the language of world diplomacy, international trade, science, technology, sport, fashion, entertainment, advertising and media. Knowing English is no longer a matter of preference but it is a matter of necessity. Furthermore, computers are English-oriented. Netscape and Java are in English, the vocabulary of computing and of the Internet has been overwhelmingly English, and most of the texts that are accessed through it are in English. The World Wide Web is a permanent international conference, where papers are either in English or are accompanied by English translations. The reasons for the dominance of

English in an online network are, of course, historical – the Internet began in the U.S. and the culture of the Internet is still predominantly American. Users of the Internet become acculturated to its norms and to a style of presentation of self and of discourse that is essentially still American (Gupta, 1997).

In sum, English language has been regarded as a tool for modernisation in Thailand. It is the vehicle of political, social, and cultural change in modernity. Over time this has provoked the desire of modern Thais of all levels of Thai society (not just royal family members and elites) to learn English.

International education as an instrumental value

Despite evolving and changing views of modernisation in Thailand, the desirability of (1) English fluency, and (2) western ways and practices continues to push and pull Thai citizens overseas for further education. An unintentional consequence of this is the development of a ‘habit of mind’, the assumption that ‘to have anything done at all well, it must be done by a *farang*’ (Vella, 1957). This has also fostered an assumption that ‘an overseas course of study is better than a local one’ as many Thais and their families perceived advantages in obtaining an overseas academic qualification (Vella, 1978).

International education and economic and social status in the Thai hierarchy

With respect to the value of education, my research findings revealed that ‘knowledge-for-knowledge sake’ did not receive a high value in the opinion of these Thai students. Education is perceived more as a ‘means’ of climbing the social ladder and of gaining prestige and a higher salary, rather than an end value in itself. The symbolic value of being educated internationally seems to be reinforced in everyday life experience, and indicates that many Thai students give importance to form over content or substance.

Nineteen of my respondents revealed that an international degree was seen as a key to becoming a high profile person and holding social and occupational privileges in Thai society. For example, Sureeporn (30, female) said,

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.

They indicated that the pursuit of an education in an English speaking country would enable them to improve their language skills to become proficient in English, which could prepare them for their future careers. Pimpa (2003b) also made this argument in his research looking at key influences on Thai students' decision making about seeking international education. Pimpa looked at the influences of family, friends, and educational agents. He found that many Thai families encouraged students to choose to study overseas, exploring five ways that family influenced potential students: "finance, information, expectation, persuasion, and competition" (p. 1). Pimpa also described how agents and friends could modify these family influences by mean of three alternatives: "information, competition and persuasion" (p. 1). In some cases, international study was planned by the parents or relatives from the time the students were young. They were told, since childhood, that overseas education was better than local education as it was seen as important to maintaining their high status in Thai society.

Liberation from social strains and stresses in Thailand

International education was also seen by research respondents as an option to liberate them from social strains and stresses present in Thai society. All respondents had completed a tertiary qualification and seventeen respondents had some work experiences in Thailand before coming to Australia. The other eight respondents who just graduated in Thai educational institutions before studying in Australia did not (seriously) look for a job in Thailand because it was planned within their families even before graduation that they would receive further study overseas. Also, they believed that it was difficult to find a well paid job due to the economic crisis in Thailand. In this period it was also a high risk to invest money in a new business. These eight Thais believed that it would be better to study abroad than be potentially unemployed in Thailand. They expected that the home situation would be changed for the better after graduation from Australia and hoped that the economy and

employment situation might have recovered by then. In the interim, the advantage of international experience, it was assumed, would help them to get a better job.

For seventeen respondents who had been working in Thailand before studying in Australia, the majority revealed that they were bored of their routine lives. Taking holiday leave seemed to be insufficient. They had sought leave from what they perceived as a tiresome existence, and they looked forward to the next chapter of their life. They reported that they felt they would like to do something new to break the monotony and repetition of their present work and life. Almost all of my respondents were single at the time and the next chapter of life they were searching for was not likely to be marriage. The desire for international education was awakened for those that could afford it. For example, Natwadee (33, female) said,

I was sick of waking up in the very early morning to avoid the morning rush hour, still confronting the traffic problem on the road, doing routine jobs in the office, avoiding the traffic problem in the evening rush hours by catching up with friends or hanging around in the shopping centre, arriving home in the late night and then watching TV programs before sleep. I know that job vacancies in the market are now less. Even though I was working a well paid job in a good company, I preferred to navigate to the new world of studying overseas.

Natwadee (33, female) was allowed to take study leave from her workplace for six months. She did not want to take the high risk of leaving her job. However, after a few months in Australia she sent a resignation letter to her company.

Moreover, it was said by Najaree (37, female) that,

I stood under my mother's umbrella since I was born. After graduating from the university in Thailand I had worked with my mom in our family business. She was my boss at home and at the office. On one hand it made me feel secure but at the same time it made me feel powerless as well. I was so happy and excited when my mom allowed me to take on an overseas education. At that moment what I was thinking of is not only the overseas experience but also getting away from home.

This finding is similar to Lawley and Perry (1997) who found in *Thai and Malaysian students' perception of overseas study destinations: an exploratory study* that Thai students undertake postgraduate study in Australia to improve their English and hence their job prospects. Meanwhile the secondary importance is to get away from home. In contrast, the Malaysian market is mainly driven by a desire for undergraduate qualifications due to the unavailability of local places.

Apart from limited job opportunities, the tedious repetition of their lives and getting away from home, twelve respondents indicated that social interaction in Thai society required a good deal more awareness of status, age and gender since Thais recognise extensive differences in these categories. Before studying in Australia six respondents were struggling and frustrated with the protocols of the Thai social system which was first and foremost a hierarchically structured society. These young Thai people felt strongly about gradations of social seniority and the patronage system, both deeply rooted in Thai culture. For example, promotions were allocated according to the length of service; workers enter the organisation and advance to higher positions as vacancies occur. All workers would work their way up through the ranks.

Prasarn (37, male) said,

It seemed to be impossible to surpass elders in the workplace even though you have better qualifications and better performance. According to 'first come first serve' and to show 'loyalty' to the organisation, you would need to pay respect and give the way to the elder.

Also, Apanchanij (32, female) said,

The Thai bureaucracy was frequently underpaid and able to be galvanised into action more quickly by personal contacts, small gifts or cash. Without such assistance, it also functioned albeit slowly.

My respondents reported that in Thailand someone would have the advantage of receiving either a job offer or a promotion if they were a relative (or friend) of 'a big

brother' in the organisation, or if they had some other affective linkage to a 'big brother', such as having graduated from a same institution, or come from the same town. This linkage would stimulate them to help one another. Generally, a big brother who rendered 'bunkhun' (indebted goodness) would be remembered or acknowledged (as the 'roo bunkhun') and would expect to receive kindness (the 'tob thaen bunkhun') in return from the indebted person. In many cases there was no expectation of an immediate return of the favour, rather the reciprocity was often delayed or expressed hierarchically in that the 'roo bunkhun' was always considered to be in a higher position in the organisation than the indebted person. My respondents typically described such social seniority and the patronage system as 'unfair games, old fashioned and uncivilised'.

My respondents who were working also received permission from their family to resign from their job and to undertake further study overseas. They spent their savings for their further study and some received financial support from their parents or relatives.

Why choose Australia?

In Thailand, Thai language dominates the domestic scene. It is the primary medium of instruction in the school system. As Thailand was never colonised by a Western power, the domestic hegemony of Thai language was never seriously challenged. However, the study of English language in Thai basic education is compulsory and highly recommend in higher education. English in Thailand is taught as English as a foreign language. Most lessons were taught by Thai speakers of English whose language may be correct but lacking western 'authenticity'. Many used grammar-translation teaching strategies, placing emphasis on the correctness of English structures (Boonyanate, 1996).

When taught in Thai schools, English is often a conglomeration of fragmentary elements of sounds, lexical items and grammatical rules. This teaching was based on the false assumption that if one memorises words in a dictionary with their equivalent translation into Thai, or if one memorises grammatical rules, then one is said to have mastery of the language (Noisaengsri, 1985, p. 3). Almost all respondents indicated that they had

studied English for more than ten years since primary school, focusing on grammar, especially in writing and reading. They were not confident with English until they had graduated with a Bachelor degree and/ or worked in an office. The use of English was much more restricted in their daily lives, except for those whose work had some contacts with foreigners or tourists. Generally for respondents, English skills were used for surfing the Internet, watching English language TV programs broadcasted on cable television, reading imported English language magazines, listening to English language music on the radio and watching English language films in the theatre. However, respondents in this research revealed that it is worth improving English communication skills and exercising them in English speaking countries is a more effective learning method than in studying Thailand.

Financial considerations

Historically, Thais who travelled to western countries for education purposes were mainly royal family members, elites and scholarship students whose financial status or support was readily available for overseas study. Predictably, the most preferred destinations of overseas study for Thai people were The United States and the United Kingdom due to the long standing relationship with these two countries (Pimpa, 2003b; Lawley & Perry, 1997). Recently, however, many middle class Thais have also been seeking an overseas education. Almost all of my respondents came from middle class family backgrounds. Most of them said that the choices of international education in the United States and the United Kingdom were limited because of the devaluation of Thai baht after the economic crisis in 1997. As such, other English speaking countries in the West have become attractive choices, such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand. I observed that other English speaking places in Asia such as Singapore or Hong Kong were not mentioned as alternative choices, suggesting that western countries were preferred.

Findings from this study seem to be consistent with the findings of other research into push and pull factors that motivate the decision to study overseas. The majority of my respondents said they chose Australia because it was affordable due to favourable exchange rates. Compared with the United States and the United Kingdom, Australia was cheaper

(cost for study and living), closer (distance to Thailand), and easier to obtain a student visa⁴. They realised too 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.

Country character and educational considerations

The recently signed Free Trade Agreement between Australia and Thailand, which started in January 2005, has significantly increased already substantial trade, education and defence links. As Australia is not far from Thailand (compared with the United States and the United Kingdom) it was perceived to be convenient by Thai international students and their parents who wished to visit each other in either Thailand or Australia. My respondents revealed that Australia was considered as a peaceful place in a world that had become unsettled after the events of 9/11. Moreover, they seemed to trust in the standard of study programs offered by any developed country in the West.

Respondents also discussed that Canada and New Zealand were seen as relative newcomers in the educational market. Australia was well known and seen as the most aggressive player in the educational market. The information accessibility and administrative process for prospect students was readily available and students were able to gain entry somewhere because of the large number of educational institutions. Moreover, the non-specific test requirement for entry into Australian Universities was attractive. This was especially the case for business courses. The GMAT (The Graduate Management Admission Test) is not required for entry into Australian business courses (while GMAT is required by almost all business schools in the US.). Furthermore, the direct entry English language

⁴ From 26 April 2008, the two-step application process for permission to work as part of a student visa was streamlined to become a one-step process. Label-free arrangements were also extended to countries in the Assessment Level 2-4 eVisa trial, namely India, Indonesia and Thailand. These arrangements mean that students do not have to obtain a visa label and can instead rely on the Visa Entitlement Verification Online (VEVO) service to check visa information and entitlements. This eliminates the need for onshore applications for permission to work, reducing the administrative burden and red tape for students (DIAC, Annual report 2007-08).

course (such as ELICOS) offered by many Australian institutions would potentially allow students to satisfy the English language requirements to begin their university studies. After successfully completing their English pathway, the students were not required to sit an external English test (such as TOEFL or IELTS) in order to begin their university degree.

Almost all of my respondents 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. For example, some parents had an overseas experience themselves and this inspired the respondents to do likewise. 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. In general it was not difficult to receive family permission to study abroad. The parents also believed that overseas tertiary education was superior to local education and they believed that the student could have a better life after graduation. 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 and their services were free of charge.

In sum, the argument presented in this chapter is that a demand for overseas education by these research respondents did not foundationally stem from a desire for international migration nor was it derived from limited access to higher education in Thailand. As described, the national development toward modernisation and westernisation has together over a century ingrained a general desirability to be more western and know English in Thai society. The demand for overseas education has traditionally been driven by the Thai value of being more western and knowing more English as well as the expectation of its ability to temporarily liberate the students from social stresses and to raise their economic and social status in Thai social hierarchy. This is a result of the growing prestige of international tertiary study, fluency in English language and life experience in English speaking western countries.

My respondents (both undergraduate and postgraduate) 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. In the next chapter, life as a Thai international student in Australia is examined to understand how these research participants come to the decision to seek permanent residence, and subsequently became skilled migrants in Australia despite their initial plans to return to Thailand after graduation.

Chapter Three

Student life in Australia

As the previous chapter explored in some detail, the demand for overseas education of research participants did not foundationally stem from a desire for international migration. Unlike many young Australians and New Zealanders, for whom a period of travel overseas (often called ‘OE’ for ‘overseas experience’) is seen as a desirable thing in and of itself, and has a cultural status of its own, Thai motivations for international travel are quite different. As the previous chapter described, a succession of historical and contemporary national plans acculturated Thai society to modernisation and westernisation pressures, such that today these adaptations position English language and Western ways as significant and valuable cultural capital for educated Thai people to acquire.

International travel for research participants has traditionally been driven by the Thai value placed on being more western and being fluent in English as well as the expectation that travel would temporarily liberate them from social stresses, as well as raising their economic and social status in the Thai social hierarchy. This was a result of the growing prestige of international tertiary study, fluency in English language and life experience in English speaking western countries. However, the research participants I followed have changed from being tertiary students in Australia to new Australian migrants after the completion of their studies and as such have experienced a new sense of life in Australia. It is therefore necessary to examine life as a Thai international student in Australia to understand the context of how these Thai students come to the decision to seek permanent residence as skilled migrants in Australia.

In any transitional phase of a person’s life, whether it pertains to educational transitions, life transitions from adolescence to adulthood, changes in marital status or

sojourns⁵ in a foreign country, they experience varying degrees of difficulty which manifest as stress during the different phases of the adjustment process. These transitions require the development of coping strategies before a comfortable state is attained, if adaptation is indeed achieved. The element which remains unpredictable is the interplay of variables which can affect each individual in a very personal way. In studies of cultural contact this transition is thought of as a state of ‘culture shock’ (Oberg, 1960).

Culture shock is the anxiety and emotional disturbance experienced by people when two sets of realities and conceptualisations meet. It is about being out of place in a certain place and time. The term was first coined by Oberg in 1960 to describe problems of acculturation and adjustment among Americans who were working in a health project in Brazil. He defined ‘culture shock’ as being “precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (1960, p. 177). That is, if one defines and negotiates reality through the symbolic representations of life, then one must question this reality when faced with alternative representations. When the symbols used to describe and conceptualise the world are alien, this can lead to feelings of isolation or even a loss of identity. The security resulting from one’s ‘taken-for-grantedness’ disappears and one feels ill at ease. Giddens’s (1991, pp. 35-69) contrast between ‘ontological security’ and ‘existential anxiety’ illustrates the sense of safety that familiarity brings to people. In a sense, culture shock is an illness resulting from the loss of meaning brought about when people from one symbolic reality find themselves immersed in another, typically through long-term travel (Irwin, 2007).

Symbolic interaction theorists remind us that culture is socially constructed and produced through social relationships and in social groups. The processes and issues felt at the individual level arguably occur at the social level, and therefore a more comprehensive explanation of culture shock might be found within basic anthropological understandings. Geertz (2000, p. 5) describes ‘man’ as ‘an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun’. This is based on a view of reality as a corporate construction, produced

⁵ Sojourn is simply defined as a temporary stay in foreign culture; generally for more than six months but less than five years. Tourists alongside migrants, business people, refugees and international students are considered in standard typologies of sojourners.

and embodied in public symbols and actions. Douglas (2002, p. 3) writes that rituals, which are based on these shared symbols, 'create a unity in experience'. Symbols, however, are not at all limited to specific ritual events, but are an essential part of the social process (Turner, 2004, p. 536). People create and transmit meaning through shared symbols; without these symbols, meaning is lost and depression, anxiety, and paranoia can result.

Within an anthropological framework of symbols and meaning, then, culture shock is not reducible to the level of individual psychologies, but rather is concerned with social facts and the creation and dissemination of meaning. Specifically, culture shock occurs when one is placed into an environment with different symbols and acceptable levels of risk than what is 'normal' in one's own culture. Depression, in the form of culture shock, occurs when the firm grounding of one's own symbolic world is lost. Since language and communication are based on a set of shared symbols, communicating with others is difficult. One begins to question the relevance of one's world view. Loss of identity occurs as one becomes integrated into the new society with its symbols and meanings. Overall, as the individual is unable to produce and share meaning, he or she is isolated from the community or society (Irwin, 2007). Notions of risk are based upon the shared set of symbols that make up a 'cultural currency', and risk perception therefore can be understood to depend on shared culture, not individual psychology (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982, p. xix). The 'unknown' (the 'unfamiliar' or the 'other') is seen as dangerous. As we begin to 'know' something it becomes less dangerous. Douglas and Wildavsky (1982, p. 195) pose the question: if we cannot know the risks we face, how can we cope with unknown dangers? Knowledge seems to be the first step to acquiring certainty. However, knowledge is not a static object, but is the changing product of social activity (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982, p. 192).

The root of culture shock is the loss of meaning that originates in the inability to share symbols, that is, to communicate and produce meaning. The unknown is 'risky', because the symbols used in creating risk are different. Unfortunately for the sojourner, social activity and knowledge rely on shared symbols. The individual perception of risk is not individual in this case, but rather a learned social process. Even returning home after visiting a foreign country can make one's native cultural habits seem suddenly strange and

moving from one cultural environment to another within one's own society can make a person feel out of place and alienated. In the culture shock experience, not only is knowledge scant, but the ability to produce and understand the symbolic and social basis of knowledge is minimal (Irwin, 2007). Furnham & Bochner (1986, p. 14) use the term 'culture learning'; the goal of a sojourner is not to totally adjust *per se*, but to learn the salient characteristics of the new setting. The individuals cannot produce meaning until they understand how to comport oneself in a socially acceptable way (Irwin, 2007).

In investigating life as an international student in Australia, I explored how research respondents initially experienced culture shock in the form of personal and academic challenges during study in Australia, but then made some successful adjustments in their lives and settled into an integrated and stable existential rhythm. The typical way that most respondents became integrated with Australian society was to integrate themselves into a network of Thai people in Australia, making use of the Thai community and connections to other cultural and social groups in Australian multicultural society to forge link with the mainstream. Therefore, the Thai international student group in Australia, utilising a multicultural milieu to connect to the mainstream, was arguably more open to integration than would be the case in more explicitly mono-cultural countries. In Australia a range of different international student communities can readily be seen and Thai students from this perspective are simply one more international group. The benefit to Thai students in grouping with fellow Thais, and other international students, is the confidence and comfort they develop from associations of shared experience, and this *communitas* was a positive influence on the decision of most respondents to migrate.

Having laid out, in very brief form, the trajectory of integration, the remainder of this chapter backtracks somewhat to explore the initial culture shock of adjusting to Australian society and university study. It is divided into two parts. First, the discussion centres on the experience of culture shock itself in term of academically challenging experiences and various ways in which these research participants encounter this. In the second part, the discussion shifts to describing more personal challenges of adjusting to the Australian context.

Experiencing ‘culture shock’

The problems reported by foreign students in a variety of host countries have remained essentially the same over the last thirty years; the most important problems appear to be language difficulties, financial problems, adjusting to a new educational system, homesickness, adjusting to social customs and norms, and for some students, racial discrimination (Church, 1982). The complex nature of the foreign student’s adjustment is well summarized by Bochner (1972), who sees the foreign student as needing to attain adjustment to four different roles: as a foreigner with special cultural learning problems; as a student adjusting to the stress common to all beginning students; as a maturing, developing person concerned about purposes, meaning, and goals; and as a national representative sensitive about his or her ethnic background and national status.

Life as an international student in Australia was for almost all respondents a considerable challenge, particularly for those not familiar with the customs and language. International students faced enrolments, registrations and other bureaucratic processes, sometimes only a few days after stepping off the airplane. By studying abroad, respondents showed their initiative and eagerness to experience personal and academic challenges which were unavailable in their homeland, highlighting their desire to communicate in English, to adapt to unfamiliar environments and to develop a more sophisticated way of looking at the world. Most respondents agreed that, in addition to being fun and an exciting adventure, study in Australia was a unique life changing experience which could have a lasting impact, helping them grow academically and personally.

Respondents gained collateral academic benefits from studying abroad too, such as experience of learning in different teaching styles, exposure to new academic customs, and opportunities to look at a project or situation from different perspectives. For personal benefits, they had experienced a new sense of life after getting a chance of living independently. It was arguably the start of a wonderful and emotionally vivid maturing process. They had learned by trial and error how to manage their lives and become stronger and more self encouraging as they had left all the people who had been important to them.

The flight to Australia represented a transition from a socio-centric world to an egocentric world, from dependent childhood to independent adulthood as they now had to make nearly all of their daily decisions themselves. Respondents revealed that the experience of living and studying in another country was eye-opening. It tested preconceptions and habits they were not even aware were so ingrained in them. They faced situations in Australia which they may not regularly encounter in Thailand, and these experiences equipped them to be more independent, assertive, mature and able to take on risks, encounter new problems, tolerate ambiguity, make a request, refuse a request, criticise someone, and be criticised by someone. They had gained a better understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses and their personal values and biases.

However, there was a price to be paid for an overseas qualification. Even though Australia was well known for its attempts to bridge the cultural and language gaps in the teaching of students whose first language is not English, language difficulties were nevertheless a key stress point for Thai international students. Bradley and Bradley (1984a) indicated in their research that Thai overseas students were nervous of the unknown and that awareness of the possibility of making intercultural mistakes was high. They were initially overwhelmed by negative symptoms commonly associated with culture shock. At the early stage, self-doubt and loss of self-esteem were typical feelings among overseas students as they struggled to make themselves understood (Hofstede, 1991a). The move to a new environment was described as one of the most traumatic events in a person's life and for many students some degree of culture shock was inevitable (Brown, 2009). Here are some statements made by my respondents that attest to this initial shock:

After the completion of my English course my friend decided to return home. He did not want to be an Australian university graduate any more. Instead, he planned to study further in Thailand. It's understandable. When perceived benefits turned to real difficulties we were tempted to run back to our comfort zones with a better appreciation of our own culture, rather than other cultures. All the good things that we had taken for granted about the family and things in Thailand were suddenly treasured and we did not want to leave them behind (Prapop, 38, male).

“SOMEBODY HELP ME!” or “ARE THERE ANY THAI PEOPLE AROUND HERE!” These kind of words always echoed inside of my mind when I first arrived here, especially when I was in the classroom (Nimit, 37, male).

I came to Australia with my Thai friend. We studied in the same classroom and stayed in the same house. We stuck together almost all the time and were quiet in the classroom. We didn't want to make any mistake or feel embarrassed in front of other people (Pimporn, 26, female).

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, 26, female).

In all these cases the initial shock influenced them 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.

Academically challenging experiences

Beside academic entry requirements, all international students were required to meet an English language requirement. It was compulsory, with some exceptions such as for those who applied for Basic English courses. The English language skills gained by many respondents before arrival to Australia were probably not as high as desirable in terms of basic interpersonal communication skills unless they came from a school system which used English as the medium of instruction or had majored in the study of English language in university. As Boonyanate (1996) has indicated that English language proficiency was one of the major problems encountered by overseas students. This is supported in Samuelowicz's survey (1987) which was conducted in Australian universities. Samuelowicz reported that difficulties in using English language were of great concern to overseas students. Both staff and students ranked students' English language proficiency as the most important problem (1987, pp. 121-134). Surdam and Collins (1984) suggested that the students who were more

successful in their academic studies seemed to be characterised by having better English language skills. Some researchers, however, argued that although English proficiency might be a necessity, it was not sufficient to ensure the academic success of overseas students (Kennedy, 1995).

Before arriving in Australia, respondents were not concerned, or indeed informed, about the many varieties of English used in the Western world and thus entered the country unaware of the extent to which local accents, fast speech and Australian colloquialisms were going to affect their ability to speak and understand English in Australia. Australian English vocabulary is a hybridisation that draws on Hiberno-English, Welsh, Scottish, London Cockney, Northern English dialects, as well, as some Indigenous, Malay and Polynesian words; reinforcing the obvious fact of Australia being home to many people who have migrated here from different parts of the world (Angelo *et al.*, 1994; Bowles, 1986; Kell & Vogl, 2006). While formal British English was firmly established as the language of the Australian state in respect to the orthodox Anglo-Saxon political, social and cultural aspects of Australian life, more informal and idiomatic forms of Australian English were popularised (Singh, Kell & Pandian, 2002; Kell & Vogl, 2006). As a result, English in Australia presents a more complicated learning experience for Thai international students than they may have expected. The difficulties with English lay in the fact that not only was it a foreign language but that the English research respondents learned in Thailand was a British or American English with formal grammar. It was highly likely that they were not used to the speed, slang or accent of Australian speakers.

Nevertheless, Thai international students, like other international students, were not generally admitted to tertiary study in Australia without passing an entrance test in English. La Trobe University in its online handbook for the academic Year 2009 (“English language requirements”, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/international/apply/how-to/english>), states that international students applying for undergraduate degree programs generally had to meet strict English language proficiency requirements. These were an IELTS⁶ (Academic) score

⁶ IELTS stands for The International English Language Test Score

of 6.0 with no individual band score less than 6.0, a minimum TOEFL⁷ Paper-based Test score of 550 with a score of 5 or better in the Test of Written English, a minimum TOEFL Computer-based Test score of 213 with a score of 5 in essay writing, a minimum TOEFL Internet-based Test score of 80 with no individual score less than 20, or the successful completion of English for Further Studies Advanced Stage 5B certificate at undergraduate (EFS5 60% UG) level conducted by La Trobe University International College. Similarly, international students applying for postgraduate coursework and research programs had to meet English language proficiency requirements with either an IELTS (Academic) score of 6.5 with no individual band score less than 6.0, a minimum TOEFL Paper-based Test score of 575 with a score of 5 or better in the Test of Written English, a minimum TOEFL Computer-based Test score of 233 with a score of 5 in essay writing, a minimum TOEFL Internet-based Test score of 88 with no individual score less than 22, or successful completion of English for Further Studies Advanced Stage 5B certificate at postgraduate (EFS5 70% PG1) level conducted by La Trobe University International College. In order to conform to this almost bewildering array of prerequisites, most respondents had attended between ten to thirty weeks of an ELICOS⁸ program prior to the commencement of their formal courses. However, according to Boonyanate (1996) and Bradley & Bradley (1984), to assume that the language program alone was able to adequately prepare Thai international students for the demands of academic English in a variety of subjects was to grossly overestimate the language program and underestimate the complexity of the experiences confronting students during their academic course.

