



## Channels to Meet Foreign Partners and the Daily Life Adaptation in the Current Society of the Southern Thai Families Whose Members are married to Foreigners

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### **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative research study used a phenomenological approach by studying from 20 families in southern Thailand whose members are married to foreigners (Western and Asian) and live in various provinces in the south, including Songkhla, Surat Thani, Krabi, Trang, Phuket, Trang, and Chumphon. The data was analyzed by using an interpreting method. The inductive reasoning was performed and the results then were presented in a descriptive analysis. The study results reveal that the channels to meet foreign partners are through working in similar or the same occupations and working in the fields that are likely to meet the foreigners, such as teaching English language in high schools, teaching foreign languages, and studying abroad. The adaptation started early since when they began dating. The results also find that these days the society began to open wide about marriages between Thais and foreigners than in the past. For economic adaptation, most families are moderate to good standing. Due to current economic conditions, higher cost of living affect the family economic condition, they then agree to resolve the problem by reducing unnecessary costs within the family and maintain austerity budget to reduce unnecessary costs in order to have sufficient income for the family. For the cultural adaptation, Thai families whose members are married to foreigners uniquely have positive attitude and openness to ideas and able to exchange ideas with each other when they see things differently. The foreign spouses are also able to accept and learn the southern Thai culture, and at the same time the families are also open to learn the foreign culture.

**Keywords:** Adaptation, families in southern Thailand, foreign spouses, meeting channels.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Marriage to a foreigner in Thailand has occurred for a long time; the obvious period was in the Ayutthaya until the reign of King Rama IV and Rama V, when the imperialism was trying to invade into the country. In addition, during the Vietnam War when the Americans were setting up bases in Thailand (1965-1975 AD), many entertainment businesses and prostitutions were established to serve the needs of these American soldiers. Later on, at the end of the Vietnam War, the Americans retreated back to their country. In the past, marriage to a foreigner was viewed as negative. But, in reality, not all people who married or living with a foreigner are prostitutes or hoping for economic benefits (Mettharikanon, 2011). Today cross-cultural marriages have many different conditions from the past. Together with the values and social changes, Thai people perspectives have changed. In addition, there is a whole range of political, economic and cultural organizations; from the simple life forms to a more complex social structure. Starting from a single-family household with family members to other units in the society, family is the beginning of human society that is important to both the biological and social relationships. Humans are cared for and learning from their family (Vogel, 1968). Thus, family is the most important part for human of every society. And today's society, in a globalized condition, is in the current situation where the world is changing fast and furious in all aspects of social, economic, political and technology, as a result from the information technology development and the economic structure. World politics has resulted in various countries have mutual dependence and links between each other more than in the past. The world that used to be big thus seems to smaller than ever. A country that is far away from one another can communicate with each other within seconds like a global village. Mountains and seas which are natural borders that had long been a barrier for us to communicate and travel to each other seem to disappear. The world thus has become boundless. The influence of globalization pose a driving force competing in various fields whether it is the global industries, increased competitors in the market economy etc. More and more the states are facing each other. Public and private sectors will no longer have borders between their management. The states will reduce their role in the regulation, but will increase their role in supporting the private sector and the public sector (Maharatsakul, 2000). From now on, the world is entering a period of change which is greatest transition of world history in the era of globalization. This refers to the interconnected global information community. No matter where you are, you can quickly perceive and are affected by what is happening due to the development of information technology. According to the fast growing telecommunication, the globalized society is then the period where the information has no borders. This is the era of development and the dramatic changes in technology. Communication and transport are linked to other countries making them are closer. It makes the world become a small village. The global flows in the form of information capital, some values and culture values have spread widely throughout the world. The world is a globalized world where humans can cross national borders more quickly by using technology as a tool of communication in a borderless way. Each country cannot block economic vitality. In addition, the economy's system has changed fundamentally from the industry's economic base to the information based economy, which is directly related to the news production process management. News has become a product, and the human community has become very close. Due to these factors, it makes the distance between humans is not an obstacle anymore. People can travel or communicate with each other easier. Families of cross-cultural marriages have increased today. These families have unique characteristic. This study is interested to study about the phenomena of channels to meet foreign partners and the adaptation in their daily life and social economy among the Thai families in the south of those whose members are married to foreigners. In today's society, as a family in one of the Southeast Asian countries, thus the results found then will help create knowledge and understanding for the co-existence of people in today's society. It also will help to manage about the state's welfare or product production and market services for the private sector in relation to the needs of this group of people.

### 1.1 Objectives

1. Study channels used to meet foreign partners of southern Thai people who are married to foreigners

2. Study about the adaptation of the daily social, economy, and culture family of southern Thai families who members are married foreigners in the current society.

