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Constructing the Self-image of Akha Women in Cross-cultural Marriages*

การประกอบสร้างภาพตัวตนของผู้หญิงอาข่า
ที่แต่งงานข้ามวัฒนธรรม

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความชิ้นนี้ต้องการนำเสนอภาพตัวตนของผู้หญิงอาข่าที่แต่งงานกับชาวต่างชาติ และไปใช้ชีวิตในต่างแดนโดยใช้การวิเคราะห์เรื่องเล่าและการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกเป็นเครื่องมือในการวิจัย ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ปัจจัยสำคัญสองประการที่มีส่วนในการประกอบสร้างภาพตัวตนของผู้หญิง คือ อัตลักษณ์ทางชาติพันธุ์ หรือราก (root) ทางวัฒนธรรม และเส้นทางชีวิต (route) อัตลักษณ์ทางชาติพันธุ์เป็นทุนทางวัฒนธรรมที่สะสมในตัวและถูกหยิบออกมาใช้เมื่อข้ามแดน ขณะที่เส้นทางชีวิตสร้างตัวตนใหม่ที่ทำให้หลุดจากการกดทับของอัตลักษณ์ทางชาติพันธุ์ แต่ก็มีภาพตัวตนบางส่วนที่ติดฝัง ดังนั้น ตัวตนข้ามวัฒนธรรมจึงเป็นตัวตนลูกผสมไม่เป็นอันหนึ่งอันเดียว ยืดหยุ่นและต่อรงได้ เพราะมีความเป็นผู้กระทำการซึ่งไม่ติดกับวาทกรรมอัตลักษณ์ชาติพันธุ์ เป็นลักษณะของพลเมืองที่ยืดหยุ่นหรือตัวตนในกระแสโลกาภิวัตน์ที่ผู้กระทำการสามารถเลือกหยิบจับปรับใช้ตัวตนที่หลากหลาย ทั้งตัวตนในโลกชาติพันธุ์อันเป็นทุนเดิมที่ยึดโยงให้ผู้หญิงมีรากความสัมพันธ์กับครอบครัวเก่าและจินตนาการถึงต้นทางชีวิตที่จากมา และตัวตนสมัยใหม่ที่เกิดจากเส้นทางชีวิตในต่างแดนที่ช่วยให้ผู้หญิงมีเสรีภาพแบบที่ตัวตนผู้หญิงในวิถีอาข่าไม่สามารถมีได้

คำสำคัญ: อาข่า, ตัวตน, ทุนทางวัฒนธรรม, พลเมืองที่ยืดหยุ่น, การแต่งงานข้ามวัฒนธรรม

A b s t r a c t

The purpose of this article is to present the self-image of Akha women married to foreigners. This study used narrative analysis and in-depth interviews as the research methodology. The study indicated that two important factors contributing to the self-image of women are their ethnic identity or cultural roots, and the route of life. Ethnic identity is a form of cumulative cultural capital and is used when crossing borders. As the route of life forms a new identity that breaks out from the pressures of ethnic identity, there are some embedded insights. Cross-cultural self is a hybrid identity, flexible and negotiable as an agency which is not attached to the ethnic identity discourse. It is a flexible citizen or globalized citizen who can choose to embrace a diversity of identities. One is the self that originates from ethnic capital that is rooted in women's relationships with their former family, envisioning the source of life. The other is the modern self that emanates from the route of life in a foreign country that gives women the liberty which they could not have in the Akha world.

Keywords: Akha, self, cultural capital, flexible citizen, cross cultural marriage

Introduction

The study of cross-cultural marriages has been the subject of increased theoretical and policy attention as a result of the rapid and widespread emergence of the pattern and nature of marriages which vary from region to region. The concept that explains this phenomenon not only reflects the link between transnational relations in the context of the global political economy, but also introduces a reversal of the process of individual identities in cross-cultural states. Cross-cultural marriages are not new in Thai society, but have changed in accordance with Thai state policy towards foreign states. However, the married life of women who marry westerners and easterners is different both in terms of destination culture and the inner-self of women due to the relationship with the partner. Thus, it can be concluded that cross-cultural marriages are related to political, economic, personal and family status as well as nationality.

