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The culture of migration in Southeast Asia: Acculturation, enculturation and deculturation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to look at how migration and culture interact to shape the migration landscape in Southeast Asian countries. Within the scope of migration study, there has been a lack of attention paid to the importance of culture. Scholars may have lost sight of the importance of culture due to a sustained and continuous concentration on socioeconomic concerns. The research claims that one of the aspects that influences migration decision-making is culture. To back up our claim, we performed qualitative research in Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei. Through the lens of acculturation, enculturation, and deculturation, the study highlights a vital problem of whether migration influences culture or the other way around or whether migration itself becomes a part of a culture.

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Migration; southeast asia; culture; enculturation; deculturation; acculturation

Introduction

Since the early 1970s, culture has played a key role in migration scholarships under a variety of pseudonyms. As a result, the cultural focus on migration studies is a relatively new addition to the field of study. J. H. Cohen and Ibrahim (2011) made significant attempts to include culture in the migration study, laying the groundwork for a fundamental argument concerning the cultural-migration nexus. Researchers investigate how culture plays a role in the migration process for migrants, family members who remain behind, and those who have already arrived in the destination countries (Epstein & Gang, 2010). The beholder determines the shape of migrant culture. In Western culture, migration, for example, is a desire for greener pastures. However, in the Pacific, escalation of migration is typically seen as preserving kin relationships (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009), migration in the global south is seen as a result of adverse economic conditions (Benson, 2011; Benson & O'Reilly, 2009), and migration in ancient Africa is seen as a means of enslavement (Benson, 2011).

Migrants' behaviour is typically influenced by the culture they originate from or belong to, as well as the society they eventually settle into. Individuals in an egocentric society are tied to one another, implying that their migration decision is driven by significant self-interest. Chain migration is frequently viewed as a selfless act. On the other hand, chain migration is common in an egocentric culture. Individuals in collectivist societies integrate

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into a kinship-based system and have strong peer and group feelings (Hofstede, 2001). Migration, according to Hans and Klute (2007), is fuelled by regionally specified valuations of preferable strategy patterns.

The migration movement, we suggest, is a cultural expression. Cohen (1997) discusses the internal logic of whether or not a person migrates to a culture that is comparable to their own and, if so, when and where they migrate. Researchers approached the issue of migrant culture in a variety of ways. Wiest (), for example, sees migration as a culture that breeds reliance. Mines (1981) claims that migration has established a community tradition, whereas Massey et al. (1987), Goldring (1992), and Rouse (1992) believe that migration is a natural aspect of life. According to Smith (1998), migrant-sending communities are transnational locales, and Kandel and Massey (2002) believe that migrants always represent social life, politics, and culture when they are not present.

When it comes to understanding migration as an economic phenomenon, culture is crucial. My debate centre on the question of whether migration influences culture or migration impacts culture. Understanding the processes of acculturation, enculturation, and deculturation is essential for answering this question. Throughout this paper, I consider if migration affects culture or vice versa, or whether migration becomes a part of a culture in Southeast Asian civilisation. I approach this from the perspective of acculturation, enculturation, and deculturation.

People of various origins learn to communicate with one another and engage in a variety of social activities, which leads to more cultural interaction and subsequent intermingling. Diasporic practices connect origins and destinations as people live in transnational spaces (Ullah, 2016), and migratory populations tend to acquire cultural practices. As culture travels with migrants, it gets mixed, and migrants impact surrounding cultures in various ways. Epstein and Gang (2010) linked ethnic resemblance to migrants' ability to live in a culturally similar environment, such as speaking the same language (Bleakley & Chin, 2010), listening to the same music, reading the same newspapers, and eating the same ethnic food. Migrants benefit financially from cultural similarities because ethnic variables lower migration's monetary and psychological costs (Epstein & Gang, 2010; Ullah, 2010). As a result, ethnicity and culture become inextricably interwoven (Figure 1).

