



8

Negotiating Identities in a Globalized World: From Southeast Asia to the San Joaquin Valley

Jessica McKenzie , Emily Leighton, Macy Davis,
and José J. Reyes

In a rural village in northern Thailand, the school day ends and a teenager hops on her motorbike to begin a 90-minute drive into the nearest city to practice Korean cover dancing. Though she does not have internet access at home, she learned about Korean cover dancing on Facebook and has lately spent school day breaks in the computer lab watching YouTube videos to learn the basic steps (McKenzie, 2014). In a Maya community in southern Mexico, cell phone service was recently introduced. A teenager wearing a t-shirt and track pants stands over her kneeling grandmother, who wears traditional embroidered Mayan clothing, showing her a photograph that is circulating through the community WhatsApp (Manago et al., 2021).

In New Delhi, India, a young Muslim woman rejects incessant Facebook friend requests from her brothers and their wives (Mishra & Basu,

J. McKenzie (✉) · E. Leighton · M. Davis · J. J. Reyes
California State University, Fresno, CA, USA
e-mail: jmckenzie@csufresno.edu

2014). Were she to accept their requests, they would see photographs of her wearing a *bindi* (which is traditionally only worn by Hindu women). Though she is just wearing the *bindi* for fashion, she is certain that her relatives would not approve. In Trinidad, a young man posts an image of himself on Facebook wearing sunglasses, low-slung jeans, branded clothing, and bling, invoking the “gangsta” image from U.S. hip-hop (Miller et al., 2016). A young South African “digital nomad” moves to central Vietnam. Under the moniker “Ninja Teacher,” he posts videos of his café- and beach-hopping to his YouTube channel, which has amassed 50,000 subscribers. In one such video filmed at a hidden beach, he waves to a woman who introduces herself as “Black digital nomad” (Ninja Teacher, 2021). She also has a YouTube channel.

As these snapshots illustrate, modern globalization shapes how young people around the world grow up. Intercultural contact—in person and via digital media—exposes youth to multiple sets of cultural practices and values, whether or not they have traveled beyond their hometown. How do young people negotiate multiple sets of cultural values to construct their identities? In this chapter, we address this question by discussing how youth, who are bicultural by way of globalization and immigration, manage multiple custom complexes. We begin by introducing the *custom complex* framework that guides this discussion.

Navigating Multiple Custom Complexes

As a result of globalization and immigration, young people around the world navigate multiple *custom complexes*. The term “custom complex,” introduced by anthropologists Whiting and Child (1953), addresses the link between cultural beliefs and practices. This term highlights that practices are laced with and informed by accompanying beliefs, values, and ideologies. For example, the Mayan teenager in Mexico who shares the image circulating through the community WhatsApp with her grandmother (introduced in the first paragraph of this chapter) likely does so because she values both digital media and connecting with her grandmother, and because she understands that her grandmother values being privy to local gossip.

Until relatively recently in human history, young people generally drew from custom complexes within their community to develop their identities. This changed, first, with the increasing feasibility of international travel in the latter half of the twentieth century (Dulles, 1966), and more recently, with the advent of Wi-Fi and the commercial availability and financial feasibility of mobile phone ownership at the turn of the twenty-first century (Anderson, 2003; Dyroff, 2018).¹ Today, young people are routinely exposed to multiple custom complexes in a way that cuts across racial, ethnic, and class lines (even if, to some extent, digital divides remain; see Manago et al., 2015; McKenzie et al., 2022). This exposure to the custom complexes of distinct and distant communities has complexified and extended the process of identity development.

Used in the context of globalization, the custom complex framing knits together research that emphasizes how globalization reshapes cultural values (e.g., Abu Aleon et al., 2019; Greenfield, 2009; Kaasa & Minkov, 2020) and practices (e.g., Correa-Chávez & Rogoff, 2009; Rogoff, 2003). In contrast with the more common categorical approach to cross-cultural youth development (e.g., via focusing on individualism /collectivism categories; Harkness & Super, 2020), we aim to capture how individual psychologies interact with their (changing) cultural contexts. Because ways of negotiating multiple custom complexes in the context of globalization and immigration overlap, we draw from both literatures. In particular, we draw from our fieldwork in northern Thailand and in central California. To set the stage for that discussion, we first provide background information on proximal (immigrant-based) and remote (globalization-based) acculturation.

Proximal Acculturation

The earliest conceptualizations of acculturation were unidimensional (Gordon, 1964), taking interest in whether an acculturating individual

¹ Although the first mobile phone was released by Motorola in 1983, its \$4,000 cost made it cost prohibitive for most (Dyroff, 2018). It was not until 2002 that more affordable mobile phones were released.

was or was not assimilated to a second culture. For example, Rosa's family immigrates to the United States from Mexico. The assimilation model is concerned about whether or not Rosa has adopted the custom complexes of U.S. culture. More recent conceptualizations of acculturation have moved away from the reductionistic assimilation model by recognizing that acculturation is in fact multidimensional.