## 2.0 Literature review

Adaptation is a mental process which people use to achieve their needs and social needs so they can fit the environment that is being or changed (Adolwatthanasiri, 2007). Humans need to live together as a group, whether it is as a family, neighbor, or a community. At times, the adaptation means an interaction between people and the environment in the society. The adaptation within the family as well that needs to happen. In every type of family there is the need to be adjusted within the family. All humans are raised by a family. Their individual self-beings are shaped by their family. This is a result of the experience of family that reflects in every aspect of our lives. All aspects of a good family life's adjustment must be valued and seen as important by family members. The warm and accepting of each other lead to the creation of happiness to occur within the family (Arkoff, 1968). Living together after marriage requires the adaptation and fulfillment of common needs between husband and wife. The responsibilities within the family are assigned, the communication and conflicts as well. The family financial and the feelings and relationships between husband and wife that change over time are all needed to managed, due to the cultural difference between people living together (Atwater, 1994). The phenomena study of channels to meet foreign partners and the adaptation of southern Thai families whose members are married to foreigners show the ways they adjust themselves in the aspects of economy, society and culture.

## 3.0 Methodology

This study used a qualitative research method of a phenomenological approach. It collected data and information from the documents and related research studies. The research tools used were non-participatory observation, in-depth interviews and focused group discussion following the interview guidelines. The key Informants in this study were the southern Thai families whose members were cross-culturally married to foreigners of the western and Asian countries. These key informant families of 20 in total were also currently living in provinces in southern Thailand. The countries that their foreign partners come from are, such as Malaysia, Japan, England, and the United States of America. The purposive sampling was used to find the sample group. The key informants were from two groups, including the first group was those living in the following provinces, Songkhla, Surat Thani, Phuket, Krabi, Trang, and Chumphon. The second group was of cultural and family academics and social development organizations. The triangulation method was used to check the accuracy of the information in the research process. Questions asked were based on the interview guideline. The people interviewed were living in different areas and from different groups. The gathered data then was verified for its accuracy by examining the information source on key topics mainly. The analytic induction was conducted relying on data interpretation and the descriptively analyzed the data. The study focused on the families of southern Thais who were married to a foreigner as their families formed by the cultural integration in the Thai society and foreign cultures. The study relied on the viewpoints of those who experienced cross-cultural marriage in the southern provinces, including of Songkhla, Surat Thani, Krabi, Trang, Phuket, and Chumphon. The interaction between people with cross-cultural marriages and other people was also studied by looking through the experiences with cross-cultural marriages in the context area of multicultural lifestyle of people and adaptation in daily social, economic, cultural and culture life of families who members married to foreigners in southern Thailand.

## 4.0 Results

### 4.1 Channels to meet foreign partners of southern Thais who married cross-culturally

The channels to meet foreign partners: it is found that they mainly met by their jobs, working in or similar occupation, and working the works that were likely to meet with foreigners, more often than

other occupations, for example, teaching high school English, teaching in a foreign language school or university, and traveling to study abroad. Some had moved from other places and returned to the provinces in the south. There is a variety careers owned by these people, such as entrepreneurship, being an employee, governmental servant or working in private organizations. Some live with their relatives and help work in their businesses. Since most of the work they involved with foreigners and they had a chance to encounter foreigners regularly, as well as the places they are living are the major tourist attraction in the south, thus there are many foreign tourists visiting. These provinces are, such as Phuket, Krabi, Surat Thani, Trang and Songkhla. The southern Thais who are married to foreign partners have a fair to good command of English language. Some of them can speak English language from the beginning. This comes from the language skills they had learned before. Some graduated in English major directly. Some southern Thai who are married to foreign partners began to not being able to speak in English; they relied on learning and receiving the speaking and listening English language in their daily life or working with the foreigners. Thus, they became able to speak English fluently. In summary, it is important to be able to communicate with foreigners which led to the marriage.

“I met my husband, because it is to work together. The same work the husband is an English teacher I am a teacher and a teaching assistant. We work in a language that the foreign teachers to teach in a school in Songkhla province. The first time I felt my friend did not feel anything for him. Then he talked to me a lot. Learn quirks that he was not flirting. Care very well dating for two years, decided to get married in Songkhla province.”

(southern Thailand female, age 34, who is married to an English husband)

“I met my wife, I went to Australia to study and go to stay with my sister. My sister worked as a manager at a hotel. I went to work there, he met his wife, a Japanese who worked there as well. My sister introduced me.”

(southern Thailand male, age 37, who is married to an Japanese wife.)

