THE YOUTH PROBLEMS IN THE GLOBALIZATION ERA THAT AFFECT THE CULTURE IN THAI SOCIETY[*]

Narubet Papol

Faculty of Sciences and Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Thailand

Corresponding Author's Email: Narubet2000@yahoo com

Abstract

This article examines the impacts of globalization on Thai youth and the resulting cultural transformations within Thai society. It argues that while globalization provides opportunities for creativity, education, and international engagement, it also generates significant challenges including identity confusion, consumerism, language shifts, digital media problems, and the erosion of community bonds. These youth problems affect traditional cultural values such as *kreng jai, bun khun*, and Buddhist practices, leading to weakened family ties, reduced religious engagement, and hybridization of language and arts. In response, Thai society has employed coping mechanisms such as integrating cultural heritage into education, strengthening family and community resilience, promoting media literacy, and developing hybrid cultural forms. The article concludes that the key challenge is to balance global engagement with cultural preservation, empowering Thai youth to be both global citizens and cultural custodians.

Keywords: Globalization, Thai youth, Cultural change, Identity, Society

Introduction

Globalization, broadly defined as the intensification of interconnectedness and interdependence across nations through economic, cultural, technological, and political flows, has penetrated nearly every dimension of Thai society (Giddens, 1990; Robertson, 1992). It is not only visible in the global circulation of goods and capital but also in the diffusion of cultural practices, languages, and lifestyles that now shape the daily lives of Thai citizens. In urban centers such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Hat Yai, the influence of globalization is evident in consumer choices, digital media consumption, and the adoption of hybrid cultural identities. Even in rural areas, advances in communication technology and social media have allowed global values, images, and lifestyles to reach young people with unprecedented speed and intensity (Appadurai, 1996).

Youth are particularly vulnerable to these forces because they occupy a transitional life stage characterized by identity exploration, peer influence, and exposure to global cultural trends (Erikson, 1968; Arnett, 2004). Unlike older generations who have stronger roots in traditional Thai values, today's youth are digital natives who navigate global and local influences simultaneously. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram present ideals of beauty, success, and consumerist lifestyles that can conflict with deeply embedded Thai cultural norms such as *kreng jai* (deference and respect) and *bun khun* (gratitude and obligation) (Mulder, 1996; Keyes, 2014). As a result, globalization offers young people opportunities to connect, innovate, and modernize, while at the same time creating cultural dissonance, identity confusion, and challenges to traditional Thai social cohesion.

The central argument of this article is that globalization has generated new spaces for creativity, learning, and international exchange among Thai youth, yet it has also exacerbated problems such as consumerism, identity

conflict, erosion of traditional practices, and weakening of cultural values. These problems, if unaddressed, risk undermining the cultural integrity and social fabric of Thai society.

This article is organized into six sections. Following this introduction, the second section discusses the characteristics of Thai youth in the globalization era. The third section analyzes the major youth problems that emerge from global cultural and technological influences. The fourth section examines the specific cultural impacts of these problems on Thai family structures, religion, language, and social values. The fifth section explores coping mechanisms and societal responses, including educational, familial, and community initiatives. Finally, the sixth section offers a discussion and conclusion, emphasizing the balance between embracing globalization and preserving Thai cultural identity.

Youth in the Globalization Era

Thai youth today are often described as *digital natives*, growing up in a social environment saturated by technology, global media, and transnational flows of ideas (Prensky, 2001; Siriyuvasak & Shin, 2007). Unlike their parents and grandparents, who were primarily exposed to localized cultural frameworks transmitted through schools, temples, and families, today's younger generations are increasingly shaped by online networks, international entertainment industries, and global consumer brands. This has given rise to *cosmopolitan aspirations* and *hybrid identities* in which Thai youth mix traditional values with global cultural practices (Jackson, 2004). For instance, many young people simultaneously embrace Buddhist rituals while following global pop culture icons such as K-pop stars or Western influencers on platforms like TikTok and YouTube. This coexistence of local and global values reflects a process of cultural hybridization, where new cultural forms emerge out of the blending of multiple traditions (Canclini, 1995; Robertson, 1995).