Berry's (1997) acculturation model, for instance, recognizes that custom complexes from two cultural contexts can be simultaneously held. According to this model, *assimilation* is just one of four possible acculturation strategies that an immigrant or a person from an immigrant family can choose. That is, Rosa may *assimilate* to U.S. culture by exclusively valuing U.S., and no longer valuing Mexican, custom complexes. But she may also *integrate* the two cultures (by maintaining Mexican, while adopting U.S., custom complexes). Alternatively, she could be *separated* (by maintaining Mexican, and eschewing U.S., custom complexes) or *marginalized* (by feeling alienated from both Mexican and U.S. custom complexes).

Research has rather conclusively shown that: (1) individual variation exists in whether heritage and majority cultural values are endorsed, with people being classified as integrated (also known as bicultural), assimilated, separated, marginalized; (2) integration/biculturalism is the healthiest form of cultural adaptation; (3) adaptations are, to some extent, choiceful (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Ferguson et al., 2020; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Sam & Berry, 2010). That is, youth are active agents in determining how they adapt to intercultural contact.

Remote Acculturation

More recently, Jensen and colleagues (2011) extended Berry's acculturation model to the context of globalization. This work argues, and research widely confirms, that globalization can similarly spur acculturation to remote or global cultures via direct (in person) and indirect (media-based) intercultural contact (e.g., Chen et al., 2008; Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012). Accordingly, globalization can influence young people in one of four ways: (1) an individual who "sheds" local custom

complexes in favor of global custom complexes would be *assimilated*, (2) an individual who maintains local custom complexes while integrating global ones would be *bicultural*, (3) an individual who maintains allegiance to local custom complexes and rejects global custom complexes would be *separated*, and (4) an individual who is connected to neither local nor global custom complexes would be *marginalized* (Jensen et al., 2011).

In contrast to acculturation spurred by immigration (henceforth referred to as “proximal acculturation”), acculturation spurred by globalization (henceforth referred to as “remote acculturation”) is a relatively younger field of study. And yet, the proliferation of digital media and the porousness of national borders renders this a pressing line of inquiry. Remote acculturation research suggests that young people in far-flung regions of the world can and do acculturate to geographically distant cultures by way of media (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012; Ferguson et al., 2018). In emerging and developing world regions where technological change is particularly rapid, digital media confer risks (e.g., potential loss of cultural values, an emergent cultural gap between adolescents and parents) and opportunities (e.g., for young people to shape their development and reshape cultural values) (Manago & McKenzie, 2022).

In Jamaica, for example, one-third of urban adolescents take on bicultural identities as “Americanized Jamaicans”—endorsing both Jamaican and American practices and values (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012). In northern India, Ladakhi young adults who move to the urban center of Delhi endorse three cultural streams: local Ladakhi, national Indian, and global Western (Ozer & Schwartz, 2016; Ozer et al., 2017). The vehicles of remote acculturation include exposure to U.S. media and food, as well as intercultural contact via tourism (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015; Jensen et al., 2011). Research addressing the adaptiveness of remote acculturation has found that it presents challenges (e.g., culture gaps between adolescents and their parents or elders, greater adolescent-parent conflict, local culture loss, cultural identity confusion, poorer academic performance) and opportunities (e.g., behavioral frame-switching, preparation for career and travel) for young people (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015; Ferguson et al., 2020; Jensen et al., 2011; McKenzie, 2018, 2019a; Ozer et al., 2017).

In both fields of study—proximal and remote acculturation—less is known about the processes through which youth manage multiple custom complexes (McKenzie, 2020; Ward, 2008). That is, we know little about *how* heritage and majority cultures are integrated or negotiated (in the case of proximal acculturation) and about *how* local and global cultures are integrated or negotiated (in the case of remote acculturation). Understanding how young people manage multiple custom complexes is important for at least two reasons.

First, this understanding promises to more clearly link the closely related fields of remote and proximal acculturation, which are typically treated and studied separately. (For a notable exception, see Ferguson et al., 2020.) Understanding how these fields overlap will aid the development of a guiding theoretical base for the study of acculturation in the twenty-first century. Second, some forms of negotiation may be more adaptive than others. As previously noted, research tends to suggest that “biculturalism” is the most adaptive of the four acculturation patterns (Berry et al., 2006; Sam & Berry, 2010). And yet, as we shall see, variation exists within that broad category in terms of how young people negotiate discrepant custom complexes. Understanding the diversity that lies within the bicultural category is likely to help us understand whether one form of integration is more adaptive than others.

Remote Acculturation in Thailand

In this section, we discuss northern Thailand as a remote acculturation case study. We draw from a series of studies that the first author has published over the last 5 years which center the perspectives of Thai adolescents living in the large metropolitan city of Chiang Mai. When relevant, we draw from studies that include their parents and adolescents living in rural Mae Kiaw, just 25 miles away.² These studies address current beliefs (about moral values and religion) and behaviors (pertaining to media, religion, diet, and language). In totality, they paint a picture of the custom complexes that Thai adolescents endorse, and

² In order to protect the identities of those in this small district, “Mae Kiaw” is a pseudonym.

how they navigate—at times discrepant—custom complexes to construct their identities.

