RETURNING HOME AFTER STUDYING IN THE U.K.: THE READJUSTMENT OF THAI MILITARY PERSONNEL RETURNEES

BY

LT.JG. NATNICHA BOONPOKAEW

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS

THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY

ACDEMIC YEAR 2025

RETURNING HOME AFTER STUDYING IN THE U.K.: THE READJUSTMENT OF THAI MILITARY PERSONNEL RETURNEES

BY

LT.JG. NATNICHA BOONPOKAEW

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS

THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY

ACDEMIC YEAR 2025

THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS

THESIS

BY

LT.JG. NATNICHA BOONPOKAEW

ENTITLED

RETURNING HOME AFTER STUDYING IN THE U.K.: THE READJUSTMENT OF THAI MILITARY PERSONNEL RETURNEES

was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

on December 25 , 2025

Chairman Lugsamee Nuamthanom Kimura

(Assistant Professor Lugsamee Nuamthanom Kimura, Ph.D.)

Member and Advisor

(Assistant Professor Harald Andreas Kraus, Ph.D.)

Member Saneh Thongrin

(Associate Professor Saneh Thongrin, Ph.D.)

Dean

(Assistant Professor Sirirat Na Ranong, Ph.D.)

Thesis Title	RETURNING HOME AFTER STUDYING IN THE U.K.: THE READJUSTMENT OF THAI MILITARY PERSONNEL RETURNEES
Author	Lt.JG Natnicha Boonpokaew
Degree	Master of Arts
Major Field/Faculty/University	English Language Studies Faculty of Arts Thammasat University
Thesis Advisor	Associate Professor Harald Andreas Kraus, Ph.D.
Academic Year	2025

ABSTRACT

The United Kingdom remains one of the top destinations among international students, as well as statistics from the Royal Thai Armed Forces indicating that the majority of military personnel who graduate overseas are graduates from the UK. However, there is little literature examining the cultural readjustment from a civilian Western context to the Thai military society with its different cultural dimensions at home, particularly in terms of collectivism and power distance. This research investigates the readjustment experiences of Thai military returnees who completed a master's degree in the UK and returned to Thailand to perform active-duty military service in the Royal Thai Armed Forces. Hofstede's national cultural dimensions, reverse cultural shock, and transnationalism are used as a framework to explore what the returnees believed they had gained from their studies and how these gains impacted their personal lives in Thailand and professional lives within the Royal Thai Armed Forces. This qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis with 15 commissioned officers who had studied in the UK for at least one academic year and transitioned to a military career in Thailand. The findings reveal that studying for a master's degree in the UK resulted in returnees experiencing significant personal growth, interpersonal competencies, and professional benefits. However, returnees reported challenges during reintegration at home, such as emotional distress and unmet career expectations in adjusting to cultural values at home and military organization. This study provides a valuable perspective to understand how returnees negotiate their newly gained cosmopolitan identities from the UK

and develop strategies to balance them with local cultural values at home. This research contributes to the underexplored literature on military officers' readjustment from the civilian context to the military context and offers useful insights for military personnel considering studying abroad. This also encompasses foreign-graduated civilians who aspire to join the active service in Thailand's military organization.

Keywords: Military, Readjustment, Returnees, Study Abroad, Thailand, The United Kingdom

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support, advice, and encouragement from many people, to whom I would like to express my deepest gratitude.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Asst. Prof. Dr. Harald Kraus, my dissertation advisor, for his patience, constructive suggestions, careful reading, and constructive feedback throughout the writing process. His unwavering support during my final stages of this dissertation was invaluable, and I am sincerely grateful for his dedication.

I would like to express my gratitude to my former advisor, Dr. Natsatorn Witayarat, who provided invaluable advice at the beginning of my research and helped lay the foundation for this study, as well as my sincere gratitude to my thesis committee members, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Saneh Thongrin and Asst. Prof. Dr. Lugsamee Nuamthanom Kimura, for their constructive comments, critical assessments, and valuable time devoted during both of my proposal and dissertation defenses.

Again, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents for their unwavering love and financial support, which enabled me to achieve my academic goals with confidence and peace of mind. Finally, I would like to thank my best partner, Panus Veeradejkumhaeng, for his encouragement and emotional support. His trust in me has been a source of strength throughout this journey.

Lt.JG. Natnicha Boonpokaew

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LISTS OF TABLES

LISTS OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

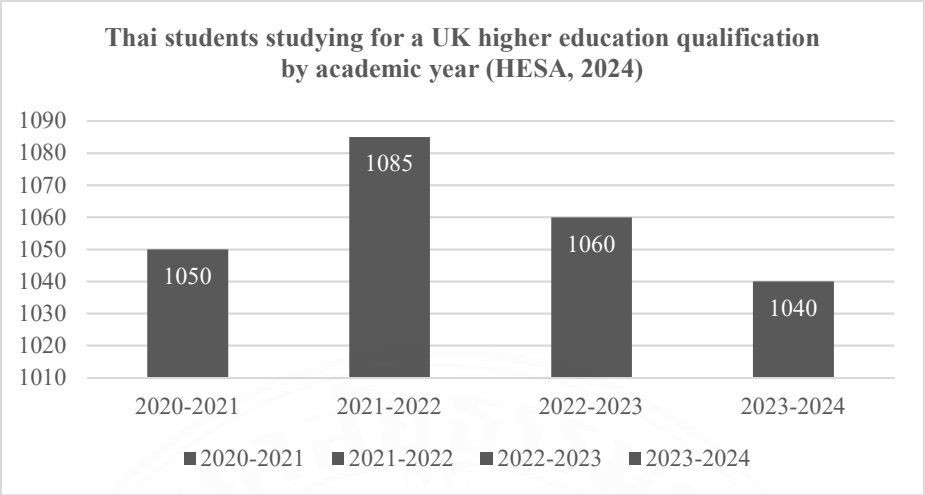
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale

As the world becomes more interconnected, studying abroad plays an important role in fostering students' cross-cultural experiences. Studying abroad offers students with the opportunity to connect with international networks, to experience diverse cultural norms, and to gain new knowledge. Among study abroad destinations, the United Kingdom (UK) remains a top destination for postgraduate study due to its long-standing academic reputation, short study periods, lifelong friendships, and supportive learning environment (British Council, 2024). For this reason, its strong reputation for postgraduate education also makes it a highly valued study destination for Thai students. According to AECC study abroad consultant (2023), the UK is widely favored as a destination for studying abroad on account of its abundant research prospects, renowned universities, distinguished academic standing, and worldwide professional outlook. As highlighted by QS World University Rankings, the UK consistently ranks highly in global university rankings, such as the QS World University Rankings 2024, where four of the top ten universities are located in the UK. UK universities adhere to standards set by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), which ensures that their qualifications are recognized worldwide. The blend of traditional lectures with innovative teaching methods and leading research methodologies contributes to the UK's top position in postgraduate education rankings.

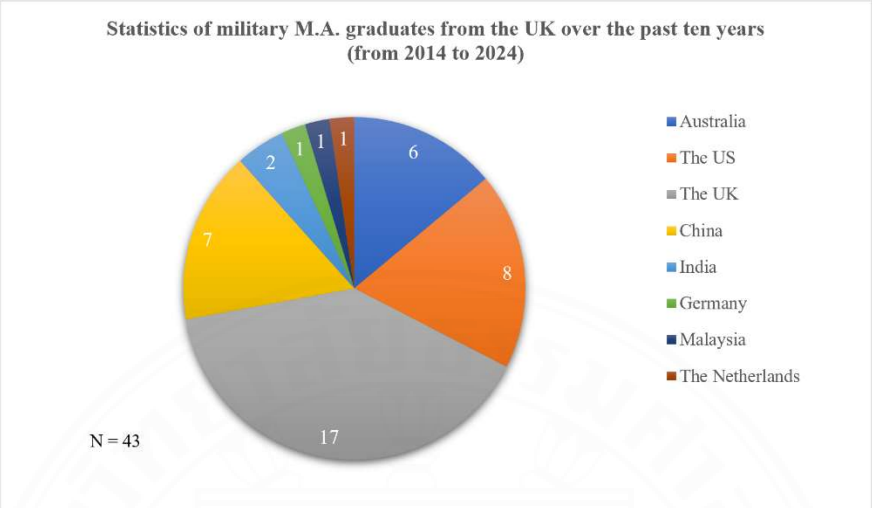
According to Higher Education Student Statistics (HESA), it was reported four years ago (from academic year 2020 to 2024) that the number of Thai students studying for a UK higher education degree remained steady (see figure 1) (HESA, 2024). Factors which attract Thai students to pursue a master's degree in the UK were investigated by Lertjanyakit and Bunchapattanasakda (2015) who reported the following reasons: (1) new worldviews and perspectives, (2) short study period (e.g. a master's degree in the UK typically requires at least only one year of full-time study (House, 2010), (3) students can do extra work while studying, (4) the ease of currency conversion, (5) studying abroad can upgrade profile in their curriculum vitae, (6) receiving a full scholarship or scholarship discount, (7) Visa approval is not very strict when compared to other countries, and (8) university rankings.

Figure 1 Number of Thai Students from Studying Wholly Overseas for a UK Higher Education Qualification from Academic Year 2020 to 2024 (HESA, 2024).



Additionally, the Thai military encourages its personnel to study abroad, especially for a master's degree, as it is perceived to offer significant career advantages (for those who carry the official report of study leave) and is an accessible education and requires a shorter process, with degrees typically completed within a few years. As the bachelor's degree is a minimum requirement for becoming a commissioned officer, a master's degree is considered a convenient and tangible choice to facilitate job advancements, such as salary increases, faster promotions, and eligibility for some provided military scholarships. Each year, various Thai military units grant study leave, allowing personnel to pursue degrees abroad for the necessary duration to complete their education, both on full-time study basis and weekend programs (Saturday and Sunday). According to official statistics from RTARF, in the past 10 years, it has been found that there are 43 people who graduated with a master's degree after 2014 until the present (2024). These personnel graduated from various countries, such as the UK, the US, China, and other countries, respectively. Among these graduates, 17 people graduated with master's degrees from the UK as the largest number, including those who received both fully funded scholarships and those who used private scholarships, indicating that the UK also attracts people from the Thai military organizations as well.

Figure 2 Number of RTARF Military Personnel Who Graduated with a Master's Degree From the Year 2014 – 2024 (Directorate of Joint Personnel, RTARF, 2024)



For Thai military returnees from study abroad experiences, the journey does not only end with the completion of a degree, but they also tend to gain valuable self-growth and competencies, which could be beneficial in their personal and professional lives. However, they may face a complex readjustment, (‘reverse culture shock’) particularly when bringing their received cultural, cosmopolitan and global skills home. For example, the differences between Western and Eastern cultures can be broadly explained by Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (2001), with Thailand scoring high on power distance and collectivism, while the UK scores high on individualism and low on power distance (The Culture Factor Group, 2024). Additionally, since the Thai military functions as a smaller sub-cultural environment within Thai society, the values of power distance and collectivism particularly apply to the military, with its stronger emphasis on stricter chain of command, compliance, teamwork, and mutual respect among members, as well as its internal governance system with long-term welfare benefits that attract personnel to the core values within the military.

Although previous intercultural studies have explored the cross-cultural transition faced by returning international students, most of this research has focused on civilian contexts, such as academics, private organization workers, and civil servants. Much less attention has been given to the military context. Therefore, this study addresses this gap specifically by focusing on Thai commissioned officers who have completed their master's degrees in the UK

and returned to join the service under the Royal Thai Armed Forces. The rationale for this study may provide the valuable insights of understanding the reintegration experience specific to groups of people like military personnel. This study, also hopes to provide insights into how they perceive gains from studying in the UK and strategies for transitioning into their personal and professional lives at home.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Studying in the UK offers an opportunity for Thai military personnel to be exposed to egalitarian teaching and learning strategies. Despite its advantages, there could also be challenges because returning back to the highly disciplined, hierarchical, and collectivist environment at home and in the workplace can be very different from the values of Western educational institutions. Returnees tend to experience feelings of depression, alienation, or resistance upon returning to their home. Although there is a number of research on the reentry experiences of international students, most of them have been conducted in civilian contexts, which still leaves a gap in knowledge about the unique experiences faced by military returnees. This lack of targeted research exists, and the wider implications of reintegration, both for personal career development and institutional change, are underexplored.

As a Thai commissioned officer who may consider further studies in a Western country, I have a personal interest in learning about this distinction of international transitions from civilian to military and want to examine how military returnees negotiate the readjustment and how they perceive the advantages and limitations of studying abroad once they are at home. Therefore, this study aims to address a significant gap in the academic debate on transnational military transitions and guide future recruits by offering insights into these events, thus promoting organizational awareness.

1.3 The Focus of the Study

This study investigates the readjustment experiences of Thai military officers who have completed their master's degrees in the UK. It focuses on how these returnees are interpreting and applying the academic, cultural, and social experiences upon their return to Thailand. This also includes the perception of the value of Western education and how this experience influences their personal and professional roles within the context of the hierarchical, collective, feminine-oriented, and uncertainty-avoidance cultural structures at

home. The study uses Hofstede's national cultural dimensions, reverse culture shock, and the transnationalism approaches to international students proposed by Gu (2009, 2015) and Gu & Schweisfurth (2015) to frame the specific readjustment of each person in a different home environment after experiencing a more open, egalitarian, and individual-focused society in the UK.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This research aims to:

1.4.1. Explore the perceived gains from studying in the UK by military returnees.

1.4.2 Examine how these gains influenced their personal lives and professional lives at home over time.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What do Thai military returnees believe they have gained from their experiences studying in the UK?

2. In what ways have these gains influenced their personal lives and careers?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it explores the well-rounded perspectives, not only in the cultural dimension but also the shift in identities of returnees with effects on the returnees' personal lives and professional lives over time. The researcher believes that this study can offer invaluable information about the impact of international education on the personal growth and reintegration of military personnel within Thailand. Such insights can shed light on the complex ways in which their holistic study abroad experiences can reshape their personal and professional roles within the Thai military through the dynamics of changing cultures and cross-culturalism. This study therefore adds to the limited literature on transnational readjustment specific to Thai military personnel, not just common civilians. It is hoped that the study's results will also help future military personnel to reflect on studying abroad, reintegration, and future education decisions. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute

to a more profound understanding of the benefits and challenges faced by Thai military personnel and provide advice to others who may follow a similar path of studying abroad.

1.7 The Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focused on Thai postgraduate students in the UK transitioning from a civilian context back into the Thai military. The target is to examine commissioned officers who completed their postgraduate studies within a 10-year timeframe from 2014 to 2024. Participants were required to have stayed in the UK for at least one academic year and to have returned to military duty shortly after returning to Thailand. This time frame ensured that the study captured reflections of returning soldiers in the most recent historical period while allowing for a wide range in the timing of their reentry experiences. Individuals who completed short-term training courses, diplomas, bachelor's degrees, or doctorates or who studied at specialized military institutions overseas were excluded. Non-commissioned officers and those who served outside of formal military units were also excluded in order to maintain consistency and focus on those who had leadership or professional responsibility within a structured command system. Participants were aged approximately 20–60 years, as this is the expectancy for military service.

1.8 Keywords and Definition of Terms

Keywords: Readjustment, Military, Returnees, Study abroad

- **Military personnel:** The Thai personnel of the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarter
- **Home:** The home country in this context refers to Thailand.
- **Readjustment:** The process by which military personnel adapt or modify behaviors, routines, and attitudes to align with societal norms, military protocols, and personal expectations in Thailand after returning from study in the U.K.
- **Returnees:** Members of the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarter who, after completing postgraduate studies in the UK, have returned to Thailand to resume their military duties and station at their branches.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the literature which related to the readjustment experiences of international student returnees, with a specific focus on Thai military personnel returning from postgraduate studies in the UK. The first section discusses the cross-cultural context and highlights the cultural differences between the UK and Thailand by drawing upon Hofstede's cultural dimensions to explain how national cultural dimensions affect each country's military organizational culture. The following section reviews studies on international student returnees and examines how cultural perspectives can be used as an analytical framework for understanding readjustment experiences. However, focusing on national cultural frameworks alone may cause stereotyping, ignore the diversity and the uniqueness of returnees' lived experiences. Therefore, this chapter also introduces the concept of transnationalism to broaden the analytical lens and capture the identity transformation, and global connectedness that go beyond fixed cultural boundaries. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a multidimensional foundation for interpreting the readjustment processes explored in this study.

2.1 Cross-cultural Context

2.1.1 The Differences Between the UK and Thailand's Cultural Context

Hofstede's cultural dimensions have become a well-known tool for comparing countries and understanding different cultural dimensions (Shaiq et al., 2011). He (1994) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people" (Hofstede, 1994, p.1) from another, emphasizing shared values and norms, including six key dimensions for comparing national cultures: the Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV), Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS), the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO), and Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR) (Hofstede 2001). All of these dimensions were studied on a large scale by 64 different countries who worked in a multinational corporation called IBM and among 2 groups of students in 10 and 23 countries, respectively (see table 1), which is widely criticized among some scholars who do not believe in using Hofstede's cultural framework solely in cross-cultural studies. This will be discussed later in section 2.2.2.

Table 1 Comparison of Thailand and the UK according to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Cultural Dimension	Thailand's Culture Pole	The UK's Culture Pole
Power Distance Index (PDI)	High PDI: Accepts hierarchical order; authority is rarely questioned.	Low PDI: Prefers equality; decision-making is participative and decentralized.
Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)	Collectivism: Values group loyalty, harmony, and belonging; prioritizes collective success.	Individualism: Values independence, personal achievement, and self-reliance.
Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)	Femininity: Emphasizes care, cooperation, quality of life, and social well-being.	Masculinity: Emphasizes competition, ambition, success, and achievement.
Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)	High UAI: Avoids ambiguity through strict rules and structure; prefers predictability.	Low UAI: Comfortable with ambiguity and risk; open to innovation and diverse viewpoints.
Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO)	Long-Term: Focuses on perseverance, future rewards, and adaptability to change.	Short-Term: Oriented toward tradition, social obligations, and quick results.
Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR)	Restraint: Suppresses gratification; emphasizes discipline, duty, and societal norms.	Indulgence: Encourages free expression of desires and pursuit of enjoyment and personal happiness.

According to the Culture Factor Group's (2024) data, which adopted Hofstede's model of cultural values, Thailand has got high scores for power distance, individualism, femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. These are roughly half of those in the UK, while the scores for long-term orientation and indulgence are quite similar (see figure 2), indicating considerable cultural differences. Among these various scores, the first four indicators may differ enough to justify investigation. Numerous previous research studies used Hofstede's model in educational and private organization contexts, such as those by Chayakonvikom et al. (2016), Pimpa (2012), Rutegard (2024), and Tarry (2011), and produced results similar to these indicators (see table 1).

First, Thai and British cultures differ greatly in terms of power distance. Thai society has a significant power distance, with hierarchies strongly ingrained and authority rarely challenged. Pimpa (2012) confirms this viewpoint by underlining how Thai government agencies reflect widespread acceptance of hierarchical systems. This value is accepted widely among older generations with beliefs of a strong respect for authority, while challenging superiors is considered improper. This hierarchical perspective is also linked to the cultural concept of "losing face," in which people avoid confrontation or conflict in order to maintain social cohesion and save others' face (Rutgard, 2024). Power distance has also been studied in educational contexts. Chayakonvikom et al. (2016) found that Thai students, who are influenced by a teacher-centered education system, are typically hesitant to participate in class discussions or ask questions, even when they are in trouble or don't understand the subject content. This tendency is from an attempt to avoid criticizing teachers and avoid causing embarrassment in public. In contrast, British higher education institutions represent a low power distance culture by encouraging egalitarian values and open interaction among students. Tarry (2010) notes that UK colleges encourage classroom discussions and questions, which indicates a more equal connection between instructors and students. Wenxin and Wan (2022) demonstrate this further with their study of cultural variations in schooling between China and the UK. Their study showed that British students frequently prioritize personal preferences and liberty. In a more egalitarian educational atmosphere, actions such as yelling in class, wearing cosmetics, and skipping lessons were viewed as ways of opposing harsh authority and expressing individuality.

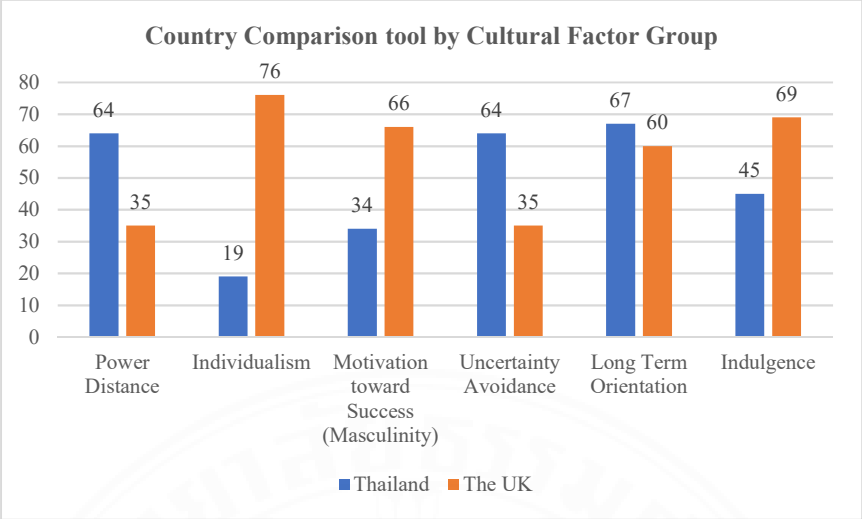
The contrast between individualism and collectivism is another example of cultural differences. Thai society is more collectivist, which means that the needs of the collective are more important than the needs of the individual. This cultural orientation means that decisions are often made with the collective well-being in mind (Rutegard, 2024). For example, Tarry (2010) discovered that Thai students who studied in the UK frequently carried the weight of family expectations. Many of them were encouraged by relatives to pursue international degrees in order to improve the family's social status. However, exposure to British individualism may encourage those students to adopt more independent attitudes. Some participants in Tarry's study began to express independent opinions and seek personal goals, which contrasted with the traditionally family-oriented decision-making culture they were raised in.