In Thai society, studies of cross-cultural marriages have been carried out since 2005. According to the work of Rattana Boonmathaya (2005), the relationship between local factors and globalization reflects the cross-cultural hybridity of the family which has also caused the creation of new identities for Isan women who marry Westerners. Patcharin Lapanun (2010) and Suriya Smutkupt and Pattana Kitiarsa (2014) present a picture of a “westerner’s wife” arising from the post-Vietnam war era. The target group focuses on women marrying westerners and getting involved in the labor market in big cities like Bangkok and Pattaya.

Departure from remote villages resulted in many women marrying foreigners when working in the labor market area. The works of Cohen (1982), Jeffrey (2002), Patcharin (2010) and Sirijit Sunanta (2014) highlight the relationship between the world political situation, world labor market, modernization development, Thai policy and business tourism which affect the adjustment after marriage with a westerner. However,

Panitee Suksomboon (2009) studies the conditions of the destination countries that construct the Thai women's identity. Nevertheless, there is no study focusing on the cross-cultural marriage of ethnic groups which are different from Isan women in Thailand, such as the issues of ethnic identity, beliefs and traditions, and gender roles that subjugate females. These factors not only contribute to the decision to live in a foreign country, but also enhance the process of constructing ethnic identities different from Isan women. The collected work by Nicole Constable (2005) demonstrates that marriage is linked to displacement and ethnicity mobility. Moreover, cross-cultural marriage is also related to nationality, ethnicity, investment, family, and the married couple's cultures. She also proposes that cross-cultural marriage involves experiences, life-objectives, life-changes, state power and family, the articulation of gender roles between the two cultures, and women's mobility. (See also; Nicole Constable (2005), Suriya Smutkupt and Pattana Kitiarsa (2014)). Each of the women who married across cultures has a different way of life, choices, and self-image. The image of the Isan woman who marries a westerner is not the only image that reflects the identity of Thai women marrying across cultures. Consequently, describing the experience and identity of married women has a specific context, and it is not just adaptation to a different cultural life.

Key informants backgrounds*

The target group of this study is three Akha women in the 40-43 age range from Chiang Rai province. They are Akha children whose parents migrated from Burma and raised them in Thailand. They all have Thai nationality. They were supported to continue their studies by a non-governmental organization called “Soon Luk Ying”. After finishing grade 9 in Chiang Rai, each woman separated from Soon Luk Ying because of a change in their life circumstances. Education has become a crucial factor in articulating the cultural capital to supplement a new image of Akha children: it helps them to become working Akha in the city. They have opportunities to meet and fall in love with foreigners. Then, when married to a foreigner, they have a different lifestyle according to their husband’s status. Therefore, the self-image of Akha women has changed in accordance with three periods of their life-context. The first is the Akha culture context, at the beginning of life and at primary school. The second is the urban culture context at “Soon Luk Ying” in Chiang Rai and at working age in big cities, such as Hat Yai, Chiang Mai, and Bangkok. The third is the foreign culture context after getting married. This change reveals the conceptual dynamics of identity, and the accumulation of capital in various aspects in order to create an identity as a global citizen under cross-cultural relations.

* I collected field data from 2016 to 2017 in the areas of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai in Thailand and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. My research methodology was in-depth interviews and narrative analysis (all interviews were recorded). The main criteria of the Key Informants selected was that they all passed Soon Luk Ying, got married to a foreign man, and moved abroad. All the names are pseudonyms.

Background information	Ar-Jeuh	Ar-Teuh	Ar-Jum
Family and childhood	lives in a large family with 2 sisters, 1 older brother and 2 younger brothers at Pa-Hee village, Mae Sai District	born in Jor-Pa-Kha village with an older brother and younger brother	grew up in Samakkee Mai village, Mae Fa Luang District with an older sister, a younger sister, and a younger brother
Age	43	40	42
Life after grade 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> maid in hotel 1 year – moved to the south for massage work (8 years) transborder to Malaysia in 2006 married her husband in 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> went back to the mountains because of health problems married 1st husband in 1997 divorced in 2003 moved around for work and met 2nd husband in 2013 in Phuket and moved to Australia in 2014 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> graduated from Chiang Rai university and moved to work in Chiang Mai in 2006 2010 move to the Netherlands and got married
Years of living abroad / marriage	13 / 9	6 / 5	9 / 9
Husband's Nationality	Chinese	1 st husband-Japanese 2 nd husband-English	Dutch
Husband's age	44	55	41
Country of residence	Malaysia	Australia	Netherlands

Table 1: information background of key informants

Root: Cultural Capital and Social Construction of Self

The contexts of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1997), which mean Akha traditions and world view including the gender role in the family in which they grow up in the mountains, and the patriarchy system are important conditions for determining

the roles of Akha. All case studies show that daughters/sisters were influenced by the determination of cultural identities that affected their later life in cross-cultural families.