In today's society, communication technology plays significance towards people in the society. The channels that allow cross-cultural couples to meet and get to know each other are Social network. The programs that Thais who marry cross-culturally use mostly are Facebook, MSN, Skype, etc. These programs enable them to see photos and how the other look. By registering a user, creating an account with a password, these programs then are immediately available to use. Once successfully applied, the users can join a specific group; a group of friends or they can add a name or other persons not known to be friends with by asking to know (Add Facebook). These programs enable users to text and chat back and forth between each other. It can be accessed 24 hours a day, which is not a problem for couples who are in different countries and on different continents to communicate to each other. Hence this is a channel that provides the opportunity to know each other and finally meet each other to build their relationship and become lovers.

“After divorcing husband took my son returned home from Thailand to the south. Made baked goods sold by restaurants and pastry shops in Hat Yai yet had the opportunity to know Bush Thailand women who marry foreigners. Just focus on the search for foreigners who want to socialize with females Thailand. Met my husband, we've talked to the Internet and then meet me at my house. I know the family is currently dating each other. He worked as an engineer in Australia. He plans to have a family in Thailand. I did speak I use Program Facebook, MSN, Skype to communicate well.”

(southern Thailand female, age 35, who is married to an Australian husband)

“I met my husband on Facebook. That he was a teacher as well. Well, I wanted to know how to teach children. What is the medium of instruction well, it's coming appointment date.”

(southern Thailand female, age 30, who is married to an Irish husband)

In addition, another channel is being the introduction by a relative, their friends who are already married to foreigner or even some foreigners who are married to Thais. These foreigners introduced their close relatives and friends from their home country to know relatives of their Thai partners from

southern Thailand. They then continue the relationship that develops to be a loving couple and finally getting marriage.

“I know the husband of Croatia. When I worked Spa in Phuket, a shop of my aunt, who was married to her husband, the British. He was the husband of Croatia diving courses in Phuket, then I know I am. Aunt introduced me with his habits were a good person and I love to fellowship together and continued until marriage.”

(southern Thailand female, age 33, who is married to an Croatia husband)

Background information in the study is that people in this southern Thailand where cross-cultural marriage and spouses of foreigners in southern Thailand.

**Table 1:** Displaying a sex, professional, domicile.

The sequence data	Sex	Career	Domicile(Province)
1	female	private business	Krabi
2	female	family care	Songkhla
3	female	university professors	Songkhla
4	male	contractors	Suratthani
5	female	nurse	Songkhla
6	female	university professors	Suratthani
7	female	private school teachers	Songkhla
8	male	tattoo shop owner pattern and resorts	Krabi
9	female	university professors	Suratthani
10	female	family care	Songkhla
11	female	employees	Chumphon
12	female	work in the government service	Suratthani
13	female	work in the government service	Songkhla
14	female	work in the government service	Songkhla
15	female	pastry bakery	Songkhla
16	female	Owner English language school	Phuket
17	female	employees	Phuket
18	male	employees	Songkhla
19	female	family care	Suratthani
20	male	Owner Japanese restaurants	Songkhla

**Table 2:** Displaying spouses of foreign nationals married to foreigners to study.

The sequence data	Spouses of foreign nationals
1	Croatian
2	Malaysian
3	British
4	British
5	British
6	Canadian
7	Romanian
8	swede
9	Finn
10	Irish
11	South African
12	Canadian
13	Japanese
14	Australian
15	Australian
16	Dutch
17	American

18	British
19	British
20	Japanese

## 4.2 The adaptation in the social, economic, and cultural aspects of southern Thais who are married cross-culturally in the current society context

### 4.2.1 The social adaptation

The social adaptation of the families whose members are married to foreigners adapted socially since they began dating their foreign partners. In today, Thai society in the south started to open wider for the cross-cultural marriages. However, there are some Thais; for example, their relatives or community members when the Thai partners take their foreign partners to visit their families and relatives, still see that such marriages are different from marrying Thais. Today, marrying to foreigners are more accepted than in the past. People can date openly and start their family with foreigners more because Thai society open to new medias and their way of life are different from the past. Their perspectives changed, so the results are that the cross-cultural families are not different from general Thai-Thai families. The cross-cultural families are not seen as strange or negative like before. However, there is still some in the society see as different, so this requires the cross-cultural family to adapt themselves. Today, the families of those who are married to foreigners in southern Thailand have grouped themselves socially as a group of cross-cultural family. Each group might be one nationality or a group of Thais marry to foreigners. Mainly, they know each other from works or have Thai partners or meet occasionally. Since they are the same cross-cultural families, they then became very familiar with each other very quickly. This study reveals that the foreign partners usually introduce their Thai partners to other families who are also cross-cultural. They do activities together, such as having dinner, doing exercises, going to the temple. These activities are relaxing and retreating for the families. It is a specific social group.