The major sources of complexity were not just lack of competence in English but also culturally distinctive learning styles. Some issues were closely intertwined and it is difficult to categorise them separately (Boonyanate, 1996; Bradley & Bradley, 1984b; Ballard & Clanchy, 1984). Language issues could be, for example, the ability to write essays or reports in English, to read and listen in English, to know the right English words to express thoughts, to communicate in English, to give oral reports and participate in the class. Obviously students who were working in a language that was not their own could have added difficulties when they had to use this language within the time limits of a test.

⁷ TOEFL stands for The Test of English as a Foreign Language

⁸ ELICOS stands for English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students

Learning style issues could produce differences in expectations and methods of study, such as styles of teaching and learning, the roles of teachers and students and the nature and functions of assessment. Thai international students can find it difficult to adapt to this educational culture. Although modern education systems have been adopted in Thailand since 1892, earlier traditions (such as the memorisation of content and active listening) continue to influence the flavour of Thai education system and it is difficult for Thai students in Australia to change their traditional attitudes overnight (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991).

Boonyanate (1996) reported that Australian students were generally used to speech classes in their curricula where the art of public speaking was taught, practised and assessed. In many Australian high schools knowledge ceased to be regarded as fixed and absolute and became open to criticism and development. Teachers might raise issues, refer to a range of sources, theories and interpretations and actively encourage students to question and evaluate. In the final stages of tertiary education in Australia the emphasis was placed firmly on the potential for extending the knowledge base (Boonyanate, 1996). The advanced student was encouraged to speculate, to hypothesise and search for new evidence, new interpretation and new understandings (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991). In contrast, in the Thai traditional education system, reflective thinking and active listening were valued (Boonyanate, 1996). Thai students were likely encouraged to seek for certainty in the area of traditional knowledge and the memorisation of content rather than the exploration of competing hypotheses (Hofstede, 1991b; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Findings in this thesis seem to be consistent with the findings of other research into culture shock in Thai international students. The difficulties of many respondents (such as Prapop, Nimit, Pimporn and Bimra, quoted above) lay in not knowing what the lecturers were looking for and not knowing how to present practical ideas. Although Thai students who came from the Thai traditional educational system background might study long hours, get private tutorial assistance, and memorise accurately and extensively, they might be unable to make the transition from learning as the memorisation of traditionally sanctioned knowledge to learning as the pursuit of individual truth to be wrung out of competing theories of the natural world and human behaviour (Boonyanate, 1996).

Boonyanate also stated that many Australian teachers increasingly treat students as equals and the educational process is ideally more student centred (Boonyanate, 1996). Students are expected to find their own paths to knowledge, with the teacher attempting to approximate a peer rather than an arbiter. Knowledge in general is available to anyone who searches for it and is not dependent on the teacher-student relationship. In contrast, a teacher in Thai society is by definition someone with knowledge, experience and authority, and is highly respected (Boonyanate, 1996). A teacher is not only a transmitter of knowledge but also as a role model. Students were to obey and be diligent in acquiring the skills and knowledge essential to fulfil their adult functions. Some female respondents (such as Najaree, whose personality could perhaps be characterised as ‘submissive’) were unused to intellectual disputatious, personalised arguments in tutorials or university cafes and were unable to see the virtue in attacking the viewpoints of respected teachers. Differences in classroom behaviour between Thai international students and local students were therefore not just reflections of learning styles, but of different conceptions of respect and legitimate authority (Boonyanate, 1996). They might find the informality of teacher-student relationships embarrassing and might then be confused when assessment requirements suddenly excluded personal relationships or considerations that were built up during the course of substantive study. International students may also expect that class operations be under close control of the teacher and they felt slightly lost when explicit instructions do not appear to be given (Boonyanate, 1996; Bradley & Bradley, 1984; Ballard & Clanchy, 1984).

Language and learning about cultural issues have thus been significant initial barriers and major sources of anxiety and concern for Thai students. However, this may be lessened in the future as both Thai and Australian educational institutions, and also Thai and Australian governments, have done surveys and developed policy frameworks in recent years to deal with student integration (see “International students invited to have their say at roundtable”, http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_090727_180358.aspx accessed 27 July 2009). The practical strategies could reduce the confusion of Thai international students trying to come to terms with a new approach to learning so that they experience fewer transition problems in the future.

Almost all of my respondents recalled in interviews that they had experienced academic challenges, in terms of both language barriers and in adapting to a new learning culture and respondents often found their languages got mixed up.

Narong (27, male) said,

I often thought in a jumble of Thai and English. Those who start dreaming in English are on the right track.

Sureeporn (30, female) also 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.

Over time, the experience of many (particularly those who worked in Thai restaurants during their study, such as Natwadee, Somjit, Najaree, Prasarn, Jinda, and Jamnong) was that they had not interacted with local students or other Australians sufficiently. They were unable to form close friendships with Australians, especially Anglo-Australians. It may seem to be a paradox that most respondents were here to learn about English and Western ways, yet they remained in close contact with Thai speaking networks or other Asian nationals who had cultural mores that they were already familiar with:

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

I didn't approach them (referring to Anglo- Australian students⁹) and they didn't approach me (Najaree, 37, female).

I agree that I did not reach the desired academic language proficiency level before graduation. My English language remained, if not 'incorrect' lacking in western authenticity (Kamra, 38, female).

The English of many of my respondents was not as high as desirable in terms of basic interpersonal communication skills, even after studying in Australia for at least two years to apply for Australian permanent residency¹⁰. James Gee (2008) suggested that students learn to use language effectively in face-to-face communication, whereby face-to-face communication produces 'contextualised language'. What this means is that in face-to-face communication a good deal of meaning does not come directly from words and sentences but from the 'context', that is, from facial expression and gestures, intonation, and pausing, as well as a shared physical and social setting, and shared knowledge, background, and culture. It requires the learner to learn how certain words and patterns of grammar match up with certain communicative functions and social practices. This requires immersion in the communicative functions and social practices of people who use this sort of language. Learners cannot learn the socially situated identity that goes with a language and its associated social practices if such an identity is not coherently developed for them. As a result, for students without sufficient face-to-face communication in that language, their language skills will not reach the desired level. However, the language at school or university is most likely to focus on writing and reading essays. School based language is generally 'decontextualised language'. The shared social context of face-to-face communication is missing or minimised. Students need to get a lot of practice outside school with contextualised language in face-to-face communication to develop appreciable fluency (Gee, 2008).

⁹ When talking about 'local' it could refer to those who were born or grew up or migrated here. For my participants, however, when they were talking about 'local students' they were focusing on 'white' Australians.

¹⁰ The Skilled Visa (Subclass 885 and 886) is a permanent visa eligible for overseas students who have obtained an Australian qualification in Australia as a result of at least two years study.

According to this perspective, I argue that one main reason for Thai students not reaching the desired academic language proficiency level is insufficient social interactions with Australians. In order for a student to acquire high level language skills face-to-face communication with native speakers is a matter of necessity, rather than of preference. The way to learn a different language is to spend a lengthy amount of time in the surroundings of where that language is spoken. The possibility of broadening foreign language skills increases greatly when forced to communicate in way different from their own. So, the lifestyle outside the school with native speakers of Thai international students could have a great impact on the fluency of their English, and as such the meta-linguistic, or more broadly social, aspects of culture shock are of interest.

Personally challenging experiences

It is possible to list typical problems that overseas students encounter in Australia, especially Thai international students from close knit family backgrounds. Beside academic challenges, there are, for instance, homesickness, loneliness, isolation, welfare problems, housing problems, health problems, and financial constraints. All are potentially very disruptive to academic performance. Compared with life in Thailand, life in Australia can be markedly different at an everyday level. This is especially true for Thai elites who normally employed servants for cooking, cleaning and routine shopping at home. Such students had probably never had to clean their own room, wash their clothes, or cook. Living in Australia might thus present substantial problems in getting used to such mundane tasks. These kinds of difficulties seemed to be well-known to overseas students, who usually received orientation materials about all of them before coming to Australia. However, they still caused stress.

For my respondents, the early part of the adjustment period was hard and sometimes miserable. It was not only life on campus but also a life outside their studies, as those undergoing transition lose what they were familiar with when they entered the new culture or organisation. In general, overseas students need to cope with day-to-day living and might have problems with finding and keeping accommodation, travelling to and from the place of study (usually on public transport), buying and cooking food (often for the first time in their lives), and many other time-consuming non-study activities. Moreover, they might

occasionally think of their family, friends and old pastimes, hobbies, habits and places. They might be perplexed and felt a bit let down from time to time. The very fact that they are studying in a foreign country, in comparison to their local counterparts, means they are likely to encounter more complex problems in their everyday lives which could detrimentally affect their academic performance. In practice these difficulties might not be an insurmountable, indeed most of these problems were solved over time but they were not resolved overnight:

My student life was busy with day to day living businesses such as cooking, travelling, and cleaning. I asked myself many times, “Why I am here and what I am doing here?” I missed my conveniences at home (Sumitra, 27, female).

I bought a return ticket to Australia. In my first three months in Australia I looked at my return ticket several times and thought whether or not I should go back home. But it’s such a shame to return to Thailand because of my immaturity and inability to be independent (Leela, 32, female).

Among academic service providers there has been a growing call for greater awareness of overseas students’ learning problems and a commitment to meet their needs (see “International students invited to have their say at roundtable”, http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_090727_180358.aspx accessed 27 July 2009). To provide the best quality education possible, institutions now consider not only how to get overseas students in, but also how to look after them well when they come in to study. Understanding overseas students’ concerns and problems was essential for institutions in counselling, helping their overseas students, and in improving the quality of services. 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. Examples might include accommodation services, career support, health services, counselling rooms, assistance with academic expectations, and language and academic skills mentors who could work with international students to improve their language and learning skills and assist them with assignments (see “Support services, La

Trobe University”, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/international/life> accessed 7 October 2010). Moreover, city councils that contain educational institutions within their boundaries often host receptions to welcome all international students, especially during orientation weeks.

Despite access to these ‘outsider’ services, many respondents revealed that they were most likely to seek help from those ‘insiders’ with whom they were comfortable, and with whom they could relate informally in the manner of a ‘brotherhood or sisterhood’. This typically was because they came from a society in which advice on personal matters was sought within the hierarchy of the family. They were not familiar with seeking professional help for personal problems. Some perceived seeking professional help as implying loss of status. They first pursue other ways of dealing with their stress rather than attract the attention of formal support groups for fear of endangering their own reputation and that of their country. This national element to ‘shame’ comes about because some respondents were sometimes thrust into the role of informal ‘ambassadors’ or representatives of their nation. This happened when getting to know people who express curiosity about one’s nation origins and customs.

In interesting aspect of the culture gap between Thai international students and Australian society was revealed when respondents mentioned that they considered that health care was best self-organised. Almost all respondents stated that they brought some medicines from Thailand because they believed that it would be too expensive to see a doctor in Australia and overseas student health insurance would not cover all costs. Australian doctors were visited with reluctance and only during serious illness. Some respondents (such as Natwadee, Kamra, and Prapop) were surprised that the hospital system in Australia and its staff were so different and they preferred the ‘gracious’ service ethic of the hospitals in Thailand and the hospitality of their staff. Consistent with this, other studies indicated that overseas students in Australia consulted doctors no more frequently than local students even though there was the stereotype that Asian students get ill with colds and flu more often due to the unfamiliar climate in Australia (Cole, Allen & Green, 1980). The overall implication of these patterns is that support services for international students 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. This seems to be consistent with findings of other research. The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (ACDP/AVCC, 1989), Burke (1989) and Edmond (1995) indicated that international students would not necessarily make use of all of the services. Each international group did not necessarily make the same use of full suite of services because they were perceived to be culturally inappropriate.

Again, the language/culture nexus is important; at the early stage of studying in Australia almost all respondents were struggling with their English communication skills. Due to this language barrier and Thai cultural protocols of 'saving face' (fear of ridicule and of being embarrassed, rejected or cheated), they could not muster their courage to access the full range of services:

I was struggling with speaking English. How could I ask student support services for help? How could I explain to them what I feel or what I want? (Nipa, 30, female).

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, 32, male).

Before coming to Australia the educational agents in Thailand were able to help the students arrange short term accommodation in Australia, usually a home stay (which the students later found was in fact expensive). To find new accommodation they generally asked for advice and/or information from close friends (if they had them) and/or other Thais in Australia, such as the Thai virtual community, Thai migrants and other Thai international students. In many cases they made arrangements to have some other Thais as their new housemates. In some cases they asked other Thais or someone whom they trusted to be an

interpreter, or to accompany them when they wanted to access student support services, or to contact a real estate agent to inspect new accommodation. Clearly, in all these cases the initial phases of integration were conducted mainly through the formal and informal Thai networks.

Negotiating ‘culture shock’

Having looked at the sense of culture shock experienced by respondents as they came to Australia, first in terms of the academic environment, and second in a range of other personal and social settings, this section now turns to consider some of the ways that they negotiated the shock of the new environment and achieved a new equilibrium.

Studies of the friendship patterns of foreign students show that overseas students tend to belong to three distinct social networks, each serving a particular psychological function (Ward *et al.*, 2001). The primary network consists of bonds with fellow compatriots, its function being to rehearse, express, and affirm culture – of – origin values. Another network consists of links with host nationals, its function being largely instrumental, to facilitate the academic and professional aims of the students. Typically, the persons in this network will be other students, teachers and university staff and the relationships will tend to be formal rather than personal in nature. The third network consists of friendships with other non-compatriot foreign students. The function of this network is largely recreational, as well as providing mutual social support based on a shared foreignness (Ward *et al.*, 2001). Consistent with this, studies conducted in many countries including Australia have found that despite the benefits of contact with local students and teachers, this is the least salient of the three networks. In general, overseas students are most likely to report that their closest friends are from the same culture as their own (Ward *et al.*, 2001).

One of my respondents said that she was isolated and dreadfully lonely after arriving in Australia even though people around her were friendly. She chose to be in a place with no other Thais. After a few months in Australia, she eagerly wanted to consume ‘Thainess’. She walked around major shopping centres wishing to see other Thais (in her case Thai tourists

were targeted). She approached them cautiously, speaking in Thai and offering them a hand. She said, “I knew it’s weird but it helped me feel better”. She did it several times until she had cultivated some Thai friends in Australia.

Another respondent said,

Anglo-Australians were willing to talk only about superficial things, or when group studies were assigned. They were not interested in going beyond chit-chat. They had their own friends and social lives before knowing ‘us’. They stuck together with other Anglo-Australians. We have less in common. I have tried to mix with them but I have never got as close as with Thai friends (Nimit, 37, male).

My research revealed that the typical way that most respondents negotiated culture shock when they were overseas students was to integrate themselves to a network of Thai people in Australia, making use of the Thai community as part of an Australian multicultural society, connected to other cultural and social groups. Even though they did not run away back to their comfort zones in Thailand, they were most likely to integrate into a network of Thai people in Australia which could then be their new comfort zones in Australia. Despite the attraction of familiarity, many hoped that they would not be ghettoised in Australia with other Thais or Asians so they could be forced to improve their English yet they lived surrounded by other Thais.

Thai student group formation in this case, however, did not necessarily match with the definition of ‘separation’ or ‘marginalisation’ defined by Berry (1997). Berry’s (1997) social psychological framework describes how overseas students encounter a new culture through ascending phases of acculturative stress. According to Berry, when a level of crisis is reached, individuals select one of four strategies of acculturation: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation. From the point of view of non-dominant groups, when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, the assimilation strategy is developed. This means individuals abandon their original cultural identity and adopt, as much as possible, that of the host majority. In contrast, when individuals place a value on holding onto their original culture, and at the

same time wish to avoid interaction with others, then the separation alternative is the result. It reflects a desire to preserve one's own culture and reject contact with host members and participation in the new culture. When there is an interest in both maintaining and developing one's original culture, while also having daily interactions with other groups, integration is an option. Integration maintains some degree of cultural integrity, while at the same time permits participation in the larger social network. It refers to the process by which individuals acquire some (but not all) aspects of the host culture. Finally, when there is little possibility or interest in culture maintenance, and little interest in having relations with others, then marginalisation can occur. It reflects a person's failure to adjust to a new culture because individuals reject both the original culture and the host one, thereby experiencing feelings of alienation and loss of identity (Berry, 1997).

My respondents 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 and participation in Australian culture. Instead, Thai student group formation can be seen as 'today's integration' in the particular Australian multicultural context (this issue will be expanded upon and clarified in Chapter Six). The Thai international student group in Australia was arguably more open to integration than would be the case in more explicitly mono-cultural countries. In Australia a range of different international student communities can readily be seen and Thai students from this perspective are simply one more international group. The benefit to Thai students in grouping with fellow Thais, and other international students, is the confidence and comfort they develop from associations of shared experience. Therefore, I argue that attachment of Thai students to Thai community networks in Australia should not be defined as separation or marginalisation; this was not a case of failure to adjust to a new culture, but simply an initial coping strategy that relied on familiar networks to begin the process of integration into multicultural Australia.

On a quotidian practical level, my research participants experienced that the logistical requirements of survival were reduced by sharing accommodation and food with other overseas students, usually from the same country. Unfortunately, this often resulted in Thai student group formation that had little contact with Australians. While some

respondents did interact with local people to the extent that it assisted with 'getting the job done' (e.g. getting a degree from an Australian university, achieving work experience from a local workplace) many respondents did not move from Thai (or other Asian) zones in terms of accommodation and friendship networks. They did not develop a global network of culturally diverse friends but instead gained more Thai friends 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. Many respondents remained distinctively foreign, right to the end of their courses and through to their graduation.

The Thai restaurant: a gateway to a little Thai society

Apart from taking a school break to visit Thailand, communicating with friends or family in Thailand over phone and email, or parents occasionally coming to visit them in Australia, most of my respondents (eighteen in total) used Thai restaurants to get in contact with other Thais in Australia. The most commonly run businesses by Thai migrants in Australia are Thai restaurants, while other Thai businesses established in Australia include Thai spa and massage, Thai DVD shops and Thai grocery stores. These, too, become other job sources for Thai international students. But working in Thai restaurants is the main target for Thai international students who are looking for casual or part time jobs. Thai students work in restaurants as waiters or waitresses, kitchen hands, dish washers and chefs. It is interesting that almost all of my respondents 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 (occasionally, some might help by working in their family's business, not for money but to express love and obedience to their parents). However, almost all of my respondents 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 respondents 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 (some respondents had classes only a few days a week). Many also believed that doing paid work could lessen their family's financial burden or give them extra money to spend. Namtip (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.

Working in Thai restaurants was attractive for many Thai students because students in every area of study could apply. Thai international students could make use of their personal background, reduce meal costs in their living expenses, earn some money to cover their tuition fees and other expenses, practice English with customers, and connect with other Thais. In general, those working in a Thai restaurant for the dinner shift would have a dinner at the restaurant before working and a supper after working, which they could take home for breakfast or lunch on the next day. A generous owner might allow them to have special authentic Thai meals which did not appear in the menu. Food provided by restaurant was normally more healthy and balanced than food students cooked or bought. Students generally received between A\$45 and A\$60 per shift: the lunch shift running from 10 am to 4 pm and the dinner shift from 5 pm to 11 pm. Tips would be equally divided between all the staff on that shift. After the dinner shift some owners arranged a lift for the staff to go back home or to the nearest public transport point.

Thai restaurants were thus seen as a gateway to the Thai world in Australia. When students entered a Thai restaurant, they were simultaneously entering into a little Thai society in Australia. My research showed that other Thais in the wider Thai restaurant network can be as important as (or even more important than) school friends whom they may have spent time with:

In our first three months in Australia, Pimporn and I had only studied and tried to adjust ourselves to new environments. After that we started finding jobs in Thai restaurants. We had too much free time and had no other friends or social activities. We didn't know where to go and what to do in this city. It was better to work and earn some money even though we didn't have financial problems at that time. We worked at the same Thai restaurant for three shifts a week before extending to work almost every day in few different restaurants. While working we learned to be patient, humble and how to work with others. We were tired but happier. We met more Thai friends and had somewhere to go and something to do. We spent more time in the restaurant than in the school. Our lives were surrounded by other Thais. We watched Thai movies, listened to Thai songs, had Thai food and often spoke Thai. Some locals (Anglo-Australians) were employed as a waitress in the workplace and there were locals in the family network of the restaurant owner. Locals were friendly but their lifestyle was different. We didn't feel comfortable enough to have social activities with them except working together (Bimra, 26, female).

Eighteen respondents 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 temples¹¹ 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

¹¹ Many attended Buddhist temples occasionally, such as on their birthday and on Buddhist festivals.

were also seen as social spaces for empowering Thai culture in Australia. For example, while mainstream Australia has a relatively informal approach to displaying authority in workplaces and social situations, in Thai restaurants international students could practice the formal Thai seniority system. This is where younger Thais should first ‘*Wai*’ (see Figure 3.1) to the elder and then the elder should ‘*Rub Wai*’ (return the ‘*Wai*’) back to them. Moreover, within this system experienced Thai employees have authority over less experienced ones, who should automatically ‘*Kreng Jai*’ (care for a person’s feelings and their needs and please them if possible), even though experienced employees might not perform well at their job.



Figure 3.1 The ‘*Wai*’ is a Thai gesture of greeting, thanks, pardon, farewell, and paying respect by bringing the palms and fingers together pointing upward in front of the chest, face above the head while inclining the head forward. In general the lower status individuals do this first, followed by the upper status individuals.

Source: ‘*The Wai*’, http://www.kroobannok.com/blog/view.php?article_id=13686 accessed 20 July 2009

In many cases, respondents 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. Some bought new clothes, shoes, mobile phones, short trips, night life tours, or even went gambling in the casino. 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 respondents who worked in Thai restaurants that they extended their working hours over time, sometimes eventually working in two to three places. Some of them applied for jobs in non-Thai

businesses like sandwich shops, coffee shops, pizza shops or local factories. Four respondents went fruit picking on Australian farms during university holidays. Three applied for cleaning jobs in local (non-Thai) hotels and offices. While almost all enjoyed being busy and making money, some of them experienced the effects of work overload which showed up in poor academic results:

I changed my study program from Master of Business Administration or MBA (a one-year course) to a Certificate in Hospitality (a two-year course). After working in the restaurants I didn't have time to focus on my study enough to complete the one-year course. Also, I wanted to extend my stay in Australia (Natwadee, 33, female).

Like most other overseas students, Thai international students worked in low skill jobs in which advanced English communication skills were not required. Typically, the student's academic and language skills were not significantly progressed by this type of work experience. However, some respondents were able to get a job in other sectors of Australian business. For example, Prasarn (37, male) was trained by his Thai landlord to produce leather hand-made products such as bags and belts to be sold in art markets. While studying, he worked for his landlord before running his own small business. At the same time, he also worked in a Thai restaurant and was able to pay for his living and study costs in Australia. Prakitch (38, male), who had advanced computer skills, worked in a Thai restaurant only one day before quitting. He built budget personal computers and sold them. He bought a used car and drove to many campuses to post advertisements. He sold them to students with one year insurance and delivery services. His business was going well so he told his parents to stop sending the money to him. Kamra (38, female) had worked as a salesperson in local businesses and restaurants connected to Thai people in Australia. In another example, a Thai with good English (Sureeporn, 30, female) got a job as a casual research analyst at a consulting firm which needed to have someone help contact Thai people in Thailand. Another student with good English (Sumitra, 27, female) worked very hard as a volunteer for the Thai international student community. She had many Thai contacts and she received a job offer from a Thai businesswoman in Australia to be an education counsellor in an education agency business; while her parents supported her for tuition fees she met the cost of all other expenses involved in living in Australia.

So, after my research respondents had made the initial personal, social and economic adjustments to life as an international student in Australia, their lives settled into a steady rhythm and some stability was established. At this stage they formed routine patterns of behaviour. Pastime and study patterns also stabilised. Their circle of initial acquaintances became regular and reliable, and as such assumed a more important status. Eventually my respondents made new and true friends and were able to become involved with social activities they liked in Australia. Those Thais who gave them early support might remain close friends, but some might not. They began to rely less on old acquaintances and started to enjoy the company of people they did not know before they arrived in Australia. Respondents who were able to swim over the river of unfamiliarity learned how culture shock was important for self-development and personal growth. 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. Independence, stress and strength were positively linked; studying overseas was now viewed as a testing yet life-changing event. It was common to hear respondents 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 (Adler, 1987). As their confidence and comfort developed they now had a solid platform from which to consider the possibility of migration after graduation.

In summary, this chapter has focused on the consolidation of personal, social and economic integration of Thai international students in Australia. By examining the period of time between my respondents' arrival in Australia and the point at which they are willing to consider seeking permanent residence, several significant features of Thai experiences in Australia have shed light on how these Thai people come to the decision to seek permanent residence. The culture shock experienced while moving from Thai to Australian culture was considered from two aspects. The first looked at the academic experience and the personal dimensions of this transition. The second looked at the typical social ways that these Thai people negotiate their way through the sense of culture shock and 'find their feet', so that they see Australia as a stimulating and desirable place to live. The next chapter looks at how

the new confidence discovered by negotiating their way successfully through academic study, completing a degree and developing an independent social life becomes a key to the decision to seek Australian permanent residence.

Chapter Four

From student to migrant

As described in Chapter Three, the desire of research respondents to continue to live in Australia after graduation from Australian territory institutions was stimulated during study abroad. This decision was made after these international students had successfully adjusted to culture shock and found their feet in a new environment. The students typically integrated into the Australian Thai community and made use of these connections to make links to Australia's broader multicultural society. The benefit for Thai students of grouping with fellow Thais was that this initial network gave them the confidence and comfort to develop an understanding of Australia as a stimulating and desirable place to live. This confidence also created a space for the students to make a decision about permanent migration. This chapter is divided into two sections: the first looks at the question of why these former Thai international students migrated to Australia after graduation and the second looks at the process they went through when deciding to migrate to Australia.

Why migrate to Australia after graduation?

In focusing on the decision making process, 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. The present chapter 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.

The neoclassical approach to explaining migration decisions typically focuses on wage differentials between regions (Smith, 1776; Ravenstein, 1889; Harris & Todaro, 1970). Put simply, people living and working in low wage regions tend to migrate to high wage regions. Distance and the probability of finding employment in the destination region have

also been shown to be significant determinants. This approach gives economic motives greater value than cultural, social or psychological motives in the decision-making process. However, although Chapin (1989) says that wage differentials are important to potential migrants, he adds that they are not the sole determinants in many situations of migration. Economic disparities alone are not enough to explain international movements. For example, even with equal wages across international labour markets, people may have an incentive to migrate if domestic markets are inefficient or poorly developed such that this threatens their material well-being (Massey, 2003).

The value of being more independent

The migration motivations of the former Thai international students who responded to this research were not based solely on current economic opportunities. Wage differentials and economic factors, such as high levels of unemployment in Thailand and employment or trade opportunities in Australia were not the only incentives for their decision to migrate after graduation. I found that economic and socio-cultural factors both affected the attractiveness of migration decision making to stay in Australia for these former Thai international students, but greater impact was found in socio-cultural factors relating to the life style, especially in relation to a sense of an 'independent life'. The elevation of 'happiness' (in the form of relief from burdensome Thai social obligations) above financial rewards was a decisive factor.