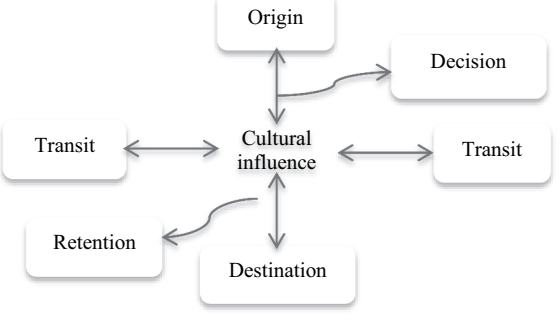


Figure 1. Culture-migration dynamics. Source: Author, 2022

While we emphasise culture as a key driver of migration, we do not aim to undermine the importance of traditional variables such as economic and political forces. The interaction of economic and cultural factors, on the other hand, has always been fascinating in terms of how [im]migrants respond to financial incentives to learn the host country's language and accent (Siniver, 2010).

Potential migrants bring both tangible belongings and emotional feelings with them during the migration process. They, too, experience cultural bereavement as a result of the loss of culture, cultural values, and conventions, particularly while adjusting to new cultures in new places. Cultural bereavement, according to Eisenbruch (1990), is the loss of cultural values and identity experienced by the uprooted person. Denial and isolation, followed by anger, bargaining, sadness, and acceptance, were identified by Kübler and Ross (1969) as the first five stages of grief following losses.

This means migrants must acclimatise to a new cultural environment (language, food, religion, way of life, belief, clothing, etc.) when they arrive at their destinations. This suggests that they undergo a transformation. This shift in their cultural experience may come as a shock to them, which we commonly refer to as a cultural shock. Cultural shock is defined by Oberg (1960) and Taft (1977) as the stress of adjusting to a new culture, a sense of loss, a sense of confusion in expectations and self-identity, a sense of rejection by the new culture, and the anxiety that follows. As a result, although not every migrant experience cultural shock, the reaction to the new culture has been dubbed 'cultural shock.'

The matter of culture's contribution to cultural variety is brought up. There are also debates on whether migrants help maintain cultural diversity. Cultural variety, according to scholars, promotes synergies, which lead to superior outcomes in any societal activity (Ager & Brückner, 2013). Others suggest that varied surroundings might lead to coordination issues (Gören, 2014), resulting in racial fragmentation, which can harm social cohesiveness and trust (Alesina et al., 2016; Esteban & Ray, 2011; Ullah et al., 2019).

R. Cohen and Jónsson (2011) argue that a cultural analysis of migration studies is overdue. A deeper understanding of migration necessitates a closer examination of cultural shifts in both the source and destination societies (Castles & Sean, 2002). This research makes a contribution by examining the impact of culture in determining migration in Southeast Asian society using a variety of cultural elements such as food, language, behaviours, and traditions. We look at how migrants cope with and integrate themselves into receiving countries in order to feel at home, as well as whether this makes sense to them.

Objectives and methods

This article investigates how locals and migrants interact in various aspects of life, as well as how cultural reproduction occurs. To put it another way, how and to what extent does migration affect culture, and how does migration change culture? Brunei, Thailand, and Malaysia are the nations in which I conducted the research. The logistical convenience of these countries was a factor in their selection. We examined interactions between residents and migrants from 2016 to late 2018. Only unskilled migrants were chosen for this study. The grounds for choosing unskilled migrants are that they make up the largest

percentage of all migrants and are, therefore, more likely to contact locals (Uri, 2014). Interactions were only observed in local wet markets (in Brunei: Sengkurong vegetable market; Bandar Tamu; Gadong fish market; in Malaysia: Taman Tun Wet market, Pudu wet market; Kepong Bary wet market; in Thailand: Talad Thai wet market, Khlong Toey fish market; Chatuchak weekend market; and Ayutthaya fish market.

For this study, three research assistants were recruited locally. They received qualitative research training. They gathered data from both participants and non-participants. It took four months to establish rapport. They chose stores that were frequented by migrants rather than others. The observations took roughly two years to complete. Every day that the information was supplied to us, we double-checked it. I went back to the areas as needed to double-check the data. The survey sample, participant selection, instrument, findings, and demographics all was discussed.