Another important dimension is masculinity vs. femininity. According to Hofstede's model, Thailand tends to hold feminine cultural values such as care, cooperation, and

politeness over competitiveness and aggressiveness. This cultural feature promotes social harmony while discouraging competitive behaviors (Rutegard, 2024). Chayakonvikom et al. (2016) found that this cultural orientation also affects classroom behavior. Students in Thailand prefer to follow instructions quietly rather than having debate participation or competitive learning activities. They frequently refrain from asking in-depth or serious questions in order to avoid being viewed as disrespectful or disruptive, which is consistent with the cultural norm of maintaining respectful and cooperative interactions. In the same way, the ancient Thai phrase “Do your best, but don't stand out” illustrates this approach well, as being extremely noticeable may be perceived as a threat or as bragging (Witayarat, 2020).

Finally, Thai culture values uncertainty avoidance, which means that people want stability, controlled environments, and unambiguous norms. Ambiguity or unexpected change is likely to cause them discomfort. Uncertainty avoidance was evidenced in Pimpa’s (2010) study revealing that Thai government officials frequently use group unity and conformity as a method to avoid ambiguity. In comparison, the UK has a more modest level of uncertainty avoidance, which allows people there to have better tolerance of ambiguity and change. Morrow et al. (2013) investigated this cultural gap in their study of international medical graduates adjusting to the UK workplace. They discovered that doctors from collectivist and high-uncertainty-avoidance cultures (such as non-EU nations) frequently struggle with the assertiveness required in the UK. These individuals may struggle to advocate for themselves or engage in open communication with superiors since they are accustomed to hierarchical institutions and stringent procedural rules. Furthermore, they may need to adapt to the UK's more flexible and uncertain clinical decision-making environment, which values individual judgment and open communication (Morrow et al., 2013).

Figure 3 A Cultural Value Comparison Between Thailand and The United Kingdom Using the Hofstede Six Dimensions (The Culture Factor Group, 2024)



2.1.2 Influence of National Cultures on a Military Organization

Hofstede's (1994) model of national culture was not found only in the study of a nation's context but also in the organizational context. He raised the differences between national and organizational cultures in terms of nature and formation. National cultures refer to the shared values, beliefs, and practices that have developed over centuries among people belonging to a nation, region, or ethnic group. These cultural characteristics are deeply cultivated and acquired during childhood, which is mostly influenced by traditions and historical factors. On the other hand, organizational cultures are created within companies or organizations. These cultures emerge from the symbols, heroes, rituals, and daily practices established by founders and leaders and lead to a distinctive environment that is more recent and subject to change over time.

As evidenced by Soeters et al. (2006) and Dragomir (2015), national culture plays a significant role in shaping military structures, social norms, and operational styles. Soeters et al. (2006) stated that national cultural dimensions are deeply embedded in historical, social, and institutional beliefs, which influence military practices, the same as what Dragomir (2015) highlighted: "The military culture is perceived as a process, not just as heritage," evolving as a dynamic system shaped by the society it serves. The military reflects the values, norms, and social structures of the country from which it originates and operates.

"The military culture is perceived as a process, not just as heritage, being an aggregate of systems, therefore a dynamic culture. As a national institution, the military organization is representative of the society it serves. The specific national environment and its historical evolution have marked it and shaped its values and norms, and as a consequence, the military reflects both the social structure and the cultural values of the society from which it originates and in which it operates." – Dragomir (2015)

Lang, as cited in Soeters et al. (2006), studied the military culture in Western countries and explained the character of military occupation as "communal characteristics" through the distinction between normative (institutional) and occupational orientations in military culture. In a normative or institutional orientation, military personnel view their service as a lifelong vocation and prioritize institutional loyalty (e.g., monarch, patriotism, constitutionality) over personal ambitions. This communal lifestyle reduces the distinction between personal and professional life, which is seen in countries where there was low individualism with low masculinity, like Belgium, Italy, and Germany. In contrast, an occupational orientation treats military service as a career with an emphasis on individual performance, work-life balance, and transferable qualifications. This orientation is more common in countries with high individualism and masculinity, like the United States, Denmark, Norway, and Canada, which consider military service a temporary stage of life rather than a long-term identity (Soeters et al., 2006). Consequently, these cultural orientations influence how military careers are structured across nations, which means that countries with strict hierarchies and obedience tend to promote seniority, long-term service, and institutional commitment, while more egalitarian societies allow for flexible, performance-driven career paths (Soeters et al., 2006). Even though, to the author's knowledge, there has not been a direct study in military culture in Thailand in terms of communal characteristics, the author, as a Thai female military member, observed that the Thai military system aligns more closely with the institutional orientation, which brings the seniority-based job characteristics and offers lifelong welfare benefits such as fixed salaries, medical care for families, and pensions (Kanithasen, 2021). Thai individuals can join the Thai military as a civil service job through cadet academies like the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School (Kanithasen, 2021) or through civilian direct recruitment when specific fields (e.g., finance, law, or engineering) lack commissioned officers (Army Training Command, 2017). Regardless of entry route, new service members must quickly adapt to the hierarchical and collectivist structure of the military organization. Once joined the active service, the Thai military distinguishes between commissioned and

non-commissioned officers, with the former commanding the latter (Regulation of the Ministry of Defence on Military Rank Appointments, B.E. 2507, 1964). Rank, rather than years of service, determines authority and facilitates effective communication and operations.

Drawing from Hofstede's cultural dimensions, there are several correlations between Thai national culture and the organizational culture of the Thai military in terms of power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and non-aggressive competition (also known as femininity). Thai military culture has a high degree of power distance, which is characterized by deeply rooted values, customs, and attitudes that reinforce hierarchical structures and institutional authority (Dragomir, 2015). Strict obedience is maintained through a formal bureaucratic chain of command (Soeters et al., 2006) to function as mechanisms of internal control and discipline (Holmberg & Alvinius, 2019). The Thai military also holds strong collectivist values by emphasizing loyalty, group cohesion, and shared responsibility over personal ambition, where the individual is subordinated to group objectives (Grimell, 2015). This is evidenced by Dragomir's argument (2015) that military culture emphasizes 'group cohesion' and requires individuals to be 'instrumentalized and individualized in favor of the group.' Uncertainty avoidance is another characteristic of Thai military culture, as it has an occupational structure for stability and lifetime employment, which could discourage deviation from established norms and career paths. Military institutions also adhere to formal rules and procedures that enhance predictability and operational order (Dragomir, 2015). They run the organization with clear lines of authority and decision-making, which is a core of high uncertainty avoidance. In this operational style, each role is clearly defined, and there is little room for ambiguity, which helps to reduce uncertainty about who is in charge. Moreover, the seniority-based promotion system can contribute to low levels of internal competition. This is different from more individualistic cultures where advancement is often performance-based. Consequently, this strong-structured environment fosters strong in-group bonds that may also create psychological distance from civilian society, as observed by Truusa and Castro (2019) and grounded in Tajfel's (1974) theory of social identity.

2.2 Readjustment Literature

2.2.1 Reverse Culture Shock

In the above argument, the researcher discussed how national cultural perspectives impact organizational management within the military. Now, the researcher will discuss the use of cultural perspectives in literature on international students returning to their home countries and how different cultural dimensions contribute to students' experience of reverse culture shock. Reverse culture shock is the term that has attracted widespread scholarly attention, one of the most notable being Oberg's (1960) discussion of how adapting to a different culture is often tied to a painful journey to readjust to the norms of the home culture upon return. It describes reentry challenges associated with adjusting psychologically and socially to the home culture after living in another culture for a long time (Gaw, 2000). Psychological challenges often take the form of emotional states such as loneliness, isolation, frustration, or even depression (Allison et al., 2011; Butcher, 2002; Christofi & Thompson, 2006; Pritchard, 2011; Soeterik, 2006). Studies have identified various factors that cause different levels of reverse culture shock, such as age (Kranz & Goedderz, 2020), expectations of the home country (Geeraert et al., 2022; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Young, 2014), length of stay abroad (Mastrianni, 2021), motivation to return home (Dentakos et al., 2017), and planning before returning home (Alsulami, 2020; Raja et al., 2023).

Allison et al. (2011) and Butcher (2002) reported that discomfort arose because returnees' perception of having been trained and cultivated abroad for a period of time did not correspond to the others' expectations of their home country. When they returned, these situations resulted in internal conflicts and depression due to unmet emotional needs (Nonaka, 2020). From past studies, the results of reverse culture shock on returnees are always caused by the changing perception in social and cultural values at home (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). For example, Christofi and Thompson (2007) studied participants from Cyprus, Russia, Germany, and Liberia who spent time in the US and the UK. These participants expressed dissatisfaction with their home countries and expressed a desire to return to their host countries due to a more liberated life. A study by Tarry (2010) indicates that Thai students studying abroad, particularly in Western countries, begin to adopt more individualistic attitudes, so this shift can create tensions as their new perspectives may conflict with the traditional collectivist values held by their families back home.

Changing social values are also reflected in the form of gender norms, whereby returnees may find it difficult to blend in with conservative familial and gender expectations at home once again with their new global perspectives. This led to feelings of alienation and disconnection. For example, Pritchard (2010) reported that gender biases were a readjustment challenge for some Asian returnees (e.g., Taiwan and Sri Lanka), with female graduates facing inferior treatment or rejection from partners due to their increased independence after studying abroad. A study by Le & La Cost (2017) also found that Vietnamese returnees from the U.S. felt it difficult to live under their parents' roof again due to their mature and individual worldviews, while traditional gender norms in Vietnam also pose a challenge for female returnees in terms of marriage struggles. The patriarchal culture oppressed Vietnamese female returnees to search for a man to build a family (Le & La Cost, 2017). In Saudi Arabia, Alsulami (2020) revealed that one Saudi participant could feel an unstable relationship with her family member related to her mother's illiteracy and dependence on a conservative family point of view. Alkubaidi & Alzhrani (2020) found that Saudi Arabian cultural practices limit women to household management, which causes Saudi women returnees to struggle with restrictions in conservative homes.

2.2.2 Controversy Over Using the Cultural Framework

In the context of international education, Hofstede's cultural dimensions model has come under increasing criticism, despite the fact that it is still widely employed, especially by organizations like the Culture Factor Group (2024). Researchers like McGrath & Gu (2015) caution against stereotyping by categorizing international students as a "homogeneous group" (Jones, 2005) based solely on Hofstede's framework. As McGrath and Gu (2015) emphasize, "culture is itself a fluid and dynamic construct," shaped continually by globalization and human interaction; this cultural framework may fail to account for the diversity of individual experiences. There are studies by Morrison et al. (2005) and Cleary (2016) that support this argument by showing that Chinese and Thai students studying in the UK often challenge cultural assumptions through their agency, adaptability, and motivation. In Cleary's (2016) study, Thai students are sometimes misperceived as passive, unserious, and only smiling due to cultural stereotypes. However, many of them were able to actively engage in collaborative learning and extracurricular activities. In the same way, this dynamic view of culture challenges the more static interpretations within Hofstede's model as well as the concept of reverse culture shock. McGrath and Gu (2015) further argue that existing cultural frameworks

often overly focus on negative reentry experiences and cultural dissonance while overlooking the personal growth from cross-cultural transitions.

2.2.3 Transnationalism in Readjustment Context

Rather than focusing only on emotional distress due to the change in different cultural contexts, McGrath and Gu (2015) highlight how returnees become more culturally, socially, and intellectually competent over time by learning to solve problems and navigate themselves in complex environments. These scholars have a view on international education not just as an academic endeavor but as a process of ongoing personal development. Upon returning, students may experience identity fusion by mixing their national, professional, and global identities rather than cultural dislocation. Later, Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) advance this perspective through the lens of transnationalism, which offers alternative choices to understand returnees' experiences. Instead of viewing returnees as being divided between two static cultures, transnationalism emphasizes the complex dynamic of social, professional, and cultural connections that students develop across borders. This view acknowledges that individuals often readjust themselves in diverse networks and communities from both their home and host countries. As globalization increased in the late 20th century, the term "transnationalism" was widely used to examine how individuals maintain connections across borders and how they adapt and interact with multiple cultural contexts. Other transnationalism scholars defined transnationalism differently based on their specific empirical contexts, such as economic, sociocultural, political, etc. (Tedeschi et al., 2022). This term is widely defined depending on factors like migration patterns, historical relationships, and proximity, so it is studied differently for different groups. Later, Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) expanded the term "transnationalism," proposed by Vertovec (1999) as "multiple ties or interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states," into the international studies literature to comprehend how international returnees perceive themselves as belonging to multiple places, creating identities that integrate their experiences from both "here" and "there." This framework has provided valuable insights into the experiences of student sojourners returning home by showing how they integrate aspects of their host and home cultures in ways that are transformative and long-lasting (Karakas, 2020). Unlike physical mobility alone, transnationalism emphasizes an interconnectedness across cultural boundaries. It focuses on a sense of "being" and "becoming" that evolves from international students' cross-border experiences (Phan, 2023). For example, Ghosh and Wang

(2003) describe how studying in Canada encouraged their participants to reflect on "who I am," "who I want to be," and "how I can be both here and there," which capture an awareness of self and identity that goes beyond a single cultural setting.

However, due to its lack of a universal definition, “transnationalism” was still interpreted variably depending on research methods and perspectives (Portes, 2001; Tedeschi et al., 2021). As a result, this term is still under debate among scholars and requires clearer criteria to differentiate between transnational and non-transnational individuals (Tedeschi et al., 2021). That is because research on transnationalism often uses qualitative methods, which leads to diverse interpretations of its characteristics (Tedeschi et al., 2021). Similarly, transnationalism may fail to apply to some migrants or returnees who are not "transnational." A study by Beauchemin & Safi (2020) supports this argument by revealing that rejection-based transnationalism could occur when returnees feel disconnected from their host country, which is often due to racism and discrimination. This form can lead to returning migration and increased ties to the home country. As a result, there is a gap in adopting this approach to address the various realities of returnees. This means that the current research may question the standard definition of transnationalism, particularly for those whose experiences do not fit typical transnational characteristics.

2.2.4 Impacts of Transnationalism in Readjustment Context

The concept of transnationalism has evolved to describe international students as the “linkages between people, places, and institutions crossing nation-state borders” (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Students frequently develop transnational or cosmopolitan identities that include dual or multiple selves through these transnational activities (e.g., a “Chinese self” and an “international self”) (Gu, 2015). These identities refer to a sense of self that is shaped by interactions and experiences across national borders that result in shifts of values, skills, and self-understanding. Continuous self-examination and adaptation to new norms mean that returnees develop hybrid identities by encompassing new cultural skills, worldviews, competencies, and networks that transcend national boundaries (Ai & Wang, 2017). Returning students do not simply revert to their former selves; rather, they integrate their foreign experiences into their personal and professional lives at home (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). A study by Gu (2015) highlights that these transformed identities often become more obvious upon their return home as participants in her study reflect on their international experiences as lifelong treasures.

2.2.4.1 Personal and Interpersonal Growth

Personal growth was found to be more outstanding in terms of enhanced language competence, which functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a marker of identity transformation among returnees. Several reentry studies have found that studying abroad improves returnees' language ability to the point that they may sense their skills have improved. This ability has offered students opportunities that lead to the ability to communicate more extensively (Baker, 2019). For instance, Wang (2022) conducted a study on Chinese students who obtained university degrees from the UK. They reported their most dominant skill is improved English language competence, while one of the female Chinese participants described, “I feel like I have two main languages.” Similarly, Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) also discovered that Chinese student returnees had greatly improved the other communication beyond the verbal, while the majority of returnees (81%) could experience increased confidence in their communication abilities by acknowledging the significance of English in a global context. A study by Gu (2015) also revealed that a Chinese participant gained a greater awareness of the complexities of language and communication that went beyond simple translation.

In addition to the satisfaction that student returnees have gained more proficiency in language skills, numerous studies highlighted various dimensions of positive self-perception (e.g., independence, maturity, confidence, and self-esteem) and interpersonal growth (e.g., relationships with others and interpersonal competence towards others) (Arouca, 2013). For example, Gu (2015) revealed that the challenges of studying abroad had a profound impact on returnees' self-concepts. Returnees reported enhanced confidence, self-efficacy, and positive workplace attitudes, which were evidenced by better time management and an increased ability to handle change and take on leadership roles. Similarly, Arouca (2013) reported that students initially focused on memorization to pass classes but eventually adopted more mature and flexible learning habits. This shift allowed them to learn more efficiently, increase their confidence, and require less study time. Gu (2009) found that Chinese students, particularly a female interviewee, experienced significant growth in their ability to manage their lives independently, such as communicating with people and solving problems. Alkubaidi & Alzhrani (2020) confirmed these findings among Saudi returnees, who highlighted the importance of patience and the positive changes in their personal growth, including increased knowledge, open-mindedness, and inclusivity toward other cultures.

Furthermore, it has been reported in several studies that returnees were able to navigate social and professional interactions across cultures, leading to better teamwork, conflict resolution, and collaboration in global or multicultural settings (Gu, 2009; Gu, 2015). Individuals with transnational competences received broadened worldviews by developing greater cultural sensitivity and awareness, which led them to gain deeper and more meaningful relationships with people from different backgrounds. This ongoing cultural exchange, caused by transnational experiences, leads returnees to acquire others' cultural value acceptance skills (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). For example, Ncube (2014) found that returnees returned with a more complex and hybridized worldview due to multicultural contact and exchange, with one Namibian returnee noting his increased open-mindedness and understanding of people. This open-mindedness and flexibility were further emphasized by Alkubaidi & Alzhrani (2020) and Gu (2015), who observed that returnees recognized that nothing is always right or wrong when they had to work in multicultural environments. A study by Wang (2022) similarly revealed that one of the Chinese female returnees learned to respect people with different values, attitudes, and lifestyles, while most participants integrated their national and transnational experiences more open-mindedly, understanding the uniqueness of each culture. In addition, some returnees could learn to appreciate their home cultures, as a study by Gu (2015) added that transnational competencies lead returnees to be more appreciative of their home cultural values. His research revealed that 73% of Chinese participants believed they had a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese culture than those who had not spent an extended period of time abroad. In the U.S. context, Kartoshkina's finding (2015) also supported this argument that some U.S. returnees could develop a critical perspective and an appreciative view of freedoms of choice and educational systems of their home country compared to host countries. The results from prior studies collectively demonstrate that personal development and interpersonal development are intricately connected, which reinforces the process of identity transformation among returnees. Instead of having their identities split apart (UK identity vs. Thai identity), returnees tend to create a more complex, transnational self that balances the values of both their home and host cultures. This combination makes it easier for them to adjust to life back home and be more effective in their social and professional lives, which I will discuss in the next subtopic.

2.2.4.2 Professional Advancement

Language ability, personal growth, interpersonal growth, and intercultural competence also benefit returnees' career advancement, which they perceived as a “privilege” as the difference from others who only obtain the domestic degree (Karakas, 2020). Gu & Schweisfurth (2015), Karakas (2020), and Wang (2022) explain that these cosmopolitan identities gained from studying abroad have significant impacts on professional growth because they help returnees develop a wide range of skills and ideas that are highly valued in the workplace. Individuals who were perceived as “an international student” often have good language skills, a deep understanding of cultural diversity, and the ability to navigate themselves to places where it exists. According to a study by Gu (2015), a female Chinese returnee can understand and interpret the values underlying the English language that enable her to communicate with her Western colleagues at a deeper level and enhance her self-confidence. Wang (2022) viewed some returnees as having a flexible characteristic due to their ability to collaborate effectively with others from diverse cultures, such as clients or partners from various nations. Furthermore, their "openness" to diversity leads them to encourage new ways of thinking and handling problems from different points of view (Gu, 2015). Gu & Schweisfurth (2015) indicate that one of the Chinese returnee participants could understand his boss from the UK better than other traditional Chinese co-workers. Similarly, individuals in this group often show personal growth and social skills that make them better leaders and team players (Gu, 2015). As noted by Alkubaidi & Alzhrani (2020), they also found that this growth and skills led their Saudi participants to have a sense of leadership in the academic workplace at home, as he was described as being young and a specialist in the field, making him feel a sense of pride over other co-workers.