“During the first foreigner married to a husband. My family refused to do it. The friend was shocked to think that I was a foreigner at that, my family did not understand. I tried to explain her husband and foreigners visited the house frequently so that I know that the foreign husband was a good man. Say good care It takes longer than we would accept a foreign husband.”  
(southern Thailand female, age 31, who is married to an English husband)

### 4.2.2 The economic adaptation

The adaptation of southern Thai families whose members are married to foreigners in the current society context is found to be that the majority of the families are moderate to wealthy. The reason supports this is from that their foreign partners who work in Thailand usually have high and stable income. They are also educated with a bachelor degree at least. They can communicate in various languages, such as English. Some of the foreign partners can speak Thai as well. In Thailand, it is still in needs of those with various abilities and able to command in English language. If you can speak English, it will be easy for you to find a good job and generate good income. The careers that these foreign partners have are, such as, language teacher, diving teachers in tourist spots, business owners with their Thai partners, engineers, and university teachers. Some families both Thai and foreign partners work in order to generate income to their families. The economic problems they might have are, such as, the instable economic situation now, the increased living expenses, and the increased product prices. These are the impacts that the majority of people in Thailand also are experiences due to the current economic situation. The solutions to these problems are found to be that the families solve the problems by reducing the non-necessary expense, saving more and spending less so that they will have enough money to take care of their children which is the main expense of the family. Showing each other how they are important to you, between husband and wife, is necessary for having a family like this cross-cultural one. The husbands and wives usually consult with one and another, listen to each other or make decision together on whether about their children or the family expenses. Some families

of those who are married to foreigners in the south mostly make agreement on sharing the expenses by the husband and wife within the family. They do accounting list of their personal expenses, and a family's account of all expenses as a way to plan on the family's expense. Some families the wife takes the main role in money management. The wife is the one who keeps and spends the money for any expense within the family. The husband will give all income money to her to take care of. When he wants the money or wants to buy anything, he then will ask from his wife for that. This shows about the respect and honor they have for another within the family. It also shows about the mutual decision making in living in the same family.

“The cost is expensive now, things will have to reduce the cost somewhat. Plans need to be made clear that the cost to buy anything, and my husband and I agreed that if we bought a house together. Only pay for part Pay part of the class who will also have to plan together. I was very frustrated if we ordered it. But if we allow him to think my husband happy.”

(southern Thailand female, age 39, who is married to an English husband)

#### 4.2.3 The cultural adaptation

The social adaptation of Thais who are married to foreigners in southern Thailand is found to be unique; the family members have wide open perspectives, accept other's opinions and able to disagree if they see differently. They are open to accept and learn Thai culture, southern Thai culture and the culture of the foreign partners. The Thai partners do not forget about their own culture. They usually bring their foreign partners to learn and join the southern Thai festivals. The temples act as the center of mind and location for preserving community's arts and culture. The examples of southern Thai traditions that they usually bring their foreign partners to join is the 10th lunar month merit day, Thod Kathin festival, Thod Phapa festival, Entering Buddha Lent festival. They take their partners often to walk the candles in the temple. Other local art performances in the south are, such as, Manora and Nag Talung, or the shadow play. In terms of the cultural adaptation into the local way of life, southern Thai people still maintain the local tradition of living similar to the past. For example, they eat local southern food, speak southern dialect or teach their children about the culture, and participate in the community's activities, etc. The families do not deny the adaptation of their foreign partners' culture into their family. Mostly they manage it by integrating both cultures together. Other cultural adaptation found would be, for example, giving dowry in the wedding ceremony and organizing traditional Thai wedding style. When a couple decides to marry, they arranged an engagement ceremony following the tradition maintained in the society. The man has to provide gifts to present to the woman's family. In this process the elders who are well respected act as the leaders to ask the woman's parents to allow her to marry the man. When the agreement is set, then the dowry is present during the wedding day. In abroad, the wedding tradition may be different from Thailand. Some foreign partners do not understand why they have to prepare dowry for the woman in southern Thailand. But the meaning of providing dowry in Thai society is to show honor towards the woman and her family. The families of woman from the south who are married to foreign partners used the method of explaining the man and his family that it is a cultural difference. Thus, after the understandings between both sides are made clear, then the wedding happened. But most importantly love is the important basis for the wedding.