It should be noted here that respectful submission to the authority of elders in Thailand, such as parents or family members, teachers, the Buddha and other religious symbols, the King and the Thai government is first instilled into the child by parental teaching and later reinforced by the process of the child's secondary socialisation, namely, school education (Bechstedt, 1991). In fact, a sense of subordination and superordination (an inferior-superior relationship) can be found in the Thai language which contains a remarkably elaborate system of hierarchically ordered kinship terms; for example, *Phii* (older brother/sister) and *Noong* (younger brother/sister). Thai people are always aware of their own as well as everyone else's position in the surrounding social hierarchy, and will reinforce this by appropriate manners and speech. Conformity and compliance with formal

etiquette requirements of social life, respect and obedience towards elders, trust in the wisdom and protection of elders, a sense of mutual dependence and reciprocity in familial relations, and moral indebtedness and a sense of obligation in broader hierarchical social relations – all these characteristics are significant aspects of Thai culture.

The following quotations from respondents reveal some of their thinking around these issues. Clearly a number of non-economic factors are central to what they are saying here, including independence, the ability to plan and manage one's own life, and the freedom that different social expectations allow in making a variety of day-to-day decisions:

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, 27, 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, 33, female).

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, 37, male).

Removal from the familiar home environment gave many respondents freedom from cultural and familial expectations and the opportunity for self-discovery, whilst exposure to a new culture offered them the chance to improve their cross-cultural communication skills. The elevation of self-direction over familial control was also a welcome development. However, the durability of the personal space these former students had come to value was an issue for them. Some respondents (such as Najaree and Pimporn) seemed to be apprehensive about returning to Thailand because of the negative reception they might receive to the changes they have made in their personal lives. Would the changes they made in Australia be durable upon return to Thailand or would they disappear under the familiar Thai social forms? The impending removal from new routines and the imminence of return prompted an exploration of old attitudes. After respondents discovered independent life during study in Australia, the awareness of culture shock on return increased:

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, 37, female).

While the notion of culture shock may be familiar, the idea of reverse culture shock is not as well-known. Reverse culture shock is the term used to describe the encounter of the once familiar turned unfamiliar that can occur to some degree when students return home after studying abroad for a significant period of time. Some students may think that, because they are returning back home where everything is familiar, the process of acclimatising should be quite easy. However, many respondents were unprepared for the shock that awaited them when taking holiday trips back home before graduation. They felt out of place and uncomfortable. Groups of friends back home might have changed while they were away and it might be hard for them to fit back under a system parental and communal direction:

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, 26, female).

From interviews, it was common to hear respondents 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 respondents, 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.

Najaree (37, female), Sureeporn (30, female), and Tanapoom (41, male) rejected career choices offered by their families while studying in Australia. For these respondents, completing their studies and graduating did not mean their journey was over. Nevertheless, there was anxiety over the family's reaction to their new-found assumption of control over their own path. Respect and obedience of authorities are key elements in understanding the Thai family system. In addition to the family, respect is also usually linked to status or an individual's hierarchical position in society. It is important to note that the value for respondents of an independent life and self-control did not cancel out their respect for their family. Respondents emphasised family ties but felt a sense of 'powerlessness' if they were to work or live their life under their family's control. A tangible impact of this ongoing tension between family and self is found in the fact that almost all my respondents asked for and received permission from the family before making the decision to migrate permanently to an independent life in Australia.

International migration in the Thai imaginary

As described above, the most influential factor in the decision of respondents to migrate was the socio-cultural factor relating to the value of an independent life. Independence in setting one's path in life is arguably a critical component in directing Thai skilled migrant flow to Australia. However, it was rare for respondents to make the final migration decision alone. It was almost always a matter involving other family members. The interviews revealed that almost all respondents received support from their family in Thailand for their migration plans, primarily because of the positive image of international migration in Thailand. Family perceptions were illustrated in the belief that students would have a better life and more income if they were working overseas. My respondent's families generally assumed that students would earn a satisfactory living in Australia. Even though the image of international migration perpetuated in Thailand does not always correspond accurately to the reality, it was still positively associated with social status and influential in subsequent decisions about migration, including the decision of parents to support or allow their children to migrate overseas.

The historical shaping of the image of international migration in Thai society

'Working and staying abroad' is a well-known phenomenon in Thailand. Since the Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1987), Thailand has promoted and administered the export of its labour to many countries around the world to reduce unemployment and to attempt to resolve the problem of poverty at home. In spite of the provisions of the Recruitment and Job Seekers Protection Act¹², overseas Thai workers are sometimes victimised by unscrupulous individuals or companies recruiting them for overseas employment. However, under this government-dominated migration system almost 1.5 million overseas Thai workers (about 1.6 per cent of the population) have migrated during the last decade from Thailand (see Figure 4.1), mainly to Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The majority of Thai contract labourers are relatively low skilled migrants; the highest concentration of low skilled workers is aged between 30 and 39 and their

¹² International labour migration from Thailand is governed by the Recruitment and Job Seekers Protection Act, B.E. 2528. Its main purpose is to regulate recruitment so as to prevent the cheating or exploitation of prospective migrants and to curtail illegal migration. It also offers some protection to workers after deployment in terms of their contracts and wages (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009).

employment is expected to be temporary¹³. Male contract workers have usually been employed in construction, manufacturing, and agriculture, while female contract workers have been concentrated in the household and commercial service sectors. Overseas Thai workers also remit money to support their families back home (see Figure 4.2) (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009).

Figure 4.1 Officially Deployed Overseas Thai workers, 1999-2007

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total	159,566	177,709	165,047	160,807	147,769	148,596	139,667	160,846	161,917
Male (%)	81.8	80.6	85.0	84.7	83.4	81.6	83.3	84.4	85.0
Female (%)	18.2	19.4	15.0	15.3	16.6	18.4	16.7	15.6	15.0

Source: Thailand Overseas Employment Administration, Ministry of Labour, 2008.

Figure 4.2 Remittances of Overseas Thai workers, 1999-2007

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Amount (Million Thai baht)	56,910	67,936	55,606	59,251	66,297	65,124	47,667	53,985	56,273

Source: Bank of Thailand, 2008.

An interesting change in Thai international labour patterns is the major increase in Thai skilled migrants as a result of the requirements for more skilled labour by key destination countries and regions, significantly the United States, Australia, Europe and other Western countries (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009). The typical view that many poor Thais want to migrate

¹³ Countries in Asia and the Middle East do not approve of permanent settlement and expect contract labour migrants to travel alone, remain single and childless during their stay, and return home at the end of the contract. Evidence, however, shows that formal rules do not stop migrants from engaging with the local population, marrying and having children in the destination country (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009).

internationally is in one sense validated with this change; Thai international migrants are now coming from a broader cross-section of society than in previous decades. On the other hand, the view that anyone who has a good life in Thailand in terms of job, financial status and social status will not migrate to other country is becoming less valid as many Thai people from skilled occupational or high educational backgrounds leave to seek their future overseas. Thus, today's Thai migrants are not necessarily poor (Chapin, 1989).

Working and staying overseas is now a much more widespread practice among Thais, and there are two principal issues which influence the image of international migration in Thai people's perspectives. The first is the widely accepted view that migration of skilled professionals has a negative net effect for the home country; this is the so called 'brain drain' of university-trained people moving from the home country to highly-developed countries (Chalamwong, 2004). Considerable numbers of Thais have gone to developed countries to study in recent years. Student movement to developed countries may be part of the brain drain, since many do not return home after graduation. However, this assumption of economic loss has yet to be properly tested. In many instances, when balanced against the financial return through migrant remittances and return investment, as well as decreased unemployment through replacement recruitment from the local labour market, the result may be arguably more balanced (IOM, 2004).

The second key issue is that of reintegration, and the mixed images of diasporas and return migrants. Migrants are great sources of richness and development for their homeland, through the remittances they send, the investments they make, the skills they bring, and the innovation they provide. Increasingly, migrants are being viewed by many countries of origin as potential agents for development, especially in terms of their potential for remitting funds, transferring know-how and creating businesses and trade networks. There is growing evidence of the benefits migrants can bring, in time, to their countries of origin (IOM, 2004; Castles, 1998; Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009).

Studies show migrants' incomes earned from foreign countries, when saved and sent home, are used to repay debts, build new houses, purchase consumer goods, invest in small-scale businesses, educate children, acquire land and other assets, pay medical bills, and temporarily

enjoy higher standards of living (Angsuthanasombat, 2001; Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009; Chantavanich, 1999). Migrant remittances can, in poorer households with very low consumption levels, be used to meet basic subsistence purchases. In households somewhat further above subsistence consumption levels, receipt of migrant remittances can lead to household entrepreneurial investments. Accumulated migrant earnings can allow investments that might not have otherwise been made due to credit constraints and large capital costs of investment. Remittances not only serve to improve the lives of migrants' families in Thailand, but also enable Thai migrants to maintain the link with their motherland, fulfil familial obligations, and acquire a higher status in the Thai community. At the same time, however, remittances create socio-economic inequity between migrant and non-migrant families, and create competition among migrants (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009).

In areas where international migration has been widespread, it has impacted beyond the migrant households, alleviating community poverty, while deeply changing social norms and lifestyles. Many Thai people are influenced by the perceived prestige of living and working overseas. The information, goods and money sent back home by migrants reinforces the good reputation of international migration in their homeland. Many Thais subscribe to a culture of migration which resulted in them accepting many of the aspects of international migration in an unquestioning way, particularly when there is a perception that they could become wealthy. The attraction of higher income, a higher standard of living, household economic stability alongside the expectation of living in a pleasant society with a good environment have become stronger in some cases than the desire to have family and friends nearby to rely on.

For example, Chantavanich's (1999) research of Thai women migrating to Germany notes that Germany is the top destination for Thais in Europe. Thai women migrate to Germany as spouses of Germany men or as workers (including sex workers). Statistics shows that the number of Thai brides to Germany is on the increase; from 529 in 1975 to 18,995 in 1994. Chantavanich also reveals in her research that not all women were satisfied with their lives in Germany due to language and cultural barriers. However, in spite of these difficulties in adjustment they try to send positive news back to Thailand, giving an impression that they are being successful. The migrant women are viewed in Thailand as being successful, partly because

of good news and large remittances sent back to their family in the home country. In 1990, remittances from Germany to Thailand were estimated at 802.6 million baht. The money was spent in Thailand, for example, for paying debts, and paying for children's education and house renovations. The migrant women are admired and likely to be envied by neighbours in their home country. Their image of success influences other Thai women to follow the same migration route (Chantavanich, 1999).

Historically, Thai women have played a major role in migration to Western countries. The significance of Thai 'migration-by-means-of-marriage' by women from the poorer Thai regions to European countries with long histories of male tourism to Thailand has increased. While caring for their new family, Thai migrant women work in manufacturing and as domestic helpers to achieve economic security for themselves and their families back home¹⁴ (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009). Sciortino and Punpuing's research showed that the rural Northeast village of Baan Jarn is called the 'Swiss village' because nearly one in three of the 330 village women between 20 and 59 years of age have married a foreigner, in most cases a man from Switzerland (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009). More generally, a study of Khon Kaen University found that fifteen per cent of all marriages in the Northeast in 2007 occurred between Thai women and foreign, mostly European men, resulting in the migration of the Thai brides to Europe or in the settlement of the European bridegrooms in Thailand (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009).

It is important to note that the social links between former migrants and the homeland, and the circulation of people, goods, remittances and information have profound effects throughout the home society, not just on those most closely tied to the former migrants but on virtually all of Thai society, primarily through the mass media and other publications. Interactions among social networks between former migrants and the homeland make further migration easier by reducing the costs and risks of moving. The personal relations which connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in the homeland and the host society increase the probability of international migration through circular and chain migration processes (Boyd, 1989). As social networks are extended and strengthened by each additional migrant, potential

¹⁴ Some Thai migrant women have children from a previous union with Thai men. Children may follow them to the new country or remain behind with their grandparents.

migrants are able to benefit from the social networks and ethnic communities already established in the country of destination (Haug, 2008).

Migration flows involve not only people but goods, money and information that move back and forth between the country of origin and the country of destination (Chapin, 1989; Boyd, 1989). Networks of information, assistance and obligations based on kinship, friendship and community ties connect migrants in the host country and non-migrants at the homeland across time and space. These networks ensure that movements are not necessarily limited in time, unidirectional, or permanent (Elrick, 2005). Accordingly, the concept of 'transnationalism' emerged from the realisation that migrants abroad maintain ties to their countries of origin, making 'home and host society a single arena of social action' (Brettell, 2000). Such a perspective is different from static conceptualisations that see migration as a onetime event from place A to place B. Instead they emphasise interdependence and reciprocity. From a transnational perspective, migrants are no longer 'uprooted' but rather move back and forth across international borders and between different cultures and social systems. These migrants bring changes to localised communities not only through economic remittances but also social remittances. The changing nature of interactions between home and destination as migration proceeds contributes to a process of adaptation in the home society (Chapin, 1989). Over time migration not only changes the attitudes of individuals, but also influences community values and expectations. The links between former migrants and the homeland, the circulation of people, goods, remittances and information have profound effects throughout the home society (Elrick, 2005).

Accordingly, the Thai perception that migration channels affluence and modern standards of living back home seems to have a positive effect on migration decision making. Even though the image of international migration perpetuated in Thailand does not always correspond accurately to the reality, it was important in the socio-cultural context. However, it is important to note that the greater impact on migration decision making of former Thai international students in this research was found in the socio-cultural factors relating to values about independent life.

The image that Thai people have of international migration helps to explain why respondents received permission from their parents to migrate to Australia after graduation. Almost all respondents received support from their family and friends in Thailand for their migration plan, partly because of this positive image of international migration in Thailand. Family support developed from the belief that their children will have a better life and more income if working overseas. In the present study only four respondents had an obligation to financially support their family back home, but for other respondents the non-economic issues were of primary importance. The family assumed that their children would make a satisfactory living in Australia. The research respondents and their family also perceived that they would be able to maintain their social status in Thailand. They would not lose their social acceptance in the Thai hierarchy after migration.

Here are three typical examples of the attitudes of overseas family members to the decision of some of my respondents to apply for permanent residence in Australia:

Working in Australia is cool (*Jeng* in Thai). I'm proud of my sister (Namtip's brother, interviewed at his place in Thailand).

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 at her place 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 '*farangs*' (foreigners). Two of my children are in Australia and one of them is now the owner of a Thai restaurant (Phanid's mother, interviewed at her place in Thailand).

Legal considerations of migrating to Australia

Legal and social considerations about citizenship and nationality also positively affected Thais' perspectives on migration to Australia. The respondents¹⁵ 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 (Millbank, 2001). 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'. Accordingly, after migration Thai migrants have the right to enter Thailand at any time. The Thai passport remains valid, and as long as they keep their Thai Identification Card and Thai House Registry on them, they will be able to renew their Thai passport at the closest Thai embassy any time while overseas rather than having to return to Thailand. When Thais hold both Thai and Australian passports they enter and leave Thailand on the Thai passport and enter and exit Australia on the Australian passport. None of my respondents had heard of cases where a Thai-Australian citizen was asked by immigration in either country to show also the other passport. Many respondents acknowledged the benefit of holding an Australian passport as they could travel to many countries in the world with no visa required. 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.

¹⁵ After receiving Australian permanent residency almost all of my participants later become Australian citizens.

The migration decision making process

The individual and the family

There is a polarised debate regarding the social units that drive migration decisions. One side argues that only individuals make migration decisions (DaVanzo, 1981). Another side argues that the family is the reasonable decision making unit, since members of a family usually move together (DeJong, 2000). This study revealed that most respondents made the initial decision to apply for Australian permanent residency by themselves. They did this after they managed to make some successful adjustments to culture shock and found their feet in a new environment, typically by integration into the Thai community networks in Australia. However, 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 respondents wanted to move their parents to stay with them in Australia. Most respondents 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.

Accordingly, it can be argued that the migration decision-making of Thai international students was a personal strategy within a familial socio-cultural context. That context was partly conditioned by the positive image of international migration held by migrants' family members and Thai society more broadly. As migration to Australia is seen as a channel to affluence, respondents received permission from their parents to migrate to Australia after graduation. The family consideration was illustrated in the belief that students will have the better life in term of income if working overseas. The family assumed that the students would earn a satisfactory living in Australia. Moreover, due to the legal environment respondents could retain their Thai citizenship after migrating to Australia.

Making a choice and negotiating with the family

According to the rational choice approach of the value expectation theory of migration, individuals are seen as resourceful actors who select from sets of alternatives, while constraints and opportunity structures impose restrictions on their choice (Brettell, 2000). It is evident that before the completion of their study courses in Australia, respondents considered alternative choices for life after graduation, and analysed what they might encounter in each choice. In some ways, looking at the various options before them – each with some advantages and some disadvantages – can be seen as predictable (DeJong, 2000). Expectations, or how the respondents visualised new experiences before they happened, could be both positive and negative. How respondents imagined things might be close to reality, but sometimes might be far from it. Expectations seemed to be positive when they helped respondents prepare for change, but they can also rob respondents of their flexibility and sense of adventure if they become too heavily invested in how respondents think things ought to be (Brettell, 2000).

It was obvious that my respondents did not want to return to Thailand after graduation as an independent life was now a priority. Two possible options were often mentioned: remain in Australia or move to another country, particularly neighbours of Thailand such as Singapore or Malaysia as it might be easier for them to visit their family in Thailand. However, migration preparation to an unknown country was said by respondents to be a very large time investment with highly unpredictable outcomes. Meanwhile, Australia is already a familiar country where they might more easily start a post-study life.

In order to migrate, respondents negotiated carefully with family, arguing that migration to Australia was beneficial by relating it to the Thai imaginary of international migration described earlier. Also, still avoiding question of independence, the mature respondents often claimed that “they were getting old”. In Thailand the job market did not provide them much opportunity compared to younger Thais. In Australia they were working. Even though it was a part time and low skilled occupation, it was sufficient to support them financially since study. Their net income might be higher than the salary they would have received if they returned to Thailand. In a number of cases they had developed confidence that they might be able to find a full time position after graduation and thus find a better life after migration.

In most cases, their families eventually accepted their migration proposal and allowed them to remain in Australia, partly because of the positive image of international migration of Thai people in Thailand. However, in a few cases there was conflict at the beginning of these negotiations derived from the pull between respondents' families' wills. In these cases respondents were told by their siblings in Thailand that it was 'unfair' and 'selfish' to be free from family obligations. Thai children are raised with the traditional expectation that they will contribute financial, emotional and/or social support to their family and take care of their parents in old age. Thai children are also taught to be conscious of and avoid conflict in order to promote group harmony. As such, group harmony supersedes individual need. To resolve this problem, these respondents sought to justify their proposals by claiming that international migration might be able to enlarge their potential for giving the family support. Most families were told that their children have never intended to spend the rest of their lives in Australia. Originally, their children planned to work and earn money in Australia and could become entrepreneurs upon return if they were able to accumulate savings overseas. Such reasoning contributed significantly towards the family giving a student permission to migrate to Australia after graduation.

In summary, we have seen that there was a mixture of individual and familial social forces, and personal and familial decision making that explain the motivations of Thai students to come to Australia, and then to want to stay here. The international migration for respondents in this thesis was seen as a social product, not as the sole result of individual decisions made by individual actors, not as the sole result of economic parameters, but rather as an outcome of both economic and socio-cultural factors in interaction. The present chapter 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. The greater experience of independence at the host country was a critical component in directing Thai skilled migrant flow to Australia. In the next chapter the investigation shifts its focus to understanding how Thai skilled migrants settle in Australian multicultural society and how the settlement patterns of these Thai skilled migrants shape the character of Thai community in Australia.

Chapter Five

The Thai Community and network building

The Thai skilled migrants in this project had been in Australia as international students for at least two years before receiving Australian permanent residency. While they might be called new settlers or first generation Thai skilled migrants they were not new comers. They had adapted to life in Australia, generally by integrating into Australian society through Thai community networks. Even though they were not sent to sponsors or to migrant centres where essential services and facilities needed to adapt to the new environment are provided, many already knew where to find help. However, this did not mean that they would find the transition from international students to Australian permanent residents easy.

In this chapter migration and housing is highlighted to investigate research respondents' post-study life in Australia. I argue that the residential decentralisation of Thai migrants has shaped the character of Thai community: 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, various Thai cultural and religious festivals throughout the year and other occasions when Thais gather and celebrate their culture and 'Thai-ness' in a public space, making the otherwise invisible Thai community visible. The Thai community thus manages to put itself into the wider Australian public multicultural society. Further, this exposure to the broader Australian society can facilitate network building with non-Thai social sectors. While some degree of community separation persists the Thai community in Australia is neither an overly closed nor exclusive community. The rest of this chapter will show how such interactive mechanisms position the Thai community as inextricably intertwined with the larger setting in which it exists.

The Thai community can be seen as a dynamic meta-network with many sub-networks providing links ranging from interpersonal ties to social organisation ties, from virtual encounters to real-life interactions. Thai skilled migrants in this thesis were opportunistic in manipulating ethnic linkages, and associative in developing networks of connections. Networks were interdependent, diverse, and responsive to change, yet cohesive enough to form a sense of stable community. Some of my respondents such as Saran (35, male), Prakitch (38, male), Sumitra (27, female), Apanchanij (32, female), and Tanapoom (41, male) were active agents or ‘hub’ people in the development of a networked community. All of my research participants had 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.

Residential decentralisation

According to the 2006 census (‘Victorian Community Profiles: 2006 Census Thailand-Born’, <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/stories/pdf/thailand-2006-census.pdf> accessed 18 May 2009), Thai migrants are accommodated throughout metropolitan Melbourne, with slight concentrations in Melbourne City (10 per cent) and Greater Dandenong (9 per cent). However, there was no particular Thai residential enclave or commercial focus area in Victoria, compared to some other ethnic communities in Victoria such as ‘Little Italy’ centred around Lygon Street in the inner-Melbourne suburb of Carlton, Melbourne’s Greek precinct on Lonsdale Street, Chinatown on Little Bourke Street (several newer Chinese communities are found in other areas of Melbourne, such as Box Hill on Carrington Road), and Vietnamese communities in Richmond (Victoria Street), Footscray, and Springvale. Generally, settler arrivals from Thailand were not recognised as refugees or asylum seekers. Rather they were most likely seen as people voluntarily seeking a better life. Nim (45, female), a long-term skilled Thai migrant told me that:

In the past Dandenong, Springvale and its surrounds were attractive to Thai migrants because they were well known as Southeast Asian cultural areas where refugees from neighbours of Thailand such as Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia were housed. Many Thais chose to live close to people of similar cultural background, where they felt secure and less lonely and isolated.

She also indicated that,

Many industries such as motor industries and large plants had developed gradually around Dandenong, Springvale and its surrounds. Industrial development had extended from inner Melbourne suburbs along the railway line and the Princes Highway, helping to create new suburbs. Demand for workers from these manufacturing industries continued to grow. Many Thais found jobs in these suburbs, and rented or bought homes near their workplace.

However, another long-term Thai skilled migrant said that:

Refugee areas were described by outsiders as danger zones and strongly determined by their socioeconomic level. Many Thais did not want to live in these areas. Moreover, many female Thai migrants were spouses of Australians. They followed their Australian partners to Australia. These Thai brides did not live together in the same area. Also, some female Thai migrants did not want to associate closely with other Thais. They sought privacy because they did not want to allow people to know their past as some had been poor or worked in nightclubs in Thailand (Porn, 52, female).

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, and they were keen to move from a house when they found it difficult to travel to their new workplace. For those who bought a house, they chose to build a house in a new outer metropolitan development area where the price was affordable. The majority of these participants had a car since public transport in those areas had not been well organised. Almost all of them revealed during interview that they did not have close relationships with their

neighbours. Also, almost all participants said that they understood that there is no 'Thai Zone' in Victoria. They said that it was not important to have a 'Thai Town' in Victoria. 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.

In sociology, the concept of community has been subject to significant debate, and sociologists are yet to reach agreement on the definition of the term. The word 'community' has been used so freely in both popular and social scientific literature that it is assumed that everyone understands it and is in agreement about its importance. Yet, its definitions vary substantially. Community can usually only be described, not defined, and experienced, not generalised. Traditionally a 'community' has been described as a group of interacting people living in a common location (Zimmerman, 1938). In the past century, there was concern on the part of many scholars of the world scene that community was in decline; the *gemeinschaft* described in the 19th century and continued to lose its solidarity in the 20th century (Bruhn, 2005, pp. 16-17). The concern over the loss of community in modern society has a long history, but its revival is usually associated with heightened urbanisation, residential mobility, and rapid social change when the world experiences significant shifts in values and increasing individualism (Fukuyama, 1999, pp. 55-80). However, Wellman (1999, pp. 49-92) argued that large scale social change has not destroyed communities; rather communities have been transformed. 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. Most people affect their community through interpersonal influences on those around them (Bruhn, 2005).

Since the advent of the internet (or indeed globalisation more widely), the concept of community no longer has geographical constraints as people can now virtually gather in an online community and share common interests regardless of physical location. Where social

networks sufficiently exist and maintain a quality of interaction and association, community can be achieved independently of territorial context. The internet has contributed to a shift from co-located and group-based to network-based community. In more recent decades, most social ties are not local neighbourhood ties as they were in the past decades (Bruhn, 2005). According to this point of view, a shared territory is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to define the existence of community:

People live close to one another does not necessarily mean that they have much to do with each other. There may be little interaction between neighbours. It is the nature of the relationships between people and the social networks of which they are a part that is often seen as one of the more significant aspects of 'community' (Lee & Newby, 1983, p. 57).

Wellman and his colleagues at the University of Toronto have taken a network approach to urban studies. They pointed out that community is seen as linkages between a set of persons or social units (Craven & Wellman, 1973). These linkages can be used to interpret the social behaviour of the people involved in them. Wellman found that urbanites are members of many networks, some of which are tightly knit and others loosely knit. Networks characterised by a high density of direct ties are communities. Communities, therefore, are the kinds and qualities of interpersonal ties between interacting people. Some ties are unique and personal, but the majority of ties are diverse and can be far reaching.

In addition to this, McMillan and Chavis (1986) have described four aspects of community. The first aspect is the *sense of membership* that is derived from being a part of a team. The second aspect is the sense that a person has some degree of power to *influence* the group. The third aspect is a person's capacity to contribute to the group by way of *integration and fulfilment of needs*. The last aspect is the *shared emotional connection* felt by a person after participating in a joint effort, enjoying the acceptance of other team members. McMillan and Chavis (1986) also pointed out that a sense of community is evident among ethnic groups who stick together, often settling with others from their ethnic group who have preceded them in an effort to survive in a strange and new country. A sense of community is usually associated with the degree to which people know and trust one another. What makes a community important and

meaningful is a person's feeling that he or she is valued, and that his or her safety and protection is provided for, and that there is access to resources outside of the community. The kind of community that each person believes fosters healthy connections for them is key (Bruhn, 2005).