Integrating Global Values, Reshaping Local Values

“Oh, my Buddha!”

This expression, which the first author overheard in a conversation among adolescents at a shopping mall in Chiang Mai, illustrates the power of global youth culture in the lives of modern Thai youth. On the one hand, the phrase speaks to global influence (an appropriation of the Western phrase commonly used by adolescents: “Oh my God!”). On the other hand, it illustrates local value maintenance (by adjusting the phrase such that it aligns with Buddhism, the predominant national religion).

Over numerous studies spanning an array of topics, evidence indicates that 16–18-year-old adolescents living in Chiang Mai are remotely acculturated to global cultures. Here we use the term “global cultures” rather than a specific nation or culture because evidence also suggests that Thai youth are influenced not by a single culture (as Jamaican adolescents are often acculturated to American culture, for instance). Rather, Thailand’s geographic location renders a variety of non-local cultures salient in the developmental trajectories of Thai youth (McKenzie, 2020).³ In Southeast Asia, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese influence is particularly notable. Many adolescents watch Korean and Japanese television programs and movies, listen to Korean and Japanese music, and adopt Korean or Japanese fashion and facial appearance (e.g., by lightening the skin and widening the eyes—achieved with makeup, injections, and/or facial reconstruction).

Yet Thai youth are also exposed to Western media, and therefore the influence of the United States and Western Europe is profound. In interviews, urban-dwelling Thai adolescents often shared dreams of traveling

³ Throughout this chapter, we use the term *remote acculturation* rather than *globalization-based acculturation*. While the latter field of study is also relevant, it has overwhelmingly focused on people’s identification with Western culture (Chen et al., 2008; Ozer & Schwartz, 2016; Ozer et al., 2017). As noted here, the “second cultures” with which Thai youth identify span Western and non-Western contexts.

and/or relocating to Western nations such as the United States, Canada, Europe, and Norway. But they also discussed potentially relocating to the wealthy Asian nations of Japan and Singapore (McKenzie, 2020). Because of this, in the Thai case—and likely elsewhere in Asia—it is appropriate to conceptualize remote acculturation to a broader “global youth culture” (Gidley, 2002) rather than to a specific culture.

Although urban-dwelling youth are particularly influenced by globalization (Arnett, 2002; Huntsinger et al., 2019; McKenzie, 2018), the wide-reaching availability of digital media has rendered globalization relevant in the lives of young people even in rather remote areas. In rural Mae Kiaw, adolescents are to some degree influenced by globalization. For example, during a private conversation with the first author, one high school-aged adolescent in Mae Kiaw shared that although it may appear that everyone in his class gets along, a schism had recently emerged between “the Thai group” (those who look and act Thai) and “the Korean group” (those who want white skin and wear makeup to achieve a lighter look). As another example, one high school teacher in Mae Kiaw shared with the first author that he had recently begun requiring that students submit their homework on Facebook. He reasoned that having social media would benefit them in the future, and so he required that every single student create and maintain a Facebook account in order to succeed in his course.

Yet most adolescents in rural Mae Kiaw did not have high-speed internet. Some did not have a phone signal in their homes. Many did not have access to a working computer. Rural adolescents spent fewer hours per day using new media than did urban adolescents (McKenzie et al., 2022). They were rarely exposed to foreigners as teachers, travelers, and neighbors (McKenzie, 2020), and were granted fewer opportunities to study global languages and to consume global foods (McKenzie, 2019a). In Mae Kiaw, then, globalization was less influential in the lives of young people because the vehicles of globalization—in particular, global media, languages, and foods (Jensen et al., 2011)—are simply less accessible.

We now discuss the global custom complexes that remotely acculturated youth in urban Chiang Mai endorse and the local custom complexes they maintain. We use the term “global custom complexes” to refer to the practices and values that scholarship has associated with globalization,

and the term “local custom complexes” to refer to cultural practices and values that are indigenous to the region of study—in this case, northern Thailand.

Global Custom Complexes

Among remotely acculturated Thai adolescents, global values of *autonomy*, *individual choice*, *self-fulfillment*, and the high-arousal positive affective state of *personal happiness* influence moral reasoning and religious practices (McKenzie, 2018, 2019b; McKenzie & Xiong, 2021; McKenzie, Tsutsui, et al., 2019; McKenzie et al., 2021). Autonomous values were the bedrock of urban adolescent reasoning when discussing both private moral experiences (McKenzie, 2018, 2019b) and public moral issues (of sex work [McKenzie et al., 2021] and transnational marriage [McKenzie & Xiong, 2021]). Quantitative research confirms that adolescents growing up in urban Chiang Mai reasoned more in terms of autonomy and less in terms of community than both their parents and their rural adolescent counterparts (McKenzie, 2018).

