The Acquisition of Western Values and Intercultural Youth Exchange: An Ethnographic Analysis of Thai Youth in the United States

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ABSTRCT

Using ethnographic research methods carried out over an 18 month period, this study investigates the intercultural adjustment of a group of Thai adolescent exchange students who lived in the United States for one year. The author suggests that the intercultural adjustment process can best be explained as a "synergy" between primary and secondary socialization practices. Associated with the secondary socialization process, the students acquired the following Western values during their year in the United States: Time Management; Expressive Individualism; and The Critical Mind. Upon the students' reentry into Thai society, these newly acquired values led to conflict with many Thai authority figures. Based upon the data findings, the reseacher argues that the intercultural adjustment process may lead to the disintegration of Traditional Thai values.

Introduction

On the eve of the 21st Century, the world is experiencing dynamic forces of change with the accelerating interdependence of economic relations, political decision-making, technological advancement, and cultural identity occurring on a global scale. The creation of fiber optics, fax delivery systems, electronic mail, and the World Wide Web have hastened the pace of change and expanded opportunities for people of diverse cultures to communicate almost instantaneously anywhere in the world.

Postmodern transformations create the potential for conflict. Belief systems which provided cultural stability and continuity for centuries are viewed as incapable of providing guidance in addressing the social pressures caused by the introduction of modern technology and the values and norms associated with it. Ultimately, traditional forces collide with the forces of modernization (See Schleicher 1989).

The youth of the world are perhaps most dramatically affected by this social transformation for it is they who must make sense of the transformational nature of modern life, choose appropriate adaptive strategies, and integrate change into their existing cultural identity. It is from this perspective that intercultural youth exchange may be viewed. How, and to what extent, do adolescents undergo change when thrust into an alien culture? What values and behaviors do they acquire from exposure to the new culture in which they are immersed? What impact does immersion in an alien culture have when the sojourner returns to her native culture? Questions such as these have been the subject of little empirical inquiry.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the synergy between primary and secondary socialization practices and how it affects adolescent sojourners from Thailand. Specifically, I will examine the acquisition of Western values which occurred as a result of the students' secondary socialization in the United States. First, I will present a brief overview of the research methods used in the study. Second, I will provide an analysis of Thai socialization processes. Third, ethnographic data related to the theme "Westernization as an Outcome of Intercultural Adjustment" will be displayed. Finally, implications from the data about the impact of the students' acquisition of Western values from a macro perspective will be discussed.

Presentation of Research Methods

Four populations were the focus of this study: Returnees (RET), Thai students who had participated on the "Intercultural Inc Thailand" (pseudonym) Year Abroad Program to the United States in 1992-1993; Year Program (YP) students who lived in Minnesota and Wisconsin during the 1994-95 academic year; the

Host Families (HF) who hosted these students and "Intercultural Inc" staff and volunteers in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Thailand. All the students were either 17 or 18 during the year they lived in the United States.

The process of data collection occurred over an eighteen month period and was divided into three phases carried out in Thailand and the United States. Phase one of the study was conducted in Thailand over a seven week period in June and July of 1994. Formal and informal semi-structured interviews were undertaken with "Intercultural Inc., Thailand" staff, members of the Board of Directors, and volunteers. Informal observations were made of English language instruction in Thai schools and the classroom behavior of Thai students in their English classes. In addition, formal semi-structured ethnographic interviews were conducted with 20 Returnees (12F, 8M; 12 BGK, 8 Upcountry) of the Year Program 1992-93 to the United States. All interviews were conducted in English. Through these interviews I established patterns associated with the cultural adjustment process as identified by former participants of the exchange program. The Returnees had been placed with host families throughout the United States. These interviews enhanced the generalizability of the research sample and provided a longitudinal dimension to the study.

In addition, audio-taped, ethnographic interviews were conducted with eight YP students (4F, 4M; 4BGK, 3 Upcountry, 1 suburban BGK) who had been selected to participate in the 1994-95 exchange program to the United States and had been placed with host families in the States of Wisconsin and Minnesota. The interviews took place approximately one month before the students' departure for the United States. The interviews were conducted in English to ascertain the existence of a correlation, if any, between language and intercultural adjustment. These interviews were undertaken to acquire the students' motivations and expectations for participating in the exchange program.