In short, the residential decentralisation of Thai migrants has shaped the character of Thai community in Victoria. Clearly, the Victorian Thai community was not highly visible as there was no one physical geographic location around which Thais gathered. Despite this, Thai community and culture can be seen through at least three ways.

First, there are hundreds of Thai restaurants throughout Victoria which employ a large number of Thai migrants. For example, the website 'www.eatability.com.au' shows 246 venues in the category of Thai restaurants in Melbourne ('Thai restaurants in Melbourne', http://www.eatability.com.au/au/melbourne/melbourne_restaurants-cafes/thai/ accessed 18 May 2009). Thai food such as *Pat Thai*, *Tum Yam* soup, and Thai green curry are well known in Australia. Thai restaurants can be seen as one of the major focal points of Thai people in Australia.

Second, the presence of the Thai community can also be seen through the emergence of Thai social networks through a variety of organisations within the Thai community such as Buddhist temples¹⁶, the Thai Language School of Melbourne Inc.¹⁷, the Thai Association of Victoria Inc.(TAV)¹⁸, the Thai Information and Welfare Association Inc. (TIWA)¹⁹, the SBS Radio's Thai Language Program²⁰, and Thai newsmagazines published in Victoria²¹.

¹⁶ Buddhist temples in Victoria where Buddhist Thais often attend include Wat Thai Nakorn Melbourne (Wat Boxhill), Wat Dhammarangsee (Wat Springvale), and Bodhivan Monastery (Wat Pa). There are a number of major Buddhist festivals as well as community festivals held at the temple, particularly Wat Boxhill and Wat Springvale.

¹⁷ The Thai Language School of Melbourne Inc. is a non profit organisation providing Thai language and culture classes for the Thai community in Melbourne since April 2001. Many Thai parents saw a need for their children to have some formal knowledge of the Thai culture and language, and have actively encouraged the establishment and ongoing continuance of the school. The school has been operated by volunteer teachers and staff. The school has accreditation for child classes from Department of Education and Early Childhood Development since 2004. From 2010 to 2012 the school has been approved for accreditation and the school curriculum follows Victorian Essential Learning Standards.

¹⁸ TAV was first registered as an incorporated association on the 25 August 1987. Its aims are to be a focal point for Thai people living in Victoria; to strengthen unity among the Thai people in Victoria; to promote the culture, arts, and the Thai language; to consolidate and promote the good understanding among Thais and

Third, various Thai festivals throughout the year serve as occasions when Thais gather and celebrate their culture, and provide opportunities to present Thai-ness in a public space (or common areas), making the otherwise dispersed Thai community visible. For example, the 6th Melbourne's Annual Thai Culture and Food Festival²², which attracted over 40,000 people to Federation Square, enables the community to celebrate the traditional Songkran festival (The Thai new year day), as well as learn more about Thai culture and food. Federation Square is Melbourne's key public space and an essential part of cultural precinct in the city of Melbourne, and it was transformed into a haven of Thai culture with a number of tents showcasing Thai arts and crafts, Thai tourism, Thai food, traditional Thai massage, fruit carving, and handicrafts. The Federation Square stage had continuous entertainment with Thai traditional and contemporary dance shows; Thai videos; and the annual 'Miss Thai Festival' beauty competition. The Square also hosted the inaugural Thai Festival 8 round Thai Kick Boxing tournament on the ute boxing ring. More than 20 Thai food and dessert stalls served mouth watering Thai food from tents alongside the Yarra River. Roving guides in Traditional Thai outfits were available to provide information about the activities and about Thailand. Organisers acknowledged that the festival would not have been possible without the help of the over 200 volunteers.

Australians; to render helpful services and valuable facilities to the Thai people; to represent the Thai people in all matters involving the good name of Thailand; to organise occasionally social and sports events and charitable activities.

¹⁹ TIWA is a non-profit organisation established to provide culturally-appropriate information, welfare and referral services to the Thai community in Victoria

²⁰ The SBS Radio's Thai Program offers coverage of Australia, Thailand, international news and special reports on important events especially of the Thai communities in Australia. The Thai Program aims to present information, education and entertainment which are useful for adjustment in settlement in Australia as well as to promote acceptance and understanding among diverse ethnics in multicultural Australia.

²¹ Thai news magazine published in Victoria such as Ants newsmagazine, MelbThai magazine. Target readers include Thai business owners, Thai travellers, Thai students and other business organisations that deal with Thai people and Thai organisations. These newsmagazines are free and can be seen in many Thai restaurants, temples, and Royal Thai consulate, Melbourne. Also, it is available online.

²² Melbourne's Annual Thai Culture and Food Festival is organised by the Thai Culture and Food Festival Inc. (TCFFI), a non profit association incorporated in Victoria. The Patron of TCFFI is the Ambassador of Thailand to Australia. The Honorary Chairman of the Festival Committee is the Hon Thai Consul General, Victoria. Melbourne's 6th Annual Thai Culture and Food Festival was held at Federation Square and the Riverside Terrace on Sunday 22 March 2009. For more details on these celebrations check out the website at <http://www.thaivic.com>

Figure 5.1 Melbourne's Annual Thai Culture and Food Festival, Melbourne Australia (2009)



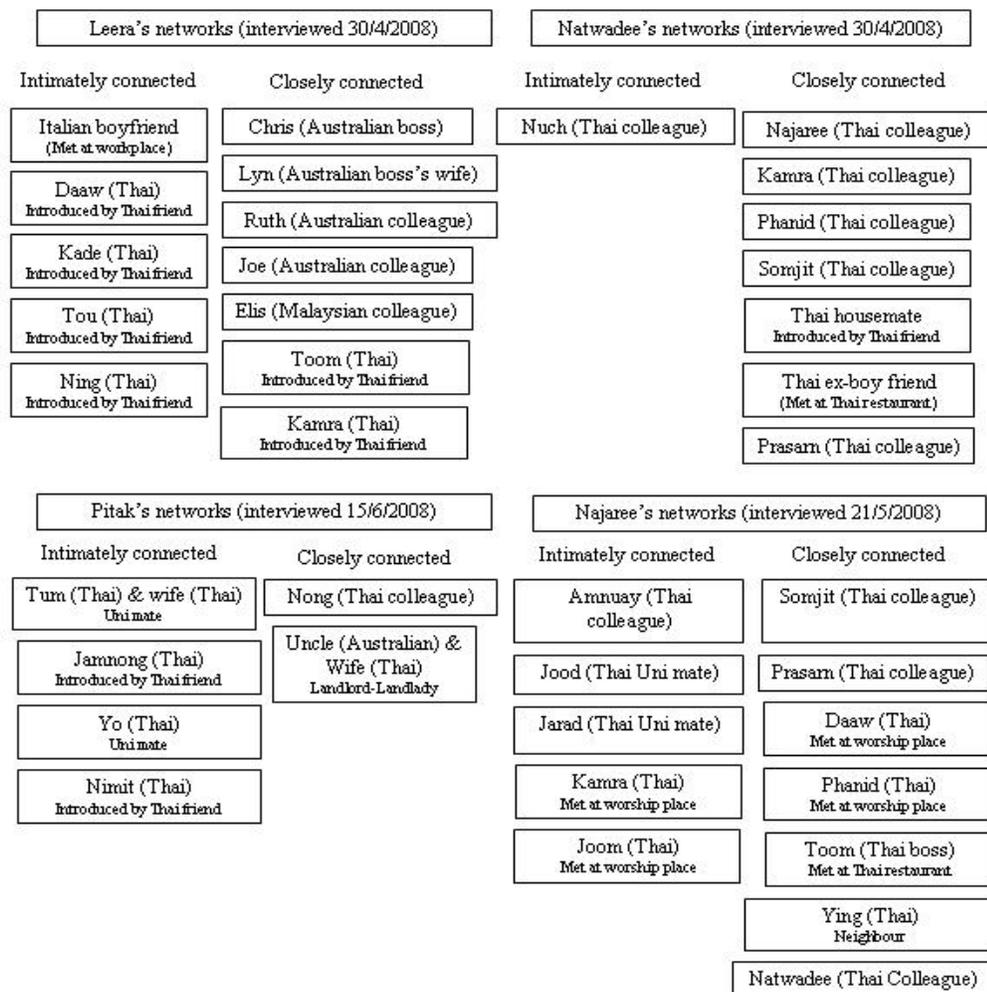
Source: Ants Newsmagazine (April 2009, p. 6-7)

This Festival was but one event in the annual calendar of Thai celebrations held in Melbourne and world-wide. Other significant events included the birthdays of His Majesty the King of Thailand or Father's day (December), Her Majesty the Queen of Thailand or Mother's day (August), the annual Loy Krathong Festival (November) and the Thai community parade along Swanston Street on Australia Day (26 January), celebrating the Thai community as a part of Australian multicultural society, connected to other cultures and social groups. During my stay in Australia, I attended several Thai culture celebrations that take place throughout the year for Thai people. I would say that the existence of Thai public spheres in Australia has increasingly gained recognition in Australian society.

Thai community as a dynamic series of networks

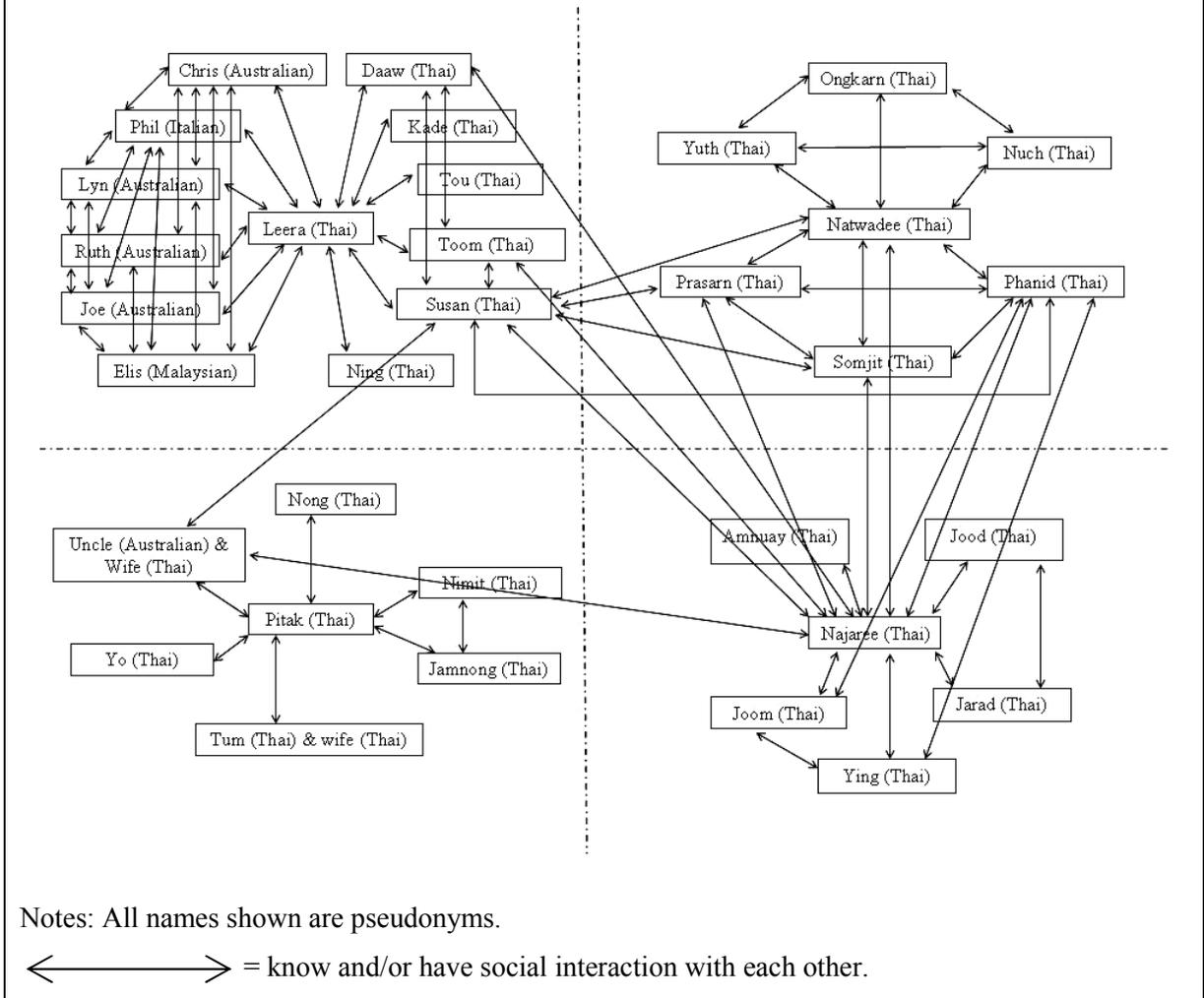
In utilising the concept of networking community, my participants were asked to list their regular contacts in Australia and to tell the story about their relationship; who he or she is; how they met to each other; how they keep in touch; how intimate is their relationship. Some examples of these connections are presented in Figures 5.2 and 5.3.

Figure 5.2 Examples of participants' interpersonal ties in Australia



Notes: All names shown are pseudonyms. Participants described the quality of their relationships by allocating them one of two levels: 'intimately connected' means close friends or significant others who share almost all areas of their lives, especially personal and family issues; 'closely connected' means important others with whom participants regularly keep in touch.

Figure 5.3 Examples of the connection webs of four focal Thai skilled migrants in Australian



The complimentary forces of ‘structure’ and ‘individual agency’ can be seen in these connections; structures seem to limit the choices and opportunities that individuals possess, but the individuals nonetheless have agency and are capable of changing the social structures they inhabit. Individuals are able to make things happen within given structural constraints and opportunities. Individual agency is treated as important components of the very makeup of structures, and as having much to contribute to the transformation of structures and to the unfolding of events. Thai individuals were motivated to achieve a wide variety of goals in raising their standard of living, ranging from mere survival to the highest benefits for their lives. They chose their own social connections and built networks of relationships composed of other people in order to achieve the desired goals. They chose social environments that

they believed would be the best for them, physically, financially, socially, and psychologically. At the same time Thais might share common goals that manifest through joint actions identified with Thai community.

Thai individuals find it easy to connect to other Thais because of their shared cultural roots and language as it met the basic need to belong. Many participants such as Natwadee, Pitak, and Najaree (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3) tended to associate closely with other Thais in Australia. Their social networks seemed to be Thai focused. Indeed, when I asked them for more details it was clear that there was also some relationship between them and non-Thais in Australia, particularly non-Thais at workplaces and at the place of worship (temples or churches). Meanwhile some participants such as Leera (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3) had an outward looking orientation. She shared relatively many contacts and close connections with non-Thais.

I argue that Thai skilled migrants constructed their social connections and built networks of relationships composed of both other Thais and non-Thais. Even though many might group mostly around other Thais, they also all had external connections to the broader Australian society. On one hand, the social connections of these Thai skilled migrants were likely founded as a consequence of cultural force (so we can see some patterns), but on the other hand they were also founded as a function of individual choice (and so they were also diverse and unpredictable).

This study has shown that Thai community networks are readily available in Australia. My participants were likely to find linkages through which to engage in the Thai community. However, networks seemed to be carefully selected. Some participants cast a wide net in an effort to explore which linkages were most beneficial or useful to them. Some opted for membership in fewer, but more densely knit groups. Some curiously would receive news about what was happening in the Thai community but cautiously resisted in participating. Some engaged with a Thai network when they could make a contribution to other people.

Berking, following on from Mauss, said in *The Sociology of Giving* that ‘to give’ means to acquire a power, to carry out a symbolic exchange, and to initiate relationships and alliances. It means to dress up strategic orientations in altruistic motives, to make social challenges look like simple acts of charity, to knit forms of mutual recognition, and to become equal and intimate (Berking, 1999, p. viii-ix). Some networks seem to be attractive because they meet personal satisfaction and needs (social, financial and emotional). Regardless of whether or not Thai individuals care for others in the Thai community, Thai community is brought together through mutual interests and concerns, providing the basis for a continuing relationship. In turn, the community agrees to cooperate with each other in order to achieve a mutual goal.

Thai skilled migrants in this research project connected to others out of self-interest and the need to meet individual needs. This approach was due to ambivalence about personal rewards derived from working for the common good, especially in an age where individual achievement is rewarded regardless of the benefit to society. Rewards in social relationships are seen as pleasures, satisfactions, and gratifications that a person enjoys from participating in relationships. Rewards can be intrinsic or extrinsic; direct or indirect; tangible (such as money, materials) or intangible (such as compliments, esteem, social approval); immediate or received in the future. When an individual’s effort or cost is returned in the form of a compensatory benefit – trusting social relationships develop. In this way trust binds the interacting people together through reciprocal expectations and obligations. These relationships that are based on social exchange can be seen as a form of social capital that generates trust, reciprocity and cooperation. The Thai community is arguably characterised by dense networks of reciprocity and trust. These networks are essential to the willingness of individuals to cooperate voluntarily and encourage behaviours that facilitate productive social interaction. They encourage Thai people to invest themselves in groups, networks and institutions.

As such, Thai community is not just an imagined community as my investigation of Thai connection webs primarily looked at face to face interactions. Face to face interactions could arguably be either a necessary or a sufficient condition to define membership in Thai

community networks. In other words, each person knew the others and identified themselves in relation to them through ongoing face to face interactions, not just through a shared common language, nationality or cultural roots. It is true that many participants engaged in the virtual communication, but it also must be noted that this often followed by face to face interactions and telephone contacts:

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 (Sureporn, 30, female).

Also, participants might engage in face to face interactions and followed up their relationship by some form of virtual communication²³. Online tools were more likely to extend their social contacts. Online activity also supplemented participation in voluntary ethnic organisations. Most participants used the internet to maintain a variety of social ties, not just as an online community.

The relationship among Thais was not ‘just’ imagined. They likely knew the people they associated with. Face to face interactions opened the way to know and develop their relationship to one another. These Thai were able to define themselves as part of a community not only defined by nationality. Indeed, Thai nationality was not a necessary condition to define the membership of the Thai community. Many non-Thais were included in Thai community. They were treated by Thais as insiders, not outsiders. In Thai language school networks, for example, some non-Thais were members of the school committee. Some of these non-Thais were spouses of Thais, but some were not. They appreciated Thai culture, learned the language and engaged with Thai community activities throughout the year (see Figure 5.4). The non-Thais in Thai community networks often led Thai migrants to have external contacts.

²³ The website ‘www.aussietip.com’ has been established since 2001 by Jakrapong Kongmalai when he was a Thai international student in Melbourne, Australia. The main language used for the site’s textual content is Thai. It was announced that more than 5,000 members has been registered and the site has been visited more than 60,000 times per month. This website is popular among Thai international students in Victoria.

Figure 5.4 Examples of non-Thais in Thai community

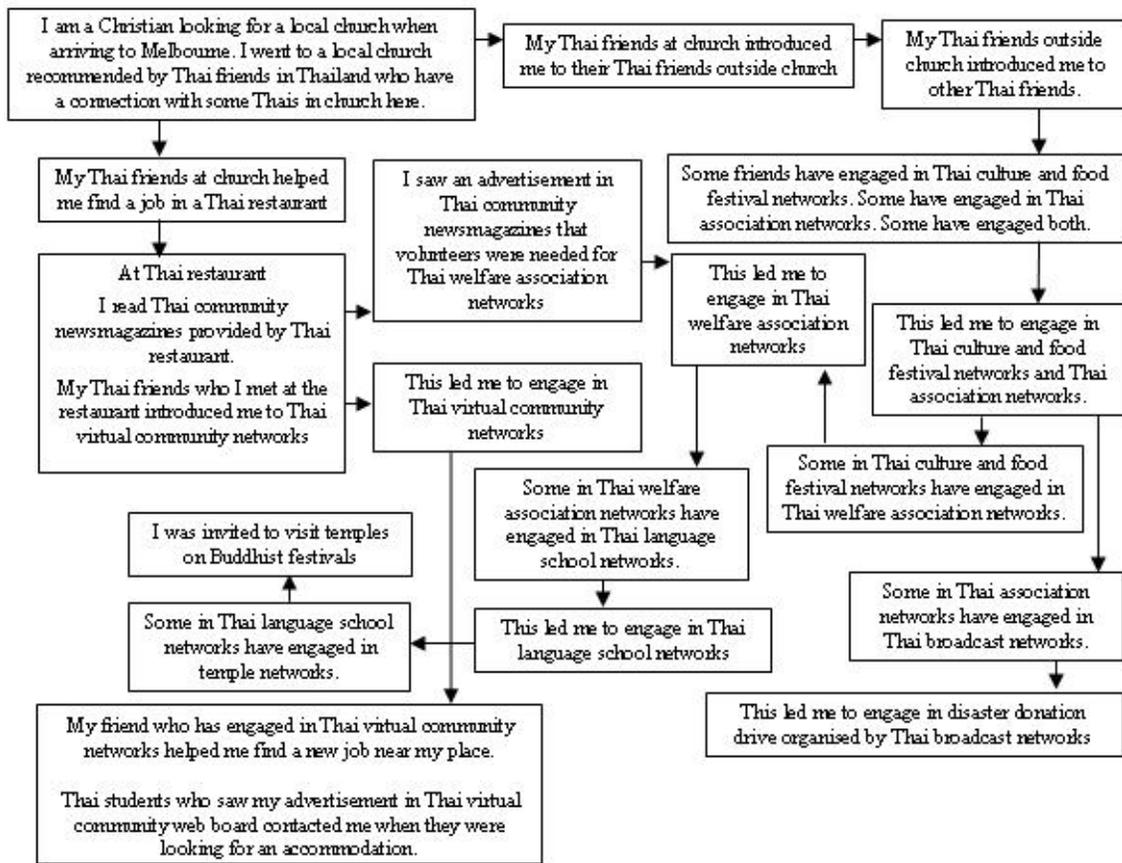


Source: Thai Language School of Melbourne, retrieved 26 February 2010 from http://www.thaimelbourne.com/grad2009_1.html

In sum, the Thai community incorporates several types of social relationships that are interpersonally meaningful. Residential decentralisation of Thai migrants has significantly shaped the character of Thai community links and networks; the community has not been framed by the use of geographical limitations. The defining criterion of Thai community is focused on what Thai people do with each other, not where they live. The Thai community is constructed from communication rather than physical proximity (which, in any case, does not guarantee communication). They constructed and chose their social connections and built networks of relationships composed of both other Thais and non-Thais. Even though many might concentrate on other Thais, they also had external contacts that could connect them to broader Australian society.

Using my own social networks as an example, we can see a variety of connections that are related to many specific circumstances (see Figure 5.5):

Figure 5.5 An example of multiple network membership



Notes: I have engaged in Thai entertainment with other Thais, including Thai DVD shops, Thai night clubs, and karaoke where Thai songs are provided. We preferred to have Thai meals together at Thai restaurants. Also, I have accompanied some of my friends to Thai education and migration services for visa or migration purposes. However, there were some networks I have never associated with; for example, Thai golf association networks and Thai badminton networks.

Connections to other Thais (Figures 5.2-5.5) could be summarised as follows:

1. connection to other Thais at home (housemates)
2. connection to other Thais at workplace (colleagues)

3. connection to other Thais at school/university/ college
4. connection to other Thais in religious networks
5. connection to other Thais in community organisations:
 - a. The Thai Language School of Melbourne Inc.
 - b. The Thai Association of Victoria Inc.
 - c. The Thai Information and Welfare Association Inc.
 - d. The Thai Culture and Food Festival Inc.
 - e. Thai community newsmagazines
 - f. The SBS Radio's Thai Language Program
 - g. Aussietip.com (Thai virtual community)
 - h. Thai education and migration services
 - i. Thai recreation networks:
 - i. Thai CVD and DVD shops
 - ii. Thai pubs and night clubs
 - iii. Thai sport lovers networks

Obviously, the Thai community was already here when my participants and I came onto the scene. We could recognise its existence and take account of its demands. The Thai community is seen as a dynamic meta-network which has many sub-networks within it. Thai migrants are opportunistic in manipulating ethnic linkages, and associative in developing networks of connections and each social linkage thread in the network seems to be readily available. Thais could gain access to all these linkages if required. From my investigation, I

argue that social linkages among Thais as mentioned above are what create community. Thai community is constructed from communication rather than physical proximity.

Community structure and order

Thai networks are an ongoing dynamic process, continually in creation and understandable only in relation to their settings and the relationships between the actors in the network. As Thai individuals influence each other and exchange information, they frequently adjust their activities to one another. This introduces regularity and predictability into their relationships, and begins a process of sharing common ideas which in turn influences and helps to perpetuate patterns of social order. Over time through this process what were once a group of relatively heterogeneous Thais bring commonality, order and meaning into their shared social life. Thai community can be argued to be the process of merging its participants into ordered social relationships infused with cultural ideas. This collective social life give rise to shared symbolic ideas associated with established social arrangements. Their relationships become arranged into multidimensional patterns that are relatively stable over time and hence predictable.

The Thai community is the property of a population, not of single individuals. It is highly influenced by characteristics of the population that comprise them. Participants in these emerging relationships frequently produce some shift from self to collective orientations. Accordingly, Thais acting as parts of social relationships create patterns of social order that become realities distinct from these individual actors (Olsen, 1968, pp. 40-44).

As I have sketched out, the Thai community in Melbourne is a dynamic meta-network with many sub-networks inter-connecting within it, ranging from interpersonal ties to organisation ties, from virtual encounters to real-life interactions. Many linkages work closely with one another and Thai migrants are connected to 'multiple' sub-networks. The dynamic meta-network has a flexible structure; its structure is seen as particular instances of ongoing processes, continually being created and changed. Some new sub-networks are integrated, while some sub-networks weaken and collapse. All of the social relationships comprising a network are to some degree interrelated. Activities or changes in one part of such a network could therefore have (less or more) effects throughout many other parts of the network. As a result,

social life is sometimes characterised by contingencies, probabilities, and unknowns. Participants experienced disconnection and reconnection in relationships. The structure is not a static phenomenon, but a dynamic pattern of events comprising a given situation. However, this overall pattern persists with relative stability. In other words, the structure is relatively stable but never static. It is gradually changed, but sufficiently regular to observe it is a meta-pattern of social relationships that persist through time. An assessment of Thai community therefore requires two complementary ways of analysing social life; the first perspective focuses on dynamic actor-driven processes while the second emphasises persistent forms and social commonality. So, over an extended period of time Thai skilled migrants have reached out to create a system of relationships. They form various kinds of networks that embrace their diversity and uniqueness. They continuously search for relationships and change them as they age and their needs change. As their collective needs change they modify their social networks or institutions, which, in turn, shape their individual lives. For more recent migrants, of course, these networks are pre-existent. They are able to engage with other Thai people through the networks that exist to access accommodation, jobs, place of worship, and many other resources they need. In time their participation contributes to the further development of these networks, continuing the classic play between agency and structure in the maintenance of a Thai community in Melbourne.