Research also points to urban adolescents’ uniquely autonomous approach to religion. One study found that urban adolescents framed their religious experiences as highly individualized, and as means to autonomous ends (McKenzie, Tsutsui, et al., 2019). For instance, one adolescent emphasized that he makes merit (engages in meritorious deeds, such as offering alms to monks) with hopes that “earning” good karma may help him test into a reputable university the following year. Another adolescent looked to the more distant future: her next incarnation. She explained that she tries to make merit as often as she can because it will increase the likelihood of her being born into a wealthy family in her next life (McKenzie, Tsutsui, et al., 2019).

These autonomous orientations toward religion—engaging in religious practices to benefit the self—serve as a stark contrast to rural adolescents, who framed their religious practices as fundamentally relational. As a point of comparison, rural adolescents shared that they make merit by donating time and money to their local temple. One adolescent explained that she makes merit at the temple on behalf of her parents,

who are often busy with rice farming and have little time to attend the temple. Another explained that he makes merit by temporarily ordaining as a monk in order to help his relatives live a better afterlife (McKenzie, Tsutsui, et al., 2019).

Individual choice and the pursuit of personal happiness are also heavily featured in the moral values of urban adolescents. When considering the taboo yet pervasive Thai practice of sex work, urban adolescents reasoned that sex work is morally acceptable if it is, and morally reprehensible if it is not, volitional (McKenzie et al., 2021). In contrast, rural adolescents tended to emphasize relational (versus individual) choice—reasoning that sex work is morally understandable if it is engaged in for the (financial) benefit of the family. Urban adolescents similarly prioritized the pursuit of personal happiness when considering their future goals (McKenzie, 2020) and the markers of “real love” (McKenzie & Xiong, 2021).

Other global values that urban-dwelling Thai adolescents endorse include: financial and material wealth, financial independence, equality, and self-development (McKenzie, 2020), and international travel, residence, and reputation (McKenzie & Xiong, 2021; McKenzie et al., 2021; McKenzie, 2019a). Importantly, these adolescents not only endorse global values; they also engage in global practices. In particular, they are skilled at navigating digital media (McKenzie, Rooney, et al., 2019), speaking global languages (e.g., English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean), and they frequently consume global (particularly Western fast) foods (McKenzie, 2019a).

Local Custom Complexes

Although remotely acculturated Thai adolescents invoke global values when discussing a range of issues, local values—particularly those pertaining to *family*, *gender*, and *religion*—are also featured. Even in the face of rapid sociocultural change, traditional Thai values appear to be, to some extent, maintained along these three domains.

Two studies have highlighted that filial piety (the responsibility to give back to and take care of one's parents) is a local value that remains prominent in urban adolescents' thought processes. This local value, though, is reconstructed to take on a more global(ized) form. One study found that the adolescent children of urban-dwelling parents demonstrate filial piety by brokering their parents' participation in digital media (McKenzie, Rooney, et al., 2019). They do this, for instance, by helping their parents access email and Facebook, introducing them to new computer games, and downloading Skype for them so that they can stay in touch when the adolescent travels abroad.

Another study (McKenzie, 2020) found that filial piety featured heavily in urban adolescents' plans for their future. Indeed, 70% of adolescents discussed plans they had to give back to their parents in 10 years' time, including giving their parents money, taking them traveling, and living nearby or with them (McKenzie, 2020). It bears mentioning that the maintenance of filial piety aligns with research in Greece (Georgas et al., 2006) and Mexico (Manago, 2014) that points to family obligation values as slow to change even in the face of rapid sociocultural change.

Although remotely acculturated Thai adolescents endorse gender equality (McKenzie, 2020; McKenzie et al., 2021), as do youth in globalizing regions of Central America, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East (e.g., Abu Aleon et al., 2019; Huntsinger et al., 2019; Manago, 2014; Weinstock et al., 2015), local gender values are to some extent maintained. One study, for instance, highlighted that urban adolescents, like their rural adolescent counterparts, invoked the Thai *kulasatrii* woman ideal—reasoning that sex work is not a virtuous job because it contradicts cultural values of sexual restraint among women (McKenzie et al., 2021).

Thai religious practices are also, to some extent, maintained among remotely acculturated adolescents. Self-report measures indicate that urban adolescents were “equally” as Buddhist as rural adolescents (90% of adolescents in both contexts self-identified as Buddhist), and that urban and rural adolescents attended the temple (or place of worship) roughly “equally” (twice monthly on average; McKenzie, Tsutsui, et al., 2019). Yet as previously noted, the way that urban adolescents make

meaning of their religious practices differ rather substantially from their rural counterparts—with urban adolescents emphasizing an autonomous orientation and rural adolescents emphasizing a relational orientation. Other studies have revealed additional local values that guide urban adolescent thought processes and future plans, including: selfless generosity (*naam jai*), low-arousal positive affective states of relaxation and contentment (McKenzie, 2020), shame avoidance (*sia-naa*), and reputation maintenance (McKenzie et al., 2021).

How do remotely acculturated adolescents psychologically manage local and global values and practices? How are these custom complexes integrated, and what happens when integration is not feasible? This is a point to which we now turn.

Processes of Managing Multiple Custom Complexes

Several studies in our lab have pointed to three distinct processes through which remotely acculturated Thai youth manage local and global custom complexes: *integration*, *compartmentalization*, and *cultural brokerage*. The first two refer to internal strategies, and the latter refers to an external strategy, that youth employ to manage multiple custom complexes.