However, these senses of benefits and privileges were denied and ignored in some situations, particularly in places where high-power distance is prioritized (Karakas, 2020). This perspective is mostly found in the literature on transitioning experienced by a scholar at home. For example, consider the reintegration experiences of Kazakh, Chinese, Saudi Arabian, and Japanese returnees in the local academic context (Guo and Lei, 2019; Jonbekova et al., 2020; Kuzhabekova et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Nonaka, 2020). In Kazakhstan, returnees struggled to gain acceptance into local scholarly societies due to the gatekeeping function of seniors in the academic environment, who were unwilling to 'acknowledge the achievements that younger overseas-trained scholars were making.' Jonbekova et al. (2020) viewed the collision between the Soviet and post-Soviet generations as one of the most

significant impediments to entering the job market and rising in the workplace. Many participants reported that their older colleagues, educated during the Soviet era and having entered the workforce, frequently viewed their ideas as 'unrealistic.' Alumni in the civil service and public sector often encountered a highly hierarchical environment where an individual maintains a position based on seniority rather than performance. Several participants mentioned that older employers or coworkers held strong beliefs and were resistant to change. Similarly, local academic communities in China perceived Chinese returnees as 'less experienced, early career academics' (Guo and Lei, 2019: 7), exhibiting a hierarchical, top-down, parenting-style relationship with their superiors. Another support for this finding is a study by Li et al. (2020), which found that the Chinese scholar returnees also faced difficulties in transferring the knowledge and educational philosophies they had acquired abroad. This challenge was compounded by the organizational constraints they encountered, which limited their ability to fulfill their roles effectively, which led them to disappointment and frustration. In Saudi Arabia, returnees encountered the rigidity of bureaucracy and felt that the existing work culture was difficult to overcome due to the conflict between different generations. Furthermore, they could not use the different teaching approaches and got stuck in the traditional way of teaching because everything was structured and standardized (Alkubaidi & Alzhrani, 2020). In Japan, Nonaka (2020) wrote her own reflection journal under the theme of transnationalism to examine the transition between “host” and “home” as well as between being Japanese female professor identities over the years. She also made a similar argument about the Japanese cultural setting, commenting that even though a professor has the same credentials and rank, seniority still plays a significant role, generating a large impact on the hierarchical connections among academic group members.

2.2.4.3 Social Reintegration at Home

Transnationalism is not only concerned with the transformation of returnees’ identities into more cosmopolitan forms, but also with how these identity shifts influence their interactions and relationships within two (or more) boundaries. Using the term “transnationalism” to explore the journeys of returnees involves returnees’ constant search for a sense of belonging as they navigate the complex dynamics of global migration and interconnectedness (Gu, 2015). Transnationalism is also used as a lens to examine how returnees maintain their social connections and transnational identities across different locations and how they reintegrate into their home societies while still being influenced by

their experiences abroad (e.g., Jin & Wang, 2022; Ncube, 2014; Ortiga et al., 2023). It focuses on individuals' interconnectedness across national borders and the ongoing exchange of cultural practices and perspectives. Furthermore, connections and relationships with individuals who share similar "routes" and "roots" (Gilroy, 1993, 2013), both within and across borders, help them sustain social ties and cultural bonds in multiple locations. This relates to how returnees maintain their cosmopolitan identities between newly acquired and previous cultural values. Social reintegration also relates to returnees' sense of belonging in groups where they can share transnational awareness of "multi-locality," "here and there consciousness," and "double consciousness" and help returnees categorize themselves differently between "Us" and "Others" (Karakas, 2020).

The term *"multi-locality"* refers to individuals or groups who have active connections and activities in multiple geographic locations at the same time. This concept is part of the transnationalism concept, as it highlights how people's economic, social, and cultural lives span multiple countries and locations (Wang, 2022; Vertovec, 2009). For example, a study by Wang (2022) reveals that when Chinese students study in the UK, they construct locality by embedding themselves within the Chinese community both practically and virtually. Similarly, when they return to China and don't feel they fit into the local Chinese context, they socialize with foreign nationals in self-constructed foreign localities (e.g., foreigner communities in China) to find a sense of belonging rather than being with a group of local Chinese (Wang, 2022).

"Here and there consciousness" refers to an individual's or community's awareness and sense of identity influenced by experiences of relocation, migration, and connection to their homelands (King & Christou, 2011). This idea includes collective memory, cultural norms, and emotional ties to both their host location and their home. It includes a sense of connection to other members and acceptance of common past and present relocation experiences. This consciousness often manifests through cultural expressions or social network activities representing the diaspora community (King & Christou, 2011; Vertovec, 2009). In the context of returnees, a number of studies found that many of them developed a strong sense of 'here and there' awareness, which made them more involved with a variety of social networks that they joined during and after their studies. For instance, Guo and Lei's (2019) study about transnational identity among Chinese academics reveals that the development of transnational communities of practice (CoPs) was driven more by their senses of identity and belonging than by shared academic traditions or theoretical perspectives. By

means of membership in international academic societies and several transnational CoPs, these transnational scholars actively shape their academic identities, crossing geographical and physical boundaries. Being in these groups gives a member access to group knowledge and encouragement for professional advancement and academic practices. In the same way, in the student returnee's context, Gu and Schweisfurth's (2015) interview findings revealed that Chinese returnees maintained social networks that encompassed ties to their home country and memberships in groups they had met in the UK. This is due to the fact that many individuals found comfort in their relationships with other Chinese residents during their studies in the UK, as they were part of this network of support. Related to the Chinese returnee's experience with this consciousness, it made them more involved with a variety of social networks, and these networks included ties to friends at home who they gained from abroad while also maintaining old friendships at home. However, Karakas's (2020) study argued that the 'here and there' awareness made some returnees more likely to connect with people who have been through similar experiences and avoid relationships with those whose experiences and skills are not similar to theirs. In the Turkish context, his study reported that 87% of participants could notice a difference in their way of thinking compared to those who had never spent a long period of time overseas; 69% reported they had made new friends whose experiences seemed more similar to their own. Similarly, 56% reported having fewer communications with the friends they had before traveling abroad, which contrasted with Guo and Lei's (2019) study.

"Double consciousness" refers to returnees' development of two distinct modes of perception: (1) based on how they view themselves and (2) based on how they believe others see them (Karakas, 2020). Returnees learned how others at home perceived them and how studying abroad impacted their personal and professional development. Many Turkish returnees developed a high sense of double consciousness, feeling both connected to Turkey and part of a global community. This awareness allowed them to identify as Turkish while also seeing themselves as global citizens. One Turkish student noted the prestige associated with obtaining a degree abroad in Turkey, pointing out that those who studied abroad were often seen by others as more open-minded and better language-skilled than other co-workers at home.

Table 2 Summary of the Core Idea of Transnational Awareness and the Relations to Research Context

Concept	Key Authors	Core Idea/ Definitions	Relevance to Military Returnees
Multi-locality	Vertovec (2009); Wang (2022)	Refers to an "action or awareness," such as maintaining active social, cultural, or professional connections in multiple locations simultaneously. Individuals construct "localities" across borders, for example, sustaining engagement with both home and host communities physically or virtually.	Some Thai military returnees may remain connected to Thai people community in the UK through academic or friendship groups met in the UK while also re-engaging with them at home again in the form of a Thai students' club or alumni meeting.
Here-and-there consciousness	King & Christou (2011); Guo & Lei (2019); Karakas (2020); Gu & Schweisfurth (2015)	Refers to an "awareness" of simultaneously belonging "here" (home) and "there" (host). This consciousness shapes a hybrid identity grounded in collective memories, cultural practices, and emotional ties to both contexts.	Some Thai military returnees may be more motivated by their senses of identity, which help them understand the feelings of and feel closer to their fellow Thai graduates from the UK than to those who have never studied there.
Double-consciousness	Karakas (2020)	Refers to an "awareness" of two perspectives: how returnees see themselves and how they perceive others view them, which could develop awareness of being both insiders and outsiders.	Some Thai military returnees may perceive themselves as modern, globally educated officers, while being seen by peers as "different" or "Westernized."

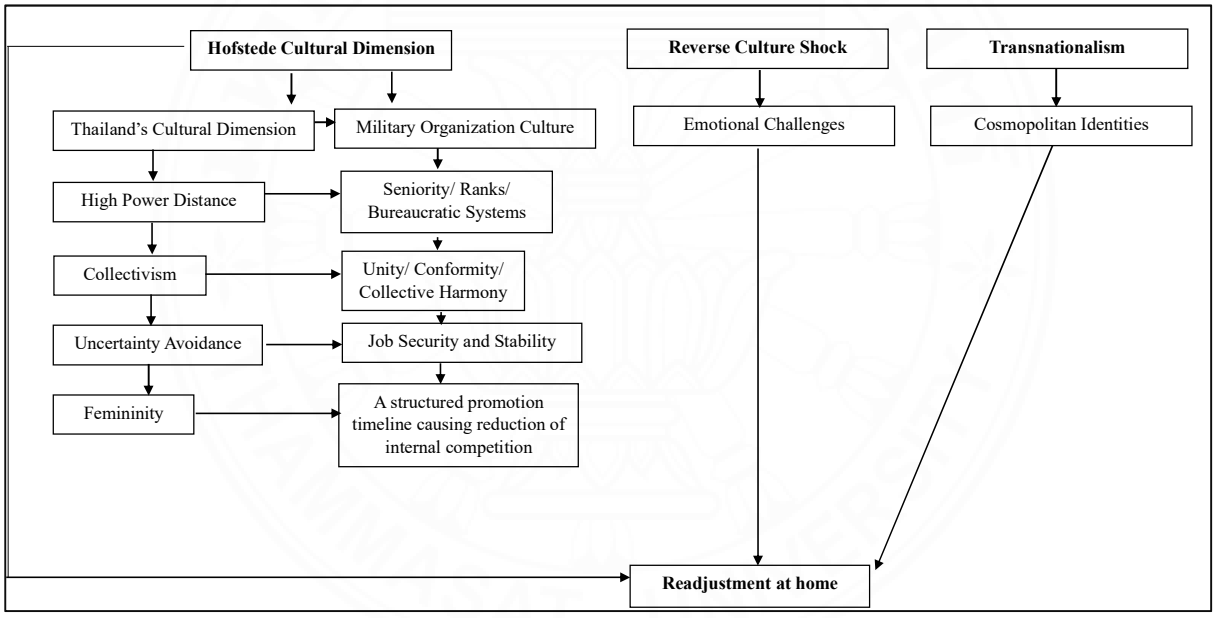
All in all, transnational perspectives could help interpret why participants may not only get trapped in the trauma from cultural frameworks but also be able to simultaneously appreciate different cultural norms at home in a critical way by adopting alternative practices learned in the UK, why they maintain social networks across borders, and why some experience identity expansion rather than identity conflict. This lens therefore clarifies how overseas learning reshapes their reintegration process and influences their adaptation at home to construct new ways of thinking, interacting, and positioning themselves at home.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The concepts outlined above can be used to formulate this study's conceptual framework (see figure 4). Each item in framework plays a specific role in explaining different layers of the returnees' experiences, and together they provide a holistic view of their personal, social, and professional reintegration. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (1994) help explain the systemic and organizational context shaping the returnees' experiences by recognizing the contrast between the individualistic, low-power-distance culture of the UK and the collectivist, high-power-distance nature of Thai society and the Royal Thai Armed Forces.At the same time, the literature on reverse culture shock (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963) provides a psychological and behavioral perspective, illustrating how returnees

experience emotional disorientation when readjusting to a familiar but now "foreign-feeling" environment, which is evidence that returning to a familiar but fundamentally changed sociocultural environment poses emotional and intellectual challenges for returning soldiers. Furthermore, transnationalism (Vertovec, 2009; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015) complements the other two frameworks by emphasizing continuity rather than separation between home and host cultures by showing how international education fosters cosmopolitan skills and dual cultural identities, enabling individuals to critically reflect on and adapt to different cultural norms. This study aims to combine these ideas to look at how experiencing a more equal and individual-focused environment in the UK affects the personal and work identities of returning Thai soldiers and how they deal with the complex relationship between the international skills they gained and the strong traditions within the Thai Armed Forces.

Figure 4 Conceptual Framework



2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explained overall conceptual frameworks examine how individuals perceive and actively engage with both their host and home cultures, exposure to different cultural norms and practices abroad may lead to the development of a new sense of self for military personnel, which requires them to reconcile these changes with conventionally established Thai military organizational identity. However, some Thai military organizational identities, which align with Hofstede's dimensions of Thai cultural identity (1994), may sharply contrast with the more egalitarian and individualistic norms found in the UK (Tarry, 2010). Consequently, while obtaining degrees from the UK offers some significant benefits, it can also create conflicts as these individuals reintegrate into the rigidly structured military environment, which can present significant challenges. While there is extensive research on the readjustment of returnees in civilian contexts such as academia, the private sector, or veterans' transition to civilian settings, there is limited understanding of the unique experiences of military returnees who pass through civilian to military settings. The transition studies for these individuals involve the integration of skills and perspectives from their foreign education with the strict expectations and norms of the Thai military, an area still lacking in research. As a result, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring how Thai military personnel reintegrate at home after studying abroad, focusing on their readjustment within their homeland, the military's cultural organization identity, and the impact on their personal and professional development. Therefore, this study applies these conceptual foundations to design a qualitative, interpretive methodological approach that explores the lived experiences of Thai military returnees, which will be discussed in the research methodology in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

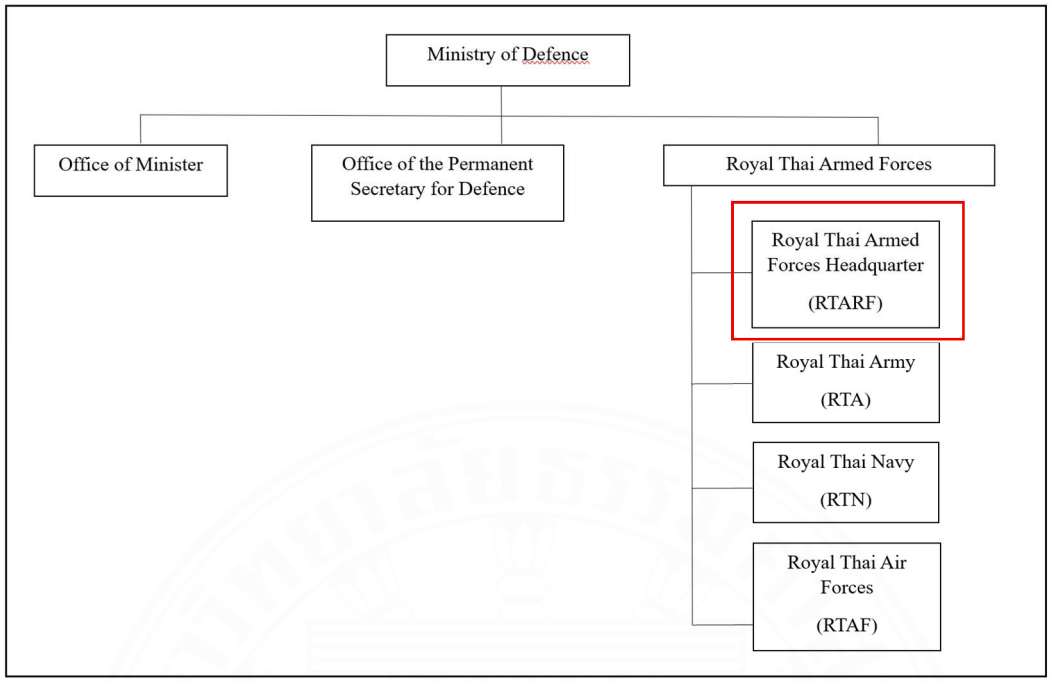
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Context

This study was conducted in Thailand, which is characterized by Hofstede's cultural values of high-power distance, collectivism, a commitment to certainty, and a strong emphasis on cooperation over competition. The participants' workplace context was the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters (RTARF), a part of the Royal Thai Armed Forces under the Ministry of Defense (see figure 5). RTARF is responsible for controlling, directing, and overseeing the operations of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, including the Royal Thai Army, Royal Thai Navy, and Royal Thai Air Force. The Chief of Defense Forces is the commander. The organization exhibits a clear power distance and a high emphasis on collectivism, with loyalty to national institutions (i.e., nation, religion, and monarchy) and a deep respect for authority embedded in the organizational culture.

Recently, an increasing number of Thai commissioned officers have pursued postgraduate studies in foreign countries, particularly in the UK, through government and private scholarships. These experiences expose them to educational environments that strongly support critical thinking, independence, and classroom equality, which have different values from the common practices of the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters. Therefore, this study sits at the intersection of cross-cultural transition and reintegration to understand how returning Thai officers navigate their transition back to home after being exposed to the sharp contrast of the cultural context of the UK in Hofstede's four dimensions.

Figure 5 The Organizational Chart of the Royal Thai Armed Forces



3.2 Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met the criteria relevant to the study's aims. It was also used to ensure the inclusion of participants with relevant cross-cultural and organizational experiences. In this study, returnees had to meet the following criteria: (1) Be a Thai commissioned officer of any affiliation currently working in a government unit within the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters; (2) Have completed a master's degree in any field from a civilian university in the United Kingdom before returning to military service; (3) Have resided in the UK during the study for at least one year; (4) Have completed the degree within the past ten years (graduated between January 2015 and December 2024) and returned to Thailand, promptly resuming military duties or joining the service so the researcher could focus on the immediate readjustment transition in both personal and professional roles; (5) Be consenting and willing to provide information for the research.

The exclusion criteria included (1) commissioned officers who did not hold a master's degree, such as those who graduated from a short course, diploma, bachelor's degree, or doctorate in the UK; (2) commissioned officers who earned their degrees from cadet academies abroad, since this research focused on transitions from civilian academic contexts;

(3) officers who studied or resided in the UK for less than one year, as this period would not provide sufficient data to analyze cross-national experiences and adjustment; (4) those who graduated from the UK but did not return to Thailand; and (5) those who refused to participate or did not give consent.

This study included 15 Thai military personnel, seven males and eight females. The participants ranged in age from 27 to 52 years. Their ranks ranged from lieutenant to colonel, while the majority held mid-level positions. All of them were commissioned officers who had the job function both in commanding and subordinate roles. The participants had studied in the UK for periods ranging from 1 year and 3 months to 2 years, with an average stay of approximately 1 year and 3 months. Participants had returned to Thailand for periods ranging from 3 months to 10 years, and 14 of the 15 participants had experiences in traveling abroad or had undertaken short courses overseas before studying in the UK, indicating some degree of cross-cultural experience. In terms of funding, eight participants were self-funded, while seven received full government-supported scholarships. As for military educational background, seven participants had military academy education, while eight had civilian education and no military academy experience. Overall, these data reveal a wide distribution of participants in terms of age, gender, rank, scholarship funding support, and educational background that could enhance the richness and depth of the data by capturing multiple perspectives and lived experiences.

Table 3 Participants Information

Participants	Ages	Gender	Ranks	Length of study in the UK (Year/Month)	Length of stay in Thailand since return (Year)	Previous experiences abroad prior to studying in the UK	Type of college funding	Military school background
P1	30	Male	Captain	1Y 3M	5Y	✓	Fully-funded	✓
P2	37	Male	Lieutenant	1Y	10Y	✓	Self-funded	X
P3	27	Male	Lieutenant	1Y 3M	3M	✓	Fully-funded	✓
P4	33	Female	Major	1Y 3M	8Y	✓	Self-funded	X
P5	33	Female	Major	1Y	9Y	✓	Self-funded	X
P6	33	Female	Lieutenant	2Y	6Y	✓	Self-funded	X
P7	30	Female	Captain	1Y	3Y	✓	Self-funded	X
P8	35	Male	Major	1Y	6Y	✓	Fully-funded	✓
P9	32	Male	Captain	1Y	6Y	✓	Self-funded	X
P10	30	Male	Captain	1Y 1M	5Y	✓	Self-funded	✓
P11	52	Male	Colonel	1Y 2M	10Y	✓	Fully-funded	✓
P12	30	Female	Lieutenant	1Y 6M	7Y	✓	Self-funded	X
P13	31	Female	Captain	1Y 3M	4Y	X	Fully-funded	X
P14	36	Female	Lieutenant Colonel	1Y	10Y	✓	Self-funded	✓
P15	46	Male	Colonel	2Y	7Y	✓	Self-funded	✓

3.3 Research Design

The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview-based qualitative investigation to explore Thai military personnel's readjustment experiences after completing postgraduate studies in the UK. This approach provided rich, detailed narratives from participants and could make a researcher focus well on their individual perspectives and transitions. The semi-structured format allowed both targeted questioning and the flexibility to probe emergent, unanticipated themes. According to Duff (2018), the number of participants should be limited enough to allow for a comprehensive description and contextualization, while too large a sample could bring less detail to the analysis. In this study, the researcher secured a total of 15 participants who provided consent, which was considered an appropriate sample size for a qualitative case study, which is large enough to yield insightful data but small enough to permit in-depth analysis (Duff, 2018). The sample size of 15 participants, Thai military officers who had studied in the UK for more than one academic year, was selected for in-depth interviews, a sample size deemed appropriate for qualitative research (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Thus, this study explored subjective and lived experiences of readjustment rather than a quantitative approach because the qualitative methodology prioritized lived experiences over statistical generalization. As direct observation of post-return adjustment was not feasible, interviews provided vital information about how participants recalled and interpreted their transitions (Nielsen & Lyhne, 2015). Through this approach, the study aimed to uncover the impacts of the returnees' UK educational backgrounds on the personal and professional lives of Thai military personnel.

The interviews took place on the Zoom online platform and lasted about 45 to 60 minutes each. In appreciation of their time, participants got a gift card worth 200 baht. To facilitate open and comfortable discussion, all interviews were carried out in Thai, as it is the participants' native language. Following Barbour (2007, p. 99), who notes, "even where they are proficient in English, using their mother tongue promoted more spontaneous and open discussions." Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim in Thai, and subsequently translated into English by the researcher. To guarantee precision and maintain the original intent, the researcher examined all translated scripts and verified ambiguous or culturally specific phrases against the original recordings and rechecked them with a native English advisor for more accurate translation.