Community membership

Thai skilled migrants in this thesis are connected to ‘multiple’ networks interwoven in complex patterns, because in this way their needs could be met. Nevertheless, despite the relative openness of these networks, not all networks provide the same degree of accessibility, accountability, availability, intimacy, confidentiality, or rewards. Different networks have different numbers of members involved; some ties are small and personal, like connections to other Thais at home, whereas some ties are large, like connections to other Thais in Buddhist temple networks. Importantly, participants chose their social connections and all built networks of relationships and even though many might concentrate on other Thais in the construction of their networks, they also had external contacts that could connect them to the broader Australian society that had at least some other people who were not Thai. For example, some Thai

organisations participated with mainstream Australian organisations and other ethnic organisations (see Figures 5.6 and 5.7).

Figure 5.6 The Thai Information and Welfare Association Inc. (TIWA) official launch, Friday 4 December 2009 at the Melbourne Multicultural Hub



(Photographer: Sudarat Setthanan)

Mr George Lekakis, the Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Melbourne City Council and many other Australian organisations were invited to TIWA official launch. TIWA aims to provide information and welfare services to Thai community members travelling to, settling and living in Victoria, to assist members of the Thai community to gain access to appropriate mainstream services, to advocate on behalf of community members on issues affecting their settlement in Victoria, and to help community members overcome cultural differences while retaining their own cultural identity during the settlement process; to strengthen the Thai community's capacity by creating/working with the community connections either within its own or with the wider communities.

Figure 5.7 The World Tipitaka Presentation Ceremony, Wednesday 21 October 2009 at the University of Melbourne



The World Tipitaka (the Romanised edition of the Theravada Buddhist scriptural canon) was presented as a ‘royal gift of peace and wisdom’ to the University of Melbourne. Members of Dhamma societies in Thailand and Australia attended a ceremony and celebration with the University of Melbourne.

Source: Ants Newsmagazine (November 2009, p. 7)

Therefore, the Thai community in Victoria is not a closed community or a cultural enclave. Exposure to the broader Australian society facilitates network building with other non-Thai networks and social sectors. There are non-Thai members in the Thai community that could lead some Thai members to have external contacts. In many cases, Thai people have some closed connections with non-Thais in their professional networks, family network, and/or religion networks. There is a spectrum of more inward and more outward looking social networks which conveys the diversity in the social networks. 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.

As Thai migrants are connected to multiple networks (engaging with a number of Thai networks and external contacts), multiple network membership serves as bridge to other interpersonal networks. This could bind many organisations together as people who are linked together could represent social units (organisations) of which they a member. The

effect of linking these networks is more marked when the personal friendships occur between the leaders of various Thai organisations. Through overlapping memberships, the activities of all the involving networks become interrelated and at least partially coordinated.

It was interesting when my participants from different social networks were asked who they believed was working for Thai community. A few Thai names were repeatedly mentioned. Some Thai names seemed to be well known or well connected across the different Thai networks. Some Thais might appear at many of Thai gatherings throughout Melbourne. It was, therefore, understandable that these well-known Thais were respected and occasionally seen as representatives of Thai community. When outsiders wanted to contact the Thai community they sometimes started by contacting these well-known Thais directly. Also, the Royal Thai Consulate often worked closely with these 'leaders' when doing social projects and community services.

Relationships act as points of reference that help Thai migrants make sense of their migration experiences. Thai migrants are embedded in networks of relationships which give their lives meaning, provide social support, and create opportunities. The advantage of being tied to multiple networks is that one could gain access to a wider range of resources through network linkages. This complexity of network clusters provides persons with potentially more resources. For example, multiple networks are crucial for finding jobs and accommodation, circulating goods and services, as well as psychological support and social and economic information. Sometimes networking could be used to promote the specialised interests and goals of individuals.

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, 38, 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, 35, female).

Migrants require the support and companionship of others throughout their lives. Group living is an adaptation that provides protection, cooperation, and communication to improve the chances for survival. Accessibility to Australian jobs market is a necessity of becoming skilled migrants in Australia. Even though some Thai people might have had experience in highly skilled jobs in Thailand before coming to Australia, they might find it difficult to find a skilled occupation in Australia as the employers tend to look for those who have local work experiences and high English communication skills. When this situation occurs some Thai skilled migrants take advantage of being tied to multiple Thai networks.

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 close friends whom we can share almost all areas of our lives (Natwadee, 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, 32, male).

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, 32, male).

Even though some Thais used Thai community networks as employment networks, there is no particular occupation, service and industry dominated by Thais unless they are jobs related directly to Thai culture such as Thai restaurants, and Thai spa and massage services. People help one another as it is a matter of mutual dependence. Community implies an acceptance of reciprocal obligations as the principle in social exchange relationships (Etzioni, 1996b). Frequently, Thai skilled migrants felt obligated to the trusted party who helped them find a job and as a result maintained social relationships. This simply motivated them to make reciprocal associations and opportunities for productive social exchanges.

Community boundaries

As described above, the Thai community was seen by respondents as one dynamic meta-network which had many sub-networks providing multiple links ranging from interpersonal ties to organisational ties, from virtual encounters to real-life interactions. The defining criterion of Thai community is focused on what Thai people do with each other, not where they live. However, it was less common to find strong interpersonal ties among my participants living in Victoria and other Thais living in other cities or states. There were some connections that helped lead Thais from different states or cities to meet together but these kinds of connections were not usually utilised. The relationships found in this project were concentrated among interacting Thais in the State of Victoria.

Each community linkage seemed to be readily accessible. Thai migrants could access most linkages if required. There is a high possibility that no Thai could completely separate from the Thai community unless they intended to make an effort to disconnect to other Thai people. Thai people could enter into a new network, establish a new connection or restore their old ties at any time. Networks could be selected, added or dropped. There were no strong barriers to keep people in or lock people out. In order to consider community boundaries, a networking community may not present itself to us in a ready-made form but the ambiguous process that much more likely to be involved with cross-boundary linkages. It could be said that Thai community boundaries were constructed and negotiated by fellow members of the network for purposes of deciding who could be included. The process of mapping the network like Figures 5.2-5.4 helps generate information in some degree to identify network boundaries and links between needs and resources.

Participants agreed that it was almost impossible to completely disconnect from other Thai people in Australia as well as to disconnect from non-Thais in this foreign country. My participants did not necessarily make a concerted effort to connect to other Thais and other non-Thais in Australia. Due to the structure of social networking, this seemed to them to occur naturally. Thai skilled migrants who helped with the research for this thesis tended to use both English and Thai language while living in Australia.

Community cohesion

According to my participants' lived experiences, the Thai community has not suffered, to any great extent, racism, discrimination, or conflict with outsiders. In some theoretical aspects it may be difficult to prove Thai community solidarity. Also, as has been described here, social networks could be carefully selected, and added or dropped. Participants experienced disconnections and reconnections in social relationships. Some networks weakened or collapsed. I was informed that some Thai networks established in the past were not functioning; for example, a Thai university students association. The student committee members of that group returned to Thailand after graduating and the affiliation was not maintained. Yet, there was an effort to bring this association back encouraged by some Thai skilled migrants. Furthermore, some respected Thais who had dedicated their lives for the Thai community appeared to have lost contact with their former Thai networks due to various issues such as health, family, career, and conflict within the networks. However, there were new generations (or old generations returning) who played an important role in the Thai community. When people disappeared and were replaced by others, people in the community would feel a sense of loss, however transient the relationship. In this research project studying through lived experiences of my participants, there was generally a low level of in-flow and out-flow of members in community networks, even though individuals would reposition how they participated as their needs and circumstances change over time. It was, therefore, possible for the interpersonal seeds of social cohesion to take root. Also, when there were more roles than people to fill them, people often felt more welcome to participate. This shows that connections among Thai individuals, or their networks, were arguably not shallow or taken for granted.

It is important to note that the Thai community did not have to be homogeneous in order to be socially cohesive. Rather, Thai community was a heterogeneous community comprising various Thais who were diverse in terms of allegiances, political views, educational, religious, age, gender, socioeconomic, and regional linguistic background. The diversity within the Thai community was seen by research participants as a source of strength rather than a problem. This is because in this way the variety of their needs could be supplied. A new range of onshore Australian General Skilled Migration (GSM) visa categories (see Chapter One) has been established to enable international students to apply for and be granted permanent residence

following the completion of their studies without the need to leave Australia. This new possibility of Australian permanent residency has apparently influenced Thai students to stay in Australia after graduating. Many diverse Thai students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) have applied for Australian permanent residence after they graduated from Australian educational institutions. The Thai community in Australia has been increasing significantly and showing more signs of diversity. Some old stereotypes of Thai migrants, such as they are low educated, spouses of Australians, or former night club workers are no longer applicable, whatever earlier truth they may or may not have contained.

In addition, Thai community cohesion could be seen in the close relationships across organisation networks. When one organisation planned any project or activity it was often found that many other organisations were keen to assist in some areas. For example, the Thai Language School of Melbourne Inc. organised ‘Father Day’ (the King’s Birthday celebration) and ‘Graduation Day’ on 29 November 2009. People from many other Thai networks such as the Thai Association of Victoria (TAV), the Thai Information and Welfare Association (TIWA), and Affiliated Newsmagazine for Thai Society (ANTS) were invited to be involved with the ceremony and gave certificates to students. The Thai Language School of Melbourne Inc. also encouraged their members to engage with the ‘Thai Gala Dinner’ on 6 December 2009, organised by TAV, and the Thai community walking people parade on Australia Day (January 26, 2010). Most Thai community networks (such as temples, Thai restaurants, Thai language schools) including Royal Thai consulate Melbourne, Thai Airways International and Tangola²⁴ cooperated with organisations in Thailand (such as Tourism Authority of Thailand) as well as Australian organisations (such as The Australia-Thailand Institute²⁵, Victorian Multicultural

²⁴ Tangola Pty Ltd was established in 1981 by Mr. Robert Fraser, a non-Thai who worked closely with the Thai community. Tangola is a specialist wholesale supplier of Thai groceries in the state of Victoria. Tangola is a bulk sale company only. The aim of Tangola is to provide the quality Thai brands that customers require to achieve an authentic Thai tastes in accordance with Australia food safety standards. The company primarily serves the Thai restaurants of Victoria but can also supply other Asian cuisine food eateries. A majority of staff at Tangola are bilingual in English and Thai.

²⁵ The Australia-Thailand Institute (ATI) was established in 2005 to promote bilateral relations between Australia and Thailand and to expand institutional and people-to-people links. The mission of ATI is to advise the Australian Government, through the Minister for Foreign Affairs, on broadening and deepening the relationship between Australia and Thailand and to undertake and support programs that strengthen next generation links between Australia and Thailand.

Commission) partly involved with Melbourne's Annual Thai Culture and Food Festival - the annual biggest event related to Thai community in Victoria organised by TCFFI.

Community cohesion is created when diverse members share common purposes, with open and honest communication, reciprocity, and trust. However, social cohesion is not a static characteristic. The basis of trust can change and the scope of trust can decrease in a community. When trust shatters or wears away, networks or institutions collapse. When networks are no longer a vital part of each person's interest, solidarity is lost and community falls apart. The common good depends on the involvement of fellow members to achieve mutual benefits. Community dies when the sense of community dissipates, when members no longer seek to reach common ground or work towards collective solutions to common problems, and when there is no longer enjoyment in solidarity and its obligations (Bruhn, 2005, pp. 233-247). Community cohesiveness, therefore, needs to be continually reaffirmed and strongly supported to withstand the challenges of generational change and forces outside community that continuously test its cohesion.

In this chapter the discussion has centred on ways the Thai community in Victoria has an existence and properties that are not reducible to characteristics of its individual members. The five sections of this chapter explore aspects of the Thai community: residential decentralisation, Thai community as a dynamic series of network, multiple network membership, negotiating community boundaries, and community cohesion. The whole is more than the sum of its component parts and can be understood and explained as an entity in itself. The Thai community referring to all processes and instances organises social life, and not only in the narrow sense of formal associations. An individual's actions and interactions are taken into account, for it is through these processes that Thai community arise. Dynamic processes, not static objects, are the ultimate essence of Thai community. I conceive of the Thai community as a dynamic meta-network, an ongoing process of social networking ranging from interpersonal to organisation ties, from virtual encounters to real-life interactions. Social order grows out of the constant patterning and re-patterning of social interactions and relationships, and the community structure could be seen as particular instances of ongoing processes; stable but never static.

The defining criterion of the Thai community is focused on what Thai people do to, for and with each other, not where they live. The presence of the Thai community is perceivable through the emergence of Thai social networks, hundreds of Thai restaurants and various Thai festivals throughout the year making Thai community visible. Thai skilled migrants were opportunistic in manipulating ethnic linkages, and associative in developing networks of connections. Networks were interdependent, diverse, and responsive to change, yet cohesive enough to form a relatively stable community. Thai skilled migrants were active agents in the development of networked communities that contribute to the wider Australian society. Thai community boundaries are constructed and negotiated by fellow members of the networking webs for purposes of deciding who could be included. The Thai community does not have to be homogeneous in order to be socially cohesive. Rather, the Thai community is a heterogeneous community comprising of various Thais who are diverse in many ways yet shared a common purpose, open communication, reciprocity, and trust. In this thesis, reciprocal responsibility refers to the perception that there are acknowledged members of an ongoing network who are mutually responsible to each other. Reciprocal responsibility connotes that networked individuals are seen as valuable resources within the setting, and that the setting responds to the needs of the individuals. People 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 people to invest themselves in groups, networks and institutions.

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. 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. It is neither a closed nor exclusive community. The Thai community manages to put itself into the wider Australian society. The exposure to the broader Australian society can facilitate network building with non-Thai social sectors. Such interactive mechanisms thus elaborate how the Thai community is inextricably intertwined with the larger setting in which it exists.

Chapter Six

Living Thai-ness

As described in the previous chapter, 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 adjustment process. How research participants adjust to Australian society is primarily dependent on the nature and extent of the ties that bind them to each other. Chapter Three described Thai community as a comfort zone where Thai international students could meet their immediate needs. The Thai community met their basic needs to belong, have frequent personal contacts and to bond with other Thais for stability, security, and emotional support. Chapters Four and Five showed that, after Thai students became Australian permanent residents, their cross-cultural contacts opened much more widely. After migration, these Thai skilled migrants associated with non-Thais because of activities in their professional lives as well as residential decentralisation. However, the research also clearly showed that participants chose to continue to be integrated into Thai community networks. They did not withdraw from the Thai community.

These findings led me to investigate in more detail the potential implications for Thai skilled migrants of continuing to be embedded in Thai networks. In this chapter I argue that connections to Thai ethnic networks 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, Thai skilled migrants are connected to multiple networks interwoven in complex patterns, because in this way their needs could be met. As described in Chapter Five, the Australian-Thai community can be seen as a gateway or access to considerable social and economic resources in Australian society. These Thai community networks provide the different degree of accessibility, accountability, availability, intimacy, confidentiality, or rewards. In addition, Thai skilled migrants in this thesis draw upon social pluralism and an increased awareness of other cultures in Australia and around the globe. This pluralism is of fundamental importance in the expansion and participation of the Thai

community in Australia. Indeed, the Thai community is part of Australian multicultural society. The socio-cultural status of the Australian-Thai community is influenced by the constraints and opportunities that the Australian context (and indeed global context) imposes.

An Australian way of multiculturalism

Before the arrival of European settlers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples inhabited all areas of the Australian continent. They spoke one or more of hundreds of separate languages and dialects, and their lifestyles and cultural traditions differed from region to region. Their complex social systems and highly developed traditions reflect a deep connection with the land. Asian and Oceanic mariners and traders were in contact with Indigenous Australians for many centuries before the era of European expansion. Some formed substantial relationships with communities in northern Australia (“Ancient heritage modern society”, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/aib/history.html> accessed 12 August 2009). Since colonisation in 1788 Australia has been a country of immigration which encouraged permanent immigration to build up the population and the economy (Vasta & Vuddamalay, 2006). The first European migrants were decidedly involuntary, convicts transported from Britain, Ireland and, to a lesser degree, other British colonies. Altogether around 80,000 convicts arrived in New South Wales between 1788 and 1840; from the 1830s they were joined by small numbers of voluntary migrants, again principally from Britain and Ireland (“Australia’s migration history”, <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/belongings/about-belongings/australias-migration-history/> accessed 12 August 2009).

For most of the last two centuries British and other white (European) migrants have been required to maintain Australia’s newfound white British cultural heritage. The origins of the White Australia policy can be traced to the 1850s, when white miners’ resentment towards industrious Chinese diggers culminated in violence on the Buckland River in Victoria, and at Lambing Flat (now Young) in New South Wales. The governments of these two colonies introduced restrictions on Chinese immigration. Later, it was the turn of hard-working indentured labourers from the South Sea Islands of the Pacific (known as ‘kanakas’) in northern Queensland. Factory workers in the south became vehemently opposed to all forms of immigration, which might threaten their jobs, particularly by non-white people who they thought

would accept a lower standard of living and work for lower wages. In 1901, the new federal government passed an Act ending the employment of Pacific Islanders. Australian daily newspapers gave overwhelming support to the principle of absolutely excluding coloured immigrants, and accepted that the aim of racial homogeneity was of primary importance. The Immigration Restriction Act 1901 received royal assent on 23 December 1901. The Immigration Restriction Act 1901 restricted immigration to 'white races' and required all potential immigrants to pass a dictation test in a foreign language before they were allowed entry ("Fact sheet 8: abolition of the White Australia policy", <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/08abolition.htm> accessed 11 October 2007).

However, this attitude changed after World War II due to the growing acknowledgment of Australia's responsibilities as a member of the international community. Also, it had become clear that immigration from Britain and other white (European) countries would not be sufficient to sustain Australian demographic and economic growth. Non-whites began to feature significantly in Australia's immigration intake, predominately as unskilled labour that would not displace White workers. Since the late 1950s the language of racial exclusion based on skin colour, which was a legacy of the late 19th century, was gradually replaced by the euphemistic language of cultural incompatibility. The dictation tests and racially-specific conditions of eligibility were removed from official documents. In 1972 the Australian Labour Party with Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister formally and officially announced the end of the White Australia policy, and the Immigration Restriction Act was repealed in 1973 ("Fact sheet 6: the evolution of Australia's multicultural policy", <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/06evolution.htm> accessed 15 June 2007).

Since the removal of discriminatory restrictions, Australia's migration program has allowed people from any country to apply to migrate to Australia, regardless of their ethnicity, culture, religion or language, provided they meet the criteria set out in law.

By the early 1990s, the aims of Australia's migration program were diffuse, encompassing social (family reunification), humanitarian (refugee and humanitarian migration) as well as economic (skilled migration) objectives. Since the 1980s the emphasis of the program has been on skilled migration (both temporary and permanent), particularly to regional areas.

The old idea of unskilled migrant labour declined as employment in the manufacturing sectors shifted to more skilled jobs (Vasta & Vuddamalay, 2006). All applicants needed skills of a high level that were in demand in Australia. Over 2005 and 2006 the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) allocated 97,500 places for skilled migration with a firm focus on bringing in migrants with the relevant skills to complement Australia's labour market needs and skill shortages (Phillips, 2006).

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recently reported that the preliminary estimated resident population (ERP) of Australia at 31 December 2009 was 22,155,000 persons. In the 2006 Census Australia's population was around 20 million people and, of those reporting country of birth, about 24 per cent were born overseas and 45 per cent were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas. Australians identify with some 250 ancestries and practise a range of religions. In addition to Indigenous languages, about 200 other languages are spoken in Australia. After English, the most common languages spoken are Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic and Mandarin. Those born in the United Kingdom made up the largest share of Australia's overseas-born population (23.5 per cent). Other countries that made up large shares of Australia's overseas-born population in 2006 were New Zealand (8.8 per cent), the People's Republic of China (4.7 per cent), Italy (4.5 per cent), Vietnam (3.6 per cent), India (3.3 per cent), the Philippines (2.7 per cent), Greece (2.5 per cent) and Germany (2.4 per cent). Influxes of new migrants and the ageing of existing migrant populations changed the composition of Australia's overseas-born population between the 2001 Census and 2006 Census. Among these changes to Australia's population were an additional 63,809 people from the People's Republic of China, 51,653 more Indians and 33,700 more New Zealanders; high growth rates in the numbers of people from Liberia (124 to 1,527), Sierra Leone (363 to 1,811), Sudan (4,900 to 19,052), Saudi Arabia (1,631 to 3,477) and the United Arab Emirates (1,459 to 2,978). Since the 2006 Census, the number of people from India has increased rapidly and moved ahead of Italy and Vietnam to become the fourth largest contributor to Australia's overseas-born population ("Australia's population", <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/popflows2008-09/pop-flows-chapter1.pdf> accessed 13 August 2010).

Table 6.1 Australia's diverse population 30 June 2008

Country of birth	Median age	Sex ratio (a)	ERP (b)
Afghanistan	28.6	117.1	22 919
Argentina	45.0	95.5	13 608
Austria	61.9	113.6	20 828
Bangladesh	30.6	158.7	22 430
Bosnia and Herzegovina	45.4	101.6	37 898
Brazil	30.6	91.8	12 883
Burma (Myanmar)	43.6	96.2	17 217
Cambodia	40.9	87.9	29 417
Canada	38.2	91.8	41 090
Chile	46.0	94.3	27 903
Croatia	58.0	105.3	69 962
Cyprus	57.8	99.1	21 335
Czech Republic	57.7	99.1	14 217
Denmark	51.3	113.5	10 843
East Timor	44.0	99.7	10 487
Egypt	55.2	109.5	39 940
El Salvador	38.7	95.7	10 822
Fiji	39.8	89.3	59 241
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	53.1	103.9	49 830
France	41.5	106.5	26 297
Germany	60.2	93.1	126 500
Greece	64.9	98.6	130 501
Hong Kong (SAR of China)	34.7	95.2	87 510
Hungary	65.3	104.1	23 267
India	32.2	137.3	239 295
Indonesia	31.9	80.5	64 567
Italy	66.8	107.7	221 721
Israel	38.2	125.2	10 207
Iran	39.0	114.3	29 582
Iraq	35.8	110.7	41 664
Ireland	48.1	111.4	63 179
Japan	32.4	57.1	47 170
Kenya	34.3	104.9	13 150
Laos	43.9	93.7	10 955
Lebanon	45.8	111.0	89 065
Malaysia	37.8	86.3	120 053
Malta	61.5	105.5	50 135
Mauritius	47.2	98.9	23 379
Nepal	26.2	192.0	11 673
Netherlands	61.8	105.8	90 312
New Zealand	38.9	105.2	494 579
Pakistan	31.5	144.0	23 893
Papua New Guinea	38.3	85.1	29 481
Philippines	40.0	59.1	155 124
Poland	56.4	82.3	60 290
Portugal	50.5	107.2	18 395
PRC (excludes SARs & Taiwan)	36.3	84.6	313 572
Republic of Korea (South)	29.4	86.9	78 260
Romania	44.8	97.3	16 746
Russian Federation	42.4	64.5	20 373
Samoa	42.8	95.6	18 006
Serbia (includes Kosovo)	52.5	102.9	42 198
Singapore	34.6	85.9	52 787
South Africa	38.0	99.8	136 201
Spain	54.6	106.5	15 199
Sri Lanka	42.3	105.9	79 995
Sudan	25.2	118.6	24 796
Sweden	39.3	87.8	10 006
Switzerland	46.8	111.3	13 892
Taiwan	30.3	78.2	32 394
Thailand	29.7	54.3	43 047
Turkey	43.3	106.4	38 992
Ukraine	59.5	72.4	15 168
United Kingdom	53.4	103.2	1 166 515
United States of America	38.7	105.3	81 089
Uruguay	53.0	92.6	10 823
Vietnam	41.8	90.2	193 288
Zimbabwe	36.4	101.2	27 369

Source data: ABS Migration (3412.0)

Countries of birth with ERP over 10 000 persons (sorted by median age) are shown in this table.

(a) Number of males per 100 females. (b) Estimated Resident Population.

Australia's rich migration history and large-scale immigration has led to the formalisation of ethnic groups in Australian society, particularly through the establishment of community associations and places of worship. Also, it has produced greater ethno-cultural diversity within the nation-state, transforming identities and blurring traditional boundaries in the country of residence. Today in Australia, cross-international border or indeed global patterns of sustained communication, institutional linkage and exchange of resources among migrants, homelands and wider diasporas are commonplace during a period of increasingly normative transnationalism. The greater ethno-cultural diversity within Australia may lie in new forms of multicultural societies which facilitate gradual improvement in socio-economic situation and the rights of migrants. This has led to a major cultural shift away from policies of 'assimilation'²⁶ (migrants should shed their cultures and languages and rapidly become indistinguishable from the host population) to 'integration' (the first generation keeps its culture but their children would be indistinguishable from the children of people in Australia for generations) and then to the introduction of 'Australian multiculturalism' (numerous cultures in one society) (Kirkby, 1997; Healey, 2005).

Given Australia's remarkable diversity, and long history of absorbing immigrants, it is not surprising that the Australia's official commitment to cultural pluralism and cultural diversity stands out. Australian multicultural policies have had as their overall goal the promotion of tolerance and respect for collective identities. This has been undertaken through supporting community associations and their cultural activities, monitoring diversity in the workplace, encouraging positive images in the media and other public spaces, and modifying public services (including education, health, policing, and courts) in order to accommodate culture-based differences of value, language and social practice.

According to an explanation of the principles of multiculturalism from the *Multicultural Australia Information Kit*, produced by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMA), Australian multiculturalism means that:

²⁶ Assimilation was a vague concept from the early 20th century used to describe the process for making minorities the same as majorities. Assimilation is thus the sharp point between cultures – one side means the victory of the majority, the other the cultural survival of the minority. Assimilation, that migrants should shed their cultures and languages and rapidly become indistinguishable from the host population, was the official policy towards indigenous people and immigrants until the 1960s, when Australia signed *the International Convention to Eradicate All Forms of Racial Discrimination*.

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 (Healey, 2005; DIAC, Fact Sheet 6: the evolution of Australia's multicultural policy).