Integration

Remotely acculturated Thai youth often *integrate* global and local custom complexes. We note that “integration” (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Chen et al., 2008) has variously been referred to as “blended” (Nguyen & Rule, 2020; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997), “fused” (Chuang, 1999), “hybrid” (Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Jensen et al., 2011; Ward et al., 2018), and “remixed” (Rao et al., 2013). As previously noted, integration entails the combination of one’s local cultural identity with elements of the global culture(s) (Jensen et al., 2011). Here, we focus on the type of integration that three-quarters of remotely acculturated Thai adolescents employed when considering their envisioned futures: conceiving of global values as serving local values (McKenzie, 2020).

In the following example, one adolescent elaborates on her 10-year-plan, psychologically linking global values of financial wealth and international travel with the local value of filial piety. The interviewer (I) asks the participant (P):

- I: What goals do you have for your future?
 P: Like—rich.
 I: OK, rich. So in 10 years, how do you want your life to be?
 P: Rich.
 I: Why?
 P: Because it's convenient. I wanna take my parents to travel—sit in business class on the plane.
 I: OK, OK. And business class is better because—?
 P: It's wider.
 I: You're only a small person? [laughs].
 P: You can sit in comfort.
 I: [Laughs] OK, OK. Are there any other goals—anything else you want in your life?
 P: No [laughs], rich is my goal.

In this example, we see both *that* and *how* local–global value integration is made possible: her primary future goal of wealth accumulation is perceived as facilitating her giving back to her parents by taking them traveling in the comfort of business class: filial piety, reconstituted.

Others married their aim of financial wealth with the local value of generosity. One adolescent explained that his future wealth would enable him to donate to orphans. Another suggested that he would help beggars with his future wealth. Yet another envisioned her plan to travel the world (a global value) as helping her better determine how she can “make the world a better place” (local value of generosity).

Other work in northern Thailand similarly points to the blending of multiple custom complexes. When considering the morality of sex work, urban adolescents mapped local values of women's sexual purity and shame avoidance onto global frames of thinking, reasoning that sexual purity is an important foundation of romantic love (an ideal that has been heavily popularized and spread via Western-dominated media)

and that sex work is shameful for Thailand as it tarnishes international reputation (a global concern) (McKenzie et al., 2021). In contrast, rural adolescents commonly reasoned that women's sexual purity is mandated by Buddhist precepts and that sex work is shameful for the sex worker's family and community.

We posit that integration is psychologically adaptive for most remotely acculturated youth, as it allows for the preservation of local custom complexes and the adoption of global custom complexes. Importantly, though, the process of integrating global values in fact reshapes local values. Consider the example of remotely acculturated adolescents transforming filial piety such that it is achievable via global means (e.g., taking parents on trips abroad). As this example illustrates, even while local values are maintained, they are dynamically transformed as a result of global influence.

Compartmentalization

Some remotely acculturated Thai adolescents experienced local and global custom complexes as antithetical, resulting in *compartmentalized* selves. We note that "compartmentalized" biculturalism overlaps with "alternating" biculturalism (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Phinney & DeVich-Navarro, 1997; Ward et al., 2018), "frame-switching" (Hong et al., 2000; McKenzie, 2019a), "code-switching" (Ferguson et al., 2020), and "oppositional identities" (Ogbu, 1993). We use the term *compartmentalized biculturalism* to convey the co-existence of, but lack of unity in, local and global custom complexes. This is indeed a form of biculturalism, as young people endorse local and global custom complexes; yet it does not align neatly with Berry's (1997) conceptualization of integrated biculturalism, as these two custom complexes essentially operate in two distinct spheres. While some youth actively alternate between local and global spheres, for others, the incompatibility necessitates a choice (i.e., assimilating to, or separating from, global cultures). Still other youth may experience cultural identity confusion (Jensen et al., 2011) because they experience alternation-related barriers or because the "choice" to follow local or global custom complexes is not in fact experienced as choiceful.

In the study that examined urban Thai adolescents' envisioned futures (McKenzie, 2020), a sizable minority highlighted contradictions inherent in local and global value systems. As a result, some deemed it necessary to choose between the two value systems. For example, one female adolescent who wished to become a doctor explained:

- P:* If I decide to be a doctor, I—I don't need a [romantic] partner.
I: Oh, you don't want one?
P: Well, it's too high to get a partner.
I: Too high? What do you mean?
P: Good position in work—Thai people think if the girl has more prestige in work, it might not be good for men. Yea.
I: Why?
P: Because others will think that he doesn't have the ability to take care of his family.

Here she reasons that entering into the (male-dominated) medical field, thereby acting in accordance with the global value of gender egalitarianism, may require her to sacrifice romantic partnership because obtaining a high-powered job contradicts local gender roles of women's submissiveness to men.