Phase two of the study occurred in the United States over an eleven month period from August, 1994 until July, 1995, i.e., the 1994-95 academic school year. Interviews were conducted upon the YP students arrival in August and approximately every two months thereafter during the eleven months they lived with their host family. In total, the YP students were interviewed six times during their stay in the United States. Through these interviews I ascertained the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of the students' adjustment to life in the United States. Coping mechanisms, impressions of US culture and comparisons to life in Thailand were noted. Interviews were also conducted with members of the students' host families. Weekly journals written by the students were collected approximately every two

months. Systematic and informal observations of the students behavior in interpersonal encounters with Americans were also recorded.

Phase three of the study involved a return trip to Thailand in December, 1995. Semi-structured ethnographic interviews were conducted with the YP students to ascertain issues related to their reentry into Thai culture. The interviews focused on the values and benefits the students believed they acquired as a result of their year in the US. With this phase of the research process complete, the entire cycle of the intercultural adjustment process was analyzed.

The Thai Socialization Process

In the course of conducting ethnographic research regarding the intercultural adjustment of Thai adolescents in the United States, it became evident that the intercultural experience can best be explained through the holistic synergy of the primary socialization associated with one's native culture, and the secondary socialization a sojourner acquires in adapting to the cultural norms, values, and behaviors of the host culture.

Concerning the socialization process, Suntaree Komin (1985:170) has stated; "Man in any given society learns and internalizes through socialization, the beliefs, attitudes and values of that society about the desirable goals and appropriate modes of conduct which are, to a certain extent, prescribed by it."

Within the context of the Thai socialization processes, respect for status, obedience and deference to parental authority, and maintaining harmonious social relationships are inculcated to Thai children at a very early age. Mulder (1992) has observed Thai behavior is based on "other directedness" rather than "self-sufficiency."

> *In the socialization process we may find the basis of the perception of the other person. Basic attitudes that are instilled at an early age are **krengjai** (inhibition), **kreengklua** (awe, respectful fear), **khawrop** and **nabthyy** (respect), politeness and obedience, to acceptance of the wisdom of elders and of tradition, recognition, **khun** (goodness that results in obligation) and **katanjuu** (gratefulness), and also the fear that mysterious forces will automatically be activated to revenge infractions against the moral order. Elders are pictured as wise, moral, worthy of respect, and epitomized in the figures of the mother and the **kruu** (teacher) (p.61).*

Klausner (1993) sees Thai parents as being quite permissive with their infant children. However, they exert strict discipline in the early years of the child's life. At four or five years of age "children are inculcated with a sense of duty, obligation, and respect towards parents and elders. There are fixed boundaries within which

acceptable and appropriate behavior is carried out" (p. 320). Fieg (1989) adds that Thai children are not typically taught to think independently or develop individualistic tendencies. He contends that Thai children are taught not to challenge or argue, particularly with a person who is a teacher or someone in a senior position. He uses the term "nonassertive individualism" (p.35) to describe Thai hierarchical social patterns of inequality and respect for status. Fieg suggests Thai children are socialized "to be obedient, polite, and subdued, so that they mesh smoothly into their own hierarchical social fabric" (p.36).

According to Klausner (1993), conflict avoidance is a critical Thai cultural trait. He believes,

> *one endeavors to keep personal relationships and social interactions at a superficial, pleasant, emotionally neutral level to preserve an aura of emotional contentment. To maintain emotional distance and detachment, to achieve a sense of emotional equilibrium, is highly prized* (p.392).

Interviews conducted with Thai English teachers in several Thai schools stressed the issue of respect as an important Thai trait inculcated to Thai children during the pre-adolescent period. One teacher remarked, "it is the obligation for young Thai people to pay respect to the older people; their parents, teachers. Even if they don't believe or trust them, they have to listen. It is impolite to argue with the older people." Another teacher suggested the Thai socialization process contributed to the values of respect and obedience by asserting that Thai teenagers are not very open with their feelings because "they are taught to be modest, to be calm and respectful. So, if they don't like anything, they avoid by walking away or sometimes they keep quiet, forget it or say never mind. "

Associated with the cultural trait of displaying respect is the concept of *krengjai.* Klausner (1993) has written extensively about: the concept

> *... the word has the meaning of being reluctant to impose upon, to have consideration for. Krengjai must refer to an attitude toward someone else. In Thai society with its emphasis on 'social place' as expressed in elder-younger, subordinate-superior, patron-client relationships, krengjai is most often, an attitude displayed towards one higher in rank, social status or age scale. It is diffidence, deference, and consideration merged with respect. Krengjai is also observed in one's reticence to seek help or ask for something desired from a superior unless it is absolutely necessary* (p. 258-259).