These official government policy positions do not correspond to the sentiments of some sections of the dominant Anglo-Celtic Australian population. While Australia is now a country with highly inclusive citizenship rules, and a consciously heterogeneous identity, there are a range of negative responses to immigration, from dislike to passive resistance, to in some instances, open hostility. For instance, the 2005 Cronulla riots were a series of ethnically motivated confrontations in the week of December 11th, 2005 originating in Cronulla, New South Wales and spreading to additional Sydney suburbs²⁷. The emergence of the anti-immigrant One Nation Party in the 1990s led by Pauline Lee Hanson and the brutal policies against asylum-seekers at the beginning of the 21st century have revealed the persistent tensions surrounding immigration and nation identity. Such anti-immigration and anti-minority sentiments have been based on a number of fears such as increasing unemployment, growth in Asian immigration, and a fear that too large a population cannot be sustained by public services or the natural environment (Vasta & Vuddamalay, 2006; Kirkby, 1997). In addition, the high-profile Australian historian Professor Geoffrey Blainey wrote in his 1984 book *'All for Australia'* that multicultural policy is divisive and threatens social cohesion. Immigration seemingly threatens national coherence; opposing immigration seemingly strengthens it. He

²⁷ On 4 December 2005, a group of volunteer surf lifesavers were assaulted by a group of young men of Middle Eastern appearance, with several other violent assaults occurring over the following week. These incidents were widely reported and commented on in Sydney media. An initially peaceful crowd gathered in the morning of 11 December 2005 and by midday, approximately 5,000 people gathered at Cronulla beach to protest against a recent spate of violence against Anglo-Celtic locals. However, the crowd turned to violence when a man of Middle Eastern appearance was chased into a hotel bistro. Within few minutes the hotel was surrounded by several thousand people screaming and chanting, resulting in extensive property damage and several more assaults. Police locked down areas of Sydney including Western Sydney guarding those who were to enter and leave and searched cars and checked identification for those entering the Sutherland Shire area to avoid the occurrence of further incidents.

criticised multiculturalism for tending to emphasise the rights of new ethnic communities (particularly migrants from Asia and the Third World) at the expense of the old majority of Australians (referred to people from the UK and Ireland, the dominant class of pre-war immigrants and the largest single group of post-war immigrants in Australia) (Blainey, 1984, p. 170). In this book, it is also written that the Australian immigration policy has moved from one extreme to another, from immigration restricted to ‘white races’, to a policy that tended to be anti-British as migrants from Europe and the British Isles were declining (pp. 164-172).

Nevertheless, despite these oppositional views and the complexities of shifting long enculturated beliefs and attitudes about ethnicity, the Australian Government is currently committed 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 (“Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity”, http://www.dimia.gov.au/media/publications/settle/_pdf/united_diversity.pdf accessed by 10 November 2010). In 2000, the Australian Government established the Council for Multicultural Australia (CMA), a broad-based council to promote Government efforts to promote community harmony and show the benefits of the cultural diversity. In summary, the Australian Government’s aim is to build a culturally diverse, accepting and open society, united through a shared future, and a commitment to the nation, its democratic institutions and values, and the rule of law. This vision is reflected in the four principles that underpin multicultural policy: (1) ‘*Responsibilities of all*’ – all Australians have a civic duty to support those basic structures and principles of Australian society which guarantee us our freedom and equality and enable diversity in our society to flourish; (2) ‘*Respect for each person*’ – subject to the law, all Australians have the right to express their own culture and beliefs and have a reciprocal obligation to respect the right of others to do the same; (3) ‘*Fairness for each person*’ – all Australians are entitled to equality of treatment and opportunity, allowing them to the social, political and economic life of Australia, free from discrimination on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, location, gender or place of birth; and (4) ‘*Benefits for all*’ – all Australians benefit from productive diversity; that is, the significant cultural, social and economic dividends

arising from the diversity of the population. Diversity works for all Australians. This multicultural policy provides a framework for maximising the social, cultural and economic benefits that cultural diversity brings to all Australians. But more than that, it actively promotes good community relations and social harmony among all (Healey, 2005; DIAC, Fact Sheet 6: the evolution of Australia's multicultural policy).

Castles (2000) argues in *Ethnicity and Globalization* that the Australian approach to multiculturalism is much more on the level of social policy rather than active citizenship through collective participation in decision-making processes. Formal Australian multicultural policies imply the willingness of the general population to accept cultural differences, and to adapt national identity and institutional structures. I argue that Australian multicultural policies have been influenced by the increased awareness of social pluralism, and the multi-tiered involvement and consensus forming of a diverse range of stakeholders (global, region, local and ethnic communities). Not only ethnic communities within the country but also supranational (global and region) linkages to national communities have influenced the fate of a national community. Increasingly, contemporary patterns of globalisation are associated with a multilayered system of governance. Supranational linkages to national communities generally begin in the area of economic relations, but then spread to political, legal and cultural spheres (Castles, 2002, pp. 179-186). Since Australia is one of the United Nations member states, Australian local communities are linked with supranational institutions and Australia's responsibilities as a member of the global community are expanded, such that Australia is expected to ensure that the domestic law is compatible with international legislation²⁸.

²⁸ Australia's first federal anti-discrimination law, the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth), aims to ensure that Australians of all backgrounds are treated equally and have the same opportunities. The law protects people across Australia from discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, and immigration status. The Act also makes racial vilification against the law. This gives additional protection to people who are being publicly and openly offended, insulted, humiliated or intimidated because of their race, colour, or national or ethnic origin. The Act gives effect to Australia's obligations under *the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, to which Australia is committed. Under the Act, it is against the law for people to discriminate against you in: *employment*, such as getting a job or applying for a promotion; *education*, whether at school, university, TAFE or other colleges; *access to premises*, such as shops, libraries or hospitals and other buildings used by the public; *buying goods and using services*, such as being served in a restaurant or using taxis, banks and legal services; *accommodation*, such as renting a unit or house or buying and selling land; *activities of clubs or associations*, such as joining a sports club or RSL; *Commonwealth Government laws and programs*, such as voting and information in accessible formats; *playing sport*, including when enrolling, competing or access to mainstream competitions.

Nowadays, there is a global awareness of human equality, tolerance of cultural differences, mutual respect, and acceptance to subordinate groups, and all are considered foundations for freedom, justice, and peace in the world (Castles, 2000). This awareness is a response to common problems of similarly situated groups, rather than a result of the influence of one culture upon another. The awareness relating to social pluralism which Australia has taken into account and the multilayered system of global governance has transformed the socio-ethnic pattern of Australian society. These changes in policy, attitude and global context create a liveable space for Thai culture within Australia.

Thai skilled migrant approach to Australian multiculturalism

It should be noted here that Thai skilled migrants I interviewed were aware of social pluralism while still in Thailand. Thailand, home to 65 million people, is at the centre of Southeast Asia. Although the majority of Thailand's population is both Buddhist and ethnically and linguistically Thai, there are many regional, linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences. The presence of many non-Thai groups in Thailand contributes to a sense of diversity. In addition, participants appeared to think of themselves not only as citizens of a given nation-state (Thai, Australian or dual citizen) but also as global citizens. This assertion is supported by the engagement of eight participants and Thai community organisations in fund raising projects²⁹ for victims no matter whom the victims are or where the victims live. These activities show that many continued to connect to what were initially Thai community networks even after these networks extended well beyond the Thai community into regional and global domains.

In the interviews I conducted I noted that participants had some awareness of social pluralism and were familiar with living in social and cultural diversity from their time in Thailand, particularly those who came from Bangkok (a complex global city). The Thai community in Australia is also a heterogeneous community comprising various Thais who are diverse in term of allegiances, political views, education, religion, age, gender, socioeconomic, and regional linguistic backgrounds. Even though almost all participants agreed that they

²⁹ Some examples include tsunami relief for the victims in Thailand in 2004 organised by the Royal Thai Consulate General of Victoria; fundraising for victims of the earthquake in China and the Myanmar cyclone in 2008 coordinated by Thai restaurants in Victoria and SBS Thai language program; and Bushfire relief for victims in Victoria organised by many Thai community organisations such as Thai Buddhist temples and the Thai Culture and Food Festival Inc. (TCFFI).

experienced a much higher degree of diversity in Australian society than they did in Thailand, they seemed to be flexible and open to the ‘otherness’ found within Australia:

When I was an international student my classmates came from many countries. Many brought lunch boxes from home. During lunch time, we often sat and shared lunch together. Some food looked disgusting and smelly but I didn’t mind to try some. People have different cultures and different preferences but we are better to focus on their heart and mind. I think they might feel the same way because my Thai food was spicy and smelly from chilli, basil, and herbs too (Pimporn, 26, female).

One day I called a person who I wanted to rent his house. Due to his ascent I was thinking he was not born in Australia. He said he is Australian. I told him I came from Thailand. He repeated he is Australian! Actually it’s not a big deal. I would rent his house no matter what nationality he is. For me, I have nothing to hide. I can identify myself to others even non-Thais that I’m an Australian born in Thailand. Perhaps, this is because I have had a good experience being a Thai-Australian here (Anne, 33, female).

Australia society appears to these Thai skilled migrants as a collection of ethnic communities attempting to unite around a set of core values. Officially, it has no government-approved national identity and all cultures are described as equal. In this diverse society, the population 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 thesis has explored, in some detail, the picture of integration in participants’ eyes. 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. Participants themselves described this process in terms of an emic notion of adaptation. For example, Australia is a monolingual society, with English used as the official language and medium of exchange in all matters. It is a high possibility that members of the Thai community will have great difficulty in using their qualifications in Australia if they are not fluent in English. However, Australian multicultural policy encourages the maintenance and transmission of ethnic

languages and cultures among the migrant population. According to the policies, it is no longer necessary to be culturally assimilated to be an Australian. People could be Australian, even if they speak another language and follow different cultural practices and lifestyles (as long as these do not conflict with Australian law):

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, 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, 30, female).

This thesis has not explored the picture of integration in the imaginary of non-Thais in Australia. To them, it might be important to be asked whether or not speaking broken English, wearing modern clothes, paying tax, obeying the law of the land and respecting the elected parliamentary and democratic political structures are practical enough to prove that Thai migrants have integrated into Australian society. The conceptualisation and operationalisation of Australian multiculturalism, integration, diversity, and difference seem to be an ongoing process. There are not finished products but seem to be vague ideas or impulses. It is therefore, perhaps, not surprising to find confusion about key concepts in public debates and uncertainty about the balance unity and diversity, and inevitably contradictory messages emerge (Grillo in Vertovec, 2010).

However, at least, it could be said that the development of Australian multiculturalism created the space for Thai skilled migrants in this research to continue to participate in Thai community networks, even though their cross-culture contacts steadily opened to a much wider range of non-Thai Australians. Almost all participants described how they chose to keep some of their Thai-ness as it positively affected their self esteem. They agreed that they felt they became 'somebody' when they chose to present Thai-ness in Australia. From their migration experiences they believed that Thai culture is welcomed by other non-Thais in Australia; ethnic groups are

officially encouraged to keep their culture in Australian multicultural society and the state assists in the settlement and maintenance of ethnic cultures. It is acknowledged that the existence of Thai community organisations would not have been possible without the help and support of the state and the other parts of Australian society. Attachment to Thai-ness and the Australian-Thai community were most likely to give participants the self-confidence to interact much more dynamically and creatively with the cultural lives in Australian multicultural society. In this sense, I suggested that Thai communities help integrate Thai migrants into the mainstream society. It could be assumed that if Thai communities did not function well or broke up, this would produce great difficulties for Thais merging into Australian society.

Tanapoom (41, male) said,

Australia is a country of immigration. There are diverse ethnic groups in Australian society. Cultural diversity can be seen as central to Australian national identity. Bear in mind that this is positive and make Australia attractive. I have experienced and learned ways of life of the British, Italian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and so on. This also influenced me to integrate myself into the Thai community. It is a perfect combined sense of the familiar and the foreign. I feel I'm not lost in Australia. I found that attachment to Thai-ness helps guide me to know what to do and how to negotiate easily with others both Thais and non-Thais.

Therefore, it is possibility that the connections to Thai ethnic networks remain not as a result of lack of language proficiency or failure to adjust to life in the new environment. Some might see 'poor English' as a cause of Thai migrant group formation. An alternative suggestion is that it can be seen as an outcome of integration into Thai community networks. The awareness of social pluralism which is manifest in both Australian and Thai societies is arguably a greater factor in the existence and ongoing viability of the Thai community in Australia, even though these Thai skilled migrants are tightly integrated into Thai community networks they may speak and think in Thai more often than English. So while Thai language seems to be the most important aspect Thai-ness that helps Thai migrants maintain a sense of an old authentic self and a means to connect them with their homeland, the Thai networks that promote Thai-ness also extend beyond the Thai cultural domain to enable Thais to integrate into the Australian

mainstream, echoing my point from the previous chapter that these networks function to provide a range of needs for Thais in Melbourne.

Since Thai language has often coincided with notions of nation, and the involvement with other symbols such as music and other forms of expressive culture, Thai language can be employed to re-create and re-define cultural boundaries. These settings provide the contexts in which cultural identities, histories, and other social identities can be affirmed. However, they do not necessarily mean separation and exclusion from the broader Australian social system. Indeed, the Thai community is seen as a part of an Australian multicultural society. This has led to a positive sense of belonging among the Thai ethnic community in Australia. The positive internal social cohesion and cultural coherence that Thai community networks provide enable members to present Thai-ness in Australia.

Presentation of Thai-ness in Australia

This section builds on the argument presented earlier in this chapter that the awareness of social pluralism is the one important reason for the existence and sustainability of the Thai community in Australia. This argument is consistent with what Sonn (2002) found in his study of the adaptation of coloured South African migrants in Australia. Sonn (2002, pp. 205-222) argued that migrant adjustment could be seen as a process of community building that first involves the development of a meaningful social identity and second, establishing ties and social networks that will lead to a sense of belonging. The Thai ethnic community provides a sense of belonging for Thais in Australia; it is a kind of safety net. My participants felt that keeping informed about Thailand and interacting with fellow Thais increased their identification with the Thai community. It can be argued that integration into Thai community networks was central to the settlement process and provided opportunities for meaningful social engagement and identity development. As described in Chapter Five, the phenomenon of the Australian-Thai community is based on Thai people seeking and maintaining social ties with others who share a common culture, 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 adjustment process. How Thai skilled migrants

adjusted to Australian multicultural society is thus primarily dependent on the nature and extent of the ties that bind them to each other.

As Thai individuals interact with each other in recurrent social relationships, they formed patterns of social order and generated shared ideas about these endeavours. As they communicated about common activities, exchanged attitudes, values and beliefs, developed common standards of action, and adopted similar ways of doing things, they created cultural ideas which in return became associated with particular patterns of social order. When a Thai skilled migrant sought to become a member of an ongoing Thai community network in Australia, she or he had not only to engage in established relationships but also needed to acquire the associated cultural ideas of the Thai community. This is not to say that all Thai members of the Thai community necessarily think alike, but over time these Thai members will come to share a body of common ideas. A consequence of the emergence of cultural ideas from collective social life is the unity and stability of community, increasing the community's effectiveness in achieving goals.

Activities, networks and organisations within the Thai community emerged as a central context for interaction with fellow Thais. The Thai community networks provided the contexts where Thai people could participate, perform meaningful social roles, share stories, and develop skills and competencies to function in the broader Australian society. These settings appear to be central to the successful responses to migration, settlement and adjustment process of Thai skilled migrants. As they were interconnected within Thai community networks and connected to the homeland via transnational links (this issue will be clarified in Chapter Seven), they were viewed as carriers of Thai cultural ideas from Thailand. Thai associations and social networks have played an important role in the way homeland is constructed and also mark the differences of Thai individuals from their Anglo-Australian friends. Indeed, the localisation experience of the Australian-Thai community, as well the community's ties to Thailand, has a tremendous influence on a Thai individual's cultural life and identification. Participants acquired new perceptions of themselves in relation to migration, localisation, and transnational experiences. It can be argued that Thai-ness in Australia has to be seen in both local and transnational contexts, as well as in the context of globalisation, if contemporary Thai-ness is to be understood.

During my fieldwork, it was clear that the everyday taken for granted understandings of Thai-ness in Thailand provided much of the basis for the production of Thai-ness in the Australian context. However, the production of Thai-ness in Australia is not simply the reproduction of Thai culture, but rather the complex process of selection and modification within the new setting. Thai-ness in Australia is partly shaped by national, transnational as well as global processes. 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.

Some Thai customs and cultures continued to be presented in the new Australian environment. For example, the Thai *Wai* gesture described in Chapter Three, Figure 3.1, is a traditional mode of interaction in Thailand, used across all social classes and communities. In Australia, however, what was naturalised behaviour in Thailand has become *emblematic* of Thai culture here. The use of the *Wai* gesture in Thai to Thai exchanges, as well as in Thai to non-Thai exchanges, has become an iconic representation of Thai culture in Australia. The fact that the Thai *Wai* is a non-aggressive gesture that shows respect to the another person, plus the fact that its meaning translates fairly easily to people outside Thai culture, helps make this an attractive and interesting cultural difference, rather than a divisive one. This and other features of Thai culture, through a process of selection and testing, have positioned Thai culture in a generally positive light in Australian culture.

Thai food is another instance where these processes of selection and adaptation create Thai community in Australia. The significance of Thai food for my participants has already been discussed in Chapter Three, particularly in relation to them looking for jobs and cultural links in Thai restaurants. In Chapter Five, the importance of Thai food culture was discussed as the first of three ways in which the Thai community is able to combine the familiarity of Thai ways and practices with representing Thai-ness to the wider Australian society. Thai food can be seen from yet another perspective, the selection and adaptation of certain foods (for example green curry, *Pad Thai*, *Som Tum*, *Tom Yum*) and ways of presenting this food in Thai restaurants that is not essentially ‘true’ or ‘real’ Thai culture, but a selection and adaptation for the new Australian setting. Even though in Australia this is seen as truly Thai culture, the participants in this research project described how such food might be made with alternative ingredients, was

sometimes cooked in different ways, or perhaps avoided the use of some spices and herbs for the Australian audience. Similar processes of selection and adaptation from Thai culture could be seen in other areas of life, for instances religion and clothing:

I am a Buddhist Thai. I make merit at the temples and attend Buddhist festivals in Australia more often than when I was in Thailand. I love to go to the temple partly because I can meet up with other Thai friends there too (Prakitch, 38, male).

When I was in Thailand I had never thought of dressing like Nang Ram (Thai traditional dancers). But, you know, I have Thai traditional dresses including accessories to decorate myself like Nang Ram in Australia. I have even learned Thai traditional dances in Australia. I found myself enjoying presenting Thai-ness in Australia (Apanchanij, 32 female).

These Thai skilled migrants became more aware and appreciative of their own culture when they were away from it. They eagerly wanted to consume Thai-ness as it presents their cultural identities. In other words, it could be said that they became *more* stereotypically Thai than they were in Thailand.

The traditional Thai dress was always welcomed by parade organisers as it was the image of Thai society that they wanted to present. On Australia Day 2010 (26 January), Thai people in Victoria were encouraged to wear traditional Thai dress during the activities on the day (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 Thai community walking people parade on Australian Day, Melbourne (2010)



Photographer: Sansanee Chanarnupap (26 January 2010)

From an insider's knowledge it is apparent that there was in the fact a considerable variety of traditional Thai dress styles presented on Australia Day. It was also obvious that many Thais standing along the pathway of Swanston Street were just there as spectators. They did not participate in the parade. Some walked along the pathway, although not in the parade, from the start to the end. Some of these Thais reported that they did not walk in the parade because their dress was traditionally inappropriate. However, no one tried to stop Thai people who wanted to participate in the parade, no matter how they were dressed. No one criticised the Thai parade organiser over this issue. The proposal here is that these Thais who believed their dress was traditionally inappropriate to participate in the parade were nevertheless well aware of the desire to present a unified and simplified version of Thai-ness to the Australian audience. They were most likely under 'internal social control' exercised by the individuals over themselves (Olsen, 1968).

In the words of the German sociologist Habermas (1976, p. 93):

The symbolic unity of a person, which is created and maintained by self-identification, is founded on the affiliation to the symbolic reality of a group, on the possibility to determine one's position in the world of this group. An identity of the group, which transcends and encompasses the individual life-histories, therefore is a prerequisite for the identity of the individual.

Referring to Durkheim's concept of 'conscience collective', this collective consciousness is sum total of the collective representations of a group, the aggregate of all values, norms, knowledge, attitudes and ideas which a group has in common and which should be integrated into a coherent worldview. This collective consciousness influences, if not determines, how people think about things, and provides a frame for the individual's social construction of reality. Thus, collective identity and individual identity are dialectically related (Bechstedt, 1991).

When a person says, "Is that all the Thai you can wear?" or "Is that the best you can dress?", they are implying that they believe that traditional Thai dress should represent Thainess in Australia. The awareness of such attitudes was internalised by my participants (and indeed many other Thais) within the Thai community. They could choose not to wear 'ordinary clothes', but they were not compelled to make this decision. It was their own desire to abide by established social standards and expectations. The community members accepted community values as their own personal standards. Their self-discipline was an expression of deeply internalised community norms. The community members believed they were part of the Thai community with which they identified. They voluntarily accepted Thai community values and abided by them out of a desire to establish and sustain a relationship with Thai community networks in hope of benefiting from this conformity. In a broad sense, then, common values shape social life when they are expressed through collective norms and internalised within personalities (Olsen, 1968).

As part of my own participation in the research, on Australian Day 2010 (26 January) I wore a dress made from traditional Thai village fabric but cut in a modern style popular

among Thai teachers in Thailand. I felt a bit out of place because I was dressed differently from many other Thais in the parade. Despite the fact that no one criticised I still felt there was a social pressure operating here to present a simplified and uncomplicated version of Thai-ness to the Australian audience. However, some Thais revealed that Thai people in Thailand were no longer wearing traditional Thai dress and they did not have a traditional Thai dress either in Thailand or Australia. Still some who participated in the parade informed me that they borrowed traditional Thai dress from Thai restaurants (a waitress uniform), while some others borrowed traditional Thai costumes from a temple. Many bought traditional Thai dresses and accessories from Thailand in order to wear them in Australia. They knew that traditional Thai costume was admired and preferred as a formal dress when representing Thai-ness. There seemed to be a greater expectation for female Thais to present themselves in traditional Thai dress.

Logan (35, male), a skilled Thai migrant who has made a home in Australia said:

Traditional Thai costume is an elaborate meditation on nostalgia for lost times and lost places, the past and the homeland. Indeed, we didn't dress up traditional Thai costume in daily lives when we were in Thailand. Thai people in the history around hundred years ago wore it. Utilising traditional Thai costume as the representation to Thai-ness is something created, not from personal past experience but collective imagination. The way of life of modern Thais is not much different than modern Australian one. The internet has facilitated the flow of culture so that likeminded subcultures based on music, religions, TV shows, cooking or politics now operate in various countries around the world. These subcultures provide a more meaningful sense of belonging than that provided by vague concepts of a national character.

Participants agreed that social interaction among Thais in the Thai community in Australia was similar to what happened in Thailand in some aspects, but might not be exactly the same. For them, Thailand-based social interaction tended to require a greater awareness of status, age and sex. Thai cultural practices of social hierarchy, which in their home society were simply a naturalised way of acting, were subtly different. There was a sense of social hierarchy that frequently appeared in the Australian-Thai community which was similar to

the former seniority and patronage system of respect and a sense of hierarchy. These systems were seen as a guide on how Thai people should associate with each other whether they are inside or outside Thailand. These Thai community values were used to determine if actions were acceptable or unacceptable, desirable or undesirable. The idea was that life will be smooth and predictable if everybody knows his or her place and acts accordingly. Although the prescriptions and proscriptions of community values establish socially expected standards for social actions, in practice there may be considerable disjunction between these standards and actual behaviours.

It is interesting that some Thai skilled migrants in this research like Somjit, Prasarn, Narong, Sureeporn, Tanapoom and Najaree who decided to migrate to Australia to be liberated from Thai social stresses came to experience some of the same stresses in Australia when they chose to be immersed in the Thai community:

Sometimes I preferred to be a bad boy in the Thai community because I did not like seniority system. Despite the fact that the elders may not be always right, the younger Thais are still expected to respect elders and not criticise them (Nimit, 37, male).

This participant's problem with the re-assertion of Thai authority structures highlights the potential re-establishment of Thai culture within Australian context. For him, and for many other participants, there was a fine line between continuing to be Thai by respecting elders and those in senior positions on the one hand, and shifting to an Australian-Thai way interacting not fully controlled by Thai authority patterns. This participant objected to the re-emergence of strict Thai seniority, saying, "This was unfair". Another participant (Jamnong, 32, male) said, "We should have left these old fashions (referring to seniority and patronage systems) behind and made a fresh start".

Despite being Thai in Australia, these Thai skilled migrants adopted many new everyday skills and protocols appropriate to their new environment. For example, they learned to obey Australian law and traffic rules, to be punctual for an appointment, to keep to a regular schedule, to respect queuing etiquette, to validate tickets every time when travelling on

public transport, to divide rubbish according to its types, to move rubbish bins to the front of the house on rubbish collection day, to take responsibility of the public space in front of the house, and to say ‘thank you’ to the public bus drivers or waitresses.

The first time that I saw people put their hard waste such as broken bike and furniture in front of the house along side of the street I couldn’t understand why they did that. I learned later that there will be a hard waste collection day organised by the city council. This kind of rubbish will be collected from within the property boundary. When I was in Thailand we didn’t have this public service in my city or even in Thailand (Pimporn, 26, female).

Australia is amazing! Have your bins placed on the nature strip by 5am on your collection day. Bins should be placed beside each other, not too close together, with the wheels facing your house and the lid closed. My rubbish was not taken once. My neighbour said it was because I left the lid opened. Amazing, isn’t it? (Narong, 27, male).

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, 35, female).

Most participants agreed that they had found it necessary to become aware of such practices after their arrival in Australia. They tried to accommodate these daily routines as best as they could. By living in a new land where the basic beliefs and values of mainstream culture were different from their own, Thai skilled migrants were challenged to reframe their values and beliefs, and to developing new values more appropriate to life in Australia. Some loosened their grip on their past and adopted new perspectives while others struggled to hold on to what they were familiar with for as long as possible.

Thai skilled migrants in this thesis chose their social connections and built cross-cultural networks composed of both Thais and non-Thais. My participants were in regular contact with different cultures and social systems. They needed diverse day-to-day and strategies to deal with a variety of situations. As participants had settled down in Australia; most held dual citizenship (Thai and Australian) and were bilingual (Thai and English), they had to learn how to linguistically code-switch and other cultural practices in order to speak and behave appropriately in a number of different arenas. Code-switching (Thai and English) and monolingual Thai speech were commonly used in informal situations, with members of the Thai community. English seemed to be reserved for formal contexts including the workplace, for interactions with non-Thais and local government officials. The multiple belongings and flexible cultural identities of my participants were manifested in the way they expressed their ‘Thai-Australian-ness’ in local and transnational contexts.

Multiple cultural orientations are complicated and may be difficult for individuals to cope with. They demand multiple understandings, multiple loyalties, multiple rights and multiple duties (Heater, 1999, p. 149). Thai community members were sometimes pressured to conform to the expectations of the Thai community while at the same time they might try to influence others in the community. For example, Natwadee (33, female) felt reluctant to tell other Thai migrants about her *de facto* relationship³⁰ which is socially and legally acceptable in Australia but far from Thai traditional expectations. Natwadee told me that she had been brought up to believe that this was not culturally acceptable and would lead to family dishonour. She did not tell her parents about her relationship until she graduated from her course and migrated to Australia. Nimit (37, male) felt embarrassed and out of place when he wore shorts and thongs (a casual ‘Aussie’ style of dress) to a Buddhist temple during a festival while many other Thais wore traditional Thai dress. However, this did not result in a sense of exclusion from the Thai community. Indeed, 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.