However, this hybridity also comes with new pressures. One key influence is *consumer culture*. International advertising and brand marketing create a desire for material goods, lifestyles, and appearances that are often at odds with Thailand's traditional emphasis on moderation and the "sufficiency economy" philosophy (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2009). *Global media influence* further reinforces these aspirations, shaping perceptions of beauty, success, and social status. In addition, migration and labor mobility—both within Thailand (from rural to urban areas) and across borders—have disrupted family cohesion and increased the cultural exposure of youth to foreign values and practices (Rigg, 2012). Finally, *digital communication* has transformed social interaction patterns. While online platforms foster global connectivity, they also contribute to problems such as cyberbullying, online addiction, and declining face-to-face communication (Sereerat, 2015).

When contrasted with past generations, the differences are striking. Older Thai generations were more deeply socialized through family obligations, Buddhist monastic teachings, and community traditions (Mulder, 1996). Youth of the pre-globalization era had limited access to external cultural influences, relying primarily on schools, temples, and state media for knowledge and values. By contrast, contemporary Thai youth are exposed to a *plurality of cultural reference points*, which creates both opportunities for creativity and risks of cultural dissonance. This generational contrast highlights the central challenge of the globalization era: balancing the incorporation of global modernity with the preservation of Thai cultural identity.

Major Youth Problems Emerging from Globalization

1. Identity Confusion and Value Conflict

One of the most significant challenges facing Thai youth in the globalization era is identity confusion. Traditionally, Thai society has

emphasized values such as *kreng jai* (consideration and deference to others), filial piety, and adherence to Buddhist teachings as guiding principles of social interaction (Mulder, 1996; Keyes, 2014). However, the global diffusion of individualist ideologies-promoting self-expression, personal freedom, and autonomy-has often conflicted with these collectivist values (Triandis, 1995). As a result, many Thai youths experience tension between conforming to communal expectations and pursuing individualistic lifestyles. This cultural dissonance can manifest in strained family relationships, weakened respect for elders, and shifting priorities away from community obligations toward personal goals (Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

2. Consumerism and Materialism

The globalization of consumer culture has deeply influenced Thai youth through global advertising, brand marketing, and the pervasive presence of celebrity culture. International corporations strategically target young people with products that symbolize modernity, success, and social status (Featherstone, 2007). K-pop idols, Hollywood celebrities, and digital influencers provide aspirational lifestyles that encourage excessive spending on fashion, beauty, and technology (Siriyuvasak & Shin, 2007). This consumerist orientation has reshaped lifestyle aspirations and economic behavior, often leading to debt among young adults, increased reliance on credit, and prioritization of material goods over traditional cultural values of moderation and sufficiency, once reinforced by King Bhumibol's Sufficiency Economy philosophy (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2009).

3. Language and Communication Shifts

Another visible impact of globalization is the transformation of language practices. Thai youth frequently mix Thai with English or foreign slang, especially on social media platforms (Smakman & Heinrich, 2015). Phrases such

as "โอเคนะ" (OK na) or the insertion of English terms into Thai sentences are now common in everyday communication. While this hybridization reflects global connectivity and creative linguistic adaptation, it also raises concerns about the preservation of the Thai language, particularly formal registers and honorific speech crucial to maintaining traditional respect norms (Dhiravegin, 2011). Over time, such linguistic shifts may contribute to a decline in cultural distinctiveness and intergenerational communication barriers.

4. Digital and Social Media Issues

Digital communication platforms, while enabling global connectivity, also generate new social problems. Thai youth are increasingly vulnerable to cyberbullying, online harassment, and exposure to misinformation (Sereerat, 2015). Additionally, the fast-paced consumption of digital content has been linked to shortened attention spans, declining academic performance, and reduced capacity for sustained interpersonal engagement (Rosen et al., 2013). These digital practices also affect cultural traditions of respect and communication, as online interactions often lack the nuance of face-to-face exchanges governed by Thai cultural norms of politeness and deference (Mulder, 1996).

5. Erosion of Traditional Community Bonds

Finally, globalization has contributed to the erosion of traditional community bonds. Participation in cultural festivals, Buddhist rituals, and temple-based activities among Thai youth has declined as digital entertainment and global leisure activities become more dominant (Keyes, 2014; Pattana, 2005). Temples, once the central institution for moral education and community gathering, now play a reduced role in the daily lives of many young people. This shift undermines the transmission of cultural values, weakens intergenerational ties, and reduces opportunities for collective identity formation rooted in Thai traditions.