Komin (1991) suggests that the closest meaning of the term is "to be considerate, to feel reluctant to impose upon another person, to take another person's feeling (and ego) into account, or to take every measure not to cause discomfort or inconvenience for another person" (p. 136) . It is this "reluctance to impose" which has the potential to cause serious misunderstandings in intercultural contact between Thais and Americans.

This sociocultural context is important to understanding the dynamic impact the process of secondary socialization had upon the students while they lived in the United States. As a result of the Thai students' exposure to a variety of socializing agents in the United States, the values, norms, and behaviors acquired through their primary socialization in Thailand were transformed. The following ethnographic data identify a substantial outcome associated with this transformation; the inculcation of Western values and behaviors.

Westernization as an Outcome of Intercultural Adjustment

While in the United States, the Thai students were exposed to a variety of agents of secondary socialization; host family members, American students at school, teachers, and various forms of mass media and popular culture. Each served as powerful influences that led to significant normative and behavioral change among the students. In an analysis of data collected during their eleven month stay in the US, the following themes associated with the students' acquisition of Western values emerged: (1) Time Management, (2) Expressive Individualism, and (3) The Critical Mind. A brief overview of each theme provides important insights into the psycho-cultural dimensions of the intercultural adjustment process.

Time Management

The students repeatedly commented in interviews that as a result of their experiences in the US, they became more punctual, organized, and began to think more about their future. Students claimed they gained benefits, as one student noted, of the "American personality, like punctual, organized. The organized person is one who has a calendar and makes a plan of everything." Punctuality was especially noticeable among the Returnees. For example, in the process of data collection in Thailand, not one of the informants I interviewed was late for an appointment. This was quite remarkable given the *mai pen rai* (not to worry) attitude of Thais concerning time, which Fieg (1989) has referred to as "a slow-moving pool, which they can gradually walk around" (p.23), and the traffic congestion in Bangkok where many of the interviews took place.

In their interactions with Americans, the students learned that time is valued in an American cultural context. For example, one student claimed, "I learned the value of time in making appointments." Another noted that, "When I spent the year over there, I got a lot of good things from American culture. <such as?> Before I left, I was always late. Over there, they are really strict on time." Another commented that as a result of his year in the United States he learned time management, "I can manage time better."

Expressive Individualism

Another aspect of Western values which the students adopted was to more freely express themselves in interpersonal encounters. The students replied that they became more open. Many stressed they became more verbal and behaviorally expressive as a result of living in the United States. For example, some of the female students claimed they became more open in their gender relations in the United States, openly touching boys. One female student stated "like in America, when I leave my friends, if boys, I give them a hug. In Thailand, this is not good for old people and parents." Another stated that as a result of her year in the US she was "willing to say whatever I am thinking. I am willing to show off." One "bad" affect of her year abroad is that she "touches guys first."

The willingness to express oneself seems to have been a significant issue with respect to the students reentry into Thai society. For example, a female student replied, "Here (Thailand) I have to listen to older people when they talk. Over there I don't have to care about people." Another student claimed "My attitude is not the same. Before I went to the US, I was very calm. Now I am a very funny person." One Returnee noted that as a result of problems she had with her first host family she learned that in the future, "I know I have to talk. . . I have to talk when I have problems with a person, not keep quiet like in Thailand".

The Thai students also displayed significant growth in their sense of individuality. For example, when I first met the YP students in Thailand the month prior to their departure to the United States, I was struck by their reserve, politeness, and shy demeanor. The students were very respectful, many of the interviews were conducted while they were still wearing their school uniforms adding to the image of respect. The boys all had short, cropped hair, the girls wore no make-up and little jewelry. When I met them for the first interview, all the students greeted me with a *wai* out of respect for my status.