3.4 Instruments

3.4.1 Research Instrument

The semi-structured interview questions were divided into two main dimensions: (1) Demographic questions were designed to gather basic information about the interviewees' backgrounds, which aided the researcher in analyzing response patterns based on participants' background differences. (2) The main questions were designed to delve deeply into the core topics of the research and made the researcher understand the readjustment experiences, perceptions, and impacts related to research questions number 1 and 2. The main questions were designed to be open-ended to explore stories and insights from participants in detail. These responses served as the primary data for thematic analysis and directly addressed the research questions. The researcher therefore grouped the overall questions into two parts as follows (see appendix B):

- Part 1: Personal information (age, gender, rank, length of stay in the UK, previous experiences abroad, military school background)
- Part 2: Reentry experiences

3.4.2 Pilot study

The pilot study was conducted to assess the construct validity of the instruments in the translated Thai version of the interview questions. In addition to the main participants, three volunteers who had completed a master's degree in the UK within the past 10 years took part in the pilot interviews. All 15 questions were asked of these volunteers, and there were no further suggestions regarding the interview questions.

3.5 Research Procedure

3.5.1 A Gate Keeper and Recruitment Process

A gatekeeper had a key role in ensuring that researchers were able to gain access to potential participants and sites for research (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016). To respect the institutional protocol, the researcher sent a letter to the Chief of Defence Forces to request access to data from the Directorate of Joint Personnel, Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters to ask for qualified volunteers. The researcher worked with Captain Ramnara Somprasong,

who was responsible for the recruitment, to distribute information sheets and consent forms to potential participants through military email. The researcher closely collaborated with these personnel to ensure that the recruitment procedure adhered to ethical standards and that the selection of participants aligned with the research objectives. The facilitator assisted the volunteers in deciding whether they wanted to take part in the interview from January 2025 to May 2025. If the volunteers agreed to participate, the gatekeeper shared their information with the researcher, who then contacted them again through military email.

3.5.2 Research Consent

Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate (Etikan et al., 2016). Each participant was provided with the information sheet and consent form directly to ensure that their participation in the study was fully voluntary. They received a consent document from the researcher, which outlined ethical principles and clarified the confidentiality of the interview transcripts. This procedure ensured the ethical requirements for informed consent to respect each individual's autonomy and rights in the study, while gatekeepers assisted with participant access. The scope and overall content of the interview were sent to the interviewees before they responded. Prior to each interview, the researcher informed all participants about the study's purposes and requested their permission to audio-record the session to confirm that they all consent.

3.6 Data Analysis

All the scripts were repeatedly read in detail while notes were taken to promote consistent coding throughout the analysis. A preliminary codebook was developed to define each code and specify inclusion and exclusion criteria. The transcripts were coded iteratively, allowing early codes to be refined and adjusted as new insights emerged. As this research was conducted individually, a sample of the coded transcripts was given to a qualified peer for review. Then, the data were coded using the QDA Miner Lite program to extract and characterize concepts from the transcripts. This research used thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes to describe the data set in rich detail and interpret various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method also helped the researcher in organizing the findings into a coherent narrative and presenting them in a clear, understandable format. By grouping similar ideas together into themes, the researcher was able to more easily communicate the core findings and obstacles in simple

language to confirm that both academic and non-academic audiences could fully comprehend the study's results. Thematic analysis also allowed for the identification of patterns and themes across the entire data set, providing a rich, detailed account of the phenomena under study. By recognizing aspects that were important in relation to the research question, it helped clarify the significance of different themes without requiring strict adherence to a predetermined structure. Instead, it offered a more flexible framework adaptable to uncovering unexpected insights or themes that arose during data collection and coding. The thematic analysis of the data followed a six-step procedure adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006), which included (1) data familiarization, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The first step in qualitative data analysis was to become familiar with the data. This included reading the content multiple times and actively examining it to discover patterns and meanings. At this point, the researcher took notes or marked coding concepts that could serve as the foundation for information analysis. Transcribing spoken data, such as speeches or interviews, was an important step in the analytical process. The complete script contained relevant information for the study. The second step was to generate codes. The received data was arranged systematically during this phase and reduced into small, meaningful components through coding. The third step was searching for themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme was defined by its relevance. In this process, the codes were organized into broader themes that appeared to express something specific about the study question. The fourth step was reviewing themes. This phase involved reviewing, modifying, and developing the preliminary themes identified in Step 3. The researcher ensured that the themes were sufficiently coherent. At this stage, it was also helpful to gather any relevant information about each theme. The fifth step was defining and naming themes. This step involved the final revision of the themes. The aim was to identify the ‘essence’ of what each theme represented (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher had to identify what each theme represented, what happened to the subthemes and the main theme, and how the themes related to one another. The final step was producing the report, which could have taken the form of a journal article or dissertation. To increase the validity of the research, I used a peer-debriefing method to discuss it with my supervisor, who had expertise in qualitative research and independence from the data collection process. Five transcripts were critically reviewed, and my supervisor examined and evaluated the coding procedures, the techniques for emerging themes, and the conclusions during an informal discussion. Peer debriefing can help reduce researchers’ bias and help to identify gaps in the research (McLeod, 2024).

3.7 Ethical Aspects

The Thammasat University committee approved this study for human research after the researchers completed human research ethics training. Participants received explicit information regarding the study's objectives, associated risks, and anticipated benefits, and were afforded the opportunity to request additional information freely. They could join or leave the interview without affecting their status or relationships with the interviewer or organization. The research did not use power dynamics, intimidation, or deception to obtain participation. In addition, participants received a consent form and a copy of the information statement as evidence of their informed willingness to participate. They were informed about the request for permission to record audio and the measures taken to maintain the confidentiality of the data. The published version of the research did not name or identify each participant. The interviews were completed in June 2025, and the recordings were stored confidentially until the entire research project was completed. One month after the project's conclusion, all data was destroyed by deleting the audio files and documents related to the interviews.

In this study, pseudonyms were used in the report to ensure anonymity. To keep their identities safe and follow ethical standards, participants were given codes from P1 to P15. The researcher used anonymous codes instead of names so that they could talk about each person's point of view without giving away any personal information. This way, the participants could share sensitive information without worrying about being identified. This approach was particularly important for sensitive groups such as the military, where disclosure could compromise participants' privacy or professional standing and potentially lead to unintended consequences, such as bias stemming from efforts to preserve self-image or the reputation of their organization.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter summarizes the methodology used in this study, including the research design, research procedures, participants, data collection, data analysis, and ethical aspects. The final research instrument was developed as a semi-structured along with using thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clark (2006). Peer-debriefing throughout the research analysis process was used to ensure methodological rigor and credibility. The results of this study will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The report of the study's results is divided into two parts to answer the research questions including: (1) to explore the military returnees' perceived gains from studying in the UK; (2) to examine how these gains influenced their personal development, interpersonal development and career paths within the hierarchical and collective structures in Thailand

4.1 What Do Thai Military Returnees Believe They Have Gained from Their Experiences Studying in the UK?

For research question 1, the analysis aimed to find out what returnees believe they have gained after returning from studying in the UK. The most reported coding found that the participants believe that they gained personal growth in terms of (1) self-agency and independence, (2) more flexible worldviews, and (3) dual identities, respectively.

4.1.1 Development of Self Agency and Independence

Returnees were found to have more independence, mainly in terms of developing self-reliance, confidence, and decision-making ability, which describes how returnees gained greater self-awareness and set new personal goals through their overseas experiences. This reflects the internal growth that occurred after spending time in the UK. Five returnees, including P6, P8, P12, P13, and P15, demonstrated this personal transformation by noting through their increased self-reliance and reduced fear of judgment, which is commonly associated with post-study personal growth. Their narratives indicate that independence was not simply the result of living abroad but developed through navigating unfamiliar and often challenging environments that required decisive action. For example, P6 described her confidence of fearing nothing from her experiences living in the UK, especially in having to face risky situations like "being robbed" in London.

> *P6: "I was once in a situation where a thief robbed me in London. I just put down my phone, and I was able to survive. So I felt that there was nothing to be afraid of anymore.*"

P8 similarly describes his shift from structured, military-controlled living to self-management in the UK. His experiences highlight how the independent life abroad forces him to take

responsibility for daily decision-making, which contradicts the regimented routines traditionally embedded in his military standards of operation when he was a military student. And those self-responsibility skills remain ingrained in him to this day.

> *P8: "When I was studying at the cadet school, I was in the dormitory; someone cooked for me all the time. I just followed the time and the Standing Operating Procedure, like 1 2 3 4 5, and lived my life every day. Now I had to start determining my own life, what to do, what to buy, and what to eat... So I felt like I had grown up in terms of living on my own and doing everything by myself, and it was obvious that when I came back to Thailand, I dared to do things by myself more."*

P15's narrative further demonstrates what personal growth includes in daily functioning skills, such as time management and accountability. His ability to compare punctuality norms in both countries (Thailand and the UK) and adjust accordingly suggests the development of the capacity to reflect on his behavior in relation to contextual expectations.

> *P15: "I believe that what I truly gained was a greater sense of responsibility, which included both self-responsibility and improved time management skills, such as making appointments or things like that. The difference in time management in the UK compared to Thailand is that they're quite punctual there. When I returned to Thailand, I needed to adjust to a more relaxed attitude toward punctuality."*

Finally, P13's increased willingness to express opinions illustrates how studying in an educational culture that values critical inquiry can reshape returnees' perceptions of authority and voice. Her shift from silence to active participation signals a reorientation toward egalitarian interaction, which stands in contrast to military socialization processes that discourage challenging superiors. This suggests that overseas education not only strengthens personal confidence but also reshapes the awareness of their own right to speak.

> *P13: "I dare to share my opinions more. Before, I was someone who did not dare to say or dare to speak just because he was my boss or senior. But now I dare to say that what he did was wrong."*

4.1.2 More Flexible Worldviews

Studying abroad not only enhances returnees' sense of personal agency but also contributes to a deeper form of cognitive growth that reshapes how they see the world. The findings showed that returnees have a shift from fixed mindset, singular interpretations of any social or cultural values toward a more flexible worldview grounded in the ability to accept multiple perspectives simultaneously. This transformation manifests in two distinct forms of flexibility including (1) cultural flexibility, which allows them to interpret diverse cultural logics without judging what is really right or wrong, and (2) self-developmental flexibility, which reflects their ability to continuous self-improvement beyond the limitations of their current roles or environments.

4.1.2.1 Cultural Flexibilty

Seven returnees—P2, P3, P5, P6, P9, P10, and P14—demonstrated an ability to move beyond judging cultures as "better" or "worse," or "right" or "wrong," which reflects a transition from monocultural environments to multicultural relativism, where they could recognize the coexistence of multiple valid cultural logics. They recognized that they were not confined to any specific culture and did not determine which one was the most suitable for them, leading to a change in their broader perspective on cultural awareness and enabling them to accept other cultural perspectives simultaneously (Gu, 2015; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Studying in the UK also allowed them to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds on a daily basis, which taught them how to interpret unfamiliar social cues and communicate more effectively. P5 shared her experience working in a multicultural society and respecting different cultures so she could work flexibly with foreigners.

> *P5: "When I worked with foreigners, I became more flexible because citizens of different countries had different work cultures. I didn't think there was anything right or wrong, and it didn't seem to be that fixed. For example, in the group I worked with, there was an Indian who was very easygoing, while another member of the group was Australian, who was quite strict about working, so conflicts could arise within the group… Then I would know what kind of task I should coordinate and assign to them."*

P3's experience illustrates how transnational exposure can shift individuals toward a more flexible and hybrid cultural orientation, allowing them to detach from any particular cultural

expectations. P3 shared his story, reflecting that not only could he live in many cultures, but he could also "learn" and "grow" without being attached to any particular cultural framework.

> *P3: "I saw my friend feel traumatized when people there (in the UK) walked past and bumped into us, which could have made us feel that people there were unfriendly. But for me, I thought that bumping into each other was nothing, and we just walked our way. This allowed me to live very happily without having to care about anything and without having to refer to the fact that Thai culture didn't accept walking and bumping into others. Instead, it made me happier when I didn't refer to any particular culture."*

In the same way, two returnees—P3 and P14—reported their intercultural empathy by sharing their feelings and perspectives for people from different cultural backgrounds. This involved recognizing that individuals from other cultures had unique values, beliefs, and ways of communicating, which prevented them from judging others by their own cultural standards. For example, P14 demonstrated her more profound understanding through empathetic reflection on these differences, showing respect for diversity and a non-judgmental awareness of how individuals were shaped by different contexts. She illustrated this by explaining the contrasting educational systems between Thailand and the UK.

> *P14: "When it came to education, I had to admit that the British government placed a lot of importance on it, while Thailand had some inequality. When I saw that some Thais couldn't debate such topics tactfully on social media like Westerners, I couldn't blame them because I knew that, from childhood, we were not trained to think critically; instead, we were trained to memorize information. It wasn't their fault."*

P3 further explained that studying in the UK gave him insight into differing perspectives between military and civilian societies. He attempted to understand the motivations behind different career choices by considering the context in which each group operated. This led him to a deeper appreciation of diverse values and enhanced his ability to reflect on his own views without passing judgment on others.

> *P3: "Going to study gave me a broader perspective…. Officers perceived military jobs as stable, which led them to follow the military service path without striving for personal development, as they felt secure and lacked motivation. In contrast, individuals outside the service faced constant competition and pressure to develop themselves in various areas to keep up with social trends and the labor market…. The result was that when I came back to the military organization, I felt a bit burned out*

because this place didn't make us work that hard, or sometimes being hard-working didn't have any effect. Everything that happened made me understand everyone's perspectives more."

In the same way, P2, P6, P9, and P10 emphasized that both the UK and Thailand possess strengths and limitations, with a recognition that mirrors transnationalism in a way suggesting returnees develop dual cultural appreciation rather than adopting the host culture uncritically. This balanced perspective allows them to adapt more effectively upon return, improving emotional well-being over time and reducing the severity of reverse culture shock. (Gray & Savicki, 2015).

P2: "Although the UK has a relatively high standard in many things, at the same time, Thai people are more flexible. It is not saying that flexibility is not good, but it is better to keep the good things of each side."

P9: "I think my perspective has become more open, and I can say that every country has both strong and weak points. Not all developed countries are entirely positive. We can take into account each country's advantages and adapt accordingly.

P10: "I think that each country is different. It is not saying that England is good in every way, but our country also has advantages. We have to understand why our organization is going this way because the context of our society is like this, and each organization has to adapt to the context of its society."

Unlike early reverse culture shock models that imply dissatisfaction with home, not only were returnees open to respecting different cultural values, but some of them were also able to accept and appreciate their own home cultural value at the same time. P14 showed the appreciation for the openness of Thai society on transgender acceptance when compared to a Western developed country that is supposed to be more open for LGBTQ people.

P14: "What I found surprising was the acceptance of Western foreigners in alternative genders… Thailand is a very open country that made me feel like being LGBTQ was not a problem at all. Yes, you can be whatever you want, but in other countries, it is not. There (at the university in the UK), my classmate cannot reveal his identity. And I think Thailand is better at accepting LGBTQ."

4.1.2.2 Self-developmental Flexibility

While cultural flexibility reflects how returnees navigate and interpret diverse cultural logics, another form of developmental flexibility was identified. The study found that three returnees reported a much more open-minded attitude by embracing ongoing personal development. Their real-world experience has shaped their perception of self-development as a continuous process throughout life, fostering motivation to learn new things. P6 reflected her attitudes on language progress that developing skills such as English does not come from just learning in the classroom but from real-world practice and facing turning points that push her to still want to develop herself in language ability more.

> *P6: "I got an IELTS score of 8, but a Farang there (a westerner in the UK) spoke to me on the phone. That man even asked if I was speaking English, meaning he complained to me that he did not understand it well. From that time, it made me gradually develop my language skills."*

Furthermore, P3 and P13 expressed similar views regarding the positive attitudes and motivations necessary for pursuing higher education because of their favorable experiences while studying in the UK. For P13, the supportive learning environment and encouragement from her UK advisor served as a self-driven mindset, which motivated her to pursue knowledge not as a requirement but as a personally meaningful endeavor. She notes that studying abroad reshaped her styles of learning from obligation to intrinsic motivation. Her description of research as something she "enjoys," "persists in," and considers "part of daily life" signals a shift toward a lifelong learning identity, suggesting that the UK experience expanded her imagination of what academic success could look like beyond the military system.

> *P13: "One thing I brought about here was the culture of the education system there. I felt that the UK education system supported me in a positive way. It made me feel that difficult topics were not obstacles and it made me want to study a PhD… I had a wonderful experience which made me like doing research. So today, I have to have 1-2 research projects in hand. I feel like doing it without getting tired. I enjoy it, and I will persist in engaging in it during my free time. I still feel that my life is not fulfilled if I don't do research, and it has become part of my daily life automatically.*

Similarly, P3 indicated that studying abroad disrupted the normative career script traditionally offered within the Thai military, where advancement often follows standardized and hierarchical progression. He viewed studying in the UK as a change in "education perspective"

from being stuck in a specific role like being a military officer to seeing life as an open space that can lead him to grow in various directions. Broaden worldview gained from abroad has become his important inspiration in creating more diverse "hopes" and "lifelong goals."

> *P3: "Other officers may think that working in the Armed Forces is merely a matter of waiting to go out into the field for survey work and then spending the next 10 years studying the compulsory courses required for career advancement… However, I can continuously develop myself instead of remaining stagnant in one place. I know we as officers received training to become soldiers; however, the experiences out there revealed my potential for more."*

4.1.3 Dual Identities

Another finding was that identity transformation resulted not only in personal growth and a more flexible way of thinking but also led to new lifestyles and perceived behaviors. The situations of three returnees—P1, P3, and P13—reflect this concept of "dual identity" (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015), which refers to the existence of holding two sets of cultural identities in the same person: the original identity tied to being Thai and the new identity that comes from the experience of living in the UK. For example, P1 demonstrated a subtle change in his dressing style at home, reflecting the influence of Western grooming norms he had adopted in the UK, particularly the emphasis on situational appropriateness and formality.

> *P1: "In Thailand, it was normal to wear shorts and round-necked T-shirts and walk around anywhere like a Thai kid. But when I came back from the UK, it became apparent that I wanted to dress appropriately, and it made me be more stylish and stick to wearing trousers even more."*

P3 mentioned his socializing behaviors that he received from living in the UK, such as striking up conversations with strangers or his different style of socializing between the "British" and "Thai" communities. He was able to "switch" his socializing styles to suit the groups in different cultures to blend in with the norms of that group automatically.

> *P3: "What I learned is socializing by going out to drink alcohol and socialize (like a London boy), even though I don't usually drink it. … If I were in the British friend community, I would immediately become a London boy. But if I'm with Thais, I use a different context to communicate with them."*

P13 represented someone who adopted a straightforward attitude similar to that of Westerners, which contradicted Thai cultural values that often prioritize maintaining relationships over masculine traits such as dominance and aggression (Hofstede, 1994). She understood that being humble was still ideal for communicating with Thai people, but she viewed the courage to speak up or argue against what was wrong as something "acceptable," so she changed her personality to be more exposed and even mentioned that her identity became "hybrid."

> *P13: "I felt like my identity had become a hybrid. There were things that I had newly acquired while there was still Thainess in myself. I became a more straightforward person, and I wouldn't buy it when I saw something wrong. I could go and tell them. Before, I was someone who didn't dare to say or speak up just because that person was my boss or senior, but now I dared to say that what they did was wrong. I think this is what I learned from studying there."*

Overall, the developments in independence, flexible thinking, and hybrid identity formation demonstrate that studying in the UK reshaped returnees not only cognitively but also behaviorally. These gains do not remain confined to their time abroad; rather, they continue to influence how returnees navigate their personal relationships, professional responsibilities, and broader social environments after returning to Thailand. The following section explores how these newly acquired capacities have influence in their everyday lives and shape the ways they readjust, interact, and find meaning within the Thai military and society upon their return.

4.2 In What Ways Have These Gains Influenced Their Personal Lives and Careers?

For research question 2, the analysis aimed to answer how the returnees believed the received gains affected their personal and professional lives. The results were categorized into 2 themes: (1) Personal Lives Impacts and (2) Professional Impacts

4.2.1 Personal Lives Impacts

For personal lives impacts, three subthemes including emotional challenges, stronger family ties and broaden friendships and connections emerged.

4.2.1.1 Emotional Challenges

The emotional challenges experienced by returnees reveal a critical tension between their transformed expectations after studying abroad and the structural constraints of their home environment. In personal life aspects, the study found that four returnees reported experiencing emotional distress when comparing aspects of prosperity between the developed host country and the developing home country. These aspects included freedom, egalitarian cultural values, quality of life, environmental conditions, economic systems, financial opportunities, and transportation systems. This constant comparison created a sense of loss and dissatisfaction, leading them to realize that returning home was not a simple restoration of their former lives but rather an emotionally taxing process of adapting to a reality that no longer matched their ideal.

P3 and P15, for instance, illustrate how the disparity in transportation accessibility, cost of living, and economic flexibility (e.g., receiving high income from a part-time job) became sense of a regression in quality of life. These comparisons suggest that emotional dislocation emerges when returnees perceive home conditions as restricting their agency, which is in contrast to the autonomy they felt abroad.

> *P3: "I had stress about life being more difficult, especially when it came to transportation. When I came back, transportation here (Thailand) was very terrible, making it difficult to meet friends. Again, the cost of living here was expensive, even though my net salary was around 20,000 baht, so it was like I was feeling the pinch. In the UK, I was able to work part-time for a short period to earn some money, allowing me to continue enjoying life. But in Thailand, there were no opportunities for us to do that. My life in London was very good, surrounded by friends and a positive atmosphere*

all the time. So I felt like I was sinking deeper into my mind, as if I hadn't come back from that yet."