³⁰ This means she and her partner lived together as a couple without formal, legal marriage, what English law in earlier centuries called common law marriage.

The clash of cultural expectations can be observed in relationships between Thai skilled migrants and their non-Thai friends, colleagues and partners. For example, both Prakitch (38, male) and Kamra (38, female) married non-Thais in Australia. They both said that their values about childrearing practices were different from their partners' and they needed to compromise in a way that sometimes created conflict their family:

I want to let everyone take off their shoes before entering my house. Yes, it is Thai culture and actually it's for keeping the house clean too. My non-Thai partner wants to wear shoes in the house, but he will get used to it (Jinda, 35, 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, 38, female).

Another example of how participants had to learn to negotiate their way between their previously acquired cultural practices and the new Australian environment was in their employment. Non-Thai Australians would react with either approval or disapproval when commenting on their Thai workmates. For example, Najaree (37, female) revealed that her Australian colleagues would get angry with her because she did not go for a break but kept working at her desk. She said that sometimes she worked overtime to finish her tasks without requesting extra-payment as she normally would in Thailand. Her Australian colleagues told her about labour rights and warned her that she should not destroy the system in Australia.

It is crucial to remember that the Thai community is a heterogeneous community. Although Thai migrants share cultural roots that are important to the Thai community, there are

differences that affect the adjustment of individual Thais in Australia. Differences in political views, profession, education, religion, age, gender, socioeconomic position and regional linguistic background can affect how Thai individuals respond to the real-life situations. It is also significant that my participants presented a variety of Thai cultural experiences. Thai-ness was variously described by participants. Part of this is because Thailand is not a monolithic united entity. There are regional linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences within Thailand. Some of my participants came from the southern part of Thailand, others came from middle, eastern, or north-eastern parts of Thailand. Many were born in one region but had been educated and/or worked in another region.

Thai skilled migrants come from different places, family backgrounds and regional locations. Their ancestors may come from outside Thailand, and thus have different memories, myths, fantasies, and life narratives. In addition, these narratives could be affected differently by both the Australian and the global environment. In fieldwork, I have come across the unexpected irony that while formal Australian multiculturalism supports diversity, Thais sometimes work to present a simplified or uncomplicated version of Thai-ness that flattens out the diversity in Thai culture for Australian consumption.

This is evident in the multiple forms of Thai-ness have been negotiated by Thai migrants in Australia. One example was that during Melbourne Thai Culture and Food Festival 2010 (Sunday 22 March), held at Federation Square, a contestant in a Thai beauty contest wore a traditional Thai hill tribe dress on the stage, 'surprising' the event organiser. She said in *ANTS*, Issue 45 (2010, p. 22), a Thai newsmagazine published in Victoria, that it was controversial whether or not a traditional Thai hill tribe dress should be presented in a Thai community beauty contest. The model's desire was to show the diversity of Thai society and Thai-ness, and after a small discussion she was allowed to go on stage and eventually won the second prize.

A second example of a debate about cultural imaginings occurred over the entertainment performed by Thai ladyboys. This was criticised by some voices in the Thai community network, who questioned whether or not this subculture should appear in Thai

community festivals. Some others in the Thai community networks also questioned whether or not the contemporary Thai dance organised by a Thai entertainment company should be replaced by the traditional Thai dance organised by the College of Dramatic Arts, under the provision of Ministry of Culture of Thailand.

Perhaps a way to understand these phenomena is that both Thai and Australian plural societies have become 'too diverse' or entered a stage of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2010). The presence of a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small, and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified migrant communities adhering to values at odds with those of Western secular society may threaten cohesion, according to some Thais and Australians. This idea of super-diversity as a problem is now widely expressed in Europe, particularly the UK (Grillo in Vertovec, 2010, pp. 19-34). Diversity, therefore is potentially two-faced: (1) a source of great strength as it enriches cultural interactions and (2) its celebration-recognition may encourage social segregation, fear and conflict. A central problem is seen as balancing diversity with solidarity. The public debate about multiculturalism and integration may lead to an awareness of the multiplicity of forms of Thai-ness in the Australian context which stimulated the need for participants and the Thai communities they were associated with to negotiate over the common cultural ideas of the shared imagination. In this sense, the presentation of Thai-ness and the community security were joined in the consideration whether or not actions were acceptable or unacceptable, desirable or undesirable.

In other words, under the pluralistic name of 'Australian multicultural society' the freedom of expression to be a Thai may need to be balanced against behaving in a way deemed acceptable to the others (non-Thais). This research found that, for Thai skilled migrants, the argument about Thai-ness began even before applying for Australian permanent resident. Consciously or unconsciously, it became apparent to them that the Thai-ness they could present in Australia was not a matter of concrete truths, but rather of collective imaginings.

Hall (1990) wrote that cultural identity is composed of ever-changing representations that appear to be coherent:

Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Hall, 1990, p. 225).

Based on this theoretical perspective, 'Thai-ness' is not completely transmitted through time and place, but translated or negotiated by involving Thais (and indeed involving other Australians as well) before being selectively presented. Thai-ness is developed and understood, not through finding an essential and pure Thai culture, but rather through cultural systems of production, which select and modify existing formations of what it is to be Thai. Instead of thinking of Thai-ness as an already accomplished fact, Thai-ness is a production which is never complete and always in a process of change. At different times and in different places, Thai-ness can be differentiated. It therefore no longer makes sense to search for 'real' Thai-ness because all representations of Thai-ness in this context are arguably real. Thai-ness can be heterogeneous and diverse, it can be unified and homogenised. Depending on the time and place, it is meaningfully constructed and selectively presented. Some may think that 'real' Thai-ness should be seen in Thailand, as it is there that Thai-ness originated. Such reasoning assumes that Thai-ness in Thailand remains the same, but rapid globalisation is drastically transforming the socio-cultural status of the Thai society. If Thai migrants want to return to their past experiences in Thailand they can do so only in their nostalgic imagination.

In this chapter the discussion has moved through two distinct phases. The first part of the chapter looked at how Australian multiculturalism created a space for Thai culture within Australian society. The connections of Thai skilled migrants to Thai ethnic networks remained even after they developed wider cultural networks. This was not as a result of a

lack of language proficiency or a failure to adjust life to the new environment; the Thai community has not coalesced around a putative inability to associate with the mainstream society. Rather, the increased awareness of social pluralism was arguably of greater importance in the existence and sustainability of the Thai community in Australia. Multiculturalism has meant that Thai communities feel a sense of belonging in Australia. The internal social cohesion and cultural coherence that Thai community networks provide enabled my research participants to become involved in the presentation of Thai-ness in Australia.

The final section of this chapter focussed the discussion on the Thai community itself. Transnationalism is understood as the processes (political, cultural and economic) through which such identities are forged and maintained. My take on ethnicity emphasises the fluidity and contingency of identity which is constructed in specific socio-cultural contexts. 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. Thai-ness presented in Australia was seen as variously influenced by the diversity of Thai migrant backgrounds, even though some of the presentation was concerned to show a simplified portrait of Thai-ness. Examples in this chapter illustrated both responses to the new environment as well as ways of constituting it. Further, the awareness of the multiplicity of Thai-ness stimulated the need to negotiate some common cultural ideas and shared imaginations. Thai-ness presented in Australia was not a matter of fixed and stable truth about Thais, Thailand, or Thai culture, but rather a composite of collective imaginings. This negotiated Thai-ness brought significant cultural layers to the fabric of Australian multicultural society.

From this exploration of Thai adjustment to Australian society, the next chapter now turns to considerations about how continuing ties to Thailand are today part of what it means to be a Thai Australian.

Chapter Seven

Ties to Thailand

The last chapter focused on the ways that the Thai skilled migrants who participated in this study adapted to Australia by considering the Thai ethnic community as one part of Australian multicultural society interconnected to a globalised world. This chapter sets out to answer whether of the solidarity maintained, or not, by Thai skilled migrants with Thailand, their country of origin.

As described in Chapter One, in investigating recent Thai skilled migration in Australia, my theoretical perspective is framed around the notion of ‘transnationalism’. I view transnational activities as involving the flows of ideas, information, people and culture which transcend one or more nation-states. The lives of many individuals in the contemporary world increasingly transcend single localities and single nations. International migration mostly takes place within transnational social networks that link families and communities across long distances (Faist, 2000). Transnationalism emphasises the fact that many migrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Migrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political – that span borders are called ‘transmigrants’ (Basch *et al.*, 1994). The concept of transnationalism points to a growing and ever more routinised recognition of a people’s multiple attachments. The assumption that a person will live his or her life in one place, according to one set of national and cultural norms, in countries with impermeable national borders, no longer holds. When settling in a new city, many migrants rely on mutual links and sustain strong ethnic networks across borders, while establishing social and economic ties with their local community. Many, if not most, migrants end up belonging simultaneously to two societies as ‘transmigrants’. Transnational relationships between migrant communities and their homelands are seen as part of wider international networks.

In terms of transnational connections, while living far away from Thailand, it is possible to identify ways that Thai skilled migrants continue to maintain Thai sociality throughout their migration experiences. All the participants in this research retained strong bonds of emotion,

loyalty and affiliation with Thailand, especially towards their significant others through advances in technology, as well as broader affordability of telecommunications, media and not least mass travel opportunities. The monarchy of Thailand and family members in Thailand are described in this chapter as the significant others of the research participants. Thai language seems to be the most important means to connect them with their significant others in Thailand (indeed in Australia as well). Their ties to their homeland led these Thai transmigrants to live dual lives (dual citizenship), speak two languages (Thai and English), having homes in two countries (Thailand and Australia), and maintain regular contact across international borders and between different cultures and social systems.

Modes of transnational contacts

There is a considerable amount of social scientific research detailing the emergence of transnational social practices. These practices create a field of sociability and identification among migrants and people in the country of origin (Itzigsohn & Giorquli-Saucido, 2002). Homeland attachment can take many forms. In this section I explore four major types of transnational contacts that assist in the implementation of trans-participation. It focuses mainly on the interests of participants and their transnational networks in economic, political, religious and social engagements, investigating how these Thai skilled migrants maintained their relationships to Thailand.

Economic engagements

In this research most participants did not seem to regularly send money back home. Economic remittances seemed to be not a major mode of transnationalism for these young Thai skilled migrants. According to Thai traditions Thai children are expected to look after their parents when the parents are in their old age. Parents who give and take care, feed and love their children, sacrifice themselves for their dependents, and represent a refuge, safety, and a source of moral identity to their offspring. Because of this strong emphasis on the goodness of the parents (particularly the mother), children are obligated never to forget to return parental goodness and benevolence, to show respect and obedience, and to feel morally indebted to their lives. Thus, a sense of obligation towards elders (especially the mother) is a strong theme in Thai culture.

However, only a few participants (like Jamnong and Narong) sent money on a regular basis to financially assist family members such as parents or siblings. 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. Regardless, most participants occasionally sent money as a 'gift' to show their love and loyalty to their families. The main use of money they earned in Australia tended to be for building their own lives in Australia, rather than supporting the lives of those who remained behind. It could be said that these participants contributed more to the Australian economy, rather than the economy of Thailand.

Some participants (such as Saran and Tanapoom) donated money and items through Thai community organisations in Australia to assist natural disaster victims in Thailand. Some other participants (such as Apanchanij and Prakitch) transferred money or organised the collection of donations from time to time to support their places of worship in Thailand. In some cases, money flowed the other way and participants received financial support from their families. For example, Somjit (33, female) received financial support from her parents when she wanted to buy a house in Australia. Phanid (30, female) received financial support from her mother when she wanted to buy a car in Australia.

Besides these examples, Thai skilled migrants have economic engagements across borders in indirect ways. For example, many Thai skilled migrants usually preferred to have Thai meals in their daily life and there were hundreds of Thai restaurants throughout Australia. This produced great opportunities for suppliers to import Thai food products and other Thai merchandise from Thailand to meet the needs of Thai people and also many others in Australia who love Thai food.

Political engagements

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.

They received news about what was happening in Thailand, particularly the recent political movements around ‘the red shirt’ camp who supports the former Prime Minister of Thailand Thaksin Shinawatra, and ‘the yellow shirt’ camp who do not. Almost all participants had discussed this issue with their families in Thailand as well as with Thai people in Australia. Their friends and families in Thailand may favour one camp but almost all of their contacts in Thailand were uninvolved in the aggressive activities organised by these political movements. Participants were regularly asked by their non-Thai contacts in Australia about the current political situation in Thailand and whether they supported the ‘red shirt’ or ‘yellow shirt’ camp. They mostly replied they did not take any side.

The 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. Only one participant (Saran, 35, male) mentioned that he had a desire to be a politician in Thailand. He asked, “If Samak Sundaravej (a well-known television chef) can be a Prime Minister of Thailand, why can’t I, the owner of the restaurant, be a politician?” It was clear that there was no strong political division in the Thai community in Australia. Almost all the participants wanted to see a ‘living in harmony’ philosophy adopted both in Thailand and Australia. Moreover, the ambassador of Thailand to Australia was actively encouraging the Thai community in Australia (and indeed around the world) to promote a positive and peaceful Thai national reputation to non-Thais, especially after the recent incidents of the political unrest in Thailand (‘Ambassador Kriangsak Kittichaisaree’, <http://melbthai.com.au/Magazine/Issue6/index.html> accessed 6 September 2010).

Religious engagements

As described above, it was generally the case that my participants did not engage directly in significant economic and political activities across borders. In terms of religious engagements, most participants revealed that they had diverse religious associations with both Thai and non-Thai people in Australia. Thai skilled migrants were open to and respected religious diversity as appropriate in a multicultural society. However, there were no cases of any participants changing their religious beliefs after migration to Australia even though some were approached by missionaries or were married to a partner who had different religious beliefs. Almost all participants found a place of worship and continued their religious beliefs in Australia no matter if they were Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian.

In many cases the religious institutions with which Thai migrants associated in Australia tended to have a network which linked them to corresponding religious institutions in Thailand. 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 link between these Thai Australians and their homeland.

Buddhist Thais in Victoria regularly attended the following temples; Wat Thai Nakorn Melbourne (Wat Boxhill), Wat Dhammarangsee (Wat Springvale), and the Bodhivan Monastery (Wat Pa). Buddhist temples offered a wide range of Buddhist religious, cultural and community support activities. There were a number of major Buddhist festivals as well as broader community festivals such as the Songkran festival³¹ and the King's Birthday celebration, all of which were held at the temples. As the majority of Thai population in both Thailand and Australia, it was understandable that the Buddhist Thai temple community was occasionally seen as representatives of Thai community. When outsiders wanted to contact the Thai community they sometimes started by contacting these Buddhist Thai temple community networks. Also, the Royal Thai Consulate often worked closely with the temples when doing social projects and community services.

³¹ It is called the 'Water Festival' by Westerners because people pour water at one another as part of the cleansing ritual to welcome the New Year. Traditionally people gently sprinkled water on one another as a sign of respect. The act of pouring water is also a show of blessings and good wishes.

Social engagements

One way to see how ties to the homeland may be observed is through organisational networks across international borders. As was seen in Chapter Five, many Thai community organisations in Australia had social connections to institutions in Thailand, either in direct or indirect ways. For example, The Thai Language School of Melbourne Inc. has contracts with some universities in Thailand; enabling students from the school go to attend special Thai classes in Thailand. Also, the universities in this network (These Srinakharinwirot University (Bangkok), Burapha University (Chunburi) and Khon Kaen University (Khon Kaen)) can send their qualified students from Thailand to temporarily volunteer as trainee teachers at this Thai language school in Australia. Furthermore, textbooks and many other teaching materials were imported from Thailand.

In addition to transnational institutional linkages, like the language school mentioned above, this research revealed two the most important elements of transnational social engagements were ongoing connections to family and continued reverence for the Thai King in transnational Thai communities.

The monarchy of Thailand

The monarchy of Thailand was arguably a strong bond of emotion, loyalty and affiliation between participants and their home country. Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, ruled since 1946 by the greatly revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The intensity of respect felt by Thai people for the King stems in a large part from the distinctive form that the modern Thai monarchy has taken under his leadership, one that involves a remarkable degree of personal contact. At the same time, this respect is rooted in attitudes that can be traced to the earliest days of the Thai nation and in some of the past rulers who continued to serve as positive models of kingship. The monarchy in Thailand is powerful in that it provides a focal point for Thai people of all backgrounds, unifying the diverse elements of the country.

Interestingly, I was told by respected Thai migrants who were key individuals in Thai organisations in Australia that there are two main motivations for Thai migrants to join in on the public and community events in Australia. One of these motivations was for religious purposes;

the other was for honouring the King. Buddhist festivals and the King's birthday were considered as the more important gathering days for Thai people in Australia.

The mission of the Thai Information and Welfare Association Inc. (TIWA) is to, "provide culturally-appropriate information, welfare and referral services to the Thai community in Victoria". This appeared in the paper distributed to all guests who attended the TIWA official launch on December 4, 2009. The paper also said,

Our gratitude to our homeland is demonstrated by our genuine intention to assist our disadvantaged countrymen especially those arriving in a new country. We Thais believe that by performing these tasks to the best of our ability for the good of the Thai community in Australia, we – as Thais – are paying tribute to our Beloved King.

Thus, the monarchy of Thailand continued to provide for these migrant participants a powerful focal point bringing them together even while overseas. Some participants gave honour to the King during His birthday celebrations via the websites of organisations in Thailand. Some continued to show the pictures of the King in their Australian accommodation in the same way that many Thais normally do in Thailand. Unsurprisingly, one of my participants (Namtip, 32, female) told me that when their Australian friends asked her about which of the Thai political movements – 'red shirt' or 'yellow shirt' – she supported, she replied that she would never trust politicians, but she would trust the King. She took the King's side and supported the King in order to see a 'living in harmony' approach in Thailand.

However, my research also revealed that the location of the Thai community in Australia tested the Thai bonds of emotion, loyalty and affiliation with the monarchy of Thailand. The ABC television program *Foreign Correspondent* (Campbell, broadcast Tuesday 13 April 2010) raised some issues about the Thai monarchy. This included the future kingship, and it discussed the *lèse majesté* law that restricts criticism of the King. In spite of this being a very sensitive matter for Thai nationals, the Thai community in Victoria did not raise strong opposition to the television program. A protest letter from Royal Thai embassy to the ABC can be viewed or

downloaded from the *ANTS* website³², but this did not lead to a major controversy in the broader Victorian Thai community. The latter stated in part:

I am writing to you, both in my official capacity as Ambassador Designate of the Kingdom of Thailand to Australia and in my private capacity as a Thai citizen, with reference to Eric Campbell's documentary on Thailand in "Foreign Correspondent", which was aired on ABC1 on Tuesday 13 April 2010. I presumed that once you have decided to put this hyper-sensitive programme on air, a protest letter like mine which I hope you will seriously heed should come as no surprise. I strongly express both resentment and disappointment with the poor decision you have made. (Kittichaisaree, 15 April 2010, p. 1)

At this stage I have come to a question; If Thai migrants have such a strong bond to Thailand and the King (as the participants revealed), why do they respond to the hyper-sensitive situations like the political crisis in Thailand and an Australian TV programme on the Thai King in such a passive way? What is emerging is that my argument in Chapter Six has become more evident; the freedom of expression to be a Thai in Australia may need to be balanced against behaving in a way deemed acceptable to other Australians. The presentation of Thai-ness and the sustainability of the Australian-Thai community were joined to determine if actions were desirable or undesirable. To me, it seems to be clear that Thai migrants do not want to place themselves at risk of offending Australian norms and they do not want to be seen as a 'trouble makers' in Australian society.

Family members in Thailand:

Vertovec (2009) said in *Transnationalism* that long distance relationships between migrants and their parents in the homeland link fractured families and geographically dispersed homes, a common characteristic of contemporary migrant experience. This finding seemed to be consistent with my research. Facilitated by improved transportation, technology and telecommunications, globalisation has entailed the increasing extent, intensity, velocity and impact of global interconnectedness across international borders. The advance in communication and telephony technologies, especially mobile phones and the internet, has allowed participants

³² *ANTS* is a Thai newsmagazine published in Victoria. The protest letter was accessed on 20 April, 2010 from http://www.antsnews.com.au/pdf/Letter_to_ABC.pdf.

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.

It was found that when experiencing some difficulties in life participants routinely asked their family for advice and counselling. For example, both Prakitch (38, male) and Apanchanij (32, female) had discussed their marriage issues through international telephone calls with their parents in Thailand. Phanid (30, female) made an international telephone call to ask her mother for permission to get married to a Muslim non-Thai man in Australia. Some participants also gave advice to their family members in Thailand too.

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. The majority regularly visited their family in Thailand once a year. Some others visited Thailand once every few years. It was common for them to stay in Thailand for around two weeks to one month each time. The return airfare from Australia to Thailand, and the return airfare from Thailand to Australia, was not very different, so in principle either the participants or their family could make the trip to their loved ones. However, in practice it was my participants who were most likely to travel to their family in Thailand. Their family members in Thailand did not visit Australia so frequently because travel from Australia to Thailand was simpler and more convenient. A visa to Thailand was not required as most participants had both Thai and Australian passports. After migration to Australia, neither Australia nor Thailand makes Thai migrants renounce their Thai citizenship. Thai migrants will continue to be regarded by the Thai government and the Australian government as Thai nationals so long as they do not formally renounce their Thai nationality. Thai migrants who hold dual citizenship have the right to enter either Thailand or Australia at

any time. From my interviews, migrants entered and left Thailand on the Thai passport and entered and exited Australia on the Australian passport.

Many participants such as Leela, Prakitch, and Sureeporn also said that their parents were getting old. It was not easy for their parents to travel long distances, and the plane trip from Bangkok to Melbourne takes around nine hours. Some participants such as Namtip, and Pitak also said that it was difficult to find accommodation for their parents in Australia due to limited space in their own accommodation. Extra accommodation costs and the currency exchange rate could make it more difficult for their families to visit them in Australia. The family members of some participants (such as Bimra and Pimporn) had never travelled to Australia. Interestingly, participants did not report that language was an issue preventing family members from visiting them in Australia.

In the few circumstances where migrant's family members did visit them in Australia, they would show their family around the new environment, teaching them such things as how to use public transport ticketing systems, how to get to the local market, shopping centre, and other places of daily importance. Participants would continue their daily employment while their family members took care of themselves. Participants would join their family on weekends, spending time together and exploring Australia.

The activities that participants usually became involved in when visiting their family in Thailand included spending time with their family members, visiting their respected cousins, visiting places of worship that accorded with their beliefs, visiting some attractive places in Thailand, and catching up with their old friends. Besides these things, participants highlighted the two necessary things to do in Thailand: enjoy Thai food and shop. Most of the time participants brought Australian souvenirs to their significant others in Thailand. These included products unique to Australia's culture and lifestyle ranging from Aboriginal art, traditional souvenirs, gourmet foodstuff, and skincare and cosmetics. Also, participants brought Thai souvenirs back to their significant others in Australia.

Transnational transformation

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. As they were bilingual, speaking both Thai and English, they had to learn ‘code-switching’ in linguistics and cultural practices to speak and behave appropriately in a number of different arenas. The extensiveness, intensity and velocity of networked flows of information and resources between migrants and their homeland may alter the way people do things in local societies (Thai, Australian, and Australian-Thai societies). However, due to time limitations this thesis could not investigate whether or not everyday messages and regular visits between Thai skilled migrants and their family back home lead to significant alterations in the socio-cultural patterns that make up their transnational networks. However, the one major transformation which could be described in this chapter is the perception of having two homes.

Where is home?

“Where are you from?” was a question frequently asked of the Thai skilled migrants who participated in this study. When participants were asked this question most did not have a difficulty in giving a straightforward answer about their origins and affiliation. It can be argued that Thailand is culturally relevant to people who still call themselves Thai. But when in the research interviews participants were asked, “Where is home?” most replied that they, “have two homes”. Participants held dual orientations: to Australia where most were citizens and in which all were residents, and to Thailand, where they maintain familial and social ties.

According to research that Oommen (2000, p. 143) conducted in 1993, the Australian population can be divided into five categories: “the indigenous national citizens” (who are entitled to citizenship by birth and heritage), “the settler national citizens” (the colonisers

who adopted Australia as their homeland and transplanted their language, culture and life style into Australia), “the sojourner national citizens” (migrants who acquired citizenship and were still in the process of relocating to Australia from their country of origin), “the ethnic citizens” (migrants who came in search of the better life but have not yet adopted or do not intend to adopt Australia as their homeland), and “the ethnic non-citizens” (migrants who are not yet Australian citizens either because they did not seek it or because they have not yet been successful in acquiring citizenship). Most of my participants can be seen as fitting within the third category: the sojourner national citizens. Only a few of my participants were long-term Australian permanent residents who have not yet become Australian citizens, i.e. the fifth category. However, participants either in the third or fifth categories still felt attached to their original homeland, even while finding and creating a home in Australia. It can be noted that all participants regarded both their place of residence and their homeland as some forms of ‘home’.

This is not something new. Today, in this era of transnational migration, it is acceptable to belong to more than one country. Dual citizenship allows transmigrants to hold passports in two nation-states, giving them full rights and duties in both countries. Besides rights and obligations, citizenship can also be seen in terms of participation in political, social, cultural and economic spheres; citizenship is not only a matter of rights and duties but also a question of loyalties and identifications (Pitkanen & Kalekin-Fishman, 2007).

Almost all participants, no matter whether they were dual citizens or not, felt that in some sense they belonged to both Thailand and Australia, but they typically had a stronger sense of belonging to Thailand as they were born in Thailand, most had lived in Thailand longer than they had in Australia and their significant others were still living in Thailand. Their everyday life in Australia was also well integrated in Thai community networks. Their attitude toward Thailand as their primary home was therefore hard to change and Thailand remained, if you like, their ‘eternal home’. It was interesting when participants were going to Thailand. They always said in interviews, “I am going *baan* (home)”. Likewise, when they asked other Thais whether or not they planned to visit Thailand they often said, “Are you going back *home* this year?” They tended to use the word “home” to refer to Thailand and

they together understood that the term “home” used in their conversation signified Thailand. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily follow that Australia was less important for them or they did not have a commitment to their place of settlement. Belonging, loyalty, and sense of attachment are not parts of a zero-sum game based on a single place. Australia was seen as a ‘second home’, a home of residence where they lived their lives independently. While participants have multiple attachments that modern technology has facilitated, such multiple attachments do not necessarily hamper integration in the country of settlement.

Participants revealed that when they were in their initial phase as international students in Australia, they mostly regarded Thailand as their only home. Understanding home for them at that time was less about where they are living and more about where they are from. 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. For them, their Australian home has offered shelter, security, and a stable environment³³ as well as the privacy to establish and control personal boundaries. Their Australian homes also provided a space for Thai culture to be presented in Australian multicultural society. By this time, participants had built an independent household outside their family dwelling. In Western contexts it is common that young people reach a point in their life when it is appropriate for them to leave their family home (Mallett, 2004). However, my participants continued to maintain strong ties and bonds to their birth family in Thailand. The argument for this is that home is not necessarily a singular 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.

