Full Title:  Buddhist Wisdom and Modernisation: Finding the balance in globalized Thailand

Short title:  Buddhist Wisdom and Modernisation

Zane MA RHEA PhD

Faculty of Education, Monash University Clayton, Victoria 3800 Australia
zane.marhea@monash.edu

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Biography

Zane lectures in the Faculty of Education, Monash University. Her publications include an edited collection Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education (jointly with Dr Bob Teasdale) and a number of papers that form the basis of her continuing work, using social exchange theory, to understand how knowledge is being transferred and understood across sociocultural, political and economic differences in an increasingly globalized world and both the potential and the consequences for the development of wisdom under these new conditions. She was a student of Ven. Ayya Khema Bhikkuni and continues to be a Dhamma practitioner.
Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between wisdom and knowledge under globalization and the potential in Thailand to balance old knowledge traditions, Buddhist and rural, with new Thai and imported knowledge. It investigates the Theravadan Buddhist approach to the cultivation of wisdom, and in parallel, the engagement of the Kingdom of Thailand in its bringing of modern knowledge and capitalist economic practices into Thailand, and its efforts to find balance between the old and the new.

Consideration the findings has facilitated the development of a theoretical understanding of how old and new knowledge regimes are co-exiting in Thailand. The findings suggest that there has been a shift in understanding of panjaathaangloog worldly wisdom and the various types of knowledge that supports it from being strongly shaped by the religious framework of Buddhism to a secular framework supported by a secular Thai education system and an unmediated influx of imported knowledge. The challenge for Thai people is how to negotiate such a shift. The pressing concern is that these newer understandings are, as yet, ‘unsettled’ as reliable signposts to enlightenment and to the becoming a wise person and that the knowledge of the old pathway is in danger of being forgotten.

Keywords

Wisdom, Buddhism, transcendental knowledge, local knowledge, rural wisdom, modern knowledge, Thailand, globalization.

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Introduction

When a wise one, established well in virtue,
Develops consciousness and understanding,
One succeeds in disentangling this tangle…

(Samyutta Nikaya i, 13)

This paper examines the relationship between wisdom and knowledge under globalization and the potential in Thailand to balance old knowledge traditions, Buddhist and rural, with new Thai and imported knowledge. It investigates the Theravadan Buddhist approach to the cultivation of wisdom, and in parallel, the engagement of the Kingdom of Thailand in its bringing of modern knowledge and capitalist economic practices into Thailand, and its efforts to find balance between the old and the new.

An extended study of Buddhist philosophy and teaching undertaken in Buddhist temples and Buddhist centres in Thailand, Australia, and Germany, has been pursued in order to understand the Buddhist wisdom tradition. During this same period, a study was done of bilateral education exchanges that have developed between Thailand and Australia. Consideration of the findings of these contemporaneous studies has facilitated the development of a theoretical understanding of how old and new knowledge regimes co-exist in Thailand under an ever-evolving process of globalization. The findings suggest that there has been a shift in understanding of *panjaathaangloog* (worldly wisdom) and the various types of knowledge that support it from being strongly shaped by the religious framework of Buddhism to a secular framework supported by a secular Thai education system and an unmediated influx of imported knowledge. The challenge for Thai people, like many other peoples around the world, is how to negotiate such a shift. The more pressing concern is that these newer understandings are, as yet, ‘unsettled’ as reliable signposts to enlightenment and to becoming a wise person and that the knowledge of this pathway is in danger of being forgotten.

Wisdom and Knowledge

First, it is necessary to offer a brief discussion about wisdom and knowledge. A review of the literature about wisdom and knowledge offers one an array of opinion and theory. Working
across different cultures, academic domains, and systems of religious and philosophical thought, demands a constant checking for meaning because it is easy to take as universally true something that actually arises within a particular world view or social setting. It is especially important during this time of rapid globalization, to resist the urge to see the emergence of a global culture that is homogenous but reflecting a predominantly western worldview (Smith, 1990).

Definitions of Wisdom and Knowledge

The Thai word *panjaa* derives from the Pali word for wisdom, *pañña* (Buddhadatta, 1979; Nyanatiloka, 1988). According to the Rajapandit Dictionary (2537, p.528; Haas, 1964; Pawphicit, 2534), wisdom is defined as complete knowledge. There are numerous folk tales in Thai culture that explain various aspects of wisdom and it is important to note that these tales arise from *phumpanjaachawbaan* (indigenous Thai rural wisdom) combined with recognition of *panjaathaangtham* (Buddhist higher wisdom); Pawphicit, 2534; Rajapandit, 2537). There is less thinking that discusses the newer conception of *panjaathaangloog* (worldly wisdom) although the work of such writers as Inthankamhaeng (2536), Pramoj (1981) and Sivaraksa (1994) point out the need for such research.