P15: "Everything there (in the UK) was excellent... When I returned, I felt depressed. It was like when I encountered various aspects of both developed and developing countries. When I came back home, I felt that nothing here is right for me. It is nostalgic to think of better public areas, public transportation, and public health…"

Similarly, P13's anxiety about returning to a hierarchical and highly regulated military environment reflects her psychological transformation as she transitions from an independent lifestyle back into an institution defined by significant power distance. Her story highlights the emotional impact of reverse culture shock in terms of "cultural clash," where returnees struggle to reconcile newfound expectations of freedom with rigid institutional norms. She believed that the happiness abroad that came with "a lot of freedom" was terrible compared to "a real military system" with high regulations.

P13: "I was really not happy to return because my life there was quite free. Compared to the fact that we would actually return to work here (in Thailand), I was very anxious."

In the same way, P6 shared her disappointing experience of lack of freedom when wearing an exercise crop top in a military welfare housing area, which was interpreted as inappropriate and was secretly reported to the commander, making her feel that her privacy had been violated.

P6: "When I was in the UK, I could do whatever I wanted. I had the freedom to dress as I pleased without fear of judgment. I viewed that judging others was a form of discrimination. This was a significant culture shock I experienced while I was a lecturer at the cadet academy. At that time, I was sure that no one would find me there (in her private exercising area), but someone found me and secretly took a picture to snitch on me to superiors. I just wore a crop top while jogging. People normally wore sports bras while jogging in many foreign countries, but the cadet academy forbade this practice."

4.2.1.2 Stronger Family Ties

Despite struggling with restricted independence, stricter social norms, and lower quality of life at home, most returnees emphasized that their stronger family ties increased emotional reassurance. They reported developing a closer relationship with their families after being away, both in terms of closer physical distance and more time to spend together. This renewed closeness was accompanied by a deepened sense of pride, which stemmed not only from earning a degree but also from the new values, knowledge, skills, and social status gained through their experience. For P1 and P14, spending a long time in a culturally different country made them miss their families and more deeply appreciate the importance of familial bonds and the Thai way of life, which strongly emphasizes "familial collectivism." Their return home, therefore, helped restore the emotional ties that had weakened during their time abroad.

> *P1: "When I got to see my parents, sister, and the family, I felt so happy and wanted to come back. I missed Thailand, the food, and everything about the way of life here."*
>
> *P14: "When I returned, my first thoughts were of Thailand and my parents; also, the Thai way of life is like a familial style."*

In addition, the acquisition of a foreign degree functioned as both a symbolic success for reinforcing family prestige and status. P1 and P3 explained their stronger family bond due to receiving a degree from a developed country like the UK enhanced the family's "prestige" and "presence".

> *P1: "When I received a certificate from the UK, it was a source of pride for my parents. ... My parents could say with certainty that their child graduated from the UK. ...They seemed to have a sense of honor, and they consider me an inspiration for my sister."*
>
> *P3: "From a family perspective, it was clear that everyone in the family would love me more because I had been away from them for a long time. When I returned, it was like I could fully express my regards. Additionally, because my academic results were satisfactory, my family felt even prouder. I received both a scholarship and honors, and these accomplishments made me feel that I had lived my life to the fullest."*

P3's situation also added a positive change in the relationship between him and his family. Before going abroad to study, his parents tended to be concerned and tried to control his life paths by advising him to stay on a stable and secure career path, such as a military job. However, after he returned successfully, the family's attitudes entirely changed. They began to

see that he (P3) had grown up and was able to live independently, be self-reliant, and be able to make appropriate decisions about their life paths without being controlled or restrained any longer.

On the other hand, P6 mentioned issues about her relationships with their families after their study abroad experience, which showed challenging aspects from cultural value conflict that required time to readjust. P6 mentioned her family's relationship had clearly changed. She began to feel that she did not follow her family's opinions as before, leading to being considered "stubborn" or "hard to control" by the members in her family. This transition caused interpersonal discomfort, and it took more than a year for her to adjust to each other to balance her new perception within the Thai family context.

> *P6: "I didn't feel homesick at all. On the contrary, I felt that I was okay being abroad and didn't really want to go back home. The problem was that it felt like I took more than a year to get used to this conflict. ... Sometimes being here felt uncomfortable, and it would be because everyone in the family thought differently. ... I used to be very compliant. But now everyone said in the same way that I was a difficult person to control. This conflict occurred during the first period after my return, and I was unaware of anything happening around me. I just was myself, and I just rejected the things that I wasn't okay with."*

Collectively, these ties show that family relationships not only served as a stabilizing and supportive anchor but also allowed returnees to navigate the emotional conflicts. The following section examines how these adjustments broaden friendship networks and the cultivation of international connections and how they extend relationships and social gains acquired through overseas experience.

4.2.1.3 Broader Friendship Networks and International Connections

In addition to the context of family relationships, this study also explores the context of friendship, including relationships with domestic friends and relationships at the international network level. This section reports on two subthemes which emerged: (1) relationships with Thai friends and (2) international connections.

(1) Relationships with Thai friends

The study found that four returnees—P1, P3, P8, and P15—described a sense of experiential alignment, wherein shared overseas experiences became a foundation for renewed or expanded relationships upon returning home. This “shared experience” served as a sense of belonging that made them have smoother communication, mutual understanding, and the linking of networks such as LINE groups or regular social gatherings. They reestablish relationships with Thai friends, expand their networks by building connections with other Thai returnees, and are more likely to feel comfortable talking to people who have had similar experiences, particularly those who studied in the UK. For example, P1, P8 and P15 experienced similar situations, specifically the development of a sense of connectedness and special bonding with Thai friends who graduated from the UK. Having a “shared experience” made communication easier, understanding each other better, and feeling like a group. Although the individuals may differ slightly in terms of age or field of study, their shared experience of studying abroad fosters the development of sustainable social networks, such as LINE groups or social gatherings after returning to Thailand, which reflect the ongoing ties that persist even after they have returned to their home country.

> *P1: "I think it's easier to talk to seniors or friends from the same generation who graduated from this field and are also from the UK."*
>
> *P8: "My Thai friends, whom I met in the UK, are quite different from my foreign friends. Our cultures are similar, which made us frequently interact with each other. My senior is a management student, while I am an engineering student. During the time in the UK, we studied together, and we often greeted each other. Since they were Thai, we had a greater chance of becoming close, and it feels like 2x closer.”*
>
> *P15: "If it is a group of Thai students who meet in the UK, there will be a community group on social media like LINE and Facebook. ...When someone in a group gets married, we will go to congratulate them. When I meet friends who graduated from the UK, including my wife's friend's group and those who studied with me there, I often have the opportunity to see them, and even now we meet almost every month. We have conversations that are more meaningful and understand each other more. As a result, we socialize and participate in more activities together."*

In the same way, P3 proudly explained a strong social network by describing the relationships he formed with other Thai students both during his time studying abroad and after returning to

Thailand. These relationships provided mutual support and created a safe space for group members to help one another. Moreover, his continued engagement with these communities strengthened his visibility and reputation, particularly among younger generations in Thailand who aspired to pursue education in the UK. As a result, he became a recognizable figure, with many new students reaching out to him for guidance, thereby expanding his network even further.

> *P3: "I feel like a "someone" to my Thai friends because I serve as both the coordinator of UCL Thai Postgrad and the president of Chevening. My friends frequently reach out to me. If I experience any problems, my friends will contact me to ask for help. It's like I can keep up to date with my friends all the time… I also arrange inductions and handle everything for the new Chevening scholarship students (from Thailand) who have just started studying abroad. Therefore, the new generation will also know me."*

However, one returnee (P6) felt unable to connect with her former Thai friends. P6's situation shows that having studied abroad clearly results in a change in perspective and personal values on being independent. When she returned, she realized that she could not "tune in" or connect with her old friends because they had different ways of thinking and their priorities were in group conformity, which created a gap in values and experiences, leading to a disconnection between her and her former friends.

> *P6: "I rarely feel the need to discuss my old friends. I couldn't get along when we met again after I graduated from a provincial public school because they had different interests. I wanted to focus on loving myself, my health, and my pride. They thought differently from me. I can't get along with these people, but if I compare them to friends who have similar experiences abroad, it feels more like we can talk to each other and understand each other better."*

(2) International Connections

Beyond the Thailand, 12 returnees used social media platforms to connect with their international friends who they met in the UK. The increasing availability of communication technologies promoted immediate and continuous cross-border connections, so building these networks could help them find opportunities, exchange ideas, or even conduct joint research between countries (Vertovec, 2009, p. 10).

P1: "I felt close to my friends from the UK with whom I had shared both happiness and sorrow. When they came to Thailand, they greeted me. And since I was the host, I took them out to eat. We definitely kept in touch via Instagram, Messenger, or social media."

P3: "In my class, 50% were Chinese. Even though I didn't really socialize with them, I still tried to contact them. It was quite difficult because I had to use WeChat…But if my friends were from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada, or Australia, we already had our contact groups. We used to update each other on our lives, like, 'Hey, I'm back here.' It felt like everyone had planned to come to Thailand. I served as a central point for everyone to connect. It made my friends feel that if they came to Thailand, they would always have a companion like me here. As a result, they saw Thailand as a must-visit destination."

However, despite initial closeness, the majority (10 of the 12 above) noted a gradual decline in communication over time. They only contacted their foreign friends during the initial period back home. But as time passed, the relationship slowly faded away. They merely maintained relationship each other via social media on important occasions or when they planned to meet each other on certain occasions. Participants such as P4, P5, P7, P8, P14, and P15 described this shift from frequent and meaningful interactions to minimal or occasion-based contact, typically limited to birthdays, major life events, or passive engagements such as "liking" posts on social media. These narratives suggest that although digital platforms allow relationships to remain technically "alive," the regularity of communication often becomes superficial over time. This transition reflects the challenge of sustaining emotional intimacy without shared physical environments or common daily experiences. The following examples illustrate this theme.

P4: "As for my foreign friends, we still kept in touch. Initially, we contacted each other more frequently, but as nearly ten years passed, we began to drift apart. We mostly reconnected on social media during important occasions such as birthdays, having children, or personal achievements—when we would send greetings and congratulations."

P5: "Actually, we still kept in touch… But since we didn't text each other every day, it was uncommon to maintain close contact. Over time, the relationships faded."

P7: "While studying in the UK, we were part of a group. But when we came back, we didn't really talk that much. We might only hit the like button for each other on Facebook."

P15: "During our first year back, we engaged in numerous conversations with our group of foreign friends. But after a while, it started to fade."

P13 also mentioned being part of an academic network. She returned to Thailand and still maintained her relationship with her university lecturers. However, as time passed, they seemed to contact each other less.

P13: "Regarding the advisor, we used to contact each other for the first two years and then gradually disappeared. We were busy, so we disappeared. At first, we were going to do research together, but we still contact each other occasionally. We still followed each other through ResearchGate, where researchers can communicate. But currently, we haven't collaborated on projects."

4.2.2 Professional Impacts

After returning to Thai military institutions, the overseas experiences shaped not only returnees' new personal identities and new forms of social relationships but also their professional identities, workplace relationships, and interaction within organizational structures. In this part, the impact on work is divided into four interconnected themes including valuable working skills, trust and recognition in a workplace, ambivalent feelings with Thai military culture, and in-out group perception.

4.2.2.1 Valuable Working Skills

The study found that all returnees were able to effectively apply the skills they gained from their studies in the UK to their rigid military context in Thailand including: (1) Language skills, (2) willingness to use acquired skills, and (3) leadership and interpersonal skills.

(1) Language skills

Improved English proficiency emerged as the most consistently identified professional benefit as it was the most mentioned among participants, with 10 out of 15 participants stating that their language skills had significantly improved, giving them more confidence in communicating and allowing them to reach wider information, which benefits their work and also results in their organization's trust in taking on responsibilities that require language use. Representative examples include.

P1: "The English language is vital…. I had the opportunity to serve as a military liaison officer in the important events and translate teaching materials while I was under scholarship service commitment at the cadet academy. If the materials were in English, I believed I could perform better than my peers."

P3: "First of all, I thought my English language has improved a lot. They wanted me to participate in international cooperation projects, and I believed that studying in the UK was very beneficial for my development."

P4: "My English language has improved a lot. When I could speak, I had more confidence. From other people's perspectives, they would trust me to do more work related to language because when I returned to the International Affairs Office, the work required English, and I had the opportunity to be a host, a military liaison officer, and an interpreter, and I had more contact and coordination with foreign diplomatic assistants."

P7: "What I really gained from studying in the UK was language. The Strategic Intelligence Division always comes with international news and will often welcome foreign guests."

P9: "I saw it as a beneficial opportunity to use the language at my workplace, and I perceived that studying in the UK had its advantages itself."

P10: "What I clearly see is that when I come back, my language skills have improved. When I searched for information, I could find a wider range and get more up-to-date."

P13: "When I came back, I felt that my English had improved a lot in the year I studied there."

Overall, it was clear that participants experienced concrete professional opportunities derived from their English language proficiency. Their accounts reflect how this skill served not only as a tool for communication but also as a form of human capital. Enhanced proficiency enabled returnees to access wider sources of information, participate in international cooperation, and take on specialized responsibilities that required linguistic competence. This pattern shows how English proficiency functioned as both a competence-based asset and a signal of capability that facilitated organizational trust.

(2) Willingness to Use Acquired Skills

Beyond specific competencies, the study found that two returnees reported their appreciation of the knowledge and skills gained in the UK and described a strengthened willingness and motivation to apply what they learned abroad in their daily work. The returnees were more likely to strive to maintain their competence in their roles and create value from what they had learned abroad. P3's case is a good example how exposure to UK pedagogical practices motivated him to adopt more interactive teaching methods as a cadet instructor. His situation showed that he was trying to adapt the learning process to engage the students, demonstrating his efforts to maximize his potential in his current work.

> *P3: "I took the role of a teacher and had the opportunity to teach at the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy and the non-commissioned officer schools. I felt that I really wanted to pass on my knowledge and wanted them to have a learning approach like I had learned abroad. I wanted to share perspectives and many effective teaching techniques from the UK. So, I felt that, for example, when all the students were sitting quietly, the teacher in the UK would find techniques to make the students interact more."*

Similarly, P6 demonstrated her efforts to use the knowledge gained from the UK to the fullest extent in her work, which is characterized by openness and flexibility and results in satisfaction and a desire to further develop her working method. This action point to an internalized sense of professional responsibility, where study abroad shaped not only "what she could do" but also "how she perceived her role."

> *P6: "I feel very lucky to be in an organization like a military language institute… At the current unit, I have used all the knowledge I gained in the UK, and I feel fulfilled and want to continue developing my English teaching tasks."*

(3) Leadership and Interpersonal Skills

In addition to improving job-related hard skills like language proficiency, studying in the UK also strengthened several soft skills, particularly interpersonal and teamwork abilities, which influenced how returnees interacted and worked with others in their military roles. Five returnees reported that their overseas experiences have influenced their development of a more egalitarian perspective, especially in terms of being open to feedback from subordinates and not strictly adhering to the rank, position, or strict top-down chain of command. Rather, they

emphasize the value of others through the “qualifications” that subordinates are supposed to perform. This egalitarian perspective is an expression that takes into account the “functional contribution” of each person more than the “status-based evaluation.”

> *P6: “When I studied in the UK, I felt that people there were different. It gave me the mindset that when I saw non-commissioned officers, commissioned officers, or even generals, I would feel indifferent because it was a job that each party was responsible for. It does not depend on whether you graduated from abroad or what your rank is."*

> *P14: “Studying there taught me to listen to my subordinates' opinions, reminding me not to consider myself the center or to think that the higher rank makes me superior. … The team must consider the best outcomes and goals of our missions. I am not the only capable individual; I also have subordinates in certain roles who may even outperform me.”*

P11 and P15 also shared their perspective by seeing the value of respecting each other as "colleagues" more than “commander-subordinate” and emphasizing participatory work more than sticking to top-down orders in the traditional hierarchical system in military organizations.

> *P11: “I viewed them as a subordinate indeed, but my working style is to treat everyone as a colleague. I didn’t decide whether this person is a commissioned officer or a non-commissioned officer. I rather engaged with them in a way that fosters a relationship, ensuring they felt there was no gap between themselves and I. Even though the ranks were different, I believed that by reducing this gap when talking to subordinates with problems, they could come and talked to me. This technique helped me become aware of the problems, solved them more quickly, and made the work process smoother. I believed that I have learned about equality from there (the UK) as part of this experience.”*

> *P15: “What I have applied the most at my workplace is to let everyone participate in expressing their opinions. For example, when we were at work, I discussed things with them (subordinates), not just gave orders. There must be two-way communication, and I must try to understand their problems and what they actually needed. …I did not limit the rank to whether he or she was a commissioned officer or a non-commissioned officer. Instead, I observed that everyone contributed to brainstorming ideas effectively and regarded each other as colleagues rather than as subordinates.”*

P11 discussed his experience of seeing Westerners working in a simple style, which made him compare the work process system and begin to overlook small details without sticking to the old mindset, such as strict official regulations, resulting in being able to complete work more efficiently and quickly.

> *P11: "I observed how Westerners work, and they will do everything as easily as possible and try not to complicate it. If we talk about working in Thailand, there will be a Thai bureaucracy that has many small details and is complicated, so this tends to make people complete tasks slowly rather than quickly. I believe we can overlook regulations on official documents as long as it didn't cause a damage to the government service."*

In addition, P13 reported that she developed a more open mind to listen to others. After the UK, she found her abilities needed to be improved. The experience there changed her perspective and made her less egoistic and more willing to listen to others' opinions.

> *P13: "In the past, I was someone who admitted that I was smart to a certain extent because I got high scores, and was number 1 in my class. However, when I went to the UK, I discovered that many subjects were much broader than I had previously realized. In the first semester, there was feedback on the first essay. My supervisor discovered that I needed to make significant revisions, and my score was lower than I had expected. That time, I felt that my world might actually be too narrow. My ego shrank and this experience made me listen to others' opinions more."*

4.2.2.2 Trust and Recognition at a Workplace

A number of participants reported their degree as a "treasure," "privilege," or something they "carry with them" which illustrates how international education became embedded their identity narratives and led them to evaluate themselves relative to others in their organization. Valuable working skills, especially language ability and the image of "being international master students," cause returnees to gain trust and credits from their colleagues. Six returnees reported that these skills, images, and language proficiency foster trust, which enables them to have more assignments on significant missions and expand the range of working opportunities, which makes them feel valuable, as they are seen as having special abilities that are different from others. For example, some returnees proudly describe their "opportunities" to join an

important agency mission. They saw receiving the mission as not just a burden but a way to accumulate experience and develop themselves.

> *P3: "When my language skills improved a lot, my colleagues wanted me to participate in a collaborative project with foreign countries. ... Then they appointed me as the main person."*

> *P4: "When the workplace knew that I graduated from abroad, it was like putting a label on myself as an "international person." ... They gave me opportunities to do many things. ... At least I didn't only receive a physical degree; instead, I gained more opportunities than others, which allowed me to gradually discover my interests and do my best then."*

> *P5: "Because I have excellent language skills, it's like having more job opportunities. The supervisor wanted me to try various jobs that were appropriate for my skill level, and I felt happy about it."*

P8 also proudly mentioned comparing his performance gained from studying cybersecurity in the UK with other colleagues as a sense of "holding all the cards" and gaining a "gold medal."

> *P8: "My workplace colleague surely expected me to do various duties as I had the opportunity to study for a master's degree in cybersecurity, and it coincided with the school's transition to a new cybersecurity study program. My superiors allowed me to teach as my primary job. I perceived myself as a central figure, possessing a distinct advantage and feeling indispensable within these job groups. It made me feel like I was holding all the cards… Like, I got a gold medal, while the others received bronze medals."*

In the narratives above, the experiences of returnees illustrate a form of double consciousness in which their UK education shaped both their self-perception and the perception of others within the Thai military, as participants described their degrees as conferring a symbolic status that created their sense of priority, competence, and legitimacy. At the same time, colleagues' recognition of their language proficiency, specialized knowledge, and international exposure reinforced this status, resulting in trust and the assignment of significant responsibilities.

4.2.2.3 Ambivalent Feelings with Thai Military Culture

While studying in the UK offered returnees many professional advantages, it also raised awareness of the gaps between their expectations and the realities of their workplace. The competencies and international outlook that brought recognition and expanded opportunities sometimes exposed returnees to organizational limitations and rigid hierarchies. As a result, participants often experienced ambivalent feelings between pros in their job welfare and frustration or disappointment in systemic limitations at their Thai workplace. This tension sets the stage for understanding the “not-quite love-hate” relationships, which reflect both their appreciation for professional opportunities and the challenges of readjusting their personal aspirations with institutional expectations. The ambivalent feelings describe the conflicting and complex feelings experienced by returnees themselves, who may have confusing and disappointing sentiments towards their organization but must endure it for some professional advantages that are included in the military organization. The subthemes in this relationship were (1) unfulfilled professional expectations and (2) adapting to the workplace context.

4.2.2.3.1 Unfulfilled Professional Expectations

Returnees had contrasting perspectives on their work experiences after returning from postgraduate studies in the UK. While some returnees believed that studying abroad increased their value and sense of pride in the profession, others expressed disappointment and dissatisfaction when their expectations did not align with the realities of the Thai military organization. Bureaucratic systems and excessive hierarchical constraints misaligned their acquired skills with their developed personalities. The findings found that these mismatches were significantly interconnected mainly because of the strict chain of command.