At the end of their sojourn in the United States, the YP students were more expressive and casual; their dress had become increasingly less formal with many

wearing jeans, t-shirts, sweatpants and shorts. The boys had all grown their hair into a poneytail. The girls were wearing make-up, some had dyed or permed their hair, others doubled pierced their ears and they all wore jewelry. When asked what the student group looked like upon their return to Thailand after a year in the US, a YP student reflected "when they came back? ah, (voice tone raises, big smile, sways body back and forth) they are all different, many styles dress, shorts, new hairdos, how fat they are. Some girls, long hair, some short, dye a color; red or whatever. The student added "Some girl dye her hair yellow and her mom said "I don't like this color, change it the way it was."

The Thai students' interpersonal mannerisms also changed. The reserve and respect they demonstrated in Thailand was still evident but after their year in the United States they had developed an aura of self-confidence and informality in their relationship to me. The Thai emphasis on body status, particularly regarding the feet was no longer evident. The students no longer seemed to be cognizant of the positioning of their feet and in one interview, a student sat back in her chair and clearly displayed the bottoms of her feet to me as we talked. I also observed students giving their host parents hugs in public. Most important, the traditional *wai* which the students commonly used when they first arrived in the United States was no longer used when the students greeted me. By the end of the year they simply said "hi" and left it at that.

One student noticed that some of the Thai students who lived near him in the United States became more "Americanized." For example, he related an incident in which he ran into one of the other Thai students at an organization function. He wrote in his diary about the encounter;

> *One of my friends has changed dramatically! She is from CM. She used to be quiet and shy girl. But I met her yesterday with make-up and curly hair and fashionable dress. I was just shocked. She spoke faster and didn't look like my old friend at all. I met a teacher from Thailand too. So we had to recall our Thai manner again, which is hard. One girl forget to **wai** and we talked Thai mixed with English. Before we went home, Thai girl came to me and bye and gave me a hug. I think she forgot because Thai people are not suppose to hug in public.*

According to one student's Thai English teacher, upon her return to Thailand she had become "Americanized. She shrugs her shoulders in a 'I don't care attitude': it may hurt people around her. She's a good student. Sometimes she expects a lot from other students, sometimes she is not ready to share with other students."

Hansel (1993) has suggested exchange students who return to their native culture after a long-term sojourn abroad, experience a period of readjustment in which they experience an identity crisis; a feeling of detachment from the host culture they just left, and the native culture to which they have just returned.

For some of the students, returning to Thailand meant having to deal with a period of alienation in which they either didn't understand aspects of Thai culture they once took for granted, or people they came into interpersonal contact with did not understand the types of changes they incurred as a result of their sojourn to the United States. Either way, the students felt they did not fit and were somehow an outsider in their native culture.

For example, some students felt that their new appearance made them stand out as different from the average Thai teenager. One Returnee stated, "I felt like a freak. I dress different from other people, my hair and stuff." While another Returnee stressed,

> *I feel kind of different. People look at me differently. People remarked 'you dress weird.' I dressed with t-shirts and shorts. Here people wear everything long, long pants. People looked at me differently. When I wear torn jeans, they look at me differently. I didn't care. My dress is changing as time goes by. I change back.*

Some YP students noted that their new found independence did not bode well with the protective Thai parent they had been away from for a year. One student stated "I always argue with my mom and I think she wrong and I right and I try to explain to her and she say she know more than me. I think she wrong but she always think she right." The student also remarked she experienced problems with her independence when she returned to Thailand. She explained she had developed a "high temper, how you say? That's not good because we have to listen to parents, like, I mean Thai people respect their elder, the adults. Sometimes they wrong and I have to tell them its not right because it make me not respect the elder, not a good girl, they always say that."

Another student claimed her relationship with her parents became confrontational when she returned to Thailand. She responded, "Usually Thai children (imitates a wai) listen to their parents, everything they say is right. Me now, I don't listen to my parents. When I come back, I had a lot of arguments with my mom. . . I didn't want her to tell me to do that, do this." Another student when asked how the year affected her replied,

I think its very (smack lips, looks to right) meaningful for me. I can adopt everything there. (hesitates, searches for words, tells me to 'hang on' as she thinks, laughs and smiles) A lot of things I learned in America. So many hard times I overcame. The experience made me stronger. My grandfather is old fashioned. He thinks I went to America and he thinks my habits have changed. <how have they changed?> I was not good. I am lazy. He's strict, very strict. Everything is strict, not flexible. Its Chinese people. (inaudible) I don't know maybe I am too lazy and I don't work when he tells me. He says 'do this'. I say wait a second. So he tried to teach me, to speak to me. But then he just kept quiet. Sometimes he can't stand it and he talks to me, but not much now.