The Thai word *khwaamruu* (knowledge) according to the Rajapandit Dictionary (2537, p.706; Haas, 1964; Pawphicit, 2534) is formed from two parts: ‘information’ and ‘understanding’. There is an emerging discussion captured in the interviews that describes this new form as *khwaamruusàmàimài* (modern knowledge; Pawphicit, 2534).

Wisdom has recently been resurrected as a worthwhile research topic. Sternberg (1990) has edited an important book that begins to research this difficult topic. He believes that it is time for the psychological sciences to begin afresh to develop an ‘understanding of wisdom and to point the way for future theory and research’ (1990, p. ix). The research about wisdom is far more tentative across sociology, education, and comparative studies than it is about topics such as knowledge transfer, the politics of curriculum, and of cross-cultural learning and teaching. Nabobo (1994) and papers in the Teasdale and Little (1995) collection opened up discussion of wisdom in examination of the philosophical impact of culture on education. Some specifically investigated wisdom and knowledge (Kopong, 1995; Ma Rhea, 1995; Mel, 1995; Nabobo & Teasdale, J., 1995; and Thaman, 1995) in various national, cultural settings. These papers do not define so much as attempt to describe the relationships between wisdom, knowledge, and
education and in doing so offer some insights into how such concepts differ yet share common features across cultures. Ma Rhea and Teasdale (2000) address some of the definitional and applied issues involved. Singh (1991) specifically examines education under globalization in the 21st century and introduces the tensions involved in the Asian context. Sivaraksa (1994) argues for the need to develop a Thai Buddhist vision for renewing society through education that draws on the older *panjaathaangtham* (Buddhist higher wisdom) working together with new knowledge as the basis for his argument. Wilson (2004) provides a concise analysis of Thai efforts to discern its indigenous wisdom tradition and develop a process of bringing the knowledges that inform its development into the processes of mainstream schooling.

Part of this research was keenly interested in what impact processes of globalization were having on Thai wisdom and knowledge traditions and the consequences of Thailand becoming influenced by what many informants called ‘outsider knowledge’. The uncomfortable aspect of globalization for these informants is that globalization has opened Thailand up to comparison with other nations. For example, in discussion with a Thai historian, she/he explained it had only been recently that it had really mattered whether an overseas scholar had received a thorough education or not because the system was a self-contained one. The new information coming in had been necessary but not critical to Thailand’s economic survival.

**Researching Wisdom and Knowledge in Thailand**

A translated statement, like other types of utterances, is polymorphic in nature. That is, we cannot claim it to be identical, in all respects with the original utterance, which it addresses. The translated product is never neutral, as it always incorporates at least one more voice, one more point of view.

(Hongladarom, 1993, p. 55)

Research that is conducted across nations, cultures, and religions requires, at the outset, a distinctive concern with the type of research methodology that will be employed (Turner, 1990). This is in addition to the variety of methodological issues that need to be addressed in the course of any research. This paper is drawn from two contemporaneous research projects, one ‘Wisdom and Knowledge in Higher Education’ of which the analysis in this paper forms a part, and another as a student of Buddhism with teachers and through spending considerable years studying Pali, Sanskrit, the Tipitaka, the commentaries, and meditating which also contributes to the analysis undertaken for this paper.
Methodological Approach, Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This topic opens up a new research area, one that requires description before anything else can be done. Much Thai public discussion (see for example, Buddhadasa, 1956; Ekachai, 1991; Prachin, 1974; Sivaraksa, 1994) has been concerned about the impact of outsider knowledge on the preservation of a distinctly Thai wisdom, be it panjaathaangtham (Buddhist higher wisdom) or panjaathaangloog (worldly wisdom), as the next generation is educated into a globally-interconnected world. Many claims are being made about globalization of knowledge, particularly in the economic sphere, but little research has been done to examine the processes and the thinking behind the beliefs that are being made into policy. This research has examined the complex interaction that is occurring between established Thai wisdom pathways, their recognised and trusted knowledge traditions, and new knowledge being created by Thai people, sometimes indigenous and sometimes bought from outside.

When thinking about all the needs impinging on the design of the research, three texts gave basis for development of the overall research approach used for this paper, Rabinow (1977), Geertz (1983), and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Both Rabinow and Geertz provide well-trodden paths to undertaking anthropological, ethnographically focussed research, and their methodological work provided a useful grounding as an approach to collecting data about wisdom and knowledge in Thailand. I employed some of the data analysis methods developed in Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) work. I drew on Strauss and Corbin’s methods of data analysis (open and axial coding) without fully employing their grounded theory building model in order to suit the needs of my project, bringing together analysis of the philosophy and practice of Buddhism, old and new, together with interview data enabling a depth of understanding of the subject.

