

# Migration and Assimilation in a Nordic Setting: A Generational Analysis of the Thai Diaspora in Denmark\*

Chang Liu\*\*

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\*\* University of Copenhagen

## Abstract

The Thai diaspora is one of the biggest Asian immigrant groups in Europe, and especially in Nordic countries. Most research about Thai immigration has focused on topics related to female immigrants, such as human trafficking and transnational marriage migration, while the children of these Thai women who immigrated with their mothers from Thailand (the 1.5 generation) have been neglected, and very little attention has been paid to their assimilation into Nordic society. This article aims to shed light on Thai migration in Denmark and reexamine the key theories of assimilation that originated in the US. Furthermore, it attempts to theorize the assimilation process in a Nordic setting through an ethnographic study of Thai immigrants in Copenhagen. The research findings show that there are significant generational differences in the assimilation process between Thai women and the 1.5 generation in Denmark. However, due to the unique social structures of Nordic countries, this “dissonant acculturation” does not lead to the negative effects that the segmented assimilation theory assumes.

**Keywords:** Thai diaspora, segmented assimilation, 1.5 generation, Nordic society

The Thai diaspora in Europe has generally been viewed as a small group, and the study of Thai immigrants has been underestimated in European academia. In fact, Thai immigrants are one of the biggest Asian immigrant groups in Europe, and especially in Nordic countries. According to Statistics Denmark (2017), by the second quarter of 2017, there were a total of 11,300 Thai immigrants in Denmark, which ranked them first among the numbers of immigrants from all the Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries. The huge number of Thai immigrants also brings the flow of religion from Thailand to Denmark because around 90–95% of them are Buddhists (Borup, 2008). As described by Kitiarsa (2010), “Buddhism has become a religion which immigrants take along with them to their new homeland” (p. 114). Furthermore, the majority group of Thai immigrants in Denmark is middle-aged women, and the main pattern of migration from Thailand to Denmark is transnational marriage between Thai women and Danish men. In 2017, the proportion of female Thai immigrants in Denmark was 85.4%. However, the causes of the transnational marriage migration are debated. Suksomboon (2008) and Jungteerapanich (2014) believed the sustained phenomenon might have resulted from the popularity of Thai tourism in Europe, through which European men travel to Thailand and find wives from the local tourism and entertainment sectors. However, this does not explain why female European travelers do not find husbands in Thailand. On the other hand, some scholars have attributed the phenomenon to globalization and market forces, which commoditize marriage and women from developing countries. However, Robinson (2007) criticized

this, stating that “when a marriage is contracted, the man and woman enter into a personal relationship that cannot be reduced to a commodity exchange” (p. 483). By contrast, he emphasized the role of aspiration in “South-North” marriage migration and described it as “people moving from poor to rich countries, in search of work and improved economic circumstances” (Robinson, 2007, p. 485). However, whether these Thai women do get a better material life than they expected and still feel worthy and satisfied is questionable; many of them experience mental suffering due to problems in their transnational marriage and have difficulty getting used to the new environment.

Meanwhile, Thai temples, which recreate the feeling of the homeland, have become one of the few places where middle-aged Thai women find relief in their turbulent diaspora lives. They go to the temples to meet friends and seek advice from monks. For them, Buddhism is an important part of their diaspora lives, and they play a role in the transnational flow of religion as well. In contrast, the 1.5-generation immigrants who come to Denmark with their mothers in their early teens show very different interactions with Thai Buddhism and have assimilated into Danish society better compared to their mothers. In the context of modernization and globalization, the diaspora lives of immigrants, especially female first-generation immigrants, have been studied by many scholars (Hannah, 2010; Jongwilaiwan & Thompson 2013; Spanger, 2013a, 2013b); however, the assimilation of the children of these Thai women—the 1.5 generation—has been ignored in academia.

The segmented assimilation theory has been one of the key theories of immigrant assimilation since the 1990s. It was proposed by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993). In contrast with classical assimilation theories that usually regard assimilation as a means for upward mobility, the segmented assimilation theory argues that in the context of United States society, which is very stratified and unequal, second-generation immigrants may take three different paths of assimilation (Xie & Greenman, 2005). Waters et al. (2010) summarized the three paths (see Table 1) as follows: 1) consonant acculturation, 2) dissonant acculturation and 3) selective acculturation

**Table 1** A Summary of the Three Paths of the Segmented Assimilation Theory

Path	Process	Consequence
1	consonant acculturation	upward assimilation
2	dissonant acculturation	downward assimilation
3	selective acculturation	upward mobility combined with persistent biculturalism