A Returnee asserted that his parents 'don't understand my attitude. They think I changed. I can say what I want to say and they think this is bad for Thai kids to say to parents and old people (thrusts right hand forward, and voice tone raises, speech rate increases with excitement).

The Critical Mind

Part of the process of readjustment to Thai culture involved the development of the "critical mind" where the students began to view their culture differently after being outside it for a year. For example, a student claimed when he returned he had

Some fear that I change myself to Thai culture; the way you talk to older people, way you express feelings is different. The way you communicate with friends, like in the US guys and guys do not touch each other. Here, guys touch each other but not girls. You have to be careful about this. Thai culture is complicate and when you do things, you have to to be careful of what they think when you say. Be more polite to older people.

Another remarked that his reentry into Thailand was,

Oh, a little weird because ah, you not dressed like use to. Change to this kind of culture. Respect old people, teacher, parent. Here (US) everyone equal, talk to teacher like friend. Hard thing to do a little bit. Sometimes I forget to talk to teachers politely. Hard to cut hair short, wear uniform, its a pain. Friends were in college. The culture, sometimes I can't stand it. Its too much; old people expect me to talk politely. I don't want to do it but I have to do it. So here, (US) I made my own judgement. I more independent, more grown up, more adult. There, no, no you can't do that. Its harderst thing to change back. Sometimes I do argument with some of my relatives, I never do this before.

For many females, being back in Thailand meant giving up the personal freedom they had become accustomed to in the United States. According to one student,

> *Um, I can't be free like I was in America. When I was in America, I could do anything. Not like in Thailand. Go out with friends, come back home late or something like that. But inside I don't do but I could do that because my host family allowed me to do that. Now I have to keep studying and studying, and have to meet new friends and new environment. I mean my class and all things, so I can't do things like I was in America.*

The "critical mind" involved a conscious reappraisal of the values, behaviors, and norms acquired through the students' primary socialization as children in Thailand. One student reflected on the conservative attitudes found among many Thais.

Um, I think the people here are, they're closed, not open. They're not like themselves, they try to be like someone else. People in America are just themselves. Thais don't have so much self-confidence. See an actor, they try to act like him. In Thailand, they want to be normal, like everyone else. Try to be like the same, like everyone else. Go around Siam Square, everyone wears the same clothes, bell bottoms. A girl, Tata Young, a singer, half Thai, half American, have you seen her on TV? She has short hair. When she came out, everyone buys these jeans just like her. There are not a lot of leaders here. In US, everyone can be a leader. Here only certain people can be leaders. Most of them just follow what everyone do. They not try to do anything themselves. In my high school in Thailand, its always the same people who are leaders, 1-12 grade.

YP students responded that being back in the Thai educational system was a difficult aspect of their readjustment to Thai culture. Many students expressed frustration similar to a student who remarked "teachers, it was a pain. Mostly I force it back." Other students were critical of the lack of flexibility and technology in Thai schools. One student noted "I went to teacher to see if I could postpone test because I just arrived from US, they didn't help me at all. In the Physics class in US, if I am sick and they let me make up anytime I want." He added "There are no labs here. I like physics and chemistry, only two labs the whole year. Study 18 chapters, one lab is not enough. US, five labs in each chapter. Here, have midterm after five chapters. In US, six chapters for the whole year. Here you got to know everything."

According to one student her experience in school in the United States "make me hate Thai studying, study system of Thailand, especially university and all the traffic jam, pollution. I am stuck with traffic jams and have to study hard. I don't like it." She continued,

I am not sure what it is, if the university or just Thailand. From university to high school in America and back to university, it seems so different from freedom. I got to study hard, we just pass test last week and I have to study 2-3 weeks before the test. Sometimes it too difficult, too deep and when you grow up, you doesn't use it at all. I think its crazy. I've talked to friends and we agree, its stupid. Over there, I got more freedom. I can choose the subjects over there. Over here, the first year, you can't choose.