Culture and migration: The underlying theories

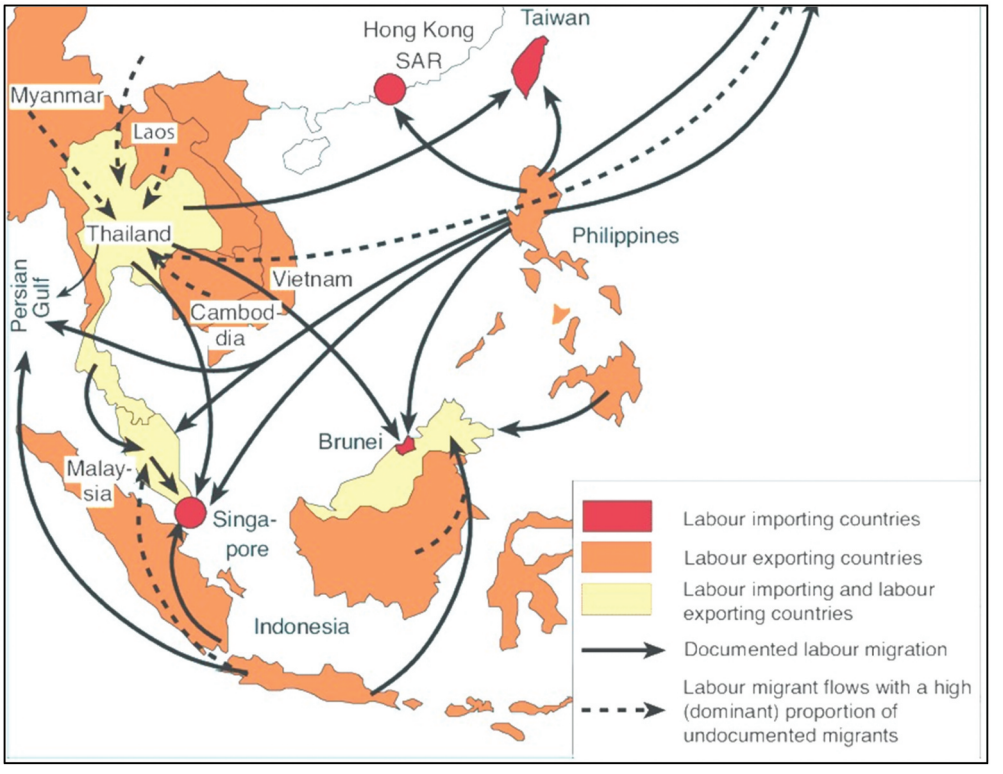
Migration is a cultural, social, economic, and political phenomenon. As members of cultural groups and societies, the underlying motivation for migration is well-being. According to J. H. Cohen and Ibrahim (2011), migrants are cultural actors whose decisions reflect wider cultural disputes. They go on to say that in order to live comfortably, they consider cultural, economic, and social security factors while making decisions to relocate (J. H. Cohen & Ibrahim, 2011).

International marital migration (IMM; Ullah, 2013), which occurs through one of the most extensively used pathways known as mail order bride (MOB), is a significant form of migration that is vital to include here (Elson, 1997). The MOB's foundation is heavily based on cultural compatibility. The rise of the MOB phenomenon has been regarded as a new social phenomenon, albeit one, in that it is a modern form of the mediated marital arrangements that have been performed in many communities from the beginning of time (Kojima, 2001). A mail-order bride is a woman who registers with a marriage agency in the hopes of being chosen as a wife by someone from another nation (Cudwska, 2016; Elson, 1997; Lee & Lewis, 2003; Ullah, 2013). She then migrates to a destination country with her husband. Mail-order brides (Cudwska, 2016) are commonly practiced in many countries (e.g. Russia, Ukraine, Ukraine, Philippines, Thailand, Japan, Colombia, Peru, and Brazil). Culture does not prohibit, if not promote, this behaviour. I suggest, without bias, that MOB has been ingrained in the cultures of those countries. However, this may not be culturally acceptable in nations where religion (particularly Islam) is deeply ingrained in society, or vice versa (Ullah, 2012).

Female migration, we believe, is a form of cultural reproduction (Kofman, 2014; Thanh-Dam, 1996). Depending on the couture possible migrant life in, gender can open or restrict doors to specific moves. Education and experience are other important factors in a migrant's success (J. H. Cohen & Ibrahim, 2011). Women in South Asia, at least, rarely moved anywhere independently until the 1990s (Ullah, 2013aa); in other contexts, women are encouraged to go to international countries, while Filipina women are encouraged to stay close to home (J. H. Cohen & Ibrahim, 2011).