In the context of Akha culture, there were no differences in family image in the three case studies. Their mother is the carer, and their father is the decision-maker. Younger brothers or older brothers are likely to have more of a voice than sisters, and the mother merely listens to her sons.

Agriculture and domestic work are the duties of women. The role of the mother is founding capital in the creation of female Akhas, especially the role of the domestic carer and cook. Growing up as Akha daughters, the interviewees said that they learned the role of Akha women from having stayed mostly with their mothers, when they were needed to cook for the family and take care of younger children. They learned that their father has the most influential role in the house and is responsible for the family economy. The reflection of cultural capital was embedded in Akha women and it is often revealed when Akha women cook “native mountain food” in foreign countries. This reflects the self that is associated with the identity emerging from the Akha culture context.

Patriarchy in Akha Culture and the Definition of “Family”

Because “Ar-Jeuh” grew up in a family in which the father often used violence, she also asked the question why her mother had to surrender although she worked hard. She rejected the role that women had to be forced and work tirelessly while men did not have to work. While she saw her mother working

hard, she felt sorry for her and even loved her mother more. Nevertheless, she did not want to be like her mother in the same situation. She constructed her identity as a working woman and did not take on the role of a wife who had to take care of husband and family, as her mother had done earlier.

*“I don’t want to be like my mother who had to work hard on everything while the father didn’t have to do anything. I don’t want to marry because I’m afraid of being like her”**

In the case of Ar-Tueh, the image of her father is different from that of Ar-Jeuh’s because her father is a hard-working family leader who takes care of everyone. The father’s image is a caretaker, responsible, and suitable for the role of family leader. Because her father did not take advantage of her mother, Ar-Tueh was happy to leave school as her father ordered (but her brothers continued to study) and feels gratitude to her parents.

“Home” during her childhood was not perfect because of economic conditions and livelihood problems, and Ar-Teuh had to live with another family. Moreover, the family members did not live together, and her brothers had to go to different places to find educational opportunities. Accordingly, her image of a mountainous home included a lack of a perfect family so she always dreamt of an ideal one. She eventually compensated for this when she married her husband. Previously, Ar-Teuh, a mother of one with her ex-husband who was Japanese, was

* Ar-Jeuh, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia (2017, January 25). Interview.

unable to live a perfect family life. Later, she took her child to Pattaya to live with the almost-married Danish boyfriend. Finally, after marrying her current English husband, they moved to live her ideal family life in Australia. It is important to note that when she has free time, she rarely goes out anywhere, but often stays at home and takes care of her husband and her son. Normally, she is cheerful and talkative, and talks politely, but when someone makes a comment about her family, she is offensive, and replies with harsh words even though she often describes herself as being calm and tolerant of everything owing to her difficult life.

*“The family should be together. When I was young, I didn’t live with my parents. And also, when I had a child with my first husband we stayed in different countries. I intend that if I have my own family, we must be together.”**

This is reflected through the habit that she often shows photographs of spending time with her husband and her son, cooking, and taking care of her family. On the contrary, Ar-Jeuh has never shown pictures of her family or family members, or even her pictures, online.

Contextual Space and the Definition of “Home”

From the Akha women’s life context, although the three Akha women grew up in the mountains in Chiang Rai, they lived in different areas, with differing external prosperity, border

* Ar-Teuh, Chiang Rai (2017, April 23). Interview.

areas, tourist attractions, and uneven state development areas. These differences made it possible to create different career opportunities, family lives and memories.

