Transnationalism, Family Life, and Wellbeing: Opportunities and Challenges for Thai Marriage Migrants in the UK

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature……………………………………………………………………….

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Thesis summary

This thesis aims to identify opportunities and challenges of Thai marriage migrants in the UK in the context of transnational migration. In-depth, semi-structure interviews with 31 Thai marriage migrants were conducted to gain insights into their lived experiences. By identifying opportunities and challenges facing Thai women in the UK, this thesis contributes original knowledge on Thai women's post-migratory practices, cross-border connections, and wellbeing. I argue that cross-border connections play a crucial role in Thai marriage migrants' experiences and wellbeing in the host country. However, these connections are not static and can be strengthened or weakened depending on women's changing life circumstances.

I explore Thai women's engagement in the home and beyond through four empirical components. First, I examine Thai women's social network formation and exchange of social capital with their co-ethnics and local people. Essentially, how women strategically use their social networks and exchange their social capital have important impacts on their wellbeing. Second, I explore the relationship of Thai women and homeland-state-religion organisations through a case study of a Thai temple in London. Here, I investigate how visiting the temple influences the maintenance of cross-border links of Thai marriage migrants and their wellbeing. I also examine how women partake and interact with the temple's activities and social groups. Third, I observe issues of everyday negotiations in Thai-British families, child-rearing decisions, and family aspirations, to discover how transnational practices permeate the private sphere of the family. Last, I focus on women's personal perceptions of opportunities and challenges they face while living in the UK. Employment, improved financial situation, access to welfare, and being in a more 'liberating' society are viewed as prominent opportunities. Whilst deskilling, pressure from natal family, lack of social capital, family disagreement, domestic abuse, and adjustment to a new society are perceived as main challenges for Thai marriage migrants in the UK.

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List of Abbreviations

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

CEFR Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

DSI Department of Special Investigation

ICTs Information and Communication Technologies

MFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MSDHS Ministry of Social Development and Human Security

NHS National Health Service

NGO Non-Governmental Organisation

NSO National Statistical Office

TWN4UK Thai Women Network in the United Kingdom

TWNE Thai Women Network in Europe

Chapter 1

Introduction

In October 2016, only one month after I arrived in the UK to continue my postgraduate studies, I received the news of the passing of King Bhumibol of Thailand. Highly revered in the 70 years of his reign, his death shook the nation. Thai people were in national bereavement. The mourning sentiment rippled to Thai people in every corner of the world, not only Thai people in Thailand. Only a few days after the King's passing, a group of Thai students in Brighton arranged a candlelight vigil in front of Brighton's Royal Pavilion in remembrance of the late King. The news spread quickly. Not only did Thai students attended, but there were also a number of Thai people from Brighton and the vicinity who joined the event. I went there with my fellow students and discovered that there were many Thai people in this area, especially women. Thai women brought their children to the mourning ceremony as well. The atmosphere was grim. However, many women seemed to know each other as they greeted and had conversations. We quickly introduced ourselves to each other and some women introduced their friends to. I had the chance to talk to some of them. I even arranged another rendezvous with one of the women. I was a bit surprised by how easy Thai people abroad connect.

Women and their cross-border connections has always been a research interest of mine, especially Thai women as they are a dominant group in transnational marriages. Although my previous research (Chuenglertsiri, 2012) focused on identity and belonging of Thai women migrants in Sweden, I had yet to explore the deeper aspects of their social life and wellbeing. In the United Kingdom, despite being one of the most popular European destinations for Thai marriage migrants, there is limited knowledge on Thai marriage migrants. After spending time observing Thai marriage migrants in the UK and their interactions with people and the society, I developed research questions to concentrate not only on cross-border connections, but also on the lived experiences of Thai marriage migrants and what kinds of opportunities and challenges they encounter after they settle in the UK.

Recent literature on Thai women's transnational marriage has shifted focus from studying the motivations and unequal distribution of wealth in Thailand, which results in the motivation for Thai women from poorer areas to choose transnational marriage as a way

out of poverty, to women's aspirations and their lived experiences, negotiations and transformations as agents of transnational migration (Angeles and Sunanta, 2009; Charoensri, 2014; Fresnoza-Flot, 2017, 2018; Jongwilaiwan and Thompson, 2013; Lapanun, 2013; Mix and Piper, 2003; Plambech, 2009; Statham, 2019; Sunanta and Angeles, 2013; Suksomboon, 2008; Tosakul, 2010; Trupp and Butratana, 2016; Webster and Haandrikman, 2014). However, most of these works still emphasise the experiences of women from Isan (North-Eastern region), which is the most economically deprived region of Thailand, or on women who transitioned from sex workers to transnational wives. We still have limited knowledge on the impact of transnational marriage on women who are from other socio-economic strata and other regions of Thailand. They may have different perceptions on their experiences and motivations to participate in transnational marriage and adopt different strategies in making their family life in host countries. There are few, although increasing, studies that shed light on Thai women's lives in countries of destination (Charoensri, 2014; Fresnoza-Flot, 2017, 2018; Hedman et al., 2009; Jongwilaiwan and Thompson, 2013; Kanchanchitra and Chuenglertsiri, 2020; Mix and Piper, 2003; Plambech, 2009; Ruankaew, 2009; Suksomboon, 2008; Trupp and Butratana, 2016; Webster and Haandrikman, 2014). This thesis, therefore, contributes to the field of migration by studying opportunities and challenges of Thai marriage migrants in the UK from women with diverse socio-economic backgrounds and age groups to stimulate discussions on non-homogeneous experiences of female marriage migrants in Europe.

This thesis will focus on the lives of Thai women after engaging in transnational marriage migration and settling down in the destination country. It will further investigate the building up and breaking down of transnational connections of Thai marriage migrants in the UK by observing different facets of their lives, from their interactions with various groups of people and areas, to negotiations in their households. It will also elaborate on women's wellbeing through examination of the perceived opportunities and challenges they encounter throughout the course of migration and building a family life in the UK.

1.1 More than just 'Thai brides': Thai women as active agents of transnational migration

Despite the previously dominate discourse of mail-order brides and victims of trafficking, recent work on Thai women and transnational marriage point out that Thai women are active agents in global migration as they make decisions and strategic life plans throughout the course of their migration. Angeles and Sunanta (2009) investigate the role of transnational wives from the North-Eastern region of Thailand (Isan) in sending remittances to their family as they are expected to play the role of 'dutiful daughters'. Women in the North-East of Thailand are bounded with the role of nurturer to their kin, family, and community. Transnational marriage helps women to fulfil their filial commitment to their natal family. Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) conducted a survey in 2003-2004 in Thailand's North-Eastern provinces and found that around 15,000 women were married or attached in some manner to foreign men, mainly from the United States and Western European countries. Every year, these women sent remittances of approximately 1,464 million baht (US$44,360,000) to their families in Thailand and spent a further 77,200 baht (US$ 2,340) per month during yearly visits to Thailand with their husbands (p. 550). Angeles and Sunanta (2009) argue that the Thai government's focus on the economic contribution of Thai marriage migrants is inadequate and ignores the changes these women bring to their location of origin. Women bring with them new skills such as language skills and internet using skills to their home village. *'Mia farangs'* (foreigner's wives) are transnational migrants who maintain close ties with their families in the villages through regular visits, phone calls, money remittances, and religious donations (p.568).

Angeles and Sunanta's work is an important study presenting knowledge of the relation of Thai women and transnational marriage. However, the situation of Thai women's marriage migration, assumed to be a victim of poverty, has changed. Women from the central and other regions have increasingly joined the transnational marriage scape (Ruenkaew, 2009). Women who have a higher educational background and higher income are also becoming transnational brides. Ruenkaew (2009) explains that, previously, Thai women who participated in transnational marriage to Germany were from two main areas: agriculture and prostitution. These women's biography can be categorised in three groups: (a) single mothers, (b) commercial sex workers for foreign men and (c) young unmarried women affected by relative economic deprivation searching

for economic and social advancement (p.23). But recently, these categories no longer constitute Thai migrant women in Germany. The changing pattern of Thai women migrants begs for the more research on the lived experience of women from different backgrounds and different aspirations. The perpetual view of Thai women migrants as passive victims of trafficking and mail-order brides ignores women who come from various socio-economic backgrounds.

Studying marriage migrants from diverse backgrounds also raises questions about notions of 'hypergamy'. Constable (2005) criticises the concept of 'global hypergamy' which assumes that women seek to gain better financial and social position through marriage, known as 'marrying up'. The term hypergamy ignores the fact that sometimes men are married to women who have higher education and economic positions than themselves (p.10). Moreover, not all marriages of women to foreign husbands are 'marrying up', there are situations where women have found out that their living conditions are not better, or even worse, after getting married to their foreign husbands. The conditions where women find themselves worse-off after getting married to foreigners is called 'paradoxical hypergamy' (Trupp and Butraratana, 2016). Trupp and Butraratana (2016) study the lives of Thai marriage migrants in Austria. Conducting surveys with 85 women, they find that 60 percent of their respondents strongly agreed that marrying Austrian husbands improves their living conditions. However, around 15 percent strongly disagreed. Their study shows that the common problems of Thai marriage migrants in Austria are low wages and lack of German language skills. Some respondents reported that their husband prohibited them in finding jobs, concerned that their wives would work in massage parlours or bars. While the majority of their sample achieved economic betterment, there were some cases that experienced economic downward mobility and received 'reverse remittances' from their family in Thailand to financially support their Thai-Austrian family in Austria (p. 102-3).

Not only do women experience economic downturn, some women and their Western partners also confront prejudice and discrimination while living in a Western society. For example, Hedman et al. (2009) observes the discursive representation of Thai-Swedish couples in the Swedish daily press. They found that Thai-Swedish marriages are portrayed as a 'social problem' in general, and an intersection of various power structures such as gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity and class which mutually constitute 'otherness' of Thai-Swedish couples. Furthermore, Hedman et al. (2009) point out that social

problems are usually portrayed by the Swedish press as individual rather than structural problems, which is the press's market strategy to increase their sales. Stereotypes thus are reinforced through a universalised and essentialised image of Thai-Swedish couples (Hedman et al. 2009, p. 34). From their analysis of the Swedish press, Hedman et al. found that the relationships between Swedish men and Thai women are at times presented as unequal and in different power positions. Swedish press also highlighted Thai women as poor, racialised, oppressed and sexually deviant from the Swedish norm and Thai-Swedish couples were discursively constructed as 'the Other' (p. 38-9). Thai women were also ascribed to the sex industry and were subject to sexual objectification by Swedish tourists who went to Thailand for sex tourism (p.40). Aside from the printed press, recently there have been many presentations of Thai women in the mass media such as television shows, news and documentaries. Most of these portrayed Thais in relation to the sex trade (in massage parlors, for example). Television shows depict Thailand as one of the most desirable holiday destinations for Swedes, however, Thai sex tourism is often brought up when tourism is mentioned in Thailand.

Similarly, in the Danish context, Plambech (2009) mentions themes which characterise the discourse of Thai mail-order brides in Danish and international settings: First, women are considered as victims of illegal trafficking. The situation of foreign women marrying Western men provokes such perceptions. Second, Thai women are perceived as victims of violence. Third, women immigrants are perceived as having "burnt all their bridges", where they have cut all ties with their homeland when moving to other countries. However, Plambech argues that women in her study maintain social networks and connections with their families in Thailand (p. 33).

Jessica Mai Sims' report (2008) also demonstrates that marriage migration does not always lead to better livelihoods for Thai women. Her work shows that Thai women in the UK and their British husbands are the target of stereotypes and the discourse of mail-order brides is still prevalent in British society thanks to mainstream media (e.g. the depiction of Ting Tong Macadangdang, the Thai mail-order bride, in the TV programme 'Little Britain', news and articles on Thai wives and Thai sex workers, etc.). Thai women are not only victims of stereotypes and prejudice but also their husbands who were accused of being in an immoral relationship with women who are assumed to be 'sex workers'. The experience of stereotypical incidents leads women to adopt a strategy to promote 'real Thai culture' to counter negative prejudicial comments by attempting to

present a 'positive image' such as Thai dance, massage and cuisine in multicultural festivals (p.16). Sims also finds that some women expressed concerns of domestic violence among Thai-British couples. Some women are more vulnerable than others as they have limited language skills and knowledge, thus have limited ability to seek help. Moreover, some women only know their husband and have no social network in the UK and have no access to public funds after separating from their husbands (p. 12).

While other academic work focusses on the motivation of women to join in cross-border marriage, Tosakul (2010) offers an important insight by linking cross-border marriage migration with connections of migrants to their homelands. Her study looks at experiences of village women from North-Eastern Thailand and their Western partners. She argues that local cultures are still upheld in the stream of global transformations. Moreover, Isan women who are married to Western husbands and live abroad still maintain strong ties and a sense of belonging with their home village, and global/local relations do not disrupt the local cultures in the global context (p. 179). Tosakul additionally argues that economic motivation is not the sole driver for women to participate in a transnational marriage. To gain more fruitful insight, she examines the social interactions of various cultural and philosophical backgrounds of intercultural couples (p. 187). Tosakul discovers that North-Eastern women who move to Western countries face new cultural thinking and practices. The interaction of different cultures urges these women to "consciously reflect on their conventional views and practices of gender relations, marriage, and sexuality in comparison with emerging new ideas and practices" (p. 181). Tosakul's work coincides with the findings of my previous research on Thai women migrants in Sweden, which shows that the dynamic of identity constitution can also be seen in relation to negotiations between different sets of values that Thai women face in their daily lives. Keeping their feet in two countries, Thai women are exposed to various sets of values which are contesting with each other. Some women compare the Thai notion of a good woman as 'sweet, gentle and delicate' vis-à-vis the Swedish notion of gender equality. They reported to work around these different values and negotiate their identities while in the context of Swedish society (Chuenglertsiri, 2012).

Aside from economic contributions to their home country, Suksomboon (2008) show in her study of Thai-Dutch couples that social remittances are also a vital aspect in the maintenance of transnational links of Thai marriage migrants and their homeland. She

urges us to revisit the assumption that migrants would try to adapt and integrate to the destination society if they wish to settle down permanently. However, it is found that migrants adopt transnational activities thanks to development of information technology, transportation, and capital flows that accelerate the time-space compression (p. 462). Suksomboon cites Levitt's (2001) definition of 'social remittances' as "ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that are transformed in the host country, and transmitted back to the community of origin, generating new cultural products that emerge and challenge the lives of those who are left behind" (p. 474). Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2010) argue that migrant's experiences before their migration have strong effects on what they do in the host countries and those experiences shape what they send back to their homelands (p.2).

Thai women's transnational marriage has gained increasing academic attention in the last two decades: beginning from the attempt to understand women's motivation to migrate through marriage with foreigners, to exploring women's role in maintaining cross-border connections and their contribution to their native family and community. Although popular perceptions assume that *'mia farang'* are well-off people due to their marriage to foreign men, the reality might be the opposite. Scholars also argue against the notion of global hypergamy, which is inadequate to grasp contemporary transnational marriages where women from various socio-economic classes, cultures, age, and educational backgrounds join in transnational marriage routes. 'Marrying up' is not always the case. Moreover, being *'luk katunyu'*, a dutiful daughter, or a grateful child is still a dominant value in Thai society. Such values are certainly attached to many Thai women who migrate abroad. These expectations put tremendous pressure on women as they have to fulfil their role as a daughter and as a wife and simultaneously mediate contesting values from the Thai and Western side.

Social and economic factors – together with the force of globalisation that connects the East and the West – are considered as drivers for Thai women to migrate. Nevertheless, several scholars argue that it is insufficient to consider economic motivation as the dominant reason why women move from one place to another. The role of gender relations, aspirations, and desire for modernity are crucial to understand women's migration as well (Mills, 1999; Lapanun, 2013). The search for modern and empowered lifestyles away from mundane, rural, traditional gender roles urges women to step out from their hometown to the urban, or even abroad. Although the study of Thai marriage

migrants principally focus on women from the North-Eastern region, empirical data from this study suggests that women from middle-class backgrounds also experience "blocked" opportunities to move to the upper echelons of Thai society due to high economic competitiveness and the rigid hierarchical characteristics of Thai society. One of the thesis's main contribution to studies on marriage migration is that, it does not mainly concentrate on the reasons why women choose to migrate and build family life in a new country, but rather on what happens afterwards. Women can choose to leave their homeland, but what makes them stay in a foreign land? By just studying Isan women as the main analytical unit, we might face the pitfall of essentialism (Narayan, 1998) that generalises experiences of marriage migrants as homogeneous, i.e, as women from poorer, rural backgrouds, who engage in sex work. In reality, Thai women who participate in transnational marriage come from different social and economic class positions and locations, and have a range of motivations. Even though it is suggested in much existing research that the majority of marriage migrants are from Isan, this thesis aims to move beyond these cliches by studying the circumstances and motivations of women from different walks of life.

1.2 Thai marriage migrants in the UK

The characteristics of Thai migration to Europe is highly feminised as marriage is one of the very few viable routes for women to enter European countries. According to Ruenkaew (2009), the number of Thai nationals who moved to Germany has sharply increased from nearly 2,000 in 1975 to 53,952 in 2009, where 80 percent of all Thai migrants to Germany are women. Similarly, in Denmark and the Netherlands approximately 80 percent of Thai migrants are women (Suksomboon, 2008). For Sweden, as of 2011, 73 percent (or 2,118) of all Thai migrants were women (Chuenglertsiri, 2012). Trupp and Butraratana (2016) investigate Thai women's lives in Austria and also found that the number of Thai women is rising: out of nearly 4,000 Thai nationals in Austria 84 percent of them are women.

The United Kingdom is the most popular European destination for Thai migrants. According to the Department of Consular Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand, as of 2017, there were 71,000 Thais living, working and studying in the UK. Among the 71,000 Thai people in the UK, 17,272 were spouses to foreigners, 19,000 were family

dependents and 25,200 were long-term residents[1]. From 2008 to 2017, 95 percent of Thai spouses who were granted settlement in the UK were women (11,586 Thai women were granted settlement as wives, whereas only 619 Thai men were granted settlement as husbands). Thai wives also account for the majority (66 percent) of Thais who were granted settlement in the UK between 2008-2017 (Home Office, 2019). This is in part because marriage migration is one of the few options available for Thais to enter the UK and gain rights to residence.

Figure 1: Grants of settlement by country of nationality (Thailand) and category (wives) 2008-2017 (Home Office, 2019)
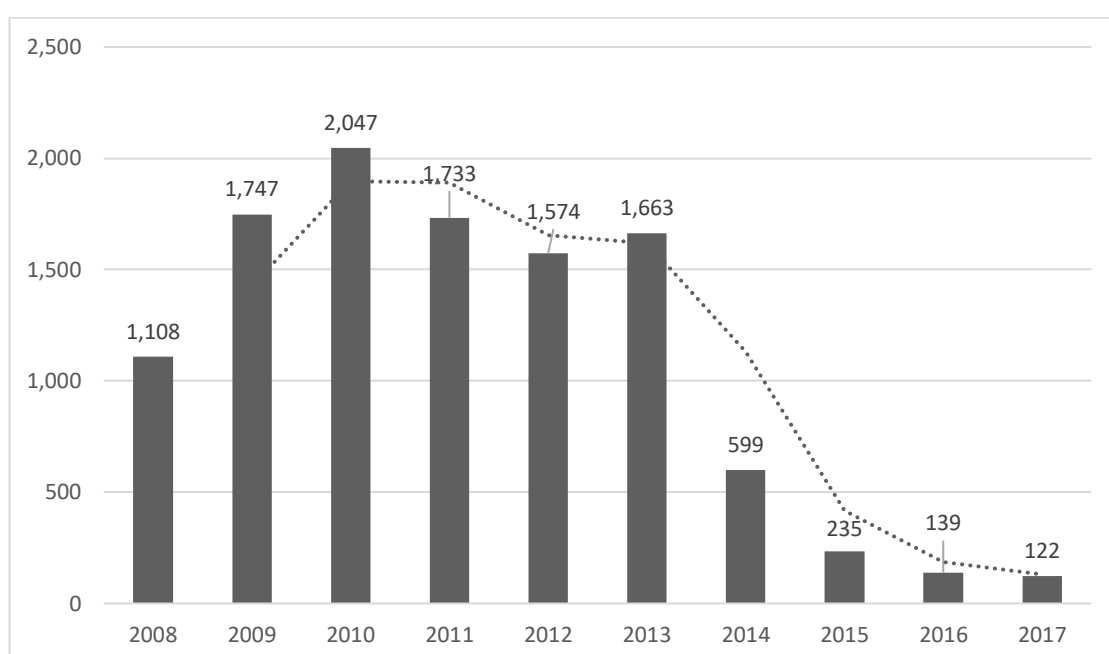
According to the UK Home Office (Figure 1), from 2008 to 2010 the number of Thai female spouses rose steadily. However, the number faced a slight decline from 2010-2013. The number of Thai women who received grants of settlement as a spouse sharply decreased from 1,663 in 2013 to 599 in 2014 and continued to decline though 2017. Since 2011, there have been a number of changes in the immigration rules that have affected the number of grants for spouse settlement for Thai women. In 2011, it was required that those who applied for a settlement visa would have to pass the English language test with

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[1] According to the Department of Consular Affairs' (2017) document, it was stated that 25,200 Thais living in the UK were 'state enterprise officers'. However, after consulting with a representative from the Royal Thai Embassy in London, it was clarified that this number is in fact 'long-term residents'.

at least a CEFR Level A1 (Home Office, n.d.-a). In 2012, the Home Office changed the rule for those who want to apply for a settlement visa, requiring applicants to live in the UK continuously for 5 years rather than 2. In 2013, the Home Office also put more effort on investigating 'sham' marriages and civil partnerships by changing the rules to impose stricter surveillance on marriage migrants (Home Office, 2013). Moreover, in the same year, the financial requirement for a settlement visa was raised. Couples must have a combined income of £18,600 a year to apply for a spouse settlement visa (Army Families Federation, 2014). Charsley and Benson (2012) point out that the British government limits the inflow of spouses as its focus on 'managed migration' is increasing (p.10), and one way to limit such an inflow is stricter surveillance on "sham marriages". However, they contend that the definition of sham marriage is too simplistic and disregards diverse marital practices involving migration which risks producing discriminatory outcomes (p.11). Marriages that vary from 'the norm' might be perceived as highly suspicious of a sham marriage by the Home Office. For example, marriages where there is a large age difference between couples (p.17). Language requirements, extension of a spouse's duration to remain in the UK, and increasing focus on sham marriages likely contribute to the steep decline of Thai spouses settling the UK in the recent years.

Although facing a decrease in numbers in the last 5 years, the Thai community in the UK is still considered one of the largest in Europe. Given the magnitude of the number of Thai wives in the UK, the topic of their lived experiences as migrants in the UK remains understudied. Sims's (2008) report on the Thai community in the UK provides an overall portrayal of prominent issues at the time, such as stereotypes and prejudices toward Thai women and their British spouses, unemployment, lack of access to healthcare and others. However, this work was commissioned by a think tank (Runnymede Trust), and academic theories and analysis are not discussed in detail. Whereas a more recent study on Thai wives in the UK by Charoensri (2014) concentrates on Thai women who came from poor rural areas and their transition from sex workers to marriage migrants in the UK. These works provide a valuable contribution to understanding Thai marriage migrants in the UK. Nevertheless, issues of Thai migrants' social networks and social capital, associations with homeland organisations, negotiations in intercultural family, and various aspects of women's wellbeing are still left unexplored.

1.3 Research questions

The main question of this thesis is "what are the main opportunities and challenges facing Thai marriage migrants amidst settling into their family life in the UK?". To answer this question, it is necessary to explore these sub questions:

1. How do Thai marriage migrants engage in social relationships with people in the UK (both Thai and non-Thai)? And how do different forms of social relationships affect their wellbeing?
2. How does the homeland organisation influence the maintenance of cross-border connections among Thai marriage migrants and how do they interact with such influences?
3. How do Thai women's cross-border connections affect their intercultural union with their British husbands and vice versa?

To answer these questions, I believe it is necessary to explore lived experiences of Thai women in both the public and private arena. Questions 1 and 2 require navigation through women's interactions outside the family: how they form, maintain or terminate social connections and networks with people in the country of origin and destination, and how they participate or not in co-ethnic cultural activities and social circles. Question 3 observes the private realm of the family to discover how women manage and negotiate family affairs in the context of an intercultural union. Following these questions, I examine the opportunities and challenges Thai marriage migrants encounter while living and building their family life in the UK. Although the main questions focus on women's post-migration practices, I also reflect on their past experiences and future aspirations in relation to their intercultural family life and transnational mobility.

1.4 Outline of chapters

In an attempt to identify opportunities and challenges of Thai marriage migrants through the lens of cross-border connections, wellbeing and intercultural union, this thesis discusses Thai women's lives from the outside (relationships with the homeland organisation and social interactions with British and Thai people) and through inside the home (family life). The thesis consists of an introduction chapter (Chapter 1), a theoretical framework chapter (Chapter 2), a methodology chapter (Chapter 3), four empirical chapters and a conclusion chapter.

Chapter 2 addresses the main theoretical framework of the thesis which is transnationalism. The concept will be presented and discussed to illustrate why this cross-border perspective is useful and important in studying Thai marriage migrants in the UK. The chapter will also shed light on the debates and relevant branches of transnationalism literature. Although this thesis includes other sociological concepts in the analysis, it proposes transnationalism as the main overarching framework of this study.

Chapter 3 describes the methods used in this study. While it relies mainly on 31 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Thai marriage migrants in the UK, it also uses participant observation and a survey to acquire data from respondents.

Chapter 4 discusses social networks, social capital and wellbeing of Thai marriage migrants to answer how Thai women engage in social relationships in the UK. Using Portes's (1998) notions of sources of social capital and Putnam's (2003) concept of bonding and bridging social capital as the main theoretical approaches, I explicate how and with whom Thai women form their social network and exchange social capital. I argue that the robust connections Thai women maintain with their homeland have a significant impact on how they build their social network and how they 'bridge' and 'bond' social capital with certain groups of people. This chapter focusses on Thai women's interaction with different social circles while living in the UK, except for their British husbands and children. This is to explore their social interactions with people outside of the family; how and why they choose to remain in or exclude themselves from certain networks, and how they 'bridge' and 'bond' social capital whilst in the UK. Essentially, how women strategically work their social network and exchange their social capital and how this affects their wellbeing.

Chapter 5 presents a case study of a homeland organisation that influences Thai migrant's transnational connections between Thailand and the UK. Buddhapadipa temple was chosen as a study site to observe the relationship of Thai women and their strong connection to Thailand. The reason I select this temple as a case study is because I consider this place as a gate to the Thai community, since it represents a physical marker of the traditional form of Thai culture in the UK. It is also a place where many Thais begin their social capital bonding to other Thais in the UK. I explain that, in Thailand, Buddhism and the state are inextricably intertwined which results in the uniqueness of Thai Buddhism as a state-sponsored religion. The establishment of Thai temples abroad is endorsed by the Thai state and the Sangha to maintain transnational connections

between Thailand and Thai migrants abroad. Buddhapadipa temple is one prominent case of the Thai state's effort to sustain such connections by means of exercising symbolic cultural practices. It is interesting to highlight that this Thai state-religious effort is reciprocated by a group of women who are active participants of the temple's activities. While only a minority of women are active members of the temple, a large number of Thai women occasionally visit the temple for relief and the yearning for home, to enroll their children in Thai courses, to enjoy Thai festivities, and to meet fellow Thais. In this chapter, I explore how visiting the temple influences the maintenance of cross-border links of Thai marriage migrants and their wellbeing in the UK.

Chapter 6 will move into the realm of the family as I investigate the cross-border impact on their Thai-British relationships and family lives. I suggest that the notion of the intercultural union is an essential tool in exploring the Thai-British union. With the attempt to discover the dynamics within the family where transnationalism and intercultural unions intersect, therefore, this chapter will mainly explore the issues of everyday negotiations in Thai-British families, decision on child-rearing, and family aspirations, to find out how transnational practices permeate the private sphere of the family and how Thai-British couples negotiate or compromise on such issues.

Chapter 7 culminates the previously discussed topics in the thesis by categorising them into opportunities and challenges Thai women face as they spend their lives in the UK. This chapter relies heavily on the concept of three-dimensional wellbeing (White, 2010) in analysing what is perceived as opportunities and challenges for Thai women. It also goes further to analyse opportunities and challenges of women through three-dimensional wellbeing, namely material, relational and subjective wellbeing. This is to broaden the perspective of the study on transnational marriage migrants, looking at the complexity in their life circumstances which results in perceptions of their wellbeing.

The final chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the main findings and highlighting significant arguments derived from the research results. The conclusion also explains the academic contribution this thesis has toward the study of transnational marriage migration and provides suggestions for future research in the field.

Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework

Thai women's mobility is a result of gendered patterns and encounters with different values, socio-political circumstances and legal arrangemnts between sending and receiving countries. As portrayed in Chapter 1, gendered patterns influence migrant women's lives from their country of origin to their destinations. Unfulfilled lives in Thailand in various ways push women to search for a better life elsewhere. We can already see from previously presented data that the majority of Thai migrants are women and enter European countries through the status of spouse or family reunification. The Thai migrant population in the UK is also predominently female and this shapes the forms of their transnational connections through the role of (dutiful) daughter, mother, sister and wife.

While a gender prespective is key to understanding women's marriage migration, this thesis proposes to go beyond explanations based exclusively on gender perspectives and aims for a more holistic approach by bringing in various sociological theories and concepts, including transnationalism, social networks and social capital, intercultural unions and wellbeing. This is not to ignore gender as an essential analytical tool, but rather to apply and include other concepts with which gender intersects. This allows us to gain a broader insight into women's experiences.

This thesis argues that in order to understand Thai marriage migrant's opportunities and challenges whilst living in the host country, their experience must be investigated through the lens of transnational cross-border connections. Although this thesis explores numerous dimensions of Thai women's experiences, the concept of transnationalism is the main theoretical starting point and will be discussed along with other relevant theories throughout the thesis. To understand migrants' cross-border ties and their effects on the family life of migrants, the concept of transnationalism and the debates around it will be discussed. The concept of transnationalism serves to explain a form of migration where migrants maintain connection with their home countries and how their engagement in multiple societies and cultures shapes or transforms their identities.

2.1 Transnationalism

Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-Blanc (1994) proposed the idea of 'transnationalism' to describe "…the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (p.7). In their view, the analysis of migrants as those who move from one country to another without maintaining relationships to their origin is no longer adequate to describe today's migration (Basch et al. 1994, p.4). Accordingly, they introduced the term 'transmigrant' as a concept to explain a type of migrants who construct social fields that connect their home countries and host countries together (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992, p.1). Glick-Schiller et al. (1992, pp.1-2) describe transmigrants as those who "… take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously". The notion of transmigrant is significant for the fact that in today's globalised world migration cannot only be analysed in terms of permanent rupture or abandonment of 'roots' because migrants nowadays maintain ties, create networks and take part in activities of their countries of origin and countries of settlement at the same time. Moreover, the term 'transnational' signifies "the fluidity with which ideas, objects, capital, and people now move across borders and boundaries" (Basch et al. 1994, p.27). The involvement of migrants in two societies or more affects the construction and negotiation of their identities (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992, p.4). Therefore, it is important to understand transnational migrants as "people who are in transit, whose identities are unfixed, destabilised and in the process of changing" (McDowell 1999, p. 205).

Although transnationalism seems to be a novel concept to describe contemporary migration, it is in fact not a new phenomenon. Basch et al. (1994) explain that the maintenance of homeland ties can be found in migrants of past generations, for instance, many European migrants in the United States in 19th and early 20th century maintained ties with their home country and contributed to their homeland's nationalist movements. However, they argue that "current transnationalism marks a new type of migrant experience, reflecting an increased and more pervasive global penetration of capital" (p. 24).

Glick-Schiller et al. (1995, p.49) argue that the use of the adjective 'transnational' in recent social sciences and cultural studies indicates the diminishing importance of national boundaries, and is linked to rising global capitalism and globalisation.

Transnational activities of immigrants are facilitated by advancements in transportation and communication technologies. People can travel across borders more rapidly and economically with airplanes, follow news in their homeland in real-time using the internet and communicate more easily with the cheaper cost of telecommunications. These are what facilitate close and immediate contact with immigrants' homeland (Glick-Schiller et al. 1995, p.52). Despite the significance of technological advancement which diminishes the breadth and length of space and time, Glick-Schiller et al. (1995) argued that,

> "…immigrant transnationalism is best understood as a response to the fact that in a global economy contemporary migrant have found full incorporation in the countries within which they resettle either not possible or not desirable".

Although it is suggested that national boundaries are weakened as a result of globalisation and intensive flows of capital and people, national identities are reinforced and reconstructed within diasporic communities. This maybe the reason why some immigrants cannot fully assimilate to host countries, as Glick-Schiller and others suggest above. The strengthening of diasporic national identities coincides with the conceptualisation of the nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). Anderson elaborates that he conceives the nation as 'imagined' because "… the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, p.6). 'Imagined community' helps explain migrants' preservation of national identity despite dismissal from their homeland. Migrants' sense of national identity extends beyond geographical territory, their sense of community is reproduced through imagination as a part of national community. However, as migrants move and settle in another country, they face different contesting nationalist values: that of their home country and host country. Basch et al. (1994, p.34) claim that transmigrants are often caught in the middle of two or more nation-building projects. Thus, hegemonic categories such as race and ethnicity, which are established in the processes of nation-building, influence their identities and practices. For that reason, it is particularly interesting to examine the challenges and contributions that migrants have towards contesting hegemonic discourses.

The concept of transmigrant discusses the issue of hegemonic construction of race and ethnicity, however, it sheds little light on 'gender' as one of the hegemonic categories in

its analytical framework. Gender should be analysed as a social construction which shapes transmigrant experiences as well. Huang et al. (2000, p.395) assert that, "[w]omen's experiences are particularly relevant in revealing the (in)ability of (trans)migrant to contest and shape new identities for themselves in diaspora". Women's departure from their countries of origin challenges "the spatial association" between home and women (especially the notion of femininity or gender equality which is socially constructed in western societies) (McDowell, 1999). Accordingly, it can also be assumed that Thai women in the UK would struggle with different sets of gender norms. Therefore, their struggle with different contesting hegemonic discourses of gender should also be examined because this might contribute to the negotiation of their identities.

While this thesis adopts transnationalism as the main starting point, it does not merely portray what types of transnational cross-border connections Thai women engage in. Instead, the thesis explores in which circumstances transnationalism matters, or does not, by drawing from primary empirical data. I found that the degree of Thai women's cross-border connections fluctuates and is less constant than other literature suggests. Life-course perspectives, family situations, duration of stay in the host country, class-relations, creation of social networks and social capital are all factors that also influence the degree of a woman's engagement in cross-border connections (see Chapter 4).

2.2 Thai women and cross-border linkages: how long does it last?

The concept of transnationalism and transmigrant examined by Glick-Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc, although considered as the fundamental and initial idea of studying here-and-there connections, is not without criticism. Waldinger (2015) argues that the evidence of migrants' 'transnationalism' shown in *Nations Unbound* conflicted with the various degrees of here-there connectedness (p.19). He further argues that, as a singular noun, transnationalism is 'ill-suited' to describe complex and various goals, plans, ideas, and beliefs of the transmigrant which are often in conflict with each other (p.19). Waldinger contends that it is not surprising that people who move across borders keep sending remittances or are involved in political activities in their birth countries (p.23). Also, he proposes that the flaw of the conventional conceptualisation of transnationalism is that it does not offer the tools for "thinking about how or why home country connections would persist" (p.24) and that there should be a better approach that explains,

"…variations across the different forms of cross-border involvement – whether occurring in political, economic or cultural spheres, or whether involving concerted action, or the everyday, uncoordinated activities of ordinary immigrants. Likewise, one needs theoretical tools to explain how and why cross-border connections change over time – whether biographical, intergenerational, or historical" (p.25).

Waldinger's critique of the traditional application of transnationalism provides an important frame for studying cross-border connections of Thai marriage migrants in the UK. Given this specific population, I seek to understand how and why they maintain, or abandon, transnational links between Thailand and the UK. Exploring the lives of Thai marriage migrants in the UK – especially on the characteristics of their cross-border connections – will contribute to the discussion on the concept of transnationalism. I hope to provide insights and explanations on the multiple and complex practices and identities of migrants through discussons on transnational cross-border connections along with other relevant theories such as social capital, social network, intercultural union and wellbeing. Moreover, in exploring these intertwining issues, this thesis will also contribute to further understanding on the maintenance, disruption, and even fluctuation of Thai marriage migrants' cross-border connections.

Waldinger (2017) makes an interesting point on the other side of migrants' cross-border ties. He argues that cross-border ties, although ubiquitous, are not enduring. Some migrants might seek to assimilate to a host society and gradually distance themselves from their homeland. The process which migrants detach themselves from their homeland is called 'dissimilation'. To define dissimilation, Waldinger (2017, p.11) cited Fitzgerald (2013):

"…dissimilation entails the process whereby the territorial boundary comes to separate people with common national origins. Driven by a two-fold change dissimilation simultaneously involves the progressive reconfiguration of territorial connections, shifting from 'there' to 'here', accompanied by migrants' need to learn and adapt to the foreign environment, imperatives that steadily distance them from the people left behind."

According to previous research on Thai marriage migrants, most Thai marriage migrants tend to retain strong ties with their homeland due to filial piety and, in some cases, an inability to fully integrate into the host society (Kanchanachitra and Chuenglertsiri, 2020). Being dutiful daughters, Thai women are obligated to provide care to their parents and their extended family members in forms of financial and emotional remittances. However, taken into account the notion of dissimilation, it is worthwhile considering that Thai marriage migrants, to some degree, go through a process of dissimilation after

spending several years away from their homeland. They might halt their contacts or remittances sending to their Thai family, and instead focus on building their new family life in the host country. Mobility, experience of a new socio-cultural context, being granted a new citizenship, building a family life in a new country, kindling new social networks and social capital – all these could affect Thai women's connections and relationships with their homeland. This can be reflected by changing volumes and frequency of remittances, contacts and return visits to Thailand. How do women juggle or negotiate the role of dutiful daughter toward their parents in Thailand, whilst playing the role of dutiful wife and mother toward their British husband and British-born children in the UK?

Here, I would like to explore the destabilised and unfixed state of transnational connections. Migrant women constantly adopt strategies in navigating through their day-to-day lives. As their lives progress, we should not assume that the characteristics of their cross-border connections and exchanges remain the same and static over time. Changing life circumstances, accumulated experiences, and shifting aspirations can cause changes in, or even disrupt, the relationship between women and their homeland. Therefore, in studying women's cross border connections, it is important to ask: how long and how consistent are these links? After settling down and building a new family life in the host country, do women still engage in the same level of cross-border engagement as when they first arrived? Studying the building-up and breaking-down of transnational linkages will contribute to the field of Migration Studies, especially on the topic of marriage migrants where the fluctuations and transformations of cross-border connections are yet to be explored.

This thesis aims to identify opportunities and challenges Thai women in the UK encounter in the context of transnational marriage migration. On the one hand, I argue that transnational connections have significant impacts on migrant women's decisions and the shaping of their lives abroad. On the other hand, I also argue that women's changing life circumstances can affect their decisions and transformations of their cross-border connections.

2.3 Transnational Social Fields

Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc (1994), define social field as a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organised, and transformed. Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004, p.9) also conclude that;

> "Social fields are multi-dimensional, encompassing structured interactions of differing forms, depth, and breadth that are differentiated in social theory by the terms organization, institution, and social movement. National boundaries are not necessarily contiguous with the boundaries of social fields. National social fields are those that stay within national boundaries while transnational social fields connect actors, through direct and indirect relations across borders."

Levitt (2001, p.9) explains that migrants recreate transnational social fields in all aspects of their social life and that;

> "…though they generally emerge from economic relations between migrants and nonmigrants, social, religious, and political connections also constitute these arenas. The more diverse and thicker a transnational social field is, the more numerous the ways it offers migrants to remain active in their homelands. The more institutionalized these relationships become, the more likely it is that transnational membership will persist."

Transnational social fields encompass multiple levels and layers of social, economic and political connections. Individual's and institutional transnational activities are linked in a complex way. Despite these descriptions of 'transnational social field', Waldinger (2015) argues that the field is "embedded in a broader field made up of state and civil society actors here and there who respond in various way to the challenges and opportunities generated by the cross-state flows produced by migration" (p. 28). Therefore, the analysis of cross-border connections cannot be limited to only the transnational social field but must extended beyond it. For this perspective, Guarnizo (1997) illustrates the concept of 'transnationalism from below' and 'transnationalism from above' which mutually engender the dynamics of transnational social fields. Guarnizo defines 'transnationalism from below' as "…multifarious and manifested by, among other things, incessant back and forth traveling of transmigrants and multidirectional exchanges of material and intangible resources and symbols…" (Guarnizo 1997, p. 282). The simplest and most obvious form of transnationalism from below is 'financial remittances' that migrants send back to their non-moving families. Moreover, migrants transfer values, norms, ideas and skills to their countries of origin, this is called 'social remittances'.

On the other end, states also institutionally support transnational activities of individuals, this is called 'transnationalism from above'. States and politics direct individuals' transnational activities; they can either limit or promote migrants cross-border activities. In studying migrants' cross-border ties, both the 'above' and 'below' sides of transnationalism and their interconnections must be examined to grasp the comprehensive picture of transnational activities.

2.3.1   *Transnationalism from Below: Individual-Level Transnational Activities*

Portes et al. (1999) contend that underpinning individuals as a starting point to understand transnationalism is the most efficient way of learning about the institutional underpinnings of transnationalism and its structural effects (p. 220). Furthermore, they state that 'grass-roots transnational activities' are "commonly developed in reaction to governmental policies and to the condition of dependent capitalism fostered on weaker countries, as immigrants and their families sought to circumvent the permanent subordination to which these conditions condemned them" (p. 220). To overcome poverty and suppresive regimes, many migrants actively forge links with their homeland by remitting money, materials, instruments, values practices and norms absorbed while in the receiving countries, to their families and communities at home. The next section will elaborate on the different types of remittance transactions which Thai marriage migrants and their family-left-behind engage in.

o   **From Abroad to Home: Financial Remittances**

As mentioned earlier, the result from a survey by Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) in 2003-2004 in Thailand's North-Eastern provinces suggested that around 15,000 North-Eastern women who were married to Westerners sent remittances of approximately 1,464 million baht (£34,080,000) to their families in Thailand every year, and spend a 77,200 baht (£1,797) per month during yearly visits to Thailand with their husbands (Angeles and Sunanta 2009, p. 550). The survey was done more than ten years ago and the amount of financial remittances from Thai marriage migrants is expected to be higher today. Suksomboon (2008) points out that by sending remittances home, Thai women and their foreign partners gained social recognition in local communities in Thailand (p. 462). The financial remittances from

Thai marriage migrants are spent on families' expenses such as accommodation, renovation or expansion, luxurious family rituals (p.462), new vehicles, support for family members and sometimes for children from a previous marriage, donations to local charities and Buddhist temples, etc. Angeles and Sunanta (2009) studied two villages in the North-Eastern part of Thailand where numerous women became transnational wives. They found that the foreign in-law's phenomenon contributes tremendously to the economic transition of these two villages. These rural villages became more 'modern', with increased of cash exchange, consumption of luxurious commodities and construction of modern-styled households. They suggest that one of the reasons why this phenomenon transforms the socio-economic landscape of Thai rural villages is that, in part, North-Eastern women are bound with 'demanding' duties to their family. The concept of *'luk katanyu'*, translated as 'grateful children', is strongly enforced in Thai society. They further explain;

> "These demanding (read exacting) duties range from taking care of parents and natal families' financial needs, lending and giving money to extended kin, and extending support to the village and the community-as-family in the form of donations and sponsorships of festive or religious events. Parents and kin are increasingly demanding (read insisting on, requiring) these duties from transmigrant women whose economic contributions nurture families, temples, schools, and other community-level institutions" (Angeles and Sunanta 2009, p. 554).

Thai women's transnational activities are an outcome of social and cultural conditions which expect women to play the role of dutiful daughters and perpetuate their care duties, whether they stay in Thailand or not. In the North-Eastern part of Thailand, it is customary that daughters are the ones who take care of their parents. Daughters are the one who inherit farm land and the youngest daughters inherit the parental household. Sons, in comparison, are expected to repay their parents by ordaining to become Buddhist monks before they marry (Angeles and Sunanta 2009). It is a Theravada Buddhist belief that when sons are ordained, parents will also gain the merit and their souls will go to heaven after they pass away. These gender roles in Thai rural society specifies how children should fulfil filial obligations.

o **From Home to Abroad: Reverse Remittances, Emotional Support and Future-Oriented Embeddedness**

Migrants not only send back materials and ideas to their countries of origin but sometimes receive support from family and friends. Such material, instrumental, emotional and

symbolic support is called 'reverse remittances'. Boccagni (2015) argues that the livelihood of migrants depends on their participation in host countries' labour market. However, migrants sometimes are unable to fully benefit from host countries' welfare provisions. In other cases, migrants might face economic hardship due to a failure in their business and/or unemployment, for example. Thus, family members who stay behind play a crucial role in providing support to their kin who moved away. Boccagni also argues that the study of reverse remittances is "critical to understanding the interface between migrants' transnational engagement and their own living conditions. It is also necessary for enhancing the connection between the transnational family debate" (p. 251). The study of cross-border connections should recognise that remittance is a two-way street, where migrants not only make contributions to their homeland, but also receive material and emotional support from those left behind. I argue that these exchanges are vital to the sustenance of cross-border connections and the lack on either end could cause connections to die down.

Boccagni (2015) distinguishes three categories of supports that 'stay-behinds' provide to their migrating kin; *reverse remittances, emotional support* and *future-oriented embeddedness*. *Reverse remittances* refer to flows of goods, money, and services from countries of origin. This kind of support, Boccagni argues, challenges our view of non-migrants as passive receivers of migrants' remittances (p. 258). The concept of reverse remittances is useful for examining 'unsuccessful' migration of Thai marriage migrants and how reverse remittances affect ties between migrants and non-migrants. As mentioned, Thai women are expected to provide financial aid to their family back home, even though they have migrated to live with their husbands abroad. Trupp and Butratana (2016) found that although most Thai migrant women in Austria reported that their economic status improved after marrying Austrian husbands, there are a minority who experienced downward economic mobility (p.102). A Thai woman, who came from a wealthy family in Thailand, reported that she moved to an Austrian countryside after marrying an Austrian husband. Her husband was studying at a university and earned part-time income while she made a living by selling handmade accessories at local markets. Their income was not enough to provide for their two children, and they therefore received money from the wife's Thai family (p.103).

Non-migrants provide *emotional support* to migrants as well. Being away from their original families and adjusting to new cultures and environments, Thai migrants might at

times feel emotionally distressed and lonely. Boccagni (2015) found that Ecuadorian migrants often called their family members while they were working in Italy. They said that talking to their family gave them moral support or 'boost' (p.261). In my observation, the extent of emotional support differs among Thai marriage migrants. Thai women from middle-class backgrounds said that they could find emotional support through sustaining contacts with their birth family in Thailand – and that they feel that they have something or someone to fall back on when they experience difficulties in the UK. On the other hand, some women from poorer backgrounds expressed detachment and lack of emotional support from their Thai family, where their conversations mostly involved financial requests from the Thai side.