Women moved modest distances (Ravenstein, 1885), primarily within their own country, to work as nannies or housekeepers. Hence most long-distance migrants were men until 1980. This pattern has shifted in recent years, and they now travel over long

distances in a more independent manner than before. The fact that female migration outnumbers male migration in Southeast Asia has given rise to the notion of feminisation of migration (Zlotnik, 2003; Ahsan et al., 2022; Curran & Saguy, 2001). This indicates that sending women out of the country as self-sufficient migrants has a lot to do with the culture of the country. For example, in a society where sending female members of the family out of the nation for employment is seen as a devaluation of the family's standing,



Map 1. Shows migration flow in Southeast Asia.

sending women out of the country unattended would be frowned upon.

Migrants go through an interaction of cultural elements between individuals and cultures in order to integrate and assimilate (Bhugra, 2001, 2004). Inevitably, in certain circumstances, cultural and ethnic identity becomes inflexible and troublesome. Individuals may opt to stick to their old identity, which may produce difficulties with the new culture but acceptance within their own (Ullah, 2017). These tensions are also related to acculturation (Farver et al., 2002), which is a way of life shared by a group of people, including the way they receive food, the way they raise their children, their values, beliefs, language, customs and religion (Abdelhady, 2008). Migrants bring along with them their culture. They bring new food, music, literature, dancing and new ideas. This also teaches kids to appreciate various ways of life and new culture. Hence, the notion of a melting pot emerged.

' . . .. From the point of view of non-dominant groups, when individuals do not intend to keep their cultural identity and seek daily connection with other cultures, the assimilation strategy is described. In contrast, when individuals place importance on keeping on to their original culture, yet at the same time seek to avoid engagement with outsiders, then the Separation alternative is described. When there is an interest in both keeping one's native culture and in everyday encounters with other groups, integration is the option; here, there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained while at the same time striving to engage as an integral member of the greater social network. Finally, when there is a little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and little interest in having interactions with others (typically for reasons of exclusion or discrimination), then marginalisation is defined . . . . . ' J. W. Berry (1997):8.

Integration and assimilation thoughts lead to another fundamental concept termed a melting pot. In sociology, the 'melting pot' is a concept referring to a varied society becoming increasingly homogeneous with the many pieces 'melting together' into a harmonic whole with a common culture. The melting pot idea is most typically used to explain the integration of immigrants to the United States (Michael Smith, 2012), but it may be applied to any situation where two or more cultures coexist. Migrants from the Middle East of various types have recently produced melting pots across Europe and the Americas. However, individuals who argue that cultural distinctions within a society are valuable and should be preserved frequently criticise this concept. As an alternative metaphor, a salad bowl or mosaic can be used to describe how diverse cultures blend while remaining distinct (Ashley, 2019).

The interviews with respondents reveal how cultures travel with migrants and what kind of dilemmas migrant communities face. When I initially met my friend [Steven], he inquired about my origins. When I informed him I was from Toronto, he asked again, this time adding, 'where I was actually from.' My response was clearly insufficient; he thought my accent was 'funny.' Surprisingly, his query was far more challenging to answer. Why couldn't he understand that some Canadians have a 'funny' accent? I didn't know how to respond. Was he expecting me to claim I'm from China? What was it about my accent that was so important? Even though I was raised in Hong Kong, I felt forced to answer Toronto when he initially asked where I was from. I was hesitant to respond to his inquiry about Hong Kong because I was afraid he would designate me as a newly immigrated alien, or FOB for short (fresh off the boat). This short narrative is typical of many immigrants in America, and it highlights crucial points that need to be investigated further. First, how do America's prevailing cultural and social standards mould immigrants' self-identities and, as a result, push them to behave in a specific way? Second, and perhaps more crucially, how can immigrants deal with the cultural competency challenge; how, if at all, can immigrants be true to their own background while remaining adaptable to new cultural environments (Calvin, 2014)?

Language, religion, music, and history are all factors that can influence migration decisions. When migrants fail to connect their own culture with that of their destination, they feel out of place and uncomfortable, emphasising that cultural similarities are significant in migration choices for integration and assimilation. Indeed, cultural spaces provide opportunities and resources for migrants to redefine their identities in new contexts, connect with those who have been left behind, and increase their subjective sense of well-being (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). Language, religion,

Table 1. Southeast Asian migration and cultural link.