**Table 2** The Number and Female Ratio of Thai Immigrants in Denmark by Age Group (2017)

Age (years old)	Male	Female	Female Ratio
Total	1647	9653	85.42%
0-9	88	52	37.14%
10-19	374	506	57.50%
20-29	482	757	61.10%
30-39	357	2321	86.67%
40-49	200	3110	93.96%
50-59	75	2128	96.60%
>=60	71	779	91.65%

**Source:** Statistics Denmark (<http://www.dst.dk>)

**Table 3** Thai Immigrants' Permits Broken Down by Type of Residence Permit in Denmark 2015

Type	Asylum	Family reunification	Work	Study	EU/EEA	Total
Number	2	436	84	107	13	642

**Source:** Denmark Statistical Overview Migration and Asylum 2015

**Table 4** Number of Permits for Family Reunification to Spouses and Cohabitants—the Largest Four Nationalities (2010–2015)

Nationality	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Syria	37	31	79	138	509	2047	2841
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>2317</b>
Philippine	362	214	223	375	270	303	1747
Turkey	333	162	127	233	180	203	1238

**Source:** Denmark Statistical Overview Migration and Asylum 2015

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) identified the specific factors that could influence the outcomes of the assimilation of second-generation immigrants as follows: 1) modes of incorporation; 2) the pace of acculturation and its bearing on normative integration; 3) challenges to second-generation youth (cultural and economic barriers); and 4) social capital (the family and community resources). In terms of “modes of incorporation,” Waters et al. (2010) stated that it includes “state definitions of immigrant groups, eligibility for welfare, degree of discrimination and antipathy toward immigrant groups” (p. 1170).

The aim of this research was to reexamine the model of the segmented assimilation theory that originated in the United States and test its assumptions of the assimilation process in a Nordic setting through an ethnographic study of Thai immigrants in Copenhagen. The research findings show that there is “dissonant acculturation” in the

assimilation process of Thai women and the 1.5 generation in Denmark. However, this dissonant acculturation does not lead to the negative effects that the segmented assimilation theory assumes due to the different social structures in Nordic countries. In the end, the paper demonstrates the peculiarity of the 1.5-generation immigration and assimilation process in a Nordic setting by showing how the 1.5-generation Thai diaspora in Copenhagen perceive their religious beliefs and assimilate into Danish society differently from their mothers. The rest of this article is organized as follows. The next section provides the research methods and data collection. The third section is an overview of Thai immigrants in Denmark. The fourth section presents the research findings of the assimilation processes of both Thai women and 1.5-generation Thai immigrants from fieldwork. The last section is the discussion and conclusion of the findings from the research.

### **Research Methods and Data Collection**

In this study, I primarily used the qualitative methodology of ethnography, but I also collected secondary statistical data from various sources. In terms of the ethnographic research, I conducted my fieldwork in Copenhagen in April 2017 and January 2018. This included participant observation of a local Thai temple, Watpa Copenhagen, and in-depth interviews with five Thai informants living in Copenhagen. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, which mainly focused on the informants' diaspora lives in Denmark, changes in their identity, and how they assimilated (or did not assimilate) into Danish society.

In addition to the fieldwork, I collected secondary statistical data from relevant official government websites and media as a supplement to the analysis.

Temple Watpa Copenhagen was chosen for the main field site considering its impact in Thai immigrant communities and the transportation convenience. It is a Thai Temple of Thammayut school built in 1992, very influential among the Thai immigrants group. According to the research of Jørn Borup (2008), "Many of whom periodically visit the three Thai Buddhist temples: Watpa Copenhagen, Wat Thai Denmark Brahmavihara Buddhist Monastery and Wat Buddha Denmark, from the Thammayut, Mahanikaya and Dhammakaya schools respectively." It is fully operated by five missionary monks in total (sometimes several elder Thai women may come here helping with the administrative work, such as the reception and coordination). It has two floors and a backyard garden, with an area of 3,105 square meters in total. Weekend is usually a busy time of the temple. Every weekend the temple provides traditional Thai food during lunch. The first time when I went to the temple, there were around 30 people there and most of them were middle-aged Thai women with their kids, but also a very few of them were the Danish husbands coming here as companions with their Thai wives. During my first visit to the temple, the head monk of the temple had an informal talk with me. After knowing my research interest of Thai Buddhism, the head monk helped me find another young monk, Payo, who can also speak English to be interviewed. Payo has been in Copenhagen for almost one year. Before he came to Denmark, he was