For the study of Buddhist philosophy, from 1994 I had been spending periods of time on retreats in study and meditation with Ven. Ayya Khema Bhikkuni (now deceased) and with kalyanamitta (noble friends) at Phra Ajaan Buddhadasa’s forest monastery, Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, with the monks and staff at Wat Pho, Bangkok, and at many other wats across Thailand and other parts of Asia and Australia that I have visited, spending hours discussing pañña (wisdom) and the pathway to its cultivation (see for example Buddhadasa Bhikku, 1956, 1986, 1988, 1989; Jackson, 1988).

I also conducted fifty-eight formal interviews over a two-year period in Bangkok and in the three
provinces outside Bangkok, Haat Yai, Chiang Mai, and Khon Kaen. There were six group
interviews. One interview was in fact a collection of conversations held over a number of days
with five Thai staff who were running a cultural program for a group of Australian teachers and
their students. Three group interviews each had three people participating; two of these were
academics at provincial universities in Thailand and the other group was at a forest monastery.
Another group interview of five people was with the staff of a university international office.
Another group interview was with two people. Altogether, ninety eight people were interviewed,
fifty one females and forty seven males. They were academics, professional staff, bureaucrats
and monastics from: seven universities and two teachers colleges; MUA; CSC; and Suan Mokkh,
a Buddhist forest monastery. I explored the following questions with them:

1. How do you understand the words *panjaa* (wisdom) and *khwaamruu* (knowledge)?
2. How are wisdom, knowledge, university knowledge, and cultural knowledge
understood in the Thai context?
3. What are the manifestations of Thai conceptions of wisdom, knowledge, university
knowledge, and cultural knowledge in higher education, government and Thai
involvement in global development programmes as a recipient of knowledge?
4. Is there a relationship in Thailand between the rhetoric of globalization and the
gaining and/or losing of local wisdom?

Most of the people with whom I spoke in the interviews had ideas about knowledge.
Significantly, fewer interviewees talked about wisdom with five people offering no opinion on
this subject. The first two questions were designed to open up general discussion about wisdom
and knowledge. The third one focussed discussion on the shifting nature of wisdom and
knowledge particularly, in education and policy development; and the fourth sought to explore
the impact of globalization on local knowledge however understood.

Wisdom and Knowledge in Thailand

For the Thai informants, wisdom has two distinct types: *panjaathaangtham* (Buddhist higher
wisdom) and *panjaathaangloog* (worldly wisdom) (see Diagram 1, below). The first is a
recognised pathway to enlightenment and arises from a full understanding of Buddhist teachings.
The second describes the path to becoming recognised as a wise person. Personally-held wisdom
was understood as deriving from community recognition, and is a characteristic of certain people
who have added to local knowledge in a particularly useful way such that the outcomes of the
new application can be displayed to a group and improved upon by group effort.
Diagram 1: Analytical Relationship between Key Terms

Knowledge was also described as being of two broad types, reflecting the two types of wisdom. The knowledge, which supports panjaathaangtham (Buddhist higher wisdom), is *khwaamruudiikhwāa* (transcendental knowledge) and the knowledge, which supports *panjaathaangloog* (worldly wisdom), is collectively understood as *khwaamruusāmimāi* (modern knowledge). *Khwamruusāmimāi* comprises a complex and ever-changing *khwaamruuthaangsangkhom* (local knowledge) and *khwaamruutjaagpaajnoog* (outsider knowledge).

Informants were agreed that an individual could investigate a transcendental or mundane domain of knowledge and thereby attain an outcome of wisdom, Buddhist higher or worldly, depending on the domain of knowledge; but the domain of knowledge itself was believed to already be extensive enough for the individual. It was a Thai perspective that the task of the individual was to apply the knowledge that already existed, although some Thai educators spoke of an emerging need in Thailand for new knowledge that was ‘home-grown’. As shown in Diagram 1 above, there are a number of overlapping and intersecting points that will be discussed more fully in later sections of the paper. Of particular interest, there is clear crossover now between outside knowledge and local knowledge, constantly reconstituting what it means to hold *khwaamruusāmimāi* (modern knowledge).

**The Pathway to Enlightenment: Panjaathaangtham (Buddhist higher wisdom)**

*Panjaathaangtham* (Buddhist higher wisdom), *pañña* in the Buddhist Pali (Buddhadatta, 1979; Nyanatiloka, 1988), is the outcome of a person penetrating the nature of reality. It arises from cultivating an understanding of three different domains of knowledge. Following the early Buddhist teachings, the idea of domains of knowledge was further developed by Nyanatiloka (1982). The three domains of knowledge are: *siinsamaadipanjaa* (the knowledge of morality, the knowledge of concentration and the knowledge of insight understanding; *sila, samadhi*, and *vipassana* in Pali; Buddhadatta, 1979; Nyanatiloka, 1988). These bodies of knowledge are
collectively called *khwaamruudiikhwàa* (transcendental knowledge) (see Diagram 2, below).