Countries	Estimated number of [in]migrants	Estimated number of [out]migrants	Major compositions of [in]migrants
Brunei	94,254*	7,000	From Indonesia (32.8 per cent), Malaysia (22.4 per cent) and the Philippines (17.5 per cent)
Cambodia		1000,000 (ILO, 2017)	68 per cent in Thailand**
Indonesia	4.5 million (UNDESA (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division), 2017)	118,177 in 2011***	Malaysia, Brunei, Hong Kong
Lao	1.3 million (UNDESA (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division), 2017)		About 60 per cent in Thailand
Malaysia	2.4 million	300,000*****	Indonesian (about 40 per cent), Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Bangladesh
Myanmar	4.5 million		About 50 per cent in Thailand, Malaysia
Philippines	11 million		US: 3,135,295 permanent residents (64.4 per cent of global total); Canada: 626,668 (12.9 per cent); Australia: 334,096 (6.9 per cent); Japan: 163,532 (3.4 per cent).
Singapore	856,000	107,446	Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and China
Thailand	3.08 million (ILO, , 2018).	In 2016, 114,437, with 13 per cent intra-ASEAN migration (ILO, 2017).	Myanmar = 50 per cent) Cambodia = (32 per cent) Lao PDR = (18 per cent)
Timor	250,000 and 260,000		Indonesia, USA, Portugal, Australia
Vietnam	540,000****		Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, Thailand****

Sources: ILO (2017). *Department of Immigration and National Registration. 2010. **UNDESA, 2015.*** Ananta Aris & Arifin Evi Nurvidya, 2014. **** Department of Overseas Labour, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, 2019). ***** Ullah (2018); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO; 2007).

entertainment, cuisine, and shopping habits are among the five domains Bhugra (2001) described as interconnected with acculturation. For a better understanding of culture and migration, two points should be considered: first, racial, ethnic, and cultural identities are all part of one's identity, and second, the development of identity and the changes that result from migration and acculturation alter the construction of identity. Gender concerns, as well as familial and social variables, play a role in determining one's identity.

Southeast Asian migration dynamics

Migration has already acquired traction in Southeast Asian countries in the ASEAN labour markets. Intra-ASEAN migration is on the rise, with 6.9 million intra-regional migrants making up two-thirds of the region's total international migrant stock (UNDESA (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division), 2017; Ullah, 2018). Within ASEAN, net sending countries include the

Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, while net receiving countries include Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei Darussalam (ILO, 2017; Ullah, 2018).

I wonder how intra-ASEAN migration is linked to culture as I examine the pattern and volume of intra-ASEAN migration. Apart from dominant reasons (such as economic and other forced conditions), I suggest that culture plays an important role in migratory decisions. According to studies (such as Ullah, 2010, 2013; Ullah et al., 2019), migrants currently send or bring remittances in kind in addition to cash. These intangible remittances in kind mainly consist of culturally significant souvenirs, tokens, and other items. The greater one's cultural connection with the nation of origin, the more likely one is to keep ties to the place of origin through investing and talking with friends and relatives (Ullah, 2017aa). This migrant society provides an ideal ground for the emergence of hybrid cultures, or cultures that combine elements from both the home and the host cultures (Oh & Kilduff, 1997). Table 1 shows some migration statistics (both intra-ASEAN and outside) as well as a main demographic breakdown of migrants to illustrate how migration and culture interact.

Despite the fact that proximity is a major driver of migration (Ravenstein, 1885; 1889), cultural ties appear to be a substantial motivator (Ullah & Kumpoh, 2018). Scholars (such as Munshi, 2003; Taylor & Wyatt, 1996) suggest that when migrants are forced to leave their homes, culture is a minor consideration. While we do not dismiss this reason, we argue that why do most Rohingyas and Syrians prefer to relocate to Bangladesh and why do most Syrians prefer to relocate to Turkey (Ullah, 2018aa; Ullah & Chattoraj, 2018)? In Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia, over a million Rohingya and hundreds of Chin refugees were residing (Ullah & Hossain, 2011; Ullah, 2016, Ullah & Diotima, 2018). Many respondents linked their desire to migrate in general to cultural similarities; however, there may be other reasons at play. Migrants tend to emphasise the most powerful recollections from their migration journey as they explain the circumstances. Even economic migrants are at ease when it comes to articulating the cultural issues that influenced their choice of destination. According to one migrant in Malaysia, he first tried durian many years ago. When he visited Hong Kong, he tried durian again, but it was too pricey.