assigned to Germany staying for a period of five months in total. My other informants are, Mary, a 60-year old Thai woman who has come to Denmark for over 30 years and three 1.5 generation Thai immigrants who came to Denmark with their mothers during their early teens and were all studying in Copenhagen. I met Mary in the temple during my second visit to the Temple Watpa Copenhagen. She immigrated to Denmark by marrying a Danish man. Now She owns a barbershop and works as a hairdresser in Copenhagen. The other three 1.5-generation Thai immigrants are Kevin, Lily and Dam. Kevin was studying a Bachelor program of Southeast Asian Studies in Copenhagen. The other two informants, Lily and Dam, were a young couple. Dam was studying gastronomy in a vocational school and Lily was taking a language class and some elective courses in a high school. The interviews of the bachelor student Kevin and the monk were conducted in English. The other interview with the young couple was conducted in English and Thai with the translation assistance by Kevin.

To collect more valid data in the fieldwork, I used two main research techniques to prepare the interviews and select samples during the research process. The first technique was the arrangement of informal meetings with informants before the formal interview. I had informal meetings with Mary and Kevin, which proved to be very helpful to the formal interviews. Although the informal meetings were unrecorded, the valuable information collected in the meetings gave me a general picture of the Thai migrants' lives in Copenhagen and helped me reflect on and improve the initial questions designed for the interviews.

I began the fieldwork by interviewing Kevin, who was studying Southeast Asian studies. He was very interested in my research and agreed to be interviewed. He also recommended one local Thai temple to me as a field site. The information he provided about the temple helped me to better prepare before visiting it. The snowball technique was the second technique I used to find potential informants. In the meeting with Kevin, I asked him if he could introduce me to more Thai friends who would be willing to be interviewed for my research. He helped me find the couple Lily and Dam to be my informants. However, there are also some limitations to my research methods. First, the number of informants was relatively insufficient to cover all the typical Thai immigrant groups in Copenhagen, especially first-generation Thai women immigrants, who are the majority of the Thai diaspora in Denmark. Second, the use of the snowball technique might have resulted in representativeness bias. For example, when we talked about religion, the young couple and Kevin held some similar opinions on Buddhism, and they also shared similar migration experiences.

### **Thai Migration in Denmark: Modes of Incorporation**

The most notable feature of Thai immigration in Denmark is its feminization. While Jungteerapanich (2014) found that Thai communities in Sweden are highly female dominant, with a female–male ratio of 78.29% in 2013, the female ratio of Thai immigrants in Denmark was 85.4% in 2017 (see Table 1). On the other hand, most male Thai immigrants in Denmark are teenagers and young people in their twenties,

while most female Thai immigrants in Denmark are middle-aged women. As shown in Table 1, among different age groups of Thai immigrants in Denmark, the age group with the most male immigrants is 20–29 years old, while most female immigrants are between 40 and 49 years old.

Transnational marriage between Thai women and European men is widely regarded as the main reason for this immigration pattern. According to Statistics Denmark (2017), from 1999 to 2016, there were 4,590 Thai immigrant women married to Danish men in total, which accounted for 42.28% of all transnational marriages between Danish men and Asian immigrant women. These data indicate that transnational marriage has been the main source of Thai immigrants in Denmark since the middle and late 20th century. When Payo was asked if most people who come to the temple are women, he confirmed and said, “Because if you come to Denmark, it’s the only way to marry the people here. So, most are women who come.” This is also verified by the statistical data published by the Danish Immigration Service and the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration. As shown in Table 3, Thai was one of the most common nationalities in the category of residence permits for family reunification to spouses and cohabitants from 2010 to 2015. In addition, in 2015, 67.91% of Thai immigrants migrated to Denmark through family reunification, which indicates that marriage migration is the main pattern of Thai migration to Denmark. Likewise, the marriage migration of Thai women also occurs in the Faroe Islands, an autonomous country under the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Denmark. According to a BBC news story, “Wives wanted in the Faroe

Islands,” by Tim Ecott (2017), due to the population decline in recent years and the leaving of young women, there is a “gender deficit,” with fewer women than men. Thus, more Faroese men find partners in other countries, especially in Southeast Asia. Many of them met their wives online, “some through commercial dating websites. Others have made connections through social media networks or existing Asian-Faroese couples” (Ecott, 2017, par. 9). Now, there are more than 300 women from Thailand and the Philippines living in the Faroe Islands, making up the largest ethnic minority.