**Diagram 2: Panjaathaangtham Pathway to Enlightenment**

According to informants, most Thais in both modern and traditional times did not actively pursue attainment of *panjaathaangtham* (Buddhist higher wisdom). The way to this wisdom was spoken of as being very difficult and requiring capacities gained in past lives, and only a few were seen to have these capacities. Most agreed that *panjaathaangtham* (Buddhist higher wisdom) was the outcome of the development of certain thinking processes that arose from understanding *khwaamruudiikhwàa* (transcendental knowledge), by being born with the capacity to understand, and having had the experience of intuitive deep understanding.

Many informants, Buddhist nuns and monks and also by lay informants, explained that while Thais may still know the phrase ‘*siinsamaadipanjaa*’ most now sought only to practice the moral precepts, to live a good life, as outlined in the knowledge domain of *siin* morality. Some who had the interest and capacities would seek the knowledge domain of *samaadi* concentration and would attempt meditation practices. Fewer still sought the transcendental teachings of *panjaa* insight understanding that led one to attain *panjaathaangtham* (Buddhist higher wisdom).

**Pathways to a Wise Life: Panjaathaangloog (Worldly wisdom)**

There was a variety of opinions about how individual *panjaathaangloog* (worldly wisdom) arises. For some it was related to values and interpretations of the world arising from pursuing *panjaa*, the Buddhist mundane wisdom path. In this view, it was a personal achievement that was inside and inward. For some, it was related to innate capacities while to others it could be learned and for still others it was a combination of both. For more traditional Thais, individual *panjaathaangloog* (worldly wisdom) derived from age and experience and was steeped in *phumpanjaachawbaan* (rural wisdom), the past source of Thai *panjaathaangloog* (worldly wisdom). Such wisdom was passed on to the younger generations. People explained that this wisdom arose because the older people had more knowledge and experience of Thai society than the younger members, and that their accumulated knowledge had assisted them to survive and
develop wisdom. Others said that *phumpanjaachawbaan* (rural wisdom) is breaking down because the older rural people often do not understand what is going on in modern urban or rural society and their values and attitudes do not help younger people to survive. In fact, some Thai informants felt that the old people’s wisdom is moving in the opposite direction to that of the newer society. They also said that the older people’s wisdom and knowledge was being devalued in the modern society by new qualifications. Thus, people with years of experience would no longer necessarily be recognised as having *panjaathaangloog* (worldly wisdom), because they had no piece of paper to validate their claim.

Many Thai academic and bureaucratic informants commented that the National Education Plan for Thailand had as one of its major goals the inclusion of *phumpanjaachawbaan* (rural wisdom) where appropriate into new education (see for example, ONEC, 1991; Terwiel, 1977). According to the Thai informants, it has proved far more difficult than was anticipated to incorporate *phumpanjaachawbaan* (rural wisdom) into the mainstream new curriculum. One academic speculated that this was because students no longer saw the world through the traditional Thai ways of knowing and a true understanding of old *phumpanjaachawbaan* (rural wisdom) could not arise without it. The new curriculum was so emphatically Western and based on overseas education systems that it had been hard for teachers to start to think positively about Thai knowledge and incorporate it into their teaching. As can be seen in Diagram 1 above, with both local and outsider knowledge feeding into what constitutes *khwaamruusàmǎimà* (modern knowledge), it is perhaps unsurprising that *phumpanjaachawbaan* (rural wisdom) is also being affected, challenged for relevance, and struggling to maintain its historical legitimacy, in the face of such pressures and expectations.

*Khwaamruusàmǎimài* (modern knowledge) was regarded by the informants to be automatically gained through the processes of a university education but many people expressed concern about some of its attributes, saying that the quality of *khwaamruusàmǎimài* modern knowledge, particularly knowledge derived from overseas study, *khwaamruutjaagpaajnoog*, encouraged a sort of secular way of living that ignored *khwaamruuthaangsangkhom* (local knowledge) and many regarded this sort of new knowledge as untested and potentially harmful to the Thai way of life. Some went so far as to assert that it was ‘un-Thai’. They saw problems arising for Thai society if graduates only understood the one and not the other. One informant, formerly a senior bureaucrat and now a Buddhist nun, said that there was already a problem because many Thai
educators were educated overseas and they themselves had forgotten about *panjaathaangtham* (Buddhist higher wisdom), *panja* (Buddhist mundane wisdom), and *khwaamruuthaangsangkhom* (local knowledge). She argued that increasingly they held *khwaamruusàmāimāi* (modern knowledge) that was almost completely *khwaamruutjaagpaajnoog* (outsider knowledge).