The last type of support is *future-oriented embeddedness*. This type of support relates to migrants' feelings of home as the place where they can always go back to. Migrants' ideas of home not only represent the past but also the future where migrants aspire to spend their lives back in their homeland after being successful in their destination country. Boccagni argues that "a deep-rooted feeling that there will always be a second option (if probably a disadvantageous one) is not much, in practical terms, to improve their life prospects abroad. It is still something, nonetheless, as a personal reservoir of sense, consistency and self-worth" and that "it is an aspiration of a future affluence there – though systematically postponed over time – which gives a meaning to often disadvantaged life conditions here" (Boccagni 2015, p.263). Boccagni conceptualised this type of support as he studied Ecuadorian domestic workers in Italy. One of them said that she kept the idea of returning home and that there was no point in working so hard and staying in Italy forever. As I focus on Thai marriage migrants, their motivation might be different from labour migrants. I am curious if marriage migrants in the UK would also hold onto the notion of going back home. However, my previous research (Chuenglertsiri, 2012) found that Thai women who moved to Sweden with their Swedish husbands still reminisced about their hometown and expressed that eventually they wanted to go back to Thailand. Some of them had a chance to go back to Thailand on holiday. While they were there, they participated in local charities. One woman told me that she went back to Thailand when the big flood occurred (in 2011). She helped cook and distribute food to those affected by the flood. She said that she was proud to help, and that as she helped fellow Thais and the King. From these cases, it is crucial to ask what makes migrants sustain the idea of returning home. In my current study, many Thai mothers in the UK

enrolled their Thai-British children into Thai language extracurricular classes at a Thai temple. One of the reasons for teaching their children Thai language and customs is to stay connected with Thailand and provide them cultural capital, should their children return and lead lives in Thailand in the future.

Future-oriented embeddedness could shape how migrants lead their lives in the receiving countries. It might dictate what migrants want (or do not want) to achieve whilst living in host countries. The role of social support from family back in Thailand could also affect the idea of future-oriented embeddedness of migrants. If migrants believe that their family is a viable 'second option' or cushion they can fall back on when they have problems abroad, the idea of returning home might seem more appealing to them.

2.3.2 *Transnationalism from Above: Institutional-level Transnational Activities*

Individuals are key to transnational dynamics as illustrated above. Some states also actively sponsor grass-roots transnational activities when they see the importance of migrants' contribution to their home country. Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) make interesting points on the relation of states and transnationalism. First, states have power over border control, where they can choose to welcome or expel groups of migrants. They argue that failure to recognise this will lead to assumptions that migrants can move freely across borders and that transnationalism is 'regular and sustained', while in fact, it is affected by states' policies. Second, state controls operate both at internal and external levels, that they attempt to "regulate membership in the national collectivity, as well as movement across territorial borders". Third, civil society actors in both host and home countries make questionable the allegiance and loyalty of those whose keep their feet in two states. Fourth, dual loyalty causes tension for migrants when host and sending countries are in conflicts. They put, "while international migrants and their descendants recurrently engage in concerted action across state boundaries, the use, form, and mobilization of the connections linking here and there are contingent outcomes subject to multiple *political* constraints (p.1178-9)."

According to these points, states contest to achieve allegiance and loyalty of individuals. Moreover, we can see that migrants' choices and actions are still regulated and dictated by state policies. Even though the history and narrative of individuals are important for beginning to comprehend transnationalism, we need to simultaneously acknowledge the

influence of states on individuals' decisions (and that individuals can also influence state policies and institutional regulations).

o   **The role of Thai government in cross-border connections**

The Thai government has adopted many strategies to sustain migrants' sense of belonging and allegiance to their homeland, including, for example, diplomatic and consular missions to assist Thai people abroad and programmes to attract migrants to share their skills and experiences. Waldinger (2012) cited Alan Gamlen's (2008) term, 'diaspora engagement' to explain activities that states use to monitor emigrants, promote national solidarity, provide them with services and incentives to send resources back to the homeland and give them rights to vote from abroad. He further argues that states can provide assistance to migrants in richer countries because these countries cause practical problems for migrants. The state might not exercise control over their cross-border nationals, but helping to resolve migrants' problems is another way to gain their loyalties. Policies that recognise legitimacy of migrants as part of their birth nation is appealing due to migrants' uncertainty of their future, whether to stay or return to their homeland (p. 92).

Apart from bridging Thai-UK long-standing relations, the mission of The Royal Thai Embassy in London includes protection for Thai nationals abroad. The Embassy provides consular services for Thais living in the UK, namely civic registration (birth, marriage, divorce, and death certificates), passport and Thai identification card issuance and legalisation of documents. The Thai Embassy in London has mobile consular services where consular officers travel to other cities in the UK to provide services for Thai people. The Thai Embassy also showcases Thai culture through organising and participating in social events and Thai Buddhist activities, for example.

In Thailand, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) has launched several programmes which aim to reach out to Thai migrants abroad. Recently, the ministry initiated a workshop which targets Thai women who are married to foreign husbands and who are living abroad. Some of them travel back to Thailand every year to visit their Thai families and friends. The ministry therefore uses this opportunity to include this group of women in trainings which provide skills for living abroad and teach them to be able to help other Thais who experience difficulties while living and settling

in foreign countries. The Thai government cooperates with the Thai Women Network in Europe (TWNE)[2] in recruiting Thai women who are interested in training in these topics. The Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development (MSDHS) has launched a website, www.yingthai.net and a mobile application, 'Ying Thai', which directly targets Thai women living abroad (Ying Thai means 'Thai women'). The website and application contain tips on how to prepare and what to expect when going to foreign countries, basic family laws and contact lists of help centres, Thai consulates and embassies and Thai communities abroad.

The Thai government is attempting to be more active in reaching out to migrants. According to a department director at MSDHS, the Thai government is starting to acknowledge that Thai migrants are valuable resource to the country. They are hopeful about migrants' contribution to Thailand in terms of economic and social contributions. In terms of economy, MSDHS revealed that they wished to launch a form of mutual fund for migrants. They also wished to propose granting royal decorations to Thai migrants who have significantly contributed to charities in Thailand.

In the Thai case, transnationalism from above can also be found in hometown associations (HTAs), the most prominent one is Thai Buddhist temples abroad. State and religion in Thailand have always been inextricably linked with one another and Theravada Buddhism has long been a part of the Thai state's nation-building project (see Chapter 5). Buddhism in Thailand is directly sponsored by the Thai state through the Office of National Buddhism which operates under the Ministry of Culture (formerly known as the Department of Religious Affairs). According to a senior officer at The Royal Thai Embassy in London, their work strategy relies on the triad of home, temple, and the Embassy. They pay attention to the affairs of Thai people and their family (home), Thai culture and Buddhism (temple), and diplomatic and consular missions of the Embassy.

There are at least 10 Thai Buddhist temples and monasteries in the UK. The biggest and the oldest one is Wat Buddhapadipa in Wimbledon, London. Wat Buddhapadipa holds major religious events and Thai cultural events every year such as Thai New Year (*Songkran* festival), *Devorohana* (special alms giving day), *Loy Krathong* (festival dedicated to paying respect to the goddess of the river), *Kathina* (robe presenting

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[2] https://www.facebook.com/twne.thaiwomennetworkineurope/

ceremony), and other Buddhist holidays. As the oldest and biggest temple in the UK and Europe, the Thai ambassador to the UK often participates in the temple's major events. The temple's events normally draw hundreds of Thai people. Levitt (2001) points out that transnational religious groups "…ground migrants by making them members of local sending- or receiving-country religious organizations. Cross-border ties between these groups allow migrants to circulate easily between chapters, thereby facilitating belonging wherever they are (p.210)." From conversations with several Thai women living in Brighton, they said that they would go to Thai temples for major events and sometimes go on the weekends for merit making[3] and chanting if they had free time. For Thai migrants, Thai Buddhist temples serve as transnational space where Thai people come together to interact socially and culturally. Being away from home, Thai temples provide an environment close to home for migrants, such as familiar tastes of Thai food and being able to speak to monks and fellow Thais in the Thai language. It is crucial to note that Thai temples abroad not only serve religious purposes, but also aim to preserve Thai nationalist values and traditional culture as they are state-sponsored hometown associations. This point will be further demonstrated in Chapter 5 where I explore the case study of Buddhapadipa Temple in London and ask: to what extent do the state-sponsored hometown associations, such as Thai temples, influence transnational ties and engagement of Thai migrants?

States are key players in maintaining cross-border ties of migrants. The public services provided to migrants can affect migrants' feelings of belonging and allegiance to their home country. States see migrants as valuable members who can transfer material and financial resources and knowledge back to their homeland. The roles of states and institutions that enforce national values beyond borders challenge the assumption that transnationalism undermines the importance and power of nation-states. Immigration might compromise the state's power to control and regulate activities within their border (Morawska 2001, p.176). However, as we can see, states and institutions still have resources and power to influence activities across borders. Moreover, they are major actors in migrants' transnationalism and in sustaining nationalism across borders.

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[3] Tantiwiramanond and Pandey (1987) point out that the law of karma and the concept of merit accumulation are the main moral principle of Thai Buddhism. Devotees seek to accumulate merit through committing good deeds i.e., making merit – among them is offering food and belonging to monks. Making merit is perceived as a way to achieve a better life in the next rebirth.

2.4 Opportunities and challenges of Thai marriage migrants in the UK: the intersection of transnationalism and wellbeing

The main objective of this thesis is to study Thai women's opportunities and challenges after their move as a spouse to the UK. The main research question asks how cross-border ties affect women's wellbeing in the UK. I argue that women's cross-border connections largely determine their respective wellbeing. As migrants, Thai women bring with them values, aspirations, and expectations from their birth country. I will explore women's perceptions of their satisfaction while living in the UK; what do they find as satisfying? Are their expectations met? Also, how do they reflect their future opportunities and challenges with life in the UK?

I contend that their contacts and remittances to those who stay behind determine their satisfaction living their lives between the two countries. The maintenance, disruptions, and even endings of these cross-border connections certainly affects women's wellbeing. Furthermore, I also investigate how their satisfaction is affected by their encounters with social welfare, employment, family and social life in the UK.

This thesis will explore opportunities and challenges of Thai women through the lens of three dimensional wellbeing, a concept coined by White (2010) to bring depth into the analysis. White (2010) propose that there are three overall dimensions of wellbeing - material, relational, and subjective - which determine a person's life satisfaction. One of the dimensions can influence another, both positively and negatively. The concept of wellbeing will be further discussed in Chapter 7 where I present a cross-cutting model between opportunities and challenges and three-dimensional wellbeing in an attempt to give a clear illustration of women's circumstances.

Chapter 3
Methodology

To study Thai marriage migrants in the UK, ethnographic methods were used to obtain qualitative data. I set my field research in Brighton and Hove and London where there are large concentrations of Thai communities, Thai businesses, and Thai governmental and cultural organisations. The main data collection methods of this thesis are semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Nevertheless, I also used survey data on Thai women in the UK (from a project I worked on in parallel to my doctoral research) and virtual ethnography to understand the context of the field I was doing research on. Before describing my research methods in detail, I believe that it is important to discuss issues of gaining access to the field, reflexivity and the insider perspective.

3.1 Gaining access to the field

Before I conducted my data collection with Thai marriage migrants, I familiarised myself with some members of the Thai community in Brighton. I participated in gatherings with Thai people and religious events at Thai temples. From these events, I met Thai women who had lived and worked in the UK for several years. Most of them are married to British citizens. Oom is a retired Thai lady in her 60s whom I frequently had contact with. I met Oom at the King Bhumibhol remembrance event in October 2016. After a short conversation, she invited me to join her on a trip to a Thai temple that weekend. Later, we met a few more times and together visited temples in London and Crawley. I took a ride in her daughter's car and sometimes we took trains together. I consider her as a key informant and gatekeeper to the Thai community in South-Eastern England. She also invited me to join social gatherings at Thai women's homes. Oom was married to a British man and lived in the UK for more than 20 years and knew an extended network of Thai migrants in the Sussex area. She was considered a senior in the Thai migrant community, especially in Brighton. She mentioned that she used to help Thai women who were victims of scams and labour exploitation in the UK. Oom introduced me to several Thai women when we went to Thai temples and social gatherings. I introduced myself to them

as a PhD student at the University of Sussex who was doing a study on Thai women's lives in the UK. Most of the women I met were happy to give me their contacts since they saw me as a student.

I gained access to the field through personal connections as well. Orapa was a family friend who was married to a British man and moved to the UK. She was a frequent visitor to the Buddhapadipa temple in London. I considered her as a gatekeeper to the temple's social group. She introduced me to the temple circle and later became one of my informants. She described to me the types of activities that were held at the temple and suggested that I should visit on the weekends when Thai language and cultural classes took place. I was also connected to a Thai dance instructor and was allowed to visit Thai dance class and had conversations with parents who took their children to these classes at the temple.

Apart from gaining access to the field through these gatekeepers, I also worked as a waitress at a Thai restaurant in Hove for 8 months (from November 2017 to June 2018) where I met some of my respondents and got to know other Thais in the food service industry. I made myself familiar with the restaurant employee-circle. I also had contact with Thai restaurant employees who were unmarried migrants who knew many Thai-British couples as they had spent many years in the UK and had met many customers along the years. These employees also connected me to other respondents.

3.2 Reflexivity

In doing research on transnational lives of Thai women and their partners, I have to reflect on my position in the field. I am not only a researcher but also carry many identities while conducting research. I perceive myself as a thirty-something academic researcher, unmarried, and with no experience in child rearing. I must be careful when I try to talk about issues regarding families and relationship with my respondents.

I intended to reflect and posit myself as not only a researcher but a learner. All of my respondents were older than me. As a young Thai female researcher, in the presence of older Thais, it was expected that I pay respect to those who were my seniors. Sometimes Thai seniors play roles of life mentors where they give life lessons and tips about life in general to younger people. Reflecting on my position in the field means that I acknowledged the power dynamics between my respondents and myself. Being a senior

in the Thai context means that you have a more authoritative voice than those who are younger. This means that I might not have total control over the research atmosphere, especially as I expected most interview sites to be at respondents' home, I would have to prepare to be a good learner and listener.

Madison (2005) asserts that reflexive ethnography is a 'turning back' on ourselves; "[w]hen we turn back, we are accountable for own research paradigms, our own positions of authority, and our own moral responsibility relative to presentation and interpretation" (p. 7). I must be aware of the risk of authoritative representation and interpretation, that the voice of my research subjects might be silenced in the process of analysing and writing. Relating to his research experience of queer people of Thai descent, Haritaworn (2008) states that, "[t]he call for positionality urges us to reflect on where we stand, to define our speaking positions and how they relate to others, especially those whom we claim to speak for". He further argues,

> "…an empirical project which takes seriously the question of positionality can enable us to directly 'touch/interact/connect' with our subject, in ways which are less exploitative, less objectifying and more politically relevant."

Acknowledging my position relative to my respondents', would help me in the process of analysing and writing in my attempt to present my respondents' voice as much as possible. My purpose of presenting Thai migrant women's experiences might be averted if I hold that my account is the one true account.

3.3 Insider perspective

Being part of the community I conducted research on, it was crucial to reflect upon my position as an 'insider' as well. Being an insider in this context means that I was in the same ethnic and cultural group with these women. However, the job of social science researcher is to 'make the strange familiar and the familiar strange'. Sharing ethnic and cultural backgrounds might distract me from seeing the 'strange' in their practices. An 'outsider' researcher, on the other hand, might be provoked by cultural differences and culture shock which easily grasps their attention. I realised that, as an insider, I had to be more observant and vigilant about their activities, actions, opinions, speech, body language, etc.

As a person who shared the language, cultural and ethnic background with respondents, I think that this would facilitate my access and help gain trust from them. Speaking the same language and having the same culture as my respondents is another advantage of being an insider. Some lingual expressions, idioms or slangs can be difficult for people who speak different tongues to understand. However, in some aspects, I might be perceived as an outsider because of my position as a researcher. Even though we shared the same language, I did not share with them their aspirations, socio-economic and occupational background, regional subculture, marital status, and similar lived experience.

3.4 Contextualisation of the field

Prior to my data collection, I had to gain some knowledge and understanding of what occurred in the Thai community in the UK: what were the issues that Thai women discuss? What were the dominant concerns among the Thai community in the UK? What were the characteristics of the population I am doing research on? To answer these questions, I found it necessary to understand the context of the field. I used virtual ethnography and survey data from a research project that I was a part, to grasp a broader perspective and knowledge of Thai marriage migrants in the UK.

3.4.1 Virtual ethnography

Virtual ethnography involves the use of online resources as part of data collection. O'Reilly (2008) cites Hine (2000) that "ethnographic studies of online settings have made a major contribution to the view of the internet as 'place' where culture is formed and transformed, and this has led to the acceptance of cyberspace as a plausible field site" (p. 215). Online resources are useful in terms of contextualisation of the field. Online platforms such as websites, discussion boards (or web boards), Facebook pages and groups, provide information which helps researchers understand ongoing topics of discussion by the community they want to study. Many Thai women discussed their daily life problems and shared their experiences on online platforms. Popular websites such as Ladyinter.com and Pantip.com provided free discussion boards where members could join in to express their feelings, ask questions or give advice to other members. Ladyinter.com is a website aimed specifically for Thai women who are in relationships

with foreign men. For Ladyinter.com, the topics of discussion range from everyday life issues. For example, family affairs, child-rearing, settling down in new countries, love and sexual relationships, legal problems, visa and resident permit issues, etc. These topics of discussion helped me develop my preliminary interview guidelines. I also friended some of my respondents and other Thai women in the UK on Facebook. Occasionally, these women updated about their life in the UK: what they did, who they socialised with, complaining about their life situations, posting pictures of their families and activities they did together, for example. I did not use their Facebook status updates and posts as part of my data. However, I sometimes used them to open a conversation with women. For instance, asking them to tell me about their posts on Facebook and discussing further about what was going on in their lives.

Online resources also provide background information of public and civil society organisations which I intended to conduct interviews with. The Royal Thai Embassy in the UK has a Facebook page[4] where they posted tips on living and settling in the UK, schedule of mobile consular services, provided warnings of incidents, and publicised the Embassy's activities, among others. Non-profit organisations aiming to help Thai women abroad such as Thai Women Network in Europe (TWNE) and Thai Women Network in the UK (TWN4UK) also had Facebook pages where they posted updates of their activities, information and tips on living abroad. The Facebook page is useful for both of these organisations and Thai internet users abroad because it gives a platform which they can instantly interact with other users. Thai people in the UK can post their questions about consular services and Embassy activities directly onto the Embassy's Facebook page. I monitored these pages regularly to find out about patterns of interaction and to see which topics or issues often come up in these discussions. Some prominent topics that emerge on these online platforms can be utilised as an icebreaker in in-depth interviews as well.

3.4.2 Survey

To understand the broader characteristics of Thai women in the UK, I used survey data from a research project which I worked on in parallel to my doctoral research. I worked with Ethnic Focus to conduct a survey on Thai women in the UK with the sample of 300

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[4] https://www.facebook.com/ThaiEmbLondon/

Thai-born women who had spent at least 5 years in the UK as permanent residents (See survey questionnaire in Appendix F). The purpose of the project is to collect data on demographic information of Thai women in the UK and their attitudes toward their life experiences and satisfaction whilst living in the country. I was responsible for designing the survey questionnaire and interpreting and analysing the data. The questionnaire was originally in English and I translated it into Thai to be used in the field. The survey was conducted in January 2018.

The survey questionnaire consists of basic biographical information (age, educational background, citizenship status, relationship status, number of children, occupation, financial situation, language ability), perceptions of success in migration to the UK, perceptions of success in providing for children, attitudes on returning to Thailand, religion and trust, perceptions of fitting into the UK, perceived problems, perceived discrimination, and social contact and communication. This information provides important and original information of the current context and situation of Thai women in the UK. In conjunction with qualitative data, some of the survey data was used in the thesis to provide a clearer and more detailed picture of women's situations and attitudes. Although the survey data was used to support qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews, it sometimes sparked further analysis and explanation of what actually happened in the field.

3.5 Data Collection

This thesis aims to identify opportunities and challenges of Thai women in intercultural unions in the UK. In-depth, semi-structured interviews are the main data collection method, which provides detailed accounts of women's experiences and attitudes. Participant observations were used to gain a better understanding of the population's activities and socio-cultural behaviour.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interview

In-depth, semi-structured interviews is the main method which I applied to uncover worldviews and experiences of the intercultural and transnational lives of Thai marriage migrants. Interview respondents were Thai-born women who were married to British

citizens for more than one year and currently resided in the UK. I conducted interviews with 31 Thai-born women who were currently or previously part of intercultural relationships (see Table 1). Respondents included women with and without children. I was also interested in interviewing people who were previously in Thai-British relationships and experienced marital problems, separation and divorce. This is to better understand prominent challenges that may occur in an intercultural union. The respondents interviewed were purposefully chosen according to criteria, and the snowballing technique was used to find further respondents. Furthermore, I sought to interview women from various socio-economic backgrounds. Even though the snowballing technique was applied to the sampling, I attempted to find women who were from middle-class and working-class backgrounds. Thus, my sample constituted of women from diverse educational levels, socio-economic classes, and different age groups. The purpose for this is to investigate if there are parities or disparities in their experiences and worldviews according to their diverse lived experiences.

Table 1: Interview respondents

No.	Name (pseudonyms)	Age	Spouse's age	Hometown[5]	Duration of long-term residency (years)	Education level (from Thailand)	Occupation	Marital status	Children from previous marriage	Children from current marriage	Financial remittance
1	Fai	38	36	North-Eastern	8	university undergraduate	business owner (restaurant owner)	married	0	1	No
2	Siri	45	56	North-Eastern	26	primary school	restaurant worker (kitchen staff)	cohabiting /living with partner	3*	0	No
3	Ning	39	34	North-Eastern	21	secondary school	customer service staff	separated	2*	0	No
4	Oom	58	83	North-Eastern	22	secondary school	retired	married	1**	0	No
5	Mine	48	55	Bangkok	3	university postgraduate	restaurant worker (waiting staff)	married	0	0	Yes, more than £200 per month
6	Nune	44	55	Southern	11	higher non-university education	care worker	married	1**	0	Yes, less than £50 per month
7	Pim	36	38	North-Eastern	11	university undergraduate	business owner (pub kitchen owner)	married	0	0	Yes, less than £50 per month
8	Nong	38	36	North-Eastern	12	secondary school	restaurant worker (waiting staff)	married	0	2	Yes, between £100 and £200 per month
9	Gan	53	78	North-Eastern	14	primary school	care worker	married	0	0	No

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[5] By the Thai region.

No.	Name (pseudonyms)	Age	Spouse's age	Hometown[5]	Duration of long-term residency (years)	Education level (from Thailand)	Occupation	Marital status	Children from previous marriage	Children from current marriage	Financial remittance
10	Opal	41	38	Bangkok	15	university postgraduate	NGO worker	married	0	2	No
11	Ming	59	65	Southern	30	university postgraduate	stress management consultant	married	0	3	No
12	Dang	52	67	Bangkok	17	university undergraduate	restaurant worker (chef)	married	0	3	No
13	Orapa	56	67	Bangkok	15	university undergraduate	self-employed	married	0	0	No
14	Wilai	49	72	Northern	16	higher non-university education	restaurant worker (waiting staff)	married	2**	0	No
15	Malee	45	58	North-Eastern	10	secondary school	care worker	married	2**	0	Yes, more than £200 per month
16	Mook	40	50	North-Eastern	17	primary school	housewife	married	1**	2	No
17	Jai	43	42	Southern	13	university undergraduate	canteen manager	married	0	1	No
18	Duang	43	46	Southern	17	university undergraduate	supermarket staff	married	0	2	No
19	Lin	43	55	Southern	14	university undergraduate	housewife	married	0	3	No
20	Ann	37	44	Southern	8	higher non-university education	cleaner	married (legally)	0	2	Yes, between £100 and £200 per month
21	Nuan	41	52	Bangkok	10	higher non-university education	supermarket staff	married	1**	0	Yes, less than £50 GBP per month

No.	Name (pseudonyms)	Age	Spouse's age	Hometown[5]	Duration of long-term residency (years)	Education level (from Thailand)	Occupation	Marital status	Children from previous marriage	Children from current marriage	Financial remittance
22	June	38	51	North-Eastern	13	higher non-university education	beauty salon staff	married	0	1	Yes, between £100 and £200 per month
23	Som	38	38	North-Eastern	15	university undergraduate	restaurant worker (waiting staff)	married	0	1	Yes, more than £200 per month
24	Kate	48	58	Bangkok	6	university undergraduate	care worker	separated	2*	0	Yes, less than £50 GBP per month
25	Nara	44	45	Southern	6	university undergraduate	NGO worker	married	0	0	No
26	Nim	49	77	Central	14	primary school	masseuse	divorced	2**	0	Yes, less than £50 GBP per month
27	Nan	42	46	Northern	2	secondary school	purchasing assistant	married	0	0	Yes, more than £200 per month
28	Apa	46	50	North-Eastern	13	university undergraduate	housewife	married	0	0	No
29	Nop	54	50	Western	23	university undergraduate	police officer	divorced	1*	0	No
30	Roong	51	57	North-Eastern	4	secondary school	supermarket staff	married	2**	0	Yes, more than £200 per month
31	Naam	48	64	Central	2	university undergraduate	self-employed	married	1**	0	No

*Number of children from previous marriage with British man, **Number of children from previous marriage with Thai man

Respondents were mainly located in Sussex county (Brighton and Hove, Southwick, Littlehampton, Burgess Hill) (n=12) and London (n=12). Others were located in other parts of the UK (n=7). Respondents were aged between 36 and 59 years old. Duration of residency of interview respondents is a minimum 2 years, maximum of 30 years and an average of 13 years. Their occupations whilst in the UK are concentrated in the service sector with some exceptions in vocational and professional level: restaurant worker (n=6), care worker (n=4), supermarket staff (n=3), housewife (n=3), business owner (food sector) (n=2), self-employed (n=2), cleaner (n=1), masseuse (n=1), NGO worker (n=2), stress management consultant (n=1), beauty salon staff (n=1), canteen manager (n=1), customer service staff (n=1), purchasing assistant (n=1), police officer (n=1), retired (n=1). Respondents were from the North-Eastern region of Thailand (n=13), Bangkok and Central region (n=8), Southern region (n=7), Northern region (n=2) and Western region (n=1). The level of education respondents received before moving to the UK is varied: university undergraduate (n=13), secondary school (n=6), higher non-university education (includes vocational/professional training) (n=5), primary school (n=4), and university postgraduate (n=3).

I collected data from interviews between October 2017 and April 2018. I initiated contact with most of the respondents on telephone or via instant message applications (LINE and Facebook messenger) to explain the research and broad topics that would be asked in the interview. I explained to my potential respondents that I would like to talk to them about their experiences about moving and settling down in the UK and what opportunities and challenges they face in their daily life. Most of the contacts agreed to set up an interview with me. Nonetheless, there were few who refused to participate, reasoning that they did not have the material I wanted or were not available for an interview. Some contacts did not participate because they did not fit the criteria. Some interview respondents referred to their friends who might be able to participate in my study as well. Most of the interviews were conducted face to face. I arranged interviews at the homes of respondents, coffee shops and a Thai temple. Respondents were given an information sheet of the research and consent form to sign before the interview began. However, some interviews were conducted over telephone conversations, where verbal consent applied. The length of interviews ranges from 30 minutes to 2 hours and 15 minutes. All interviews were recorded on digital recorder and transcribed word-for-word in Thai. Only chosen quotes used in the thesis were translated into English. I kept a field diary on most of my

respondents, especially those I met face to face or visited at their residence. I took notes on how I gained contact with each person, where we met, what the surroundings during the interview were like, observations on their living situations, and interactions with their family members, for instance.

I started off the interviews by explaining to respondents about their consent in participating in this research and research ethics, where I assured them that their identity will be kept confidential and that they could ask to remove any part of the information they did not wish to share in the study. Then I gave a short questionnaire (Appendix B), which was translated into Thai for all respondents to fill in. The questionnaire contained biographical questions regarding age, hometown, education, occupations, number of children, financial situations, and level of English language proficiency, for instance. For telephone interviews, I asked respondents for verbal consent which was digitally recorded. Then, I read out the questionnaire to respondents and filled in the form for them. I used some of respondent's answers from the questionnaire to discuss further in interviews or asked them to clarify or elaborate on them. After completing the questionnaire, I proceeded with the interview with general questions, e.g. asking them to introduce themselves, their past education and occupation, main reasons for moving to the UK, how they met their husbands, experiences of mobility and settling down in the host country, description of their daily life, among others. As for the semi-structured interview, I drafted an interview guideline (Appendix A) which contains sets of questions according to the theme of the thesis; transnational links, social relationships, aspirations, identity and belonging, and family life. I roughly followed the guideline but was open to conversations or discussions outside of it. Nevertheless, I attempted to keep the conversations and discussions along the themes as much as possible. In some cases, I asked respondents about what I had read on social media or what I heard from conversations with other Thais such as issues about gambling and drug abuse and domestic violence within the Thai community, to gain their opinions on them. Occasionally, respondents gave interesting insights on these issues and related these issues to their own experiences as well.

Kvale (1996) suggests that interviews might enforce an asymmetrical power relationship between the researcher and the researched, as the researcher is the one who directs the conversation with a pre-designed set of questions. I thus reminded myself when I conducted interviews to ask necessary questions but kept my speaking to a minimum. I

let my respondents be the main speaker and probed the conversation to gain deeper and richer content. I intended to make my respondents comfortable and notified them beforehand that they could tell me if they were uncomfortable with any question I asked, or which part they wanted to remain off the record. Sometimes I shared my opinion and experiences to my respondents to break the ice or to 'test the water' about what they feel on certain subjects.

Additionally, I conducted pilot interviews (Appendix C and D) with husbands of two of my respondents. However, due to limited time and resources, I did not manage to pursue more interviews with other British husbands and focussed on the interview material I gained from Thai wives. I also arranged an elite group interview with a Thai diplomat and a local staff from the Royal Thai Embassy in London (Appendix E), where I obtained information on the number and characteristics of the Thai population and their main issues and situations in the UK.

3.5.2 Participant observation

Another method included as a part of the ethnography is participant observation. The semi-structured interview provides insights of interviewees in their own voices, but with a researcher's presence interviewees might not fully reveal their personal thoughts. People might not describe their 'banal' everyday practices such as homemaking, child-rearing, participating in religious and cultural events, doing hobbies, etc. Participant observation would fulfil other methods by giving the researcher the opportunity to observe lives of those who we want to study. O'Reilly (2008) quotes Malinowsky (1922) that the purposes of participant observation are "to understand things from the 'native's' point of view and to blend into the setting so as to disturb it as little as possible" (p.151). Moreover, it gives "…an insight to things people may otherwise forget to mention or would not normally want to discuss" (O'Reilly 2008, p.155).

I believe that participant observation would provide a deeper understanding of how the hometown association works and how Thai people interact with the impact of such an association. I conducted participant observations by joining in cultural and social events such as events at Buddhist temples, social gatherings, Thai restaurants, community meetings and others. The most important part of participant observation was that I had to be granted access to people's lives. Therefore, I presented myself to my respondents as a

PhD student who was studying the lives of Thai-British couples in the UK. I hope I could gain trust from my respondents by describing my purpose of doing this study. Most of the Thai women I met expressed interest when I mentioned that I was a PhD student who was doing research on Thai women. They always suggest whom I should interview, where I should go to meet Thai women, and shared their contacts with me. After each participant observation, I took notes of what occurred at the scene, what was my impression about them, who attended each event, what were the roles of each group of participants, and what were discussed among participants, for example.

On a Sunday of November 2017, interviews were unintentionally conducted on the spot of participant observation. I visited Buddhapadipa temple in London to observe Thai language and cultural classes and managed to conduct interviews with Thai mothers who brought their children to classes on that day. Being an 'insider' – sharing the ethnicity and native language – facilitated creation of rapport and access to participant observations and interviews with Thai marriage migrants. Many Thai mothers agreed to join the interview immediately after I mentioned about my research. My initial intention of visiting the temple that day was to conduct participant observation and make interview appointments with Thai mothers on other occasions. Nevertheless, a Thai dance instructor suggested that I should conduct the interview on that day since mothers normally spent hours waiting for their children to finish class. As I expected the unexpected, I brought some questionnaire forms, interview guideline and a recorder with me. On that day, I managed to have four interviews in a noisy dance class. At times, my respondents and I had to shout to understand each other. A mother was preparing lunch for her children and simultaneously talking to them while we were having the interview. The advantage of doing interviews at the site of the participant observation is that I could closely observe interactions of people and instantly discussed with respondents about what was happening on the spot. I saw interactions between Thai wives and British husbands, between parents and children, and between children themselves. Nevertheless, doing interviews at the observation site entails some disadvantages: some of the interviews were rushed as mothers were dealing with their kids. Although I felt that we captured the essential material, I wish I could hear more about their life stories. Another lesson I learned on that day was that interview location is one of the most important factors of gaining rich interview material. Therefore, I always asked respondents later to meet at uncrowded places such as their homes or small coffee shops. Not only was it difficult to concentrate

on the conversations, it was hard to transcribe the interview with the loud background noise as well.

Working at a Thai restaurant was also part of my participant observations. Many Thai women, who were potentially my respondents, worked at Thai restaurants. I built trust and rapport with potential respondents through sharing experiences of working in restaurants. Working as a server allowed me to gain a richer insight of, not only Thai women's life but also the Thai community in general. The Thai restaurant is where Thai migrants exchange their casual conversations on daily life. These casual conversations had helped me understand better the experiences and issues of the lives of Thai migrants in the UK. I got to observe women's work hours, their struggle of juggling between jobs, and sometimes their discussion on life issues with each other. These instances partly helped me develop specific questions which were used for individual interviews.

Moreover, I conducted participant observations at annual meetings of the TWNE in Bangkok, Thailand twice in July 2017 and July 2018. I retained contact with members of TWNE from my previous research project on temporary migration between Thailand and Europe. In 2017, the chairperson of TWNE shared information about the workshop and invited me to attend. The purpose of the meeting was to provide basic training for Thai volunteers who helped other Thai migrants abroad. This group focussed on assisting Thai women, both labour and marriage migrants. The meetings consisted of 5-day workshops on basic counselling, which also included fieldwork to humanitarian organisations and networking of Thai volunteers who lived in different countries. The meetings were sponsored by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS), Thailand. I was offered an opportunity to participate in their 5-day workshop and built network with other volunteers. During the workshop in 2017, I had gained contacts with Thai volunteers abroad, among them was a member of TWN4UK. She invited me to join in the network's chat group and connected me with the chairperson of TWN4UK. I later became a member of the network. I expressed my clear intention as a PhD student who was working on Thai women in the UK and disclaimed membership as I might not be as resourceful as other members in giving advice to people in need. However, the chairperson of TWN4UK acknowledged that but wanted to include me as, in her opinion, I could share some academic insight on the issue of Thai women in the UK.

Furthermore, I attended a meeting of TWN4UK in April 2018 in London, where members of TWN4UK meet with partnering organisations such as The Royal Thai Embassy in

London, The Metropolitan Police and other non-governmental organisations working on human trafficking in the UK. The purpose of the meeting was to bring members of TWN4UK to meet face-to-face since they worked online and some members had never seen one another. The meeting consisted of discussions on the situation concerning issues of Thai women living in the UK, focusing on human trafficking. This was followed by a workshop to strengthen skills on handling cases, where they invited women who experienced domestic violence and were assisted by the network to share their experiences.

3.6 Coding and data analysis

The interview data I acquired were coded under four major themes; life in the UK (which includes sub-themes, i.e. occupation, social network, settling down, citizenship, everyday encounters), transnationalism (engagement with Thai communities in the UK, remittances, aspiration of return, investment in Thailand, contact and visit to Thailand, cultural and political engagement in Thailand), family (relationship with husband, raising children, relationship with Thai family members and British in-laws, conflicts, household responsibilities), and wellbeing (opportunities and challenges). All transcriptions were printed out and data were initially manually coded. Then coded data was transferred onto NVivo, a qualitative data analysis programme. The reason of using NVivo is that it helped manage the large quantity of qualitative data and assisted in categorising the data which facilitated data analysis. The four major themes were transformed as nodes and sub-themes as sub-nodes. Using NVivo helped me see the magnitude of each topic, identify key topics that emerged in interviews, see cross-cutting discussions among respondents and patterns of responses. I could see which topics were most discussed and could easily compare respondents' answers using the programme. NVivo was used as a tool to organise and manage large amounts of qualitative data, however, critical analysis and interpretation of data still had to be done by researcher.

Chapter 4
Social Networks, Social Capital and Wellbeing

This chapter discusses the relationship between social networks, social capital and wellbeing of Thai marriage migrants in the UK. The chapter will explore how social networks are formed among migrants and also between migrants and local residents. Thai marriage migrants in the UK build and re-build their networks while settling in a new country. In new settings, Thai women participate and/or exclude themselves from various forms of social relationships. Furthermore, this chapter will explore how and what kinds of social capital Thai marriage migrants gain or exchange through these networks. By focusing on forms of social relationships and networks outside of their relationship with their husband and children, I hope to examine migrants' broader social ties which affect their lives as migrants in the UK. This chapter will also examine how social networks and social capital, or lack thereof, have an impact on wellbeing of Thai women in the UK.

4.1 Social capital

Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group" (p. 21). For Bourdieu, social capital, to a certain extent, is convertible into economic capital. It can also be an indicator of social status as he argues that social capital can be "institutionalised as a form of nobility" (p. 16). In Bourdieu's sense, forms of capital are discussed in relation to class. He focusses on accumulation of capital, production of profits and reproduction of capital, which results in a power struggle and social hierarchy. Bourdieu's stance on social capital is considered fundamental in understanding social relationships and unequal power in a society. Nevertheless, he does not offer much discussion on ethnic relations which affect various forms of social capital in the society.

Providing more specific aspects in terms of social capital and ethnic groups, Portes (1995) refers to social capital as "the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures. Such resources may include economic tangibles like price discounts and interest-free loans, or intangibles like information about business conditions, employment tips, and generalized "goodwill" in

market transactions. The resources themselves are not social capital; the concept refers instead to the individual's ability to mobilize them on demand (p.12)." In his study, Portes aims to explain the relationship between social capital and entrepreneurship of migrant groups in the United States. His examination of social capital focuses on exchanges of 'currency' or expectation of reciprocity. For example, people give loans to their friends in the hope that their friends would do the same in the future. Portes suggests that actors can transfer social capital in altruistic and instrumental ways. According to him, there are four sources of social capital (Portes 1995, p. 15):

1. Values (altruistic) which comes from general moral imperatives, such as gifts to kin.

2. Bounded solidarity (altruistic) which comes from identification with in-group needs and goals, such as gifts to co-ethnic peers or members of the same religious community.

3. Reciprocity (instrumental) which comes from the expectation of commensurate returns by beneficiaries, such as market tips and other favours to business associates.

4. Enforceable trust (instrumental) which comes from the expectation of higher community status and commensurate returns by beneficiaries subject to collective sanctions, such as concessionary loans; waiving of contractual guarantees for members of the same ethnic or religious community.

Unlike Bourdieu, Portes does not emphasise the accumulation of social capital which results in social nobility, but rather on the transaction of resources through social networks and social capital within ethnic groups. His perspective on social capital helps illuminate and explain the types social capital of Thai women in the UK. Though he provides expansive and useful examination on social capital, it still does not explain the complex relationships of immigrants and local community members in terms of social capital. In the case of Thai marriage migrants who have intimate relationships with British husbands, their acquisition of social capital is more complicated than the conceptual model above, which only illustrates the transaction of social capital within, but not across ethnic groups.

Another interesting take on social capital is that of Putnam. Putnam (2007) discusses the importance of bonding and bridging social capital in his research on immigration and ethnic diversity in the US. His argument puts 'trust' as the main component in the

discussion on social capital, a concept that is absent from Bourdieu's perspective. Similar to Portes, Putnam gives a 'lean and mean' definition of social capital as "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" (p.137). He examines the relationship between diversity and social capital in the US and finds that diversity tends to reduce social solidarity and social capital in the short run. His main finding is the 'hunker down' effect where people in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods tend to keep to themselves, have fewer friends and have less trust towards their neighbours (p.150-151). Putnam's outlook is that in order to achieve a successful immigrant society, there should be "immigration policy [that] focuses on the reconstruction of ethnic identities, reducing their social salience without eliminating their personal importance" (p.161). He proposes that promoting participation of immigrants in ethnically defined social groups, such as religious institutions, is an essential initial step for the immigrant's civic engagement (p. 165). In other words, bonding social capital of immigrants is the first step to bridging social capital with local people. Here, Putnam leads us to the importance of bonding and bridging social capital in a diverse society.

4.2 Bonding and bridging social capital

Putnam (2007) suggests that ethnic diversity may result in a less engaged and less trusting environment in the society in the short term; he believes that bonding is an initial step that will lead to a bridging of social capital, thus building social solidarity and encompassing identities in the long term (p.164-5). His perspective is a key contribution in the study of social capital and migration as it points out the importance of bonding and bridging in contemporary diverse communities. As I will elaborate in the next section, I believe that the concepts of bonding and bridging will be useful in exploring social relationships of Thai marriage migrants in the context of transnational migration to the UK. I aim to find out what are the causes of bonding and bridging among this particular group, and what are the expected outcomes.

Putnum (2007) defines 'bonding' social capital as "ties to people who are like you in some important way" and 'bridging' social capital as "ties to people who are unlike you in some important way" (p.143). According to his definition, bonding includes ties among people who share the same ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, class and/or other identities, while bridging refers to ties that we create with people who do not share the same categories of our identity. In the case of this research, I found that Thai women

migrants in the UK were more prone to bonding with other Thai migrants, rather than bridging with British people. There are in-group factors that draw Thai people together, hence their bonding. These factors include shared ethnicity, language, culture, religion, and migratory experiences. They are the core reason why in-group bonding among Thais tends to be stronger than with their British counterparts. Sharing similar migratory experiences is an interesting motivation for Thai women to bond with each other. Being married to a Westerner, being apart from family and friends back home, struggling to learn a new language, adapting to a new society and finding jobs are all life experiences that are relatable to most Thai marriage migrants in the UK. Another salient factor that influences bonding among Thai migrants is the notion of 'being Thai'. From my observations, Thai migrants who are strangers are initially drawn together by hearing others speaking the Thai language. For example, when Thai people in the UK heard me speak Thai, they frequently asked me, "are you Thai?" This subsequently led to conversations about how or why we came to the country. This is the first step of bonding. It is interesting because Thais in the UK are not divided by their regional differences as much as they are in Thailand. Whereas in Thailand people show their interest in meeting people from the same region. They would greet people who they hear speaking the same dialect from where they come from. For North-eastern Thais, the saying 'people from the same home' (*kon baan diew kan*) refers to people from the same province or region, whom they assume have a similar understanding of the struggles of urban migrants and have the potential to develop friendship with. Mostly, this concept is reinforced among people who migrated from other provinces to Bangkok. In terms of Thai migrants in the UK, the Thai language is the first glue that unites them together. Although they hear people speaking different Thai dialects, they are considered 'Thai', people who came from the same country. Being Thai is more than speaking the Thai language, of course. For some, a Thai identity is reinforced by being born in Thailand, attending cultural and religious events at Thai temples and Thai associations, eating Thai food, and understanding and practicing Thai customs, values and traditions, for example. Thai migrants seem to accept this broader definition of 'being Thai' in the migratory context. 'Being Thai' in Thailand entails which region or province one comes from, while 'being Thai' abroad is defined more loosely as being born in or from Thailand. This topic will be further elaborated in the next chapter where I examine institutionalised Thai national identity construction which has a crucial impact on Thai people and their maintenance of Thai identity abroad.

I also assume that there are out-group factors that influence bonding of social capital among Thai women. Language barriers and cultural differences were mostly cited among respondents as perceived obstacles to 'fitting-in' with local people. Experiences of intolerance, racism, sexism and shared sentiment of 'internalised racism' partly contribute to their in-group collectivity and obstruct their bridging to the locals. Speight (2007) argues that 'internalised racism' is the most damaging psychological injury caused by racism (p. 130). Williams and Williams-Morris (2000) refer to internalised racism as "the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves" (p. 255). While actual racist and sexist prejudices and stereotypes were reported to seldomly occur among Thai migrants, some Thai women expressed that they 'felt' that British locals perceived them in a certain way, as being a 'third world' woman, sex worker, or bar girl, for instance. This self-perception might contribute to a relational distance between migrants and locals.

The next factor is the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs), which enables more frequent, convenient and intense transnational communication between Thai migrants and their families and friends in Thailand. This might bring about a lower motivation to connect with local people, as will be elaborated in a later section. However, bonding and bridging social capital among Thai women in the UK is not a black and white matter, but rather occurs in various degrees. It is not to say that there is much bonding and no bridging. I found that in terms of bonding Thai women seemed to bond with other Thais, and that the bonding is selective. Some women expressed that they tried to distance themselves from people who look for loans, or partake in gambling or drug use. In terms of bridging with locals, women in the sample tended to bridge their social capital with in-law family members, rather than other British acquaintances. The inherent Thai family values of extended family and taking care of relatives, especially elderly members, are important reasons in this kind of bridging. Other British non-family members were mostly on the periphery of social relationships of Thai women, generally restricted to being colleagues and casual acquaintances. The following section will elaborate on these particular findings on bonding and bridging social capital of Thai marriage migrants and how they affect their wellbeing while living in the UK.

This chapter will mainly apply the conceptual arguments on social networks and social capital of Portes and Putnam. While Bourdieu lays the foundation of the concept of social

capital, I find that Portes and Putnum's perspectives provides a deeper analysis on social capital in relation to migration and the ethnic community. I agree with Portes (1995) that migration is a cross-border network creating process. Here, I argue that Thai women's social capital is transnational. It should be considered in terms of cross-border relationships and be examined in a way that questions why their social capital is not simply bounded within a border. The failure to 'fit-in' with a host society may lead them to seek transnational social capital to improve their wellbeing as migrants. The gap in the discussion of social capital is that it tends to bound the discussion within one social setting and ignore cross-border social interactions and network building. The struggle of migrants to fit in or acculturate in the host society may discourage them from bridging social capital with local people and instead lead to bonding social capital with their co-ethnics. The bonding also transcends borders as migrants seek to reconnect with their family members, friends and network of Thai people back in Thailand. This can be seen as migrants seek emotional, moral and material support from people at home. These connections are made easier by the rapid improvement of efficient ICTs. Thai migrants also seek advice and assistance from their network of Thai people based in various locations, both in Europe and Thailand. This can be seen in the case of the Thai Women Network in the UK (TWN4UK), a voluntary non-profit association which dedicates their time and resources to helping Thai women who face difficulties in the UK.