While “Ar-Jeuh” has memories of the nature of her homeland which are embedded in her identity even when having moved to Malaysia, she still associates her “new home” with her “mountainous home”. This is because recalling the past may be the only thing that heals her and makes her calm. Later, after entering the big city to earn money, she has not been close to nature anymore. The rugged life in the big city and the dark business (massage work), due to economic necessity, subjugated her identity and created a new character – a stressed person. She became a risk-taking person both in daily and leisure life when she gambled in different ways. This past life made her become a blunt and straightforward person, not afraid of anyone.

Thus, she looks like an aggressive and straightforward person. This is consistent with her Akha friend who said that she is aggressive too (from the words she spoke to others). Indeed, when discussing a confrontational relationship, Ar-Jeuh is sensitive, sad, and anxious when talking about family. Even when talking about her husband, she always feels guilty about her former work. Nevertheless, she uses the experiences and the dark side in the past as a tool to fight others (on a basis of, “what have you got to lose?”)* This dark side will remind her that she has more experience than anyone else, and there’s no need to be considerate if she thinks that it is not right.

* Ar-Jeuh, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia (2017, January 25). Interview.

Unlike Ar-Teuh's imagination of a family and Ar-Jeuh's creation of a living location, the mountainous home for Ar-Jum suggests opportunity and freedom. Her initial experience of cultural capital is accordingly aligned with the experience she gained from "Soon Luk Ying". At this place, she met a variety of people, developed her talkative personality and became a learner. These fitted well with the opportunities that came into her life. Due to Ar-jum family's economic superiority, as well as a home village closer to the city than the other two, her father had an opportunity to work in a Royal Project. Hence, Ar-Jum was able to construct an identity that was closer to the modern world than the other two.

The mountainous house or hometown created a way of thinking and gave meaning to "home" and "family" in the dimension of nature and symbolic meaning. Being Akha is not only an important cultural capital in everyday life and in creating a unique identity as a wife, but also in creating a family-oriented worldview in a unique way in order to articulate the "family" of foreign husbands. As a result, this has not only led to the creation of families in a way that is neither Akha's nor the foreign husband's way of life, but a negotiation and hybridity in a way that both parties agree on.

While the Ar-Jeuh's self-image reflects the struggle to get rid of the traditional worldview and practice imparted by her family in their mountainous home relating to sexual subjugation, Ar-Jum views a mountainous home as a socialized area where she can learn to be a perfect mother and wife and use these

skills to live abroad. Ar-Teuh is in the middle between Ar-Jeuh and Ar-Jum. Although she wants to go out into the modern world, her mind is emotionally attached to her family. Hence, she cannot step out of the familiar space (the Akha village in Chiang Rai) into a larger city with more opportunities for work at the beginning of her new life.

In summary, the Akha way of life, especially with respect to gender roles and contextual areas, are cultural capital that all three Akha women have adopted in constructing their self-image as the wife of a foreigner in a foreign country. This process of self-creation has eventually constituted the definition of family for procreation, which differs from her own family of orientation.

Route: From Doi to Aboard

The working routes of the three women led them out of Baan Doi into urban society and brought about a turning point for economic capital accumulation, family income, and having the bargaining power not to return home.

From growing up on high mountains to studying and working in the city, the three women have had life experiences that have varied according to their work situation in terms of accumulation of economic capital. Ar-Jeuh started working as a trainee at a hotel in Bangkok. Later, her older sister ordered her to go to work as a masseur in order to earn more income. Then, she had to move to Hat Yai, and to Malaysia, respectively. She massaged for almost five years and found love and married her husband. Ar-Teuh had bad health conditions and worked

on embroidery at her Doi house (mountainous home). She married a Japanese businessman who came to visit and bought her clothes. They had a child, but unfortunately got divorced later. She then went to work in the tour and hotel business at Pattaya, Suratthani, and Phuket for over 3 years. Finally, she met her current husband and moved to Australia.