(1) Misalignment Between Skills and Job Roles

When military culture is based on a strict top-down leadership structure with a centralized chain of command (Dragomir, 2015), this means all orders and job functions mainly rely on the people in power "doing whatever the commander said," causing returnees to feel that they were taken an advantage of for their potential, unable to fully utilize their knowledge and abilities, and unable to develop themselves beyond the framework or rules set by the organization. Six returnees—P2, P3, P6, P8, P9, and P12—reflected their feelings of being undervalued and unable to apply knowledge from studying abroad in a context that emphasizes bureaucracy, which is centralized with a hierarchy of power and redundant procedures. P6 frustratedly explained that as she was believed to be fluent in English, marked by her degree abroad, she had more work than others. Rather than being offered opportunities for professional development, she was burdened with additional translation work without compensation or recognition, making her feel exploited rather than valued, which became a mental burden and led to feelings of pressure.

> *P6: "The work that I was assigned caught the commanders' eyes so much. And when it was in high demand, it was like a "thank-you" duty. It was free work without proper compensation. I think that if I were a cadet or military student who was trained to receive orders, I would be happy. However, I believe that this exploitative experience gave me heavy feelings. For instance, my commander once asked me to translate English textbooks for free, mistakenly believing I was already receiving a government salary. Then he believed that commanders could order their subordinates and use us as they pleased without providing fair compensation. They (commanders) really think that way."*

Others also criticized how their actual job responsibilities were ignored by bureaucratic obligations that had little relevance to their roles or professional expertise, such as being a receptionist for a high-ranking official, religious support activities, or any that were not directly related to their main duty. These things made them feel that their intellectual contributions were dismissed and not being used to the greatest benefit.

> *P3: "I was annoyed with the military organization because we spent too much time on tasks that were not part of our main mission, such as lobbying the commanders and making PowerPoint slides and posters, which are not our main duties. … We were also*

called to pray (in the Buddhist ceremony), do volunteer activities (of the Royal Project), or do any events that waste human resources. But as soldiers, we don't have much power to complain about that. … It feels like I am not maximizing my true potential."

P8: "Sometimes I feel disappointed because I tried my best to teach at the cadet academy, but I did not receive any salary promotion because what the organization gave importance to was not teaching as a main function. Instead, they were more focused on whether the lecturers attended religious or official ceremonies—whether those ceremonies were organized by the school or were important national or army events that required attendance—rather than on our willingness to volunteer. I see it as measuring people's worth based on unrelated tasks, not their main duty function."

In P2's and P9's cases, they similarly expressed their frustration by explaining that what their abilities gained from the UK was useless to the military organization, as the organization operated under top-down orders from superiors that could not be refused or questioned; therefore, they merely fulfilled their duties and felt unable to oppose those in higher positions.

P2: "The culture of the military is one of leniency. When people in the UK took a knowledge proficiency test, they had a set of standards that are truly standardized. They're judged based on clear, solid criteria. This is in contrast to the Thai military, where those in power often leniently allow their subordinates who fail the test to lower their standards to help each other pass, rather than letting them fail. What I learned abroad cannot be applied here (military organization system) at all… We (low-ranked officers) cannot change anything about this organization…. If we want to stay, we have to follow the flow of this organization."

P9: "I feel like it's useless (to use knowledge adopted from learning there) because the organization just keeps doing the same thing as they used to do. And I just had a function to follow what they (commanders) want."

(2) Structural Constraints and Hierarchical Control

A strict chain of command makes the seniority culture more serious. Not only does it make returnees feel inferior in terms of their abilities but also makes them feel that their power in expression is being suppressed. The 2 returnees—P6 and P13—still felt uncomfortable revealing their confident and independent personalities, such as freedom of speech. These personalities are reported by returnees sometimes to appear to be arrogant, making them seem irritating and overly prominent compared to others. They feel pressured to conform to group targets or rules instead of pursuing individual expectations, which leads them to reluctantly avoid conflicts in the workplace. P6 explained the impact of the difference in mindset between individuals who are trained to think independently (from the Western education system) and other colleagues that prioritized submission to orders.

> *P6: "I was trained to think independently, while others in the organization were trained to be submissive to the rules, and this made our focus totally different. When I graduated and worked in a place like this, it was awful, and they (colleagues) didn't like me for being ahead. It is like we completely lost our communication. They think that I did not perform well because I did not listen to them. Therefore, our mindset was entirely different."*

P6 explained further that she felt "isolated" from others by the different cultural values between "egalitarian values" from the UK and "hierarchical and collective values" in the military organization, which led to a sense of reverse culture shock, impacting her mental health, and it took her quite a long time to blend in with the tough situation.

> *P6: "I felt very stressed and depressed. I experienced culture shock for many years, and I still felt it, though I had adjusted to some extent. While studying in the UK, there were no indications of rank or status. Everyone started from the same level, and individuals did not always rely on one another as groups did in Thailand. But when I came back to Thailand, everything felt upside down… and like a nightmare."*

P13's narrative best illustrates the tension between the cultivation of independent, critical thinking through international education and the hierarchical constraints of the Thai military system. Her UK postgraduate experience promoted academic freedom of speech and made her believed in evidence-based reasoning and decision-making. Upon returning, however, she

encountered a system in which authority is heavily centralized and rank determines legitimacy, even in academic or professional matters. Her conversations further illustrate how her reckless comments could cause trouble with people in power, while subordinates are discouraged from making excessive comments that may be perceived as disrespectful and could lead her to relationship issues with coworkers.

> *P13: "When I came back, I felt that I had more questions and opinions about everything…. It became clearer that my experiences in the UK had made me feel unsuitable for life here. I saw myself as someone who held opinions and was willing to express them, but in the system I returned to, those in power did not favor people like me. I often found myself in trouble when I could not restrain the urge to express my opinions in specific situations and at particular times. They thought I was being argumentative simply because they outranked me, even when I spoke rationally. ...I once proposed a research topic, but a colonel who outranked me and was responsible for the matter disagreed and blocked my thesis proposal. I questioned whether he even had the right to block my research topic, given that it was part of my intellectual freedom. Regardless of the importance of the issue, they (the seniors) kept controlling me excessively."*

4.2.2.3.2 Readjusting to the Workplace Context

Despite dissatisfaction or disappointment with the bureaucratic military culture, four returnees initially readjusted their expectations and values, often at the expense of decision-making authority and ideals, in order to maintain their career stability, emotional well-being, and long-term resilience within a traditional organizational culture. This readjusting was often reflected in expressions such as "accept it" and "let it go," which revealed a compromise and an emotional coping mechanism rather than genuine acceptance of the system. P8's psychological and professional transition from initial resistance to adaptive acceptance within a constrained bureaucratic system. This case demonstrates how readjustment can involve recalibrating personal expectations to align with local realities while maintaining a working motivation.

> *P8: "In the beginning of my return, I felt resistant to the system and the undeveloped environment, like the Southern region (in Thailand). However, after being stationed there, I understood the limitations of the Thai bureaucratic working style, such as limited*

budget to develop remote areas. I chose to adjust my attitude and focused on accepting or fixing whatever I could do in order to maintain my motivation to work. Don't even think beyond your own capabilities. If I did that, I would keep questioning all things, so this could make me feel stressed and exhausted. So, I could only change my perspective on what actions I should take so that I can feel happier and have more energy to work."

P10 explained that he was influenced by participating in expressing opinions in classes in the UK. However, upon returning to his military organization, he found that his new ideas were often dismissed in favor of repeating previous practices. When he attempted to introduce fresh approaches, he was viewed as an outcast and eventually felt compelled to conform in order to avoid conflict.

P10: "After I returned, I valued critical thinking, especially the importance of originality and avoiding uncritical reuse of others' work. In the UK, relying on someone else's work without proper development was unacceptable. I developed this mindset during my time there. But in the military unit, no matter what the task was, they would simply reuse the same templates or plans from the previous year. When I presented new ideas as a recent graduate, my superiors saw me as an outcast. It made me feel like I was losing my mind, but eventually, I had to accept it and adapt."

P7 compared her UK experiences with the Thai military's tight hierarchical and collective structure. After returning, she saw systematic disparities, including higher-ranking officers doing less work without performances, which would be penalized in performance-based organizations like the UK. Thai organizations commonly ignore these issues due to their cultural emphasis on avoiding conflict, respecting seniority, and maintaining harmony. P7 understood that these dynamics would certainly cause her tension. Thus, she chose silent acceptance, emotionally disconnecting from the unfairness rather than confronting it.

P7: "I thought there was something we couldn't deny because it was part of the organization system. There were certain topics that we were not allowed to discuss. ... For example, let's say there was an officer with a higher rank than me, but his responsibilities were lower than mine. If he had worked in the UK, he would definitely have gotten a penalty. He would have gotten a warning letter, had his salary deducted, or had his KPI evaluated very low. But that was Thailand—even people who were older than him couldn't do anything to him to avoid conflicts in the workplace, so what could

a little person like me do? Therefore, I had to ignore it and let it go. It was just like accepting the reality a bit."

P6 shared her views on economic rationality and emotional self-regulation in the face of post-return challenges. Although she had once considered living abroad, P6 came to view her role as a government officer in Thailand as offering the most stable and valuable benefits, particularly in a country without a comprehensive welfare system. Her statement demonstrates a mindset shift from idealism to grounded realism, illustrating how returnees may reconcile unmet expectations by strategically adjusting goals and lifestyle to sustain both professional stability and personal satisfaction.

P6: "In Thailand, there were no better benefits than being a government officer in a country that is not a welfare state. I felt that it was the best value... Otherwise, no retired foreigners would have wanted to live in Thailand. If I really wanted to go abroad, I could save up money to do so... I tried not to compare myself to friends who worked in private companies and earned a lot of money. It would only make me feel annoyed, so I had to find alternatives by having a side job and learning to adjust."

4.2.2.4 Ingroup vs Outgroup Perception

While returnees' ambivalent feelings reflected their internal struggle with the organizational culture, another layer of complexity emerged in how they positioned themselves within the social structure of the military once again after returning from the UK. The findings revealed that Thai military personnel responded to military organizational norms in different ways, depending on their previous involvement with military organizational values, leading to the difference between whether they graduated from a military academy or entered the military via the civilian route. Returnees who graduated from the cadet academies before studying in the UK, such as P1, P9, and P10, reported their background of military cadet graduation made them easily readjust to traditional hierarchical structures, as they mentioned long military training from a young age has shaped their loyalty, duty, and acceptance of authority without questioning. Some of them also mentioned the ties among cadet academy alumni who may work together again in their working lives, so this tie affects them in a stronger sense of collective group identity. For example, P10 explained that, despite having paid for his studies in the UK and having no obligation to a military scholarship, he still values a military career

so much that he will not consider other professional options. The reason given is his background in studying at the cadet academy when he was still a teenager.

> *P10: "I have never thought about changing jobs. I keep working hard and remain in the same career. It may be because I graduated from a cadet academy. It is like they are producing us to be real military personnel. To speak frankly, even military officers can't say what they can do if they're not soldiers. ... Most of us graduate with this ideology."*

Similarly, P1 expressed that his prior studies at a cadet academy made him get along more easily and feel familiar with the characteristics of the military organization he was part of.

> *P1: "After I returned to Thailand, I did not feel that it was hard to readjust myself to work here (the military organization) again. It may be because I had been in a cadet academy for 5-8 years."*

P9 emphasized the acceptance that graduating from a military academy is not just an education path but also "being embedded in an authoritarian culture," which makes him see disobeying orders as something he "has no right" to do, even though he exposed to the egalitarian values in the UK. He also compared himself to other officers from civilian backgrounds, highlighting the differences in their institutional origins and expressing a sense of belonging to a collective group, similar to alumni, whom they refer to as "brothers." This reflects the seniority within military organizations of those who graduated directly from the cadet academy, viewing returnees with civilian academy backgrounds as a separate group.

> *P9: "When the brothers (commanders from the previous generation in the same cadet institute) ordered something, there was no reason for us not to do it. When the commanders told us to do something, we simply followed their orders. We had no right to decline the assignments, particularly if we had completed the cadet academy. I did not believe I could refuse any orders, and I viewed it as my duty. I noticed that my degree abroad meant I was supposed to do my duty in tasks related to the English language, and it was an appropriate assignment…. But if they are soldiers from civilian backgrounds, they would probably be able to refuse. That's all."*

Conversely, returnees with civilian academic backgrounds and UK degrees —P2 and P6— found it more challenging to reintegrate into the military organization. Their experience outside strengthened ideals like autonomy, egalitarianism, and critical thinking that frequently conflict with the rigid hierarchy and blind obedience of the Thai military. These officers frequently felt

alienated or out of place, exhibiting a sense of being "outgroups," and viewed themselves as distinct from those with cadet education backgrounds. The increasing gap between transnational attitudes and local military cultures is indicative of the influence of transnationalism, where education in Western contexts, such as in the UK, fosters the development of fresh viewpoints that may challenge established norms at home. P6 who had the background of graduating from a civilian government school before studying in the UK reflected her terrible experiences being in the traditional military workplace, which holds strict military authoritarian culture, where most people graduate from the military school.

> *P6: "Even though I am stationed in a current unit where I am happy, I had had experiences in a horrible military department before. That place was where there were many military engineering students who became officers. Therefore, what they held and believed was not the same as me. They were trained to be submissive, to be someone who follows others, while we are the ones who are educated to use our independent thoughts. Therefore, the focus will differ between the two groups."*

P2 explained that, although holding a postgraduate degree from abroad may seem beneficial and dominant among colleagues, he saw little potential for such a qualification from the UK to significantly advance one's professional career within the military. This is because most decisions are typically made by those in higher-ranking positions. He also mentioned that there are two groups of military officers who entered the service through different routes, and he believed that graduating from the UK does not necessarily lead to top-level career advancement due to "brotherhood-based" job advancement. He reasoned that "they already have those personnel," implicitly suggesting unfair treatment in which individuals with backgrounds from cadet academies have better credit for military career advancement opportunities. As a result, he feels as though he is not truly a part of the organization.

> *P2: "From the perspective of a military officer, graduating from abroad felt like gaining significant advantages in life. Even if they had a background in the cadet school or civilian school, I didn't feel that studying abroad could make use of our full potential at all... Since we received orders from the top, they must be operated accordingly. In the same way, I don't think my degree abroad can lead me to have better credit than those from cadet school anyway. ... I never feel like I am a soldier. It is just like I am joining the military only physically but not mentally. We (low-ranked officers) cannot fix*

anything about this organization. If we want to stay, we have to follow the flow of this organization."

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the empirical findings from 15 Thai military returnees following their postgraduate studies in the UK. The analysis identified interconnected themes that demonstrate how studying a master's degree in the UK reshaped participants' personal identities and how these affected their personal lives and professional lives. These themes reveal that returnees' readjustment was shifted over time by cultural values, military organizational norms, and the tension between their cosmopolitan identities and locally embedded structures. To put these all together, these insights provide the foundation for the interpretive discussion in the next chapter, where the findings are examined through the theoretical lenses of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, reverse culture shock, and transnationalism.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Overview

This chapter will discuss and interpret the main research findings that align with the two objectives of the study: (1) to explore the perceived gains from studying in the UK by military returnees; (2) to examine how these gains influenced their personal development, interpersonal development and career paths within the hierarchical and collective structures in Thailand. This research uses Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the concept of reverse culture shock, and transnationalism to help understand the literature on how returnees readjust themselves when they return to their home country. This research chose a qualitative research design to gain in-depth information from the different experiences of the interviewees. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 commissioned officers who served under the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarter, and the data were analyzed by the thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) in the following section.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings and Discussions

In this section, the conclusion of the study results and the relationship between the study results and the conceptual framework and previous studies will be discussed. The conceptual framework of the study integrates Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the concept of reverse culture shock, and transnationalism. These conceptual frameworks provide a perspective to understand how the transition experience between two cultural contexts, the UK and Thailand, can change

Thai military returnees upon their return. The research draws the following conclusions:

5.2.1 Gains that Returnees Believed

The study found that those who returned had personal growth in terms of self-agency development, more flexible worldview, and dual identity.

5.2.1.1 Development of Self Agency and Independence

By viewing from Hofstede's national culture theory, the development of self-agency and independence among returnees can be explained by their transition from a low power distance and high individualism like the UK (Hofstede, 2001). The findings show that studying in the UK affected returnees' transformation, such as sense of self-agency, confidence, and independence. They were more courageous in expressing their opinions and making decisions for themselves without fear of being judged by those around them. Their responses show that they had to face unfamiliar and unpredictable situations during their stay in the host country, which required them to develop strategies to cope with these experiences (Attah et al., 2018). These situations encouraged them to think more independently and maturely. In addition, the independence was also found in aspects of self-responsibility, such as punctuality and the need to be self-reliant, which aligns with Gu's (2009) study showing that studying abroad contributes to significant personal maturity. Regarding life direction, the results also indicate that returnees, after removing themselves from their familiar home environments, encountered a new set of Western cultural values. This exposure caused them to question, review, compare, and critically evaluate their lives back home. This shift in traditional values helped them re-evaluate their goals and develop a clearer sense of identity, which led to a greater maturity in understanding their true-life desires.

5.2.1.2 More Flexible Worldview

From a transnationalism perspective, the development of a more flexible worldview reflects returnees' ability to move beyond singular national or cultural frames of reference. These flexible characteristics allowed them to accept the strengths and limitations of both cultures without forcing themselves to strictly conform with each cultural context. Returnees became more accepting of diverse perspectives after realizing that they were part of two or more societies, which led them to develop multiple cultural perceptions. They were able to reflect on, critique, and appreciate the basic values and attitudes of both their host and home cultures and could embrace different cultural perspectives at the same time (Gu, 2015). As a result, they developed more adaptable strategies that allowed them to adjust to their current surroundings and improve their well-being over time, which is consistent with the findings of Alkubaidi and Alzhrani (2020), Gu (2015), and Ncube (2014).

The flexibility also mitigates the level of reverse culture shock because of returnees' competence in intercultural empathy. They were able to reinterpret cultural differences without

identifying what is really right or wrong with a greater understanding of and empathy for people from different backgrounds. This helped them develop participatory listening skills, connect with others more effectively, and show non-judgmental attitudes based on their own evolving standards (Gu, 2009; Gu and Schweisfurth, 2015). In addition, the study shows that returnees also gained self-developmental flexibility, which includes a lifelong learning mindset and less egoism. Returnees carried a more open-minded personality that influenced their continuous self-development, turning it into an ongoing process (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). This mindset helped promote motivation and fostered "hope" and "life goals," such as having a more positive attitude towards pursuing further education. At the same time, it also helps them listen to the opinions of those around them regardless of seniority, which drives lifelong self-development.

5.2.1.3 Dual Identities

The experiences of returnees reflect the development of dual identities, where they simultaneously draw upon cultural patterns from both their host and home (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Returnees were able to merge elements of both cultural framework which resulted in a blended way of thinking, behavior, and self-presentation such as in clothing styles, communication patterns, and confidence in expressing opinions. However, from Hofstede's view, this dualism also creates tension. This tension can also be interpreted through the lens of reverse cultural shock, where the returnees experience psychological stress not because their home culture is unfamiliar, but because their identities have changed. The need to suppress newly acquired communication patterns demonstrates that reintegration into society involves more than just adapting to a new environment. But it also involves negotiating a new identity. As one participant noted, expressing excessive opinions sometimes caused the trouble in relationships with those in authority. This underscores the emotional and professional obstacles that returnees face when attempting to manage blended identities inside rigid organizational structures. Overall, this explains why reintegration into society is not a linear restoration to one's former identity, but rather a continuous negotiation of internal changes and external institutional expectations.

5.2.2.1.1 Emotional Challenges

In personal lives, returnees experienced reverse culture shock in terms of psychological distress when they compared their home and host countries. They reported emotional distress after comparing various aspects of prosperity between the "developed host country" and their "developing home country," such as quality of life, the economic environment, financial opportunities, and transportation systems. These comparisons lead to psychological challenges where reintegration into a familiar environment becomes unexpectedly difficult due to a mismatch in expectations and reality. This is consistent with the findings of Butcher (2002), Chamove and Soeterik (2006), and Gaw (2000), who describe how returnees often experience disappointment when their expectations no longer match the reality of home. In this study, emotional strain was often tied to a perceived loss, not only of material comfort, but of the personal autonomy, opportunities, and lifestyle flexibility that returnees experienced while living in a more individualistic and developed context. Coming back to a collectivist society like Thailand, where social norms, structures, and institutional limitations may restrict such freedoms, intensified the sense of psychological struggling.

5.2.2.1.2 Stronger Family Ties

Surprisingly, the finding contrasts with many previous studies related to reverse culture shock, which suggested that family-related problems were found as "the common thing" for returnees, while most of the problems arose from the traditional family's expectations, such as filial piety (Butchers, 2002) or gender role expectations (Alkubaidi & Alzhrani, 2020; Le & La Coste, 2017). In this study, most of the returnees reported stronger family relationships after returning home due to feelings of pride, their increased intimacy after a long time spent apart, and changes in more positive perceptions of family members.