On the one hand, marriage migration has been a pathway for Thai women to pursue a better life. Many Thai women come to Denmark through marriage migration with aspirations for a better life. This was manifested in all my interviews. Lily described the migration of her mother as follows: “She came here because of the money. Then she does not need to go back, to lose the money again.” Kevin stated that the reason his mother came to Denmark was “for a better life, a better living.” In both the BBC news story “Wives wanted in the Faroe Islands” by Ecott (2017) and the Al Jazeera news story “More than a mail-order bride: The Asian women choosing life in the Faroes” by Aela Callan (2017), all the Thai female interviewees were quite satisfied with their situation and new lives in another country. One informant in the former news story described her life in the Faroe Islands as follows: “I’m happy here now, not just surviving but making a life for our family. . . here is no pollution and no crime. Not many kids have that these days. This could be the last paradise on earth” (Ecott, 2017, pars.

35-36). The informants in the latter news story “described themselves as strong, independent women because they had chosen to live here” (Callan, 2017, par. 10). Meanwhile, a few Thai immigrants are victims of international human trafficking. According to Thailand Migration Report 2014, Denmark is one of the popular destination countries for human trafficking of Thai nationals for sexual exploitation. Furthermore, sex workers are in a vulnerable position because:

They are dependent on their husbands with regard to residence permits, finances, and housing. Most of the interviewees were economically dependent on their Danish spouses during the initial period after they arrived in Denmark.....Afraid of losing their residence permits and having poor knowledge of their rights and obligations in Denmark and no confidence in the Danish authorities, the female Thai migrants neither seek out nor receive help. (Spanger, 2013b, p.98)

### **Dissonant Acculturation of Thai Immigrants in Denmark**

Many Thai women come to Denmark through marriage migration with aspirations for a better life. However, due to their inability to speak English or Danish during the initial period, economic vulnerability, and unequal power relations in their transnational marriages, many of them confront various challenges to assimilating into Danish society in the beginning, and many of them fail to assimilate at all. In contrast, their children, the 1.5-generation Thai immigrants who come to Denmark

with their mothers during their childhood or adolescence, adapt to their new lives in Denmark more quickly. Although they also experience a tough period at first, most of them can assimilate into Danish society to a greater extent compared to their mothers. The interviews indicated that with the aid of the high welfare system in Danish society, although 1.5-generation Thai immigrants in Denmark experience dissonant acculturation with their mothers, this does not lead to the negative effects that the segmented assimilation theory assumes. Furthermore, as first-generation immigrants, middle-aged Thai women are actually in a more vulnerable social position.

### **Middle-Aged Thai Women**

There is no doubt that many Thai women immigrants in Denmark are suffering various social experiences of inequality in their diaspora life. In the research of Thai female migrant groups in Sweden, Jungteerapanich (2014) argues that “The process of social exclusion and discrimination is not unidirectional but interactive and multi-leveled, in which both the host citizens and the immigrants take an active role in excluding one another in order to restore a sense of ontological security through the creation of in-group and outgroup biases.” As the first-generation immigrants, the middle-aged Thai women confront more challenges in adaption to Danish society than their children. Most challenges they face are cultural barriers, unemployment, and unequal power relations with husband.

**Culture** Different social norms and culture difference bring a lot of sufferings to these Thai women when they just move here. Payo talked about the cases that some women feel hurt and confused because of the value difference between the Danish society and Thai Society:

In the Thai social (norms).....everyone almost in Thailand, we are friendly, but come here is more personal, so sometimes, you live in a flat with each other but don't know each other. They don't care about this. But in Thailand not like this..... For me, if live in my room next to each other I don't know before, sometimes I have to talk, to give food, to try to invite, to get the food. But here no, so the people from Thailand come here, they don't know about the style of people here. Sometimes (they) just think that they are hurt. Just confused about this.

These cultural barriers have become the challenges preventing these Thai women to be integrated in the mainstream society. When I asked Lily if her mother feel integrated to the society, she also talked about the complaint of her mother to the system of Danish society, "In Thailand, we can do anything we want just if we have the money. But here, it doesn't matter if you have the money, you just cannot do. That is what she does not like. And the hospital also, when she is sick, she needs to wait for a long time. She does not understand."

**Employment** According to the two articles of BBC news story and Al Jazeera news story mentioned before, due to the language barriers, many Thai immigrants feel difficult to find a job and can only work in the labor-intensive sectors such as cleaning and catering jobs which require no knowledge of Danish language. Most of them have to take the lower qualified positions than they used to do in Thailand. And this is a similar case in the research of Jungteerapanich (2014). Many Thai immigrants in Sweden also face various kinds of social inequalities and discrimination in their process of seeking employment opportunities.