“I decided to marry my husband in Thailand must have a culture of dowry, the man must be a woman. Husband foreigners I do not understand why requires. Then when the time comes to really marry I do not agree to this, but when my husband finally understood as a matter of tradition, culture Thailand's acceptable.”

(southern Thailand female, age 31, who is married to an English husband)

“I took my husband to the traditional lunar month merit is sent to the ancestors. Then I took him to see nang talung shadow and manora dance. Husband like a shadow. My husband Southern dialect, but I do not need a translator to understand my husband.”

(southern Thailand female, age 40, who is married to an English husband)

<p><b>Figure 1:</b> Southern Thailand's Nang Talung shadow puppetry tradition</p>	<p><b>Figure 2:</b> Manora Dance</p>
	

## 5.0 Conclusion

This study reflects the cultural diffusion and its influence on the southern Thai families whose members are married cross-culturally. The concept of cultural diffusion explains about the culture originated from one source to another, making the other culture similar to one and another. The factors that support the cultural diffusion are the geography that allows culture to diffuse into the connected areas without any geographical obstacles. Human and culture must be diffused to one and another. Today is all about communication technology. So it is faster and accessible for people to communicate. This is in accordance with the study results that southern Thai today who are married cross-culturally met their foreign partners started their communication using technology as the medium. They can use technology to search for information on their own. There are factors today that support people in the society to be able to access the technology much easier and faster than in the past. Today Thai people also are more educated, thus they have knowledge and accessibility to technology, more comfortably than in the past. The economic factor also plays a key roles in supporting the cultural diffusion. It can be seen that the economically wealthy individuals or own money can travel to other societies. Wherever they go, they will diffuse their own culture directly or indirectly. Some may go for travelling visit. Some may for trading, etc. (Wannasiri, 1997).

This supports the study results revealing about the channels of meeting between southern Thais who are married cross-culturally to foreign partners who come to visit or work in the southern provinces in Thailand, or the southern Thais who went to study abroad and had the opportunity to meet their foreign partners. They got to learn about each other, the culture and finally they got married and build their family together. When the family is from a cross-cultural marriage, there will be cultural integration within the family. This is considered to be the way of giving values of social and cultural freedom between the two people of two different cultures who decide to live their life together. They see the values and accept one another. When the cultures come to meet, the borrowing and exchange of cultures, the individuals will behave following their own culture, even though they move to live in other culture. When they meet or face with individuals who come from other culture, they then will integrate their own culture into the new one. The study results allow us to learn about the learning process between the wife and husband in southern Thai families whose members are married cross-culturally where the cultural integration is applied in their way of life, including the language, belief, culture and tradition, ideas and values. The results are in accordance with the study of cross-cultural marriages among women in the northeastern Thailand that explains about the high values the women have towards individual freedom. Among the northeastern women who are married to the westerners still see the importance or values of responsibilities and roles of both sides have to have to each other. The value of individual freedom is secondary from being a good wife and well behaves to the husband and his family (Promphakpin et al., 2008). Even though there are cultural differences, there is also a learning process of adjusting oneself to living a couple lives, so they can be happier in their family. They adjust themselves; learn the language and culture of each other. They learn specific words and slangs that they integrate them into their own family's style of communication. For example, they mix

speaking Thai and English languages. They eat Thai food together with the foreign partner's food or introduce the foreign partner to learn about the Thai tradition and culture. This is in accordance with the symbolic interactionism by George Herbert Mead that explains that what makes humans are different from other animals is the mechanism of thinking. Humans learn to plan and adjust their behaviors into the situation and goals set. They learn to communicate with others using symbols. The most important symbol is language. Humans learn to interpret what others say and respond. Furthermore, humans are aware that others might feel and have their own opinions; they then learn to understand what others are thinking and how to interpret situations, as well as how to learn about themselves leading to having their identity and self-image (Changthavanich, 2009).

The study results are in accordance with the study of cross-cultural marriages between Thai women and Japanese men. The study explains about the Thai woman families where they use Thai, Japanese and English to communicate with the Japanese husbands, and that they also give importance on Thai and Japanese cultures while living together (Thinkham, 2009) in order to understand themselves. This leads to the adaptation of living as a cross-cultural family. The southern Thais who are married to foreigners often do not abandon their original culture, both the southern and traditional Thai cultures. They also maintain to practice the daily life with local traditions, such as speaking local dialect, participating in the 10th lunar month festival, making merits for the ancestors or eating southern food. According to the study, it is found that the foreign partners do not force or obstruct the Thai partners from believing in their own traditional beliefs or practice the traditional culture. Some foreign partners can voluntarily participate in the cultural and traditional activities of the Thai partners, even though they might believe or have different religion.

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