Thai youth in the globalization era face multiple challenges that reshape their values, behaviors, and cultural identity. One major issue is identity confusion and value conflict, as traditional principles such as *kreng jai,* filial piety, and Buddhist teachings come into tension with global ideals of self-expression, autonomy, and individualism, creating dissonance in family relationships and weakening respect for elders. Consumerism and materialism further complicate this landscape, with global advertising, celebrity influence, and social media encouraging excessive spending, debt, and prioritization of material success over moderation and sufficiency. Language and communication practices are also shifting, with Thai increasingly mixed with English and foreign slang in digital spaces, which while showcasing creativity and global belonging, also risk undermining the preservation of Thai language, honorific speech, and intergenerational communication. The dominance of digital and social media has introduced problems such as cyberbullying, misinformation, shortened attention spans, and weakened face-to-face interaction, eroding the cultural norms of politeness and deference embedded in Thai society. Finally, traditional community bonds are eroding as participation in festivals, Buddhist rituals, and temple activities declines, with digital entertainment and global leisure often replacing communal practices, reducing the transmission of cultural values and weakening intergenerational solidarity. Collectively, these problems illustrate how globalization is transforming Thai youth culture, challenging the balance between global engagement and cultural preservation.

Impacts on Thai Culture

1. Family Structure: Weakening Intergenerational Ties

One of the most profound cultural impacts of globalization is the transformation of Thai family structures. Traditional Thai families have

historically emphasized intergenerational solidarity, where younger members show deference and support to elders, and in return receive guidance and protection (Mulder, 1996). However, exposure to global ideals of independence and self-reliance has weakened these bonds. Youth migration from rural areas to urban centers for education or employment further reduces daily contact with parents and grandparents (Rigg, 2012). This geographic and cultural distancing has diminished the traditional practice of co-residence and contributed to a growing generational gap in values and lifestyle expectations (Knodel et al., 2013).

2. Religion: Reduced Youth Engagement in Buddhist Practices

Buddhism has long served as the moral and cultural foundation of Thai society, shaping notions of respect, generosity, and spiritual well-being (Keyes, 2014). Yet globalization has led to declining youth participation in temple activities such as *tham boon* (making merit) and *songkran* rituals. Many young people prefer digital entertainment or global leisure activities over religious practice (Pattana, 2005). Furthermore, the commercialization of Buddhist symbols—seen in fashion, accessories, or online memes-has diluted their spiritual significance (Jackson, 2016). As a result, the temple's role as a central site of moral education and community gathering is eroding among younger generations.

3. Social Values: Challenges to *Kreng Jai* and *Bun Khun*

Globalization also challenges deeply rooted Thai social values. *Kreng jai*-a cultural ethic of avoiding conflict and showing deference-has historically structured communication and social harmony. Similarly, *bun khun*, the value of gratitude and reciprocal obligation toward benefactors, has long reinforced social cohesion (Mulder, 1996). Yet global individualism, career competitiveness, and digital communication patterns encourage directness, self-assertion, and prioritization of personal interests (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). While these traits

can empower youth in global contexts, they may weaken the social glue that has traditionally bound Thai communities together.

4. Language and Arts: Cultural Hybridization and Loss of Authenticity

Language and the arts have also undergone hybridization under global influence. Thai youth increasingly incorporate English words, K-pop slang, and internet memes into daily conversation, creating hybrid linguistic codes (Smakman & Heinrich, 2015). While such practices symbolize creativity and global belonging, they also threaten the preservation of formal Thai language and traditional registers of politeness. In the arts, music, dance, and fashion show clear influences from Korean, Japanese, and Western styles, sometimes overshadowing traditional Thai forms such as *luk thung* (folk music) or classical dance. The risk is not merely aesthetic but cultural, as the younger generation may perceive traditional arts as outdated or irrelevant (Siriyuvasak & Shin, 2007).