**Marriage** With regard to the power relations in marriage, although Mary thinks she has a much better life compared to the majority of Thai women in Denmark, she made a lot of complaints about her two ex-husbands. She described one of her ex-husband as “they control you every day, what are you doing, why do you come home late, why you don’t do that..... My ex-husband is very jealous because every time I go somewhere, every man will look at me and ask me ‘why don’t you be my girlfriend?’”

Mary described the most Thai women she met in temple as the women who marry only for the purpose of money and live a miserable life. Many people in the temple make her get very sad:

*Someone they marry very old man you know. She only may be 35 years old, but she may marry a man of 65, 70 or 55 years old, like marry a grandfather..... In temple, someone goes there in white color because she has a problem with her husband. I heard something in my ears, but I don’t want to listen because it is so bad life.....*

In this context, religion or Buddhism has played an important role in the diaspora life of Thai women in Denmark. Most Thai immigrant women in Denmark are still relative religious of Buddhism. Their immigration experiences do not change their religion belief. When Kevin described about his mother, he said, “my mum is very religious, and she practices a lot”, and “She goes to the temple regularly”. Besides, when I asked them if their mothers changed their attitude to Buddhism after moving to Denmark, all of them did not think so. Dam said that his mother “still goes to the temple, still donates, still prays in the temple and at home, as what she did before in Thailand. In the visit of Watpa Copenhagen, I found most people coming to the temple were also middle-aged Thai women. On one hand, as religious Buddhists, they come to temples for the ritual activities. On the other hand, as immigrants, they come to temples for a relief to their diaspora life by talking to the monks and meeting friends. For them, the Thai temples are not only religious venues for the Buddhists, but also function as a place providing the guidance to the middle-aged Thai women about how to get used to the new environment, and a relief to their turbulent life via the recreation a feeling of homeland and listening to their problems. Despite as a small number, the work of missionary monks plays a vital role in the immigrant communities in Denmark. Payo described what they usually teach when a layman come to the temple, “Teaching about Denmark, to practice, teaching about chanting, how to use it in daily life, how to spend time when you got some problems. To tell the way to do the good things”. Many Thai women come to temples talking to

monks about the problems in their diaspora life. As new wives coming to Denmark in their middle age, they are often faced with difficulties integrating into the new society in many aspects, such as the different social norms, cultural difference and family relations. Many Thai women struggle with their relationship with their husbands because of their different way of thinking, while the language problems often worsen it. When Payo was asked about what topic the people coming here usually talk with him, he said:

People come to, have a problem to talk with me is family.....  
Sometimes, thinking different between wife and husband.....  
Maybe someone meet their husband who is drinking alcohol,  
lazy, or try to use the girl working outside to get money.....  
they meet each other in Thailand, but when they come here,  
different thinking, can't spend time together, the husband  
blames her about work, about maybe language. Language  
is important, but if you cannot speak, I mean, Danish or  
English, they will get some problems.....the husband just  
take her from Thailand. But she got a language problem.  
She does not know how to talk about with her husband. She  
talked to me, you can tell my husband, suggestions about  
doing anything here.....you got some problems because  
not understand each other.

The temples can not only provide guidance and support to their turbulent life, but also function as a venue to meet people. With an isolation of the mainstream society due to the culture and language difference, their social life usually shows an evident Thai identity. Dam talked about the social circle of his mother as having “more Thai friends”. Although the mother of Lily is a kind of “social people and she likes to talk to new people”, most of her mother’s friends are from Thailand. For them, the temples become an important part of their social network in their diaspora life, and a place for a sense of belonging. When we talked about the purpose of people who go to the temple, he said:

I think, yes, according to my mum, she said that a lot of people who go to the temple, they go there to meet each other, to talk about all the stuff, about life, work, whatever, just normal conversation.....I think people go there no necessarily just because of the religion but also to be a part of something, like a community, to exchange friendship and information, definitely.

In this context, going to the temples, becomes an ideal way for them to meet the social community needs in a foreign society to some extent, such as communication and building social connections. When I asked Payo if they feel better after coming to the temple to talk about this. He said,

Yes, it could be more relaxing. Sometimes, when you got some suffering, you need someone to talk to explain about yourself to others. When you finish from telling other ones or get some suggestions from other people, maybe you will get better. Because, human is like a social animal, you can't live alone. So, Sometimes, at least you have to meet someone, to talk someone.....if they live alone, we just think about life, parents, my own, But the thinking could be dangerous, because sometimes, we think about friends, but.....friends are not the way we think. So, if you got some problems when you feel alone, maybe it's better to talk with others, to get some suggestions from other people.