Since Ar-Jum had a better economic status and was encouraged by her sister who was progressive and already used to work in big cities, she got support for higher education and found a job in Chiang Mai. She did not get any pressure from family or even struggled to earn a living, therefore she had more life choices than the other two. Departure to a big city was a good choice for Ar-Jum because she was enthusiastic about gathering new experiences and knowledge. Ar-Jum came to work in the tourism business in Chiang Mai for almost 2 years and met her Dutch husband who came to work as a volunteer in Thailand.*

In conclusion, the case of Ar-Jum was different from Ar-Teuh and Ar-Jeuh in the sense that Ar-Teuh had to struggle to raise almost everyone in the family, and Ar-Jeuh was forced to fulfill the needs of her father and sister, who had more positional power than any others in the family. As a result, the ability to choose their own routes without these being determined by parents, income negotiation with employers, negotiations with a variety of people in power in everyday life, as well as the way of globalized capitalism, were both an opportunity to accumulate income and a way to construct a new self-image

* Ar-Jum, Chiang Mai (2017, April 17). Interview.

that was different from their ethnicity self-image. Finally, these routes were the path leading to life across borders.

Cross-cultural Marriage: The Space of Self-reconstruction

It is significant to say that Akha women who are married to foreigners, either westerners or easterners, face different conditions that affect the process of creating a woman's identity when living abroad. When Ar-Teuh decided to live with her new British husband and then move to Australia, she decided to study English along with her 11-year-old son in order to communicate with her husband more effectively. In the case of Ar-Jum, before getting married and moving to the Netherlands, she could speak English, but she had to learn some more Dutch to communicate with her husband's relatives (and because the Netherlands has a language proficiency test for visa extensions). Ar-Jeuh could use Chinese to talk to her husband as well as his family and friends because she learned Chinese from customers who are Malaysian Chinese and came to visit the Thai border area. Moreover, she learned English from attending hotel training classes after graduating from Grade 9, and from practicing by herself. Ar-Jeuh commented that the use of English made her more acceptable to both employers and police in Malaysia. Most Thai people who come to work in Malaysia speak Chinese. People who can also use English have more recognition. Therefore, the act of language learning is a self-construction in order to make it easier to communicate with people of different cultures, and at

the same time it is recognized by others as an opportunity to negotiate in more domains such as the economy, the workplace, the daily life controversy, and giving opinions on various matters. When women cross the border, they are creating a new self-image. This gives a new meaning to the concept of patriarchy that is different from the mother's generation who married Akha. An important condition is the foreign husband with whom Akha women can negotiate more.

In terms of economic equality, Akha women like the idea of working outside to earn their own personal income. This concept is different from the work of the mother in Akha culture which focused on working outside to earn income to look after the whole family. After her marriage, Ar-Jum moved to the Netherlands and worked in a restaurant until she became pregnant. After giving birth, she did not go back to work because husband wanted her to raise the baby at home. She had to fulfill her household duties as required by her husband, even though she tried to change this after her child grew older and went to school, when she wanted to go out for work. This implies that although home care and family duties were an image associated with and linked to Akha-ness, and having no contribution to the family is not an Akha woman's way of life, she had to accommodate her husband's will.

After finishing Grade 9, Ar-Teuh worked hard to support her family. When she moved to Australia, Ar-Teuh started learning English, and afterwards she asked her husband's permission to work part time as well. In her spare time, she also liked to go

shopping. She mentioned that she was very poor when she was a child and had only one set of clothes. Now, she has money and wants to buy the stuff she always wanted and never got in childhood, especially clothes and dresses.

In the case of Ar-Jeuh, she is the only one who does not cook and take care of the house because she has chosen to work outside. She argued that she wants to work and earn her own income. She did not want to be a housewife who has to take care of everyone as her mother did, because it is tiring and heavy work. She and her husband went out to work and did not necessarily cook for themselves. She seldom cooked a meal except for hosting a party with friends on special occasions and holidays.

Their Akha way of life was not different from living in a big city. It was normal that they surfed the Internet, played on Facebook, watched movies and clips from Thailand – both entertainment and news programs – and shared the stories that interested them, which reflects a modern self-image. Thus, in the modern world, their self-image was constructed in the mode of globalization and global citizenship rather than a return to their Akha identity as if they had stayed in the mountain. While they were using modern communication equipment to communicate with their family, these Akha women did not plan to return to their homeland anyway. This is because in the Akha way, the marriage of women is a symbol of being cut off from the old family to join a new family. Consequently, the self-image of Akha women is different from that of Isan women who are married

to foreigners and often come back to the village because of the relationship with their former family and are determined by the Isan woman's role to take care of the family and save money rather than living abroad. (See also; Ratana Boonmathya (2005), Patcharin Lapanun (2010), Suriya Smutkupt and Pattana Kitiarsa. (2014))