Another participant similarly felt it necessary to choose between two distinct tracks for her future paths—one that aligns with local, and another that aligns with, global values. She explained:

I think I'll marry at 25, and I don't want to work. Oh, well—no, no, no—I have two ideas: That I'll have a family at like 25 and maybe take care of my children. And another idea is that I don't have children and just go traveling around the world with my partner.

This participant compartmentalized two potential future selves: one that aligns with local gender norms of child-bearing and care-taking and another that aligns with global norms of exploring the world.

Other adolescents planned to manage local–global contradictions by alternating between local and global custom complexes. Some engaged in *macro-level alternation*, shifting between cultural practices and selves

over large swathes of time, by divvying up the life course such that global values and pursuits are temporally distinct from local values and pursuits. One adolescent, for instance, suggested that after living abroad and accumulating financial capital for 10 years (global values and pursuits), she would move back to Thailand and work alongside her mother (local values and pursuits).

Other work highlights adolescents' *micro-level alternation*, or moment-to-moment shifting of cultural practices and selves based on context. One study found that urban adolescents shift between local and global practices based on interactional partner, engaging in global practices (speaking English and eating Westernized foods) with friends and reserving local practices (speaking Thai and eating Thai foods) for parents and teachers (McKenzie, 2019a). This alternation enabled adolescents to maintain adherence to local norms while obtaining social capital and peer acceptance via their global cultural participation.

Extant literature on the adaptiveness of compartmentalization as a result of globalization is mixed, with research pointing to it both as conferring advantages and as challenging or confusing (Ferguson et al., 2020; Jensen et al., 2011; McKenzie, 2019a). As seen in the present discussion, the forced choice between incompatible local and global value systems most certainly presents challenges. We posit that the compartmentalization of local and global custom complexes is positive when youth agentically alternate between them, and negative when that alternation is either forced (e.g., in the case of some urban Thai schools that disallow or discourage local language use) or when alternation is experienced as impossible (e.g., the adolescent girl who deemed it necessary to choose between becoming a medical doctor or having a romantic partner).

Cultural Brokerage

Here we focus on remotely acculturated adolescents acting as *cultural brokers* for others by facilitating other people's (most notably, parents')

participation in global cultures. We draw on the term “cultural brokerage” that has been used in immigration literature, which refers to youth from immigrant families mediating the host culture for their families. Research has commonly addressed the instrumental behavior of language translation, which entails the transmission of cultural knowledge (Jones & Trickett, 2005; McKenzie, Rooney, et al., 2019). In the context of globalization, young people around the world increasingly possess cultural skills that their parents may not (yet) possess, thereby rendering them cultural brokers for their parents. These cultural skills include expertise in global languages (such as English), as well as other skills that confer cultural knowledge (for instance, digital media expertise).

In one study, we found that remotely acculturated Thai adolescents mobilized their new media skills to assist their parents’ participation in global media-driven culture (McKenzie, Rooney, et al., 2019). Some parents reported that their adolescent child taught them how to turn computers on and off. One parent relied on her daughter to post photographs of sweets she baked to her Facebook page (which her daughter created for her). Still another adolescent curated and downloaded computer games for the family to play together. Although adolescents used their media expertise to assist their parents, their expertise also dislodged traditional power structures in the family.

Remotely acculturated adolescents’ skill in speaking global languages (particularly English and Chinese) and their consumption of global foods (particularly Western fast food) (McKenzie, 2019a) also rendered them brokers of global value systems wherein children are agentic and, to some extent, equals in the family dynamic. One adolescent, for instance, reported that she exercises her English-speaking abilities when she does not want her parents to understand what she says. Another denied his mother’s repeated requests to practice English with her at home. Still another explained that 7-Eleven’s rice is more delicious than her mother’s rice, and requested that her mother try a recipe that approximates the taste of rice obtained at a global convenience store.

In addition to being affected by global custom complexes, then, cultural brokerage renders remotely acculturated adolescents agents of cultural value change. Their participation in global cultures grants them

the agency and power to renegotiate traditional Thai age-based hierarchies (and accompanying values of deference and obedience) toward more Western family dynamics. Here we see the critical role that young people play in the dynamic reshaping of local values and practices.

Proximal Acculturation in the United States

We now turn to central California as a proximal acculturation case study by drawing from our recent research with 18–29-year-old Hmong emerging adults living in the San Joaquin Valley. This project broadly focused on Hmong American psychological experiences of biculturalism. Data were gathered using qualitative (cultural identity mapping and semi-structured interviews) and quantitative (pre-interview questionnaire and Phinney's Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure [1992]) methodologies. Findings illustrate the custom complexes that participants endorse, and how they navigate discrepant custom complexes to construct their identities.

Centering American Values, Confronting Heritage Values

I was constantly arguing with my parents. When everything they said would piss me off, that's when I started [realizing]—oh my gosh, I am NOT Hmong. Or at least my values are not Hmong. When you live in American society, all of these values are just clashing against each other...

In this excerpt, a Hmong emerging adult recounts her recent realization of just how American her values are. To her, being agitated with one's parents and (even internally) disagreeing with their perspectives is a quintessentially American quality that contradicts Hmong expectations of deference, obedience, and age-based hierarchy. This excerpt speaks to a common theme in our proximal acculturation data: the centering of American values and the resultant confronting contradictory Hmong values.