In contrast, as a woman who has independent and stable source of income, Buddhism plays a very different role in the diaspora life of Mary. Different from other typical first-generation Thai female immigrants, she does not really need the mental support or practical guidance because of her privileged background. When I asked her if she goes to the temple regularly, she answered me that "No, not once a week. I go to temple because of New Year. Maybe I take only two times a year. Maybe five times a year.....I go to Temple because I am thinking about good people go to temple to hear the monk." Also, she does not need to go to the temple for the comfort from meeting Thai friends either. With good Danish language skills and her own business, she has integrated into Danish Society very well. During the interview

with her, she mentioned that she is not very familiar with the life of the majority of Thai women in Denmark because she does not have any Thai friends. She said “I don’t want to have Thai friends. I have my son, my sister, my families..... I think very good life I have I don’t need to have Thai people (as friends) They make problems sometimes, like ‘Oh Mary can I borrow money. My husband, he drinking he go out’” Meanwhile, she is proud of her own business and life in Denmark. “I am a helper of myself because I know everything about tax, about systems in Denmark, (like) How many taxes you have to pay. When you buy something you pay 25%, When you go to work you must to pay 38%, I have my job I have to pay 52%.....”

However, Mary still regards herself as a very religious Buddhist. Although she does not go to temple very frequently, she told me she practices religious rituals at her salon (which is also her home place) every day. When I asked her if she still recognized herself a Buddhist, she said, “I very believe it. I believe it so much because something happened to me many times.” Then she told me two stories of her that how she experienced miracles in her life. In the first story, she saw an angle with her own eyes during the holiday in a foreign country with her husband and son. The angle prophesied to her and the prophecy turned out to be true at last. In the second miracle story, she made a prophecy by herself and it also be realized.

### 1.5-Generation Thai Immigrants

In my research, “1.5-generation” are the immigrants who were born in Thailand then moved to Denmark with their mothers during their early teens. In my interviews with the 1.5-generation Thai immigrants in Denmark, all of them felt they were well integrated to the Danish society and feel content about their life in Denmark in a “western” way. Lily said, “five years now, I feel Europe is my home” and “I miss my stories because I grew up in Thailand, but I don’t have the feeling like I want to go back and live in Thailand.” Compared to their mother, they are generally assimilated into the Danish Society to a higher extent. When I asked if they think they will come back to Thailand. All of them said no. Lily felt she is well integrated in the Danish society. Dam felt maybe he was not fully integrated in that sense. He does not understand everything, but he felt like that’s enough. Throughout the interviews, it is indicated that most of them realized their acculturation of the Danish society because of education and working. In the end, the assimilation outcomes are mainly manifested in their parent-child relationship and religious identity.

**Assimilation Process** Likewise to their mother, the 1.5-generation immigrants also experienced a tough period of adaption to the Danish Society. They had many challenges of learning language, setting up new social circle and forming a new identity. Kevin moved to Denmark with his mother when he was 12 years old and he has lived in Denmark for 15 years. He recalled his first days when he just moved to Denmark as:

- Can you still remember when you just moved here, what's your feeling like in a new environment?

Kevin: yes definitely. In what context?

- Like what kind of difficulty, you have met?

Kevin: well Of course, you were in the new place, you have no friends, family. I mean I have family, I have big family in Thailand (but not here). And you don't speak the language. So the first period is quite difficult. But when I studied at school I got to know some friends, like Danish people, also migrants, but not so many.

When we talked about the integration, Kevin said in the beginning he was more passive when he hanged out with his Danish friends and less engaged in the discussion. However, he felt he became more integrated when he absorbed the culture of the new country. With regarding to the factors of integration, Kevin listed education, friends, parents and workplace as the main factors to the integration he believes. He talked about his own working experience in Denmark. His first job in Denmark is a Thai restaurant where all his colleagues are Thai. He felt it was like living in a bubble where you do not get any knowledge of Danish Society. "During the time I spent with my Thai colleagues, we spoke Thai, we listen to Thai music, watch Thai movies and stuff." Whereas now he said he has more focuses on Danish Culture because he is not engaged in that community any more:

When I talked to some of my Thai friends today, they asked me some (Thai) songs if I know. I was like “what? What the song it is?” Then I know ok, it is because I am not engaged in that community any more. But instead, I listened to Danish Rap.....So it was difficult, but it changed. It can be changed. I think there are a lot of things from my workplace friends, university and high schools..... So, I think education and work are very important.