4.3 Social network

In his examination of the concept of social networks, Portes (1995) claims that "networks are important in economic life because they are sources for the acquisition of scarce means, such as capital or information, and because they simultaneously impose effective constraints on the unrestricted pursuit of personal gain" (p.8). In his review on the concept of social capital, he also further elaborates that "social networks are not a natural given and must be constructed through investment strategies oriented to the institutionalization of group relations, usable as a reliable source of other benefits" (Portes 1998, p.3). In the same light, Vertovec (2001) argues that besides portraying how people are connected, social networks also "affect the circulation of resources, which can be defined as anything that allows an actor or group to 'control, provide or apply a sanction to another social actor: money, facilities, labor, legitimacy, group size, discretionary time, organizing experience, legal skills, or even violence'" (p.9). And for migrants, "social networks are

crucial for finding jobs and accommodation, circulating goods and services, as well as psychological support and continuous social and economic information" (p.13). Importantly, the social network perspective has an advantage in providing abstract aspects of interpersonal relations, "which cut across institutions and the boundaries of aggregated concepts such as neighbourhood, workplace, kinship or class" (Rogers and Vertovec 1995, p.15).

In this study with Thai marriage migrants, I found that Thai women seek networks to feel a sense of 'belonging' in a foreign society, which also can result in better economic opportunities and wellbeing. They found information about employment through friends and acquaintances. It is interesting to explore why Thai migrants seek to establish networks with people from the same ethnicity rather than local people. This chapter will investigate how Thai migrants create or participate in social networks and which kinds of networks they choose to get involved in. In exploring the social network and social capital of Thai marriage migrants in the UK, we will be able to understand more about their decisions and lived experiences. Choosing to be in certain social circles is a strategic decision. Migrants tend to participate in social networks that benefit them in terms of economy, social life and emotional and material support. Certainly, they also tend to stay in social networks which yield them social capital.

In the first years of moving and settling in the UK, Thai migrants join social networks by introduction from former migrants and local people. Newcomers may meet former migrants through visiting places which cater to their co-ethnics, such as religious venues, restaurants, grocery stores, festivals, or social gatherings. Occasionally, British people such as their husbands and in-laws are the ones who introduced them to these places and connect them to their co-ethnics. After spending their lives in the UK for several years, gaining employment, and having children, migrants begin to expand their social circles. They bond with their colleagues from various nationalities and backgrounds. They get to know the parents of their children's friends. They get closer to their in-law families, for instance. Despite all this, I found that Thai marriage migrants still maintain stronger bonds with fellow Thais than with people of other ethnicities. First generation migrants might find that they can command more resources through joining co-ethnic social networks rather than with people from other ethnicities due to shared language, culture, religion and similar migratory experiences.

Pim, who initially moved to the UK for English language study with her Thai friends and eventually married a British man and moved to the UK permanently, shared her opinions about the difference in social relationships among Thai migrants and the locals:

> *I have some (British) friends, mostly colleagues. They are bar staff* (Pim was an owner of a pub kitchen).

> *Interviewer: Do you feel that you can trust them or can ask for help when you are in trouble?*

> *Mostly we just hang out, go out together. But if I'm really in trouble, it would be Thai friends (that I ask for help) … I feel more comfortable (with Thai friends). I think it's easier for me to see if they are honest to me or not. British people just talk to you but when you have problem, they don't help you. Thai friends can help you more (than the British).*

> *Interviewer: What kind of problem are you referring to?*

> *Mostly general stuff, including financial problems, family issues. Or when they (Thai friends) are short of staff, I can go and give them a hand. Mostly these kinds of stuff.*

Although they forge close relationships with British spouses and in-laws, the social relationship with other British people seems to be weak and mostly limited to relationships between colleagues. Ultimately, which network migrants decide to be in, in various degrees, results in their social capital.

To understand Thai migrants in terms of their social networks and social capital, we must explore how they 'command resources' by applying their membership to certain groups where they feel that the relationships are reciprocal, beneficial and trustworthy. It is worth exploring further which membership Thai women migrants identified themselves as belonging to in British society. Does being married to British spouses and moving to the UK make them part of British society? Or rather, do they feel that they belong to a migrant social circle. This chapter will look at how they build networks in the UK and how, and with whom, they command resources.

4.4 Social networks and social capital of Thai women migrants in the UK

A number of scholars claim that cross-cultural, inter-ethnic marriage is a pathway to integration into a host society (Alba and Nee, 2003; Kalmijn, 1998; Lee and Bean, 2004; Lee and Edmonston, 2005). According to previous literature on Thai women's transnational marriage, it has been shown that Thai women engaged in transnational marriage through existing networks of Thai women who had participated in such

marriages before them. Some Thai women who were married to Westerners turned themselves into marriage brokers they invited other fellow villagers to meet Westerners in hope of a transnational marriage (Ayuwat et al., 2011; Ayuwat and Narongchai, 2018). However, from my study, I found that the majority of the sample met their husbands without using an existing network of Thai marriage migrants. Rather, they met their British husbands while at work, on holiday, or while socialising. Most of them met each other in Thailand. Some of them met in the UK while the woman was in the country as a student.

As most women met their spouses in Thailand, they came to the UK with limited, or no, co-ethnic social networks and had to establish new social relationships in the new host society. Many interviewees reflected that it was difficult for them when they first arrived in the UK with their husbands. Their lives had completely changed and they had to adapt to the new society, language, climate, values and norms, among others. Examining relations between migration and social network formation, Portes (1995) asserts that migration in itself is a cross-border network-creating process because "it develops an increasingly dense web of contacts between places of origins and destinations" (p.22). Although Portes's statement is true, I argue that we also have to look at migration as a network-creating process within the border of destination countries. Migrants will have to create new networks in the country of their destination. Especially for marriage migrants who do not move to join their co-ethnics but rather to accompany a local, i.e. their husbands. They will have to seek new social networks in a completely new environment.

From interviews with Thai women in Thai-British partnerships, I found that marriage does not necessarily pave the way to integration or make them feel belonging to the host society. Although they were married to a British man and moved to settle in the UK, the majority of Thai women still sought co-ethnic social networks, meaning that they were more inclined to build social relationships with fellow Thai migrants. This section will examine why that is the case by looking at what supports or hinders network building among Thai migrants and between them and British locals through the examination of three important stages of developing social networks and exchanging social capital of Thai marriage migrants in the UK – lonely newcomers, finding one's tribe and befriending the locals.

4.4.1 Lonely newcomers

It might seem that Thai women possess a certain level of social capital while living in the UK because of their intimate marital relationships with their British husbands. However, many interview respondents shared stories of feeling a sense of loneliness and isolation, especially when they newly arrived in the UK. The majority of interview respondents (18 out of 31) began their permanent residency in the UK in early 2000s, meaning that they arrived in the period when ICTs were still under-developed and smartphones almost non-existent. It took longer and was more difficult for migrants to contact their loved ones in Thailand. Loneliness upon arrival in a new country was one of the challenges that Thai women migrants faced as a result of migration. Being away from family members and especially their parents who they always took care of could cause emotional distress to many women. Many women struggled with loneliness because they struggled to adjust to a new life without friends they could rely on. Mook said that she did not get out of the house in the first two months after arriving in the UK in 2000 because the weather was so cold. Her husband went to work every day, so she spent most of the time alone and she occasionally cried because of loneliness.

Some said that they felt like they had to tackle feelings of homesickness, especially when they faced difficult situations or major changes in their lives. The lack of kinship support from Thai family members can also cause stress in many women migrants. Dang had three children with her British husband who was an expat in Bangkok. When his work contract in Thailand ended, they decided to move to the UK with their three children. The youngest one was only six months old at the time of their move. She told me about her homesickness and depression after she moved to the UK in the year 2000;

> *Interviewer: Did you have any expectations about what it's like to live in the UK?*
>
> *Expectations? In that moment, I felt excited. Because I was coming here, not as a student and not in my early twenties. I came here when I was a thirty-something and with babies. When I was in Thailand, I had people who helped taking care of me, helped me with the chores and the babies, helped me shopping, all that stuff. But when I came here, I had to do everything on my own. It was a lot to adjust. I felt homesick for a whole six months. I was crying, missing my home. The weather is also a factor. I felt so lonely, I didn't want to be here at that time.*

Many respondents implied that they used to being surrounded by Thai family members who always gave them a hand. Statistically, the extended family is one of the predominant types of household in Thailand (in 2007, the extended family accounts for 34.5 percent

of all Thai households) (National Statistical Office, 2008). Among these extended families are a large number of skipped generation households which consist of grandparents, grandchildren, and no middle generation since parents move away to urban areas for employment (Keeratipongpaiboon, 2012). In Thailand, some couples moved to live with their in-laws after getting married. The couples can expect their parents, parents-in-law or other relatives to help them take care of their children or help with the chores. The difference in family relations between Thailand and the UK, where the nuclear family is a norm, makes many women feel that they have to adapt massively to new family arrangements. Being attached with Thai family values where younger generations are expected to take care of older family members, many respondents said that they took care of their parents-in-law when they could. Aside from occasionally paying visits, Thai wives tend to help with cleaning, cooking and running small errands when they visit their husbands' elderly parents.

4.4.2 Finding one's tribe

After settling down in the country for a while, women began to be able to adapt to new social settings and build new social relationships. Some women would meet other Thais by attending events at temples, through acquaintances, Asian groceries stores, schools and workplaces. Some women said that their husbands were the ones who introduced them to ethnic gatherings such as Thai temples or Asian grocery stores because they could sense that their wives were lonely. Ann and Nuan said that their husbands were the ones who introduced them to Thai temples and the Thai community in the UK;

Ann

I had to adjust a lot. The weather… My husband first took me to the temple to meet other Thais. He was afraid that I would be stressed out living here, so he took me there. I started to make friends from here (the temple). I met my first Thai friend here.

Nuan

When I first arrived here, my husband took me to a Thai restaurant. I have to admit that he is quite thoughtful. The first year I was here, he took me to a Thai temple in London. He saw that I'm Thai so he prepared. He took me to Asian grocery stores where they sell Thai food… It's not that I'm here and there is nothing. He took me to a Thai festival with Thai food and Thai

activities. He took me to 2-3 temples, I think. He knows that I like to make merit at temples, so he takes me.

A number of Thai women migrants found it difficult to adjust to a new language, climate, society, customs, and culture. In this sense, Thai grocery stores, Thai restaurants and Thai temples function as 'social hubs' for the Thai ethnic community, where Thai people initiate their social networks with their co-ethnics in the UK. These hubs are where they exchange information, find employment, seek advice to their life problems and even relieve loneliness. I was acquainted with a Thai woman who worked in a Thai grocery store in Brighton. She usually mentioned that I should visit 'auntie', the shop owner, because she knew many Thai people in the area. Quite a few women from Brighton that I interviewed also mentioned this shop as the first Thai place they visited and got connected to other Thais. The shop was well-known among the Thai community in Brighton. The owner invited Buddhist monks to receive alms at the shop on major Buddhist holidays. I attended the alms giving there twice and found that there were 20-30 people attending, mostly Thai women. Some brought their husbands and children with them. It was a chance for them to make merit and catch up with other Thais in the community.

Portes (1995, p.27) points out that ethnic business enclaves are "spatially clustered networks of business owned by members of the same minority. They are not dispersed among other populations, … but emerge in close proximity to the areas settled by their own group. Enclave businesses arise at first to serve the culturally defined needs of their co-ethnics and only gradually branch out to supply the broader market." Thai grocery stores do not only provide culturally defined commodities, but are a place where cultural practices are reproduced, and ethnic social capital and networks created. Thai enclave business might be the product of former Thai migrants, but later generations of migrants also benefit from these establishments, not only for employment but also from the established social network. Although Thai restaurants are run by Thais, their main customers are locals rather than Thai migrants, since recipes of Thai food in these restaurants are adjusted (less spicy than normal Thai food, using local ingredients instead of original Thai ingredients, for example) to accommodate British people's taste. Given this, some Thai migrants visited these restaurants as customers to get to know people, or to find jobs.

Many women develop friendships with their Thai colleagues and became closer than just co-workers. They invite each other to dinner at their houses, go to clubs, ask for advice or help when they face difficulties and even ask to borrow money. It is interesting that when I ask Thai women which group of people were their closest friends, most answered "Thai friends". The closeness was defined by respondents as the ability to ask for financial help, the availability and capacity to help and give advice. These are examples of how Thai women described their relationships with their 'close friends'.

Nong

Interviewer: Are most of your friends here Thai or British?

Mostly Thai. The first year I came here I met a Thai woman whom now I consider as my sister. I don't ask her for money, but I ask her for advice. Sometimes I have arguments with other friends, I tell her. It's like I share my daily life with her. Sometimes everything is fine, but I still chat with her, talk about how our day is going.

Nan

Interviewer: Are most of your friends here Thai or British?

I have friends in various groups. My British friends are mostly from the same college. I went to a college. But in case of Thai friends, they are my former customers (she works in importing business) who became my friends. I'm also friends with my customers' friends. We met on Saturdays and Sundays. Sometimes we have events like parties, somtam (papaya salad) party, noodle party.

Interviewer: Do you have anyone you can ask for help when you are in trouble?

I think I have. I have not been in any trouble yet. But if I were to face any problem, I think I have people I can ask for help. My closest friend is Thai, but we live far away from each other. We always talk to each other, though. Everybody has to have a close friend. Mine is Thai.

For some women, 'close friends' are defined by trustworthiness and how much they can rely on them. Mine specified the type of assistance she and her close friends exchange;

Mine

Interviewer: Your Thai friends, are you able to ask them for help? Do you trust them?

Yes, I have 3-4 close friends. We became friends since we first arrived in England. We still see each other nowadays. I'm quite lucky about friendship because my friends take good care of me. When we are in trouble, we help each other. I am lucky.

Interviewer: What kind of trouble?

My trouble mostly is about finding jobs. When I quit my job and want to find a new one. Or when I want to extend my visa. You have to have a certain amount of money in your account when you apply for visa extension. So, I borrow money from my friends to make your statement look good. When my friends want the same favour, I do the same.

Interviewer: That means you have to be very close.

We used to live in the same house. We met since we arrived here (as language students). We are the same; we were working while we were studying. We went to the same school, lived in the same house. I even worked at the same place with some of my friends. We know our problems. We help each other on the visa application. We try to support each other, help each other, rely on each other.

Discussing financial problems requires a certain level of trustworthiness. Loaners must be certain that debtors will pay back their loans. According to Portes (1995), the exercise of this type of social capital between Thai friends is 'reciprocity' where the donor's motivation is instrumental. In transferring resources (in this case, money), the donor expects commensurate returns by beneficiaries (p.15). Mine is an apparent example of this, where she referred to lending money as a 'favour' which she and her friends expect each other to return. Moreover, answers from respondents showed that they were able to trust and 'command resources' from their Thai friends, whether it is information (or advice), employment, loans or assistance.

Even though giving and taking a loan was described as the demarcation of a close friendship for some women, others felt that borrowing money is an unacceptable behaviour among friends. Som expressed her feeling about the friendships she had while living in the UK. When asked if she had trustworthy or reliable friends in the UK, she added:

Yes, I have. But people here (British) mind about asking for help. If I run into trouble, I will manage it on my own. But if you have problems like no food to eat or lack of something, Thai people here are considerate. They will help you. But if you ask to borrow money, the relationship will change. If I get into financial trouble, I'm willing to pay interest or use my own credit card. I will do that rather than asking my friends for money. If I ask them a small amount, it will be fine. But if it is a lot of money, I won't ask them. It is putting yourself into other's shoes. If someone asks to borrow money from me, I don't want to keep friendship with them. I think if we can't manage our own financial issue,

we can't manage other issues in life. People here are quite independent. They don't borrow money from each other. If you have money issue, people will turn away from you. But if you want someone to talk about other problems, you can have that. Many Thai people are generous, but not about money.

According to Table 2, 77 percent of the survey sample said that they principally relied on their British partner when they have financial difficulties, followed by 8.3 percent who said that they relied on Thai friends and acquaintances for financial issues. Aside from their husbands, Thai friends are the secondary source of financial assistance. Many respondents perceived other Thais as more reliable and trustworthy than non-Thais. In part, the shared language results in clear communication and better understanding between them. As a respondent described earlier, she felt that she could easily judge whether another Thai person was being honest or not, which was the reason why she preferred to have social relationships with Thais rather than non-Thais.

Table 2: Based on your experience during your time in the UK, if you have a financial difficulty, who do you turn to for help with this?		
	Frequency	Percent
My partner in the UK	231	77.0
My family in Thailand	9	3.0
My partner's family and friends in the UK	11	3.7
British (non -Thai) friends	5	1.7
Thai friends and acquaintances in the UK	25	8.3
My children	12	4.0
I deal with it alone	6	2.0
Never had a financial difficulty	1	.3
Total	300	100.0

Thai women do not only engage in co-ethnic social networks because they expect to gain resources, but because of feelings of co-ethnic solidarity as well. Nune, who had lived in the UK for 11 years, had many Thai friends and frequently meet one another for meals,

coffees and parties. Nune discussed her relationship with her Thai friends and how she had helped them;

> *Everybody has problems. I am Thai. Sometimes, there are family issues. Mostly, it's family issue. My (Thai) friend was in trouble in the middle of a divorce. I tried to help her as much as I could. I took her to offices where she needed to be, to find suggestions. I helped her fully. I know the feeling because I am Thai. If I were in trouble, I wouldn't know where to go. If Thai people don't help each other, who will? I have helped a lot of people... I often see family problems, break ups with husbands, getting divorces, arguing with husbands. We have British husbands and we moved here. Husbands are our family. If we break up with our husbands, we have no one. If we don't have any friends, we have no one at all. Because we don't have our siblings, our relatives here. That's why friends are our family. That is my opinion. I don't know if other people would agree. But for me, if anyone is in trouble, I will absolutely help them. Because I think of them (Thai friends) as in the same family.*

Being a marriage migrant makes women feel sympathy for others who share the same experience. Nune referred to her Thai friends as 'family', whom she would definitely help if they were in trouble. Apart from shared experiences as a marriage migrant and being co-ethnics, Thai migrants feel that they face similar obstacles while living abroad. The difficulty in communicating with British locals was found to be one of the most distressing situations among respondents, especially when they faced problems while living in the UK. Another respondent said that while she was separated from her husband due to domestic abuse, she was so stressed out that she wanted to "smash her head into the wall" because she could not fluently communicate in English to get the assistance she wanted. 15 out of 31 interview respondents reported that they 'sometimes' have difficulty in understanding and communicating in English. This is supported by the survey results (Table 3) where 48 percent said that they 'sometimes' have problems with the English language in a conversation, while only 9.7 percent said that they never had such a problem.

Table 3: How often do you have problems with the English language in a conversation?		
	Frequency	Percent
Never	29	9.7
Rarely	127	42.3

Sometimes	144	48.0
Total	300	100.0

When asking women about socialisation among Thai people, few respondents mentioned problems among Thais and distanced themselves from what they perceived as bad influences and behaviours. Respondents mentioned types of Thai people they would not associate with, such as gamblers and drug addicts, whom they said were major problems in the Thai community in the UK. From my experience working in a Thai restaurant and getting to know restaurant staff and their friends, I came across some people who engaged in the drug trade and drug use, and also people who were engaged in gambling. Some occasionally went to casinos, but the more popular form of gambling among Thai restaurant workers is lottery scratch cards, which can be purchased at supermarkets and shops. However, the group who were engaged in drugs and casinos were predominantly single Thai men, while the lottery was popular among single and married Thai women. Nevertheless, I did not meet any Thai women who had serious gambling addictions, but they were mentioned in several cases during my interviews. Siri and Oom mentioned similar cases of what they perceived as unacceptable behaviours of some Thai migrants:

Siri

Interviewer: What do you think is the biggest problem among the Thai community here?

Gambling. They (Thai women) want money from their husbands. I don't want to help them. They want their husband to take care of them (financially), even though they misbehave. They earn money but lose in gambling. Then they got stressed out at their husbands. They accuse their husbands about things. They want things that other people have. Some people get jealous with each other, get into a fight. It's like that… I don't socialise with them. I don't care what they say or complain about, where they went gambling. I know the value of money. I work to support myself. I never borrow money from anyone. When I get into trouble, nobody helps me. They lose money in gambling, then they ask for my help. They make many excuses. I lend money to them once or twice, and that's it. But you know Thai people, they never ask if you are okay. How is work? How are your children? They only come to me when they need money… I don't know what they were thinking. This person has brand name handbags and she brags about it. Another woman also brags about it. They compete with each other. I just watch and listen.

Oom
Some Thai people here go to casinos, go out, drink, and sometimes do drugs. But the worst thing is the casino. They earn money and they go there.

Abandon their children, their husbands. Some people leave their children to other people to take care so they can go to the casino… They ask people for loans, borrow money, 20 percent interest. It is sad that it's Thai people who sell each other drugs… There was a woman who lost herself to drug. She went crazy. Pity her. Even children are addicted to gambling. When they go to dinner at their friends' house, they play cards. Sometimes I go to these meetings, too. But I don't drink, nor gamble. I just want to see them, want to socialise.

Oom also said that she had helped a woman who had serious financial problems. She was so poor she did not have money to buy food, so she cooked her meals. However, she said that she could not help everyone because it would become too much of a burden to her.

Friendship among Thai migrants began from knowing people of the same language and culture. In many occasions, these friendships develop into close friendships where they can share personal matters and can expect reciprocal assistance if they need one. However, some migrants encounter other Thais who lead different lifestyles and who are perceived as problematic. Respondents implied that they did not associate with people who were alcoholics, drug addicts, or gamblers. Most respondents implied that they would maintain relationships that are 'meaningful', which is based on trust, understanding, empathy and reciprocity. In many cases, Thai women expressed altruism towards other Thai women who fell into hardship while living in the UK. This might stem from feelings of belonging with co-ethnics and their understandings of shared migratory experiences, as Nune referred to other Thais as in "the same family", for example.

4.4.3 Befriending the locals

Data from interviews shows that the traits of 'close friends' could hardly be found between Thai migrants and non-Thai acquaintances. Some said that they could not establish closeness with British people, be it colleagues, other parents at their children's school, or classmates. As discussed above, it seems that Thai women migrants were more prone to 'bonding' with their co-ethnics through social gathering and religious and cultural activities since they were more comfortable communicating with people who shared the same language and cultural background. However, they were less motivated to 'bridge' their social capital with British locals due to the language barrier and different cultures and values. Among interview respondents, Nara was the only person who mentioned that she had close British friends whom she met while attending a Christian

church in London. Her case is exceptional in my sample because she had an extensive international background. Nara attended a law school in the United States for 5 years, then moved to work in Paris after her graduation and stayed in France for 12 years, where she met her British husband. After seeing each other for some time, the couple moved to London and had been staying there for 7 years. She had friends from various nationalities, but when in London, she connected with church attendees and became close with one another. She worked in a British non-profit organisation on women's rights, with no Thai colleagues. Her experience is vastly different from other interview respondents in the sense that her social network was not mainly grounded within the group of co-ethnics.

Although Thai migrants seem to manifest weak social links with the British, in many cases, they reported to have bridged social capital with family members of their husbands. A number of respondents said that they had established close relationships with their in-laws, and that they could rely on each other when they needed help. It seems their level of social capital with British people is higher with in-laws, and not very high with British colleagues or acquaintances. Many respondents expressed that there were difficulties in establishing closeness with British acquaintances, referring to different values of establishing social relationships between Thai and British friends. For example, lending money was referred to as an activity that hardly occurs between Thai and British people;

Opal

Interviewer: If you have problems, do you have anyone or friends that you can trust, talk to or help you? Except your husband.

Yes, I have friends here. It's because I have worked here for so long. I have a close friend at the Thai embassy (where she previously worked), and we have known each other for 10 years. She is the closest friend I have on this side (the UK). When I have financial problems, I can call her. I have friends here but it's different from friends I have in Thailand. It's hard to build friendship here because we met as adults. My mother-in-law said that if I have any problem, I can tell her. Farangs (foreigners) are not that bad. If I tell them, they will give a hand.

Interviewer: What about British friends?

I have some British friends, but I would not ask to borrow money from them. Because I don't feel that we are close enough to borrow money from each other. I worked in many British organisations but I never felt that close with British colleagues. I hang out with friends of my husband too, but I don't feel that we are close friends.

Mine, in explaining her lack of friendship with British people, said the major obstacle is the language barrier, despite coming to the UK for language school since 2005:

> *Interviewer: Except your husband, do you have any British friends or acquaintances that you are comfortable with?*
>
> *I don't have any British friends. I only have my husband and his family. I talk to his family once in a while, but mostly we barely see each other.*
>
> *Interviewer: You have lived here for quite a long time. How come you don't have any British friends?*
>
> *No, I don't. Mostly I have Thai friends. My English is awful. My husband is still complaining that I don't have British friends. I have only Thai friends. That's why I have problem communicating with him. My speaking English is not good or even awful.*

Ming, who has lived in the UK since 1987, shared her opinions about making friends with British people, claiming that there was envious sentiment between her and them which resulted in an inability to establish friendship:

> *When my daughter was in secondary school, I had (British) friends who were mothers. We went to parties together. But what I found was that, education is very competitive in this country. My daughter was always the top of her class. She would get full marks in every subject, even the last year she was at school. The school had a meeting to discuss giving out awards to students who had excellent performance. My daughter was the top of every subject. So, the school committee had to discuss to also give out awards to other students because other parents would not attend the ceremony if it was only my daughter who got the awards. That's why my daughter was bullied. Other parents also had prejudices towards us. A woman phoned me and asked where my daughter attended extracurricular classes. I said she didn't go to any. That woman was so furious, she slammed the phone down. It was a problem. I could not make friends from there (the school). We (Ming and other parents) were not close because they were envious.*

Ming further shared that she did not know many Thai people in the first 20 years of her life in the UK. She previously did her postgraduate study in a British university, worked at home, and took care of her three children. It seems that the only British people whom she socialised with were other parents at her children's school, whom she did not have a good relationship with. She started making friends with Thai people around the year 2011-2012 since she became part of Buddhapadipa temple community, where she volunteered as a meditation instructor. She became acquainted with, and then friends

with, other Thai women who were regular volunteers at the temple. Nowadays, they always volunteer at the temple's activities and socialise together as a group.

Whereas most of the respondents have weak friendships with locals, the majority of them shared that they had good relationships with family members of their husbands. Although their in-laws lived far away from them, they still maintained contact and were supportive of one another. These are some examples of how respondents described their relationship with family members on the husbands' side.

Nuan

It is not as good as Thai family because I'm not living with them every day. We don't see each other every week. He (her husband's uncle) calls us once or twice a month. Foreigners are like this. It is distant but we don't despise each other. They love me. When I visit him, I help them with the chores. When I see something messy, I tidy up for him. He is an elderly and I am his niece-in-law. I do what I can because he is my husband's uncle, an elderly. I do it with my heart. He does not owe me anything. He is an old person and when he sees me helping, he thinks that I am an 'okay' person. He said to my husband, "you are lucky you have a good wife who takes care of you". I don't do it to show off.

Nan

It is quite good. We have separate lives but when we meet for dinner on several occasions, I think they are quite impressed with a Thai daughter-in-law. I think it's good because I cater to them too. When I go back to Thailand I always buy them some souvenirs. It is okay.

Mine

They are okay. They respect me and are kind to me. They know that my English is not very good, so they speak slowly to me. They take care of me, make me feel warmth. They do not look down on me or hate me. When I want to eat something, they will find it for me. I am lucky that my husband's family is kind… When I want to extend visa, I have to present a support letter. They wrote the letter for me. When I'm in trouble or need help, they give me 100 percent. I don't feel so isolated. They love me, take care of me and accept me. When it was my birthday, they sent me gifts and cards. On Christmas, we had a feast… They live in Scotland, so we went there for a week for the Christmas party.

Opal

When I move back here, they (parents-in-law) help me with the kids. They help me when the kids are on vacation. They know that I have to work so they come to take care of my children for a week or half a week… They also help me with money for the kids. They will ask me if my children want anything.

> *But they don't support me to send money back to Thailand. Nothing like that. When the season changes, they will ask if the kids need any boots or jackets. It's little things. If I tell them I'm busy, they will buy them for the kids. But if it is sending money back to Thailand, they will not get involve.*

Some respondents said that their in-laws were the ones who were supportive when they first arrived in the UK, which improved their wellbeing. I was invited to lunch with Nong at her flat and conducted an interview with her. That day, her British mother-in-law who lived in a flat nearby joined the lunch as well. Nong and her mother-in-law seemed to have a great relationship and understanding about each other. Nong later said in the interview that she could share everything with her mother-in-law. She could talk about her financial concerns and her mother-in-law would lend her money to send back to her mother in Thailand. Nong further expressed her good relationship with her mother-in-law;

> *Interviewer: When you first came here, do you have any acquaintances except your husband?*
>
> *No one. There was only my husband and his family who took care of me. They introduced me to other Thai people in my neighbourhood. I got to know a Thai family that runs a grocery store. My parents-in-law took me there because they were afraid that I would be lonely. I was unemployed then. Before I got a job, my mother-in-law enrolled me into a language course. I was able to communicate and understand but she wanted me to learn more… I think being here (in the UK) is fine. I'm okay with everything. The family on this side takes very good care of me. They never make me feel that I miss my home (Thailand). I miss my mother, still. If I was not happy about family members here, I would want to go back to Thailand. But they make me feel happy. They make it feel like my second home.*

Similarly, Ann described her mother-in-law as supportive, recalling her first years of living in the UK when she could only speak a little English. She said that her mother-in-law tried to understand her and said that if she had any problems with her son, she can stay with her anytime. She even joked that she would call the police if her son made any trouble. Nara also said she was very close to her husband's family and could get along well. She could share everything with them. Her husband's family was only a 5-minute drive away. She could see them anytime she needed anything. Likewise, Lin described that she and her parents-in-law had a close relationship. Her children would stay with them during vacation, or they would come and visit their family.

It appears that many Thai marriage migrants have a good relationship with their in-laws. In fact, the in-laws often were the ones who helped them settle in and introduced them to the co-ethnic community. Thai marriage migrants also felt familial obligations by paying them visits and helping their elderly in-laws. As mentioned earlier, the Thai family value is heavily based on extended kinship, where family members can expect to receive care from other members and are also expected to provide care, especially for elderly members. This traditional family value travelled with Thai marriage migrants when they moved to the UK. They reproduced this family value and practice through providing care to their British in-laws. Nuan, who shared that she provided occasional care for her uncle-in-law, was working as a care worker. She reflected the embedded values of the family through her occupation as a care worker in a British nursing home:

> *When I was working at the nursing home, I saw old people and I felt pity for them. They could not take care of themselves. Although I earned a salary for doing this job, I did it with my heart. Sometimes, I brought snacks to my clients. Some people didn't have any relatives, any kids. There was an elderly single woman in the home. Most people had relatives visiting them on the weekends, but she didn't. Once in a while her friends came to visit. When she was sick, she would feel depressed and cried because she missed her friends. It was a reflection, really. I felt sympathy for her. I knew that she loved Kit Kats (chocolate snack). So, I brought them to her sometimes. But I told her that her friend brought them to her. One day I will get old and be like her, unable to take care of myself... In Thailand, it is our tradition that children take care (their older relatives). Sometimes Thai people go to nursing homes, but in England 90 percent (of elderly) goes to nursing home.*

It is interesting that even though Thai women migrants have settled down in the UK for a number of years (average duration of interview respondents' residency in the UK is 13 years, with the minimum of 2 years and maximum of 32 years), they rarely established deep social relationships with people in the host country. Rather, they seek to socialise with the community of people who came from the same homeland. Language barriers and cultural differences are the main factors that respondents claimed to be the limitation for them to integrate with the host society. While people they call 'friends' are mostly Thai, British and people of other nationalities (except their husbands) are mostly on the periphery of Thai migrants' social relationships, mostly in the status of 'colleagues'. Most respondents referred to Thai friends as trustworthy and willing to help. Although some respondents reported that they considered themselves as belonging in British society, this belonging was expressed in the structural and civil terms such as gaining British

citizenship and being able to work in the country and contribute by paying tax. However, on the emotional and cultural sides, Thai migrants still feel strongly that they belong to their co-ethnic community. They retain cultural and symbolic connections with Thailand i.e. most respondents enjoyed meeting with Thai friends, attending Thai temples on main Buddhist holidays and Thai national events. Some women reported that they practiced Buddhism at home, enjoy Thai soap operas and Thai music via online channels, and encouraged their children to learn the Thai language and cultural heritage. Thai migrants enjoyed meeting Thai friends for Thai food meetups. They invited each other to their homes and took turns in cooking Thai food for their friends. I was invited to some of these meetups. The hosts always showed their skill in authentic Thai cooking. They proudly talked about searching for Thai ingredients and the process of cooking them. I tasted Thai Southern fish curries and North-eastern spicy salads in the homes of proud hosts.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Thai temples and Thai enclave businesses such as grocery stores functions as a 'hub' for Thai social networks in the UK. They serve as 'gatekeepers' of social relationships among migrants. Newcomers visit these businesses not only for the service but also to meet people who share their language and culture. In addition, migrants receive information about general issues and employment. Many migrants develop friendships from visiting these places. They are places where people, both Thais and non-Thais, assume that they can get some sort of 'Thai' connection. British husbands took their wives to Thai temples, restaurants and grocery stores because they did not want their wives to be lonely and hoped that their wives would get to know people from the same country. It seems that the social capital of Thai migrants is mainly grounded in their relationship with other Thai migrants. Thai people are the main source of help when Thai migrants face problems while living in the UK. They helped each other by being translators, employment referrals, loaners, and advisors on general issues. Thai migrants gain resources necessary for their lives in the UK from their relationship with other Thai migrants. Respondents said that they felt more comfortable to ask for loans from Thai counterparts than other nationalities. They also receive information about work from other Thais. If social capital, as Portes (1995) suggests, is the ability to command resources (tangible resources such as money and intangible resources such as information), then from this study, it can be concluded that Thai migrants gained social capital by networking with Thais rather than with British or other migrants.

The majority of respondents reported that they had good but distant relationships with their in-laws. Some in-laws were very supportive of the relationship between Thai women and their husbands. Many in-laws supported the health and wellbeing of migrants, especially when they newly arrived in the UK. A number of respondents said that they lived far away from their in-laws, and only paid visits once in a while or on holidays such as Christmas. Nevertheless, a minority of respondents shared that they had difficult relationships with their in-law families. A woman said that she felt she had to 'prove' herself as a good Thai wife, and not get married with her husband because of money. Another woman shared that she felt like she was looked down on by her mother-in-law who treated her like a maid. She had to stand up for herself and refused to accept those actions.

4.5 Transnational social networks and social capital of Thai marriage migrants in the UK

Thai migrants considered co-ethnic social networks and social capital as important for them and their children. As shown in this chapter, Thai women maintain social relationships with their co-ethnics and also with their relatives and friends back home. Many Thai migrants still seek to maintain cross-border links with Thailand both in terms of finance and relationships. Although financial remittances among Thai marriage migrants are in decline, it seems that cross-border connections with their family members and friends in Thailand remains strong, with high frequency. Furthermore, the existence of cross-border connections should not only be analysed through remittances from migrants to stay-at-homes, but through reverse remittance as well. As presented, some Thai women migrants received financial assistance from their families back in Thailand to set up business in the UK, and in times of hardship[6].

The development of information communication technologies (ICTs) has made cross-border connection easier and more rapid. They certainly influence a migrant's transnational social field. Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc (1994), refer to the social field as a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organised, and transformed. ICTs increase the intensity of communication practices, and exchange of

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[6] This topic of remittances and reversed remittances will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

information and resources. Accordingly, Wilding (2006) points out that ICTs provide transnational families with "more opportunities for keeping in touch with those kin, and for creating a stronger sense of a shared social field" (p.138). ICTs facilitate pre-existing cross-border communications, where social fields are created, supported, and reproduced beyond geographical, political and cultural borders (Wilding, 2006). In his study of ICTs use of Salvadoran emigrants, Benítez (2012) suggests that there are three new possibilities of communicative practices of migrants due to ICTs: first, to maintain family ties and interactions; second, to strengthen cultural values and forms of expression; and third, to provide affective support to the family. Thai migrants' cross-border social networks are strengthened due to immediate and frequent communications. Thai-British children, who are born in the UK, bond with their Thai grandparents in Thailand via video calls several times a week. Digital mediums are considered a necessity for many Thai migrants as a tool that enables transnational family bonding. It seems that ICTs help expand social networks of people around the globe. International communication can be done affordably and conveniently. We are now able to communicate easily with people who live far away from us, and who live in different countries and have different cultures. Nevertheless, it seems that ICTs, instead of expanding out-group social networks, helps intensify in-group social networks.

Most Thai migrants in the sample still retain contacts with their families and friends in Thailand. Previously, Thai migrants relied on prepaid phone cards to call their family members back home. Opal, who began her long-term residency in the UK in 2002, described the change of communication practice throughout her residence in the UK:

> "I contact (my family in Thailand) all the time. I think it is more frequent than the first years I lived here… I remembered that, when I first moved (to the UK), I told my friend that I decided to get married. My friend sent me letters. We wrote letters to each other back then. There was e-mail, too. But letters were still consistent. I moved back to Thailand. Then, the world changed. There was the LINE application. We talked every day. Back then I had to buy telephone cards to call back home. There was no free call like this application. I remember that I had to go to the shops to find cheap telephone cards, to call home once or twice a week. But now I call through LINE. I feel that the world becomes more convenient. I don't feel so distant."

The commercial internet use in Thailand was introduced in 1995. In 2001, it was estimated that there were 3.5 million internet users in Thailand (or around 5.6 percent of the total population) (Charnsripinyo and Roongroj, n.d.). By 2017, Thai internet users

increased tremendously to 51 million (Leesa-Nguansuk, 2018). Social media agencies, Hootsuite and We Are Social conducted a survey on mobile internet use in 2018 and found that Thais ranked first place in spending the most time on mobile internet at 4.65 hours per day (Leesa-Nguansuk, 2018). Mobile internet use has become a staple of modern daily life for Thai non-migrants and migrants. As ICTs rapidly improve, migrants are able to utilise fast internet connections which allows simultaneous communications to their loved ones, together with the popularisation of smartphones which enables mobile wireless communication. Thai migrants reported that they regularly contacted their Thai relatives using smartphone applications for voice and video calls. This simultaneity has a crucial impact on transnational connections because migrants feel that they can converse with their family and friends nearly whenever and wherever they want, provided that there is the limitation of being in different time zones.

The growing use of ICTs among Thai migrants might partly result in a low incentive for migrants to bridge their social capital with local people. Many respondents said that the development of ICTs and the use of social media had alleviated their feelings of loneliness and isolation, compared to when smartphone were non-existent, because they can have easy communication with fellow migrants and also with people at home.

The most popular chat applications among Thais is LINE, a Japanese chat application which had 41 million users in Thailand, as of 2017. This accounted for 94 percent of internet users in Thailand (Tortermvasana, 2017). The number does not include Thai users overseas. But from my observation, almost every respondent I talked had a LINE account. I even added their LINE contacts to mine and used its voice call function for our interviews. Thai people abroad also use this application to talk to their family members back home. It provides free communication through text messages, voice calls and video calls. A number of respondents said that they use this application every day to talk to their parents and relatives. For older parents who are not familiar with these technologies, relatives in Thailand would help them navigate mobile phone and application features to talk to their children and grandchildren abroad. Facebook is popular among Thai migrants as well. From my observation, Facebook is used to share their experiences abroad, through status updates and photos of their British families, children, their travels, their cultural activities, and their socialisations with friends in the UK, for instance. Moreover, it also has a Facebook Messenger feature, which can be used for instant text messages, voice calls, and video calls. Most respondents said that they think Facebook has more

pros than cons, because it allows them to keep in contact and share their life experiences with families and friends both in Thailand and other countries. However, one of the cons of using Facebook is oversharing of personal circumstances and personal information which some respondents said could be dangerous. Also, sharing personal activities such as photos of leisure trips and luxury goods can be a source of jealousy and gossip among migrants. Ming gave her opinion when asked about the pros and cons of using Facebook:

> *"The good thing is that I get to connect with Thai people in Thailand or anywhere in the world, whether they are friends or family. But when people go to other people's profile and see that they have a better life or lifestyle than them, they might get upset. Like, "why am I not like them?". Some people are sensitive when friends don't greet them on social media, "why did you give compliments to that person and not me?"*

As Table 4 shows, 68 percent of survey respondents answered that they communicate with friends and family in Thailand via phone/social media/chat app several times a week. While 31 percent said that they communicate with people back in Thailand more than once per day. From interviews, women said that they could instantly chat with their family and friends, despite having to manage time zone differences. Apa said that she talked to her brother in Thailand every day. She talked to him about important topics, such as managing the family business, and about little things, such as asking him how to tend garden plants, for example. Fai said that she occasionally made video calls to her Thai parents so they could see and talk to their granddaughter. She said she wanted her daughter to be familiar with Thai relatives, and video calls was an answer to that. For many, family and friends in Thailand still remain a main source of emotional and moral support for them. It is much easier and cheaper than 10 years ago to call one's parents or friends whenever migrants feel lonely or face problems abroad. Some women said that they did not feel so lonely, or worried about situations of their family back in Thailand because they could always keep in touch and know what is happening.

Table 4: How often do you communicate directly by phone/social media/chat app with your friends or family in Thailand?		
	Frequency	Percent
More than once per day	93	31.0

Once a day	3	1.0
Several times a week	204	68.0
Total	300	100.0

As instant cross-border communication practices improve, it seems like Thai marriage migrants do not frequently return to their homeland, as shown in Table 5. Half of the survey respondents said that they return to Thailand only once every two years. Another 33 percent said they go back once every three years and only 9 percent said they go back once a year. Interview respondents provided several reasons other than communication technologies which affect their travel to Thailand, such as work obligations, financial issues, and children's term time. Although Thai migrants do not often see their family and friends in Thailand face-to-face, they maintain close relationships thanks to advanced and inexpensive communication technologies.

Table 5: How often do you return to Thailand to visit your friends and family?		
	Frequency	Percent
More than once a year	1	.3
Once a year	27	9.0
Once every two years	150	50.0
Once every three years	100	33.3
Less than once every three years	22	7.3
Total	300	100.0

What is more interesting, however, is that Thai women in the UK communicate through phone/social media/chat app with their family and friends in Thailand more often than with Thai friends in the UK. From Table 6, 68 percent said that they communicate with their Thai friends in the UK several times a week, whereas only 7 percent communicated with their friends once a day.

Table 6: How often do you communicate directly by phone/social media/chat app with a friend who is Thai living in the UK?		
	Frequency	Percent
More than once per day	25	8.3

Once a day	21	7.0
Several times a week	204	68.0
Once a week	18	6.0
Once a month	26	8.7
Less than once a month	6	2.0
Total	300	100.0

Thanks to the enhancement of ICTs, Thai migrants can conveniently and affordably sustain their links with their family members and friends in Thailand. The development of digital communication might be assumed to provide broader communication across borders and groups of people. Nonetheless, it seems that such developments strengthen cross-border connections between migrants and people who stay behind. Their kinship bonds are tighter due to the ability to frequently contact their loved ones. I argue that ICTs development and stronger transnational links to the homeland play a major part in the lower motivation to bridge social capital and establish a social network between Thai migrants and local people. Co-ethnic connections provide moral and emotional support, as well as shared understanding due to a shared culture and language. The immediate connection enables migrants to discuss their problems and address their needs to Thai relatives easily. They can expect swift exchanges of resources and support from people back home. Friends can keep in touch with each other regularly despite living on the other side of the world. This results in a stronger social network and increased social capital between migrants and non-migrants. ICTs also help with intergenerational bonding. Thai-British children who grew up in the UK and who have not met their Thai relatives can now easily bond with their kin in Thailand. This is considered important for Thai mothers since they want their children to have connections with their Thai side. Another interesting point is that it seems like the more frequent Thai migrants contact people in Thailand, the less frequent they travel back to their homeland. Due to work obligations, financial issues, and children's term time, it is difficult for some migrants to go back. But this was compensated by real-time and inexpensive communications.

4.6   From online to offline: Thai Women Network for United Kingdom (TWN4UK)

As discussed above, ICTs advancement bring people's relationship closer and facilitates spontaneous connections across borders. Another interesting effect of ICTs is in bringing people with the same interests, concerns, lifestyles and other common issues together. Wellman (1999) highlights the importance of 'computer supported social networks' (CSSNs), which are "a technologically supported continuation of a long-term shift to communities organized by shared interests rather than a shared place (neighborhood or village) or shared ancestry (kinship group)." Drawing from Wellman, Vertovec (2001) adds that CSSNs also provide psychological and emotional support, companionship and a sense of belonging similar to face-to-face relationships. This point was illustrated in the previous section that showed the positive impact of ICTs on emotional wellbeing of Thai migrants. What is more interesting is that CSSNs also have an impact on the wider scale by connecting people with shared interests or who follow the same issues, which subsequently results in an essential impact on people's lives. Wellman (1999) suggests that cybercommunities can exhibit facets of social capital and reciprocity like face-to-face relationships. "Such norms typically arise in a densely knit community, but they also appear to be common among frequent contributors to distribution lists and newsgroups. People having a strong attachment to an electronic group will be more likely to participate and provide assistance to others" (p.343).

From online anonymity and discussing common concerns and interests, online platforms bring people to meet face-to-face as well. The Thai women community abroad is able to discuss their concerns, and exchange their experiences, tips, and knowledge about living in foreign countries through online forums, websites, and Facebook groups. For Thai women in the UK, one of the most popular forums is the '*Sapai UK*' (Thai daughters-in-law in the UK) group on Facebook. As of March 2019, this group had gained 20,402 members since its creation in August 2011. Facebook allows its members to create Facebook groups to discuss shared topics. It is operated with administrators and the group's privacy can be adjusted. Thai women in the UK shared tips and knowledge necessary for living in the UK. Some people joined the group to discuss their problems and ask for suggestions. Some members of this group evolved from page administrators to actual volunteers who help give advice to Thai women experiencing troubles. Some administrators and members of this Facebook group later formed the Thai Women

Network in the UK (TWN4UK), an organised non-profit group aimed at providing assistance to Thai women who experience various issues and problems in the UK.

TWN4UK is worth noting because they operated and created the network by word of mouth among Thai communities in the UK. Their members come from all over the country. According to a member of TWN4UK, the issues Thai women face range from legal issues, family disputes, divorce, adoption, UK visa applications and extension, domestic abuse, and human trafficking and mental health. During a TWN4UK workshop in London in 2018, the chairwoman of TWN4UK said that people in distress mostly knew about them by word of mouth. Thai acquaintances referred victims to their network. Their job was to evaluate the situation of each case and provide advice. If the case needs professional assistance or involves criminal or legal issues, they will refer them to appropriate organisations such as the police or social workers. The chairwoman said that since they established the network in 2016, they had handled approximately 2,000 cases of Thai people in distress.