First, the "international credit" that returnees received helped build a sense of pride, self-worth, and value, not only in themselves but also in the eyes of their family members. Their pride did not only come from the physical degree but also from the new knowledge, language skills, and social status associated with that experience. This recognition helped returnees gain a greater positive self-image at home and even inspired other relatives to consider studying abroad. These outcomes truly reflect the value of family achievement pride, which is consistent with Hofstede's (2001) Thai collective culture that views an individual's success as a collective success (i.e., a reflection of the family's overall reputation) (Pimpa, 2012). Overall, post-return family ties could be returnees' emotional supports and symbolic

family success recognition, while this reinforcement could function as a coping mechanism for the challenges of reverse culture shock. Second, the long distance and time apart caused family members to miss the returnees and deepened the emotional bond. Extended time apart encouraged family members to think more deeply about their relationships and express increased appreciation when reunited. Third, perceived positive attitudes derived from the increasing trust among family members were also reported. For example, one male returnee could develop his maturity and self-independence abroad, which led his mother to place more trust in him and stop trying to control his life. This shift in family dynamic allowed for more balanced family relationships based on mutual respect. These three results conform to the concept proposed by McGrath & Gu (2015) that "culture is itself a fluid and dynamic construct," shaped continually by globalization and human interaction. This concept may imply that contemporary Thai families increasingly interact in more egalitarian ways, moving away from rigid traditions such as hierarchical filial piety or strictly defined gender roles.

However, Butcher's (2002) observations on reverse culture shock hold some truth. This is evidenced by one returnee (P6) in this study, who indicated her conflict in facing Hofstede's cultural differences between high and low power distance within Thai familial values and began to compare her ideal of being independent with not having to strictly listen to or adhere to adults at home. She had to readjust to living with family members and felt uncomfortable because she was expected to follow traditional norms and obey elders, and these characteristics caused her family to see her as stubborn and difficult to manage. These findings are aligned with Allison et al. (2011), who found that some returnees felt isolated and found it difficult to reconnect meaningfully with family members due to how unique and unrelatable their overseas experiences were.

5.2.2.1.3 Broader Friendships and International Connections

This can be explained through the transnationalism lens by Gilroy's (1993) observation that returnees who share the same "roots" (being Thai) and "routes" (being a master's student in the UK) have a desire to establish social and cultural connections with fellow ethnic individuals (Gu, 2015) both in Thailand and in the UK. This conclusion also resonates with Vertovec (2009) and Gu and Schweisfurth (2015), who mentioned the creation of new social spaces across countries and continuous cross-border activities. Returnees' expansion of both domestic and international networks reinforces the concept of transnationalism. Their participation in Thai student friendship communities abroad and continued collaboration upon

returning home illustrates multi-local belonging and cross-border social fields (Vertovec, 2009). Returnees expanded their networks of relationships, both among Thai people and international connections, as friends and advisors. Among Thai friends, returnees still built relationships with old friends at home and also expanded their networks by building relationships with other Thai students in the community who returned from the UK and who were abroad. Returnees generally felt at ease conversing and sharing experiences with Thai friends who had undergone similar study abroad experiences, which served as a significant foundation for mutual support and understanding. These connections provided emotional support and facilitated a smoother readjustment back to Thai society. These activities affect people's sense of belonging, loyalty, and attachment, and they become multi-local activities by meeting and staying in more than one place (Klingenberg et al., 2020). For example, returnees had their Thai clubs in the UK and the Thai student community who graduated from the UK, where they helped each other with domestic and international matters, such as assisting with visa applications and writing letters of recommendation for juniors applying to institutions in the UK.

However, one female returnee reported that she was having difficulty readjusting to her home country and was unable to connect with her pre-existing Thai friends because the ideas and attitudes she had learned from the UK had changed her personality. This experience can be understood through the concept of double consciousness, in which she simultaneously recognized her Thai identity while becoming acutely aware of how her transformed perspectives differentiate her from those who have never been abroad (Karakas, 2020). The results of this study suggest that not all returnees locate it easy or desirable to fully re-enter their original friendship circles, forcing them to choose to maintain relationships that suit their developed identities.

5.2.2.2 Professional Impacts

This section discusses how the benefits obtained from studying in the UK impacted participants' military careers. The themes of valuable working skills, trust and recognition at the workplace, ambivalent feelings with military culture, and ingroup-outgroup perceptions emerged.

5.2.2.2.1 Valuable Working Skills

By viewing from the perspective of transnationalism and Hofstede's framework, the positive outcomes of English proficiency, critical thinking, a target-oriented working style, and interpersonal leadership were part of cosmopolitan competencies gained through studying in a low-power, distant society like the UK. These competencies reflect not only enhanced professional value but also a shift in workplace identity. In this study, the most mentioned competency is returnee's improved English proficiency, which gave them confidence and allowed them to take on a wider range of responsibilities at work, particularly in areas such as international collaboration and any high-importance key duties. Furthermore, they felt stronger about their gained abilities and had more willingness to use them. As a result, participants were able to maintain competence in their roles and build more value from their overseas learning. This finding strongly supports research by Gu and Schweisfurth (2015), which shows that studying abroad helps returnees develop important skills that make them aware of their value and how employers appreciate these skills. Towards a strong sense of self and a willingness to use these abilities, the confidence gained from the challenges of the study abroad experience and the appreciation of the skills and knowledge gained impacted the concept of self (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Returnees also significantly develop their interpersonal and leadership skills from their experiences studying in a low-power distance society like the UK. It led them to participatory leadership and a more egalitarian approach, which enabled them to recognize the "true potential" of others without focusing on ranks or strict chains of command. Additionally, the returnees' courage to question, analyze, and rationally criticize various issues abroad led them to practical applications of their skills, resulting in improved efficiency and quality of their work at home. All of these skills align with previous research by Gu (2015), which emphasizes that studying abroad equips individuals with valuable transnational competencies, including excellent communication, critical thinking, and leadership abilities, all of which have been emphasized in the literature as important for success in a global context, leading to better performance and higher professional expectations.

5.2.2.2.2 Trust and Recognition at the Workplace

"Double-consciousness" could be the best term to describe this phenomenon, which means not only did returnees gained pride, trust, and recognition from coworkers because of their international education, but they were also aware of being "different" from others in the workplace. Their degrees and skills from the UK became both a source of privilege and a marker that set them apart, shaping how they saw themselves and how others perceived them. Most of them not only reported a sense of pride and viewed their degree as a symbolic resource embedded in their consciousness, which enhanced their self-worth, but also compared it to a "lifelong treasure" (Gu, 2009) or even "a privilege" (Karakas, 2020) With open perspectives and improved language skills, participants were trusted to take on more responsibility and opportunities to work on new tasks. This result is consistent with the academic literature proposed by Gu & Schweisfurth (2015), Karakas (2020), and Wang (2022), who emphasize that international education not only increases individuals' confidence but also promotes better interpersonal communication and trust in the professional environment by bonding with their team and becoming more appealing to others. From returnees' self-perspectives, returnees were also able to realize that their roles were important and valuable to others, especially in terms of their specific academic abilities, interpersonal competences, and English language skills, which gave them the opportunity to prove themselves and expand their roles to those around them.

5.2.2.2.3 Ambivalent Feelings with Thai Military Culture

The mixed feelings that military returnees experienced when reintegrating into the military organizational culture after studying in the UK include the sense of frustration and the tolerating. Firstly, frustration emerged largely from the transition from a low power-distance context in the UK to a high power-distance military environment in Thailand (Hofstede, 2001), where autonomy is limited by the authority of superiors and the chain of command. Many returnees faced unfulfilled professional expectations, feelings of being undervalued, and even discrimination. They often found it difficult to apply their new knowledge because of an organizational culture based on hierarchy and centralized authority, where decisions were made only by those in power. As a result, they felt they couldn't fully express themselves or pursue their ideas. Some of them also felt pressured not to stand out more than their seniors, not to share opinions that might embarrass others, and to act more humbly to avoid conflict and being labeled as disrespectful or overly confident. In addition, some returnees felt discomfort from being isolated and different from others. This discomfort reflects the clash between personal

transformation and unchanged social expectations. It also aligns with the findings of Allison et al. (2011) and Butcher (2002), who found that returnees often feel out of place because the growth they experienced abroad is not recognized or valued at home. When they returned, these conflicting situations triggered emotional strain, leading to internal conflict and, in some cases, depression caused by unmet emotional needs and a reduced sense of belonging (Nonaka, 2020).

Secondly, the sense of tolerating often showed in way how returnees chose to stay in the military despite their emotional difficulties. Many returnees chose to stay because of the job security and benefits they received, which they viewed as a "safe zone." This decision could be seen to reflect Thailand's collectivist orientation, feminine convincing values, and strong uncertainty avoidance, where people value social harmony, avoid conflict, and seek long-term stability. Over time, returnees were able to shift their attitude from constantly questioning or comparing life in the UK to finding ways to blend into their current organization. This attitude was reflected in expressions such as "let it go," "follow the flow," or "accept it." This reflects Soeters et al. (2006), who describe how strict ranking systems and stable salary structures encourage military personnel to remain committed for life and build a strong institutional identity. They also tried to accept each country's pros and cons and focus on the benefits of staying. This approach supports Ai and Wang's (2017) idea that a cosmopolitan identity is shaped through experiences with different cultures and leads to growth in values, self-awareness, and flexibility in adjusting to new norms. In addition, returnees preferred the fixed income systems, which reduce excessive competition, and they continued to appreciate core military principles. This selection is clearly affected by personal factors such as age, career stability, and economic pressures.

5.2.2.2.4 Ingroup vs Outgroup Perception in the Military

Interestingly, the level of reverse culture shock among returnees differs, which involves prolonged cultivated military culture. The study found that there were clear differences in how commissioned officers entered military service, with those who graduated from the cadet academy having a much stronger connection to the military organization and indicating a greater distance from civilian life compared to those who did not attend the cadet academy before. Returnees who graduated from the cadet academy seem to follow a traditional path, learning to accept the military's strict hierarchy and obedience from a young age despite their new identity gained from the UK. They are more likely to adhere to military rules, such as respecting the chain of command and valuing connections with fellow alumni. This supports

the study by Truusa & Castro (2019), which states, “These bonds are more often than not mainly within the military culture, forming a strong in-group identity" (Tajfel, 1974). These ties formed at the military academy made these returnees even more accepting of manipulative treatment as part of their duties, such as working overtime without fair pay or being assigned tasks not related to their main responsibilities; however, they still see these treatments as “acceptable” and insist on and plan to continue military careers until their retirement, as emphasized by 3 male returnees who mention that they are not going to go against the norms of military culture because they have the military academy graduation background. One of them stressed this idea by saying, “If I'm not military, I don't know what else to do.”

It can be seen that the career progression between two groups (those with military backgrounds and those with civilian educations) in military service differs because the organizational structure is designed to facilitate a “brotherhood system” rather than a performance-based career progression. The interviews of both groups of military officers show that each "entry route to be a soldier" has instilled the military’s core values differently. This resulted in some members who transitioned to work in military organizations facing more challenges in accepting the values and norms of the group and seeing themselves as members of a group and starting to compare themselves with other groups, which highlights distinctive group identity and social categorization between “insiders” (cadet graduates) and “others” (civilian-trained officers). (Haslam, 2004; 1, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Officers who have never attended a cadet academy will see themselves as not fully belonging to the military group, and this feeling strengthens when they transition to studying in the UK. These conflicting ideas and the power distance within the military organization result in challenges for some military returnees as they readjust to the society in which they work.

In contrast, two participants from civilian educational backgrounds who developed such critical perspectives reported they are often viewed as deviating from the collective ethos. This divergence leads to them being perceived and perceiving themselves as more marginalized within their own organization. For example, a female returnee stated that “I see working without proper compensation as a waste of time.” And a male returnee’s reflection similarly points to ingroup-outgroup dynamics: “I don’t think my degree abroad can lead me to have better credit than those from cadet school anyway.” Therefore, this situation indicated that commissioned officer returnees who enter via the civilian route are found to encounter more complexities, as they may need to change their perceptions of power and hierarchical norms as

well as inherited institutional culture in their organizations. Often, they perceive pressure to modify their attitudes to conform to the organizational culture.

5.3 Contributions to Knowledge and Implications

This study contributes to the study abroad-related research by offering one of the first in-depth examinations of a specific group called Thai military returnees, which is a group largely unexplored by existing research. In the past, study abroad studies have focused predominantly on civilian students, or even the military-related studies often explored military-to-civilian transitions. This study demonstrates how changing in cultural transition influences not only personal transformation but also the way returnees interpret norms, authority, and career structures within the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters. These findings extend existing study-abroad literature to a new context by showing how their gained identities function within a command-based organization, while expanding the theoretical understanding of how transnational experiences operate in institutions characterized by hierarchy and limited autonomy. Moreover, ingroup favoritism is also quite new in reentry literature or even the military job orientation studies because it involves not only seniority but also the organization's culture of discrimination. The findings also have important implications for military human resource development and leadership practices. Enhanced self-agency and broader worldviews among returnees indicate that exposure to diverse educational environments can enrich military professionalism. However, the tension between newly acquired values and the strictly hierarchical culture suggests that organizations may need clearer mechanisms for supporting reentry, such as structured mentoring, post-study, or reintegration support programs. Doing so could help the military returnees maintain their competencies to ensure that these beneficial transformed identities are applied effectively.

5.4 Limitations

5.4.1. Potential Bias

This study may face limitations in terms of a sensitive political topic related to military and national security. As the interviews were considered a sensitive group, as I conducted them with those working in a military environment, participants may have felt limited in sharing honest insights or fully critiquing the agency regarding the tensions in rigid and hierarchical institution culture. Such circumstances may have led participants to underreport negative experiences that could affect the organization's image or involve the national stability. In addition, recall bias may happen, as some participants have been back in Thailand for a long time, so the time gap may affect the reliability due to the selective recall; the greater the chance of forgetting or misremembering, or reinterpreting their past experiences (Spencer et al., 2017). Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

5.4.2. Limited National and Professional Comparison and Context

This study remains confined to the UK study abroad context only and does not examine the adjustment experiences of Thai military personnel returning from other educational and cultural societies. The focus on a single country may mean that the identified challenges and benefits are specific to the UK educational environment and may not hold true for other international contexts with different cultural dimensions or academic structures. Finally, even though the Thai military has a unique operational structure, this aspect may make it hard to apply the findings to other military contexts that have different cultural values or ways of operating. Therefore, the study's recommendations must be interpreted with caution when considering wider applicability to other military contexts.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results and limitations of this research, the researcher would like to suggest guidelines for future studies to expand their understanding of the adjustment experiences of Thai military personnel after studying abroad. First, future research should consider using quantitative or mixed-method approaches to enhance the depth of understanding derived from the qualitative data utilized in this study. By using statistical tools, researchers can significantly analyze the relationship patterns between demographic variables, such as age, rank, or length of stay abroad, and the levels of personal and professional adjustment. In addition, quantitative

research can also measure related constructs such as cultural intelligence, perceived organizational support, or mental health, which will help understand the overall experience of those returning from studying abroad more comprehensively.

Second, there should be further studying in-group favoritism and its effect on returning service members. In particular, studying the relationship between military educational background (e.g., those who graduated from the cadet academy versus those who graduated from civilian universities) and the level of difficulty of adjustment may offer information about the hierarchical dynamics, career advancement, and acceptance within the social groups within the military organization. It may also reflect the power structures and social expectations that affect the personnel's return experience.

Lastly, since this study included participants from Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarter so its results may provide a specific overview but may not address the other sub-organizations of the Royal Thai Armed Forces organization. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies focus on a specific branch or compare each branch of the military, as each branch may have significantly different organizational cultures, command systems, and operational flexibility. For example, military units in the remote provinces may have different operational or even stricter contexts than units in the capital city, such as Bangkok, which may affect the adjustment experience of returnees from abroad in different ways.

5.6 Conclusion

This study utilizes three conceptual frameworks, including Hofstede's cultural dimensions, transnationalism, and reverse culture shock, to analyze the adjustment process of Thai commissioned officers returning home after completing postgraduate studies in the UK. Hofstede's framework remains invaluable in explaining the systemic cultural characteristics of both the UK and Thai societies along with Thai military organizations. Transnationalism plays a role in understanding returnees' ability to overcome adjustment barriers, highlighting that Thai students' experiences become more culturally, socially, and intellectually competent over time (McGrath & Gu, 2015). The reverse culture shock framework also helps explain the emotional experiences that arise from the clash of cultural values between their home and home countries. Considering Hofstede's "power distance" dimension, returnees struggle to adjust to a highly hierarchical environment. This phenomenon affects both their personal lives (for example, reintegrating with family and friends) and their work environments, especially in

military organizations where there is a clear power structure from military commanders to national institutions like monarchs. However, most of the returnees selected to use a traditional Thai strategy called “Yu-pen (อยู่เป็น),” meaning “know how to get along with the situational flow,” to readjust themselves to avoid conflicts and maintain harmony in the workplace. In contrast, the dimensions of "femininity" and "uncertainty avoidance" did not present significant challenges. Returnees felt safer in a stable bureaucracy and more comfortable than in the highly competitive and uncertain Western value. They valued a system with no layoff culture and lifelong military benefits, which allowed them to confidently plan their military careers as their long-term careers. Many returnees were able to critically compare the perspectives of both societies (Thailand and the UK) and chose to adapt without resisting or conflicting with the existing high power distance structure, despite recognizing the limitations of organizational culture, such as discrimination or devaluation. By integrating data from Hofstede's four dimensions along with transnationalism, it suggests that returnees’ behaviors and attitudes demonstrate a continuous awareness of living between two cultural backgrounds, which is simultaneously influenced by the norms of the UK and the expectations of Thai society. Personally, returnees demonstrate significant personal development with cosmopolitan identity in way more openness, maturity, and dual identity. All of these factors contribute to enhancing the self-esteem of returnees. Regarding relationships, returnees have been able to build extensive social networks both domestically and internationally that could support emotional readjustment and build a sense of belonging. Professionally, returnees have been reported to have developed language skills, leadership abilities, critical thinking, and interpersonal relationships, which cause returnees to perceive themselves as “valuable” to people around them by being given important roles within the organization and gaining greater trust from colleagues. However, those with "valuable feelings" only face difficulties readjusting to the Thai context, particularly where there is a power distance. Such optimism is reflected in their feeling that their abilities and privileges gained from studying abroad could often be undervalued in Thai society. In summary, although transnationalism has been criticized for its ambiguity and the lack of a unified interpretation since its meaning often varies across research contexts (Portes, 2001; Tedeschi et al., 2021), this study reveals outcomes that resonate with the findings of many scholars who adopted a transnational framework in their international student-related research. Specifically, it highlights that all Thai military officers who returned after postgraduate study in the UK experienced clear identity transformations. This analysis is conducted using Hofstede's cultural dimensions. This study highlights the relationship between

cosmopolitan identity change through an intercultural transition and reintegration into a personal and professional context at home, emphasizing that the study abroad experience can be both a source of opportunity and a challenge. This paper suggests that, despite its arguments, transnationalism still provides a useful lens for explaining how returnees reconstructed their identities in response to cross-cultural differences. These findings may be useful for policymakers or commanders in the Royal Thai Armed Forces designing a support system for the adjustment of those returning from studying abroad so that their return is not just an individual adjustment but an opportunity to truly enhance the potential of the organization.

References

Ai, B., & Wang, L. (2017). Homeland Integration: An Academic Returnee's Experiences in Chinese Universities. (International Journal of Qualitative Methods), *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (Vols. 16–1, pp. 1–9). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917696741

Alkubaidi, M., & Alzhrani, N. (2020). "We Are Back": Reverse Culture Shock Among Saudi Scholars After Doctoral Study Abroad. *SAGE Open*, *10*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020970555

Alsulami, N. D. Z. (2021). Challenges of the Re-Entry Experiences of returning Saudi international students after studying abroad. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, *13*(4), 101–117. https://doi.org/10.32674/jcihe.v13i4.2833

Arouca, R. A. (2013). *A qualitative study of returning study abroad students: The critical role of reentry support programs* (PhD dissertation). (University of Montana, Graduate School, & Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers). Graduate School. Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/33

Army Training Command. (2017). *Commissioned officer handbook*. Army Education Department Press.

Attah, D. A., Boafo-Arthur, S., & Boafo-Arthur, A. (2018). The Sojourner's return. In *Advances in linguistics and communication studies* (pp. 218–255). https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-3814-1.ch010

Baker, S. (2019, October). Returning Home: Making meaning of study abroad experience to facilitate transformative learning (thesis). (Northeastern University), *Graduate School of Education*.

Barbour, R. (2007). *Doing Focus Groups*. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208956

Beauchemin, C., & Safi, M. (2019). Migrants' connections within and beyond borders: insights from the comparison of three categories of migrants in France. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *43*(2), 255–274. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1572906

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

British Council. (n.d.). 5 great reasons to study in the UK | Study UK. Retrieved June 24, 2025, from https://study-uk.britishcouncil.org/blog/five-great-reasons-to-study-uk

Butcher, A. (2002). A Grief Observed: Grief Experiences of East Asian International Students Returning to their Countries of Origin. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *6*(4), 354–368. https://doi.org/10.1177/102831502237641

Chamove, A. S., & Soeterik, S. M. (2006). Grief in returning sojourners. *Journal of Social Sciences*, *13*(3), 215–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2006.11892552

Chang, W. C. (n.d.). In search of the Chinese in all the wrong places? *Journal of Psychology in the Chinese Societies*, *1*(1), 125–142.

Chayakonvikom, M., Fuangvut, P., & Cannell, S. (2016). Exploring education culture by employing Hofstede's cultural dimensions to evaluate the effectiveness of the current ERP training approach in Thailand. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, *4*(10). https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v4i10.1775

Christofi, V., & Thompson, C. L. (2007). You Cannot Go Home Again: A Phenomenological Investigation of Returning to the Sojourn Country After Studying Abroad. (The State University of New York at Plattsburgh, The University of Tennessee, & The University of Tulsa), *Journal of Counseling & Development* (Vol. 85, p. 54).