By contrast, Kevin gave an example of one of his Thai friends who was born in Denmark but cannot get assimilated into Danish Society very well:

He was growing up with with the Thai values and Thai Cultures. Even he was born here but he was rasied and living in the Thai community with his social circle is 90% Thai. Then he cannot really integrate to the Dansih Society. He also cannot accept to have a girlfriend of different ethnicity from Thai.

**Parent-Child Relationship** Compare to their life in Thailand, all the 1.5-generation informants felt they have more freedom in their family after moving to Denmark. While in the Thai society, the traditional family structure is relative hierarchical and most of their mothers keep their Thai traditional values in their religion and social life, they have an

interesting change in their relationship with their mothers after their immigration. Dam said,

In Thailand the parents have strict time for when should come home...but the life is freer. I have more open conversations with my mother. We are more open to each other's opinion.....In Thailand, the parents are not that open to their children's opinions.

Kevin also felt the change of his mother, he described it as "She accepts more, we are more equal now..... She can now say sorry.....She is more self-critical as well." Lily compared her life in Thailand and Europe as:

When I lived in Thailand, every child in Thailand need to listen to parents. Every parent decides, and you must follow. When I come to live in Europe, my mum, she still says, like comment, but I don't need to follow everything. I can have myself, I can think what I want to do and do what I want.....I feel it's good in Europe. Because (in Thailand) parents (and children) are so close, sometimes I need my space also. But when I lived in Thailand, I lived close to my dad, I love him, I understand everything he told me, but sometimes I feel it's too much. I feel like I cannot breathe.....

**Religious Identity** As a new generation growing up in the western societies, they have a different attitude to religion from their Thai parents. In the interviews with three young Thai people, all of them showed a critical attitude about Buddhism. They did not see Buddhism as a serious religion belief, but more like one of their obligations for the sake of their religious parents. Dam described his experience as a monk when he was twenty years old as “It’s like a tradition, repay for your parents. It’s like fulfill a duty.” Lily said,

I don’t think religion is important for me.....We need to polite to the Buddha, but I don’t know why. I just do for my family, they happy. They said, go to the temple, pray for Buddha and the good thing will come to you. But I don’t see. It’s just like we do what they say. But for me, it’s just not important.

Compare to Lily, Dam seemed like having a “softer” attitude to religion, he liked the history of Buddhism, but he did not think he was very religious as his parents.

- What’s your feeling to religion??

Dam: I like my religion.

- You like?

Dam: Yes. I collect the religious “goods”. Because I think (there are) many histories about it, for a long time. But I don’t have a strong belief of Buddhism.

Lily has had a critical attitude to Buddhism for a long time, "I have the question all my life, Why I need to go the temple? Give some food to Buddha? But what Buddha give us? And why we need to wake up 5 o'clock in the morning, do everything for Buddha and Buddha, they cannot talk." By contrast, Kevin has become less religious after moving to Denmark.

- Did you feel your self-identity as a Thai change during these years?

Kevin: Yes. Definitely.

- Like what kind of change?

Kevin: Because I live in Denmark. I become more western.

- Can you give me some example? Like in which way you feel you are more western now?

Kevin: Food (laugh). Or maybe also if you can say that, less religious would be a western thing, although it's not actually in these days, a lot of people are still religious. But maybe Danish people are not so religious and less superstitious. I become much less superstitious. And the way I think, because maybe in Thailand or in Asia generally, they don't teach you to think critically. So that changed me a lot. And it also maybe leads to some other changes in my identity I think.

On the other hand, influenced by their childhood experience and their origin family, many of the 1.5-generation immigrants still see themselves as a Buddhist but in a less religious way. They still go to the temple sometimes. However, after I knew their critical attitude to the Buddhism, when asked if they think they are an atheist or do not have the belief, all of them denied. Kevin said, "I still believe in Buddhism but not in every part of Buddhism". Dam also thought, "No, it's not like that I don't have the belief, I'm just not very religious.". Dam still went to the temple regularly. He said, "Every month I went there to give the food to the monks, but I didn't pray or anything..." While Lily went to the temple in every Thai new year.

- Did you still go to the temple here?

Lily: Yes, I don't know why, but I do it every time in the new year. In the new year, they have party maybe I just feel bored.....I just want to have some prays for I can see and think after in this year, maybe it's not important to be in the temple, but I feel when I was in the temple, it's just my feeling, I feel like, yeah, everything is gone, and be better. But I don't know why I do that. I do that for five years now.