Students also began to question the Thai cultural trait of *krengjai* and how it was constraining their sense of independence. According to one student, *"krengjai* causes me not to show what I want or feel. It causes you to act different from what you want and you get bad feelings." The student added that when she returned to Thailand she questioned why she had to continue to *krengjai*. As a teenager, she stressed she is constantly bound by this trait. Accordingly, when she returned she stated, *"krengjai,* always *krengjai* and it makes you not yourself. I can't stand *krengjai,* why do I have to *krengjai?"*

Discussion

As the data above clearly illustrates, the "critical mind" represented the most dynamic adoption of the Western value system: an independent capacity to think critically. As such, the students began to critically analyze fundamental aspects of Thai culture; the hierarchical social system and the respect for authority which allows the system to function in all social interaction. Other theorists have reached similar conclusions about Thai students who study abroad. (See Frieg 1989; Phillips 1987) For example, Phillips (1987) has observed that a common characteristic of Thais who have studied abroad was their "diffuse sense of dissatisfaction with Thai society" (p. 189) which emanated from having to give up the freedom they had experienced abroad and readapting to family and class obligations in Thailand.

An important dimension of the "critical mind" was the students questioning of institutions that perpetuate Thai values; the family, school, the political and economic systems. After a year abroad many of the students experienced a process of critical reflection in which they began to question the viability of their role and status in Thai culture.

The data from this study suggest that in the process of acquiring Western values, traditional Thai values may have been compromised, at least in the short term. Past studies of Thai student sojourners acquiring Western values have not been definitive. Berry (1967) noted that Thai university students he studied in the United

States were influenced by American pragmatism and incurred some alienation upon their reentry to Thai culture. Palmer (1972) came to a different conclusion suggesting the Thai university students in his case study "came as Thai- and returned as Thai" (p. 317).

The data from this study suggest the Thai students adopted specific elements of American culture which they found attractive and/or useful. Such Western traits as punctuality, expressive individualism, and the creation of critical thinking skills were appealing to these students. Moreover, their changed appearance was an important manifestation of the Western values that appealed to them. Similar to Berry's students, the students in this sample also experienced a degree of alienation when they returned to Thailand. Of particular importance was their display of individualistic attitudes which led them to question traditional conduits of authority, ie, their parents, elders, and teachers.

Thanaphum (1980) has observed that Thai society is undergoing significant changes toward Western values which is affecting the Thai family structure. He states, "young people now demand more freedom, express more needs, and struggle for greater independence. Teenagers have become not only more assertive or social, but much more aware of themselves and their personal identities." (p. 489)

Mulder (1992) has theorized that one of the most dynamic influences changing traditional Thai society is the influence of Western ideas and notions of modern knowledge. According to Mulder the result is the creation of

> ...an educated elite capable of producing new ideas that challenge the legitimacy of the existing order. *Such changing ideas and radically new views of society will generally develop from those who are intellectually mobile, from students, intellectuals, and other people in contact with outside ideas and perceptions.* (p. 10) (My emphasis added,).

It is clearly evident that "Intercultural Inc. Thailand's" Mission is based in part on an economic development framework. As such, the intercultural exchange program to Western industrialized countries can be seen as an opportunity to groom a social elite well versed in the values and behaviors of the West. For example, the following excerpts from "Intercultural Inc Thailand" 1994 Annual Report are indicative of the role that the Year Program Abroad is expected to play in Thailand's future modernization efforts:

Thailand itself is a rapidly changing country. From a Developing nation to a Newly Industrialized Country, there has been economic, social, environmental and political change. These changes have affected traditional Thai values and customs. "Intercultural Inc" Thailand has an important role to play in our changing nation. It is through education that we can hope to increase the awareness of our people on how these changes are impacting on our society. Education will enable Thai people to view themselves as a part of the Global community, to see that what we do in Thailand will affect other countries, in order to improve our own. . . "Intercultural Inc" Thailand can assist in the process of change by providing intercultural learning opportunities, by providing information and by providing channels for communication so enabling people from vastly different backgrounds to realise their differences and similarities.