Cleary, A. M. (2017). *Smiles and Challenges: an ethnographically-oriented study into the experiences of a particular group of Thai post-graduate students in UK higher education* (PhD Dissertation). University of Birmingham. Retrieved from http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/7968

Country comparison tool. (n.d.). Retrieved June 24, 2025, from https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool

Dentakos, S., Wintre, M., Chavoshi, S., & Wright, L. (2016). Acculturation motivation in international student adjustment and permanent residency intentions. *Emerging Adulthood*, *5*(1), 27–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696816643628

Duff, P. (2014). Case study research in applied Linguistics. *Routledge eBooks*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203827147

Etikan, I. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, *5*(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11

Gaw, K. F. (2000). Reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *24*(1), 83–104. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0147-1767(99)00024-3

Geeraert, N., Demes, K. A., & Ward, C. (2021). Sojourner expectations: Are they met and does it matter if they're not? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *84*, 27–40. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.06.004

Geeraert, N., Ward, C., & Hanel, P. H. P. (2022). Returning home: The role of expectations in re-entry adaptation. *Applied Psychology Health and Well-Being*, *14*(3), 949–966. https://doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12361

Ghosh, S., & Wang, L. (2003). Transnationalism and identity: a tale of two faces and multiple lives. *Canadian Geographies / Géographies Canadiennes*, *47*(3), 269–282. https://doi.org/10.1111/1541-0064.00022

Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard University Press.

Gilroy, P. (2013). *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. Routledge.

Grimell, J. (2015). A Transitional Narrative of Military Identity: Eric's Story. *International Journal for Dialogical Science*, *9*(1), 135–157.

Gu, Q. (2009). Maturity and Interculturality: Chinese students' experiences in UK higher education. *European Journal of Education*, *44*(1), 37–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-3435.2008.01369.x

Gu, Q. (2015). An emotional journey of identity change and transformation: The impact of study-abroad experience on the lives and careers of Chinese students and returnees. *Learning and Teaching*, *8*(3), 60–81. https://doi.org/10.3167/latiss.2015.080304

Gu, Q., & Schweisfurth, M. (2015). Transnational connections, competences and identities: experiences of Chinese international students after their return 'home.' *British Educational Research Journal*, *41*(6), 947–970. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3175

Gullahorn, J. T., & Gullahorn, J. E. (1963). An extension of the U-Curve hypothesis1. *Journal of Social Issues*, *19*(3), 33–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1963.tb00447.x

Guo, S., & Lei, L. (2019). Toward Transnational Communities of Practice: An Inquiry Into the Experiences of Transnational Academic Mobility. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *70*(1), 26–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713619867636

HESA - Where do HE students come from? (2025, April 3). Retrieved June 24, 2025, from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from

Hofstede, G. (1994). The business of international business is culture. *International Business Review*, *3*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/0969-5931(94)90011-6

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*. SAGE Publications.

Holmberg, A., & Alvinius, A. (2019). How pressure for change challenge military organizational characteristics. *Defence Studies*, *19*(2), 130–148. https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2019.1575698

Ingraham, E. C., & Peterson, D. L. (2004). Assessing the Impact of Study Abroad on Student Learning at Michigan State University. *Frontiers the Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *10*(1), 83–100. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v10i1.134

Jin, R., & Wang, X. (2022). "Somewhere I belong?" A study on transnational identity shifts caused by "double stigmatization" among Chinese international student returnees during COVID-19 through the lens of mindsponge mechanism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1018843

Jonbekova, D., Kim, T., Kerimkulova, S., Ruby, A., & Sparks, J. (2021). Employment of international education graduates: Issues of economy and resistance to change. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *75*(4), 618–633. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12321

Jones, A. (2005). Culture and context: critical thinking and student learning in introductory macroeconomics. *Studies in Higher Education*, *30*(3), 339–354. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500095788

Kanithasen, 1st Lt. (2020). *Successful adaptation to organizational culture : a case study of commissioned officers, who were Civilian/Reservist, in Finance Department, Royal Thai Army*. https://doi.org/10.58837/chula.is.2021.404

Karakaş, A. (2020). Disciplining transnationality? The impact of study abroad educational experiences on Turkish returnee scholars' lives, careers and identity. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, *15*(3), 252–272. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499920946223

Khanal, J., & Gaulee, U. (2019). Challenges of International Students from Pre-Departure to Post-Study. *Journal of International Students*, *9*(2), 560–581. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v9i2.673

King, R., & Christou, A. (2011). Of Counter-Diaspora and Reverse Transnationalism: Return Mobilities to and from the Ancestral Homeland. *Mobilities*, *6*(4), 451–466. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2011.603941

Kivisto, P., & La Vecchia-Mikkola, V. (2013). Immigrant Ambivalence Toward the Homeland: The Case of Iraqis in Helsinki and Rome. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, *11*(2), 198–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2013.759000

Kranz, D., & Goedderz, A. (2019). Coming home from a stay abroad: Associations between young people's reentry problems and their cultural identity formation. *International*

Journal of Intercultural Relations, *74*, 115–126. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.11.003

Kuzhabekova, A., Sparks, J., & Temerbayeva, A. (2019). Returning from study abroad and transitioning as a scholar: Stories of foreign PhD holders from Kazakhstan. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, *14*(3), 412–430. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499919868644

Le, A. T., & LaCost, B. Y. (2017). Vietnamese graduate international student repatriates: Reverse adjustment. *Zenodo (CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research)*. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.570295

Lertjanyakit, H., & Bunchapattanasakda, C. (2015). The Determinants of Thai Students Decision-Making to study in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. *International Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts*, *8*(4).

Li, M., Croucher, S., & Wang, M. (2020). Re-entry Cultural Adaptation of Foreign-Educated Academics at Chinese Universities. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, *20*(3), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v20i3.308

Mastrianni, M. (2021). *Is the end just the beginning?* (thesis). (Ronald Deluga, Ed.).

McFadyen, J., & Rankin, J. (2016). The Role of Gatekeepers in Research: Learning from Reflexivity and Reflection. *GSTF Journal of Nursing and Health Care*, *4*(1), 82-88. http://dl6.globalstf.org/index.php/jnhc/article/view/1745

McGrath, S. A., & Gu, Q. (2015). Routledge Handbook of International Education and Development. *Routledge eBooks*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315797007

McLeod, Dr. (2024, December 20). *Peer debriefing in qualitative research*. Simplypsychology. Retrieved November 18, 2025, from https://www.simplypsychology.org/peer-debriefing-in-qualitative-research.html

Ministry of Defence. (1964). *Regulation of the Ministry of Defence on the Appointment of Military Ranks B.E. 2507*.

Morrison, J., Merrick, B., Higgs, S., & Métais, J. L. (2005). Researching the performance of international students in the UK. *Studies in Higher Education*, *30*(3), 327–337. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500095762

Morrow, G., Rothwell, C., Burford, B., & Illing, J. (2013). Cultural dimensions in the transition of overseas medical graduates to the UK workplace. *Medical Teacher*, *35*(10), e1537–e1545. https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159x.2013.802298

Nastasi, B. K., & Schensul, S. L. (2005). Contributions of qualitative research to the validity of intervention research. *Journal of School Psychology*, *43*(3), 177–195. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2005.04.003

Ncube, N. N., NCBNOLOOl. (2014). Narratives of the transnational student: a complicated story of cultural identity, cultural exchange and homecoming. *University of Cape Town*.

Nielsen, H., & Lyhne, I. (2015). Adding action to the interview: Conceptualizing an interview approach inspired by action research elements. *Action Research*, *14*(1), 54–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750315573591

Nonaka, C. (2020). Transnational identity: The struggles of being and becoming a Japanese female professor in a neo-kokusaikaphase of Japan. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, *15*(3), 234–251. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499920946201

Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, *os-7*(4), 177–182. https://doi.org/10.1177/009182966000700405

Oberg, Kalvero, Gullahorn, G., Brown and Holloway, Chapdelaine and Alexitch, Ward, Matsumoto, . . . Hofstede. (2012, August). Culture Shock: Reexamining the Concept and the W-curve Model of the Adaptation Process through Sojourner Experiences of International Students (thesis). *MA Professional Language and Intercultural Studies* (p. 2). The University of Leeds.

Ortiga, Y. Y., Wang, J., & Chou, M. (2023). International academic or citizen scholar?: Singaporean returnees in the global city. *Cities*, *137*, 104327. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104327

Phan, A. N. Q. (2023). *Moving through space, pausing in place: Vietnamese doctoral sojourners' transnational experiences of identity (Re)Negotiation, sense of belonging, and sense of home* (PhD Dissertation). The University of Auckland.

Pierce, P. N. (2017). Reentry and Reflection for Study Abroad Returnees at the University of South Carolina (thesis). (University of South Carolina & University of South Carolina), *Senior Theses*. Retrieved from https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/senior_theses/213

Pimpa, N. (2012). Amazing Thailand: Organizational Culture in the Thai Public Sector. *International Business Research*, *5*(11). https://doi.org/10.5539/ibr.v5n11p35

Portes, A. (2001). Introduction: the debates and significance of immigrant transnationalism. *Global Networks*, *1*(3), 181–194. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00012

Pritchard, R. (2010). Re-entry trauma: Asian re-integration after study in the West. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *15*(1), 93–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315310365541

Qs. (2024, October 22). QS World University Rankings 2024: Top global universities. Retrieved June 24, 2025, from https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings/2024

Raja, R., Ma, J., Zhang, M., Li, X. Y., Almutairi, N. S., & Almutairi, A. H. (2023). Social identity loss and reverse culture shock: Experiences of international students in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.994411

Rutegård, R. (2024). How cultural values influence participation in Sharing Economy platforms: A systematic literature review of the potential expansion of Airbnb in Thailand (thesis). (KTH Royal Institute of Technology, M. Höjer, Ed.), *Degree Project in Strategies for Sustainable Development*. KTH Royal Institute of Technology. Retrieved from https://www.kth.se

Soeters, J. L., Winslow, D. J., & Weibull, A. (2006). Military culture. In *Handbooks of sociology and social research* (pp. 237–254). https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-34576-0_14

Spencer, E., Brassey, J., & Mahtani, K. (2017). Recall bias. Retrieved from https://www.catalogueofbiases.org/biases/recall-bias

Study in the UK with AECC. (n.d.). Retrieved June 24, 2025, from https://www.aeccglobal.com/study-in-uk

Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behaviour. *Social Science Information*, *13*(2), 65–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847401300204

Taksinapan, C. (2020). The Study of Leadership Behavior and The Factors That Make a Leader inThe Organization's Culture in Thailand. *Journal of Buddhist Psychology*, *5*(2).

Tarry, E. (2011). Is West really best? Social and cultural tensions international students experience having studied at British universities. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *35*(1), 69–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877x.2010.540316

Tedeschi, M., Vorobeva, E., Jauhiainen, J. S., & The Author(s). (2020). Transnationalism: current debates and new perspectives (journal-article). *GeoJournal* (Vols. 87–603, pp. 603–619). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-020-10271-8

Truusa, T., & Castro, C. A. (2019). Definition of a veteran: the military viewed as a culture. In *Elsevier eBooks* (pp. 5–19). https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-815312-3.00002-4

Wang, S. (2020). Self in Mobility: Exploring the transnational in-between identity of Chinese student returnees from the UK. *Compare a Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *52*(6), 861–878. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1840335

Wenxin, Z., & Wan, Y. (2022). An Analysis on Sino-UK Cultural Differences in Education from the Perspective of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (A Case Study of Are Our Kids Tough Enough?). *Journal on Education*, *4*(2), 373–384. https://doi.org/10.31004/joe.v4i2.438

Young, G. E. (2014). Reentry: supporting students in the final stage of study abroad. *New Directions for Student Services*, *2014*(146), 59–67. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20091

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM (ENGLISH)

Project Title: Returning Home after Studying in the U.K.: The Readjustment of Thai Military Personnel Returnees)
Date of Consent.....
Name (Mr./Mrs./Ms.) .....

This document is prepared before the Principal Investigator as evidence that:

1. Prior to signing this informed consent form, I have been clearly informed by the researcher about the objectives of the study, research activities, possible risks, and potential benefits in detail. I fully understand all aspects of the study.

2. The researcher has assured that all of my questions and concerns will be answered honestly and openly, without concealment, to my full satisfaction.

3. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to my current status, rights, or benefits within any relevant agency or organization, and without affecting any existing relationships I have with the organization or any entitled benefits in the future.

4. The researcher guarantees that all personal information related to me will be kept confidential and will be disclosed only in the form of summarized research results. Disclosure of any personal information to relevant agencies shall only occur when necessary and for academic purposes only.

5. The researcher ensures that if there is any additional information that may affect the study, I will be informed immediately and transparently without concealment.

I have read and fully understood the above statements, and I voluntarily sign this informed consent form to participate in the research.

Signature……..…Participant
(.....)
...../...../.....

Signature….……Principal Investigator
(Natnicha Boonpokaew)
...../...../.....

Signature ……Witness
(.....)
...../...../.....

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ENGLISH)

Part 1 Personal Information

1. Please tell your age, gender, station, and rank.
2. Please tell me about the length of stay in the UK.
3. Please tell me your field of study and the name of institution.
4. Did you receive scholarships or self-funding?
5. Have you ever been abroad before? Tell me the purpose of the visit.
6. How long have you been back in Thailand?

Part 2 Reentry experiences

1. Can you describe your experiences upon returning to Thailand after completing your master's degree in the UK? What was it like?
2. What personal changes have you noticed in yourself since completing your studies in the UK?
3. Compared to before going to the UK, what are the most important personal changes you have experienced since returning to Thailand?
4. Has your experience of living with your family changed since returning? If yes, how have you readjusted to living with them?
5. How have you reconnected with friends and co-workers in Thailand?
6. Do you maintain relationships with friends or other people you met while abroad? If yes, how do you maintain those relationships?
7. What new skills, knowledge or insights from your studies in the UK have been useful in your work?
8. Compared to before going to the UK, what are the most important professional changes you have experienced since returning to Thailand?
9. Do you have anything else you would like to reflect or share with other people or the colleagues who may have similar experiences as you? If yes, please explain.

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM (THAI LANGUAGE)

หนังสือแสดงเจตนายินยอมเข้าร่วมการวิจัย

(Consent Form)

โครงการวิจัยเรื่อง การเดินทางกลับประเทศไทยหลังสำเร็จการศึกษาจากสหราชอาณาจักร: การปรับตัวของนายทหารสัญญาบัตรชาวไทย (Returning Home after Studying in the U.K.: The Readjustment of Thai Military Personnel Returnees)

วันที่ให้คำยินยอม.....

ข้าพเจ้า (นาย/นาง/นางสาว).....

ขอทำหนังสือนี้ไว้ต่อหน้าหัวหน้าโครงการวิจัยเพื่อเป็นหลักฐานแสดงว่า

ข้อ 1. ก่อนลงนามในหนังสือแสดงเจตนายินยอมเข้าร่วมการวิจัยนี้ ข้าพเจ้าได้รับการอธิบายจากผู้วิจัยให้ทราบถึงวัตถุประสงค์ของการวิจัย กิจกรรมการวิจัย ความเสี่ยง รวมทั้งประโยชน์ที่อาจเกิดขึ้นจากการวิจัยอย่างละเอียด และมีความเข้าใจดีแล้ว

ข้อ 2 ผู้วิจัยรับรองว่าจะตอบคำถามต่าง ๆ ที่ข้าพเจ้าสงสัยด้วยความเต็มใจ ไม่ปิดบัง ซ่อนเร้น จนข้าพเจ้าพอใจ

ข้อ 3 ข้าพเจ้าเข้าร่วมโครงการวิจัยนี้โดยสมัครใจ และข้าพเจ้ามีสิทธิที่จะบอกเลิกการเข้าร่วมในโครงการวิจัยนี้เมื่อใดก็ได้ และการบอกเลิกการเข้าร่วมวิจัยนี้จะไม่มีผลกระทบต่อสถานะหรือสิทธิ์ใดๆ ที่ข้าพเจ้ามีต่อหน่วยงานหรือองค์กรที่เกี่ยวข้อง หรือไม่ส่งผลกระทบต่อความสัมพันธ์ใดๆ ที่ข้าพเจ้ามีในองค์กรนี้ รวมถึงสิทธิประโยชน์ที่ข้าพเจ้าจะพึงได้รับต่อไป

ข้อ 4 ผู้วิจัยรับรองว่า จะเก็บข้อมูลเฉพาะเกี่ยวกับตัวข้าพเจ้าเป็นความลับ และจะเปิดเผยได้เฉพาะในรูปที่เป็นสรุปผลการวิจัย การเปิดเผยข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับตัวข้าพเจ้าต่อหน่วยงานต่าง ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้อง กระทำได้เฉพาะกรณีจำเป็นด้วยเหตุผลทางวิชาการเท่านั้น

ข้อ 5 ผู้วิจัยรับรองว่า หากมีข้อมูลเพิ่มเติมที่ส่งผลกระทบต่อการวิจัย ข้าพเจ้าจะได้รับการแจ้งให้ทราบทันทีโดยไม่ปิดบัง ซ่อนเร้น

ข้าพเจ้าได้อ่านข้อความข้างต้นแล้วมีความเข้าใจดีทุกประการ และได้ลงนามในหนังสือแสดงเจตนายินยอมเข้าร่วมการวิจัยนี้ด้วยความเต็มใจ

ลงนาม.....ผู้ให้ความยินยอม
(.....)
...../...../.....

ลงนาม.....พยาน
(.....)
...../...../.....

ลงนาม ..... หัวหน้าโครงการวิจัย
(ณัฐณิชา บุญโพธิ์แก้ว)
...../...../.....

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (THAI LANGUAGE)

<u>ส่วนที่ 1</u> ข้อมูลส่วนตัว

1. โปรดแนะนำตัวโดยการ บอกอายุ เพศ สังกัด และยศของคุณ
2. คุณพำนักอาศัยอยู่ในสหราชอาณาจักรเป็นระยะเวลาเท่าไหร่
3. คุณเรียนสาขาวิชาอะไร จากมหาวิทยาลัยอะไร
4. คุณได้รับทุนการศึกษาหรือทุนส่วนตัว
5. คุณเคยไปต่างประเทศมาก่อนหรือไม่ ถ้าเคย โปรดบอกวัตถุประสงค์ในการไปต่างประเทศ
6. คุณกลับมาเมืองไทยนานแค่ไหนแล้ว

<u>ส่วนที่ 2</u> ประสบการณ์การกลับเข้าประเทศ

1. โปรดเล่าประสบการณ์ของคุณเมื่อกลับมายังประเทศไทยหลังจากสำเร็จการศึกษาระดับปริญญาโทในประเทศสหราชอาณาจักร ประสบการณ์เหล่านั้นเป็นอย่างไรบ้างเมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับที่ประเทศไทย

2. คุณสังเกตเห็นการเปลี่ยนแปลงของตัวเองตั้งแต่สำเร็จการศึกษาในสหราชอาณาจักรอย่างไรบ้าง

3. เมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับช่วงก่อนที่คุณจะไปเรียนที่สหราชอาณาจักร คุณคิดว่าการเปลี่ยนแปลงของตัวเองในด้านใดที่สำคัญที่สุดหลังกลับมาประเทศไทย

4. ประสบการณ์ในการใช้ชีวิตร่วมกับครอบครัวของคุณเปลี่ยนไปหรือไม่หลังจากกลับมา หากเปลี่ยนไป คุณปรับตัวอย่างไรกับการใช้ชีวิตร่วมกับพวกเขา

5. คุณได้กลับมาเชื่อมต่อกับเพื่อนและเพื่อนร่วมงานในประเทศไทยอย่างไร

6. คุณยังคงรักษาความสัมพันธ์กับเพื่อนหรือคนอื่น ๆ ที่คุณได้พบขณะอยู่ต่างประเทศหรือไม่ หากยังคงมี คุณรักษาความสัมพันธ์เหล่านั้นอย่างไร

7. ทักษะ ความรู้ หรือมุมมองใหม่ ๆ ที่คุณได้รับจากการเรียนในสหราชอาณาจักร แบบใดที่เป็นประโยชน์ต่อการทำงานของคุณ

8. เมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับช่วงก่อนที่คุณจะไปเรียนที่สหราชอาณาจักร คุณคิดว่าการเปลี่ยนแปลงในด้านอาชีพใดสำคัญที่สุดหลังกลับมาประเทศไทย

9. คุณมีอะไรอยากจะสะท้อน หรือแบ่งปันเพิ่มเติม แก่ผู้คนรอบข้างหรือบุคลากรในสถานที่ทำงานที่อาจจะมีประสบการณ์เช่นเดียวกันกับคุณ

BIOGRAPHY

Name	Lt.JG. Natnicha Boonpokaew
Date of Birth	March 3rd, 1996
Educational Background	B.A. in English, Faculty of Humanities, Srinakharinwirot University, Academic Year 2014
	1-year of Studies for Special International Students, Faculty of Letters, Ryukoku University, Academic Year 2016
Work Position	Foreign Language Instructor, General Subjects Branch, Education Division, Survey School, Royal Thai Survey Department, RTARF
Work Experiences	Foreign Language Instructor, General Subjects Branch, Education Division, Survey School, Royal Thai Survey Department, RTARF September, 2021 - Present
	Guest Service Agent, Avani Pattaya Resort & Spa December, 2018 – December, 2020