It is interesting to note that growing up in the Akha family with “ethnicity” that is different from the lowland people was not a problem for the three girls when living in the mountains. Nevertheless, this was questioned when they started working for economic accumulation in urban society. Ar-Jum, for instance, went to learn Dutch in Nakornratchasima, and was insulted by her teacher's wife who said that she was only a hill-tribe girl who could not even speak Thai clearly, so how can you learn Dutch? In the case of Ar-Jueh, when working in Phuket, she had to live with her Akha friends from Chiang Rai, rather than go out to get in touch with local people. In the context of urban life when they came to work after graduation, they also defined themselves as Akha all the time because at that time their relationship was with their friends and relatives working abroad. This implication of the Akha's image and identity had a significant meaning when they were in “partisan” areas. Although it is clear that the cultural capital of the Akha's identity is powerful in linking women's identities with others, they still tell the people around them and their lovers that they are Akha, even in situations and areas where they do not need such identities (because in a foreign country, they can choose many identities

including individuality, Thai identity, Akha identity as well as global citizenship). In conclusion, ethnic identity has the power to dominate the worldview of women.

It is clear that the accumulation of cultural capital from homeland, economic capital, language training, and working with the aim of bringing about a new identity construction in a foreign country is a linkage of the Akha women from their homelands to a self-image within globalization. These changing processes, with the addition of new ideologies such as equality, lack of obligation, pursuit of opportunity, urban lifestyle under globalization and foreign culture, have created many identities both inconsistent with their original identity and the new self-image that are reconstructed in the context of their varying lives in foreign countries. It is interesting to explain that the way of life of Akha cross-marriage women suggests different forms of identity, both defined by their ethnic identity and having partially become a portion of the present female identity. Ethnic identity in this sense is something that is far away, but with an inevitable longing and need to escape. In addition, Akha women who are married always talk about Akha self-image. They often talk about being in a good environment, happily far from hustle, without competition, and being proud of being Akha (some key informants called themselves “Doi People”). They are, however, uncomfortable with the Akha women’s or mother’s role, being obedient, hardworking, and not having their own life. Although they were thinking of their hometown, there were no Akha women living in a foreign country who wanted to go back to the

mountainous home and live like their mothers. The self-image instigated by ethnic identity is a self-image in a nostalgic sense, which is talked about occasionally and more meaningful when it comes to meeting Akha friends. Moreover, ethnic identity also contributes to the creation of the ideal self-image, often in the narratives of a specific historical context (memory in childhood). In other words, this self-image is subjected to the discourses of daughter, wife and mother as well as the ethnicity or self-image that are expected from society.

It is clear that the modern way of life, which changes with globalization, has supplemented a new self-image for Akha women, and generated lifestyles and new requirements associated with Akha ethnic elements which they still want to keep. A variety of self-images are used to satisfy and negotiate the benefits of relationships, and sometimes it is fulfillment of the spiritual happiness that has returned to the ethnic self-image from time to time. It is clear that although globalization and nation-state have had a significant role in constructing diverse self-images of women, they can pick out and select, as far as possible, their self-images to live their lives abroad. This new self-image will not exist if they grow and live in a traditional Akha family.

Modern Self as Global Citizen

The concept of self is developed from the symbolic interaction theory which focuses on the relationship between self and other. Besides, from the study of self from postmodern

perspectives evolves the concept of self from static into fragmentation. It is important to understand that self is not an absolute subject, but it is determined by some structure or self under discourse. Moreover, self is also an agency that can choose to define itself under a variety of discourses because people can construct truth from life experiences and reflect on the interaction process (Prus 1996). Understanding self is meant to examine the process by which individuals use their experiences, lives, and interactions with their cultural representations in various dimensions that appear in their daily lives (Denzin 1992), while experiences are integrated with each other's desires Elliott (2014). Life in a foreign country that differs from their homeland is an essential factor that affects the new self-construction process for these Akha women. While life on the mountain is a life that emphasizes the economic and cultural dimensions of ethnicity, when they studied in the city and went to work in big cities, the mechanism of economic capital accumulation generated an alternative self and embedded practices from a foreign country such as the ideas of inequality, English competency and modern dress, as well as leisure and a lifestyle which could not happen with life in the mountains.