The San Joaquin Valley is home to a large Hmong population, who arrived as refugees in the 1970s and 1980s following the Vietnam War. Today, roughly 14% of Fresno's population is Asian; within that pan-ethnic category, the dominant ethnicity is Hmong (Statistical Atlas, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Of the 24 emerging adults that took part in this study, all but two were born in the United States. For all but one participant, both parents were born in Southeast Asia.

As we shall see, our Hmong participants were acculturated to American custom complexes—rendering theirs a classic case of proximal acculturation. Yet they were also often *remotely* acculturated to Asian cultures, even if they had not traveled to Asia and had no known relatives living in Asia. One participant, who studied Japanese language and watched anime in his free time, chose a Japanese pseudonym for the study. Another participant, who became fluent in Thai language and culture by watching Thai soap operas, chose a Thai pseudonym. Still another participant, who identified with Indian, Chinese, and Korean cultures, was enthralled with Bollywood and studied abroad in India. Hmong participants were often acculturated to U.S. culture (by necessity), and to Asian cultures via media (by choice). Aligning with various Asian cultures enabled the exploration and assertion of their Asian identity, in the face of a largely hidden and painful Hmong history.

At present, we focus on their proximal acculturation to U.S. culture. To that end, we now discuss the American custom complexes that Hmong youth endorse and the heritage custom complexes they confront and maintain.

American Custom Complexes

Hmong emerging adults overwhelmingly endorsed American values pertaining to *independence*, as well as corresponding values of *autonomous* (versus relational) *choice*, *freedom*, *exploration*, and *gender equality*.

Most Hmong emerging adults in our study valued individual concerns and choices. Participants centered autonomous choices in relatively small ways (e.g., dying one's hair, getting a tattoo, going to a party) and in more consequential ways (e.g., who to marry, whether and where to

attend college, what major to choose, where to live). They overwhelmingly strove to assert autonomous choices, but commonly encountered roadblocks given their family's prioritization of relational choice, age-based hierarchy, and collectivism. When speaking about their envisioned futures, Hmong youth centered goals of financial independence and career success, as well as wanting the freedom to choose their career and how they live their lives. Several participants dreamt of a future that enabled them to venture beyond the San Joaquin Valley, but suggested that this dream would likely remain unfulfilled because it contradicts obligations to their families.

Hmong participants also overwhelmingly endorsed gender equality. Participants spoke at length about believing that men and women, and boys and girls, should be treated equally—and female participants expressed frustrations with the fact that this does not happen in their own homes. Some spoke about specific practices that were symptoms of these gendered beliefs, such as their brothers sleeping in until 10 am while they awoke at 6 am to cook rice for the family. Female and male participants shared that gender equality and feminism, values in which they were steeped at university, were ideals toward which they strived. Those who discussed desires of having children of their own commonly expressed a wish to “break the cycle” of sons being placed on a higher pedestal than daughters.

Other American custom complexes that Hmong emerging adults endorsed included personality traits of confidence and extraversion, and of openness about emotional states, the pursuit of higher education, striving for the American dream, and the freedom to participate in a capitalistic society. Their endorsement of these personality traits and personal goals were commonly met with pushback, however, because they contradicted Hmong custom complexes, described below.

Heritage Custom Complexes

Many participants suggested that they felt proud to be Hmong and that they identified strongly with Hmong culture. Indeed, an eagerness to

talk about Hmong culture—in the face of what they deemed a striking absence and lack of representation in academic literature and popular culture—is what drove most participants to take part in this study. Yet once participants started talking about “Hmongness,” nearly everything they discussed were Hmong values and practices they wished to change.

The vast majority of participants pushed back against Hmong gender role expectations and gender inequality. Many further pushed back against Shamanism and animism, and personality traits of obedience, deference, and emotional stoicism. Interestingly, participants in some ways endorsed the custom complexes they critiqued. For instance, several female participants who were frustrated with rigid Hmong gender role expectations suggested that their cooking and cleaning skills would enable them to fulfill individualistic American ideals. Several participants who questioned the efficacy of religious rituals continued to participate in them. A few participants who expressed frustration with their parents’ stoicism neither shared their emotions with, nor inquired about the emotions of, their parents.

The Hmong custom complex that our participants universally endorsed was that of *family*. For our participants, family was a central organizing concept that informed every corner of their lives. At present, they prioritized and respected their family and their family’s wishes. Many framed their pursuit of college education as both motivated by their family (their parents value higher education) and serving their family (education will help them get a good job, which will enable them to support family financially and materially). In the future, participants typically wished to live with or near their family in order to offer support. Although our participants centered family, this was not without complexity. Participants often felt stymied by their parents (e.g., because they did not support their independence, exploration, and emotional expression). Yet participants still felt great indebtedness and duty to their parents.