5. Community Practices: Festivals and Traditions Adapting or Fading

Finally, globalization has reshaped community practices. Traditional festivals such as *Loy Krathong* or *Songkran* remain popular but are increasingly celebrated as commercialized events aimed at tourists rather than spiritual or communal experiences (Askew, 2002). In urban areas, participation in temple fairs, ordination ceremonies, or agricultural rituals has declined as young people gravitate toward global leisure activities like concerts, gaming, or online communities. While some traditions adapt by incorporating modern elements- for example, using digital campaigns to promote temple festivals-others face gradual decline, threatening the continuity of cultural heritage (Pattana, 2005).

Globalization has deeply transformed Thai culture, with its most profound impact seen in family structures where traditional intergenerational solidarity is weakening as youth embrace ideals of independence and migrate to urban centers, creating gaps in values and daily interactions with elders.

Religion, once the foundation of moral and communal life, is losing influence among younger generations as engagement in Buddhist practices such as *tham boon* and *songkran* declines, with many preferring global leisure activities, while commercialization has diluted the spiritual meaning of Buddhist symbols. Core social values such as *kreng jai* and *bun khun*, which once ensured harmony and gratitude in social relationships, are challenged by global individualism and digital communication that promote self-assertion and personal ambition over collective responsibility. Language and the arts are undergoing hybridization, as Thai youth adopt English words, foreign slang, and global cultural styles that overshadow traditional Thai language, music, and dance, raising concerns about the loss of authenticity and the perception of traditional arts as outdated. Community practices, too, are adapting or fading, with festivals like *Loy Krathong* and *Songkran* becoming more commercialized and oriented toward tourism rather than spirituality, while participation in temple fairs and rituals declines as youth turn to global entertainment and online communities. Together, these cultural shifts illustrate how globalization is reshaping Thai identity, weakening traditional structures, and compelling society to reconsider how to preserve cultural continuity in a global age.

Coping Mechanisms and Thai Responses

1. Role of Education: Integrating Cultural Heritage into Curricula

Education is one of the most important mechanisms through which Thai society seeks to cope with the cultural challenges of globalization. The Thai Ministry of Education has emphasized the inclusion of national identity, cultural heritage, and Buddhist ethics in school curricula to strengthen youth awareness of traditional values (Fry & Bi, 2013). Programs such as cultural history courses, moral education, and extracurricular activities linked to festivals are designed to ensure that students develop both global competencies and local cultural

literacy. Scholars argue that integrating cultural education into formal schooling helps balance modernization with heritage preservation, preventing the alienation of youth from their cultural roots (Ockey, 2004).

2. Family and Community Resilience: Intergenerational Projects and Temple-Based Youth Programs

Families and communities continue to play a central role in reinforcing resilience against the disruptive effects of globalization. Intergenerational projects, such as storytelling by elders, community volunteering, and traditional arts workshops, encourage knowledge transfer and cultural continuity (Knodel et al., 2013). Temples, once the moral and social centers of Thai villages, are also adapting to engage youth by offering meditation camps, community service programs, and youth-oriented religious festivals (Pattana, 2005). These initiatives not only strengthen cultural ties but also provide alternatives to the digital consumerist lifestyles that dominate youth culture today.

3. Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Campaigns

Another key coping mechanism is the promotion of media literacy. Thai policymakers and NGOs have initiated campaigns to encourage youth to critically evaluate global media messages, resist harmful consumerist trends, and use digital platforms responsibly (Sereerat, 2015). Programs on cyber-safety, misinformation awareness, and online etiquette are increasingly common in schools and community centers. Such campaigns aim to equip youth with critical thinking skills to navigate the flood of global information while retaining their cultural judgment and identity (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007).

4. Hybrid Cultural Forms: Thai Pop Culture Blending with Global Influences

Rather than resisting globalization entirely, many Thai youths are creating hybrid cultural forms that blend global and local influences. Thai pop culture-particularly in music, film, and fashion-demonstrates how global trends

like K-pop and J-pop can be reinterpreted through Thai creativity (Siriyuvasak & Shin, 2007). For example, Thai pop bands and influencers often combine Western or Korean aesthetics with Thai language lyrics, Buddhist symbolism, or references to Thai festivals. This hybridity illustrates a process of *glocalization* (Robertson, 1995), in which global cultural forms are localized to preserve national identity while remaining relevant to youth aspirations. Such innovations show that globalization does not only erode culture but can also be harnessed to revitalize it in new and dynamic ways.