It was surprising to know that prior to the 2018 meeting some members of TWN4UK had not seen each other face-to-face because they contacted each other through online platforms, mainly the LINE application and Facebook. The chairwoman of TWN4UK explained that this created a problem of cooperation as it was difficult to work with someone they had never met. Therefore, she set up a committee tasked to have meetings face-to-face in order to have clear communications. There were five members of the committee, the rest of the members were volunteers who maintain contacts and help the network through online platforms. These volunteers are not required to have face-to-face meetings. Recently they established cooperation with Thai governmental organisations, such as the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS), in hopes to exchange information and assist Thai people in distress more effectively. In 2018, TWN4UK was registered in Thailand as a public interest nongovernmental organisation with MSDHS, making it eligible to apply for public funds from Thailand.

Recently, the TWN4UK launched an online course called 'Life in UK'. Volunteers of the network act as tutors for women who want to take the 'Life in United Kingdom' test. This is a test required for those who want to apply for British citizenship or settlement visa (Home Office, n.d.-b). The lessons are taught through the LINE group chat and video call with a small fee of £60.

I was also invited to join their network and was part of their LINE chat group, where they discussed Thai women's complaints, which they called 'cases'. Since I have little knowledge on British laws, I did not share my advice to the group. However, I assisted in providing advice to a case where a Thai student in Liverpool was experiencing mental health issues and suggested an appropriate service that she could contact. The chat group is strictly confidential and sharing information from this group will result in legal actions, according to the chairwoman. People who join in the chat group are volunteers, and Thai women living in the UK and Thailand. Some had experienced problems and previously asked for the network's help. When they received assistance and their issues were resolved, they became volunteers and worked with the group. Other members include officers from the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) in Thailand and other Thai civil officers who have knowledge on family issues and Thai family law.

The creation of TWN4UK stems from the gap between government and civil society in terms of migrants' welfare. The lack of English language skills, inadequate legal knowledge and understanding of different cultures, proved to be the main obstacles for Thai women to acquire necessary assistance when they are in trouble abroad. TWN4UK volunteers provide interpretations, legal advice, practical information and knowledge about living in the UK for those who seek assistance. The network provides services that Thai MFA could not immediately provide for Thai migrants in the UK. In many cases, members pay visits to women in distress within days after they issue complaints. Furthermore, TWN4UK's volunteers provide advice on which local organisations Thai women can turn to, in case they are in trouble while living in the UK. The network acts as a bridge between migrants and British civil and legal services in terms of language and information which facilitates problem solving for Thai migrants and organisations involved.

The most recent and notable involvement of TWN4UK is the case of 'Lady of the Hills'. In 2004, a group of six male hikers found a body near Pen-y-Ghent in Yorkshire Dales. The body was identified as a dark-haired, southeast Asian woman, aged between 25-35 years old. Even though the body was not identified as Thai, police officers referred to her as a 'Thai bride' since they assumed that she was part of the 'Thai bride boom' in 1990s-2000s (Head, 2006). Her case remained a mystery since the police could not find any matches of her body in the British population database. However, North Yorkshire police

believed that she was killed by suffocation before her body was dumped at the scene. They also believed that she was killed by someone who had a close relationship to her. Her husband could have killed her and told others that their relationship failed, and she flew back to Thailand (Perraudin, 2019). The only clue of who she was, was a gold ring on her wedding ring finger which could be traced back to being made in Bangkok. In 2018, the police reopened investigations of unsolved deaths including the Lady of the Hills. North Yorkshire Police launched an appeal on Facebook asking for identification of this woman in Thai, Filipino and English (BBC News, 2018).

In January 2019, TWN4UK received a letter from Jumsri Seekanya and Buasa Seekanya, a Thai couple in Udon Thani province, Thailand, stating the disappearance of their daughter, Lamduan Seekanya, who was married to a British man and moved to England in 1991 (BBC Thai, 2019b). Their daughter worked in a restaurant and sent them money from time to time. She had two children with her British husband. In 2004, she brought her children to visit her parents in Thailand. Around one month after she went back to England, she called them and said that she had an argument with her husband about financial issues and was physically abused by him. Jumsri and Buasa said they could not contact Lamduan after that call. In 2016, their grandson came back to Thailand and asked for his mother. His father told him that his mother broke up with him and went back to Thailand to marry a Thai man in Udon Thani. The couple were shocked because they had no communications with their daughter since 2004. They then went to the police station, the Thai MFA and the Thai Consular Service in Bangkok to find their daughter, but no one could find her (Khaosod, 2019). The mother said to the BBC that after the BBC Thai reported the reinvestigation, her Thai relative in England sent her a sketch of 'Lady of the Hills' to her. The sketch was a close resemblance to her daughter, so she and her husband wrote a letter to TWN4UK asking for help (BBC Thai, 2019a). TWN4UK then cooperated with The Udon Thani Provincial Justice Office, Thai forensics and Department of Special Investigation, Thailand and North Yorkshire Police to exchange valuable information and follow the development of this case. In March 2019, after further forensic investigations, North Yorkshire Police revealed they could confirm that the body was Lamduan Seekanya.

It was striking that nobody reported the woman missing after she disappeared in the UK. It can be assumed that she did not have many friends or acquaintances in the UK, apart from her husband. Her social capital bond with other Thai migrants and social capital

bridge with other British might have been very low. Putnam (2007) points out that a social network has powerful externalities, in the sense that it could prevent crime, especially in social-capital-rich neighbourhoods. Stronger social capital or belonging to a tight-knit social network, might have helped Lamduan to be identified sooner or her murder could have been prevented.

This case is an example of how a transnational social network can facilitate problem solving across borders and between civilians and international civil services. It also reflects the development of a social network of Thai migrants. In 2004 when ICTs were still underdeveloped, the exchange of information was slower, and it was more difficult to identify or find people. As we can see, nowadays, online communications facilitate flows of information, which results in swift cooperation between TWN4UK and other organisations. The 14-year murder mystery was solved within 3 months thanks to the transnational social network.

4.7   Conclusion

The objective of this chapter is to examine the formation of social networks and the form of social capital of Thai marriage migrants in the UK. I began with theoretical discussions on social capital, social networking and bonding and bridging of social capital. I then elaborated on the social networks and social capital of Thai marriage migrants in the UK, and in transnational terms. Finally, I discussed the Thai Women Network to illustrate the manifestation of social networks and social capital among the Thai migrant community, civil society and government sector. As discussed above, Thai women are inclined to bond social capital with their co-ethnics more than bridging their social capital with local people. This stems from their established social networks with fellow Thais, who they perceived as more responsive to reciprocity and more trustworthy. Shared ethnicity, culture, language and migratory experiences seem to be crucial factors that attract Thai women to participate in a co-ethnic social network. They also felt that their bonding resulted in better wellbeing, especially in terms of mental health. Respondents cited language barriers and perceived cultural differences as main obstacles for Thai migrants to bridge their social capital with local people. The development of ICTs is another important factor that lowers the incentive of Thai migrants to connect with local people since they can conveniently contact friends and relatives at home whenever they need support.

Transnational co-ethnic social networks and capital are not merely found on the individual level but on the institutional level as well, as presented in the case of TWN4UK and their work on 'Lady of the Hills'. Such non-profit organisations were created to fill the gap between civil society and government. Their existence facilitates cooperation between governmental organisations and civil society, which benefit people in need, both migrants and non-migrants. Thai people in the UK know about TWN4UK by word of mouth and sometimes through social media. In other words, Thai people know about this organisation as a result of information exchange within the co-ethnic social network.

In conclusion, drawing largely from Putnam and Portes on social capital and social network, I would like to suggest that, on the individual level, bonding and bridging of Thai marriage migrants occur in various degrees. Apart from their relationships with their British husbands and children, I broadly categorise the plausible social networks that Thai marriage migrants engaged in when they settled down in the UK. There are six main groups of people that Thai migrants in the UK exchange social capital with:

1. *Close Thai friends in the UK*

   According to the data, it appears that Thai marriage migrants retain the strongest relationships with their Thai friends, apart from their husbands and children. With shared nationality, language, religion, culture and migratory experiences, Thai marriage migrants created a strong bond with one another. They are prone to have frequent communication with each other through mobile chat applications and usually meet each other for coffee, dinner parties or cultural gatherings at temples, for example. Some respondents referred to their close Thai friends as sisters, who knew each other since they first moved to the country. Most respondents said that they can trust and rely on their Thai friends. A distinct feature of their relationship is the ability to ask for financial loans or assistance within this group. Close Thai friends exchange moral, emotional, material and financial support with one another.

   The types of social capital exchange in this group are 'bounded solidarity' (as they shared in-group identification), and 'reciprocity' (as transfer of resources is expected to be returned in the future).

2. *Family members (and friends) in Thailand*

Although Thai women moved to join their husbands in the UK, they still maintain strong transnational links with their birth family. With the development of ICTs, migrants can constantly contact those who stay behind. Most respondents said that the advanced communication technologies enable them to connect with their relatives spontaneously, which results in their improved emotional and mental wellbeing. Frequent communications also strengthen relationship with their Thai family. They can discuss life problems and family matters and check on their family members back home. Apart from moral and emotional support, some respondents said that their family provided financial support to them when they needed to make an investment in the UK or when they were in trouble.

Thai migrants and their family members in Thailand exchange social capital in forms of 'values' as they exchange resources based on general moral imperatives i.e. familial obligations.

3. *Thai acquaintances and colleagues in the UK*

Thai marriage migrants became acquainted with other Thais they met through social, cultural and religious gatherings, at events at Thai temples, Thai grocery stores, Thai restaurants, and introduction through friends, for instance. Some also meet each other through work. They exchange information about work, tips on settlement in the UK, but rarely exchange material or financial assistance. The relationship is not as deep as the ones with close Thai friends which they feel they can fully trust and rely on.

Their forms of social capital are based on 'bounded solidarity' (sharing in-group identification) and 'enforceable trust', as some resource exchange might occur because one expects to be known in the community and build a social network among Thais 'in case' they need assistance in the future. For instance, Thai people visit Thai temples or Thai grocery stores to expand their co-ethnic social network by getting to know more people and making themselves known to other Thais.

4. *Close British friends*

Very few respondents mentioned that they have close British friends. Not many respondents feel that they have local friends whom they can trust and rely on when they are in trouble. Relationship with close British friends seems to stem from shared interests (attending the same church or clubs, for instance). It is worth

noting that respondents felt that they could not discuss their financial problems with British friends, while they can do so with Thai friends. Some said that they perceived that talking about money is not a British value and tend to discuss other daily-life issues instead.

The types of social capital that Thai migrants exchange with their close British friends are a 'bounded solidarity' where relationships occur and resources are transferred because of identification of being in the same group (sharing interests), or in the same religious community, for instance.

5. *Husband's family members*

The majority of interview respondents said that they have a good but distant relationship with their in-law family members. I found that the Thai daughter in-law occasionally pays visits and provides care for elderly parents of their husbands. Only two respondents shared that they lived in close proximity to the in-laws' and had frequent interactions. Some reported that their parents-in-law are the ones who initially help them settle down in the UK, by introducing them to the Thai community in the area, giving them moral support, and important information, such as enrolment in English language courses. In some cases, in-laws provide Thai women financial assistance when needed. The types of social capital that Thai migrants exchange with their in-law family members is 'values' based, where Thai women provide care for elderly parents in-law as expected in traditional Thai family values. Whereas in-laws provide practical support beneficial for migrants' settlement as general moral imperatives.

6. *British (and non-Thai) acquaintances & colleagues*

Most Thai marriage migrants interviewed had distant friendships with locals and other non-Thai people. They know each other through work or friends of friends. This kind of relationship seldom has exchanges of resources. They participate in occasional socialisations such as work parties or gatherings. Many respondents said that they did not feel comfortable talking about their life problems or financial issues with local acquaintances and colleagues. The type of social capital exchanged in this kind of relationship is 'reciprocity', migrants and local acquaintances may exchange resources such as information or tips in the hope that another party would do the same in the future.

These forms of social network and capital are not static and can change over time. Acquaintances might evolve into close friendships. On the other hand, close friendships can also become distant. Relationships might be broken, and people create new dynamics of relationships with new people. The differences in the reciprocity and resources people give and receive in each type of relationship provides us with an understanding of their motivation to partake, in various degrees, in social interactions with different groups of people. Putnam (2007) suggests that bonding and bridging social capital are not necessarily inversely correlated, where high bonding is related to low bridging and vice versa. However, relying heavily on qualitative data, I found that the inverse correlation appears to be the case for Thai migrants in the UK. Besides their close relationship with their husbands, Thai women tend to bond and build social networks within their ethnic group, rather than bridge their social capital with British and non-Thai people. It also appears that their enhanced ability to contact their homeland, due to developing ICTs, reduces their motivation to establish deep or meaningful relationships with non-Thai people. Another interesting point is that ICTs also partly reduce their motivation to return to their homeland. Many Thai migrants felt that instant communication through mobile applications decreased their feelings of loneliness and isolation. They can also talk to their Thai family and friends in real time, making them feel much closer to home.

Chapter 5

Buddhapadipa Temple: The Imported Thai Space and Transnational Belonging

Buddhapadipa Temple, Wimbledon was one of the first places I visited for my research on Thai marriage migrants in the UK. Due to the kindness of a Thai woman whom I met at a gathering for King Bhumibhol's remembrance in October 2016, I had the chance to discover this place. Oom, a Thai woman in her fifties, told me that I could ride along with her, her daughter and grandchildren to the temple on Loy Krathong Day in November 2016. Like other Thai women who migrated to the UK, I was told to visit this Thai Buddhist temple in the outskirts of London, not to just receive blessings from the monks but to meet other Thai people. I had heard of Buddhapadipa before but had never been there. The moment I stepped in, I felt like I was in Thailand. Not only because of the Thai crowd, but also the atmosphere, the Thai language signs and Thai-styled building. The sight of it was fascinating to me as I could not imagine there would be a majestic Thai-styled building in the middle of a British middle-class residential area. The temple immediately drew my attention. I continued visiting the temple many times and learned that there were dynamics in the activities and interactions of the people who attended the temple. Buddhapadipa Temple, is the oldest and the most established Thai Buddhist temple in the UK. It regularly organises major Thai Buddhist events that draw thousands of attendees every year, Thai and non-Thai. From my observations, the majority of attendees at Buddhapadipa are Thai women.

The temple serves various functions for different groups of people. On normal days, Buddhapadipa is calm and serene. Whilst it can be lively and clamorous on festive days. It does not merely serve as a religious venue but also functions as a Thai cultural and education centre in the UK as it provides Thai language and cultural classes for children. Almost all of the women interviewed mentioned that they knew about this place and many said they visited it at least once since they moved to the country. Some women continued to visit on Buddhist holidays or for events such as the Thai New Year (Songkran) and Loy Krathong. Some mentioned that they went the temple to make merit and pray to the Buddha when they experienced challenges in life. Although not all Thai migrants are temple-goers, this temple seems to be an important 'gate' to the Thai community in the

UK. It is a place where Thai women initiate and sustain their social networks, send their children for Thai education, join Buddhist practices and rituals, seek spirituality and mindfulness, join cultural events, and even earn money selling food at the temple's events.

This chapter will focus on the Buddhapadipa temple as a case study that illustrates how the temple, as a homeland religious state-sponsored organisation, functions as an intermediary for cross-border connections between Thailand and the UK. It is a core reference for Thai marriage migrants. This chapter also asks, to what extent does the Buddhapadipa temple have an impact on wellbeing of Thai marriage migrants and their families?

5.1 Thai Buddhism as a transnational religion

Before exploring the relationship between the Buddhapadipa temple and Thai women, I would like to present a brief history of Thai Buddhism, in order to provide a clear picture of how a Thai Buddhist temple functions and has influence on Thai people's lives. Moreover, this section will discuss Thai Buddhism as a cross-border connection which binds Thai people abroad to their homeland.

According to the National Statistical Office of Thailand (2016), 94.6 percent of the Thai population is Buddhist. Most Thais follow the tradition of Theravada Buddhism. The Buddhist temple, or *'wat'*, has been the centre of Thai life since ancient times (it is said that Thais adopted Buddhism as their religion in 1100 A.D.) (Virasai 1981, p.53). In addition to being a venue for religious practices, a temple also plays a crucial and diverse role in the Thai community. In Thailand, the temple also has an educational function as schools are set up in the temple's domain. In rural areas, government officials sometimes use a temple's space as a meeting hall for district functionaries and village headmen and villagers. Furthermore, the temple is considered as a socio-cultural centre as it provides space for recreational activities and parents frequently bring their children to play in the temple's yard. Its space is also used during major events such as New Year celebrations where shows, dance, and other recreational activities take place (Virasai, 1981).

In the Thai case, Buddhism is inextricably linked to the modern Thai nation building project. Buddhism and Thai politics were separated until the reign of King Rama IV (reigning from 1851-1868), who had spent 27 years as a monk. Seeing the relaxation in

Pali Canon among the Sangha during his monkhood, King Rama IV sought Buddhist reform after ascending to the throne. His approach aimed for a strict, modern and rational interpretation of Buddhist scripture, which was closely linked through royal patronage to the Thai Royal Family (Stuart-Fox 2006, p. 10).

Buddhism has become one of the core symbols of the Thai nation. King Rama VI (reigning from 1910-1925) adopted the nation-building mission from his ancestors, which has been described as an attempt to resist Western colonial powers at that time (Thananitichot, 2011). The king introduced the Thai national flag which was based on his idea of the Thai nation, or *'chat Thai'*. King Rama VI's concept of the Thai nation was established on the basic triad of chat-satsana-phramahakasat (nation-religion-monarchy). He then introduced the tri-colored flag, called the *'trirong,'* which has the colours red, white and blue to symbolise his Thai-nation motto, 'nation-religion-monarchy' (Peleggi 2007, p. 119 cited in Thananitichot 2011, p.258).

However, during the reign of King Rama VII, Thai progressives and the military staged a revolution in 1932 to overcome absolutism and subsequently placed the monarchy under a Thai constitution. The revolution was said to have dismantled absolute monarchy. It was not until the late 1950s, during the reign of King Rama IX (Bhumibol Adulyadej), when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat took power with a coup d'état that the Thai monarchy once again gained respect as a sacred nationalistic figure. Fong (2009) points out that Sarit's support for the palace was used to gain legitimacy as head of state despite being an unelected and despotic leader. Under his tenure, Sarit and his royalist networks attempted to link the monarchy with the sacred Buddhist past and Siamese imperialistic nationalism (p.675-6). After efforts to revive rituals and ceremonies involving the Chakri Dynasty by the royalist camp (for example, royal ploughing ritual, royal kathina, revival of Chakri Day and declaring the celebration of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) Day), royal rituals were promoted and 'fully flourished' by the 1960s (Winichakul 2008, p.21). The legacy of these royalist efforts to maintain monarchist power resulted in the preservation of the image of the Thai King as a sacred nationalistic figure that is still revered and remains strong today.

The legacy of the 'nation-religion-monarchy' trinity still prevails in Thai society as it is reinforced both at the institutional and individual level. It is constitutionally required that the Thai king has to be Buddhist. In addition, the discourse of 'being Thai' as also 'being Buddhist' is still prevalent in Thai society (Bao 2005, p.117-8). Therefore, participation

in religious practices and temple activities of Thais who have settled abroad should not be merely seen as a matter of faith but also as sentiments of nationalism that are attached to them. Benedict Anderson (1983) asserts that even though members of a nation do not have face-to-face interactions, they are bounded together by imaginary mutual connections. This imagination is forged by the creation of language and symbols such as censuses, maps and museums. In the Thai case, the creation of a national flag and the meanings of the national symbols which are attached to it are the best examples. Given the discourse of the 'trinity', Thai Buddhism must be understood as closely related to the Thai nation-building project.

Kitiarsa (2010) argues that Thai Buddhism is a transnational religion and that the Thai state has been actively sponsoring and supporting religious activities of Thai Buddhist monks abroad. According to Kitiarsa, the transnationalisation of Thai Buddhism is the product of three main forces: "(1) the overseas Buddhist missionary policy and activity sponsored by the Sangha (Buddhist monastic order) and the Office of National Buddhism under the Ministry of Culture (formerly known as the Department of Religious Affairs); (2) the growth of Thai migrant communities abroad and their strong ties to their homeland; and (3) the growing global interest in Buddhism, particularly in Australia, Europe, and North America, and subsequent travel and exchanges concerning Buddhist ordination and meditation as well as 'religious commodification'" (Kitiarsa 2010, p. 111). According to the National Office of Buddhism of Thailand (2012), there are 360 Thai Buddhist temples worldwide in 2012, 16 of which are in the UK.

As discussed above, Buddhism and the Thai state are inextricably intertwined. Buddhism is one pillar of the modern Thai nation-building project. Thai Buddhism does not only expand across Thailand, but the Thai state also promotes its expansion across borders to reach Thai migrants abroad. In Britain, this expansion can be seen in the establishment of Buddhapadipa temple, which is an attempt by the Royal Thai government to preserve Thai Buddhist ideologies and nationalism among Thai people in the UK. Furthermore, it is also an attempt to promote Thai Theravada Buddhism to the British public. The emergence of Buddhapadipa temple is not to provide a religious venue to serve as a gateway for migrants to assimilate into British culture. But rather to create 'Thailand in England', where Thai migrants can find their home: their refuge from their struggles in the foreign land. Exploring the existence of Buddhapadipa temple and its impact on the Thai community, in this case Thai women, is essential to grasp the importance and

impacts of this state-sponsored Buddhist institution to lived experiences of Thai women in the UK.

5.2   Buddhapadipa Temple

Buddhapadipa temple is located in Wimbledon, London. It is the first Thai-style temple in Europe. It is affiliated with The Royal Thai government and under royal patronage. King Bhumibol (Rama IX) and the Thai Sangha Supreme Patriarch presided over Buddhapadipa's founding ceremony in 1964. However, it was not until 1982 that the construction of the *'ubosot'* (main hall) was complete (Figure 2). Princess Galyani Vadhana, sister of King Bhumibol, and Princess Alexandra of Kent joined in the opening ceremony of Buddhapadipa's ubosot. Bell (1991) maintains that Buddhapadipa serves as part of the Thai 'national church' as it is under royal patronage and the bhikkhus (male ordained monks) are religious representatives of the Royal Thai Embassy (p.54).

Figure 2: 'Ubosot' (main hall) of Buddhapadipa Temple from http://www.watbuddhapadipa.org/

Buddhapadipa's traditional Thai-style main hall is distinct from other Buddhist temples in the UK where the temples are situated in small, normal buildings or houses. On the temple's property there is a monk's building, a main hall, classrooms, outdoor restrooms, a meditation garden, a lake and a vast lawn where festivals and activities usually take place. The main hall of Buddhapadipa temple is one of the most beautifully decorated and prestigious main halls of Thai temples in Europe. The main hall's murals (Figure 3) were commissioned to Panya Vijinthanasarn and Chalermchai Kositpipat, (both of whom are renowned painters and currently appointed National Artists of Thailand) and 28 young Thai artists. The murals were finished in 1992 after 8 years of work (Cate 2003, p.3). They are a mix of traditional Thai mural art with modern interpretation by adding modern objects such as airplanes into the paintings. The murals tell a story of *'Thosachat'* (Ten Lives of the Buddha) and *'Triphum'* (Three World cosmology). The temple materialistically symbolises Thai Buddhist culture at its best. According to Cate (2003), the murals of Buddhapadipa temple "hold a prominent place in Thai contemporary culture", since "they are the first Thai Buddhist murals ever painted outside the country" (p.4). King Bhumibol himself proclaimed that the murals are the true representation of "the art of the Ninth Reign" (Chalermchai, 1994 cited in Cate, 2003). The main hall is used as a place of worship as it is filled with Buddha statues where people can enter to pray, meditate or pay respect to the Buddha. The basement of the main hall is currently being used as a classroom for Thai dance lessons on Sundays.

Figure 3: Murals in the main hall of Buddhapadipa Temple from http://www.watbuddhapadipa.org/

According to the temple's website, the temple was established to serve five main missions (Buddhapadipa Temple, n. d.).

1. To establish Buddhism in the UK

2. To provide religious services to Thai people

3. To honour the reputation of the Thai Sangha and Thailand

4. To be a centre of Thai cultural education in the UK

5. To promote the study of dhamma and mindful meditation to Thai and foreign people

Additionally, the temple indicates responsibilities of venerable monks of Buddhapadipa as religious workers, who must provide religious services, education services, facility services and multifaith services (Buddhapadipa Temple, n. d.). It is interesting to note that Buddhapadipa's main missions are to serve the Thai population in the UK and view non-Thais in the UK as 'foreign'. This reflects the Thai-centric view, even though the temple's location is outside Thailand. It also indicates the intention to import Thai Buddhism and culture to the UK through the Thai Sangha and government authority.

The monks who reside at Buddhapadipa temple are *'thammathut'* or 'Buddhist missionaries' as termed by Kitiarsa (2010). These monks have to pass necessary courses for them to be able to join the 'Thammathut Bhiksu going abroad program'. These courses include the Buddhist Tripitaka, Buddhist philosophy, principles and teaching methods in Buddhism, English for overseas Buddhist missionary monks, counselling, public relations, evangelism, introduction to computers, history and culture of the targeted destinations, and overseas Thai communities and Buddhist monasteries (Kitiarsa 2010, p. 123). The growth of overseas Thai communities influenced the Sangha's initiation of sending Buddhist missionaries abroad. In the Sangha's view Thai people needed to be close to their religion and Thai Buddhist temples would be good places to hold onto while living abroad. According to the Sangha, temples would also serve as cultural centres for Thais abroad (Phra Thammathut Thai Nai Tang Daen [Thai Overseas Buddhist Mission] 2001 cited in Kitiarsa 2010, p. 121).

Apart from being the most prominent Thai Buddhist temple in the UK, Buddhapadipa temple is also responsible for preserving Thai Buddhist culture abroad. In addition to organising religious services, the temple also organises Thai cultural events and events

regarding the Thai Royal Family such as the remembrance ceremony of the late King Bhumibol. In the wake of King Bhumibol's passing in October 2016, the temple organised a mourning ceremony and religious service which drew around one thousand people to the temple (estimated from the number of sandalwood flowers given to each participant to use in the ceremony, according to a temple's volunteer). Annual Thai cultural events such as Thai New Year's Day (April) and Loy Krathong festival (November), where Thai people pay respect to the river spirit, attract hundreds of Thais and the general public to the temple. The Thai Ambassador to the UK and representatives from the Royal Thai Embassy often attend these major events, signifying royal representation in opening ceremonies of these events.

Furthermore, the temple provides meditation classes and retreats for people of all faiths. Every Saturday, a Thai traditional music class takes place at the temple run by a club called the Thai Music Circle in the UK (Chaisamritpol, 2018). The music instructor is a British woman who can speak Thai fluently and has extensive knowledge in Thai traditional performances and music, due to her life in Thailand during her teenage years with her professor father who taught Southeast Asian studies in Malaysia and Thailand. Another instructor is a Thai woman who was a scholarship student in music education, under the patronage of Princess Sirindhorn (King Bhumibol's third child). Princess Sirindhorn wanted Thai music teachers in the UK to continue their studies, whilst teaching Thai music and spreading the arts to the British public. Students of these classes include Thai adults and Thai-British children. The temple also provides free Sunday Thai language classes (for 6-year-olds and above) and Thai dance class for children (5-year-olds and above). Most of the children who participate are of Thai-British heritage, some are Thai-born children who moved to the UK with their mothers. The temple reports that they provided Thai language lessons to 120 children in 2017, with help from 15 volunteer teachers.

In the case of Buddhapadipa temple, the temple space was created to cater to an ethnic enclave and preserves the Thai national identity. Rather than using the religious institutional space as a link to the host society, the temple space was used as a refuge from the mainstream culture and the British public. In their study of immigrant religion in the US and Western Europe, Foner and Alba (2008) discover that for immigrants in the US, joining and becoming members of churches and temples paves the path for them to becoming 'American' since religious institutions serve as the bridge to local

communities. However, in the case of Western Europe, focusing on Muslim immigrants, they conclude that Islam is seen as a social problem and that immigrant religions in Western Europe do not bridge immigrants to local societies, unlike the US. This is because the majority of US immigrants are Christian, and Christianity is dominant in the US. While, as Foner and Alba claim, Western European countries are more secular and have more trouble accepting religious claims (p.361). Per my observation, Thai Buddhism in the UK is not perceived as a 'social problem', still it is not a bridge to inclusiveness for Thai migrants in British society. Rather, Thai Buddhist institutions aim to preserve their ethnic identity and to promote Thai national culture.

Somers (1992, p.6) notes that Thai Theravada Buddhism in Britain is distinct from other Buddhist influences in the country due to its disconnection from the British colonial past. Somers claimed that Buddhism was introduced and popularised by the influence of Sir Edwin Arnold, who was positioned as the Principal of a college in Poona, India, in 1854 where he studied Sanskrit and South Asian religions and culture. He came back to Britain and wrote 'The Light of India', a poetic story of the life of Gautama Buddha first published in London in 1879 (p. 4). However, ordained Buddhist monk, Ananda Metteyya (né Charles Bennett), who was an English man ordained in Burma, was the first person to preach dhamma (Buddha's teachings) in England. He led the Buddhist mission to England from Burma in 1908 (p.5). It can be said that the establishment of Buddhapadipa temple physically marked the spread of Thai Theravada Buddhism in England. It is also worth pointing out that such establishment is institutionalised through the sponsorship of the Thai Royal Family and the Royal Thai government. In addition to religious missions, as noted, Buddhapadipa aims to be a centre of Thai cultural education in the UK. This signifies imported transnationalism by Thai governing institutions to not only preserve, but also to promote Thai 'culture' among the Thai community and British public.

5.3 Thai women and the temple

I first visited Buddhapadipa temple on Loy Krathong day, November 2016 with Oom whom I met at the gathering of Thai people in Brighton for remembrance of King Bhumibol in October 2016. She told me about the event at the Thai temple in Wimbledon, so I wanted to pay a visit and make merit. We paid respect to Buddha statues in the main

hall and then proceeded to the monk's quarters to give alms to the monks. After that day, I visited the temple several times on non-event days, on Songkran day in April (2017 and 2018) and another Loy Krathong day in November 2017. On event days, the schedule would normally start in the morning with Buddhist chanting and alms giving ceremony, followed by cultural performances such as traditional Thai instrumental music, Thai dances and beauty contests (Miss Songkran on Songkran day and Miss Noppamas on Loy Krathong day). These activities spanned from 9 am in the morning until around 5 pm in the afternoon. Apart from cultural shows on stage which drew large crowds, food stalls at festivals were another highlight of these events. Some attendees, especially students, normally went to Buddhapadipa on major events with the intention to attend these Thai food stalls. Pad Thai, somtam (papaya salad), meat ball noodles, curries and other assorted Thai street foods and desserts could be found at the temple. Attendees could also find small Thai groceries stalls at these events. Songkran and Loy Krathong days always come with a small Thai food fair which many Thai migrants looked forward to.

Figure 4: The crowd at Buddhapadipa Temple's yard on Songkran Day (14 April 2018), taken by author

I observed that on these events, there were at least 400-500 people attending the temple. I estimated that 60 percent of attendees were Thai women, 20 percent were their husbands and children, 10 percent were Thai students, and other 10 percent were British and

tourists. Some Thai women came not just to attend but also to fully take part in the temple's activities. Some dressed in Thai traditional dresses and volunteered to help with the temple's work. Some brought their children to perform on stage. The children who performed were from the Thai Dance Academy, Thai Arts Cultural Centre, and those who attended Sunday Thai dance class and Thai language class at Buddhapadipa temple.

Figure 5: Thai women enjoying Thai traditional dance, 'Ram Wong' (รำวง) at Buddapadipa Temple on Songkran Day (14 April 2018), taken by author

Figure 6: Thai traditional dance show by students at Buddhapadipa Temple on Songkran Day

On normal days, Thai people go to temple to make merit or give alms to monks. Thai Buddhists usually go to temples on their birthdays to make merit and receive blessings from monks, or when they are experiencing hard times in life. Merit-making is a form of good karma which is believed to help relieve bad circumstances and bad karma in this life and the next life. I had meetings with my respondents at the temple on non-event days. I also went there on Sundays to conduct interviews and observe Thai dance class and Thai language class.

Although they actively participate in the temple's activities, women are always at the periphery of Thai Theravada Buddhism. In Thailand, women are not allowed to be ordained into female monkhood (*Bhikkuni*) and can only maintain their role as laypeople, or as *'Mae chiis'* (laypeople in white, who shave their head and wear white robes but are not ordained). Kabilsingh (1991) points out that gender bias and discriminatory practices in Buddhism are influenced by ancient Indian Brahmanism, which upheld caste system and treated women as secondary to men. The Buddha originally rejected this prejudiced belief. However, it has been upheld among the Sangha of Theravada Buddhism. It is widely believed among Thai Buddhist that "women were born from their bad karma" (Kabilsingh 1991, p.31). Kabilsingh further asserts that many women are convinced that "they carry a heavy load of negative karma due to the simple fact of their gender and are therefore eager to gain merit to offset it" (Kabilsingh 1991, p. 31). The old prejudices toward women, influenced by Brahmanical beliefs, excludes them from participating as ordained monks and reinforces their subordinated role in Thai Buddhism. Nevertheless, Thai women maintain their role as laywomen, who are the main source of support for the Sangha. Studying Buddhism in Thailand, Cadge (2004) observes that it is often women who stand in front of their house to donate food to monks when monks go on alms every morning. While the main helpers at the temple are boys or men, women also provide secondary support at the temple by administrating or cleaning (Cadge, 2004). While men are encouraged to join the monkhood to achieve nirvana, women only play secondary, supporting roles in upholding Buddhist practices. Nonetheless, due to gendered migration and settlement in a new country, Thai women continue their supportive – yet important – role in keeping cross-border Buddhist faith, Thai nationalism and culture whilst living abroad.

Thai women are an essential part of Buddhapadipa's organisation. Contrary to temples in Thailand where men are the primary and the majority of monk's assistants. *'Dek wat'*, or

temple boys, are normally seen at temples in Thailand. These boys are sent from their family to live at temples to receive education from monks. Sometimes they are children from poor families or orphans who are adopted by monks. They walk behind monks while they are out for '*binthabat*' (morning walk to receive food from laypeople) and help monks carry food and belongings. *Dek wat* are responsible for cleaning, assisting and sometimes running errands for monks. *Dek wat* are predominantly male because it is prohibited for Thai Buddhist monks to have physical contact with female persons. Conversely, in the UK, the responsibilities of *dek wat* are transferred to women, since they are the majority of the Thai-born population in the UK. Women are the main organisers of the temple's affairs. They play active roles, for example, as monks' assistants, drivers, meditation instructors, cooks, cleaners, fundraisers, language teachers, and art and cultural teachers. Women's role has thus changed as the result of migration. Even though Thai culture and traditions are preserved within the temple's space, traditional gender roles have been disrupted because of changes in the society of settlement.

Some women are frequent visitors as monk's assistants, as mentioned above. Moreover, some occasionally come to the temple for their children's extracurricular lessons. The temple organises free Thai dance class and Thai language class every Sunday which are taught by volunteer teachers. From my observations, most of the children who attended these classes were half-Thai British, aged 5-10 years old, while a minority were Thai-born. Thai women would send their children to classes and wait for them until the class finishes. While they were waiting, they would sit in groups and share food with other Thai women and their husbands.

Figure 7: Thai women shared home-cooked food while waiting for their children to finish class on a Sunday, taken by author

I argue that Thai women's participation in the temple's activities is less of a religious motivation and more of gaining a sense of belonging and community within the ethnic group. As discussed earlier, the establishment of Buddhapadipa temple is an initiative of the Thai state to create a space to preserve the sense of Buddhist nationalism among Thai migrants. For Thai marriage migrants, going to the temple is a way to maintain transnational ties to Thailand. Furthermore, such transnational ties were exercised through the symbolic representation of 'Thai' culture. Traditional dresses, ethnic and regional food, traditional songs and dances, national anthem, these can be found within the temple's space. For Thai mothers, the temple is also a good place to introduce Thai culture to their children. Most respondents interviewed reported that they had been to a Thai temple or a Buddhist monastery at least once since they came to the UK, usually for main events. Some go occasionally for merit-making and some women always go to the temple to help with the temple's affairs and activities.

Thai temple is also a place where Thai migrants visit when they experience hard times in life to find emotional and psychological comforts. Roong, who had experienced domestic violence, told me that she went to Buddhist temples several times since she moved to the UK to make merit and also send money to make merit in Thailand. She said, *"I hope that the merit I made will come back to me"*, after telling her story about her abusive husband and domestic violence.

Similarly, Nuan talked about an incident that led her to seek spiritual retreat at a Thai temple. Working as a care provider in a nursing home, she was assigned to care for a patient who she was not familiar with, while her colleague was on leave. She had little knowledge about his conditions and habits. Unfortunately, the patient assaulted her which caused her fractured ribs. Her doctor said she had to take leave from work for one year and could not do heavy lifting. She said that this 'accident' led her to join the 5-day meditation retreat at Buddhapadipa temple to seek spirituality and mindfulness. During her sick leave, she also prayed for the Buddha and practiced mindfulness every day.

In his observation, Candamitto (cited in Bell 1991, p.54) comments that: "British Buddhists try to learn about Buddhism, Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist meditation and so on. In contrast Thai Buddhists in the UK prefer to make merit than to study Buddhist teaching. They come to see the monks and they like following Buddhism mainly by way of ceremony and religious services". From my observation, most temple-goers went to the temple to make merit by offering food to monks, assisting in temple's chores and donating money to the temple, but not to practice meditation or observe Buddhist precepts. The core of dhamma (Buddha's teachings) is to get rid of one's own desires to end worldly suffering and achieve enlightenment. However, most Buddhist practices in Thailand are rituals such as praying, offering food and materials to monks and asking for monk's blessings. It is a popular superstitious belief among Thai Buddhists that committing good karma, especially to monks, will result in good luck, wealth, better health and bring about better situations in life. It is also believed that praying to the Buddha will result in bringing good things in life. Especially when one experiences hardship and difficulties, he/she will seek to make merit in the hope good things to return, as we saw from Roong who sought to make merit after her experience of domestic violence. However, a minority of lay people were devotees in practicing dhamma. Nuan was an example of a lay person who frequently practices meditation and observes the dhamma, which she said she was interested in since before moving to the UK.

As mentioned earlier, Thai women also visit temples for cultural events and education of their children. Growing up in the UK, English is the native language for the majority of second-generation Thai migrants or Thai-British children. Many Thai mothers felt that their children should also learn Thai because being bilingual was considered a strong advantage. June took her daughter to Sunday Thai language school at the temple. She emphasised the importance of learning the Thai heritage while talking about her child:

> *I want her to speak Thai and learn about Thai culture, because we are Thai people. I want my kid to be bi-cultured. No one in my (Thai) family can speak English. So, when I take her back to Thailand, she can speak Thai to my family. I also think about the future. In case she wants to be in Thailand, at least knowing two languages is an advantage.*

Some women tried to speak Thai with their children on a daily basis. However, they admitted that it was hard to teach the Thai language to their kids because of the English-dominated environment. In some cases, young children were resistant to learning Thai with their mothers because they did not want to sound different from their British peers. Some mothers thus enrolled their children in Sunday Thai language classes at Buddhapadipa in the hope that their children would excel in Thai in addition to English, and also meet other Thai and Thai-British children. Dang was one of the regular helpers at the temple, she enrolled her three children in Buddhapadipa's Sunday Thai language course when they were little. However, her oldest son refused to focus on learning and speaking Thai because he felt different being a mixed child who spoke a foreign language among British classmates. He was also bullied by his classmates between year 5 and year 10 for his distinct appearance. Now, a young man in his twenties, he is working at a British university as an international student officer who assists Thai students. He can speak Thai but still struggle in reading and writing. Dang shared the story about her children:

> *We (Dang and her children) speak Thai at home. They are proud that they are more capable than others because Thai language is different from Spanish, German or French, not many people can speak Thai. So, they feel that they are more capable. I'm lucky. However, it's unfortunate that I tried to put them in Thai language school but the oldest one didn't accept any Thai lessons. Now he can't read nor write. The middle one likes languages though. She copied Thai phrases and searched for the definition on the internet. My youngest son can read and write. He wrote me 'rak mae' (love mom) in Thai. He also asked me if it was correct. The youngest knows more Thai than the others because he was in the summer school (at the temple). The oldest one refused to learn. He can only speak Thai but can't read or write… Now that he's an adult, he wants to learn*

Thai because he sees its benefit. But it's too late because he is too old to relearn the alphabet. The Thai teachers don't accept adult students… He likes Thai language now. He is working at a university helping Thai undergraduate and graduate students. However, he can't read oor write Thai. He just sent me a text asking me to translate some Thai phrases for him. He sent me a photo. I think he has built up his confidence over the years. It's not bad or strange to be a mixed kid or having a foreign mother.

Interviewer: It's like he has grown up and now he can adjust.

Yes, and there is no more bullying. I think this makes him proud and confident. When he speaks to me, he speaks Thai. He just called me a moment ago. As you saw me answering the phone. I was speaking Thai to him.

From Dang's account, the Thai language proficiency of her children is considered pride in being half Thai. She refers their ability to speak Thai as 'capability' over other Westerners who can only speak English or other European languages normally taught in British schools. Bringing her children to Thai language school was important for Dang since she wanted her children to learn their mother's native language and take pride in their Thai descent and heritage.

Most of Thai women from the survey (58.3 percent) said that the main purpose of their visit to a Thai temple is to retain links with their Thai heritage and culture. Not only Thai women visit temples to retain links with Thailand themselves, but they also bring their children to absorb and learn the Thai culture. For visitors at Buddhapadipa, enrolling their children into Thai language and cultural classes is a way for them and their children to retain links to the homeland.

It is important for children to know where their mothers come from. Some asserted that having children learning Thai will be an advantage and that they can make a living in Thailand in the future if they want to. This future-oriented embeddedness (Boccagni, 2015) refers to an immigrant's ideas of home which not only represent the past but also the future where migrants wishfully want to go back to their homeland to spend their lives after being successful in their host country. In the mothers' views, children would gain cultural and social capital by attending Thai language and cultural classes. Such capitals are seen as necessary for children if they return to Thailand.

Table 7: What is the likelihood that you will return to Thailand and live there permanently in the future?		
	Frequency	Percent
1 (not at all)	3	1.0
2	17	5.7
3	24	8.0
4	33	11.0
5	33	11.0
6	41	13.7
7	50	16.7
8	45	15.0
9	29	9.7
10 (definitely)	25	8.3
Total	300	100.0

According to the survey data, a large number of Thai women had the future prospect of returning to Thailand. Table 8 shows data from the survey asking, "on a scale of one to ten (where 1 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'definitely'), what is the likelihood that you will return to Thailand and live there permanently in the future?". It is found that, on average, there is moderate likelihood (M = 6.243, SD = 2.314) that Thai women believe they will return and live in Thailand in the future.

Table 8: If Thai women have children living with them in the UK, what is the likelihood that their children will return to Thailand and live there permanently in the future?			
		Frequency	Percent
	1 (not at all)	73	24.3
	2	95	31.7
	3	75	25.0
	4	27	9.0
	5	6	2.0
	6	3	1.0
	7	0	0
	8	0	0
	9	0	0
	10 (definitely)	0	0
	Total	279	93.0
No children		21	7.0
Total		300	100.0

What is interesting, however, is that when asked "what do you think is the likelihood that your children will return to Thailand and live there permanently in the future?" (see Table 8) the answer is almost the opposite, with average low likelihood (Mean = 2.308, SD = 1.091) that their children will return and spend their lives in Thailand. It is also worth noting that the maximum value of likelihood is 6 (moderate), meaning that there is a very small likelihood that children born to Thai mothers will return and live permanently in Thailand.

Most interview respondents with children wanted their children to learn Thai language and culture, so they could at least communicate with the Thai side of the family. However, they said that it was their children's decision whether they wanted to live in Thailand permanently or not. Despite the unforeseeable future of their children, Thai mothers wanted their children to gain the social and cultural capital 'in case' it would be useful in whichever life choices their children take. Here is an example from Ning, a Thai mother discussing her children's future:

> *"I want them to absorb Thai culture… They have two passports, Thai and British. They also have the Thai birth registrations. If they have Thai birth registrations, they can apply for Thai passports. They can also have their*

name in Thai home registration, and they won't become aliens (in Thailand).
Maybe they would go to Thailand in the future, but it is up to them ".

Most interview respondents said that they had been to a Thai temple or a Buddhist monastery at least once since they came to the UK. Most of them go to the temple for main events. Some go occasionally for merit-making and few women always go to temple to help with the temple's affairs and activities. Asking Thai women, "how often do you visit a Buddhist temple in the UK?" (Table 9), 54.7 percent said they visited once every six months. This can be assumed that they visit on the main annual events such as Songkran and Loy Krathong. Respectively, 24.3 percent said they visited a Buddhist temple once a year which can be assumed that they went on main events. Twelve percent of respondents said that they had never visited a Thai Buddhist temple. Lastly, 9 percent said that they visited a temple once a month. This group of people might be those who are monk's assistants or devoted Buddhists. Many interview respondents shared that they visited a temple when there were major events, when they are free, or if there is a temple nearby.

Table 9: How often do you visit a Buddhist Temple in the UK?		
	Frequency	Percent
Once a month	27	9.0
Once every six months	164	54.7
Once a year	73	24.3
Never	36	12.0
Total	300	100.0

Going to the temple also strengthens relationships in the Thai-British family. Many women recounted their experiences of first coming to the UK. As discussed in Chapter 4, the initial feeling was loneliness and isolation despite coming here with their husbands. Some said that their husbands were the ones who introduced them to the Thai community in the UK because they did not want their wives to feel lonely in a foreign country. Some husbands brought their wives to Thai grocery stores to meet other Thais and to the Thai temple to make them feel at home. Dew is one of respondents who shared that her husband was the one who introduced her to the Thai temple:

I was lonely. I didn't know anyone. My husband was the one who took me here (Buddhapadipa) so I know other Thais.

However, only 3 percent of survey respondents said that the main purpose of visiting a Thai Buddhist temple is to meet and stay in touch with other Thais in the UK. Some women initially develop friendship with Thai friends and acquaintances at the temple. Some people became frequent temple visitors and developed an extended social network from the temple. They continued to maintain friendships and networks outside the temple. They shared information and advice to each other, and in some cases, invited each other to socialise outside the temple's activities. Orapa shared her experience of getting to know Thai friends from Buddhapadipa temple, and who later shared useful legal information to her:

> *When I have a problem, my Thai friends can help me. Like friends at Wimbledon, London. This group of friends gave me good advice. I asked them for a lot of advice. Sometimes I was not sure about legal issues (marital law), I asked them.*

As illustrated above, Thai women's main purpose of visiting the temple is to maintain cultural heritage. But, as a consequence of going and participating in the temple's activities, they often develop social networks, although the initial purpose of going to the temple was not to make friends. Many Thai mothers who sent their children to Sunday classes got to know each other at the temple. They became weekly social groups where they shared lunch and had conversations while waiting for their kids to finish classes. Some people knew each other from joining the same meditation class. For example, Nuan mentioned that she knew Orapa from a meditation retreat at Buddhapadipa temple and that they maintained contact ever since. They always invited each other to meditation retreats or other Buddhist activities.