He claims that durian is plentiful and inexpensive here. 'You could say that durian is one of my top reasons for coming here.' Of course, a higher salary, cleaner air (than at home), and a blend of Asian and Western ideals and infrastructure are significant. I do not feel completely out of place."

Because most Filipinas are open to many cultures, their options for locations within the country are also diverse. There are around three million Filipinas/Filipinos that call the United States home. These figures are thought to be staggering because most Filipinos fit in well with American culture. Scholars claim that due to the colonial heritage of the United States, Filipinas/Filipinos are inclined towards American culture. For almost 50 years, the Philippines were part of the United States (James, 1987). This is due to the fact that the majority of them have language skills that are comparable to the international standard. Filipinas/Filipinos, for example, dominate the domestic helper market in Hong Kong, Singapore, Brunei, and Macao. Religion is less important here, while cosmopolitanism is more important (Ahsan et al., 2022). Furthermore, Hong Kong's eating culture is similar to that of the Philippines.

Singapore has risen to the top of the list of wealthy migration destinations (Tay, 2019). Singapore was the seventh most popular country for millionaires to migrate to in 2018, with a net influx of 1,000 high-net-worth people (HNWI). The cosiness afforded in Singapore justifies their migration (Global Wealth Migration Review, 2019), and many HNWIs have already made Singapore their second home. Approximately 108,000 high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) left their native countries in 2018 (Tay, 2019). This type of movement is referred to as non-traditional migration, and it has become more prevalent in recent years. It is also referred to as elite migration (Ullah et al., 2019). Elite culture can be defined as the 'high' cultural forms and institutions that were once limited to modern social elites and are now a distinguishing feature of them (Adrian, 2007).

Thailand has been sending workers to other nations on a formal basis since the 1970s. In 2007, 20% of Thailand's 161,917 deployed workers travelled to the Middle East, with Israel accounting for 32% of those employed in the Middle East and Taiwan accounting for nearly half of all Thai deployed workers in Asia (Hugo, 2006). People migrate from Laos to Thailand for a variety of reasons, including economic opportunity and cultural and linguistic similarities. According to the ILO (2017), approximately 180,000 Lao workers registered for work in Thailand in 2010.

'It's like northern and north-eastern Thailand combined,' Thais would say when describing Laos. Because the inhabitants of Northeast Thailand are of Lao descent, their dialect is nearly identical to Lao. Thai people, on average, understand 80% of spoken Lao and Laotians, and on average, comprehend 90% of spoken Thai.

Acculturation, enculturation and deculturation

Let us now look at the participants' reactions to how they see themselves in terms of acculturation, enculturation, and deculturation. We frequently hear from migrants that they have experienced a cultural shock. The cultural shock was defined by many researchers (Adler, 1981; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Oberg, 1960; Taft, 1977) as a feeling of disorientation or discomfort brought on by the unfamiliarity of the new surroundings.

Migrants preserve their own culture while adopting the behaviours and values of another during the acculturation process. Acculturation, according to Gudykunst and Kim (2003), is the unlearning of past cultural practices. Acculturation is a two-way process in which members of the majority culture assimilate elements of the minority culture with which they interact (Storti, 1990). Let us examine how it differs from absorption. Maintaining the original culture is inconsequential in an assimilation plan, and a great deal of emphasis is focused on fitting in with the host culture, whereas enculturation is a process through which migrants acquire their host culture via observation and experiences (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Deculturation is a process where aspects of one culture are lost as migrants embarked on another culture (Padilla & Perez, 2003).

The foreigner is the one who must assimilate or integrate into the host society. Whatever the situation may be, these pressures on migrants are frequently based on essentialist cultural conceptions (Ali, 2007; Hans & Klute, 2007). Migrants in Southeast Asia primarily adopt acculturation or the concept of a melting pot (Anderson, 2017). The

metaphor of the melting pot refers to the extent to which migrants assimilate in their destination countries. African-Americans, for example, are totally culturally integrated into American culture (Hirschman, 2013). The majority of respondents said they saw returned migrants and heard positive things about foreign countries and cultures. Furthermore, they witnessed the improvement of their socioeconomic conditions as a result of migration [of their friends, relatives, and neighbours] and acquired aspirations, leading to a desire to relocate (Kandel & Massey, 2002; Ullah, 2010). This indicates that these migrants have a proclivity to enculturate.