Thai society has developed several coping mechanisms to address the cultural challenges brought by globalization, beginning with education, where the inclusion of national identity, cultural heritage, and Buddhist ethics in school curricula seeks to strengthen youth awareness of traditional values while balancing global competencies with local cultural literacy through history courses, moral education, and festival-based activities. Families and communities also serve as critical pillars of resilience by organizing intergenerational projects such as storytelling, volunteering, and traditional arts workshops that foster cultural continuity, while temples adapt to modern contexts by engaging youth through meditation camps, service projects, and youth-oriented religious festivals that provide meaningful alternatives to consumerist lifestyles. Another important strategy lies in media literacy and critical thinking campaigns promoted by policymakers and NGOs, which aim to equip young people with the ability to critically evaluate global media, avoid harmful consumerist influences, and practice responsible digital engagement through initiatives on cyber-safety, misinformation, and online etiquette. At the same time, Thai youth are themselves actively creating hybrid cultural forms that merge global and local elements, particularly in pop culture, where music, film, and fashion combine global aesthetics with Thai language, Buddhist symbolism, and cultural references, demonstrating a process of glocalization that transforms globalization into a tool for cultural revitalization rather than

erosion. Together, these responses reflect Thailand's effort to balance global engagement with the preservation and creative renewal of cultural identity.

Conclusion

Globalization has profoundly transformed the lives of Thai youth, creating both opportunities and challenges that directly reshape cultural values and practices in society. Thai youth today, as digital natives, navigate global media, consumer trends, and cosmopolitan aspirations, resulting in hybrid identities that blend local traditions with global influences. While this opens avenues for creativity, education, and international exchange, it also introduces significant problems such as identity confusion, conflicts between collectivist values like *kreng jai* and *bun khun* and global individualism, growing consumerism and materialism driven by advertising and celebrity culture, language shifts through the mixing of Thai with English and foreign slang, digital issues such as cyberbullying and misinformation, and the erosion of traditional community bonds. These problems have led to weakened intergenerational family ties, declining participation in Buddhist practices, challenges to social values, hybridization of language and arts, and reduced involvement in festivals and communal traditions. In response, Thai society has sought coping mechanisms through education reforms that integrate cultural heritage into curricula, family and community resilience programs including temple-based youth activities, media literacy and critical thinking campaigns, and the development of hybrid cultural forms such as Thai pop culture influenced by K-pop and J-pop yet retaining Thai elements. The overall challenge is not to reject globalization but to find balance, enabling youth to engage with global opportunities while preserving and adapting Thai cultural identity. By empowering young people as global citizens and cultural custodians, Thailand can maintain its cultural integrity while thriving in an interconnected world.

References

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Askew, M. (2002). *Bangkok: Place, Practice and Representation*. London: Routledge.

Canclini, N. G. (1995). *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dhiravegin, L. (2011). *Thai Politics: Globalization and Cultural Change*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Featherstone, M. (2007). *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage.

Fry, G., & Bi, H. (2013). *The Evolution of Educational Reform in Thailand: The Thai Education Reform Project (1999–2010)*. Bangkok: Ministry of Education.

Giddens, A. (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Inglehart, R., & Baker, W. (2000). Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values. *American Sociological Review*, 65(1), 19–51.

Jackson, P. (2004). *Constructing Masculinity and Sexuality in Thailand*. In P. Jackson & N. Cook (Eds.), *Genders & Sexualities in Modern Thailand* (pp. 25–53). Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Jackson, P. (2016). *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict: The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism*. Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.

Keyes, C. F. (2014). Finding Their Voice: Northeastern Villagers and the Thai State. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Knodel, J., Teerawichitchainan, B., Prachuabmoh, V., & Pothisiri, W. (2013). The Situation of Thailand's Older Population: An Update Based on the 2010 Census. *Population Studies Center Research Report*. University of Michigan.

Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. (2007). Gradations in Digital Inclusion: Children, Young People, and the Digital Divide. *New Media & Society*, 9(4), 671–696.

Mulder, N. (1996). *Inside Thai Society: Religion, Everyday Life, Change*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books.