Historically, in Thailand formal studies were conducted in the *wat* (temple) by monks who were also senior, revered members of the local community. Only boys were allowed to attend the *wat* for formal studies. Formal studies comprised learning the ways of knowing in the three domains of *khwaamruudiikhwâa* (transcendental knowledge) of morality, concentration, and insight understanding. The *wat* was, by definition, a place for cultivating *panjaathaangtham* (higher wisdom). *Khwaamruuthaangsangkhom* (local knowledge) socialised people into a cultural identity and activities such as commerce were learnt by experience. In time, the *wat* expanded to teach a more secular curriculum, creating the possibility of an approach to education that was not embedded in the Buddhist world view (McDaniel, 2008).

A modern school system was then established for both boys and girls, as were universities, with academics performing the role of passing on *khwaamruutjaagpaajnoog* (outsider knowledge) that was derived from overseas education systems. This was incorporated into Thai universities using the new term *khwaamruusàmāimāi* (modern knowledge). This imported, secular knowledge became a distinct hallmark of the national education system and Thai universities, distinguishing them from the Buddhist education system and initially regarded as a complement to insider, Thai, ways of thinking (Wyatt, 1994).

The importing of *khwaamruusàmāimāi* (modern knowledge) was regarded principally as a source of information for Thailand about what other countries were doing in order to protect Thailand and enable it to be prepared for outsiders. Those who had the social position and the capacity were sent out of Thailand, knowledge was learned, and then brought back. In the overseas country, Thai students were taught ways of thinking that were outside the experience of the majority of Thai people. In earlier times, during the period of Thai engagement with English and French colonial powers, it was the children of the elites that were sent out, those who would return and take up leadership roles in the new Thailand. This was a significant channel for new knowledge and new ways of thinking to be introduced into the country and the ideas were
heavily mediated and filtered through established social mores before they were incorporated into the society. A fascinating narrative of this process is captured in the wonderful *Sii Phaendin*, (The Four Reigns, Pramoj, 1981) which tells of the Kings carefully gathering information about any new ideas, discussing things extensively, and trying each new item before it was adopted into the society. There is a wonderful description of the King taking a *rótjàyaansõnglór* (bicycle) out for its first test. Now, although there are many avenues by which information can enter the country, the contribution of the overseas scholars is still significant, because they continue to import new ideas and technologies into Thailand from the outside. Thai informants said that Thai people still generally consider outsider knowledge acquired at an overseas university to be more useful to Thai economic development than local education, particularly at the postgraduate level (Ketudat, 1973; Nimmanhiminda, 1970).

I had a number of discussions with Thai academics who had studied overseas. I spoke specifically with them about whether they felt the need to change or translate knowledge they had gained once they returned to Thailand. Most said that the Thai new style was now to teach from a deductive, Western-derived theory base. Even so, one academic had spent many years arguing for the need to cultivate an ‘indigenous economics’ using an inductive approach and rejected the assumptions of the Western scientific tradition by using a Buddhist argument. The academic explained it in this way:

> A Western scientist may observe something, thereby perceiving and sensing it. At this point if the knowledge was apprehended it would be knowledge derived from observation. But mental formation rapidly orders the observation, simply because of the extensive training of the scientist in the scientific theoretical way of thinking, and in this, empiricism is compromised.

A Thai economist asserted that all outsider knowledge had a social context that could not be ignored, even if it claimed to be ‘pure knowledge’. For the Thai informants the most distinctive aspect of university knowledge, in particular, and imported knowledge in general was that it was seen as untested and had to be thought about alongside *panjaa* (Buddhist mundane wisdom), *phumpanjaachawbaan* (rural wisdom), and their underlying *khwaamruuthaangsangkhom* (local knowledge). For the informants, this combination of uniquely Thai wisdom and knowledge is what identifies them as ‘Thai’ but they said that increasingly their national knowledge was being influenced by imported knowledge. The Thai informants were concerned with the impact of
imported knowledge within Thailand, focusing their comments on how difficult it was becoming for Thai people to maintain a sense of cultural identity amidst the overwhelming amount of incoming information that their country was experiencing.