Some Thai scholars theorize that intercultural exchanges may play an important role in Thailand's economic development plans for the future. For example, Sippanondha Ketudat (1990) participating in an anticipatory futures research study by Robert Textor, noted that in an optimistic scenario of Thailand's future:

... person-to-person contact is the kind that is most likely to produce changes in attitudes and values that might eventually add up to culture change-for these foreigners directly and interactively model types of behavior that are in many ways sharply different from traditional Thai ways. While all foreigners doubtless have some degree of influence, it would appear that the most influential are the Japanese, other East Asians and Americans (p. 54).

Likewise, several theorists (Berry 1967; Kriengkraipetch and Smith 1992; Mulder 1992) note that an enduring quality of Thai culture has been its historical propensity to integrate only those ideas from other cultures which will in some way benefit Thailand. This is particularly true with respect to technological skills (see Frieg 1989; Palmer 1972). However, whether traditional Thai cultural institutions have the capability to withstand the continuous onslaught of Western ideas transmitted through the mass media and the globalization of economic relations, is a matter of debate.

For example, Ratanakul (1989) asserts Thailand has become economically and technologically dependent on Western industrial countries and the groups who benefit most from this dependency may become divorced from Thai cultural traditions. As Westernization progresses the likelihood of a dichotomy emerging between traditional value structures and modern values increases. This dichotomy

would be most notable between rural and urban areas (see Klausner 1993), groups tied to information age knowledge and global capital versus those tied to the informal economic sector and other areas of declining or stagnant economic opportunity (see Chotana and Pongsudhirak 1993), and between the younger generation which has more exposure to Western influences and their elders (see Sirivunnabood 1989).

Kriengkraipetch and Smith (1992) see Western style individualism as particularly upsetting to the established Thai social order.

> *Competition for material gain and privileged status has become fierce and almost uncontrollable. In this unsettling process of change, while people are intensely jostling for more elbow room, the traditional Thai concept of accomodation and group solidarity seems to have become one of the first casualties. The Western brand of individualism, which people see in movies and on television, rather than the accomodation and group solidarity, would seem to be a more efficient way of entering this new world of competition. And yet Western individualism runs counter to many of the other traditional Thai values and beliefs that are still prevalent. This dilemma between Western individualism and Thai group solidarity, is but one facet of deep-seated conflicts between traditions and modernity in which Thailand is helplessly caught (p. 218).*

Komin (1985) notes that with increasing economic opportunities in Thailand, many Thais are practicing a set of values that are more self-centered and competitive, at the expense of traditional values which stress concern for other people and community spirit. According to Kulawat (1988) "economic growth and globalization are also influencing our social attitude. While economic growth brings more money, globalization increases cultural distribution. And with the money we buy a kind of life we see in Western films" (p. 59).

Conclusion

Recent projections of economic growth in Asia by Western business interests have identified the 21st Century as one of Asian economic dominance (see Tanzer 1996; Naisbett 1996). In a significant departure from this perspective (Greider 1997; see chapter 15) asserts that the integration of emerging economies like Thailand into the global capitalist economy, has a deleterious impact on its national identity, disrupting the social fabric of tradition. Recent economic troubles in Thailand resulting in the International Monetary Fund bailout of the Thai economy will most certainly exacerbate the dichotomies within Thai society.

The inculcation ot Western values by these Thai students creates a need for researchers to investigate several areas of inquiry in the field of youth exchange and study abroad programs between Thailand and the West. First, is the adoption of Western values among students from Thailand more pervasive than the adoption of traditional or collective values by students from the United States who sojourn to Thailand? Second, is the adoption of Western values among Thai students transitory or permanent? Finally, do intercultural exchanges contribute to the breakdown of cultural traditions? Previous research has generally concluded that the outcome of youth exchange is a positive experience which enhances intercultural understanding and "global peace" (Bachner, Zeutschel & Shannon 1993; Gerner, Perry, Moselle, & Archbold 1992; Hansel & Grove 1986; Hansel 1988; Wilson 1993). Based on the data from this sample of Thai students, it appears the transformation that results from a sojourn also has potentially deleterious sociocultural effects.

As Thailand moves closer to full integration in the world economy exchange students represent a critical link to information age technologies. The values they adopt in their encounters with the West, however, must be seen in a larger socio-cultural context. Past research on adolescent exchange programs have failed to recognize this important point. Thus, future studies must begin to focus on the synergy between primary and secondary socialization and the impact that secondary socializing agents have upon the sojourner's native cultural values.

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