Several women reported that they attended the Thai temple more often than they used to after they moved to the UK. When asked why they attended more often, many said that it is a way to meet other Thais (they used the word 'friends'). A minority said that it was about keeping faith or religious practices, but most talked about meeting other Thai people and to enjoy cultural experiences such as Thai food and speaking the Thai language. Dang who was one of the regular assistants to monks at Buddhapadipa temple expressed her feelings about visiting the temple:

> *In my opinion, I think temple is a centre. Aside from calmness and dhamma that the venerable monk teaches us or paying respect to the Buddha among the calm surroundings, I think I have expanded (my social network), I have known more Thai people. I believe that those who come to the temple have a similar attitude. I like it. I like surroundings that are not busy. Actually, I can sit for a long time in a pub for a cup of coffee. But if I'm free, I prefer to go to the temple. I don't know why.*

Nop said that she visited Thai Buddhist temples in the UK more often than when she was in Thailand. The main reason for her was to find something to *"spiritually hold onto",* and to meet other Thai people:

> *I visit the temple more often after I moved here. I didn't go to any temple when I was working in Bangkok. After I came here, it (the temple) is the only place I can spiritually hold onto… Also, I get to meet people there, chatting, meeting monks. I get to pray. I feel content when I hear monk's prayers.*

Every woman I talked to said that their husbands were supportive of them joining the temple's activities and keeping the Buddhist way of life. During my fieldwork, I was offered rides to temples from Thai women and their husbands. Some British husbands drove their wives to Buddhist temples on the weekend or on Buddhist holidays per their wives' request. Several women said that their husbands are *'jai dee'* (have a good heart) for letting them and sometimes taking them to temples. Furthermore, British fathers were supportive of their children going to a Thai temple with their mothers and having the chance to learn the Thai language and culture. Some husbands accompanied their wives and children to Thai language and cultural classes and observed their activities. Nong talked about her husband's support:

> *Interviewer: What does your husband say about you bringing children to the temple?*
>
> *He always goes with me. We go together to make merit. (Our family) often goes to the temple, if we have the chance. My husband likes to go to the temple.*

Table 10: All things considered, how important are your visits to a Buddhist Temple in sustaining/supporting your life here in the UK?		Frequency	Percent
	1 (not at all)	0	0
	2	7	2.3
	3	15	5.0
	4	18	6.0
	5	23	7.7
	6	68	22.7
	7	37	12.3
	8	84	28.0
	9	10	3.3
	10 (definitely)	2	.7
	Total	264	88.0
No answer		36	12.0
Total		300	100.0

As presented in Table 10, the survey asked, "all things considered, how important are your visits to a Buddhist temple in sustaining and supporting your life here in the UK?" The average value of this question is moderate (Mean = 6.803, SD 1.546), with the concentration on the moderate (25.8 percent marked 6 and 14 percent marked 7 on the scale) and high importance (31.8 percent marked 8 on the scale). We can see that, in the view of survey respondents, attending temple activities has a positive impact on their wellbeing. As investigated earlier, their perceived wellbeing from visiting the temple can be assumed to be the result of strengthening the relationship within the family, practicing one's own religious faith, developing a social network, and cultivating a sense of belonging in one's own ethnic and cultural community.

Although most women I talked to attended Buddhist temples and participated in cultural and religious activities, some women were less enthusiastic in visiting the temple and engaging in such activities. For example, Mine expressed a different opinion in regard to visiting the temple:

> *Interviewer: Have you ever been to any Thai temples here?*
>
> *I go once a year, to work. I go on Loy Krathong. This year I'm going too, to sell noodles.*
>
> *Interviewer: Which temple?*
>
> *The one in Wimbledon, London. I go to work there every year, once a year.*

Interviewer: So, you are not those who visit temples for religious purposes?

No, I don't take part in those activities. Mostly I just want to meet my friends and have some food. I don't socialise much with other Thais. I don't get too close to them.

Mine stated that she was not part of any social group at the temple. She further commented that she disliked going to temple events and that social groups at the temple were 'fake'. She expressed such feelings because she did not belong in the social groups of frequent temple-goers and the superficial representation of Thai 'culture' such as traditional dresses, cultural shows and others. She only went there to work and earn money, but not to build a network or socialise with others. Not all women who engage in the temple's activities wish to sustain a link to their homeland, but the events are a chance for them to earn some extra income from selling food and groceries. It is worth noting that the symbolic and cultural representation at Buddhapadipa is principally based on the central (using central Thai (Bangkok) dialect), official (associated with The Royal Thai Embassy), and royal (under the patronage of the Thai Royal Family) sides of Thailand. As opposed to the rural, provincial, local, or the representation of 'other' Thai cultures. In other words, Buddhapadipa temple represents the Bangkok version of Thailand in the middle of England. Not all Thai women, who are from various locations and socio-economic backgrounds, feel that they fully belong to the temple circle.

As I observed, I found that those who were frequent visitors or helpers at the temple had more conservative social and political views regarding Thailand. Most of the regular and frequent helpers of the temple were women from the central and southern regions of Thailand, where most middle-class and politically conservative populations reside. Ming was from a middle-class family in Songkhla, a southern province in Thailand. In 1980s, she met her husband in Thailand and moved to England with him. She managed to gain an MPhil degree in education at a British University. Ming told me that her father was in monkhood for a long time and she had absorbed Buddhist mindfulness practices from her father. Whilst in the UK, she frequently visited the temple to practice mindfulness and eventually became a meditation instructor there. Furthermore, she always followed news and political situations in Thailand. Enthusiastic about Thai political situations, Ming said that she flew back to Thailand in 2013 to 'help' in a demonstration to oppose the Amnesty Bill. The Bill was endorsed by members of parliament in an attempt to grant amnesty to those who took part in political rallies from 2006-2011. The controversial bill was said to

favour the Red Shirt group, who were publicly perceived as progressive and anti-monarchy. Most Red Shirt supporters were people from Northern and North-Eastern provinces, the agricultural and economically deprived regions of Thailand. Ming said that she was on the side of 'the Yellow Shirt', the royalist and conservative political group in Thailand. She went back to Bangkok in 2013 to join the protest against the Amnesty Bill and said that she disliked the Red Shirts. She further said that she endorsed General Prayut Chan-o-Cha, the current Thai Prime Minister who stepped into power by staging a military coup in 2014.

Jai was from Nakhon Sri Thammarat, a Southern province of Thailand. She finished her university education in Bangkok and continued to work in Bangkok in the IT sector. She was a frequent visitor at Buddhapadipa as she enrolled her children in the Sunday Thai language school. Jai told me that she knew many Thais from the temple and from online forums. She organised political movement groups for Thais abroad. For example, she managed to gather Thai people in the UK and went for a protest to oppose the Amnesty Bill with other Thais in Denmark. She also flew back to Thailand to partake in the mourning ceremony of King Bhumibol in 2016 and said 20 Thai people in the UK went back to Thailand for the ceremony with her.

Unlike Thai women who did not participate or frequently go to the temple, these women paid active attention to royalist-nationalist, political conservative activities in Thailand. Buddhapadipa temple, as mentioned above, represents Thai royalty and traditional Thai Buddhist culture. This is also reflected in the association of the Thai collective who are more politically and culturally conservative in the space of the temple. There were only a small group of Thai women who actively engaged in the temple's activities and associations. While other women occasionally took part in yearly major events, to relieve their yearning for 'home' or in some cases, merely to earn money from selling Thai food.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter discusses the importance of Thai temples and Thai women's cross-border activities by using Buddhapadipa temple in Wimbledon as a case study. Buddhapadipa is the most prominent Thai Buddhist organisation in Europe as the first Thai-styled temple under the Thai Royal patronage. Aside from serving a religious purpose for Thai Buddhists, it is also a space where the Thai culture, heritage and nationalism are

celebrated and maintained. As a state-sponsored organisation, the important, unwritten mission of Buddhapadipa is to preserve Thai Buddhist nationalist values among Thai people in the UK. The establishment of Buddhapadipa is an attempt by the Thai state to create 'Thailand in England' to retain strong links between Thai migrants and their homeland. On the other hand, Thai women in the UK are also important actors in reciprocating and sustaining this transnational institutionalisation, while simultaneously searching for the sense of belonging and community in the foreign land for themselves.

The majority of Thai women in the survey sample went to the temple for major events to celebrate their national and ethnic cultures, while only a small number of women went regularly to the temple. Frequent temple-goers seemed to be more politically and culturally conservative, as they supported the royalist movement and conservative political parties in Thailand. They were also the group who enrolled their children in Thai language and cultural courses. These symbolic links were passed onto their children. Learning about their mother's heritage and language is a precautionary strategy of migrant mothers in case their children want to move to Thailand in the future.

Visiting the temple also invokes Thai women's feelings of belonging to the Thai community in the UK and helped them cope with difficult circumstances in life. Occasionally, people visited the temple to pursue mindfulness, spirituality, and emotional shelter. It is a place where Thai women seek emotional wellbeing by making merits and receiving blessings from the monks. It is also interesting that while around a quarter of survey respondents said that they visited the temple to worship and practice religion, in reality, their practices were rather more symbolic and superstitious than practicing core Buddhist lessons of mindfulness and spirituality. From my observations, Thai people visit Buddhapadipa to offer food or necessary items for monks and make prayers as a way to 'make merit'. A minority engaged in learning Buddhist teachings or practice mindfulness meditation which are central to achieving spiritual goals in Buddhist sense.

Most Thais attend the temple to exercise symbolic acts of Buddhist rituals rather than practicing mindfulness for spiritual improvement. Here, I argue that attendance at the temple among Thais is more about gaining a sense of belonging both emotionally and materialistically, through symbolic cultural engagement; rather than a religious purpose, as the majority of respondents both from interviews and surveys, visit the temple only on major cultural events to immerse themselves with a familiar culture and language and meet fellow Thais. Even though the temple seems to be the centre for Thai culture,

Buddhism and co-ethnic social networks, not all Thai women were enthusiastic about participating in its activities. Some people felt that they did not belong in the temple circle and did not feel particularly engaged in socialisation with other Thais.

Buddhapadipa temple is a case where Thai women's cross-border connections are exercised through symbolic engagement with the temple's activities. Women's forms of engagement vary according to their life circumstances and aspirations in life. It seems that the Thai temple positively impacts the lives of Thai marriage migrants and helps their relationships within Thai-British families. In turn, the existence of this homeland-state-religious organisation is also sustained by active engagement of Thai migrants in the UK.

Chapter 6

Intercultural Union and Cross-Border Connections

The transnational linkages Thai women retain affect their everyday family lives. This chapter will explore the intersection of transnational connections and Thai-British unions. The cross-border connections Thai women have with their natal family and their ethnic culture play a crucial role in their relationships with their husbands. Moreover, these connections also influence child-rearing approaches and aspirations for the family. The family is an essential analytical unit in the discussion on transnationalism. While the issue of women's migration and cross-border marriage is widely studied, there should be more research on the dynamics of family formation of intercultural couples. Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) offer the key to understanding transnational migration by conceptualising 'transnational social fields', which refers to multi-layered cross-border connections that encompass various actors and institutions. Such connections, as we observed, are manifested in the public sphere, for example, through the engagement in socio-cultural activities at a Thai temple. This chapter moves attention to the impact of cross-border connections which permeate their private realm. Here, I explicate how cross-border links which Thai marriage migrants sustain impact their Thai-British intercultural union and family life. The cross-border manifestations of migrants affect people around them, their partner, their children, and their extended family members. The migrant's partner, whom they have the closest relationships with while abroad, is the one who is closest to the migrant's transnational influences. As migrants, Thai women in an intercultural union are caught up with different sets of values from their home and host countries. It is thus of interest to explore how Thai women negotiate their identity and position in the context of a mixed family.

6.1 Cross-border marriage and intercultural union

More and more academic work on cross-border marriage is looking at the phenomenon through the lens of transnationalism, especially in terms of how marriage migrants maintain their connection to their home and how they make contributions to their family and local community back home. However, there have been few studies that discuss their

sense of belonging and identity construction and re-construction and negotiation in the course of their mobility, and how this affects their family life in their country of destination. There is especially limited knowledge on the family life of Thai-British partnerships, instead focusing on public perceptions and representations of Thai-Farang relationships. Furthermore, Crippen and Brew (2007) argue that "most studies of migration view the household as a monolithic unit pertaining to decisions about where to live, yet partners have different emotions and desires prior to a decision-making process that is characterised by negotiation and tension and is affected by differential levels of power" (p. 108). Hence, it is crucial to study marriage migration and intercultural unions in a way that considers power relations and dynamics within the family.

In her study of intercultural couples in the United States, Bystydzienski (2011) suggests that mobility can affect people's sense of belonging and construction of hybrid identities. Marriage migrants are in the position of facing constantly contesting values and norms both in the family and the host society in general. Her feminist approach is useful in the study of Thai marriage migrants on the issue of difference. She agrees with Grearson and Smith (1995) that "at some level, every domestic partnership is "intercultural" as each couple develop its own unique culture out of two" (p.45). Domestic partnerships always lead to identity transformation but intercultural couples experience a more complex dynamic, where two people carry distinct cultural expectations and understandings (p.46). In the same light, Rodríguez-García (2015) comments that in terms of what he calls 'intermarriage', there is relatively little knowledge on the "scope, internal dynamics, and social consequences of mixedness", and whether or not intermarriages "lead to greater social, cultural, economic and/or political integration for individuals and groups that have not been considered part of the societal mainstream and in what context" (p.9-10). In the case of Britain, issues of Southeast Asian-British partnership in the UK is understudied. As Song (2010) states, most research and policy on diversity and mixedness in Britain has focused on black Caribbean-white and black African-white unions because these groups are the largest mixed population group (677,000) in Britain according to 2001 British census (p.1201).

Luke and Luke (1998) argue that the study of interracial couples offers the opportunity to analyse micropolitics of the family by applying Stuart Hall's concept of 'new times'. Luke and Luke quote Hall (1996, p.226), "…'new times' lead to the 'weakening and subverting . . . eroding [of the] lines of continuity which hitherto stabilised our social

identities". They further put that, "interrace has the effect of destabilising and suspending, blurring and doubling in vision the 'lines of continuity', the certainties of normalising practices that exist in many monoculture relationships. What we see here are patterns of gendered division of domestic and sexual labour, child-rearing, language and power relationships that are destabilised and put 'up for grabs' in interracial relationships, to be reformed in new regimes of power, cultural practices, and social relations" (Luke and Luke 1998, p. 750). I agree that the study of intercultural/mixed race couples is important due its hybrid political location, which erodes existing traditional patterns of family life and domestic partnerships. Therefore, studying such unions will open up a broader examination of the personal account of people in relation to socio-political power structures. Similarly, Fouron and Glick-Schiller (2001) argue that family life and political regime are intertwined:

> "Household and family life are surveyed, disciplined, and inhabited by the political regime. Therefore, as people create family and household they produce gendered individuals whose activities, beliefs, and identities as women and men are part and parcel of the ways in which the nation is reproduced and its links to the state are re-envisioned. To the extent to which the family and home simultaneously are defined as women's domains and the site of national honor and virtue, when women do women's work, they become committed to the ideas and imagery that build the nation (p.542)."

People in intercultural unions bring with them different sets of beliefs, political views, cultural and social conducts into their cohabitation. Sometimes these differences can be compromised and harmonised but sometimes negotiation and even conflicts take place. When one of the partners in an intercultural union is a migrant, he/she might participate in transnational activities which affect, and at times even complicate, their partnership. Lucy Williams (2010) argues that migrant's hybrid dynamics of family life "might go unnoticed outside the scrutinised world of the migrant" (p.25).

When people from different cultures are in a relationship, there is often contestation and negotiation of cultural values. Luke and Luke (1998) found that there was a mismatch of views among Southeast Asian wives and white Australian husbands, where "…Southeast Asian women prefer white Australian men because they considered them less 'traditional', many of the white Australian males stated that they preferred non-Anglo women because they are more 'traditional' and less 'liberated' and 'forward' than Australian women" (p.748). Asian wives are seen as traditional by their foreign husbands. However, Asian wives perceive marriage to foreigners as a chance to liberate themselves

from traditional Asian values. But in reality, many women face expectations of being traditional wives by their foreign husbands. Identity construction is a complex issue. Even though some Asian women see marrying Western husbands and moving to Western society as the opportunity to emancipate themselves from traditional values, some women, as Chuenglertsiri (2012) found, are proud of their traditional values on homemaking and being dutiful wives to their Western husbands.

One of the essential components of family life are decisions on child-rearing. To better understand intercultural union, I would like to also explore how couples with children manage or make decisions on the upbringing of mixed-raced children. As mentioned, there are a significant number of mixed-race/ethnicity studies in Britain. However, similar to studies of intercultural/interracial union, most shed light on children with parentage of White British and other ethnic groups such as South Asian, Black Caribbean, African, and others (Edwards, 2008; Caballero et al., 2008). Although numbers are relatively smaller, there is a research gap on the lives of Thai-British children and Thai children who are raised in the UK.

Crippen and Brew's (2007) review of intercultural parenting found that challenges for couples include their different social and cultural backgrounds, which affects their approach to parenting and decision-making in the household. Having children can also trigger conflicts, which stem from cultural differences which mixed couples were previously able to compromise on (p.109). Rodriguez-García's (2006) study on African-Spanish couples in Catalonia, Spain suggests that dynamics of conflict and accommodation of mixed-race, intercultural families can be evidently found in the upbringing of children, especially in the intergenerational transmission of values and socio-cultural models, where "parents try to preserve and transmit their respective values, with more or less flexibility" (p.421). Rodriguez-García found that in Senegambian-Spanish families, Senegambian parents, concerned about their children's education and employment opportunities, were more likely to support their children in embracing modern ways of doing things. However, they were sometimes worried that their children, especially daughters, would become 'too Westernised'. He suggests that these difficulties may be in conflict with the values of their Spanish wives and eventually may lead to the couple's separation (p.421-2). This type of case study draws my attention to explore the dynamics of conflict in Thai-British families in raising children. As mentioned by Rodriguez-García, the area of children's upbringing may lead to obvious disagreement in

families. The encounter of Eastern and Western traditions in Thai-British families may invite some disagreement on the transmission of parents' cultural values and customs onto their children. It is interesting to see how Thai-British couples negotiate and accommodate this issue. Amidst these challenges, however, intercultural unions bring opportunities for richer cultural integration. Child-rearing by mixed couples also brings about the creation of new cultures as a result of mixing multiple cultures and religions (p.111). In this context, it is interesting to see what specific challenges and opportunities Thai-British couples face as parents and a mixed union and how they deal with them.

This chapter will explore dimensions where transnationalism and intercultural partnership intersect, and how they affect decisions in the family. First, I will discuss the issue of negotiations on Thai women's cross-border responsibilities and how they impact the relationship with their husband. Although they have moved to another country, many Thai women still bring with them responsibilities to support the natal family. Several of them also have to support children from a previous marriage. Many Thai women feel that they are obligated to fulfil this filial role. Although sending financial remittances is a declining trend for long-stay migrants as their life situations transform, I found that this issue is prominent especially for newcomers and new couples. Being the ones who left home to search for better opportunities, women are obligated by family expectations to send back financial remittances. This issue was raised by many interview respondents as one of the most crucial topics they had to discuss with their husbands in the early stage of their co-habitation. Second, I will move to the negotiation of everyday living of the intercultural family. The everyday practices of people from different backgrounds sometimes demand negotiations, explanations and understanding, as there are distinctions in practices in the home between couples. Third, the issue of raising Thai-British children will be examined. Having mixed-race children requires parents to negotiate their child-rearing practices. Children are the ones who their parents transmit values, norms, and beliefs to. It is interesting to explore what approach intercultural parents adopt to raise their children, and how having children affects their partnership. Lastly, the topic on family aspirations will be discussed. This section will investigate future plans for the Thai-British family by focussing on Thai women's accounts of their family aspirations and what factors they thought would enable them to achieve those future plans. I argue that women's different socio-economic classes prior to their migration to the UK influence their aspirations to return or remain in the UK.

6.2 My family is your family: the transnational responsibilities of Thai women

As elaborated in previous sections, the majority of interview respondents appeared to maintain strong ties to their natal family in Thailand. They maintain emotional ties with their family members and friends in Thailand and reproduce cross-border social capital with people back home. However, at the time of interview, a minority of respondents said that they still regularly sent financial remittances to their family members in Thailand. It seems that women remit in the first years of their migration to the UK. As time passes, members of their family pass away, and their children from previous marriage, or nieces and nephews, begin to support themselves. Per these life-course circumstances, women are relieved of the burden of supporting their natal families. Nevertheless, it was highlighted several times in interviews that sending remittances and supporting their children and relatives (including bringing children to live with them in the UK) had caused serious discussions and negotiations between Thai wives and British husbands, especially in the first years of their marriage. These are few accounts that respondents shared on their negotiations about their practices of financial remittances:

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> *We are very different (culturally) and we have a lot of arguments… Mostly we argue about little things. But the serious issue is that I had to send money back to my mother. He is curious why I have to send money back. I had to explain it to him. I don't use his money. I work and earn the money myself. We talked about this in the beginning (of their relationship) that if I stop working and have kids, I still have to send money to my mother. But actually, I never stop working.*

Nan explained the transformation of her husband's perception about Thai practices of supporting extended family. She said that her husband did not understand her practices at first. After her attempt to get him to know her extended family by bringing him to Thailand, he gradually understood her point of view and eventually changed his actions towards her family members:

> *I want my husband to absorb Thai culture. I want him to get used to the Thai way of life or Thai family. I try to go back to Thailand as often as I can. If I can take a leave, we (she and her husband) will be in Thailand for a couple of weeks or ten days. I want him to get used to Thai people. It's because when we first saw each other, we had some issues… Different cultures, for example, sending money back home. In British culture, people don't look after their*

family forever, only on special occasions. But for Thais we have to send money back every month. He doesn't say he is not happy about it, but he doesn't understand. When I want to buy things for my Thai nieces and nephews, he asks why I have to buy them things because I already gave them the money. In my opinion, I don't want him to 'accept' (what she does) but I want him to understand. Because if he only accepts it, when we have serious issues he will not understand, he will not be willing to do it, and eventually he will not be happy about it.

Interviewer: Do you think that he has better understanding about Thai culture after he visits Thailand?

Yes, much more. He was shocked the first time he visited Thailand. For example, when my relatives came to see us, to congratulate us (on the wedding). He was shocked, in a good way. He first visited Thailand when we were getting married. It was a hassle, a lot of spending. He was shocked about that, too. Because he is quite frugal, but not stingy. He will spend on what is necessary. But for Thais, we think everything is necessary… Now we don't have that kind of problem. I said to him that I would go back to Thailand in April and I wanted to buy my nephew a pair of soccer trainers. He knows this kid as well, because I let them talk to each other and they had met each other in Thailand. I wanted them to know each other. My husband looked at the trainers price and he said, "they are not so expensive, I'll buy them for him." Now, he knows what to do. We are okay now.

Thai women saw financial remittances as a cultural practice, as a way to show gratitude (*bun khun*) to their birth parents and fulfil their filial duty by supporting their family members. They justified the practice to their husbands by pointing out that they send money which they earned by themselves. However, the cultural dimension is not the only dynamic in this intercultural partnership. As Rodríguez-García (2006) argues, socio-economic, situational and personal factors contribute to conflicts in the intercultural family rather than cultural differences. The different economic positions of Thai wives and British husbands also contribute to frictions in relationships. It is clear that most Thai marriage migrants in the sample were working women and did not fully rely on their husbands financially. Many women worked not just to support themselves but also support their family in Thailand. Pim, an owner of a pub kitchen in London, talked about the common problem Thai wives had with their husbands:

The biggest family problem here is that people don't have time for their family. Most Thai women work in restaurants. The women I know don't have time for their family. Mostly, we have Sunday off, the only day that we get to spend time with our husbands. But today (Sunday), my husband is working over-time, so we haven't seen each other for a week now… Normally, he finishes work at 5-6 pm and arrives home at 7 pm. He is alone in the house, cooks for himself. Because I still work in the pub. He has to adjust himself to

me. We often fight about not spending enough time with each other. This is the main problem I face until now. I don't have time for my husband. Farangs like to take holidays and go travel. For me, I get to do that only once a year. I think I still have the opportunity to earn money. My health is still intact, too. If I get older, I wouldn't be able to earn as much money as I earn today. So, I think that I have to work while I can. I think I will take him out when I get older. We are going to travel so much, he is sick of it. Farangs can take days-off and they still get paid. If I take days-off, I don't get paid at all.

Most Thai women interviewed were working in low-paid and low-skilled jobs. As with Pim, restaurant workers mostly work odd hours, as opposed to their British husbands who mostly work in a professional position with regular office hours. Thai women who worked in restaurants said that they did not have time for their husbands because of their different working hours. Eighteen out of 31 interview respondents had an undergraduate level of education or above. Nevertheless 21 out of 31 worked in the service sector, such as restaurant staff, care worker, cleaner, masseuse, customer service staff, and supermarket staff. Pim received an undergraduate degree in Thailand and moved to the UK with no work experience. During the 12 years in the UK, she worked as a waiter, hotel housekeeper, hotel receptionist and recently set up her own food business. Her experience is similar to other women I talked to. Thai women who previously worked in Thailand as a financial broker, financial administrator, IT coordinator, computer technician, and accountant, for example, had shifted their occupation into the service sector after moving to the UK. Respondents said that their education attainment in Thailand was not applicable to apply for professional-level jobs in the UK. Another hindrance is the lack of English language proficiency. The British socio-economic structure that bars Thai women from professional occupation, despite their high education, renders these women to low-paid, odd-hour jobs. The problem cited as 'not spending enough time with each other' seems to stem from their socio-economic position as migrant women. Working in low-paid jobs drives many women to take longer and unsocial working hours to earn more income. Especially for those who still have to support their Thai family back home.

This also shows that Thai women are becoming more and more financially independent of their husbands. Only 3 respondents said that they were full-time housewives. They also perceived that they could not fully rely on their husbands financially and had to share the financial burden in the household. Some respondents saw this as a 'Western value', where

husband and wife have to share their financial and household responsibilities, as opposed to the 'Thai value' where men are expected to be the main breadwinner and women as homemaker. Nuan commented on the differences between Thai and British families:

> *If you are in Western family, you have to share (financial responsibilities). Unless your husband is a millionaire, you don't have to… We can't just sit or lay around doing nothing. In Thailand, women can stay home to look after children. But here, both husband and wife have to work.*

It appears that the clash that leads to the breaking of relationships is not a result of cultural differences, but a combination of various factors. While cultural differences may cause minor discontent and arguments between couples, it appears that these differences can be resolved with conversation and compromise and are less likely to cause family breakdown. Mutual understanding of each other's cultural backgrounds was crucial for Thai-British couples to achieve harmonious relationships.

On the other hand, arguments which are caused by economic, situational or personal issues are more likely to cause more intense conflicts which lead to separation, divorce, and even domestic violence. Sending remittances to their family was claimed by respondents as a matter of culture, where it is a norm that Thai daughters have to fulfil familial obligations. However, this 'cultural difference' intersects with the 'economic difference', where Thai women are in a different economic position from their husbands. Some respondents relied on their husbands for remittances or asked for additional financial support in certain circumstances, as we will see in the case of Mook who financially relied on her husband for remittances, and additionally asked him for more financial assistance for her father's funeral. The combination of cultural and financial issues, which accumulated over time, finally led to their divorce. Mook mentioned that the main reason for her divorce from her husband was that he did not understand that she had to take care of her family in Thailand;

> *The reason (for the divorce) was that we learn about each other after getting married. Everything was perfect. It was okay. But then my father passed away and I felt stressed out by a lot of things. He didn't understand why I had to take charge of managing my father's funeral. I asked him (for money). He gave me 100 pounds. He said this would cover the cost. But for Thais, it's not enough. He didn't know Thai culture. I could not explain it properly to him. My English was not that good at the time. He said, "your father passed away, I'll let you go back (to Thailand)". After I came back, we didn't get along. He didn't understand why I have to work so hard… Before this, we had no problem. He used to send money to my father every month, around 100*

pounds (per month). But when my father died, we had problems with each other.

In this case, Mook was partly financially dependent on her husband. He gave her £100 per month to send back to her father. But when her father passed away, Mook asked for additional money to cover the cost of his funeral. The strain in their relationship began after her father's funeral which eventually led to their separation and divorce. In Thailand, funerals can last several days, and the host normally takes care of guests by providing food and drinks. They also have to 'make donations' to the temple that the funeral is held. Additionally, there are the costs for handling the corpse and cremation. The tremendous cost of the funeral was assumed to be Mook's responsibilities since she was the one who moved abroad, and therefore would earn more income than other Thai family members. The reality is that the money she earned was a combination of working hard in unskilled jobs and being financially dependent on her husband to cover the expenses in Thailand.

Women's cross-border responsibilities are not only limited to financial remittance, but also include familial responsibilities of mothering. In Thailand where women are assumed to be the main care provider of children, the responsibility of taking care of children from a previous marriage with Thai men fall on the women. Nine out of 31 interview respondents reported that they had children from a previous marriage with a Thai man. While 8 of them brought their children to join them in the UK. Bringing children from a previous marriage to live in a new family is a challenge for both mothers and children. Most people who brought their Thai children to the UK said that the children had to initially go through tremendous adjustments to a new environment, new language, and new school. But as they grew up, they were able to adapt and be part of British society. In terms of relationships within the family, most respondents who brought their children from a previous marriage to join the new family did not report any problems. However, a few respondents mentioned conflict which happened between their Thai children and their British husbands. Kate said that she broke up with her husband partly because of a disagreement about her son from a previous marriage. Her husband disagreed about her Thai son joining her in the UK because he planned that he would move to Thailand with her after retirement and having her son here would ruin the plan. After her son lived in the UK for six months, her husband told him to leave and go back to Thailand.

In a more extreme case, Nim recalled that after she got married and settled down with her husband, she decided to bring her two children to live in the UK. Her husband approved of the decision. Nevertheless, when they spent time under one roof, problems occurred. She said:

> *I worked night shift. He (her husband) was with my children while I was at work. He turned off the lights at 8 pm. He did not allow my children to watch television or do anything after that time. My kids were using their small laptops and he pulled them away from their hands. That was when the problem started. Since then I had more and more problems in my life and my family. There were some organisations that intervened when the violence happened. He didn't let me go anywhere. He took away all my papers. He didn't want me to have anything. But I'm not stupid. I was curious. I couldn't read or write (English) but I always asked him when I want to know something. He didn't like it when I did that. Then, the problems accumulated. Sometimes, the police intervened. Women's Aid, social work supports came to help me. Until I could not take it anymore because my children and I were physically abused, they (organisations) came in and took me to an emergency shelter.*

Not only did her husband set strict house rules over her children, he also exercised control over her by confiscating all of her identification documents to limit her movement. He took advantage of her limited English proficiency and used it to control her. However, after intervention from social workers and police, the couple finally received a court order for divorce.

Thai women do not cut ties with their family in Thailand once they get married and move abroad. Being dutiful daughters, they have to return *'bun khun'* to their parents and support other family members. These 'duties' permeate into the realm of the family. Thai women's decision to fulfil cross-border familial duties has to be negotiated with their British husbands because sometimes husbands are the ones that support these duties. For those who are financially independent from their husbands, they still have to explain their 'cultural' practices to their spouses. It was found that a minority of cases interviewed had experienced major conflicts stemming from Thai women's transnational activities. Most Thai women interviewed agreed that conversations about distinct cultural practices and explanations about Thai culture to their husbands are important to keep their relationships healthy. Moreover, their husbands appeared to accept and understand these practices over time and occasionally helped them support their family.

6.3   Everyday negotiations

6.3.1 "Cultural" differences

All married couples have to go through adjustment once they decided to get married and live together. In the case of Thai-British couples, there are specific issues emerging in their domestic partnership. Specific values, norms, beliefs and etiquettes that differ among couples might seem to be unimportant. In truth, these minor issues can cause misunderstandings and require explanations, learning, and understanding between couples in order to have smooth relationships. For some couples, minor disagreements and discontent can accumulate over time and finally lead to separation or divorce. Many respondents said that they had to go through tremendous adjustment once they got married to their husbands and moved to the UK. They described the process of learning and understanding their husbands' culture and how to negotiate it in order to bring about harmony in their relationships.

Pim (aged 36), who had been married with her British husband (aged 38) for 11 years, described what she perceived as 'culture shock' after getting married:

> *When I was not married, I didn't feel (culture shock). But after I got married and led the couple life, I felt that there were plenty of clashes with my husband... Thai men take good care of their women. When Thai women sulk, Thai men will understand them and know how to take care of them. But when it comes to British men, when we sulk or are being sarcastic, they will not understand. They will not take care of us. We have to figure out by ourselves. And I could not explain to him in proper English that I wanted him that I was unhappy, he had to take care of me. This is Thai norms, but foreigners don't understand. They would see you as acting silly. So we came to the solution that, if I have any problem, I need to tell him and he will accommodate. Lately, I have adjusted myself. I speak up more, no more silence. Normally, when Thai women are upset, we will be silent. I understand him and talk to him. He has also adjusted himself and done everything for me. It is good that I speak up more and I won't sulk and act silly again... It took me around one year to adjust to this.*

Pim compared the differences in the characteristics of Thai men and Western men, and her initial expectation of gender roles in a relationship that men should be able to figure out the women's needs, even though they do not explain their needs to men. The instilled Thai gender roles and expectation of Thai women in relationship with Western husbands sometimes bring about frictions between couples.

The issue of intimacy was claimed to stem from cultural difference for some women. Mine (aged 48) had been married to her Scottish husband (aged 55) for 3 years, and shared that the major issues in their relationship were communication and displays of affection. Her husband was 'sensitive' about spending time together since he usually worked abroad. Whenever he was home, he expected her to be with him. Therefore, she tried to accommodate his needs by not using the mobile telephone and making him the priority. For the issue of displaying affection, she recognised it as a cultural difference, as she explained:

> *He wanted me to show my love to him. This was a problem, though. He was unhappy about it. I was not used to it, the kissing… I had to explain to him, "you have to understand me. It is not my home culture. I am not willing to do it." It was a problem. He adjusted himself, tried not to be upset. But he would say, "did you forget something?" If it was like before, he would be upset and pouted. Both of us try to adjust. I warn myself not to forget to give him a kiss, while he warns himself not to be upset… We try to talk to each other, but sometimes it slips. If he gets upset, I will keep silent, not explain anything. I just listen to him. I will explain to him when he calms down. And when I get upset, he will also be silent.*

Lin (aged 43), who had been married to her British husband (aged 55) for 17 years, shared that they had disagreements on Thai cultural practices. Although her husband did not reject those practices, he seemed to question them, Lin explained:

> *Sometimes he does not have a deep understanding of Thai culture. I explained it to him and he listened. But when the time comes, he does not understand. I explained to him, "when my mother sits, you don't cross over her when you approach her." But he just walked across my mother's legs. I said he couldn't do that, but he replied, "oh, this is my house, I can do this with my parents." He does not have the understanding that elderly is higher than us. He played with his father's head. But we can't do that with our parents. I told him, taught him. He listened but he did not understand.*

For Thais, the head is considered the most important body part as it is the highest and most sacred part of the body. Thais "believe the head is exalted while the feet are based" (Juntanamalaga, 1992, p. 169). Younger people in particular should not touch an older person's head and should apologise if they accidentally touch it. Touching the head is a sign of utter disrespect. In contrast to the feet which are considered a 'low' and dirty body part. One should not point their feet towards anyone as it is a sign of disrespect, and they should not use their feet to move objects. Most Thais would find touching the head,

passing objects over the head, pointing at a person or object with the foot, or moving objects with the foot, highly inappropriate and offensive. The Thai head-foot norms were reflected as part of the cultural-difference problems to a number of women interviewed.

Nop (aged 54) voiced her discontent about the differences between her and her husband (aged 50), whom she had been married to for 4 years:

> *There are a lot (of cultural differences) … Such as food, he will complain if I cook garlic. Also, he uses his foot to point at things, uses them to move things. We see each other for 8 years now but he still forgets about my culture. I have to warn him so often. It's good that he still understands me.*

Most respondents expressed that they had encountered disagreement and discontent due to "cultural" differences. In the beginning of their relationships, many women chose to stay silent when they were upset or felt offended owing to different cultural practices of their husbands. However, as the relationship progressed, they learned to voice their needs and speak up to their husband about what was bothering them. The 'speak-up' trait was perceived as a Western value which Thai women needed to learn. Here we can see that women tried to gain autonomy and agency in their relationships with their husbands as their relationship progressed. As Statham (2019) explains, Thai women in long-term relationships with Western partners are empowered thanks to their human capital and resourcefulness that they gained from their life experiences over time. Their increased English proficiency and understanding of British culture empower them to 'speak-up', in other words, to negotiate family matters with their husbands. Thai women saw autonomy and agency as beneficial to themselves and their partnership.

Both British husbands and Thai wives seem to adjust themselves to meet the needs of each other. From having cultural individuality, Thai wives and British husbands tried to work together and negotiate to achieve a cultural partnership. Some respondents described their strategy as 'meeting each other halfway', where they try to explain each other's cultures, norms, values and needs, in order to compromise and accommodate each other. 'Meeting halfway' signifies the transformation of identities on both ends. Bystydzienski states that,

> "[i]n the past, many marriage and family sociologists assumed that if a member of a 'minority' or subordinate group married to a member of the 'majority' or dominant group, that person's cultural identity was automatically obliterated, 'assimilated' into the majority (e.g. Alba, 1986; Barron, 1972; Gordon, 1964; Lyman and Douglas, 1973)". More recent

research, however, has demonstrated that cultural assimilation through marriage is not automatic (Diggs, 2001; Grearson and Smith, 2001; Judd, 1990; McCarthy, 2007); Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell, 1995; Vosburgh and Juliani, 1990)" (Bystydzienski, 2011, p.46).

In her study of intercultural couples in the US, Bystydzienski asserts that, "over time most of the participating couples became less concerned with cultural differences between the partners and their identities assumed an increasingly 'hybrid' character" (Bystydzienski, 2011, p.47). In the same light, Lucy Williams argues that,

> "…the majority of migrants adopt gender roles that hybridise the roles they bring with them from home and the roles they develop in response to their lives as migrants. This hybridity, which may result in individuals adopting different gender roles in public and domestic settings, is part of the negotiations of everyday life which might go unnoticed outside the scrutinised world" (Williams, 2010, p.25).

As we observed in the case of Mine, showing affection and intimacy to her husband made her anxious because she was not familiar to it. Nonetheless, she tried to adjust and be more flexible about it. It also appeared that Thai wives put effort into explaining their needs and their cultural practices to their husbands. While simultaneously, their husbands tried to understand their wives' cultural practices. From interviews, it seems that Thai wives were the ones who put more effort in 'educating' their husbands of their ethnic culture. While none of them mentioned that their husbands 'taught' or 'explained' British culture to them, most Thai women interviewed said it was important for their husband to understand Thai culture, that they had to explain, or 'teach' their husbands about it. British husbands, on the other hand, seems to be more flexible about religious and cultural practices in the family. They did not oppose their wives to pursuit of religious or cultural activities and sometimes even supported and accompanied their wives to such events. Thai women take autonomy in preserving their cultural and ethnic identity, as opposed to living in a Western household. At the same time, they have also adopted different values and cultural practices. For example, Thai women perceived that they have to voice their opinion and speak out about what they want to keep their relationships healthy.

6.3.2 Domestic responsibilities

Housework is one of the everyday practices that reflect a family's perception of gender roles and power relations in the household. It requires everyday negotiations about who is responsible for which tasks in the household. Most respondents said that they took a larger share of domestic responsibilities, with occasional assistance from their husbands. Sometimes the chores were shared at convenience, the one who was free would take the responsibilities, for instance. Respondents also reflected on traditional Thai gender roles where women are supposed to take care of the chores and children. When asked about sharing domestic responsibilities, they replied:

Ann

It depends on who is free at the time. When I'm at work, he will do it. Before, it was me (who did the housework) because I'm a woman. But now I'm busy, so we have to share. When I go to work, he can take care of the kids all day. He wants to have children, he can take care of them.

Jai

I have to tell him (to do the housework), "can you please hang the clothes?", because I'm busy. But now he takes care of the kids more. He will pick up the kids from school. Now I work until 4 pm, I used to work until 3 pm. So he has to pick up the children and I will drop them off in the morning.

Nan

We know (who does what) automatically. We wash our own clothes. But I do most of the housework because I have more time than him. Cooking is my job, too. But if I feel lazy, I'll tell him, "let's order pizza, darling." Sometimes we don't want to wash the dishes, but eventually, I do it. Sometimes he leaves the bubbles on the dishes. I can't stand it. And he only washes the ones he uses. But I wash all of them. I do all the housework.

Gan

We don't divide the tasks. I take care all of the housework. He does the housework, too. But it's not very neat, so I have to take care all of it.

Although some respondents said the housework was shared 'automatically' or without saying, women were the ones who took the larger share of this responsibility. By 'automatically', it can be implied that Thai women automatically assumed their gender roles as homekeeper, and would spend more time on household chores than their

husbands. For Ann, she explicitly asserted that as a woman, the housework was her responsibility. However, in some cases, we can also see that domestic responsibilities were negotiated and shared, as Jai described task sharing between her and her husband. Most respondents said that although their husband helped them with domestic tasks, they were the ones who were largely responsible. Although Thai wives also work outside the home, they still bear more domestic responsibilities. Nevertheless, as working women, they used their work commitment as a bargaining tool so their husbands would give them a hand.

Although many respondents seemed to assume traditional gender roles in domestic responsibilities, some respondents resisted such ideas and felt that they were not expected to fulfil traditional domestic responsibilities. They felt that they were mostly responsible for domestic responsibilities in the beginning of their marriage, according to traditional gender roles. But after being in a relationship for some time, they understand that their husbands should also share these responsibilities.

Pim, who spent most of her time managing her pub kitchen, shared the division of chores in her household with her husband:

> *In our home, we divide the chores half and half. He cleans two rooms, I clean two rooms. On the weekends, we take out the rubbish together. He irons all of his clothes. I don't have to manage that… I used to iron his clothes for him, but he said, "you don't have to, you work hard enough. The clothes are mine, I'll do it." It's good. This is fair… When I first got married, I thought that I would take care of the house and prepare the food. But he said that he could take care of himself because what he eats and what I eat are different. Normally he cooks on Sunday because it's the only day that we are home together. If he has to work late, I'll cook for him because he might be too tired. It's automatic. We divide the tasks automatically.*

Lin expressed a similar view on sharing the chores:

> *We help each other in the house. I cook and he washes dishes. I mop the floor, he washes the car. I'm not taking up Thai culture that women have to do everything because I have to work (outside), and he has to work, too. Everything is 50-50.*

For some families, husbands and wives did not share the housework but rather had different roles in domestic responsibilities, as Nong explained:

We did not divide the tasks. Sometimes I hire my friend to do the cleaning, Sometimes I do it myself. He will not do the housework, but he will take care of the children. If I go to work, he will take care of them. Mostly he will organise things around the kids. I take care of the house. He picks up the kids, tucks them into bed, teaches them the homework, cooks for them. He will also plan where to take them out, if he is free. If the children are on holiday, he will search where he can take them.

Although we begin to see transformation in gender divisions of labour in the household as men get more involved in domestic tasks, there are some cases where Thai women are still oppressed in the household. For example, Roong (aged 51) experienced emotional and physical abuse from her ex-husband (aged 57) who only saw her as his maid. She worked full-time as a supermarket employee. Still, she had to take care of her husband in almost every aspect:

He just takes a shower, brushes his teeth, eats his food, goes to bed, and that's it. The rest is my responsibility: cooking, washing clothes, ironing, cleaning the house, gardening, taking the rubbish out. I do everything. And I have to work outside as well. When I get home, I have to cook for him. I have to wake up at 5 am in the morning every day to pack him lunch, make his coffee, give him milk and medication. After that, I can go to work.

Roong said that her ex-husband's behaviour had gradually changed as he was getting more and more irritated with everything she did and started to call her names and insult her. She finally found out about his mistress. She and her ex-husband later had a dispute over his adultery which escalated into physical abuse. In the midst of their argument, her husband said, *"I wouldn't take you here if you couldn't cook and clean!"*. This sentence was eye-opening for her.

Her ex-husband expected to have a traditional wife to take care of him. As appeared in several studies on cross-border marriage migration, there are cases where Asian women expected that marrying Western partners would provide them a route to liberate themselves from certain types of work such as sex work and domestic work or liberate themselves from traditional gender norms. As Piper and Roces (2003) remind us, although women engage in marriage migration in the hope of improving their socio-economic status, some of them are still subject to different types of victimisation. Some women could be "victims of a husband's 'slave mentality' where wives are expected to be their personal maids" (Piper and Roces 2003, p. 9). After migration, they are in fact

trapped in the same types of work and expected to pursue traditional gender roles by their husbands. (Luke and Luke, 1998; McKay, 2003; Piper and Roces, 2003). Roong had been working as a care worker for elderly patients in Bangkok for over ten years prior to moving to the UK to join her ex-husband, whom she met while he was on holiday in Thailand. She thought that moving would change her life situation, however, she was expected to fulfil domestic responsibilities and provide care for her ex-husband. Roong did not resist the expected traditional gender roles at first. Nevertheless, when the truth about his mistresses was revealed, she tried to confront him about it and gained agency to decide that she would not tolerate this relationship any longer, and eventually sought a divorce.

Thai women in intercultural relationships still take most of the household responsibilities. Most respondents subconsciously adopted traditional gender divisions of labour in the household. For Thais, gender division of labour is still strongly reinforced. The view of the woman as the main homemaker is instilled in Thai women abroad. It is noteworthy that some women expressed that they 'learned' that housework is not only for women but also men, as their husbands helped them out. Moreover, as Thai women in the UK are increasingly participating in the labour force, gender division of labour tends to change. While women still take more responsibilities in the home, men increasingly join the tasks. This is partly a result of negotiations in the family. As presented, some respondents negotiated for their husbands to help more with housework by reasoning that they too were another breadwinner in the family. Being in an intercultural family brings new understandings of gender roles and identity transformation to these women. They learned to express their opinions, negotiate, and gradually subvert traditional gender roles. The process of transformation is not automatic, but it is a product of learning and negotiation between couples.

6.4 Children

Thai women's transnational activities also affected their children. The values and norms mothers bring with them from the home country are more or less transmitted to them. As we observed in Chapter 5, many Thai mothers were enthusiastic in educating their children in Thai language and culture because of sense of transnational belonging, and because they felt that it would facilitate better opportunities for their children in the future. In the context of the intercultural family, Thai women have to negotiate their decision-

making in child-rearing with their husbands who have different cultural points of view on the matter. Here I will observe how transnationalism plays out in regard to raising children in the context of an intercultural family. This section will focus on children who are of Thai and British heritage, or 'mixed' children.