**Whither Wisdom?**

This section moves to provide an analysis of Thai responses to globalization in the education services sector in order to understand the need expressed by many Thai informants that it was necessary for Thailand to find a way to balance the need to demonstrate an internationalist perspective while simultaneously preserving and maintaining something distinctly ‘Thai’ (see also, Malaska, 1993; Ma Rhea and Seddon, 2006, for a broader discussion of the impacts of global knowledge on old local knowledges and national identities). Drawing from the interview data and also from the literature, I will first discuss Thai informants’ interaction with and responses to perceived global trends. As discussed previously, Thailand has been sending people to study in Western universities since the late 1800s and has an established perspective on sending bright scholars to different parts of the world to gather information and new ideas. The experiences of the early students have been fictionalised in popular novels by Pramoj (1981) and Sudham (1983, 1987, and 1988). Culture shock was prominent, as was the awareness that the experience in a Western country was giving students great cultural status on their return home. This was mixed with an underlying belief that it was necessary for the Kingdom of Siam to develop into the modern state of Thailand (Jumsai, 1991).

In discussions with Thai scholars studying at Australian universities in the late 20th century, there are two levels of understanding that need to be considered about Thai international scholars. At a personal level, many commented that study abroad has given them the opportunity to increase their status, improve their job prospects and that they will be able to command a higher salary on their return home because of their overseas studies. Thai university education, particularly postgraduate studies, is not considered to be as good as an overseas qualification.

A second way of understanding their study experiences was to look at feelings about responsibility to Thailand and was of evident importance when I had discussions with students who received AusAID or Royal Thai Government scholarships and who expected to return to Thailand to take up university or government employment (Sethasathien, 1995). These students said they were always assessing the applicability of what they are learning in view of their future
work responsibilities.

Another aspect that students spoke about reflected the changes that were occurring in Thailand due to the sustained economic development of the country and Thailand’s greater participation in world affairs. For the Thai student, there had been increased scope for studying abroad because Thai families were becoming wealthier. This is occurring in parallel with the older practices of students going out into the world and bringing back knowledge for Thai national development. Many of the students are now using education as a way of improving their activities in the sphere of private enterprise.

The practice of going all over the world to get a university education is a relatively new global phenomenon and the larger picture of international student migration under global market forces has not yet been recognised as being of significant research interest. Global capital requires a mobile elite workforce that is comfortable with working in a variety of national contexts. The university is being brought in to train people for this mobility. International student mobility is becoming an important part of the processes of market globalization.

Thai academic and bureaucratic informants were cautious about the globalization of markets. One Thai academic said that Thailand was using its own domestic capital as much possible to gain access to new technological knowledge because, ‘to do so helps us to globalise and join the world community, but we can substantially be on our own’. This sort of response to global markets was evident in many discussions I had with Thai informants, one that I have termed ‘self-sufficient inclusion’ in the global market. Thai policy makers also showed evidence of their awareness of global education services markets in the ways that they were encouraging their universities to develop. The central Thai focus was two pronged. The first was an approach to processes of globalization through regionalism by looking after the poorer nations in their region and establishing themselves as a regional power, coupled with a careful nurturing of relationships with foreign powers. Concurrently, a policy of internationalisation of their universities contributed directly to their economic success (Boonyavatana, 1995). Academics and government informants both said they recognised a need for the preservation of Thai cultural identity in the new global world and in order to create unique Thai knowledge they needed the capacity for independent research, something strongly reflected in *Wisdom 2015* (Ministry of Education, 2005).
Thai academics have had a particular responsibility to receive ‘new’ overseas knowledge, adapt it, and reproduce it in the local context. Thai bureaucrats and academics were eager to have collaborative research with these more powerful nations because to lose access to advanced knowledge production and reproduction threatened the ability of Thailand to function in the globalised economy, and it was feared that this might render the nation vulnerable. Whilst something similar to the reproduction thesis of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), I have argued elsewhere that this should more correctly be understood as adaptive balancing rather than straightforward reproduction (Ma Rhea 2000). Reproduction implies copying and this is not what seems to be occurring in Thailand. Thai academics are clearly adapting outsider knowledge to local Thai conditions and worldview, balancing the need to exhibit an understanding of Western ways of thinking with Thai cultural imperatives.

Even so, in Althusserian (1971) terms, Thailand could be seen to be reproducing the existing relations of production within the global market. This is echoed in the discussions that I had with some Thai academics who were trying to teach in a university system that was radically changing. The intrusion of market forces had left them feeling disillusioned with their future role in the university. Others were content with the changes that were occurring, seeing the university’s new responsiveness to the market as a positive thing for them. Some Thai informants suggested that ideas about globalization were simply disguised justifications for a process of Westernisation, imposing Western economic models and Western technological information on countries such as Thailand (Inkeles & Smith, 1974).