Many years ago I was returning from a domestic trip with Qantas. The crew played ‘I Still Call Australia Home’ (an Australian song written and performed by Peter Allen). To this day, this song has an effect on me, I am proud to be Australian - by choice, if not by birth! (Tanapoom, 41, male)

³³ The situation in Thailand during the time of my research was unstable due to the political movements and the violent situation in the southern border part of Thailand.

When asked about their future plan, whether or not they planned to return to Thailand permanently at the time of their interview, most answered that they were not sure about their future, but for now they had no plans to move back to Thailand, they preferred to live in Australia as their new independent life was now very much valued. Some participants such as Leele and Nimit revealed that their lives were now settled and they did not want to restart their professional life in Thailand. Others (such as Kamra and Phanid) have married, built a house and made their own families in Australia.

It is worth noting that there were no instances in my research of participants discussing their home as a 'home of ancestors'. This finding differs from Somerville (1992) who argues that home is an ideological construct that is "not just a matter of feelings and lived experience but also of cognition and intellectual construction: people may have a sense of home even though they have no experience or memory of it" (p. 530). This was apparent when I visited or talked to some of my participants' families in Thailand that their ancestors were not Thais. For example, the ancestors of Somjit, Najaree, Narong, Leela, Pitak and Prapop were from China. Their family members in Thailand have practiced some of Chinese traditional ways in their daily lives. Many spoke Chinese at home. These participants tended to have no business or attachment to their ancestral homeland. Kin ties to the home of ancestors become less important after a number of generations (Chee-Beng, 2007).

In addition, as described in Chapter Six, participants appeared to think of themselves not only as citizens of a given nation-state (Thai, Australian or dual citizen) but also as global citizens. However, it did not follow that they were thinking of the globe as home when the question of "Where is home?" was discussed. My research suggested that participants were conscious of being part of the global community but this does not necessarily mean that they will conceive of the world as home. The way most of my participants thought about home was appealing to fixed notions of society or culture.

In some cases, my participants had been seriously tempted to return to Thailand permanently. For example, when mother of Natwadee (33, female) was very sick, Natwadee was depressed. She went back to Thailand to nurse her mother where she had time to think about moving back to Thailand. After her mother passed away she finally decided to return

to Australia and live her life there. Nattawut (29, male) went back to Thailand for a period of time after resigning from his fulltime job in Australia. He searched for an opportunity to be an entrepreneur in Thailand and he thought that, if things went well, he would move his family back to Thailand and rent out his house in Australia. However, his wife got a job promotion and her career seemed to be going well in Australia. Recently, he returned to Australia. In another situation, a beloved niece of Somjit (33, female) was killed in a car accident in Thailand. Her parents and siblings deeply mourned the death of their child. Somjit was sad and felt guilty that she could not stay beside her family and comfort them. She mentioned to her Thai husband about moving back to Thailand permanently but her husband discouraged her from making a big decision when her emotions were not stable. Somjit and her husband are now still living in Australia.

Initially, almost all participants revealed at the time of interviews that they had no plans to return to Thailand permanently. Two participants, however, finally moved from Australia and went back to settle again in Thailand. Sureeporn (30, female) returned to Thailand to assist her family business. Her parents came to Australia and talked to her seriously about her life and her future. At that time she had just resigned from her casual job and was looking for a new job. She reported that she could not convince her parents that she had a better life in Australia, so her parents persisted and eventually she decided to return to Thailand. She packed some of her belongings to go to Thailand, but left most of her stuff with her Thai housemate in Australia. She expected that if things in Thailand were not going well, she could come back to Australia again. After six months, she reported to me that her life in Thailand was satisfactory; her life in Thailand was neither perfect nor was it miserable. As a middle class person in Thailand she had access to considerable social and economic resources and could enjoy a high standard of living. However, in Australia she was able to enjoy a substantial degree of independence which most participants found to be a highly precious aspect of their Australian experience. Indeed, this participant was searching for an opportunity to set up her own business in Thailand; she was thinking of establishing an educational and tour agency to bring Thai tourists to Australia. It can be argued that seeking to have her own business rather than remaining within her family business shows her desire to retain the independence that she discovered while she was in Australia.

Another case was Pitak (32, male). He resigned from his fulltime job as a room manager in an Australian factory and then returned to Thailand with his non-Thai wife and a baby daughter. He stated that after having a baby he had changed his mind about staying in Australia and he expressed concern about his baby daughter's future. In Australia there were no other sources of support so his wife needed to resign from her job in order to take care of the baby. She took on almost all the responsibilities of the home single-handedly. He and his wife had to manage all their issues by themselves. Also, he believed that there were limited opportunities to become an entrepreneur in Australia. Meanwhile, in Thailand childrearing is shared among members of the extended family and others such as neighbours. His parents could support him and his family financially, emotionally and socially; he could have a healthy family life in Thailand. He told his parents about his plan to move. His parents prepared and provided some land and a house to welcome him and his family. His parents were able to speak English with his non-Thai wife as they had previously graduated overseas. After moving back to Thailand, within six months he got a job as a senior staff member in a big international company in Thailand. His non-Thai wife also got a part-time job from her ethnic community networks in Thailand. From these community networks she was able to build up some new friendships in Thailand too. Interestingly, his non-Thai wife actually secured her job in Thailand before him.

In both Sureporn and Pitak's cases, they could enter to Australia at any time as they were also Australian citizens, even though they had permanently moved back to Thailand. However, their travels between Thailand and Australia, as well as their international telephone calls, had greatly decreased. While they retained a right to enter Australia at any time, Australia was no longer seen as their actual country of residence. If home is grounded less in the place but more in the activity that occurs in the place, it can be assumed that in the near future Sureporn and Pitak will not feel attached to Australia anymore. Also, Sureporn and Pitak may no longer be transmigrants as they do not maintain multiple relations that span international borders.

For participants who still remained in Australia, almost all reported they were not sure about their future, whether or not they would stay in Australia for the rest of their lives.

A common response to the question “Will you stay in Australia?” was “I’m not sure; who knows?” When pressed further, participants made statements such as “I really don’t know, but at the moment I have no plans to go back.” Such tentative ideas about the future only gradually resolved themselves in the lives of my participants, some returning to Thailand to live and some continuing to live in Australia. As has been explored here, so long as they continue to retain strong bonds with their significant others in Thailand it seems highly probable that many of them will continue their transnational participation, moving back-and-forth across the international borders between Thailand and Australia.

In this chapter, the examination of the connections and relationships that continue between Thai migrants and their families in Thailand has suggested that Thai skilled migrants continue to retain strong bonds of emotion, loyalty and affiliation with the homeland. Ties to Thailand led these Thai transmigrants to live dual lives (dual belonging), speak two languages (Thai and English), have homes in two countries (Thailand and Australia). However, Thailand still remained an ‘eternal home’. Meanwhile, Australia was seen as a ‘second home’, a home of residence where they lived their lives independently. 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 in this thesis 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. As described in Chapter Six, 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. The freedom of expression to be a Thai was balanced against behaving in a way deemed acceptable to the other Australians. The

presentation of being a Thai in Australia and the sustainability of the Australian-Thai community were joined to determine if actions were desirable or undesirable. When acting subjects were emplaced both 'here' and 'there' and the 'flexible' Thai identities participants practiced depended on contingent circumstances in the different social spaces in which they were acting. These Thai skilled migrants preferred to be seen as peaceful Australian citizens, as they believed that they were welcome in this pluralistic society. In addition to this, the main use of money participants earned in Australia contributed more to the economy of Australia, rather than using for supporting the lives of those who remained behind in Thailand. 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 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. Although networks of many Thais might be concentrated among other Thais, they also have external contacts that could connect them to broader Australian society (as described in Chapter Five). The Thai community in Australia is neither an overly closed nor exclusive community. The Thai community manages to put itself into the wider Australian society. The exposure to the broader Australian society can facilitate network building with non-Thai social sectors. Such interactive mechanisms thus elaborate how the Thai community is inextricably intertwined with the larger setting in which it exists.

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.

In the age of globalisation, the diversity driven by transnational migration and ongoing transnational ties are now coming to be regarded as unsurprising, commonplace, and unquestioned. As increasing numbers of migrants live parts of their lives across national

boundaries, the question is no longer whether this is good or bad. Rather, the challenge is to look outside the nation-state box to figure out how individuals who live between two cultures can best be protected and represented and what the host society should expect from them in return (Vertovec, 2005; Levitt, 2004; Modood, 2006).

Integration is one of those concepts that most people desire but it is not easy to define. If we agree that integration is neither assimilation into a single homogenous culture nor a society of separate enclaves, and then between those two extremes there is a great range and diversity of types of integration. The Crick Report, *'The New and the Old: the report of the life in the United Kingdom'* (2003), indicated that integration means not simply mutual respect and tolerance between different groups but continual interaction, engagement and civic participation. Accordingly, in the Australian context there must be commonalities, notably the English language, as well as the space within the concept of 'Australian-ness' for diverse Australians to express their cultural identities. Australian-ness may not be seen as a singular, but encompassing the collective contribution diverse communities make to the country. Australian-ness itself will be changed over time, not solely as a result of new immigration, but many other social forces such as the influence of mass media, cultural consumption, and cosmopolitanism. The culture of migrants is also changed as the forces of localisation and globalisation impose themselves.

In the politics of social integration, this thesis 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 us towards an Australia where our ethnic origin does not determine our destiny.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Thai people have been in Australia since 1861, but initially their numbers were very small. After Federation, immigration to Australia was strictly governed by the Immigration Restriction Act 1901. There were fewer than 50 Thais officially counted in NSW until the 1950s, and the numbers did not rise substantially until the Immigration Restriction Act was repealed in 1973. Due to the desire of well-to-do Thais to acquire racehorses, the horse buying expeditions would become the first significant link of Thailand to Australia.

Connections between Australia and Thailand developed further with visits of Thai Royal family members. Moreover, in the early 1950s the Colombo Plan is best remembered for sponsoring many Thais (and other Asian students) to study in Australian tertiary institutions. Since 1984 the Australian government regional relation policies gradually moved from aid to trade in the provision of education for overseas students. 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. In 2007-08 Thailand has become the fourth most significant source country for overseas students in Australia. Since 1980s after a new range of onshore GSM visa categories has been established and 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 Thai students to stay in Australia after graduating and the Thai community in Australia has been increasing significantly as a result.

Of immediate interest to researchers have been topics such as the overall economic impact of international students, and investigating the consequences of their presence for educational institutions, collectively or individually. Also of concern have been the labour market effects of permitting international students to work in Australia. However, so far one neglected aspect of research has been the possible connection between a period living as an

international student and subsequent immigration to Australia. My research was designed to examine the evolving relationship between international students and immigration, and address this research gap. In doing so, the results of the present study have the potential to provide a valuable source of information for both Australian and Thai agencies in planning, managing and dealing with transnational migration, particularly migration focussed around higher education.

This research investigated the transition period during which Thai international students become skilled migrants, as well as the way that Thai skilled migrants live in Australia and maintain ties to Thailand. In this research, twenty-five Thai skilled migrants of diverse age, gender, place of birth, marital status, and occupational background generated the core data for the study. They initially came to Australia for further education and then applied for Australian permanent residence after graduating. In addition to the Australian-based research this study, the researcher also undertook interviews of seven families of key informants in Thailand to investigate the migration experience across the geographic range of this diasporic sociality. These investigations were clarified by focusing on the following research questions: (1) Why do many Thai students initially come to Australia and then make a decision to settle in Australia after graduation?; (2) How do the settlement patterns of Thai skilled migrants shape the character of the Thai community in Australia?; (3) How do Thai skilled migrants adjust themselves to Australian society?; and (4) How do Thai skilled migrants maintain ties to the homeland?

The research findings address six major steps in the process of recent Thai skilled migration in Victoria, Australia. Chapters Two to Seven successively explored each of these steps and how various aspects this migration process interacted with one another.

The *first* step (Chapter Two) was to answer the question “Why, in the first place, do many Thai students come to Australia and then make a decision to settle in Australia after graduation?” This research suggests that a demand for overseas education by these former Thai overseas students 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 in 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 the research participants, the demand for overseas education has been driven by the traditional value Thais place on being ‘more western’ (*farang*) and knowing more English. 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.

The *second* step (Chapter Three) of this research was to understand how Thai overseas students negotiate their way through the sense of culture shock to ‘finding their feet’ in Australian society. Life as Thai overseas students in Australia was considered from two aspects: the academically challenging experiences and the personally challenging dimensions of this transition. 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. 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.

The *third* step (Chapter Four) focused on migration decision making. This research proposes that there was a mixture of individual and familial social forces, and personal and familial decision making that explained the motivations of Thai students to come to Australia, and then to want to stay here. The international migration for participants was seen as a social product, not as the sole result of individual decisions made by individual actors. That is, not as the sole result of economic parameters, but rather as an outcome of both economic and socio-cultural factors in interaction. For these skilled migrants, non-economic factors

relating to the independence of their lives in Australia were of greater importance in the migration decision making process and were arguably a critical component in the shifting composition of the Thai skilled migrant flow.

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 emphasised 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. 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. After these participants have become Thai skilled migrants in Australia, the research narrative shifted its focus to understand how these Thai skilled migrants settled and adjusted themselves to Australian multicultural society as well as how these Thai skilled migrants maintained ties to their homeland.

The *fourth* step (Chapter Five) was centred around ways the Thai community in Victoria has an existence and properties that were not reducible to characteristics of its individual members. The research findings show that the Australian-Thai community can be seen as a dynamic meta-network or a continual ongoing process of social networking ranging from interpersonal to organisational ties, and from virtual encounters to real-life interactions. The social order of the Thai community in Melbourne emerges out of the constant patterning and re-patterning of social interactions and relationships. The particular choices and actions of the participants can be seen as instances of these ongoing processes that form the community structure, a structure that is relatively stable but never static. Furthermore, the residential decentralisation of Thai migrants has shaped the character of the Thai community in Melbourne. The defining criterion of the Thai community was elicited by focusing on what Thai people do to, for, and with each other; not where they live. The presence of the Thai

community was perceivable through the emergence of Thai social networks, hundreds of Thai restaurants and various Thai festivals throughout the year. Participants were opportunistic in manipulating ethnic linkages, and associative in developing networks of connections. Networks were interdependent, diverse, and responsive to change, yet cohesive to form a relatively stable community. These Thai skilled migrants were active agents in the development of networking community that contribute to the wider Australian society.

Thai community boundaries were constructed and negotiated by fellow members of the networking webs for purposes of deciding who could be included. The Thai community did not have to be homogeneous in order to be socially cohesive. Rather, the Thai community was a heterogeneous community comprising various Thais who were diverse in many ways but nevertheless shared common purposes: open communication, reciprocity, and trust. In this research, reciprocity refers to the perception that there are acknowledged members of an ongoing network who are mutually responsible to each other. Reciprocal responsibility connotes that network members are seen as valuable resources within the setting, and that the setting responds to the needs of the individuals. People tend to be satisfied when they believe that they can both receive *and* give something of value. This ethos was essential in producing a willingness to cooperate voluntarily and it encouraged behaviours that facilitated productive social interaction. In short, it encouraged Thai people to invest themselves in groups, networks and institutions.

Participants typically had Thai social networks that could be used to connect them with others for various reasons at various times. These Thai skilled migrants had been connected to Thai social networks since the time of their arrival; they have used these networks to construct their own personal worlds and livelihoods. Although networks of many Thais might be concentrated on other Thais, participants also had external contacts that could connect them to broader Australian society and this exposure facilitated network building to non-Thai social sectors. It is not an overly closed or exclusive community. Such interactive mechanisms thus elaborate how the Thai community maintains a sense of discrete Thai-ness yet is inextricably intertwined with the larger setting in which it exists.

The *fifth* step (Chapter Six) discussed how the awareness of social pluralism (which occurs in both contemporary Australia and Thailand) creates a space for Thai culture within Australian society. The connections to Thai ethnic networks persisted even after the cultural contacts of participants were opened widely. This was not as a result of lack of language proficiency or failure to adjust life to the new environment. The Thai community was not ‘ghettoised’ nor one that coalesced around a putative inability to associate with the mainstream society. Rather, the awareness of the value of social pluralism which both Australian and Thai societies provided was arguably of greater importance in the existence and sustainability of the Thai community in Australia.

Thai-ness that was constructed and internalised 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. 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.

The awareness of the multiplicity of Thai-ness stimulated the need to negotiate some common cultural ideas of shared imagination. 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 Thailand or Thai culture, but rather a composite of collective imaginings. This negotiated Thai-ness brought significant cultural layers to the fabric of Australian multicultural society.

The *last* step (Chapter Seven) examined the connections and relationships that continue between Thai skilled migrants in Australia and with their families in Thailand. This 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 institution of monarchy of Thailand continued to be powerful for them in the sense of providing a focal point that brought together Thai people even while overseas. International telephone calls as well as low cost and frequent plane travels have allowed these Thai skilled migrants to have continuous communication within their family. Their connections to their family were not lost in transmigration. Ties to the homeland led these Thai transmigrants to live dual lives; speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and continuing to have regular contact across international borders and between different cultures and social systems. However, multiple attachments did not hamper integration in the country of settlement. On the contrary, attachment to Thai-ness, the Australian-Thai community, and Thailand were most likely to give participants the self-confidence to interact much more dynamically and creatively with the cultural lives in Australian multicultural society.

Although migrants around the globe may have some common experiences, migration itself is a complex and diverse phenomenon. Migrants can be differentiated, such as, by ethnicity, the reason to migrate, the stage of the lifecycle at which they move, and the impact of globalisation that affects population movement. It assumes that migrants act and are acted upon with reference to their socio-cultural locations (Brettell, 2000). A consideration of Thai skilled migration in Australia may offer a better understanding of the process of transnational migration particularly migration focussed around higher education.

The participants of the research project have challenged the Australian assumption (or perhaps stereotype) of the traditional Thai migrants as unskilled, poorly educated, someone who finds English language acquisition difficult, and uncomfortable outside the local Thai community. These Thai people in this research are skilled migrants, they added further degree qualification in Australia, and 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. They select appropriate elements of their Thai-Australian-ness that seem to fit various social occasions they encounter. This permeability between the Thai community and Australian civic society is a significant shift from more traditional patterns of Thai migration.

The participants are not only positioned within an Australian imaginary which they are in fact part of actively shifting to something new, but they are also positioned within a Thai imaginary of what Western or overseas life is like in Australia – that it is very ‘comfortable’, wealthy and luxurious with a high standard of living. As they continued to engage with their home Thai families and communities they necessarily engage with Thai people’s imagined Australia. Indeed, their lived experience in Australia is extraordinary challenging such that participants were often posed the question, with an overseas education higher degree, an English language qualification and the opportunities that will open up in Thailand, why do you want to stay in Australia in an ordinary job? The value of personal choice and independence, which becomes so attractive and compelling to many Thais after they have made some successful adjustment to Australian society, may not make any sense to some of their friends and family who continue to be fully involved in Thai society and culture at home, but it is a powerful decision making factor in the Australian context. Nevertheless, sensing the incomprehension, these Thai skilled migrants explain to their Thai friends and family at home that they stay in Australia because they are making a reasonable income. The fact is, of course, money is not the primary factor to be considered in the social decision making matrix that Thai skilled migrants work through.

Although these recent Thai skilled migrants have integrated themselves into the Australian-Thai community similarly to many traditional Thai migrants, they also participate in significant ways in Australian society more generally – obviously enough at university, but also through paid employment and involvement in various social networks. These Thai skilled migrants have gained many of the pleasures and benefits of integration into the Thai community. However, they do not coalesce due to a putative inability to associate with the

mainstream society. Rather, the public discourse of Australian multiculturalism provides a space for them in contemporary Australia to be both different but also acceptable..

The new (multiple and flexible) Thai migrant identities being formed by these research participants comes from their engagement with the pull of two societies, two homes, Australia and Thailand. How this will develop in the future remains to be seen. For some, the overall balance of commitment and values may lead to resettling in Thailand, but for others, they will further develop their Australian lives. For all of them, their origin and destination cultures are part of who they now are. Working out what that means for themselves and their families will undoubtedly be an ongoing theme in their lives, wherever they live.

Appendix 1 Map of Thailand



Map No.3853 Rev.2 UNITED NATIONS
 July 2009
 Department of Field Support
 Cartographic Section

Appendix 2 Introduction of New Points Test

It is proposed that a new points test for skilled migration visa applications will be introduced on 1 July 2011. It complements the series of reforms the Australian Government announced in February 2010. The new points test is focused on selecting highly skilled people to deliver a more responsive and targeted migration program. It was developed following a review of the current points test, which considered submissions from a variety of experts and the wider Australian community. The new points test balances the different factors that are considered when determining whether someone will be granted a skilled migration visa. It will deliver the best and brightest skilled migrants by emphasising high level qualifications, better English language levels and extensive skilled work experience. The new points test will continue to award points for study in Australia, including regional study, community languages, and partner skills and completing an approved Professional Year. Points will no longer be awarded on the basis of an applicant's occupation, but all applicants must still nominate an occupation on the applicable Skilled Occupation List. It is important to note that the new points test will only apply to one component of the skilled migration program. This change won't affect every type of skilled migration visa and only applies to the following visas.

Subclass 885 Skilled Independent	Subclass 886 Skilled Sponsored
Subclass 175 Skilled Independent	Subclass 487 Skilled Regional Sponsored
Subclass 176 Skilled Sponsored	Subclass 475 Skilled – Regional Sponsored

It is proposed that the new points test will apply to applications made from 1 July 2011, unless the applicant is eligible for transitional arrangements. Transitional arrangements apply to people who, on 8 February 2010 held or had applied for a Temporary Skilled Graduate visa (subclass 485). Until the end of 2012, this group is able to apply for a permanent skilled visa under the points test in effect as at 8 February 2010. Student visa holders who lodge an application for points tested skilled migration from 1 July 2011 will be assessed under the new points test. There are still transitional arrangements which may apply to those students affected by the reforms announced on 8 February 2010. People who held an eligible Student visa on 8 February 2010 still have until the end of 2012 to apply for a Temporary Skilled Graduate visa (subclass 485) under the arrangements in place for that visa as at 8 February 2010. See: www.immi.gov.au/students/_pdf/recent-changes-gsm.pdf

The pass mark is the number of points required to be eligible for skilled migration. The pass mark is a tool that allows for management of the skilled migration program and is always subject to change.

It is expected that the pass mark will be set at 65 points. More information about the new points test is available. See: www.immi.gov.au/skilled/general-skilled-migration/pdf/points-testfaq.pdf If you are in Australia you can also contact the department by telephone. Telephone: 1300 735 683.

New Points Test

Factor	Description	Points
Age	18-24	25 points
	25-32	30 points
	33-39	25 points
	40-44	15 points
	45-49	0 points
English language	Competent English - IELTS 6	0 points
	Proficient English - IELTS 7	10 points
	Superior English - IELTS 8	20 points
Australian work experience in nominated occupation or a closely related occupation	One year Australian (of past two years)	5 points
	Three years Australian (of past five years)	10 points
	Five years Australian (of past seven years)	15 points
Overseas work experience in nominated occupation or a closely related occupation	Three years overseas (of past five years)	5 points
	Five years overseas (of past seven years)	10 points
	Eight years overseas (of past 10 years)	15 points
Qualifications (Australian or recognised overseas)	Offshore recognised apprenticeship AQFIII/IV completed in Australia Diploma completed in Australia	10 points
	Bachelor degree (including a Bachelor degree with Honours or Masters)	15 points
	PhD	20 points
Recognition of Australian Study	Minimum two years fulltime (Australian study requirement)	5 points
Designated language		5 points
Partner skills		5 points
Professional Year		5 points
Sponsorship by state or territory government		5 points
Sponsorship by family or state or territory government to regional Australia		10 points
Study in a regional area		5 points

Appendix 3 Table of key participants' social characteristics (At the time of the interview)

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Place of Birth	Marital Status	No. of Children	Education in Thailand	Engaged in study in Australia	Occupation in Thailand before coming to Australia	Occupation in Australia on the interview day
Natwadee	33	F	Burirum	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Certificate	Employee (Admin staff)	Waitress & Employee in laundry shop
Somjit	33	F	Rayong	Married	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Family business (Admin staff)	Work room manager
Nattawut	29	M	Nakornrasima	Married	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master, PhD	Employee (Computer engineer)	Just resigned from IT job and preparing to set up his own business
Najaree	37	F	Bangkok	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Family business (HR staff)	Blind maker
Prasarn	37	M	Nongkhai	Married	2	Bachelor	ELICOS, Certificate	Employee (Technician)	Chef & his own handicraft business
Jinda	35	F	Pechaboon	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Employee (Accountant)	Accountant
Nimit	37	M	Bangkok	Single	-	Primary school	ELICOS, High school	Student	Retail in VDO shop
Jamrong	32	M	Bangkok	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Employee (Computer staff)	Retail in convenient store
Namtip	32	F	Nakornsrithummarat	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Student	Staff in childcare centre
Narong	27	M	Bangkok	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Student	Receptionist in Spa business
Prakitich	38	M	Samutprakarn	Married	1	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Employee (Computer staff)	Owner of computer business
Saran	35	M	Bangkok	Married	1	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Student	Owner of Thai restaurant
Sumitra	27	F	Bangkok	Single	-	High school	ELICOS, Bachelor, Master	Student	Staff in education services
Apanchanij	32	F	Bangkok	Widow	1	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Employee (Marketing staff)	Staff in education services
Tanapoom	41	M	Bangkok	Widow	2	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Student	Owner of Thai restaurant
Sureeporn	30	F	Pachaboon	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Employee (Auditor)	Just resigned from research analyst and preparing to set up her own business
Pemmapa	30	F	Bangkok	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Family business (Admin staff)	Operations assistant
Nipa	30	F	Chiangmai	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Student	Education counsellor
Kanra	38	F	Bangkok	Married	1	Bachelor	ELICOS, Certificate	Employee (Salesperson)	Housewife
Leela	32	F	Bangkok	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Student	Financial staff
Phanid	30	F	Lumpang	Married	-	Certificate	ELICOS, Certificate	Employee (Waitress in 5 stars hotel)	Salesperson
Prapop	38	M	Bangkok	Married	1	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Associate owner of the pub	Work room manager
Ptiak	32	M	Bangkok	Single	-	Bachelor	ELICOS, Master	Employee (computer staff)	Work contract is dued, looking for job
Bimra	26	F	Chatyapoom	Single	-	High school	ELICOS, Certificate	Employee in factory	Kitchen hand in Thai Restaurant
Pimporn	26	F	Chatyapoom	Single	-	High school	ELICOS, Certificate	Employee in factory	Kitchen hand in Thai Restaurant

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