Crippren and Brew (2007) suggest that the challenges for intercultural couples include their different social and cultural backgrounds which influence their approach to parenting and decision-making in the household. They also argue that for intercultural couples, having children can trigger conflicts which stem from cultural differences which mixed couples were previously able to compromise on (p.109). In the same light, Rodríguez-García (2006) suggest that dynamics of conflict and accommodation for mixed-race, intercultural families can be found in the upbringing of children (p.421).

Thai mothers described similar parenting styles for their Thai-British children. They mostly emphasised the importance of Thai heritage and wanted their children to learn about this. Some claimed that child-rearing highlighted the conflict with their husbands regarding varied points of view on raising children. Many women saw parenting mixed-race children as challenging. For example, Ning, who had a son (aged 11) and a daughter (aged 9) with her British ex-husband, described the challenges she faced raising her two children:

> *In Thai system, children have to do what their parents say. It's like we have the rules for them to follow. But here (the UK), children are free. We can't control their opinions. They want to do what their friends do. It's European culture like, "I don't care." They have no culture of respecting elderly, that we have to humbly approach them. In Thailand, we can't touch older people's head, but here they touch it… I have to explain that to them. They are half Thai, half British. I am open to them. Let them know about British culture. But if it is against Thai culture, I will warn them… My son is not into Buddhism at all. He does not accept any religion. He says he doesn't believe in any religion. I have to teach him, have to explain to him. But my daughter can attend both Christian and Buddhist activities. She will go to church on every Sunday with her friends, since she was younger. There is a new Buddhist temple that opened nearby recently, so I take her to that temple. I want her to see Buddhist practices, what the culture is like. I want her to absorb Thai culture.*

Oom is the mother of Ning, and often took her grandchildren to Thai Buddhist temples. She said that she tried to bring her family to Buddhist temples but as they grew older, they increasingly distanced themselves from these Buddhist practices. She tried to take

her grandson to temples to practice meditation since he was spending a lot of time on video games, an activity that she considered as becoming more *'farang'* (foreigner).

Ming also reflected on the different cultures involved in raising her children. She had two daughters (aged 20 and 26) and one son (aged 27) with her British husband of 30 years. Ming recalled disputes with her husband about parenting practices when their children were younger:

> *We have disagreements. It's normal. People in the same family, although they are not from different cultures, they would have disagreements. My son was ordained as a Buddhist novice here once, and in Thailand once. My husband said that I put him into hardship because novices are only allowed two meals a day, or only one meal. He cried at the temple, my husband. Because he was raised a spoiled Westerner. He didn't want his child to struggle because he was raised like that. But when my son finished his noviceship, my husband was happy because he became much more mature.*

In Thai Buddhist traditions, it is believed that when sons are ordained as a novice monk it would bring their parents merit, and it is a way to show gratitude to their parents. Boys aged 7-19 years old are allowed to be ordained as a novice. In the olden times, especially for poor families, young boys would be sent to temples to be ordained in order to receive education from Buddhist monks. Some orphan boys are ordained in order for them to have a place to live and receive education. Nowadays, it is popular in Thailand for parents to send their sons to summer noviceship for a short period of time, with the intention of training them to be more disciplined in Buddhist practices.

Ming further elaborated on her opinion about intercultural unions:

> *I think marrying a man from a different culture or being in multicultural family has few challenges. But the challenge is on the children. Which way are they going? Because they were growing up this way (in the UK), while having a Thai mother. I still have Thai mindsets; things have to be like this and that. We didn't have a lot of problems about religion because my husband is not very religious. He can go to temples or churches. We don't force any particular way on our children. But I think the problem is on them, where to go? ... So, they sometimes go to temples, sometimes go to churches. They educate themselves in many ways. They took yoga. But I think finally they lean to Buddhism. They ask me rather than my husband when they face problems or how to manage stress. They don't identify as Buddhists but practically they are in a Buddhist way. My daughters' boyfriends are interested in mindfulness meditation as well.*

Ming additionally explained that she wanted her children to know the Thai language, however she faced some setbacks at home:

> *We speak English (at home). My children can speak a little Thai. I used to speak Thai to them, but my husband wanted to translate. He didn't know what I was saying and he couldn't stand it. It was boring that I had to translate everything I say. It was exhausting translating every sentence. So I stopped (speaking Thai at home). It was a shame because other people's husbands wouldn't want their wives to translate. But my husband wants to know everything... I want my children to speak Thai, but I guess they have to learn it on their own. My second one doesn't have much interest in it. The first one got interested when he graduated from university. So I taught him, he can read and write some Thai. The last one went to Thailand. She visited an elephant sanctuary and she loved it. She learned some Thai when she was there.*

Similarly, Opal had conflict with her husband about speaking the Thai language at home with her children:

> *I tend to speak Thai when my husband is not at home. When he is home, he wanted me to speak English because he can't listen or speak Thai. He is afraid that I would say something behind his back. And it's true, I say things behind his back in Thai with my kids. When I speak Thai, he knows (that she is talking behind his back). If my husband is away, I try to speak Thai with my children.*

Most Thai mothers interviewed stressed the importance of Thai heritage and their desire to pass it on to their children. Nevertheless, being in an intercultural family, passing on one's own heritage is not without challenges. Even though their husbands were quite open to the ethnic culture of their wives, the ethnic cultural practices women endowed on children can cause tension between them and their husbands. As in terms of the language used in the household, some Thai women attempted to compromise with their husbands by not speaking Thai in their presence. While Thai women who migrated to the UK had to learn English for everyday use, British husbands did not make any effort to learn their wives' language assuming that English is the norm in the household. It appears that Thai women were the ones who put more effort into adjusting to the British environment, and, in the household, they had to adjust themselves to their husbands' expectations as well. This has led to a failure by mothers to practice the Thai language with their Thai-British children. Some respondents also shared disagreements with their husbands in educating their children about Thai culture and heritage. Som described the conflict she had with her husband regarding her desire to educate her daughter in Thai heritage, and explained the reasons why learning Thai heritage was essential for her and her child:

Since I had a child, I always go to the temple. I want her to absorb Thainess. I want her to see Thai traditions and customs. It's true that I live here and my husband is a Westerner (Polish). I don't know what kind of life my child would live when she grows up. I let her go to church. I went to church, too. But I didn't feel into it. My husband is a Christian but he doesn't take our daughter to church. I want her to learn about our traditions. It depends on her if she will accept them or not. Maybe when she grows up, she would choose for herself... At first, my husband and I had disagreements (about taking their daughter to a Thai temple). He asked me, "why do you have to push her (to know Thai culture) so much?". I had to explain to him that I wanted her to learn about her heritage. It's part of her blood. She is Thai, eats Thai food. So, wouldn't it be better if she has more variety of opportunities to choose than British kids who grow up in Britain? The language also, I try to let her speak four languages because her father is Polish. At least she should know three to four languages; Thai, English, Polish and Isan, my home dialect. I try to teach her because I want her to know a lot. It is adorable when a child can speak Isan.

The main reason for passing on Thai heritage, apart from knowing one's identity, is to retain connection with the Thai side of the family. Jai goes to a Thai temple in London every Sunday for her Thai-British daughter's (aged 9) Thai dance class. I interviewed her on the lawn of the temple while she was waiting for her daughter to finish the class. I asked her about enrolling her daughter in Thai cultural lessons, she answered:

At first my daughter asked me to take her to a Thai language class but I couldn't because it took all day. So, I said that she could take a dance class instead. The first year she took it, she liked it. She performed on stage. She liked to attend the class and meet other Thai-British kids. I feel that it is a social circle that she is happy to be in. But lately, she started to complain, asking me if she can stop. I said that she could stop but I really wanted her to learn. Because the teachers don't only teach the dance but they teach etiquettes, too… I want her to speak more Thai as well, so she can speak to Thai relatives when she goes back. Older people can't speak English. My sister can speak a little bit of English. Whenever my family visits Thailand, I always bring my daughter with me.

Some respondents said that having children uncovers the conflicts with their husbands due to different opinions on child-rearing. Opal explained that before having children, she and her husband did not have many arguments, but things changed after she gave birth to her children;

Previously, we didn't fight so much. But ever since we had kids, we have been fighting a lot. It's the culture. When I didn't have kids, I didn't think so much about anything. But when I have them, it's different. Westerners let children

run in the rain. If they are outside and it's raining, they don't bring children under the shade. It is normal for people in this country to walk in the rain. For me, I can't let them do that. I have to bring my kids under a roof. Or in winter, I need to keep my children as warm as possible. My husband would say that I put on too much clothes on them. They are familiar with this. I didn't grow up in a cold country. When it gets a bit cold, I feel that I need to keep warm. When I have kids, I can feel that our cultures are different.

Interviewer: What about when you teach your kids? Are there any disagreements?

So often. Sometimes my husband plays with my kids by swinging them under his legs. I don't think it is appropriate. I grew up in Thailand. It contradicts with my feelings. Westerners do not believe that the head is high and the legs are low. I told him not to play with the kids like that because I don't like it. The head is considered higher body part. He said, "why is it higher? It is just a body part."

When we were still not married, I was not so serious about these things. But when it comes to the children. I feel more defensive. My husband usually uses his foot to point at things. Sometimes he lies on the sofa, he uses his foot to point. I thought, "why do you have to use your foot? Didn't your parents teach you that it's rude?". My children saw him and they imitate him. I told them that they should not do it because the foot is not for pointing. They said their father did it, so why couldn't they?

As we can see here, having children can unearth disagreement in an intercultural union. The decision-making on how to raise children and which sets of values and norms should be used in the household can lead to debate between couples. Conflicts can always occur among all married couples, but what is worth noting here is that disagreements between Thai-British couples are often due to specific cultural practices and values. While some respondents shared about their conflicts and disagreement in the family, most respondents described that they could negotiate and compromise on them by learning about each other's cultures. For some, their husbands gave them support in teaching Thai language and heritage to their children. They encouraged children to learn different languages other than English. Especially for British fathers who had experiences living and working in Thailand and abroad (this example will be discussed in a following section). Many fathers participated in their children's Thai heritage learning by taking them to Thai language school and supporting them in Thai cultural activities at Thai temples, for instance.

6.5 Family aspiration

As presented in the previous sections, Thai mothers are motivated to educate their children about their ethnic and cultural identity and heritage. Thai marriage migrants preserve strong ethnic identity and practice their culture and traditions in the realm of the intercultural family, with flexibility. Another reason they want their children to learn multiple languages and cultures, is so they would have an 'advantage', or the cultural and social capital to be able to choose to stay in the UK or live in Thailand. In Thai mothers' perceptions, gaining such capital would facilitate their move and provide them more flexibility and opportunities to live or work across borders. These benefits are not only for children, but for the parents as well. In many cases, Thai women still yearn to return to Thailand. Most respondents aspired to return home after their working age to rest and be with families in Thailand. In a study of cross-national relationships, Adams (2004) found that emotions and subjective interpretations of home, rather than rational inputs, have a more solid impact in one's decision about location of residence. It is true that Thai women interviewed retain strong emotional ties to their birth country. Most interview respondents still felt they belonged in Thailand rather than in the UK and wanted to return 'home' in the future. However, they also considered various factors that would enable them to return such as such as economic resources and family situations and relationships with their husbands. I asked respondents whether they eventually wanted to move back to Thailand, these are some of their answers:

Ming

I like it every time I go back to Thailand. Actually, I want to be in Thailand. But it is impossible because my family is here. I don't want to be away from my children… I talked to my family about it. They don't want to live in Thailand, they just want to have holidays there. (In my late life,) I want to be in Thailand because it is so cold here. I can come here for summer holidays. The flowers are beautiful here.

Fai

I want to return to Thailand because my parents are getting older and our family business would not have anyone to look after. So, I think I have to go back to take care of it. Maybe my daughter would remain here, but I would go back and forth. Plus, my husband really wants to be in Thailand.

Dang

I just talked to my friend that my kids are grown up now. I used to think that if my second one is in the second year of university, I will retire. Because he is quite mature now. I was thinking maybe I will retire next year. I will go back and forth (the UK and Thailand). Last time I went to Thailand alone in September, I talked to my kids and asked how they were, how was the weather. I also ask them these questions when I'm here. I'm not too worried about them now. My plan is that I will retire early and fly back and forth. My kids will be here.

Interviewer: What about your husband?

That's the thing. This is separation, isn't it? He wants to go to Thailand, too. But I guess that he would want to stay home (in the UK) when he gets older. He had been working in many countries, New York, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand. He would think that England is his home, like me, I think Thailand is my home.

Wilai

I want to go back to Thailand, but, how can I? Both of my children are here. I discussed with my husband that maybe we put the house up for rent for 6 months, going back to Thailand for 6 months. But he won't do it. It's uncertain. If we get older, I lose him or he lose me. I don't know who is going to die first. But definitely I have to go back and die at home.

Jai

I discussed with my husband that I definitely will go back and die in Thailand. But it's a long shot. We will retire at 65 but now we are 43-44 years old. My daughter is only 9 years old. Until then, she will have her own life. My plan now is to return, to die in Thailand. It is different here. First, I felt excited (moving to the UK). But after spending time here for a while, it's not for me. I have some plots of land in Thailand, they are my parents'. I can make use of them.

Lin

I want to be in Thailand. I said to my kid, "I'm going back to Thailand". I want her to make a plan. Because if she doesn't take Thai language class, she will not be able to communicate, when I'm in Thailand. If she misses me, she has to go to Thailand.

Ann

I will definitely go back to Thailand. I want to die there. I don't want to die here… I feel that as Thai people, I want to go home, to see my family. If I get old here, the society here is quite isolating. It's not like our home, we still stay home even though we grow old. There are many children and grandchildren

with you when you are frail and forgetful. We stay together, have a chat together. It is depressing here.

Interviewer: Do you feel you belong in this country?

I don't feel that I'm a part of this country. I'm still Thai. I stay here for work, for my duty to take care of my child. I wouldn't stay here forever. No place is happy like home.

Nan

I have already persuaded my husband to go to Thailand. My aim is to return when I retire. I want to go back to Thailand. But I want to go as a retired person… My husband is also thinking about going to Thailand. His brother has cancer and it was acute. So, he feels that life is uncertain. He thinks that he has to do what he wants to do. He discussed his pension plan. If he gets retired now, he will get 2,000 pounds per month, which is enough. He also has a flat, a house for rent and his own house. If he sells one of them, he will have enough money to live in Thailand. I said to him that, "now is not the time. It's true that anything can happen in life but now I want to work. We can discuss our future later".

Yuval-Davis et al. (2005) argue that feelings of belonging are shaped by experiences of exclusion rather than inclusion. The experiences of deskilling, discrimination, and stereotypes these women faced shaped the perception of their social locations and thus excluded them from feeling as fully belonging to British society, even though they have gained British citizenship. From these accounts, the issue of belonging is more complex than being a citizen of one country but involves 'emotional investment' and 'desire for attachment' (Yuval-Davis, 2006). According to the respondents above, they did not feel that they truly belonged in the UK. They perceived being in the UK to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers. Some implied that when their mothering 'duty' was done, they would go back to their homeland by themselves and leave their children, and even their husbands, behind.

Although most interview respondents expressed their desire to spend the last years of their life in Thailand, considering family situations and economic resources, some respondents said that they were still uncertain about their future and were quite anxious about going back to Thailand;

Nim

Actually, I want to go back to Thailand, but what can I do there? I'm old but I don't have much. My children are all here as well. I'm saving for the future, in case I want to return to Thailand to rest, six months here, six months there. Now, I'm

struggling alone but I still have to support my relatives when they need help. I feel like I can't handle it. Lately, I'm very exhausted. I got hit by a car. I'm exhausted. I want to relax. I don't want to contact my family in Thailand because they never ask me if I'm doing fine, what I want, or if they can send any medicine to me. The first word from them is always, "do you have any money?", "when will you send money?", "is this enough?". I never get courtesy from my family.

Ning, Oom's daughter, moved to the UK when she was 18 years old to accompany her mother who got married to a British husband. Ning herself married a British partner after moving to the UK and had a son (aged 11) and a daughter (aged 9) with him. However, they were separated, and she became a single mother:

> *I miss Thailand. I hope I could return someday. But it depends on the situation. If I were single and without kids, I would go back. My kids were born here. I have to consider if they would be ready to be on their own. If I return to Thailand, another question is, what can I do there? I have lived here for 20 years, more than the time I spent in Thailand. I didn't read the news in Thailand. I don't know what is happening there. If I go back, use my savings and it runs out, what to do next? I have to consider many options, think thoroughly which way to choose. If I go for holiday, yes. But to live in Thailand, I'm not sure. I have to see if I'm ready. Is there anything that will support my life there?*

Siri was another respondent who left Thailand at a young age. She met her British husband in Bangkok, where she moved to work in a factory, at the age of 18. She decided to get married and move to the UK with him. They had three children together but later got divorced. She has lived in the UK for 27 years. Currently, she is cohabiting with a new British partner. At the time of interview, she said that the last time she visited Thailand was 3 years ago. I asked her about returning to Thailand;

> *Interviewer: You have been here for so long. Don't you miss home?*
>
> *No, because my family is here. I have nothing to worry about in Thailand… I used to buy a car (in Thailand) and had down payment. It was miserable. I don't want to do it again. I also bought a house with cash, too. But I got in problems with my siblings. They want everything. So, I let go. I don't want it. Now, I don't have any assets in Thailand. I let go. I only live day by day here. I'm comfortable now.*

Those who expressed their desire, and who have the potential to go back are mostly middle-class women, or were from middle-class backgrounds in Thailand, while those who expressed little interest were from working-class backgrounds or had left Thailand

at a young age. Ning left Thailand when she was 18 years old to join her mother, Oom, who moved before her. Nim and Siri were from working-class backgrounds in Thailand. They had experienced internal migration from rural areas to Bangkok to join the urban labour market. Siri worked as a factory worker in Bangkok and had moved to the UK when she was 18 years old, after she met her British partner. The distant relationship with the Thai family also determined their desire to return home as in the case of Nim and Siri, who expressed their estranged relationship with their Thai family members.

Comparatively, for working-class women, life in the UK seems to be more fulfilling economically and emotionally (in their relationship with their husbands and children) than living in Thailand as they expressed, "my family is here (in the UK)". Moreover, for those who came from poorer backgrounds, most have migrated to Bangkok or other big cities to earn a better income. Moving away from a rural family and expectations from the family to send back remittances, have put a tremendous burden on these women. Meeting and marrying Westerners seemed to be preferable options for them. Many women decided to move to the UK with their husbands in the hope of a better life. In contrast, women from middle-class, well-educated backgrounds, often expressed that they wanted to go back to Thailand after they retired. Most of these women did not have the experience of internal labour migration prior to their move to the UK. They were always with their family and had close relationships with them. They implied that they would be able to afford to be in Thailand after retirement, with their family's assets and surrounded by Thai family members. They have enough economic and emotional resources to fall back on. Middle-class women seemed to have more of an emotional and material 'safety net' if they eventually returned to Thailand. Women from a working-class background, on the other hand, faced economic struggle and estrangement from natal families as a result of the unequal development and their migration.

It is striking to see the different forms of 'belonging' among Thai marriage migrants. Although most of them still felt they belong in Thailand and wanted to go back, some of them did not feel the same. The experiences of leaving Thailand at a young age and being from the working class excluded women from feeling that they belong to their home country. The asymmetrical development of the Thai urban and rural areas has caused massive urban migration to find a better life, and even international migration, for these women. Those who were from rural areas and who internally migrated echoed that they did not have a close relationship with their natal families. But they felt bounded by *'bun*

khun', and their connections were almost reduced to a solely economic level rather than an emotional attachment. They felt that they were more emotionally attached with the families they had in the UK, than in Thailand.

Taking women's pre-migration socio-economic positions into account, it is impossible to generalise a women's status mobility in relation to marriage migration. Assuming that women from developing countries participate in 'hypergamy' or marrying-up through marriage migration to Western countries ignores the complexities and diversification of women's experiences. Class differences of Thai women shape varied perceptions of their social locations and aspirations of migration and settlement. In the course of migration, women from working-class backgrounds tend to experience upward socio-economic mobility due to the relatively increased income and being in a more equal and liberating society. While many middle-class, well-educated women shared that they experienced downward mobility as a result of deskilling, where they could not find jobs that match their credentials and feel emotionally deprived as a result of the distance from their family members in Thailand.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter discusses intercultural unions and cross-border connections focussing on the Thai-British union. In studying Thai marriage migrants, I argue that it is worth investigating the intersection of intercultural unions and transnational activities to better grasp the dynamics of their lived experiences. Four main topics were explored: women's transnational responsibilities, everyday negotiations in the family, children, and family aspirations. Women's transnational responsibilities have a crucial impact on dynamics in the intercultural family, since issues of remittances and transnational care had to be discussed between Thai wives and British husbands. While Thai women perceived disagreements over such issues as a result of cultural differences, when explored deeper, the disagreements were more likely the result of personal situations and economic issues. It is found that Thai-British couples attempted to work out their 'differences' by educating and accepting each other's distinct practices. Furthermore, Thai women negotiate their agency and autonomy with their husbands regarding their remittance practices by justifying that they send the money that they earned by themselves.

In regard to everyday negotiations, the different values, norms, beliefs and etiquettes between Thai wives and British husbands were claimed as a source of friction in the family. Although women move to a different country, they still bring with them their own cultural understandings of family and household practices. What is interesting is the process of negotiation and transformation of the Thai women's mindset to learn and adapt to Western culture. Many respondents shared that they learned to voice their opinion in the household, as opposed to Thai values where women are supposed to be quiet and subservient to their husbands. In the context of transnational migration, women are caught up in various sets of values and norms. After spending some years in a Western country and being exposed to Western gender norms, their understandings of traditional gender roles also changed as they realised that men should share the burden of domestic tasks. While some Thai women still saw housework as women's work, others shifted their perceptions of traditional gender roles. As working women, Thai wives negotiated with their husband to assist in domestic responsibilities by using their position of a breadwinner as a bargaining tool.

It is said that having children could trigger conflicts between couples because they were in-between their parents' contesting values. This chapter focusses on couples who had Thai-British children together. It is true for most of the respondents that having children sparked debates between Thai mothers and British fathers, especially on parenting practices and which sets of values and norms they want to pass on to their children. It is discovered that Thai mothers were more enthusiastic than British fathers to pass on their ethnic and cultural heritage to their children. In raising children in the British context, many Thai-British children were encouraged to learn their mother's native language and cultural practices. Thai-British couples certainly went through numerous discussions and explanations on the ways they wanted to raise their children. However, it seems that British fathers were more flexible in their children's cultural and language learning. Some even encourage their children to learn Thai and participate in Thai cultural and Buddhist activities with their mothers.

Transnational migration is a process which does not cease when a person decides to settle down in a new country. As an ongoing process, changing life circumstances can cause a person to move back and forth between home and host countries. After settling down and having a family, we should not assume that Thai women's migration path will stop. Rather, they constantly think about their future plans for themselves and their family.

Most respondents said that they still felt they belong in Thailand and wanted to return, especially after their retirement. However, some women thought that they had better opportunities and had an established family life here and were uncertain about moving back to Thailand in the future. I argue that the different aspirations of women are an outcome of different social locations among women. This reminds us that we should not generalise about women's migratory motivations and aspirations, as they were shaped by their different socio-economic positions.

Being in-between various contesting cultures, norms and values, Thai women have gradually transformed themselves in terms of learning, accepting, and sometimes resisting the dominate host country's cultures, norms, and values. Thai women still hold strong connections to their home country in many aspects. Their transnational links influence decisions and negotiations in their intercultural families. They also seek to transmit their ethnic and cultural heritage to their children. For some women, these transnational practices are strategic as they aspire for themselves and their families to be able to move back and forth, benefiting from living in both the UK and Thailand.

Chapter 7

Opportunities and Challenges: Wellbeing of Thai Marriage Migrants in the UK

Having discussed Thai women's transnational lives in the UK, this chapter will observe further the opportunities and challenges Thai women face in their transnational living. As investigated in the previous chapters, I found that although Thai women decide to move and settle in the UK, they still retain strong connections to their homeland. These connections affect both opportunities as well as challenges in settling down in a new country. While there is significant literature about Thai women's motivations to engage in transnational marriage and migration, there is insufficient discussion on their life satisfaction after getting married and spending their lives in the host society. By bringing in the wellbeing perspective, I hope to highlight the complexity of Thai marriage migrants' experiences in the UK. Transnational marriage is often cited as a gateway to a better life for women in developing countries. However, transnational marriage does not always yield satisfaction, nor is it the finite destination of people's lives as is often assumed. It is rather an ongoing struggle and process, which provides women opportunities and challenges along the way.

The discussion on wellbeing in this chapter is principally based on qualitative data derived from in-depth interviews and participant observations with Thai marriage migrants in the UK. Women shared their accounts of positive and negative experiences migrating and settling down in the UK. These accounts were then categorised as 'opportunities' and 'challenges'. However, I found that solely categorising women's experiences into the binary of opportunities and challenges is quite simplistic and inadequate to grasp the various aspects and impacts on women's lives. The benefits of bringing in wellbeing into analysing migrant's experiences includes investigating the various aspects which affect human lives other than the material. In a broad sense, Gough and McGregor (2007, p.34) define wellbeing as "…a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals and where one enjoys satisfactory quality of life". Furthermore, Sarah White (2010) suggests that, at the intuitive level, wellbeing refers to the model of 'doing well – feeling good' and 'doing good - feeling well'. 'Doing well' points to the material, welfare and standard of

life, while 'feeling good' refers to the subjective dimension of personal perceptions and level of satisfaction. On the other hand, 'doing good' involves more of moral aspect, where the good life is not only about individual satisfaction but also collective and shared values. 'Feeling well' might be concerned with the health aspect but can also be about one's relationship with others and feeling comfortable with their place in the world. Thus, when we discuss wellbeing of Thai marriage migrants, as per the conceptualisations of wellbeing above, we should not merely observe if they are wealthier but also if their lives are fulfilled. Do they feel they belong to part of a community, are they able to fulfil their familial duty, can they maintain good mental health, and what factors have a negative impact on their wellbeing?

Using previously discussed results and other emerging issues in the data, this chapter will distinguish between opportunities and challenges of Thai marriage migrants along the lines of three dimensions of wellbeing: material, subjective and relational. I chose to investigate Thai women's opportunities and challenges by using a three-dimensional wellbeing perspective is because I found that it provides a deeper, cross-sectional analysis of migrants' lives. Using three-dimensional wellbeing as a frame to discuss opportunities and challenges provides a systematic overview of what is happening in Thai women's lives, and also shows us their complex experiences as migrants, which involves navigating their transnational lives and constantly weighing the positives and the negatives of staying in or leaving the country.

The triangle of material, subjective and relational wellbeing are the main dimensions used when discussing quality of life. However, discussing these dimensions separately does not provide us with an overall picture of one's wellbeing. As White (2010) suggests that the three dimensions of wellbeing are interrelated and cannot exist without one another. For example, while one dimension improves, another might deteriorate, or in order for one dimension to improve, another might have to improve as well. Therefore, the three dimensions of wellbeing are analytical tools which offer a more 'holistic' view on people's wellbeing. In her study of Peruvian migrants in London, Katie Wright (2010) argues that transnational and integrationist perspectives are useful for analysing migrants' lives, but it is not without shortfalls. Wright criticises the integrationist perspective as overly focussing on the migrants' insertion into the labour market of the host society, but not looking at the strategies they adopt in other dimensions of their lives. Thus a 'holistic analysis' should be included in the studies of migrants' lives (Wright 2010, p.368). In a

similar view, White (2010) maintains that wellbeing is important in social development policy and practice due to its 'holistic outlook', which focusses on the connection of mind, body, and spirit. Moreover, it "aims to move away from outsider categories towards an actor-oriented focus which emphasises 'strengths' rather than 'needs', and recognises the multiplicity and integrity of people's lives forged in a complex mix of priorities, strategies, influences, activities and therefore outcomes" (White 2010, p. 160).

White offers three dimensions to analyse wellbeing: material, subjective and relational.

> "The material comprises assets, welfare, and standards of living. For practical analysis, the relational is divided into two spheres: the social: social relations and access to public goods; and the human: capabilities, attitudes to life, and personal relationships. The subjective also has two aspects: on the one hand people's perceptions of their (material, social, and human) positions, and on the other hand cultural values, ideologies, and beliefs" (White 2010, p.161).

White further puts that "the understandings of wellbeing are socially and culturally constructed (White 2008, p.5), meaning that wellbeing is perceived within cultural and social conditions of the subject. Observing wellbeing in the course of migration shows us that the value or practice that positively affect one's wellbeing in one social and cultural setting might not be valued in the other. For example, extended family and kinship are valued among Thai people as they exchange material resources, assistance and emotional support among family members, while this value is not recognised in the Western culture where the practice of the nuclear family is dominant. This issue was mentioned many times by Thai women on the differences between Thailand and the UK, and sometimes caused them loneliness and anxiety not having relatives around them.

As Boccagni (2016, p. 285) states in his study of female immigrant care workers in Italy, "migration is an inherent source of paradoxes for the wellbeing of those involved, whether as movers or as stayers. A quest for better life conditions is an atypical driver of labor migrants' trajectories - including those of the women whose pervasive employment in gendered, often exploitative care tasks is central to global care chains". This highlights the need to explore further how a woman's search for wellbeing might not be driven solely for themselves, but also for people back home. The paradoxes are the result of sacrifices and losses women have to face when they decide to migrate. For some women, this might especially ring true if they lack resources back home and have to search for better economic opportunities to support their natal family members and have to leave their children behind. Some Thai women I interviewed talked about their experiences of domestic abuse after a transnational marriage but decided not to return as they saw that

staying in the UK would provide them with better opportunities and resources to support their families in Thailand.

The perception of wellbeing of Thai marriage migrants is worth exploring as they are faced with multiple contesting sets of values, norms, social settings and cultures when they move to a new country. Apart from the data discussed in earlier chapters, I also asked women about their positive (opportunities) and negative experiences (challenges) of living and settling down in the UK. I found that their opportunities and challenges can be categorised into the three-dimensional frame of wellbeing. Based on Thai women's life stories, the following sections will present a more elaborate picture of Thai women's perceptions of what influences their material, subjective and relational wellbeing, thus their perceived opportunities and challenges as transnational migrants in the UK.

7.1 Opportunities

7.1.1 Material wellbeing

- **Work and income**

One of the most prevalent opportunities for Thai migrants in the UK is employment and the ability to earn an income. Earning money is an opportunity attached with a transnational marriage. This contrasts the common perception of cross-border marriage of Thai women to Western partners, where women are often seen as totally dependent financially on their husbands. This might be true in some cases, but the majority of Thai wives I sampled are employed. Sixteen out of 30 women interviewed said they were working full-time, 9 of them were working part-time, 3 were unemployed (housewife), 1 was retired and 1 was between jobs. Most respondents were working in the service sector, concentrated in the restaurant and cleaning industry. The hourly minimum wage in Britain (£7.83 as of September 2018) is about the same as the daily minimum wage in Thailand (300 baht or £7.10). This significant difference in wage earnings is one of the main incentives for many Thai women to remain in the UK. Even though the pound sterling value has plunged in recent years, the wage comparatively earned in the UK is still significantly higher than in Thailand.

Earning more income in the UK is said to improve women's life. Nuan who was burdened with credit card debt when she was in Thailand said that being in the UK had improved her quality of living, especially in terms of finances:

> *It is better (living in the UK) because before I came here, I had a hundred thousand baht in credit card debt. I earned only 10,000 baht a month when I was working in Thailand. It was not enough. But when I came here, I have been working and I can pay all my debt. Today, I'm debt-free. It's comfortable living here. I'm not using any credit card now. I only use cash machine and money I got in my bank account… If I was still in Thailand, I would have a million baht in credit card debt because it kept accumulating.*

Mine also reflected on the issue of employment and income as a main opportunity of living in the UK. She was a waiter at a Thai restaurant and a local pub in Brighton. She graduated with a master's degree in financial management from a Bangkok University and previously worked in the finance and insurance sector. Mine said that she was 'bored' with her mundane life in Bangkok and wanted to change her lifestyle. She always wanted to study English and experience life abroad, so she decided to quit her job in Bangkok and enrol in a language school in Britain. After studying English for a while, she and her friends applied for waiting jobs in restaurants. After her first student visa expired, she applied to another business management course to obtain a student visa in order to extend her stay in the UK. The main reason, she said, was not to study but to have more time to work in the UK. She finally met her Scottish husband and decided to stay in the UK indefinitely. Mine still worked as a waiter and caterer and was able to earn money for herself and her mother back in Thailand.

When asked what she liked most about being in the UK, she answered:

> *The best thing about being here is working and spending money. When I work here, I get the amount of money I want. I can afford good things. I can travel abroad. Besides, they don't have age-restrictions on working. The work opportunities are open for aged persons. If you go back to Thailand, the age is restricted. (In the UK) I have the opportunity to work in different positions… I like this kind of opportunity (work). I'm not talking about office jobs but service jobs like supermarkets or shops. They are open for disabled people and older people. In Thailand, they will recruit 35-40 years-old at best, and then they don't want you. I like it here very much. That's why I'm happy about working here. I work and I spend. If you work hard here, you can spend money on brand name bags. In Thailand, even though you work hard, you don't have any money left to travel abroad. There are limitations.*

The ability to earn more income than in Thailand is an essential reason why Thai women want to stay in the UK. Though some migrant women experience hardship in terms of family conflicts and even domestic abuses, they still want to remain in the UK, citing that there are better opportunities. The statement above also reflects how the Thai labour market restricts opportunities for women in late working ages, whereas age

discrimination at work is illegal in the UK. In Thailand there is no law to prevent age discrimination in employment. The UK government introduced The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 prohibit employers from unreasonable discrimination against employees on the grounds of age[7]. Moore (2007) points out that the 2006 Regulations are a response to Britain's ageing society by increasing economic activities of older persons. The Regulations were superseded by The Equality Act 2010[8], which protects a person from discrimination or unfair treatment on the basis of certain personal characteristics, such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Therefore, it is illegal to address preferred ages or years of experience on applicants in job adverts. Being protected from age discrimination was perceived by several women interviewed as an advantage of living and working in the UK, where age is not a limitation to their employment.

Although some women face hardship while living in the UK, a higher income is one of the main incentives to remain in the country. Roong was from Udon Thani province. She moved to Bangkok when she was young to find work, and worked as a care giver for 17 years. She then met a British man in Thailand and eventually got married and moved to live with him in the UK. Here, she worked as a hotel housekeeper and supermarket staff and sent money back to Thailand to care for her mother, two sisters and disabled son. After 4 years living with her husband, she caught him cheating on her. He became emotionally, verbally and physically abusive towards her. Roong told me about her incident and her contact back to Thailand:

> I told my family about what happened but they said, "what can we do?". They are poor so they can't do anything. They said that if I really couldn't stay, just go home. I didn't know what to say. If you ask me if I'm close to my family... I was always in Bangkok. I worked there since I was young. I went back home just once a year... My relationship with my family is not close. I love my parents like anybody else but I am mostly in Bangkok taking care of sick people.

> Interviewer: *How did you feel when they said you could go back to Thailand?*

> I cried. I couldn't do anything but cry. I said if it was not the end, I would not go back. If it was not dead end, I would not go back. If I got permanent

[7] *The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations*. (2006). Retrieved from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1031/contents/made

[8] *The Equality Act*. (2010). Retrieved from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

resident, I will apply for a British passport. After that I will stay here. One day, in the end, I will go back to Thailand. I won't be here. But now, I'm getting older and it is difficult to find a job in Thailand. I can't lift old people like I used to.

Interviewer: *So, there are more opportunities to earn money here than in Thailand?*

Yes. I worked in Bangkok for one month, I got paid 10,000 baht or 12,000 baht at the most. I only got Sunday off. But here I earn 50,000 baht a month. It's different.

Especially for those who came from financially poor backgrounds, their experience of rural-urban migration affected their relationship with their family and kin in their hometown. In some cases, women report of a 'distant' relationship with their Thai family because they moved away from home to work in Bangkok at a young age. They always look for better economic opportunities both for themselves and their families. Being in the UK serves that purpose well. Whatever difficulties they face while living in the UK, they tend to stay if the economic opportunities are still available.

- o **Financial remittance**

In addition to work opportunities, Thai migrants also send financial remittances to family members in Thailand. Financial remittances are considered an important feature of migration, especially South-to-North migration or when migrants from economically poorer countries move to work and send money back home. This is also true for marriage migrants. Financial remittances are frequently mentioned in the study of Thai-Western cross-border marriage as a key contribution to their family members in Thailand (Angeles and Sunanta, 2009; Suksomboon, 2008)

From this research, however, 18 out of 31 interview respondents said that they do not remit money and only 4 people said that they send more than £200 per month. Notably, the continuation and volume of financial remittances seems to decrease over time. Many respondents said they 'used to' send money back to Thailand, but when financial burdens were relieved, they stopped. For example, when their parents pass away, when their younger relatives graduate from school or when ill relatives are cured from an illness. A number of respondents said they occasionally send money as gifts on special occasions, such as birthdays, or when their families need financial help. Money might be one of the leading motivations for why women move abroad. However, a life-course perspective

should also be considered in relation to financial remittances. Life situations change over time and influence the continuation and volume of remittances. Working aged women from financially deprived backgrounds likely have face more of a burden to send financial remittances back home than women from middle-class backgrounds. However, as time passes, natal families become less financially dependent, and as women age they are no longer expected to send money. Their financial burden might be relieved, such as the case of Oom.

Oom has lived in the UK for 23 years. She was from a family of farmers in Nong Bualamphoo province. She recently retired from work due to illness. Oom was the only one in her family who moved abroad, and her family had always placed the financial burden on her. She said that she used to financially support 12 family members including her parents, sisters and her nieces. She had to pay for their medical bills, tuition fees, farming costs and living costs. The pressure of supporting her family contributed to her mental illness. She was clinically diagnosed with depression. Her situation gradually improved after her ill relatives recovered and her nieces graduated from school. Her financial burden was relieved. She said that she was not currently supporting anyone in Thailand.

According to Table 11, 32.7 percent of survey respondents said they do not send money to support their family in Thailand and 34.3 percent said that they send between £50 and £100 per month. It seems that the money women earn from working in the UK is mostly spent on their families in the UK. Only a small amount of money is remitted to Thai families.

Table 11: If at all, do you send money to support your family in Thailand, and please can you assess the approximate value of what you send per month?		
	Frequency	Percent
No	98	32.7
Yes, less than £50 GBP per month	49	16.3

Yes, between £50 and £100 per month	103	34.3
Yes, between £100 and £200 per month	49	16.3
Yes, more than £200 per month	1	.3
Total	300	100.0

According to Table 12, 65.3 percent reported that their family members did not place any financial demand on them, while 17.3 percent said that demands are 'modest' or relatively small. According to several scholars, the notion of '*bun-khun'* (filial piety) and *'luk-katunyu'* (grateful child) are important family values in Thailand, where children are expected to 'pay back' and take care of their parents (Angeles and Sunanta, 2009; Trupp and Butratana, 2016; Suksomboon, 2008). For migrants, *bun-khun* is predominantly expressed in the form of money. Nonetheless, the data from this study illustrates that the financial remittances to Thailand is not as burdensome to women as we understood. According to interviews – for example in the case of Oom as mentioned above – it seems that changing life circumstances and the length of stay, leads to diminishing amount of money Thai marriage migrants in the UK remit to their homeland.

Table 12: How would you describe the financial demands that are placed on you by your family in Thailand?		
	Frequency	Percent
None – they do not make demands on me	196	65.3
Modest - their demands are relatively small	52	17.3

Reasonable - on balance their demands are fair	25	8.3
Excessive – their demands are too high	25	8.3
Not relevant, I do not have family in Thailand to support	2	.7
Total	300	100.0

Thai women have more opportunity to earn money and financially support their families back home. Still, the volume and frequency of financial remittances by Thai women in the sample is minimal. The money they remit home is largely based on occasional and emergent needs by their Thai families.

Earning money in the UK also contributes to the ability of migrants to save and invest in their homeland. Some respondents stated that they invested some money in real-estate property in their hometown. Nim bought farmland in her hometown to rent out with the income going to her family in Thailand. Similarly, Orapa invested in a condominium unit and earned money from the rent.

Migrants do not only invest in businesses, but they also invest in their future return and settlement. Mine and Kate mentioned their plans to buy plots of land where they planned to build a house so they and their husbands could move to Thailand after retirement. Migrants invest for their future mobility. In the case of Thai women migrants, most respondents said that they wanted to spend the last years of their life in Thailand. However, only a few of them actually invested in real estate for future settlement.

o **Healthcare services**

Thai women migrants and their families benefit from healthcare services provided for residents in the UK. Many women mentioned the National Health Service (NHS) coverage as a major advantage of living in the UK. As permanent residents in the UK, these women are eligible for free healthcare services. Some explained that free healthcare for their children and spouses was one of the main reasons they decided to move to the UK. Most respondents were impressed with the service and treatment from the NHS compared to the service and cost in Thailand.

Orapa described the opportunity to receive free and good quality healthcare service as the reason why she wanted to contribute to British society:

> *2 years ago, I had cyst in my uterus. My operation was free and I was happy. I was thinking what I can do for the community. I went for blood donation (in the UK). I'm now a frequent blood donor. Before that I couldn't give blood because I had the problem of excessive bleeding during my period. After I removed my uterus, I could donate my blood. There was no problem, so I did it. I also donate to charities every month. I give to many charities in the UK. Sometimes I donate my money to the hospital that treated me.*

Not only did they receive healthcare for themselves but also for their children. Nune brought her son from a previous marriage with a Thai man to live with her in the UK. Her son had epilepsy and was treated for his condition in the UK. She described her impression of the healthcare service, when asked about her expectation of living in the UK:

> *They (the UK government) have good support, like educational support. My son has epilepsy and they give very good support. They have good support for children and women. That's why I love this country. I can only say that I love this country. It's not that I have British citizenship. I love this country. I have stayed here until I love it.*
>
> *Interviewer: Do you think raising your son in Thailand or in the UK is better?*
>
> *Here (the UK) is better. They give better support. The medication is free. It is very expensive in Thailand.*

Opal met and got married to her husband in the UK. When she got pregnant with her first child, she chose to go back to Thailand because she thought raising a child without help from her extended family members in the UK was too tough for her. In Thailand, she had her parents and other relatives to help take care of the baby. She went back to Thailand and gave birth to her daughter. However, after 4 years of living in Thailand, she finally moved back to the UK. Opal explained her decision to move and stay in the UK:

> *Actually, I want to stay (in Thailand) forever. When you have a child, it is better to be in Thailand because we have grandparents and family. But here (in the UK), we don't have a family. But there are a lot of bad influences in Thailand. You can't survive there… My children are growing up and I'm thinking where should their school be? I have to compare where is better for school, between Thailand or the UK. After weighing up (pros and cons), I think we should come back here.*

Of course, I took a lot of time weighing up before I decided to come back. I'm a woman and there are lots of social issues back in Thailand. Here, there is free healthcare. When I was in Thailand, I never had kids. I had no idea that medical cost (for kids) was so high, very high. Even though I had my family's insurance, I still got stressed out when medical bills came. I have two kids! My children were not in any healthcare scheme in Thailand. After thinking about it, I chose to come back here.

Naam said that she never wanted to move to the UK after she got married to her British husband. She owned an interior design business in Bangkok and always worked there. She met her husband in Thailand and planned to live there together. However, shortly after getting married and living in Thailand, her husband was diagnosed with cancer. They decided to move back to the UK in order to be treated under the NHS because the Thai government does not provide health coverage benefits for foreigners. Naam had been in the UK for 3 years and she said the main reason to be here is to care for her husband's health.

Free healthcare is one of the main reasons why women choose to stay in the UK. They not only benefit from it personally, but by staying in the UK their family members benefit as well. Despite their desire to remain in Thailand, the health and wellbeing of their spouses and children is a priority to them.

o **Childcare and education**

Government benefits for childcare and education is another opportunity for migrants to secure wellbeing for their family. Respondents cited better education, childcare and benefits for single mothers as advantages of living in the UK. Some respondents who had experienced family conflicts felt that the British government's child benefits programme helped them get through their tough situation. Nim experienced domestic abuse and had to stay in a women's shelter. She finally got housing from the government:

I was in the shelter for a year until I got private housing for me and my two children. The government prioritised children's needs. It is an important issue here. I got lucky that I got housing. I started working. I told them (the government agency) that I would not claim for too much benefits. I would work and support myself… I didn't ask for anything but child benefits. I worked full-time and 6 years after that, I applied for a British passport for me and my children… I had to fight for my children. In Thai it's called 'mother dog with young pups'. If my back is not against the wall, I won't run. I couldn't go back to Thailand. I had already quit my job and I am getting old.

Many Thai mothers expressed that staying in the UK offered a better education for their children. Being educated in the British setting certainly gives children English proficiency. Most mothers in the Thai-British families I interviewed regarded bilingualism as an advantage for their Thai-British children. In respondents' views, bilingualism would open more doors for their children. They have more choices, such as being able to choose between living and leading their lives in Thailand or in the UK. Being able to speak two languages potentially gives them more economic opportunities and a wider social network.

The decision to stay in the UK is partly due to the comparison between the quality of education in Thailand and the UK, as mentioned. Being in an intercultural family also provide chances for children to learn multiple cultures. Most mothers I interviewed mentioned the importance of their children to be able to recognise both their mother's and father's cultures and languages. Being bilingual and multicultural would provide them the advantage of being able to live in both Thailand and the UK. Being mixed-race was perceived by some respondents as 'special' because they had more advantages by being exposed to multiple cultures, speaking multiple languages and possessing a unique 'mixed' appearance. In Thailand, many popular movie stars are mixed-raced of Thai and Caucasian descent. Some parents even suggested that if anything goes wrong in the UK, their children might be able to move to Thailand and find a career in the entertainment industry.

Most respondents who have children expressed that they wanted their children to learn both Thai and English but that it was difficult to learn Thai because their children were in the UK and mostly interacted with British people and use English in their daily life. Moreover, the school environment discouraged them from learning Thai. Some children want to speak with a 'proper' English accent while socialising in schools, so they would not sound 'weird' among other children. For example, Fai talked about her 4-year-old Thai-British daughter and why she did not want to speak Thai:

> *Interviewer: Do you speak Thai (to your daughter) when you are at home?*
>
> *Yes, I do. But she does not respond in Thai. There are a lot of Thai people here (she owns a Thai restaurant) but she does not speak Thai. She only speaks English. She thinks that nobody can understand her if she speaks Thai at school. She thinks she is strange.*
>
> *Interviewer: She said that?*

Yes. But I told her, "you are special. You can speak Thai, you can speak two languages".

Fai perceived the ability of her daughter to understand two languages as being 'special', while her young daughter understood that speaking Thai would be a hindrance for her to fit in the school life.