The majority of local sellers at Tamu and Sengkurong markets speak different languages (such as Bengali, Thai, Hindi). When asked how they learned the language and why they speak it, they replied, 'How did they learn it, and why do they speak it?' 'There are many customers from Bangladesh, India, and Thailand. They, like us, have trouble communicating in English. We learnt these languages at a survival level so that both (parties) feel comfortable and these customers are not lost.'

To better converse with them, sellers spoke these languages (at least at a survival level). This means that the melting pot concept has been flipped on its head (i.e. pot melted). Migrants from other nations claimed to have learned Malay in order to interact more effectively with their contractors, employers, and vendors. Migrants do not abandon their values; instead, they try to figure out how to articulate their need for assistance (Bhugra, 2004). Migrants utilise acculturation tactics in this situation (Redfield et al., 1936).

Assimilation, according to Berry (1980), is the removal of cultural differences, while some have suggested that assimilation and acculturation are the same things. Gordon (1964) distinguishes three types of assimilation: structural, identification, and behavioural. Assimilation is nearly impossible in Southeast Asia. No other ASEAN country accepts permanent residents or naturalised citizens except Singapore. The majority of respondents agreed on one point: because of the intra-ASEAN movement, migrants never leave their culture behind and instead bring it with them. They acculturate rather than integrate at best.

Some cultures may be destroyed or lost depending on the circumstances. Others have just been overlooked. Because some societies are more evolved than others, the stronger cultures can easily overrun the weaker nations. We spoke to a number of Myanmarese in Talad Thai who had migrated to Thailand in the early 1990s and who seemed to have forgotten their past culture. This could be related to their diminishing chances of returning to Myanmar.

One of the most essential and distinctive human capacities for cultural transmission is language (Lotem et al., 2017). A culture's language reveals a lot about its values, beliefs, and traditions. In Malaysia, we listened to merchants and purchasers engage in Taman Tun Wet Market, Pudu Wet Market, and Kepong Bary Wet Market. When Bangladeshis or Indians converse with local sellers, an intriguing blended dialogue (Bengali-Hindi-Malay) emerges, and it is evident that they are extremely well conversant. Of course, this scenario could be different under a cultural hegemon. For example, China is culturally so powerful that outside culture would readily meltdown (albeit English is steadily penetrating Chinese society). Latin America would be in the same boat.

Conclusions

The capacity to embrace the host country's culture in any manner and express oneself through music, poetry, or food is crucial to their success. Migrants can build a comfortable zone for themselves because of cultural similarities (language, food, religion, etc.). This aids migrant retention and, as a result, increases their success in Southeast Asian labour markets.

The scarcity of literature about the interaction between migration and culture has been notable. Our literature search focused on factors such as culture that drive migration, as well as acculturation and deculturation experiences. We discovered that cultural similarity serves as a critical means for empowerment and self-expression, as well as integration, for migrants, particularly labour migrants, during their journeys and at their destination in situations of separation anxiety, trauma, and financial crisis.

In South-East Asia, cultural changes have happened in recent decades, particularly in the last three decades (Bunnell et al., 2005). Indonesia's political and economic transformation; Brunei's application of Shariah Law; Malaysia's political changes; Thailand's military administration; Singapore's new beginning after Lee Kwan Yew's death; Rohingya genocide; populist government; and the Philippines' violent drug war. Whatever the consequences of these changes may be, it is widely assumed that the presence of migrants from a variety of backgrounds has acted as a catalyst for change. Migrants, of course, allowed themselves to be absorbed into the host culture. We are not suggesting, however, that migrants have created a hybrid culture. In Southeast Asia, we claimed that migration aided the creation of a dynamic culture through the melting pot metaphor or blending. We believe that this study contributes significantly to the current scholarly literature on the interaction between migration and culture in Southeast Asia. More research on the subject will help answer many of the unanswered questions.

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Notes on contributor

AKM Ahsan Ullah is Associate Professor in Geography, Environment and Development at the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD). Ullah's research areas include population migration, human rights, development, environment and health policy. Dr Ullah has contributed 60 scientific articles to refereed journals and at least 40 chapters in a number of books, and published 15 books.

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Ethics approval

This research has gone through the ethical review process and was approved by UBD internal review board.

Consent for publication

We fully consent to publish this article.

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