Outsider knowledge brought into Thailand can be a two-edged sword as argued by Prachin (1974) and Altbach & Kelly (1978). Universities came into being before the formation of nation states. Both modern and ancient universities, whether Islamic, Chinese, Greek, Roman, Siennese, Parisian or contemporary Western, have all drawn their scholars and intellectuals from a geographically diverse group of people. The funding arrangements for these centres have always been diverse. Accessibility to them has also been various. Some have been funded predominantly by religious or monarchical sources and continue to be so. Others have been funded from public monies. Thai universities evolved after the formation of the state but as an essential component of it (Wyatt, 1994). Their role has been to produce the state administrative personnel to run the modern state of Thailand and also to bring in ideas from outside, incorporating the necessary ideas into the local university knowledge pool. Because modern universities are located within
nations and are funded by them, they have not been accountable until recently to global markets in any direct way. Traditionally, universities have disseminated their discoveries through exchange and reproduction, across national boundaries.

University knowledge, like any other type of production, has historically been locally owned. Access to it has depended on numerous factors, social, economic, and political. Thailand participated in the international Colombo Plan where development and university knowledge were cast as tools in the internationalist ideal of peace and prosperity. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, in part that:

…higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit…Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (cited in UNESCO, 1991, p. 16).

UNESCO took up the promotion of education for all on the planet. This organisation clearly linked education to ‘peace, balanced and sustainable development, respect for human rights and the preservation of the ecosystem’ (UNESCO, 1991, p.5). It built its vision of universal education upon the strength of each nation state and the international theme has been one of peace and planetary survival. Each country that is a signatory to the United Nations declaration is supposed to establish an education system that meets its local needs and also educates about the increasing interdependence of us all, thus breaking down barriers of ignorance and fear about one another. For UNESCO policy-makers, education has maintained its use-value.

Even so, UNESCO has a particularly colonising international perspective within its own agenda. UNESCO (1993, p. 14) defines its role as, ‘to facilitate the transfer and sharing of knowledge’ and ‘strengthening the role of education so as to give the world a scientific view of things and spread a scientific culture’. Clearly, such a view of education can be interpreted as strengthening the Western, scientific worldview and justifies the fears of Thai academic informants that the globalization agenda is really a Westernisation one rather than a modernisation one that preserves Thai wisdom and knowledge traditions, transcendental and mundane, in a globally-interconnected world.
Balancing Old and New

The opinions given about a Buddhist understanding of \textit{panjaathaangtham} (Buddhist higher wisdom) were repeated in comments about \textit{panjaathaangloog} (worldly wisdom). Informants said that the capacity to cultivate wisdom was latent and needed to be stimulated by access to knowledge, such as that taught in schools and universities or in the modern community through the internet and television. There was consistent concern raised, and reinforced by more recent economic and political upheaval in Thailand as a result of the global financial crisis, that the innate capacity for wisdom is being inhibited by formal education processes and that if Thailand loses its unique perspective on life then its people will end up ‘like everyone else’.

For Thai people, there is no split between the brain and the heart. In both Buddhist and secular pedagogical approaches to the cultivation of wisdom, informants often pointed out for my benefit that the processes of thinking that train the \textit{caj} (mind) train both the heart and the brain together, saying that Westerners often misunderstand the Thai meaning of the concept of \textit{caj}. They assert that neither \textit{panjaathaangtham} (Buddhist higher wisdom) nor \textit{panjaathaangloog} (worldly wisdom) can arise if only the brain is trained. Attempts are being made in both schools and universities in Thailand to enable students to cultivate both sorts of wisdom and further the Buddhist modernisation project (Ma Rhea, 1994, 2000).

A number of Thai educators explained that students were encouraged to do such things as voluntary work in rural villages during their holidays, to observe the Buddhist holy days, and to become involved in extracurricular religious activities as a complement their secular studies to encourage the cultivation of \textit{panjaathaangtham} (Buddhist higher wisdom). Others said that this approach was insufficient and that to cultivate \textit{panjaathaangtham} (Buddhist higher wisdom), the three domains of \textit{khwaamruudiikhwàa} (transcendental knowledge) had to be brought into the mainstream curriculum; otherwise this sort of wisdom would become increasingly marginalised by the pursuit of \textit{khwaamruusàmàimài} (modern knowledge). These informants did not regard it as sufficient to rely on cultivating \textit{panjaa} (Buddhist mundane wisdom) as this was being swamped by non-Buddhist \textit{khwaamruusàmàimài} (modern knowledge). Some Thai informants rejected \textit{panjaathaangtham} (Buddhist higher wisdom) in the formal mainstream education setting and commented that it was inappropriate to try to bring it into a secular education system that serves Thai children of a variety of religions.
Analysis of the data suggests that Thai conceptions of wisdom and knowledge are changing and that there is a strongly articulated awareness of the need to negotiate very complex and ever-changing *khwaamruusàmǎimài* (modern knowledge). Western scholars are sometimes critical of modern Thailand arguing that the approach to knowledge and wisdom is traditional and static. Such criticism is found in the work of Mulder (1990), a non-Thai researcher of Thai society. He says (1990, p. 100, 116):