Thai mothers saw being mixed-race and bilingual as 'special' and 'more capable'. They felt that the knowledge of the Thai language was unique in the context of a European society. Although most of the mothers admitted that it was difficult to teach Thai language and Thai culture and etiquette to their children in the English-speaking environment, they continued to try. Transmitting Thai language to children, especially in the British environment, takes tremendous time and effort, Thai language is perceived as a cultural capital which Thai mothers wanted to 'invest' in their children in order for them to be able to choose where they want to live and to have more work opportunities, either in Thailand or the UK.

o **Access to legal protection**

The issue of strict law enforcement and order was brought up many times when respondents were asked about what they considered as positive experiences of living in the UK. In comparison to Thailand, respondents expressed that the UK has stricter laws and better protection for its residents. Some respondents implied that being in the UK is safer than living in Thailand. For example, Kate mentioned the things she liked while living in the UK:

Interviewer: What do you like most about being here? What makes you feel impressed?

I like the law here. It protects its people. Everything is protected. For example, if you buy something but it is in bad quality, they will accept the item back in 30 days without any condition. Does Thailand have such a thing?

Interviewer: Yes, but in very few cases.

But they protect you here. The other day, I bought a wall clock. I already unpacked it and it was not what I saw in the commercial. So, I returned it and they accepted it. Consumers are well-protected. The law here is very strict. Another thing I like is the traffic law, very strict. If you drive without car insurance or without paying road tax, the police don't need to call you on the road like in Thailand. They just look at the plate registration and they know if you have insurance or not. The laws are genuinely enforced here. If you drive

above the speed limit, the camera will record it and they will send you a notification letter within a week. They are really serious. I like it. If the law is strict, people will drive safer. I see very few accidents. I have been driving in this country for 4 years, very few accidents. Because they respect traffic regulations. It's not like this in Thailand. They cut in the sides, in the front, in the back. It is better (than in Thailand). People here are organised and they respect each other which is a good thing. That's why (the UK) is called a developed country.

Moreover, women who experienced domestic abuse reported that they received assistance and legal advice from the police which helped them get through their situation. Compared to Thailand, respondents perceived that they have the chance to be in a safer environment where their rights are protected by law and people benefit from effective law enforcement.

7.1.2 Relational wellbeing
- **Establishing close social relationships**

Being in the UK gives Thai women opportunities to widen their social network and bridge social capital with local people. As presented in this thesis, I found that Thai women tend to bond their social capital with Thai people, rather than bridging with local British. However, bridging social capital with local people especially with in-law families improves Thai women's wellbeing, especially when they were newcomers in the UK and faced tremendous adjustments to a new social setting. Not only do the in-laws provide materials and information necessary for settling in the UK, they also introduce Thai women to co-ethnic circles. Some women reported that their in-law family members were the ones who introduced them to the Thai social network by taking them to Thai restaurants or grocery stores to get the acquainted with other Thais. Having good relationships with in-laws proves to be important for the emotional wellbeing of Thai women, as they considered in-laws as the closest social connection they had when they were newly arrived in the country. Thai women considered their in-law family members as kin and, in many cases, provide care for their parents-in-law.

As mentioned, most Thai marriage migrants seek to participate in co-ethnic social networks with local people. Co-ethnic social networks benefit Thai women in many ways: the exchange of information, loans, and emotional and moral support, for instance. They exchanged information about work, visa extensions, legal issues, tips about living in the UK and others. Sharing the same language and cultural practices also made Thai women

feel more comfortable to talk about their life situations among their group. They perceived Thai people as the most trustworthy to discuss financial and life problems with. The majority of interview respondents said that they had close Thai friends whom they trusted and usually socialised with. Most of the Thai migrants interviewed said that they occasionally met Thai friends at gatherings and shared meals together. A group of women I met at a Thai temple said that they met up weekly because their children attended Sunday language class there. They always shared home-cooked lunch while they were waiting for their children to finish class. They updated each other about their personal situations and discussed news and situations in Thailand. Apart from usual gatherings, Thai migrants tend to put a considerable amount of trust in their fellow migrants. Respondents reported the activities of lending money to friends, opening their houses for Thais who experienced family problems and securing important documents for friends in times of trouble.

Nim and Roong are Thai women who experienced domestic abuse. They mentioned in their interviews that during their conflicts with their husbands, they gave their friends their important documents such as marriage registration, childbirth certificate, house registration and passport, in case of a worst-case scenario. Nim said that her husband eventually shut his door and left her out of the house with nothing. Fortunately, her friend held her personal documents and she was able to retrieve them.

Having a strong social network among Thai migrants also helps them overcome problems while living in the UK as in the case of the Thai Women Network in the UK (TWN4UK). This is an established network that aims to provide Thai women in the UK advice and assistance when they face problems. Many women who went through visa issues, family conflicts and domestic violence, for instance, had received assistance from the network, which helped solve their issues and continue to lead their lives in the UK.

7.1.3 Subjective wellbeing

o **Being in a more 'liberating' society**

In asking women why they preferred living in the UK rather than in Thailand, several of them mentioned constraints such as the hierarchical social and economic statuses in Thailand. Furthermore, the discourse of Thai femininity, which operates along the lines of middle/upper-class and lower-class divisions, also puts pressure on women to be affluent, beautiful and desirable. In his study of femininity in Thai public discourse,

Singhakowinta (2014) points out that the discursive media representation of women in Thailand ideally equates them as career women who are 'beautiful'. He also argues that in modern Thai capitalist discourse, beauty is a prerequisite for women's success in life. However, the construction of 'beauty' in the Thai context is not only a matter of gender but class as well. Sunanta and Angeles (2013) argue that the idealised notion of Thai femininity is classed. Desirable Thai women are often described as delicate, fair-skinned, and having gentle, subtle, and sexually reserved gestures (van Esterik, 2000), portraying the traits associated to upper-class women. This contrasts the image of "[p]oor, working-class women and rural, Isan women, who constitute the majority of *mia farang*, [and] are distant from the classed, stereotyped conception of the traditional Thai woman because of their peasant background, low education, dark complexion, bold manner, and, in some cases, past employment in tourist red-light businesses" (Sunanta and Angeles 2013, p. 187). These divisive discourses certainly have an impact on the decision of some Thai marriage migrants to migrate and stay abroad, as they see it as a way to liberate themselves from these constraining discourses. Some women expressed in interviews that there were still prejudices and stereotypes in Thailand toward people from lower social and economic class, which was why they received biased treatment from the society. They felt that people could be perceived as being from lower, working-class backgrounds by the way they dress or present themselves.

Ageism was another issue that came up in interviews, especially in relation to employment. Younger and physically appealing women were said to be more desirable in the Thai labour market. Women in their later working-ages were thus excluded from job applications. This was reflected by many respondents as one of the main constraints of the Thai labour market. These constraints result in limited opportunities in life such as employment or advancement in their careers. Moreover, these status prejudices also put pressure on women on how they should publicly present themselves. They felt that living in the UK gave them more opportunities in employment and more freedom to live and present themselves as they wanted.

As mentioned above respondents felt that there were more work opportunities in the UK than in Thailand because of a more inclusive labour market which is a result of legislation that prohibits discriminatory practices based on age and other characters in job applications and the workplace. Women in their 30s-40s can still be recruited into the service sector in the UK, where it is much more difficult to do so in Thailand. Moreover,

physical appearance is not as important in the UK as in Thailand in terms of getting recruited into the service sector. Respondents also mentioned that the 'class' system was more severe in Thailand than in the UK, where people tended to judge one another by their economic and social class. While in the UK, they could do anything regardless of their background.

Pim was from Nakhon Panom province. She came to the UK in 2006 after she completed her bachelor's degree in Thailand. She took English language and vocational courses and worked as a restaurant employee on the side. At first, she decided to stay in the UK because of the high wages she earned as restaurant staff. She later met her husband, got married in 2011 and has stayed in the country ever since. At the time of the interview, she was an owner of a small food enterprise in London. Pim said that she had more freedom living in the UK than in Thailand. When I asked her to elaborate what she meant by 'freedom', she said:

> *If you are in Thailand, you have to care what other people talk about you, like your older relatives. Being successful in Thailand means being rich. You have a house, and a car. You can travel abroad. You have money to splurge on luxuries. That is being successful in Thai people's definition. But here, (being successful is) not being rich. We have a house, a car, a warm family and a good husband, that's enough. People here are happy with those things. Parents don't expect their children to have millions of pounds to be successful. A cleaner who has a good child, a house, a car, that is happiness. Nobody pushes us to be millionaires. I like it this way.*

Som voiced a similar view. She was also from Nakhon Panom province and left her hometown as soon as she finished her bachelor's degree and moved to the UK in 2002 to study in an English language course. She met her Polish husband when they studied in the same language institute. She continued staying in the UK and had been working as a restaurant staff in London. After being away from Thailand for 16 years, although she occasionally goes back to meet her parents, she explained her preference of living in the UK:

> *I like the relaxing attitude of people in the UK. They are not too materialistic. Everybody lives their own lives. Nobody judges who is good or who is bad. Nobody cares, I don't know if it is because they are so open. Nobody cares if you live in a small house, what kind of car you drive, no comparison. When I went back to my hometown, people looked at me as if I am rich. I didn't show them that I have money. I dressed normally.*
>
> *Interviewer: When you live abroad, people will assume that you are rich.*

Yes. But if I don't, they will be sarcastic to you; "you live abroad for so long, don't you have anything?". I didn't listen to them. It is my business, my life. It's not that I live abroad then I have to have this, have that. Nobody knows how much I have. People who dress well might have no money. Who knows? It is like this in Thailand. I went to a Gucci store (in Bangkok) and they didn't serve me… The staff said to me, "this one is expensive". So I said, "that's okay I will buy it in London". I didn't care how I look. I went there because I wanted to look at the goods.

Both Pim and Som came from a middle-class family in Thailand. They were able to afford to take language and vocational courses in Britain before meeting their husbands and getting married. They had no work experience in Thailand prior coming to the UK. They contrast the common picture of *'mia farang'* as poor Isan women with a low level of education. In spite of being from Isan, these women finished higher education in Thailand and could afford to study overseas. They sought better economic opportunities abroad but did not intend to move to Bangkok for employment. Som said that her uncle was in the UK prior to her move and he was the one who facilitated her move and settlement. Both women felt that their values and expectations differ from their Thai counterparts. In Thailand, graduating with bachelor's degree, one is expected to be employed in white collar jobs. Moreover, working blue collar jobs in Thailand would not pay for a comfortable life or receive the same level of welfare as in the UK. Pim said that she had more 'freedom' living in the UK, which means freedom from not being judged and being classed into certain social positions. Working in the restaurant had earned her enough money that she could start her own business in London. She was satisfied with her work and family life, not having to show luxuries to others. Pim felt that she was not being judged while she was living in the UK, unlike when she went back to Thailand. She could express herself the way she wanted, without superficial judgment from others.

According to respondents, class relations in Thailand are reflected by how people are being treated based on their material ownership. Another reflection on different class relations between Thailand and the UK is the provision and access to public services. Residents in the UK have access to benefits and public service regardless of their social and economic status. Nim shared her experience of caring for her mother at a Thai hospital:

When my mother was in the hospital for cancer treatment, I saw other patients lying all over nearby. It was very hot and there was no fan. When I saw that, I felt heartbroken. Even I had some money and I wanted a private room for

my mother, I had to wait for ages. It is difficult. It's like, status and class are everything. If you don't have money, you have no rights.

When asked if they want to eventually return to Thailand, a number of women said that they would want to, but not currently. They said that there were no job opportunities for them back home. They often expressed their dismay at the prospect of going back to Thailand in their late working age (40-60 years old): "I don't know what to do". This reflects the selective labour market situation in Thailand that many women do not want to face. Some women said that in the UK, there is 'no class'. These are their expressions when comparing life in Thailand to the UK. In Thailand socio-economic class can affect how people are treated in the society. While in the UK, they felt that wherever they are from or what they do, does not influence how they are treated.

The perception of social and economic advantages of living in the UK does not only reflect the unequal global development between richer and poorer countries. It also reflects the inequality within the home country that influences an individual's decision to move for better opportunities and a more equal and liberating society. Being protected by British laws and included in the welfare state's infrastructure partly made some women feel that they belong to the host society. Interestingly, although they felt that they were part of British society, most women interviewed said that they eventually wanted to go back to Thailand. This reflects the temporality of belonging where Thai women in working ages feel that they belong in the UK when they can work, pay taxes, and be protected by laws and welfare services. The more egalitarian value upheld in British society, such as not being judged by age or appearances, also made Thai women feel that they were part of the society. But on the emotional side, they felt that they wanted to spend their retirement or the last years of their lives at 'home'. The discourse of 'home' is strongly reinforced among Thai migrants. We can see that 'belonging' is not static and can change over time. In Thai women's case, it changes according to their ability to have access to resources and the life course.

7.2 Challenges

7.2.1 Material wellbeing

- **Insufficient income and deskilling**

Although moving to the UK provides better economic opportunities for migrants, some of the respondents still wished that they could gain more income. From the survey, as illustrated in Table 13, 33.3 percent said that they were in a 'hard' financial situation and another 58.7 percent said that their financial situation was 'acceptable'. Only 7 percent had a 'comfortable' financial situation and merely 0.3 percent said that they were 'affluent'. According to the 31 interview respondents, 23 people said that their financial situation was 'comfortable', 5 were 'acceptable' and 3 were 'hard'. Some interview respondents said that they wished to earn more income in order to start or expand their own business or purchase property in the UK.

Table 13: How would you describe your financial situation?		
	Frequency	Percent
Precarious – I don't have enough money to live on	2	.7
Hard – I just have enough to survive on	100	33.3
Acceptable – I am able to make ends meet satisfactorily (but not really save)	176	58.7
Comfortable – I am able to save some money	21	7.0
Affluent – I have more than enough to live on	1	.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 14: If any, how many hours paid work per week do you do?		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes - Less than 12 hours per week	28	9.3
Yes - Between 12 hours and 30 hours per week	49	16.3
Yes - More than 30 hours per week	174	58.0

None - Unemployed/seeking work	17	5.7
None - Ill health/disability	5	1.7
None - Parental leave	15	5.0
None - Caring for a family member	6	2.0
None - Housewife (only if others do not apply)	6	2.0
Total	300	100.0

Even though the majority of survey respondents worked more than 30 hours per week (Table 14), they could secure little savings. This is also reflected in the occupations these women work in. They work mostly in low-paid jobs in the service sector. The top ten occupations of Thai women in our survey sample are

1. Cleaner
2. Kitchen staff and waiting staff
3. Beauty therapist and beautician
4. Nurse and nursery assistant
5. Care worker
6. Housekeeper
7. Retail salesperson
8. Hair stylist and hairdresser
9. Factory worker
10. Healthcare worker

According to Table 15, most of the survey respondents graduated from secondary school in Thailand (48 percent). However, 19 percent attained higher non-university education, 11.7 percent attained university undergraduate education and 14 percent attained university postgraduate education. Many women interviewed described an inability to find jobs that match their qualifications attained from Thailand.

Table 15: What is the highest educational level that you attained in Thailand?		
	Frequency	Percent

No diploma	1	.3
Primary school	21	7.0
Secondary school	144	48.0
Higher non-university education	57	19.0
University undergraduate	35	11.7
University postgraduate	42	14.0
Total	300	100.0

Jai received a bachelor's degree in computer science from a Bangkok university and worked in the information technology (IT) sector in Thailand. But when she decided to move to the UK with her husband, she struggled to find jobs in her field:

> *Interviewer: What do you do for a living here?*
>
> *I started from zero. Here, the computer science degree I have is useless. I went out to find work when I first came here. I was quite confident with my language ability (she worked in international colleagues in Thailand). I applied for work in my field. I got a call for an interview, but I didn't get it. They asked me what kind of work experiences I had here. I think I could not get the job, so I change my plan.*
>
> *Interviewer: Do you think that it is because of the level of competency that affects your job application or is it something else?*
>
> *I think experience is one factor, and maybe because I'm Asian? I'm not sure. I didn't have the chance to show my full potential. So, I applied for jobs that Thai people do. I applied to work in a department store but I didn't get anything. My husband suggested that employers here looked for people who have degree that matches the jobs. If you were graduated in computer science, they would not accept you to work in department store.*
>
> *Interviewer: So, you didn't get the job that you want. What did you do next?*
>
> *I joined volunteer work. I worked on projects and managed a website. Shortly after that, I got pregnant. I did not work until my child became 5 years old. Then, I got back to volunteering and began to do catering because I started to have an interest in cooking.*

Naam, a successful businesswoman who had previous professional experience working in the education and government sectors in Thailand, shared her feelings of depression when discussed her adjustment to life in the UK:

Interviewer: Did you experience any challenge after moving here?

Is there any challenge? I have to say that there were a lot. It was difficult for me to adapt. I could not adapt at all. People who are successful in business or have high education, if they move to England, they will have harder time adjusting than people who have basic qualifications, or people who are from struggling families. If you have high education or are successful, if you move here your degrees, experiences or statuses will become useless. I could not adjust. I absolutely could not. Until today, I feel like I have to let go. It is difficult to find jobs to match the experience I have from Thailand. Jobs available here are in the restaurant or service sector. I have never done these jobs. I could not adapt. I was depressed because I could not adapt.

It's like I started counting one in my age (49 years old). Those who came to the UK and could adapt are; first, those who came in young age. Second, those who don't have social status. They accept to work in service sector. If they don't have high status or professional status, it will be great for them to live in the UK. But because of my age and the jobs that I have not done, I felt like I lose my self-respect. I felt sorry for myself. It made you feel unhappy, low, depressed. I was always working and I worked a lot. When I came here, I felt like I don't have quality, no value. Nobody saw my value, my meaning. I felt like a failure, lack of confidence to live here. That was my problem.

Many migrant women experience 'deskilling' as a result of migration. They tend to be recruited in employment below their qualifications. Furthermore, the language barrier seems to be a major hindrance for migrants to be employed at the professional level. Some respondents felt that race was a key feature shaping employers' decision to employ someone. Dang claimed that there was 'politics' in her workplace that caused her to be made redundant in her position as a facilities employee in a hospital.

Interviewer: What was their reason to make you redundant?

Politics. This word. I'm not making this up. I'm not lying because they put their son, brother and a relative in instead of us. Those who were made redundant are all foreign; German, Polish and Thai.

Although Thai migrants see better economic opportunity working in the UK than in Thailand, there are a number of challenges in terms of mismatches in qualifications and discrimination that prevented them from being employed in suitable positions.

7.2.2 Relational wellbeing

  o **Lack of local social capital with local people**

As explored in Chapter 4, many newly arrived marriage migrants experience loneliness and isolation on their arrival in the UK. Being far away from an established social

network and kinship ties in their home country, newcomers have to start over in building their social capital after their move, and occasionally find it difficult to adjust to the new society. For some migrants, rebuilding social capital might cause stress, loneliness and isolation. But as they gain access to social circles and expand their network, their loneliness and isolation is reduced. Interestingly, this study found that Thai women migrants accumulate their social capital within the Thai community, rather than with British locals.

As mentioned above, most Thai migrants in the sample felt that they had difficulties adjusting to a new environment as newcomers. When asked, migrants who live in the UK for more than 5 years, 30 percent said that they felt loneliness and isolation while 70 percent did not. However, it seems that the social connections that Thai women build over the years are concentrated in their own ethnic group.

Apart from their British partners, Thai marriage migrants reported having few ties with British locals. The majority of interview respondents said they built strong ties with Thai counterparts in the UK and have trusted and close Thai friends. Very few of them have strong ties with British locals, and instead have weak ties with them, such as neighbours and colleagues. Some of them reported to have strong ties with their in-laws, especially parents-in-law.

Language barriers and cultural differences might play a crucial role in the inability of Thai migrants to create strong ties with British locals. According to the survey results, 61.3 percent of survey respondents said that a minority of their acquaintances are of British or non-Thai origin. Fifty-five percent said that a minority of people they trust are of British or non-Thai origin, and 59.7 percent reported having contact less than once a month with people of British or non-Thai origin. However, when asked about their socialisation with Thais, 68 percent said they had direct communication via phone, social media or chat applications with other Thais in the UK several times a week. However, when asked about direct communication via the same channels with British or non-Thai friends, 59.7 percent had such contact less than once a month. When asked about how often they meet in person with Thai friends in the UK, 37 percent answered once a week and 28 percent answered once a month. While 53 percent said that they meet their British or non-Thai friends in person less than once a month.

Roong mentioned that she was friends with a British couple but when she faced domestic abuse and asked for their help to contact a lawyer for her, they declined:

(Talking about her British friends) At first, it seemed like they would help me. I asked them to contact a lawyer for me. They said no. At first, they seemed like nice people. They said that I have to contact (a lawyer) myself. But my English was not good. I was not good at using internet either. I could not access it. They said that I would get used to it... They were friends of my husbands. But I had stopped seeing them already. They said nice things to you but when you actually asked for help, they declined.

These activities require a certain level of trust which very few of respondents receive from British acquaintances. The strong ties Thai migrants have with British are those with their husbands and, in some cases, their husbands' families. The challenge of having a weak social network with locals in the host society might result in strengthening transnational connections. In reverse, the strength of a migrant's transnational connections might affect their interest in building strong ties with locals.

- o **Disagreements within the family**

According to studies on intercultural relationships, researchers have found that some of the challenges these couples face are cultural and economic differences, which influence their approach to parenting and decision making in the household (Crippen and Brew, 2007; Rodriguez-García, 2006). In the study of African-Spanish couples, Rodiguez-García (2006) discovered that dynamics of conflict and accommodation of mixed-race, intercultural families can be evidently found in the upbringing of children, especially in the intergenerational transmission of values and socio-cultural models.

Opal said that she had more arguments with her husband after having her first child. They argued about different parenting and cultural practices. For instance, Opal felt uneasy when she saw her children's head were placed between her husband's legs when they were playing, and when her husband used his foot to touch or point at things. She felt uncomfortable especially because she did not want her children to imitate the action and wanted to teach them 'appropriate' Thai etiquette and culture. Her husband, on the other hand, saw the head and legs as mere body parts and felt he could use them in ways he found convenient.

For couples with no children, cultural differences were also cited as leading to misunderstandings and sometimes to conflicts. According to interview respondents' examples of cultural differences were different ways of expressing affection or the way

Thai women deal with conflict though silence. Cultural differences might be a crucial cause of family conflicts, but it can also be resolved if couples turn to each other to talk and learn about each other's culture and differences. Many couples I interviewed faced this type of misunderstanding and disagreement. However, they tried to overcome these issues by talking and opening up to each other. As we can see, during disagreements and conflicts Thai women exercise their agency by explaining and making their culture known to their partners. They did not completely or submissively accept values or norms in the British household. They tried to resolve them with their husband and tried to exert Thai values and culture into the family and the relationship in the process.

Cultural differences do not cause conflicts as much as situational, personal and economic conflicts. Different economic positions, such as when the Thai wife is economically dependent on her husband might eventually lead to conflicts in the household as we observe in Chapter 6. Also, Thai women's responsibilities toward their Thai children from previous marriages can spark clashes between them and their British husbands. As we have seen, some cases with financial problems led to divorce and disagreements on family arrangements led to domestic abuse.

Another source of family conflict is the relationship with the in-laws. Most Thai women I interviewed did not have conflicts with their in-law families. Most women commented that their parents-in-law were supportive of their relationship with their husbands and that they had good relationship with their husband's family. However, some of them felt that they were not fully accepted in the British family. In an exceptional case, Apa expressed her frustration about her relationship with her mother-in-law, saying that she was in immense pressure when she and her husband visited his parents' home. Her mother-in-law constrained her with house rules, for example, being strictly on-time for teatime or not allowing her to use their utensils without permission. Apa said that she tried to help with tidying up their house whenever she paid a visit. However, a conflict emerged as she found out about her mother-in-law's opinion about her:

> *My mother-in-law and I could not get along. Sometimes I helped her with the chores, washing dishes, tidying up when she cooked. But I didn't know where she got this idea from because, lately, she just let me do it. She told me to do this and that. I cleaned the bathroom of the room I slept in then she said, "could you clean that bathroom as well? And the bathroom in my bedroom as well?". It was more like an order. At first, I thought I should help clean the room because we were staying in their house. We should clean it and make the bed. One day, I overheard her while she was on the phone with her friend.*

She said, "when my daughter-in-law visits, I have a servant". So I told my husband about it. He said I must mishear it and I said no. She said to her friend on the phone, "if you come to my house tomorrow, you will see that my house is clean because she did all the housework. I have a servant". I felt really bad. She was being prejudiced because I'm Thai.

After this incident, Apa said that she no longer tolerated her mother-in-law's behaviour. She became more outspoken when she felt that things were not right. This conflict caused her pressure and she thought she would not extend her British visa and go back to Thailand. However, her father-in-law tried to resolve this conflict and asked her to extend her visa. Being a woman and a foreigner, family conflict is more than just a relationship issue, and sometimes includes racial prejudices. In many cases, Thai women have to 'prove' themselves against the stereotypes of docile and traditional Asian women. Apa's reaction to this was harsh, she said sometimes she directly scolded her mother-in-law in front of family and friends. This was an attempt to negotiate her position and regain her agency in the family. The case of Apa is not common among women interviewed. While most women said that they had good relationships and received good support from their in-laws, only a minority reported that they experienced some sort of conflict as presented above.

- o **Domestic abuse**

While most interview and survey respondents reported that they had never faced violent disputes or abuse in their household, there were some women who had. Not all relationships of Thai-British couples are successful. According to TWN4UK, there are many cases of domestic abuse that occur in Thai-British relationships. A TWN4UK representative said that family disputes made up most of the cases they dealt with. Family disputes sometimes can lead to domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is a major challenge for marriage migrants as it causes physical and emotional harm, which could have long-lasting effects.

Thai women leave their homeland and start anew in a new society where they have to build new social networks. The lack of strong ties, especially for domestic abuse victims, makes it harder for them to seek proper support. Language barrier is another issue for victims of violence because they cannot communicate properly or find the right channel for the assistance they need.

Two interview respondents in this research said that they experienced domestic abuse and shared their story of going through this situation and what kind of assistance they received while in the UK. Nim was a victim of domestic violence in 2004. She viewed the main cause as being an argument between her husband and her daughter and son from a previous marriage with a Thai husband, whom she brought to live with her after she got married to her British husband. She experienced physical violence from her husband at home. She told me that once her husband broke her fingers, and that she could still not use them properly today. Her husband sometimes assaulted her until she bled. Finally, he violently removed her and her children from their home in the middle of winter. She had nothing, only a garbage bag filled with her personal belongings. She had no place to stay so her British employer (restaurant owner) at the time took her in. She then moved to stay with a Thai woman who was married to a policeman for a week. Her husband stalked her and caused a menace to the people who helped her. He would go to her workplace, honking his car horn and pouring oil in front of the restaurant where she worked. Finally, her friend took her and her children to Women's Aid and she stayed in their shelter for two years until she received housing from the government. Her husband received a court order banning him from visiting her and her children.

When the incident first occurred, she said that she did not have any Thai acquaintances who could help her. However, she was lucky that her British employer supported her. She later got acquainted with a Thai woman who told her about Women's Aid and took her there. She did not have any knowledge about where to get assistance for domestic abuse until her friend told her. At that time, she could not properly read or write English. But she was supported by social workers and interpreters from NGOs who helped her get through the situation. She said she was grateful for the NGOs and governmental organisations who supported her and helped her overcome this circumstance. Now, she is part of the TWN4UK and provides advice to women who experience family issues and domestic violence.

Roong was emotionally and physically abused by her British husband. Only one year after getting married, she found out that he had had an affair with a woman whom he met while on holiday in Southeast Asia. The abuse began after he came back from the holiday where he started the affair. It began with verbal and emotional abuse such as insults and scolding. He became more irritated with her over small things. She noticed that her husband's behaviour had changed. Consequently, she went through his mail and mobile

phone and found out about the affair. However, she put up with his behaviour for years. He kept on denying that he had an affair and they often had disputes. Recently, he again had another affair with a Thai woman whom he met in Thailand. After months of gathering information and evidence on his affairs, she confronted him. She sent a text message to her husband's friend asking about other women. When he found out, he was furious. He shouted abuse at her and violently grabbed her arm. His nails sunk into her skin and caused bruises. Her arm was in pain, she could not go to work for days. The matter got worse when he threatened to sell the house they lived in together. He started to move his furniture and belongings out of the house, leaving her with nothing. He also threatened that he would no longer sponsor her visa and that the Home Office would deport her back to Thailand, because they got married and registered in Thailand and not in the UK. He put the house up for sale. However, she still remained in the empty house. A day after, he cancelled all utilities in the house while she was at work. She called a Thai friend who referred her to a member of the TWN4UK. The TWN4UK advised her that she had full rights to the property as she was his legal spouse. Their marriage registration in Thailand was also valid in Britain. Local police also came into her house and advised her that she had full right to this property because he had already removed all his belongings. She was deceived by her husband who did not acknowledge her right as a lawful wife. According to the law, he could not sell the house without her consent. Roong admitted that the language barrier and her internet illiteracy made her feel helpless. She could not understand English fully and did not have any basic knowledge of family law. While the solution and assistance for her problem could be found on the internet, she did not know how to use it. However, she got in contact with the TWN4UK who helped her with document translation and advice on applying for a visa to extend her stay after breaking up with her husband.

The challenge for marriage migrants is not solely domestic abuse in itself, but the ability to handle the situation as well. Many Thai women who came to the UK do not have enough English proficiency to easily access information that would be helpful for their situation. Many women do not realise their basic rights as a lawful spouse and do not have knowledge about basic immigration law. According to conversations with women volunteers in Europe, in several cases, Thai women put up with the abusive and hostile environment at home due to the fear of visa termination and deportation. The lack of a social networks also puts women in greater and more prolonged risks. Having a close

social network would help them handle the situation more effectively and seek support sooner. Many Thai women still rely on unofficial working groups such as the TWN4UK for assistance, advice and support. A TWN4UK representative said that the Thai community knew them from word of mouth and online forums. They also have members in many cities all over the UK.

7.2.3 Subjective wellbeing

o **Adjustment to host country's new sets of values and practices**

Most respondents reported that they found it difficult to adjust to the new country when they first arrived. Some used the word 'culture shock' to describe their initial feelings settling into the UK. Many women in the sample did not have the experience of visiting a foreign country prior their move to the UK. Language barriers, different weather conditions, and different cultures, among other things, caused tension for these migrants. Moving from Thailand to the UK means moving from a society of an extended family to a society of a nuclear family. This change was perceived by Thai migrants as a challenge for living in the UK, as reflected in many interviews. Thai women mentioned the differences between family life in Thailand and in the UK. For example, they feel that there is 'warmth' in the family back in Thailand because they have relatives around them who can help with chores or taking care of their children. In Thailand, one can rely on grandparents or other relatives to take care of their child while he/she is occupied. Although, this trend is also changing in Thailand as people move out of their hometowns to settle in urban areas with their own nuclear family. This decreases the role and involvement of relatives in helping with household chores and child-rearing. Many Thai women in this study still feel that they can expect to rely on Thai family members for familial assistance more than their in-law family in the UK. Fai lived in Kalasin with her family and was working in the family business before moving to the UK with her husband. She said that her parents wanted her to start a business in the UK, but she and her husband wanted to eventually live in Thailand. When I asked Fai about challenges of living in the UK she answered:

> *The weather is one. Sometimes I miss home (Thailand), when I face problems or when I got sick. There were few people who took care of me. All I have here is my husband, me and my daughter. It's different from Thailand. When I got sick, there would be relatives or caregivers who help take care of your child,*

or a babysitter. But I have to do everything on my own here. Luckily, I got my husband who helped with everything. It was ok.

Apa was from Ubon Ratchathani. She was the youngest daughter of five. After she graduated with her bachelor's degree, she moved to Bangkok to work as a salesperson in an exporting company. She was the one who took care of her parents because her brothers and sisters got married before her and had their own obligations. She travelled back and forth from Bangkok to Ubon Ratchathani to take care of her parents, sometimes she went on weekends and had to travelled back to Bangkok to work on weekdays. She said when she was back in Isan her brothers and sisters 'spoiled' her because she was the one who worked hard and supported their parents and they wanted her to relax when she got back home. She compared her dramatic change of moving from Thailand to the UK after getting married to her husband:

> *When I first got married (and moved to the UK), I have to say that I couldn't live here. I was very attached to my family, to my father, my brothers, my sisters. When I was in Bangkok, I was always with my sister. I lived in the same house as her and I slept in the same room with my niece. I was really attached to my family. When I moved here, I thought I couldn't make it because I could not cook. It was easier in Thailand because you can buy whatever you want to eat. When I was home, my sister cooked for me. When I was back at my father's or my brother's, I was treated like an angel. I just told them what I want to eat. I never cooked. But when I was here, I cried. I want to eat this and that. I couldn't cook. It was very hard for me to adjust.*

Living in an extended family, where care and emotional support are frequently exchanged, even though family members live in separate regions, is normal for Thai families. The move to the UK changed the family formation completely. Thai women have to adjust to a nuclear family where the in-laws have little involvement in the couple's lives. The emotional support and care they previously received disappeared. In many cases, the absence of such support causes them to feel anxious and homesick. The tremendous change resulting from migration has proved to be difficult for women to adjust to the new environment and can cause emotional distress. However, as time passes, women gained life experiences and gradually learned to navigate their new lives in a new country, and thanks to more advanced communication technology, Thai women relieved their feelings of homesickness by retaining close ties with their Thai family.

While homesickness occurred to some respondents, they also said that better information and communication technologies (ICTs) had improved their wellbeing. Frequent contacts with the family in Thailand help them cope with loneliness and homesickness. Respondents recalled difficulties communicating with family and friends back home when they first arrived in the UK years ago when instant messages and call applications were non-existent. The tremendous change from life in Thailand to life in the UK caused newcomers to face culture shock and, in some cases, extreme loneliness. Mook said that when she first arrived in the UK and experienced cold weather, she did not want to get out of the house. She stayed in her home for a prolonged period of time, and did not meet anyone outside, until she felt extreme loneliness.

> *Interviewer: Was it difficult for you to adjust to the life in the UK?*
>
> *It was difficult. The first day I arrived, I got off the coach and it was snowing. It was so cold, I didn't get out of the house for two months because I could not bear it. I was lonely, too. My husband worked in London. He had to travel from Brighton to London every day. I had to be alone all the time. It was okay but sometimes I felt lonely. Sometimes I cried, I didn't know what to do. There was no Facebook back then. I called from a telephone booth using calling cards because I didn't have a landline. I missed home.*
>
> *Interviewer: So, you felt homesick.*
>
> *Yes. But now you can see everyone (using internet). Everything is okay… I don't feel so lonely now. But when I first arrived here, I always cried. I had no friends. My mother-in-law came to take care of me, but I couldn't speak English very well. I didn't know where to go out and buy things. It was difficult to adjust.*

Some respondents said that their husbands support them to be more socially engaged whilst in the UK. Having British husbands as a local can be an important part of Thai migrant women's experiences as they sometimes introduce them to existing to migrant communities and cultures. This helps them cope with loneliness and helps them begin cultivating a new social network in a new country. Discussing the adjustment to life in the UK, several women told me that their husbands were the ones who took them to a Thai temple when they newly arrived in the country to help with their loneliness. Thai migrants gradually build their social network and adjust to the host society over time. Some migrant women helped newcomers by introducing them to social circles, helped them find employment and provided advice and support on general and family matters. The survey sample was asked if they felt lonely and isolated living in the UK, 30 percent said yes while 70 percent said no. However, the survey sample criteria are women who

lived in the UK for more than 5 years. It seems that Thai women have built and expanded their social network over time. As demonstrated earlier, a number of interview respondents expressed difficulties adjusting to a new country as newcomers. Some women did not experience stress or depression when they arrived because they already have family members or friends who lived in the UK or who had visited foreign countries before settling in the UK. They were therefore more familiar with Western cultures and systems. These migrants already had an established network and source of help and were familiar with different cultures.

o **Discrimination**

Some Thai migrants experience prejudice and discrimination while living in the UK. Six out of 30 respondents said that they had experienced some form of direct discrimination in their life. Another 6 'feel' that they are seen as 'different' or 'looked down on' by locals. However, the majority of interview respondents did not experience discrimination and prejudice in their daily life. This data coincides with the survey data in Table 16, where 72.3 percent of Thai women in the sample said they had never faced 'hostility or unfair treatment' in the UK, while 11.7 percent answered 'occasionally', and 15 percent said 'sometimes'.

Table 16: How often, if at all, do you experience hostility or unfair treatment towards you by people in the UK because of your ethnic or Thai origin?		
	Frequency	Percent
Never	217	72.3
Occasionally	35	11.7
Sometimes	45	15.0
Often	3	1.0
Total	300	100.0

The interesting point that emerges in the issue of discrimination of Thai women is that a number of them perceived themselves as being disdained by locals. The feeling of being looked down upon can be described by the notion of 'internalised racism' (Speight, 2007; Williams and Williams-Morris, 2000). Some respondents felt that they were looked at with disdain by locals, without experiencing actual incidents of racial discrimination or abuse. They were self-aware of the stereotypical image of the 'Thai bride' who marries Westerners as prostitutes or frauds. These feelings affect women's perception of their identity and Thai women's identity as a whole, as the examples will show in the following section.

While the majority of Thai women studied said that they had not experienced any form of discrimination, prejudice or oppression in their life in the UK, some of them had come across such incidents. These are a few examples:

Ning

Interviewer: Do you feel that you are part of British society?

I think I am still a second-class citizen.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that? Why do you think you are second-class citizen?

If they had to choose between their people and Asian people, their people would have more chance than us. They have better job opportunities and received better benefits than foreigners.

Interviewer: Have you experienced such treatment? Or is it just something you see?

I experienced it and have seen it with other people. I have fewer opportunities. When I went to the hospital, they asked me, "are you eligible to use free service?". This is because I'm Asian. If you look like a Westerner, they won't ask you this. They asked me about my visa and if I had the right to use free service. If you are British, they won't ask you."

Oom

Some people don't like us. It's little things. Sometimes they said, "go back to your country". But not so often. People are different. I have never had problems living here. I've been here for 21 years. I have never been stalked or chased, but sometimes I got scolded when I talked to my friends. There was an old man. I think he was mentally ill because he shouted abuse at every one at bus stop. That was a minority. It was no problem.

Mine

I have encountered some (discrimination), but not so often. I was on a bus in London. They were racist, they mocked me. They shouted 'Ni Hao' ('hello' in Chinese) at me. Once, when I carried a lot of heavy stuff onto the bus, a guy said that I was in his way and had to take my stuff out of the way. So I said to him, "why do I have to do that?". Sometimes people walked into you and didn't say sorry. Mostly, they are not genuine British people. Mostly, they are old or black people, or rowdy teenagers. Real British people will not do that to you.

Som

There was one time when I was speaking on my mobile phone in Thai. And an old man came up to me and said, "you are now in England. You have to speak English all the time". I said to him, "I'm sorry, I was speaking to my Thai friend, so I had to speak Thai. If you are upset, please stand away". And he replied, "this is my country". I didn't reply back to him and walked away. I thought there was no use to fight him. I could not change his mind.

Som further shared her experience of discrimination;

One day I was in the country with my uncle. A guy came up to us and said, "Asians get out!". But we did not care because he was an old man. And another incident, I was on a bus, I tried to speak on my headset, low volume. I heard someone on the bus say, "what are you saying? I don't understand. Why don't you speak English?". I replied, "why do you have to understand? It is my freedom to speak any language". Most of the passengers were foreigners, they were satisfied of what I said. Few of them were British. Old people. They don't offend me because they might 'close their eyes' (be close-minded).

Nim

After I got out of the safehouse (she was a victim of domestic abuse), I got accommodation from the government. British people (neighbours) looked at me like I was taking away their housing, claiming benefits. They threw eggs at my house. Police wouldn't come when I called them. 15-16 teenagers came to my house at night to disturb and throw eggs at my house. They cut my phone line as well. They vandalised my bicycle, too. I had to make a complaint. I said I paid taxes and police got paid by my tax money. I complained until the police headquarter sent a letter to apologise. I was very serious. My neighbour also disturbed me. I told the council office that I wasn't here just to claim benefits. I paid taxes and they were using my money as well.

Some of the above respondents expressed that they were not offended by racist remarks from elderly or implied that racism is not from 'real British people'. They felt that elderly people had more conservative views on immigration than younger generations. They

tried to dismiss racist or discriminatory remarks as 'little things' and did not give much attention to them. Som specifically shared her unpleasant encounter on the bus with a British elderly and referred to him as 'close-minded'. Being in intercultural relationships in this decade, she might see people of her generation as more open-minded and more accepting of people of different ethnicities. For Mine, being married to a Scottish man might influence her opinion that 'real British people' would not engage in discriminatory actions. These women are being partial of which group of people (in this case, elderly, teenagers and black people) would engage in racism and refuse to delve into those remarks. What is further worth noting here is the ability of these women to handle discriminatory treatment and racist remarks. Having spent their lives in British society for quite some time, these women realised that they had the agency and rights to be protected from such treatments. They tend to speak up and counter discrimination and racism by legitimising their position as taxpaying British citizens, as in the case of Nim.

As mentioned earlier, 6 out of 30 interview respondents 'feel' that they were seen as 'different' or 'looked down on' by locals. They had not encountered direct incidents of prejudice and discrimination but said to 'have [had] the impression' that they were looked down on. Many Thai women in the sample adopted internalised racism and sexism when encountering locals. The imaginary and stereotypical image of Thailand and Thai women are widespread in Western media. For example, a British television show called 'Little Britain' introduced a character called 'Tingtong Macadangdang' in 2005, portraying a mail-order bride from Thailand who later revealed that she was transgender. The word *'tingtong'* means stupid in Thai. She was portrayed as a deceitful person and wanted to bring her family members in Thailand to live with her and set up a Thai restaurant in her husband's flat. This portrayal made a lasting impact on the perception of Thai women in the UK. When asked about discrimination in the UK, Opal told me about the 'parody' of Thai woman in Little Britain. She said that after the episode with Tingtong aired, people made fun of her for being Thai and asked if she was 'Tingtong'. She said that there were complaints from the Thai community to the Thai Embassy when the show aired.

As mentioned, general stereotypes and portrayal of Thai people in the media influence self-perceptions of Thai women migrants. Some respondents felt that Thai women were viewed as sex workers or frauds, who wanted to marry Westerners for money or a British visa.

Pim talked about her socialisation with her British husband's friend:

When he (her husband) introduced me to his friends, they looked at me as if I was 'degrading', a Thai woman who got married with a Westerner for visa. I felt that. It bothered me that they looked at me as inferior, that I didn't get married with my consent.

Interviewer: Why did you feel like that? Did they treat you like that?

They got too close to me. Some Thai women are like that but not everyone. They said that most Thai women they knew let them kiss and hug. I don't do that with my husband, but his friend wanted to do it to me. My husband told his friend that I was not 'that kind' of woman. He shouldn't tease me like that. Sometimes, British people saw some groups of women. I'm sorry to say this, 'women from prostitution'. They do that (getting close). They think all women are like that. My husband's relatives also thought that I got married to him just for a visa. It took some time to prove that I was not like that.

Gan

Interviewer: How do you think British people feel about Thai people?

I think some of them look down on us. I went to a pub and they stared at me. Maybe because I am Asian.

June

Interviewer: How do you think British feel about Thai people in the UK?

I think they see us as second-class, in general... I don't know. When I talk to my customers, when they talk about Thailand, there was something different. I felt it. It was not obvious... People talk nice to you, but they are not fully open to you. They are still in their group.

Interviewer: So, you feel different?

Yes, I do.

Kate

Interviewer: What do you think are challenges or something you don't like living here?

When I go out, I don't like it when people look at me like I'm from a third-world country. Do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: What did they do to make you think that?

The look, the talk. I feel like some people are racist.

Interviewer: Did they say it out loud or just the gestures?

The way they look or talk. Racism still exists here. I don't see it often, but my friends faced these things. There are still some problems. They are not open. There are still some old-fashioned people who close their minds. They don't listen to anything.

Nuan

Interviewer: How do you think British people think of Thai women here?

You know that what Thai women are like, right? To be frank, Pattaya women, Patpong women (from sex tourism areas). When a British guy has a Thai girlfriend, their relatives will ask. I was asked what kind of job I did. I know what they wanted to say. They think that (I am a prostitute) because our country is famous for that. But it's not all women who do that. Isan women who do this kind of job got foreign boyfriends. My female colleague said that a European could easily find a girlfriend in Thailand. I was stunned. I said I didn't do that kind of job. If I were a foreigner and said things like this to you. How would you feel as a Thai person?

Even though a number of respondents reported that the level of unfair or discriminatory treatment was minimal, many of them internalised the feeling of being discriminated against and being inferior as migrants in the UK. The experience of racism, sexism, discriminatory treatment or prejudice which Thai women saw or heard from their acquaintances contributes to their internalised racism. Furthermore, the popular and stereotypical image of Thai women in British media as sex workers and marriage frauds is also internalised in many Thai women migrants. Thai wives not only receive negative views from British society but from Thai society as well. Sunanta (2009) argues that, in Thailand, the urban middle-class perceive a relationship between Thai women and Westerners as a moral problem which stems from "rampaging materialism and consumerism which threatens to degrade the Thai traditional culture" (p. 136). Therefore, the Thai word *'mia farang'* or literally translated as 'westerner's wife' has negative connotations in Thailand and has become a stigma for Thai women in such unions. Moreover, some respondents felt that they were treated or looked at as 'second-class' or from a 'third-world country'. This reflects the feelings of inferiority as being foreigners and coming from developing countries.

Prilleltensky and Gonick (1996) argue that "small daily doses of personal devaluation usually suffice" for oppression to be internalised (p. 132). Moreover, "images of personal inferiority are formed following experiences of shame and humiliation that erode self-confidence" (p.132). Nuan associated the image of Thai women with Pattaya and Patpong, two infamous destinations for sex tourism in Thailand. Her husband's relative might ask out of sheer curiosity and pure intention, wanting to know about her

background. But because of popular images of Thai women and her experience with her colleagues, she assumed that they implied that she was a former prostitute.

Some respondents who reported direct discriminatory treatment expressed that it was 'no problem' or 'little things'. Such attitudes can normalise the acceptance of racism and perpetuate self-oppression within the Thai migrant community. The danger is the inability to see "the destructive social context and accept the dominant group's exploitation as simply "the way things are"" (Freire, 1999).

Although both interview and survey data show that the number of racially discriminatory incidents is low among Thai women in the UK, the reality of racism is still in the consciousness of Thai migrants. Many respondents said that they found racial discrimination incidents fewer than years before and they mostly experienced it with older locals who are not as open-minded as younger generations. They also tried to dismiss unpleasant incidents and accepted it as normal. Despite this, they acknowledged the stereotypical image of Thai women and British men as negative. Some women said that they had to 'prove' themselves to their husband's relatives that they were not frauds that only got married because of money. This negative image comes from both sending and receiving society, which eventually affirms Thai women's perception about themselves.