Meanwhile, they also keep their Thai identity in their social life to some extent and sometimes cannot fully enjoyed their diaspora life in Denmark. Different from a typical western way as hanging out with friends outside, Lily described her social life as "We usually eat at home

because it saves money.....What we can do in Denmark, if we do not eat, if we do not drink?” When we asked Dam if he felt well integrated to the Danish society he said, “Maybe not fully integrated in that sense. I do not understand everything, but I feel like that’s enough.”

In contrast with our informants, some Thai young immigrants are still as religious as the old generation. When asked about if they have any religious friend in Copenhagen. Lily said she has one religious friend and described her as “She goes to the temple every week. She stays at the temple for one night every week. And she prays for ..... I don’t know for what. She will dress up and wear everything white. She does talk about.....”

## Discussion and Conclusion

Forsander (2004) argued that “Nordic countries perform well with regard to many aspects of social capital. . . . However, the strong social capital of Nordic welfare seems to be exclusionary, where immigrants’ integration--and especially labor market integration--is concerned” (p. 207). Comparative research of first- and 1.5-generation Thai immigrants in Denmark has indicated that the strong social capital provided by Nordic welfare plays different roles in the diaspora lives of Thai immigrants from different generations. On the one hand, many middle-aged Thai women, as first-generation immigrants, are marginalized and less integrated into Danish society. To some extent, their mode of incorporation through transnational marriage means that most of them can only find low-paying jobs and face a higher risk

of being isolated from the mainstream. On the other hand, the free education opportunities offered by Nordic welfare enable more 1.5-generation immigrants to assimilate into Danish society.

Middle-aged first-generation immigrants have more difficulty getting used to a new environment than their young children do. In this context, for the Thai women who come to Denmark through marriage migration, their Buddhist religious beliefs play an important role in their diaspora lives. They go to the Thai temple for counseling on the problems they face. They talk to the monks about their sufferings and seek guidance and advice in a practical or religious way. Furthermore, they are often on the weak side of the power relations in their new marriages because of the gender and language problems. However, the government pays very little attention to these Thai women immigrants, compared to investor immigrants or international students, and few services are targeted at improving the women's situations. As Rattana Jongwilaiwan and Eric C. Thompson (2013) argued, "The international system of territorially defined nation-states with varied regimes of citizenship is central to producing transnational patriarchy" (p. 377). Due to Thai women's inability to speak the English and Danish languages, it is hard for them to find any support from social welfare agencies or the other government institutions. Therefore, the temple becomes an ideal place for them to seek guidance, help, and relief in their turbulent diaspora lives. On the other hand, the temple also functions as a social place for them to experience a sense of belonging. It can meet their social needs such as communication and building social connections.

Whereas Western culture values individualism, traditional Thai culture values collectivism. Due to their relative isolation from mainstream society, these Thai women immigrants come to the temple to feel as if they are a part of a community. Due to the absence of support from the local government, some religious venues function as replacements for the absent social welfare agencies, which should provide services and support to these legal immigrants. These immigrants seem to coexist with mainstream society geographically, but the two groups in fact live in two different worlds.

In contrast, 1.5-generation Thai immigrants, who are the children of these Thai women, show much better assimilation into Danish society compared to their mothers. With regard to the parent-child relationship, compared to their lives in Thailand, the 1.5-generation informants felt they had more freedom in their new lives in Denmark. There is no doubt that their families are influenced by the Danish culture in which parents and children should be in a more equal relationship. In terms of their religious identity, their attitudes toward Buddhism are usually critical, but their feelings about Buddhism are complex and sometimes ambiguous. Religion's influence on them has declined. Meanwhile, they still recognize themselves as Buddhists and have religious beliefs. With the wide reach of the Internet and media, globalization diffuses Western values to more areas. In this context, the new generation usually has more of a recognition of Western values than the previous generation does. At the same time, Western society and education enable the new generation to develop a more critical way

of thinking, which enables them to reflect more on religion. In addition, most of the 1.5-generation immigrants grew up in Thailand and were influenced by the religious environment for many years. They see their religious experiences as important parts of their lives. Buddhism is a part of their ethnic identity or a cultural mark of their country of origin.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, in contrast to the assumptions of the segmented assimilation theory based on United States society, the assimilation of first- and 1.5-generation immigrants in a Nordic setting can be very different in terms of modes of incorporation, the challenges they confront, and the resources offered by society that they can mobilize. These differences also lead to the opposite effect of dissonant acculturation. In the context of the Nordic welfare system in Danish society, although 1.5-generation Thai immigrants in Denmark experience dissonant acculturation with their mothers, this does not lead to the negative effects that the segmented assimilation theory assumes. By contrast, as first-generation immigrants, middle-aged Thai women are actually in a more vulnerable social position.

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