…Wisdom and knowledge are of course highly respected, as exemplified in the status of teachers and elders, but the cultural conception of wisdom and knowledge is static… To study is simply to amass the knowledge of one’s teachers and not to develop one’s own. Whether it is new or ecclesiastical studies, what society is interested in is a level of conventional knowledge, and not the genesis of spiritual or intellectual curiosity... To achieve in the area of new ideas is, in spite of the pressures of modernity, still negatively valued in Thai culture, which prefers to follow old recipes and traditional wisdom... The main impulse in Thai education is to accumulate conventional knowledge, and not so much to gain wisdom.

There were other non-Thais who shared Mulder’s interpretation of Thai approaches to knowledge but the Thai people that informed this research suggested there was a need to look deeper into modern Thailand and find those aspects that still had continuity with older times but at the same time were distinctly new. The Thai informants consistently and implicitly refuted Mulder’s claim that Thais primarily accumulate knowledge. They argued that what Mulder labels as ‘conventional’ knowledge is better considered as imported knowledge and non-Thai scholars such as Mulder have not adequately recognized the Thai understanding of usefulness of having such knowledge for the broader reasons of cultural survival through readiness to adapt and change.

The particular difficulty of balancing *phumpanjaachawbaan* (rural wisdom) with *khwaamruusàmǎimài* (modern knowledge) led one Thai person to suggest that ‘once you have had an overseas education you can no longer hear the wisdom of your ancestors’. It was clear that a new *panjaathaangloog* (worldly wisdom) in Thailand tends to be greatly influenced by global economic knowledge and an economic way of knowing the world. This thinking is overshadowing *panjaathaangtham* (Buddhist higher wisdom), *phumpanjaachawbaan* (rural wisdom), and *panjaab* (Buddhist mundane wisdom). The global demand for Thailand to maintain
the pace of its rapid economic development places heavy demand on Thai new graduates to have up to date outsider knowledge in order to help Thailand take its place in the new globally connected, economic world. It is only gradually that the demand from within Thai society to listen to the wisdom of Buddhism and of old Thailand has been gaining respectability (as can be seen, for example, in the recent Thai Ministry of Education’s *Wisdom Thailand 2015 for Knowledge-Based Society* project; see also Parnwell & Seeger, 2008; Wilson, 2004), but the Thai informants felt this would not occur in the near future.

The strongest theme to arise from analysis of old and new forms of knowledge in Thailand in the early 21st century was that the emergence of *khwaamruusà mâimài*, indigenous and imported, has opened up significant social transformation in Thailand and that the cultural fabric of old Thai Buddhist and rural knowledge is under strain. Significant change in the Thai knowledge culture as it moves to a global one threatens the old traditions. While efforts are being made to discern a new wisdom tradition that balances the old and the new and to embed that into the Thai education system (Inthankamhaeng, 2536), it is possible that Thailand, like its westernized counterparts, will lose access both to its Buddhist transcendental and mundane wisdom pathways in its pursuit of secular knowledge and economic development under globalization.

**Conclusion**

Globalization is a process that has happened because of the intersection of many related factors and Thailand has been riding a proverbial juggernaut in its attempts to find a balance between its unique Thai ways of knowing and knowledge that is being imported into the country. In the colonial time and up until the late 20th century, the elites of the Thai Buddhist, monarchical and administrative classes strove to adaptively balance *khwaamruusà mâimài* modern knowledge into Thai society to foster a gradual modernisation of the country whilst avoiding the overwhelming impact of Western values and behaviours.

The global education services market is one significant factor discussed in this paper that has radically changed that gradual cautious accommodation of global forces. Improved technological communications and increased wealth, supported by people’s involvement in global education markets, has opened up Thai culture to outsider knowledge as never before. For many nations, this has simply meant that an overseas education has been a vehicle for the opening up of that society to Westernisation. This paper argues that for a nation such as Thailand, it is still possible
to find balance between the old and the new but it is questionable whether new global education services markets will support such aspirations.

Without doubt, traditional knowledge systems such as Buddhism that preserve a pedagogical pathway to (Buddhist higher wisdom) and to mundane wisdom are under threat of being subsumed into more secular approaches to wisdom. It is cause for optimism that there is ongoing commitment by successive Thai governments to proactively support education to preserve and maintain a distinctly Thai worldview with its firm foundations in *panjaathaangtham* (Buddhist higher wisdom), *phumpanjaachawbaan* (rural wisdom) and Buddhist mundane wisdom as it negotiates imported knowledge and locally-created, new knowledge in its constitution as *khwaamruusàmàimà* modern knowledge.

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