7.3   Conclusion

This chapter attempts to capture the opportunities and challenges of Thai marriage migrants in regard to wellbeing by analysing women's perceptions of their lived experiences in the UK. Exploring discussions of earlier chapters and other emerging issues from in-depth interviews and surveys, I found that opportunities and challenges should be categorised along three dimensions of wellbeing, namely material, relational, and subjective (see Table 18). By taking all three dimensions of wellbeing into account, I hope to illustrate a holistic picture of Thai marriage migrants' wellbeing. The three-dimensional approach also provides a better understanding of the complexities of migrant women's transnational living.

As White (2010) claims, each dimension of wellbeing is interrelated and that one cannot exist without the other. I would further argue that, by looking at opportunities and challenges along the lines of three-dimensional wellbeing, we can see that an opportunity in one dimension can cause a challenge in the other. Although many women implied that

the decision to get married and migrate to their husbands' homeland was an escape route from poverty and traditional, mundane life in Thailand, they later realised that with better economic and life chances, they were still experiencing challenges of settling down in a foreign country. The table below shows the perceptions of respondents on the opportunities and challenges they face while living in the UK, through the lens of the three dimensions of wellbeing.

Table 17: Opportunities and challenges of Thai marriage migrants, categorised by types of wellbeing

Types of wellbeing	Opportunities	Challenges
Material	- Work and income - Financial remittances - Healthcare services - Childcare and education - Access to legal protection	Insufficient income and deskilling
Relational	Establishing close relationships with co-ethnics and in-law family members	- Lack of social capital with local people - Disagreement within the family (in the UK)

		• Domestic abuse
Subjective	• Being in a more 'liberating' society	• Adjustment to host country's new sets of values and practices • Discrimination

We can see that on the opportunities side, material wellbeing outweighs other dimensions. More work opportunities, income, better healthcare services, childcare and education, and access to legal protection were cited as the main factors that improve their material wellbeing. However, some respondent said that although they had higher income working in the UK compared to Thailand, it was difficult for them to save up and invest in properties or business in the UK as their professions were structurally restricted to the service sector. Many women from well-educated backgrounds also reported that they experienced 'deskilling', and that they had to accept working in occupations below their educational attainment. For some women, this experience had an emotional and psychological impact, resulting in feelings of unworthiness and depression.

In terms of relational wellbeing, respondents claimed that being protected by British laws was one of the main positive aspects to life in the UK compared to Thailand because they felt safe and accepted as a part of the society. Being away from their birth family, women sought to establish new social relationships with their in-laws. Most women said that they had good relationships with their in-law family members, and that they provided crucial connections and support especially when Thai women first arrived and attempted to settle down.

On the challenging side of relational wellbeing, some women reported that they felt tremendous pressure having to financially support their family members in Thailand, especially in the first years of migration. Family expectations on migrating women to support them financially caused women stress and, in some cases, depression. However, the financial burden seemed to be alleviated as younger family members were able to support themselves or older members passed away.

In regard to their relationship with local people, most respondents reported that they did not have close relationships with local people, except for their husbands and in-law families. They mostly established close relationships with Thai people whom they trusted

and had reciprocal relationships with. Some women shared that being in an intercultural family could be a challenge because of different cultural practices in daily lives and parenting. Most women interviewed mentioned that there were some disagreements with their husbands through the course of their marriage. However, most disagreements seem to be minor and the couples were able to overcome them by having dialogues and compromising. Only a minority reported that they had come across severe conflicts or violence. Only two interview respondents said that they had experienced major conflicts and abuse in their marriage with British husbands. Nevertheless, they were assisted by social workers, police officers, Thai women's networks and other relevant organisations. Domestic abuse is a possible risk that women can face in their relationships. However, as migrants, this risk can be exacerbated because of the inability to fully understand or communicate in English and insufficient knowledge of their civil rights and British laws, which can leave women in a more vulnerable and disadvantaged position.

On the subjective wellbeing side, some respondents felt that living in the UK provided them with the opportunity to be in a more liberating society, compared to Thailand. Women referred to the class system and public gendered discourses in Thailand where people are judged based on their wealth or appearance. These values were not socially reinforced in British settings where women felt that they had more freedom from the social scrutiny they faced in Thailand. Moreover, respondents mentioned that they preferred a more inclusive labour market in the UK where age and physical appearance are not qualifications for their employment.

In terms of the challenges, most women expressed that they had gone through difficulties adjusting to a new society especially in the initial period of their migration to the UK. But having gained support from their husbands and in-law family members, in addition to their own accumulated practical knowledge and experiences of living in the country over time, women were able to overcome obstacles and adjust to their life in the British society. Interestingly, while many women felt that they belong in British society, this was primarily expressed in terms of their civic engagement, such as being a citizen, paying taxes and having voting rights. In emotional terms, most respondents expressed that they had strong attachment to Thailand. This could be in part due to their experiences of discrimination and prejudice. Several women shared their encounters with racist remarks and verbal abuse in public. However, they tended to dismiss the remarks as 'nothing' or 'little things' and, in some cases, handled the situations on their own. Most interview and

survey respondents said that they had never experienced maltreatment or violence based on their race and ethnicity. Nevertheless, I found that the feelings of being discriminated and prejudiced against were internalised by many respondents, which resulted in their own perceptions of how other people view them. It is worth noting that internalised racism is partly a product of structural stereotyping in British popular media and the Thai upper-class's discourse of *'mia farang'*. This can bring about a lack of confidence and self-consciousness about being inferior and different in a Western society.

The results also reflect the cultural and social constructs of wellbeing (White, 2008), which means that wellbeing is not objective but rather dependent on encultured and socially conditioned perceptions, or people's 'subjective' perceptions of their life situations. While material welfare and standards of living are fundamentally important, studies of wellbeing should not separate the objective from people's subjective perceptions (White 2008, p.5). As migrants, Thai women face contesting norms and values of their home and host countries. For instance, individualism and the nuclear family are norms in Western society which Thai women found to be different from their own cultural practices, and which were challenges for their wellbeing. The change from being in an extended family norm to a nuclear family norm can cause emotional distress for some women. For Thais, intergenerational, extended kinship is valued and is an essential part of one's material, relational and subjective wellbeing. According to respondents, being in an extended family means having more material and social support, and feeling more fulfilled due to being surrounded by family members. Respondents found that the value of being in an extended family was not the norm in the British setting, which could cause them anxiety and distress especially when they face difficulties in life. The different cultural and parenting practices also spark disagreement and tension in intercultural families. However, many women found that being in a Western society had given them more freedom than staying in Thailand.

It is also worth noting that the wellbeing of Thai marriage migrants was affected by their migration trajectories. Boccagni (2016) argues in the discussions of women migrants and wellbeing that,

> "[I]n the case of migrant women, in particular, the search for well-being takes different shapes and horizons over time, depending on their evolving kinship ties and obligations, on the structure of opportunities available to reconcile family and work, and on their changing perceptions of the importance of either field. Overall, migrants' search for better life opportunities may result in an

> ironic displacement, whereby their struggles are compensated by an expectation of future well-being, or even by its "externalization" in favor of their family members left behind" (p. 285)

In the first years of migration, the majority of Thai marriage migrants said that they experienced feelings of loneliness, isolation, and for some, 'culture shock'. They also carried the burden of financial remittances more than in later years of their stay in the host country. As time passes, the natal family burden seemed to decrease as children or grandchildren left behind could support themselves or elder family members passed away. Women later focused more on working and saving for themselves and their families in the UK. Moreover, as they accumulated knowledge and experiences living in the UK, they realised that they have equal rights to other British citizens, and thus tended to exercise their agency and have more confidence in their daily life. They could solve problems on their own and even offer help to other women who shared similar experiences. Their social networks also expanded (although mostly within the same ethnic group). Thai women thought about future plans and aspirations for themselves and their Thai-British families. Many women took action to actualise their plans by saving up, planning for their retirement and return to Thailand, and investing in their children's education in both the formal British system and in Thai extracurricular activities provided by Thai organisations in the UK, for instance.

According to the results, I found that the opportunities of settling down in the UK tend to be more about the material dimension, while the challenges are on the side of relational and subjective dimensions. Although living in the UK provides Thai migrants with better material wellbeing, it comes with emotional and psychological costs of being distant from their natal family and experiencing struggles in a new country. We can see the interrelatedness of the three-dimensional wellbeing. While economic and material wellbeing is measured in terms of monetary flows, relational and subjective wellbeing, which often concern emotional and psychological issues, cannot be easily measured or seen. Especially in terms of challenges for migrant women, several women reported having experienced some kind of distress or depression after migrating to the UK and facing new social settings and practices. Furthermore, burdens that migrant women carry such as financial remittances and transnational care, also take a toll on their emotional wellbeing. As Statham's (2019) investigation of Thai women's transnational marriage trajectories show, women also bear tremendous psychological and emotional burdens due to juggling between the demands from their partners and their natal families. The

challenges of emotional and psychological wellbeing are not obvious, thus more attention needs to be paid on these issues when we discuss women and transnational migration.

Chapter 8
Conclusion

8.1 Thai Marriage Migrants in the UK: Same Destination, Diverse Satisfaction

Thai women described better economic opportunities, legal protections, social services and benefits, being in a more liberating society and forging social relationships with other Thais and British extended family members as the advantages of living in the UK. Nevertheless, deskilling, lack of social capital with local people, difficulties adjusting to the host society, discrimination, family conflict and domestic abuse were marked as prominent disadvantages of living in the country. Although I broadly categorise what counts as opportunities and challenges of Thai marriage migrants in the UK, what is more interesting, is that my findings suggest that not every Thai marriage migrant perceives their opportunities and challenges in the same way.

I would like to give the example of the different life paths of Nong and Naam, both of whom I had the chance to meet and talk to around one year after my fieldwork. I had the opportunity to observe how their lives panned out after we had interviews. Here are the accounts of what happened with their lives:

> *At the time of my fieldwork, I interviewed Nong who was from Udon Thani province. After finishing secondary school, she moved to Bangkok to seek employment. While she was working as a hotel reception staff in Bangkok, she met her husband. They got married and moved to the UK in 2005. She said that she had a happy life in the UK. However, Nong told me that she and her husband were planning to move to Thailand with their 7-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter. Her husband wanted to live in Thailand and they also agreed that they wanted to enrol their children into Thai schools, so they would not lose their Thai language and heritage. They moved to a province in North-East Thailand and started anew. It appeared that it was difficult for her husband and Nong to find jobs in Thailand, having moved and lived in the UK for more than 10 years. Her husband and daughter also fell ill while living there. They had to pay expensive medical bills for the family since they were not covered by the Thai universal healthcare coverage. The family stayed in*

Thailand for less than one year and moved back to the UK, where Nong continued her same occupation as a kitchen staff at a Thai restaurant.

Naam was a successful businesswoman who owned an interior design company in Bangkok. She earned a bachelor's degree in architecture from a Thai university and had work experience in the government and education sectors. She met her British husband in Thailand, got married and decided to move to the UK with him in 2015. Naam recalled the feelings of depression after moving to the UK, saying her educational level and work experiences from Thailand were not recognised there. Naam said she had nothing to do therefore she enrolled into a local college to earn a diploma. However, she felt that the life in the UK was not for her. She felt that she had "no value", living there. Naam finally decided to discuss her discomfort with her husband and asked him to go back to Thailand for a couple of months. I met her again in Bangkok where she continued her interior design business and also did volunteer work for TWN4UK. Although she has still kept her marital relationship with her husband, she has not returned to the UK for more than a year.

As observed here, pre-migratory socio-economic class positions have significant implications on how women perceived their experiences of marriage migration. Nong was from Isan and struggled to find work in Bangkok. In the UK, she worked in a Thai restaurant while her husband worked as an event organiser and a part-time writer. Together, they could support their family in the UK and support her mother in Thailand. However, being away from her hometown for 10 years, Nong could not reconnect with the society or people there when she returned to Thailand and tried to build a family life. On the contrary, Naam, a middle-class, well-educated woman, found her life in the UK extremely challenging. She had to readjust and faced the reality that her accumulated work experiences and qualifications were not useful there. As a result, she decided to move back to Thailand and has not returned to the UK. It appears that women's socio-economic class and experiences prior to migration determine their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of moving to and living in Britain. Many women feel that they benefit from a better social service infrastructure and economic opportunities, whilst others feel that they are not welcome due to the mismatch of their skills and occupations available for migrant women. Nong and Naam are good examples of this.

Instead of asking: "what is considered as a successful transnational marriage?", we should ask: "are women satisfied in their transnational marriage life?". Throughout this research, I learned that I was dealing with a very subjective issue, rather than an objective one. Although the main purpose of this thesis is to identify opportunities and challenges of Thai marriage migrants in the UK, I argue that this needs to be done through the concept of wellbeing as it offers a subjective approach to assess satisfaction of a person in each domain. The wellbeing perspective (White, 2010) suggests that we should not only consider material gain as the sole indicator of satisfaction, but also consider if a person feels that one's life is meaningful, that they belong to a part of a community, can maintain healthy relationships, and can maintain healthy physical and mental health. In this study, it appears that women constantly weigh the upsides and downsides of leading a family life in the UK. Overall, most of them feel satisfied with living in the country. Despite some obstacles, they feel that they are more materially and emotionally fulfilled compared to living in Thailand.

By obtaining qualitative data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 31 Thai women who were in Thai-British relationships and settled in the UK, this study presents complex accounts of what constitute as opportunities and challenges for Thai women leading their lives between Thailand and the UK. To explore their lived experiences and wellbeing, there are four main components I focussed on: 1.) social network and social capital, 2.) influence of state-religious-hometown associations, 3.) Thai-British family life, and 4.) women's personal perceptions on what counts as opportunities and challenges.

This thesis provides a valuable and original contribution in examining post-migratory experiences of Thai marriage migrants which leads to a better understanding of ever-changing migratory practices of marriage migrants. Moreover, it also provides space for women to reflect on their past encounters, present experiences, and future aspirations regarding their mobilities and wellbeing. In the following section, I would like to elaborate on how each of the four empirical components contribute to a better understanding of the lives of Thai marriage migrants and their wellbeing.

8.2 Social network and social capital: what's in it for me?

It might seem unsurprising that Thai migrants tend to have a close relationship among themselves or 'stick together'. At a superficial glance, we might assume that a homogeneous language and culture are the main reasons why co-ethnics tend to have close social circles. Despite being married to British nationals, who possess social and cultural capital which could facilitate their wives' integration in the host country, it appears that Thai marriage migrants still strongly retain ties with their fellow Thai migrants and even their family and friends in Thailand. In Chapter 4, I argue that we need to ask further questions as to how social networks are formed and how social capital is exchanged among migrants, because I believe that the social circles they choose to be in, or social capital they exchange, have significant impacts on their wellbeing.

Although initially connected with other Thais by the virtue of a shared nationality, culture and migratory experiences, more importantly, I discover that Thai marriage migrants are prone to participate in social networks where their goodwill is reciprocated, the parties are trustworthy, and where they can 'command resources'. They tend to stay in social circles where there are rich exchanges of resources, e.g. financial assistance, loans, material exchange, favours, information, moral and emotional support. Nevertheless, this is not to dismiss the quality of solidarity. Many Thai migrants expressed the feeling of solidarity that according to their shared struggles as migrants in a foreign country, they extended their sympathy and helped other Thai women as much as they could. Many women said that they developed friendship with and placed their trust onto other Thais, which might be the result of clearer communications and understanding among those who shared the same (or similar) language and culture. However, I argue that the decision to participate in a specific social network or who to exchange social capital with is less of an altruistic motive than strategic and instrumental motives. Thai marriage migrants find themselves more able to command resources from co-ethnics and British family members than from other local British or non-Thais.

After the end of my fieldwork, I still spent time with other Thais in the UK, some of them were my respondents who I became friends with. I saw the dissolving of friendship among people who declared themselves 'close' due to business conflicts. A woman has always helped her friend who ran a restaurant business by filling in as a waitress when they were short of staff. She also travelled out of town to help with her friend's food truck, without getting extra pay. However, once she got sick and did not tell her friend that she could

not make it for her shift, her friend got furious and replied with upsetting messages. She realised that the restaurant owner had never thought of her as a friend and her goodwill was meaningless. She decided to cut ties with the restaurant and her friendship with the owner. This is an example of when goodwill is not reciprocated and social ties do not facilitate the command of resources (in this case, favour and money), they break down.

Another interesting finding on social network and social capital of Thai women is their relationship with their in-laws. According to Thai family values, the daughter or son-in-law are obliged to support and take care of parents-in-law. Sometimes, Thai parents-in-law assist with household chores and childcare for the couple. This intrinsic Thai family value extends to Thai women's practices in giving care to their in-laws. Being away from their birth family, Thai women fulfil familial obligations and gender roles as the "good daughter-in-law" through providing care to their British in-laws. Doing so is also a way to forge meaningful relationships and feel a sense of belonging as part of a British family. Moreover, many women shared that their British parents-in-law were the main source of support when they first arrived in the UK, and their support had a crucial impact on their improved wellbeing.

Most respondents interviewed expressed that they still maintained strong ties with family and friends in Thailand. The implication for this is two-fold. First, the inability to integrate into the host society might push women to seek more moral and emotional support from people back home. Second, the advancements of ICTs and instant online communications might also contribute to the lower motivation to bridge their social capital with local people as women can easily command and exchange resources with their family in Thailand, rather than with the locals. Although Putnam (2007) suggests that while people bond their social capital with their co-ethnics, their bridging does not necessarily decline. However, according to my data, I find that the majority of them seemed to engage in a high level of bonding with other Thais while engaging in a low level of bridging social capital with locals and non-Thais. What is more interesting is that, the more interactions women have with their family and friends in Thailand, the less frequent they want to return to the country. I argue here that the transnational perspective is important in studying social networks and social capital of migrants as we will not understand a migrant's forms of social ties in the host country without examining their connections with the stay-at-homes.

I maintain that being part of an extended social network is vital to marriage migrants' relational wellbeing. Having friends one can confide in and exchange materials with or ask for help in pressing times, is important for improving wellbeing of migrants. I find that those who had a limited social network and social capital in the host country are in more distressed conditions than others who were in a tight-knit social network, both with co-ethnics and locals. By bringing in social capital and social network perspective into the study of Thai marriage migrants, this thesis offers a deeper exploration on how co-ethnic network works and how social capital is earned and exchanged among Thai marriage migrants in the UK.

8.3 Cross-border connections: complexities, continuity and disruption

As discussed in various literature on Thai women's marriage migration, I find that Thai women retain cross-border connections through obligations of a dutiful daughter and filial piety. Women still financially support their family members in Thailand even though they have moved to the other side of the world while struggling to settle in new countries themselves. However, cross-border connections are not only defined by financial flows. A migrant's symbolic practices of homeland culture, values and norms, ritual, and religion, for example, are worthwhile to be examined in a transnational perspective. In Chapter 5, I investigate the interactions between the influence of the hometown associations i.e., Buddhapadipa temple, and Thai women in the UK. I discover that Thai women participate in the temple's activities in various degrees. As a religious, state-sponsored organisation, Buddhapadipa projects traditional, conservative Thai culture to the British public. As mentioned in the chapter, Thai Theravada Buddhism is inseparable from the Thai nation-building project which we can certainly observe in the case of Buddhapadipa temple. While a large number of Thai women engage in the temple's activities on festival days, a minority are devotees of Buddhist teachings and practices and are usually volunteers at the temple. The majority of women seem to visit the temple to relieve the yearning of being at home and belonging to the co-ethnic social circles. This also highlights the issue of migrants' engagement in the hometown associations where not all of them affiliate or give allegiance to the state-centric organisations. It is hence important to ask – when we discuss the influence of the hometown associations – whose homeland is it? Not all Thais feel they belong to the central region culture. People from Northern, North-Eastern, Southern and Western regions of Thailand possess their own

regional cultures, dialects, practices and traditions. Most of the frequent temple-goers expressed that they leaned on the royalist camp and conservative political views. While other occasional temple visitors did not feel that they belong in the temple circle and only visit for occasional festivities and to earn money selling food. Here, we can observe the reproduction of Thai class relations and rural-urban cleavage in the temple's domain. I noticed that the main volunteers at the temple were women from Bangkok and the Southern region, with conservative political views and middle-class backgrounds. Women from different regions and class backgrounds might find themselves excluded from this circle due to differentiated values, socio-economic backgrounds, and political views.

Another significant research result on Thai women's cross-border linkages is that the characteristics of transnational links they maintain are not consistent and change over time. With the value of *'luk katunyu'* (grateful child), Thai daughters are tasked to be the main source of support for their family. I learn that Thai marriage migrants tend to consistently send back financial remittances in the first years after they migrate, but the amount gradually decreases as the time passes. As their family members gain the ability to support themselves, sick members recovered, or elderly members passed away, women's financial burden to their Thai kin is minimised. Along with rising burdens on the UK side, when they welcome their first child, trying to set up a business, or struggling with high living costs in the UK; financial remittance hence declines over time, due to changing life circumstances.

It was also gripping to hear many women describe what happened as lives progressed and their burdens relieved. At the same time, they expressed that they did not have a close emotional kinship bond with their Thai family, as illustrated in Chapter 6. I learn that those who voiced similar views were women from rural and poorer backgrounds in Thailand. Being the ones who migrated to a Western country and gained 'better' opportunities than their kin, they were expected to support their family members at home. Several women shared that they felt immense pressure of having to support people back home. Therefore, they attempted to seek employment as soon as they settled in the UK. These transnational linkages have become transnational responsibilities. Many women did not feel the yearning to go back to their family, even though they experienced hardships – in some cases, domestic abuse – and even said that they "don't know where to go". They expressed the impression of being "not here nor there" – not feeling they

belong in any society because their homeland pushed them to search for better opportunities – whilst simultaneously, in the destination country, they struggled with unsuccessful relationships, were excluded from the labour market and faced discrimination. These women had experiences of internal rural-urban migration, as young labourers, prior to moving to the UK. Their emotional belonging with their natal families were detached. The familial or kinship bond has become a duty, which is reduced to just a matter of economic transactions. Moreover, many marriage migrants feel excluded from both their homeland and host country. The stigma of *'mia farang'* in Thailand and being the 'Thai bride' in the UK pushes them into a space where they do not belong anywhere.

In contrast, women from middle-class backgrounds, with higher education and who have worked in white-collar jobs in Thailand expressed that they had close relationships with their natal family and aspired to go back to the homeland in their retirement. Most of them had not internally migrated and were from families that could financially support them. Some lamented about being away from their Thai family and friends and kept regular contacts back home. Given that they had encountered hardship during their time in the UK, their Thai family would be able to support them. Reversed remittances were seen in this group, where family members in Thailand financially supported migrants at times of difficulties.

Unlike other literatures on Thai marriage migration which heavily focus on women from poor Isan areas, I offer a comparative aspect on class and a reflection on life-course circumstances. As my samples were distributed among Thai women from various socio-economic backgrounds, some interesting patterns emerged from the findings. I argue that a woman's different socio-economic class backgrounds determine diverse migratory expectations, decisions and future aspirations, as illustrated at the beginning in the case of Nong and Naam. These cases show us that pre-migratory socio-economic class positions and lived experiences also affect different post-migratory class mobilities among marriage migrants. Women from working-class backgrounds mostly found themselves in an upward economic mobility after migration, whereas middle-class women voiced that they face downward mobility in terms of deskilling. It should be noted that the elements of class and life-course are crucial to the production of knowledge on transnational migration. Women who came to the UK at a young age (20s-30s) find it easier to adjust to the environment and the society, whereas those who move to the UK in their 30s-40s, in the middle of their career, find it more difficult to adjust and change

their career path. These cases remind us that transnational migration is a process where there are always transformations in migrants' lives. Without taking their life-course into account, we would not be able to fully grasp their decisions on mobilities.

8.4 Intercultural union of Thai-British couples: working through differences

Exploring the issue of Thai women's transnational marriage in terms of their family life is one of this thesis's original contributions to migration studies. In Chapter 6, I explore Thai-British relationships through the concept of the intercultural union. I argue that intercultural unions must be examined in the intersection with transnationalism. As women's cross-border connections permeate into practices, decisions, and negotiation in the family.

As mentioned, women's transnational responsibilities put them in the position of working women. With the employment structure in the destination country where they are often pushed to work in the low-paid service sector, with long and unsocial working hours; their relationship with their husbands are affected by these factors. The issue of "not spending enough time with each other" reflects the different positions of British husbands as a native citizen and Thai wives as migrants. While most British husbands are employed in jobs with normal, daytime working hours, Thai wives work in the service sector where occasionally they have to work odd and long hours, as restaurant workers or supermarket staff, that sometimes requires them to work night shifts. This has caused the mismatch of lifestyles which could lead to conflicts in the household.

While I focus on how the different cultures between British husbands and Thai wives play out in their relationships, it is fascinating to discover that cultural differences – such as household and child-rearing practices, and issues of intimacy – do not cause conflicts in the relationship as much as economic differences. While sometimes, cultural differences bring about arguments in the household, these arguments appear to be minor and can be resolved by learning each other's culture, understanding and compromise from both sides. Nevertheless, economic, situational or personal issues often lead to more intense conflicts in the household which are more likely to cause the breakdown in the family. As shown in the case of Nim, who had a major clash with her British ex-husband about bringing in her children from a previous marriage into their household. The family

situation worsened as verbal abuse from her ex-husband evolved into physical violence, which forced her to leave home and end up in an emergency shelter.

Moreover, it is worth noting that some women implied that there was power play in the Thai-British family where Thai wives were always the ones who had to assimilate to their husbands' cultural practices. Being Thai migrants in the UK, Thai women grappled with learning English in order to communicate with locals. However, in the household, they attempted to instil their children with the Thai language and speak the language to them in the house. Some women found that they wound up in disagreement with their husbands since their husbands asserted that English is the main language in the household. Without making the effort to learn their wives' language, in few cases, British husbands set rules barring Thai language use at home. This was a concern for Thai women who desired to teach their children the Thai language and heritage. Child-rearing is also a contesting domain between Thai wives and British husbands where conflicts and negotiations on different values and practices occur. Opal shared that she and her husband argue more often after having their first child, mostly over different practices in child-rearing. She claimed that cultural differences were the main source of disagreement between herself and her husband. According to her, there was a clear demarcation of 'Thai' and 'Western' way of child-rearing and she found herself struggling to assert Thai practices onto her children.

Being in an intercultural union also affects identity transformation for Thai women. Getting caught up in-between their own culture and their husbands', Thai women transformed themselves through learning, negotiating and at times resisting diverse cultural practices. Women noticed themselves changing from being a listener to a speaker in the relationship. They realised that they did not have to be submissive to Thai family practices and traditional gender roles where women were expected to be the homemaker and listener. In the Western context, they learned to stand up for themselves, have reasonable discussions and voice their opinions and needs with their partners.

8.5   Opportunities and challenges for Thai marriage migrants

Following the three empirical chapters, in Chapter 7, I culminate the findings and attempt to identify perceived opportunities and challenges Thai marriage migrants encounter whilst living in the UK. I asked women what the positive and negative aspects of moving

and settling down in the country are. I use the results from this question along with observations I made in Chapter 4 to 6, to classify opportunities and challenges of Thai women. Using the three-dimensional wellbeing (White, 2008; 2010) as a frame to categorise women's experiences, we can see a clearer picture of how they perceive their experiences in each term: material, relational and subjective. While opportunities of Thai marriage migrants are evident in terms of material wellbeing, their challenges concentrate on the side of relational and subjective wellbeing. Although women earn more income and gain the ability to financially support their family, there are emotional and psychological costs of migration and readjustment to life in a new society. Also, Thai women face further challenges as their married life progressed: keeping up with high living costs, disagreement over child-rearing and household issues, conflicts in the family, and domestic abuse for instance.

During my fieldwork, I talked to women who went through serious family conflicts and violent abuses. The findings suggested that these women did not only struggled with language barriers, but also their general and legal knowledge on how and where to receive appropriate service and assistance when they encountered distressed situations. I also had the chance to talk to them about their experiences and how they recovered and rebuilt their lives in the aftermath of separation and violence. It appears that their experiences had equipped them with the knowledge and capabilities to navigate through potential obstacles. Some women used their own unpleasant experiences to help others who fell into similar circumstances. Interestingly, those who faced these unfortunate events still desired to remain in Britain. Although they encountered violent conflicts with their British partners, they believed that they could gain better opportunities in employment and social mobility than moving back to Thailand.

By studying opportunities and challenges in the context of transnational marriage, we consequently understand women's decisions and future aspirations regarding migration and family life. Their pre-migratory conditions play an important part in their decisions to stay or return. Thai marriage migrants constantly compare the impacts on their wellbeing living 'here' or 'there' and strategically make plans for themselves and their families. Most women said that they wanted to eventually return to Thailand, but as long as they were capable of working and supporting their Thai and British families, they would remain in the UK. Nevertheless, some women were less enthusiastic about the future prospects of returning to their homeland. Moving away from her Isan hometown

to work in a Bangkok factory as a teenager and then moving to the UK with her then-husband as a young woman; Siri said, "my family is here", during our interview in her Southwick home, talking about her established, content life in Britain and her pride in raising her three Thai-British children on her own. She had lost attachment to her natal family and relatives whom she felt always put a financial burden on her.

It is crucial to note that Thai women do not perceive their opportunities and challenges in a homogeneous way. Different pre-migratory class positions, post-migratory class mobilities, life-course and family situations engender diverse perceptions of their own experiences which lead to different decisions and aspirations for themselves and their family. Thai women's wellbeing is a transnational and collective matter. Besides their personal health and socio-economic status in the society, their wellbeing was often defined by their capability to materially and emotionally support both their Thai and British families and maintain their relationships with others. How they balance the needs of family members 'here' and 'there', whilst taking care of their own needs and wellbeing.

8.6   Policy recommendations

On the British side, there should be policies which promote community engagement both within co-ethnic community and between migrants and local people. Community engagement would improve relational wellbeing of migrants by helping them adjust to new settings and relieve a sense of loneliness and isolation. Community engagement would also bridge social capital of Thai migrants and locals. Moreover, it would help overcome prejudice and stereotypes of migrants, as well as build trust and understanding among people from diverse ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds. Policies which promote migrants' relational wellbeing will benefit at the individual and community level. From research findings, belonging in extended social networks and having rich exchange of social capital will improve migrants' wellbeing and could even prevent crime.

The Thai government should adopt a more proactive approach in improving Thai migrants' wellbeing by improving dissemination of information. Although the minority of the research sample indicated that they faced extreme family conflicts and domestic abuse whilst in the UK, representatives from TWN4UK shared that family issues are the top concerns for the network and the problems could be mitigated if Thai women

understood British law and their basic rights as a lawful spouse or British citizen. The information of basic British family and immigration law, tips about living in the UK, and contacts of local organisations or Thai organisations in the UK which assist women in times of need, for example, should be widely distributed in the Thai community. The information should not limit to online sources because many women still struggle to navigate on online platforms. Furthermore, Thai women who are moving abroad should be equipped with basic information and legal knowledge before they arrive in the destination country.

8.7   Suggestion for future research

Having explored Thai women's social networks, hometown associations engagement, their family life and wellbeing, there are still numerous issues to be studied in the future. Although I had asked women about their future aspirations regarding their return and family life, we do not know if these plans will be materialised in the future. A longitudinal study on this topic would point out what factors have an impact on their ability to carry out these plans. The age of women when they first migrate abroad might also determine the differences of their expectations and satisfaction of living in another country. Moreover, it is also interesting to investigate the upcoming trend of Thai marriage migration; if it increases or decreases and why.

The topic of children of Thai-Western descents is also understudied. My work presented a glimpse of the relationship of Thai mothers and their Thai-British children in their early years. We could see that there were tensions both between Thai mothers and their Thai-British children, and between Thai-British children and their peers. The feelings of being different from their British counterparts often result in resistance of Thai-British children to learn or accept their mother's culture and heritage. There are many questions worth examining. For example, how a Thai-British person navigate their life in the UK as an adult? Do they assimilate or feel alienated from the British society? How do they perceive their identity and positions in the society? In which country or culture do they feel they belong in? What are their aspirations in life?

My initial intention of this research was to study the views of both Thai wives and British husbands. But due to limited time and resources, I could only conduct interviews with Thai women. I had done a couple of pilot interviews with British husbands who had extensive knowledge on Thailand and had spent years in the country prior to getting

married to their Thai wives and moving back to the UK. These men said they understood their wives' practices and were quite open about bi-cultural and bi-lingual practices at home. However, I am intrigued to learn about different opinions of British husbands who had limited knowledge of Thai values and practices; what are their opinions about being in an intercultural union and how they manage their relationships in the household, for instance. Furthermore, it is noteworthy to ask if British husbands aspire to move to Thailand in the future since retirement migration to Thailand is currently popular among Westerners; and what do the Thai-British family do to achieve the plan.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Guide

(For Thai migrants)

1. General questions

-   Can you please introduce yourself? Where are you from? How old are you? Why did you come to the UK?

-   What is the main reason why you moved to the UK?

-   How did you meet your husband?

-   Did anyone help you with the arrangement to move? Is there anyone who influence your decision to come to the UK?

-   Can you describe the process of marriage registration? Did you have to make the process both in Thailand and the UK?

-   When you first arrived here, did you have any contact or connection with locals or Thai people who lived here before? Did they help you settle down in the UK?

-   What kind of job did you have in Thailand? What is your occupation now? If working in different occupations, why did you change your occupation?

-   Can you tell about me about your experiences when you first came here? How was adaptation? Do you feel anything different from Thailand?

-   Can you describe your daily life?

2. Transnational links

-   Who do you still maintain contact with people back home? Do you have children back in Thailand? Do you still communicate and/or support them?

-   How often do you contact family members and friends in Thailand?

-   How do you contact people back in Thailand? (Telephone, LINE application, Facebook chat, FaceTime, Skype, etc.)

-   Do you send money back to family members in Thailand? How much and how often?

-   Do you know how your family spend the money you give them?

- Do you send money back to Thailand to support activities such as religious donations, charities, associations, political groups, etc.?
- How often do you go back to Thailand? How long? What did you do there?
- How do you feel when you go back to Thailand? Is there anything different?
- How do you think your Thai family and friends back home think about you when you go back to Thailand?
- Do you join in activities with Thai community in the UK such as going to temples, join in Thai associations, for example. What do you do there? How do you feel about going to these events?
- Do you follow news in Thailand? How do you feel about the current situations in Thailand?

3. Social network
- Do you have a trusting relationship with Thai friends or local friends (British)?
- Do you visit your husband's family? Do you consider them reliable when you have issues in the UK?
- Where do you seek support when you experience problems in your daily life?
- Do you use any forms of social media? (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Line) How do you think these platforms have positive or negative impact on your life?
- Are you a member or visitors of any web boards (Pantip.com, Ladyinter.com, etc.)? What are the main topics that you view or join in the discussions? Do you find these platforms beneficial for people who live abroad?
- Have you ever help anyone in need when you are in the UK? Please explain how.

4. Aspiration
- Before coming to the UK, did you have any expectations? What did you imagine living in the UK to be like? Were your expectations met?
- Do you experience any culture shock while you are here?
- How do you feel about your overall well-being living in the UK now? What do you wish to be improved or changed?
- What do you like most about living in the UK? And what do you dislike or think are the most challenging issues living here?

5. Identification
- Where is you 'home'?
- Do you miss 'home'? What makes you miss 'home'?
- Do you listen to music and watch television in Thai or English?
- Do you feel belong in the British society?
- How do you think British people think about Thai people?
- How do you think people perceive your relationship with your British partner?
- Have you ever contacted Thai embassy or NGOs while living here? What did you contact them for? What was the experience like?
- How often do you go to Thai temple? Do your husband and children go with you? Of what religion is your children?
- If you can compare between Thailand and the UK, what do you think are better/worse or different?
- Have you and your family members experienced any forms of discrimination in their daily lives, in schools, or in governmental offices?
- What do you think 'Thainess' mean?

6. Family life
- Does intercultural relationship bring any opportunities or challenges?
- Who make decisions in the family (regarding money, child-rearing, family affairs)? Who takes which responsibility in the family?
- Who have more roles in child-rearing? What side of the culture do you teach your children?
- Have you had any disagreement regarding raising your children?
- If any conflicts arise in the family, how do you manage such conflicts?
- What do you think are the causes of conflict in your family?
- Have you ever heard about domestic violence of other Thai-British families? Can you describe about it?
- Which language does dominate in the household? Who speak which language with whom?
- Do you have good relationship with your neighbours? Can you ask them for help if you need them?
- What do you do on the weekends?

- What kind of food do you make when you are at home?
- Do you get invited to parties or dinner with other British families?
- Do your husband and children talk to your Thai family? Do they support each other in anyway?
- Do you think it is important for children born and raised in the UK to know about their migrant parents' heritage and cultural root? If yes, how do you educate your children about your heritage?
- Do you intend to settle down in the UK permanently or eventually go back to Thailand?
- How do you think your life (and family) will be like in 5 years?

Appendix B

Biographical information form
(For Thai migrants)

Respondent: ……………

Please fill in the form below

1. When were you born?

   (YEAR) …………….……

2. Do you have any dependent family members in Thailand?
   ☐ Yes
   If yes, who are they?

   1. ……………….……………………………. age……………
   2. ……………….……………………………. age……………
   3. ……………….……………………………. age……………
   4. ……………….……………………………. age……………
   5. ……………….……………………………. age……………

   ☐ No

3. Where in Thailand do you come from?

   …………………….……………….………………………………..

4. In which year did you move to the UK with the intention of remaining here to live for a considerable period of time (if prompted, at least more than 1 year)?
   (YEAR) …………….……

5. What is the highest education level that you attained in Thailand?

   ☐ No diploma
   ☐ Primary school
   ☐ Secondary school
   ☐ Higher non-University education (vocational/professional training)
   ☐ University undergraduate
   ☐ University postgraduate

6. If any, how many hours paid work per week do you do?

   ☐ None - Unemployed/seeking work

     ☐ None - Retired
     ☐ None - Ill health/disability
     ☐ None - Parental leave
     ☐ None - Caring for a family member
     ☐ None - Housewife (only if others do not apply)
     ☐ Yes - Less than 12 hours per week
     ☐ Yes - Between 12 hours and 30 hours per week
     ☐ Yes - More than 30 hours per week

If YES, what is your occupation? ……………………………………….

7. On what basis are you resident in the UK?
     ☐ British citizen
     ☐ Indefinite Leave to Remain
     ☐ Marriage Settlement and Partner/Spouse Visa
     ☐ Fiancée Visit Visa
     ☐ Student Visa
     ☐ Visit tourist Visa
     ☐ Other please specify …………………………………………..

8. Do you hold a Thai passport?
     ☐ Yes
     ☐ No

9. What best describes your current marital status with a British in the UK?
     ☐ Married (legally)
     ☐ Cohabiting/living with partner
     ☐ Divorced
     ☐ Separated (only if none of others)
     ☐ Widowed
     ☐ Single (never married)

10. In what year did you get married to your current partner?

    ………………………..

11. How old is your partner (and/or former partner) of British/European origin?

    ………………………..

12. How many children do you have from your current and previous relationships and how old are they? (If no children go to 12)

12.1 Number of children from previous relationship (s) ……………
12.2 Age of children from previous relationship (s)
1. ……………………..

2. ……………………..
3. ……………………..
4. ……………………..

12.3 Number of children from current relationship ……………

12.4 Age of children from current relationship

1. ……………………..

2. ……………………..
3. ……………………..
4. ……………………..

13. Regarding children under the age of 18 years, which of the following describes your current household situation? (multiple choice – can select more than one)
☐ Children from British/European partnership living with me in UK
☐ Children from previous relationship with Thai partner living with me in UK
☐ Children from previous relationship with Thai partner living with relatives in Thailand
☐ British/European Partner's children from former relationship living with me in UK

14. How would you describe your financial situation?
☐ Precarious – I don't have enough money to live on
☐ Hard – I just have enough to survive on
☐ Acceptable – I am able to make ends meet satisfactorily (but not really save)
☐ Comfortable – I am able to save some money
☐ Affluent – I have more than enough to live on

15. If at all, do you send money to support family in Thailand?
☐ No
☐ Yes, less than £50 GBP per month
☐ Yes, between £50 and £100 per month
☐ Yes, between £100 and £200 per month
☐ Yes, more than £200 per month

16. How often do you have problems with the English language in a conversation?
☐ Never
☐ Rarely
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often
☐ Always

Appendix C

Interview Guide

(For British spouses)

1. General questions
- Have you been in Thailand before meeting your wife? What was the purpose of visiting?
- How did you meet your wife?
- How long have you known each other?
- Did you get married here or in Thailand?
- Can you understand or speak Thai?

2. Social network
- How is your relationship with your wife's family?
- Do you give money to your wife's family?
- How is your wife's relationship with your British family?
- Apart from your wife, do you have any Thai friends?
- Do you accompany your wife to Thai religious or cultural events? (attending temples, join Thai festivals)
- What do you think about your wife's cultural activities?
- Does your wife socialise with your friends or other British friends?
- Do you use any forms of social media? (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Line) How do you think these platforms have positive or negative impact on your life?
- What do you think about your wife's use of these social media?
- Do you socialise with other parents who are in Thai-British relationships?
- How do you think people perceive relationship between Thai women and British men? Have you ever come across any stereotypes or prejudices?
- Did you vote to stay or leave the European Union?
- Do you think Brexit will affect your family in any way?

3. Family life

- Do you think being in a relationship with a person from a different culture bring any opportunities or challenges?
- Do you think it is difficult to communicate or understand each other?
- Are you satisfied with the wellbeing of your family right now? Do you want anything to change or improve?
- Have you ever helped your wife coping with homesick or loneliness from being away from Thailand?
- Who make decisions in the family (regarding money, child-rearing, family affairs)? Who takes which responsibility in the family?
  - Who takes children to school?
  - Who goes to parents meeting at school?
  - Who manages money in the house?
  - Who takes care of household chores?
  - Who takes care of children?

- Who have more roles in child-rearing? What side of the culture do you teach your children?
- Do you think there are any challenges raising children of two cultures in the UK?
- Have you had any disagreement regarding raising your children? (examples)
- If any disagreements or misunderstandings arise in the family, how do you manage them?
- Do you think cultural differences are the cause of disagreements and misunderstandings in your family?
- Have you ever heard about problems or disagreement of other Thai-British families? Can you describe about it?
- What do you think are the keys to a successful relationship?
- Which language does dominate in the household? Who speak which language with whom?
- How do you feel when your wife speaks Thai with your children?
- Do you want your children to learn about Thai culture and Buddhism?
- What do you and your family do on the weekends?
- What kind of food do you make when you are at home?

- Do you get invited to parties or dinner with Thai people?

- Have you ever thought about raising your family in Thailand?

- How do you think your life (and family) will be like in 5 years?

Appendix D

Biographical information form

(For British Spouses)

Respondent: ……………

Please fill in the form below

1. When were you born?

   (YEAR) …………….……

2. Where was your birthplace?

   ……………………………………………………………………..

3. What is the highest education level that you attained?

   ☐ No schooling completed
   ☐ Nursery school to 8th grade
   ☐ Some high school, no diploma
   ☐ High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
   ☐ Some college credit, no degree
   ☐ Trade/technical/vocational training
   ☐ Associate degree
   ☐ Bachelor's degree
   ☐ Master's degree
   ☐ Professional degree
   ☐ Doctorate degree

4. If any, how many hours paid work per week do you do?

   ☐ None - Unemployed/seeking work
   ☐ None - Retired
   ☐ None - Ill health/disability
   ☐ None - Parental leave
   ☐ None - Caring for a family member
   ☐ None - Housewife (only if others do not apply)
   ☐ Yes - Less than 12 hours per week
   ☐ Yes - Between 12 hours and 30 hours per week
   ☐ Yes - More than 30 hours per week

   If YES, what is your occupation? ………………………………………

5. What best describes your current marital status with your Thai partner?

☐ Married (legally)
☐ Cohabiting/living with partner
☐ Divorced

☐ Separated (only if none of others)
☐ Widowed

6. In what year did you get married (or start the relationship, if not married) to your current partner?

……………………..

7. How old is your partner (and/or former partner) of British/European origin?

……………………..

8. How many children do you have from your current and previous relationships and how old are they? (If no children go to 11)

8.1 Number of children from previous relationship (s) …………….
8.2 Age of children from previous relationship (s)
1. ……………………..
2. ……………………..

3. ……………………..
4. ……………………..

8.3 Number of children from current relationship …………….

8.4 Age of children from current relationship

1. …………………….
2. ……………………..
3. ……………………..
4. ……………………..

9. Regarding children under the age of 18 years, which of the following describes your current household situation? (multiple choice – can select more than one)

☐ Children from current partnership living with me in UK
☐ Children from previous relationship with living with me in UK
☐ Children from previous relationship living with previous partner

10. How would you describe your financial situation?
☐ Precarious – I don't have enough money to live on
☐ Hard – I just have enough to survive on
☐ Acceptable – I am able to make ends meet satisfactorily (but not really save)
☐ Comfortable – I am able to save some money
☐ Affluent – I have more than enough to live on

11. Have you ever been to Thailand?
☐ Yes (if yes, continue to next question)
☐ No (if no, skip to question 15)

12. When was the first time (year) did you visit Thailand and for what purpose?

………………………………………………………

13. What was the longest period that you have spent in Thailand?

....

14. How often do you visit Thailand?

☐ Less than once a year
☐ Once a year
☐ Twice a year
☐ Three times a year
☐ More than three times a year

15. What are the purposes of your visiting to Thailand?
(you can answer more than one)
☐ Accompany my wife/family
☐ Leisure
☐ Business
☐ Visit Thai family members
☐ Others (please specify) …………………………………………….

16. How would you rate your fluency in Thai language?

	Fluently	Fairly fluently	Moderately	With difficulty	Only a few words	Not at all
I speak Thai						
I write Thai						
I read Thai						
I understand spoken Thai						

17. Have you ever had difficulties communicating with your Thai partner?
☐ Never
☐ Rarely
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often
☐ Always

Appendix E

Interview Guide
(for elite interviews)

1. Please describe your organisation's mission and your responsibilities
Can you please provide numbers or statistics of Thai population in the UK? What are the trends and current situations?

2. Do you have numbers on emigration of Thai population from the UK?

3. Do you have statistics on remittances of Thai migrants in the UK?

4. Are Thai citizens allowed to hold dual citizenship or hold two passports?

5. What are the main purposes of Thai migrants in moving to the UK?

6. What do you think are the approaches of the British government toward Thai marriage migrants in the UK?

7. How does the changing British visa policy affect Thai immigration to the UK?

8. What do you think are the prominent issues concerning Thai marriage migrants? What are challenges or issues, and how do you handle them?

9. What are your organisation's responsibilities toward Thai migrants? Do you provide assistance? What are the policies?

10. Does Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs cooperate with other agencies on the issue regarding Thai migrants in the UK?

11. Can you please elaborate on the role of three counterparts (home, temple and Embassy), on how they cooperate with one another?

12. How does your organisation promote Thai culture in the host country? What are the main activities and their importance?

13. Does the Thai government have policy which support wellbeing of Thai people abroad?

14. How do you think Thai migration to other countries affect the Thai economy and society?

15. How do you think Thai migrants give back to their homeland?

16. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of moving from Thailand to abroad?

17. In the state's view, what are the advantages or disadvantages of forming intercultural family?