Aihwa Ong (1999) offers a new definition of citizenship associated with capitalism and globalization, which shows that citizens do not just accept their fate and change according to globalization, but they can contest, negotiate and construct meaning for themselves by using the basis of ideas, beliefs and localities, or specificity as tools. Thus, Ong's actor is an agency

that has the power to create a flexible citizen, who performs various practices from different sources of the capital. Actor and agency also have the same characteristics which are not defined by the structure or accept the principle by which the state or economic and political structure is determined.

It is interesting to consider that an Akha cross-marriage demonstrates the characteristic of flexible citizenship with a diverse selection of self-expressions. They are citizens who are not entirely governed by the state and not necessarily in conflict or anti-state, but citizens who know how to deploy their capitals, both cultural in the dimension of ethnic identity, and economic which was created when they left home for self-interest, and combine the benefits with the social structure that lives within the capitalist world today (Robertson 1992). These flexible citizens are seen in technological practice, as expressions of ethnic identity through modern media, enhancing self-image in order to utilize and adapt to globalization through language learning, work and the use of modern media, so as not to be disconnected from their ethnic identity. These women choose to deny the illusion of the image of Thai women married to westerners by defining themselves as Akha, or the expression of Akha identity through “Tom Pak Doi” live on Facebook, and describe the procedures in Thai and Dutch, dress in modern western clothing, but learn English. Hybridity of self-image formed by numerous capitals, including the people with which women interact, is a fragment of self-image in the modern world that the agency can indicate to supplement their identities according to imagination

at community levels, that is, imagination of the ethnic group on the online world and help audiences to understand the practice of ethnic groups that use imagination to create self at the state of modernity that “trans” borders, both nationality and ethnic borders through daily activities and ‘scapes’ in various forms, such as ethnoscaples, mediascaples, ideascaples, etc. (Appadurai 2008). It is possible to consider contemporary society under globalization which is highly individualized. We can also understand the relationships between imagination, practice, globalization and modernity through individuality because at present individuals use imagination to create their self-images in several forms. Therefore, the use of modern media leads to new self-construction as they want both at the image level (imaginative space) for the creation of self-image through the media and the level of change towards the body (physical area), such as dress, language, etc., as appeared in the cross-marriage of these Akha women.

Conclusion

The cross-marriage is neither a matter of “love across the horizon” nor merely involves two people. It is likely to be related to politics, state policy, creation of otherness, and economy in the global market including specific life situations of each woman. The world synchronization of external power relations and inner thoughts, as well as the imaginations of women is the result of a combination of establishing, changing, distorting, or reinforcing the ideology of women who have different backgrounds, such

as family, gender relations in the domestic sphere, educational level, community discourse, ethnicity, professionalism, and cultural worldview. These things affect the relationships between women and others around them, and also have an impact on the women's self-creation. Consequently, background or cultural capital play important roles on the way of each woman's thinking and become significant capital for women to negotiate in power relations, not only with their husbands but also with their family members.

It is essential to conclude that the crucial point in understanding the self of Akha's cross-cultural marriage likely has two main points; the root and the route. The root is an Akha's self that cannot be clearly visible (in the state of trans-border life), but always helps her to connect self to the homeland (which, in fact, is apparently interrupted by spatial boundaries). Moreover, the root is brought into play regularly in transborder space, both physically and in the online world of contemporary epoch, but it is the root that is integrated, modified, supplemented and negotiated in surrounding contexts as a global citizen. While the route is something that is slowly accumulated in Akha women's lives, it is strengthened out of the space or away from the root. Thus, increasing knowledge, changing environment, economic obligation, and livelihood are gradually adding to the self of women in the globalization process.

Therefore, it is possible to say that both the root and the route probably work together in order for Akha's women to construct self-images, and to link their ethnic identity to the

identity of a flexible citizen. Sometimes, the route affects and even has a conflict with the root, as in the path of modern women who work for themselves, and a private world that is different from the Akha women, where the family world and the private world overlap. Nevertheless, in some situations, the route is reinforced by the stronger root, such as in the ethnic affirmation of “Akha”, which is not “Thai” in the husband’s family in a foreign country.



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