For a great many of our participants, Hmongness was shrouded in mystery. Many expressed a lack of clarity about their parents’ past, their migration to the United States, and about Hmong history more generally. Yet nearly every participant expressed pride in being Hmong. That is, the prioritization of *community* also played an important role in

participants' lives. They reported feeling connected with, and protective of, other Hmong community members. Similarly, many participants prioritized cultural preservation—especially Hmong language and dress—for the next generation. This was deemed important because these practices, and the values encoded in them, were deemed at risk of loss in the near future.

Processes of Managing Multiple Custom Complexes

Integration

Most participants situationally integrated Hmong and American custom complexes. That is, they integrated specific behaviors or values in specific situations, as opposed to having an integrated cultural identity. Hmong youth at times integrated languages by speaking “Hmonglish.” Notably, they spoke Hmonglish with particular others: similar age peers who they deemed similarly as acculturated as themselves. In contrast, they reserved “pure Hmong” for speaking with elders, and “pure English” for speaking with younger generations. (Here too, then, we see compartmentalization and alternation, which we discuss later.) Though participants occasionally framed Hmong values as serving American values (consider those who framed traditional gender roles as fostering independence), integration overwhelmingly took the form of American values serving Hmong values. For many, integration was not deemed possible at present, but was reserved as a future ideal.

Participants commonly strove to integrate the American value of *education* with the Hmong value of *community*. Many participants framed their pursuit of higher education as enabling them to give back to their community. One participant, for instance, wished to become a dietician so that she could share with the local Hmong community what they should and should not eat to manage diabetes. Another participant wished to obtain a PhD in order to train faculty and staff at universities with a substantial Hmong student body to be more culturally competent. Still another participant envisioned her college degree as a prerequisite of

earning her parents' approval, which has otherwise been denied based on her gender.

Some participants mobilized the American value of *self-expression* to honor their *family*. One such participant described the significance of her tattoo:

P: My tattoo is a Pisces sign of yin and yang. I did it to represent my grandparents because they passed, so I did two Koi fish—but it's in a Pisces sign because I'm a Pisces. And I did the yin and yang because I like balance and I believe there's balance to everything, and good and bad things happen for a reason. It's really meaningful to me.

I: So tracing back to your ancestral heritage, but also infusing your meaning into it?

P: Yea. My meaning and the historical meaning.

I: When you told your mom the meaning of it, did she—

P: No, she was still mad. She was like, "I'm still gonna skin it off!" Hmong parents, they just don't like tattoos.

Here, she exercises her bodily autonomy as a vehicle to express her affection for her grandmother, while infusing both her American subcultural interest in astrology and Hmong beliefs in karmic cause-and-effect. In spite of the fact that her tattoo honors her heritage culture in two ways, her mother rejected it.

Another participant wanted to get a tattoo of lavender flowers to honor her recently deceased grandmother, with whom she was very close. Her father disallowed this, however, reasoning that doing so would make her a *poj laib* ("a bad, or disobedient Hmong, girl"). In these cases, Hmong values of age-based hierarchy and gender roles were roadblocks to their attempted integration. This speaks to the challenges that participants often experienced with attempting to blend Hmong and American custom complexes: finding themselves stuck between conflicting cultural ideologies. This is a point to which we now turn.

Compartmentalization

Every single participant in our study compartmentalized their Hmong and American identities in some rather deep ways. For the most part, compartmentalization was a necessary consequence of an inability to integrate incompatible value systems and expectations. Participants pointed to a wide array of heritage custom complexes that are not accepted in mainstream U.S. society (e.g., gender role expectations and restrictions, collectivism, relational choice, religion, deference, modesty) and American custom complexes that are not accepted at home (e.g., gender egalitarianism, individualism, autonomous choice, freedom, extraversion, strong opinions). Because one value system could not be brought into the other sphere, they were left with little choice but to compartmentalize.

All participants who compartmentalized their Hmong and American identities alternated between the two based on circumstance. Like remotely acculturated Thai youth, proximally acculturated Hmong youth engaged in *micro-level alternation*. This occurred with linguistic frame-switching—alternating language spoken based on their interactional partner's ethnicity, age, and generation. It also occurred when transitioning from home to school spheres. At home, female participants invoked the “good Hmong girl” ideal—cooking for the family, cleaning the house, looking after siblings, and otherwise maintaining an air of deference to and respect of their parents. At school, female participants invoked another side of themselves: one that has and voices opinions, studies topics of personal interest, and talks freely with friends and peers. For this reason, several participants framed school as an escape from cultural expectations that they experienced as confining.

Highlighting the contradictions inherent in Hmong and American expectations, one participant explained:

At school, you always have to be the best. But in Hmong culture if you try too hard to be the best, then you're being too much of yourself. So I always try to stay beneath somebody so that I don't look like I'm trying too hard. But then if you just stay beneath somebody then you'll always be below them.

At school, being “the best” and making yourself known are necessary to earn good grades, get to know professors and obtain positive letters of recommendation, and to obtain a good job. At home, humility and modesty is idealized for women. For her to successfully navigate both cultural streams, she must compartmentalize and alternate between these two very different custom complexes.

Some participants further engaged in *macro-level alternation*. One participant explained that her ethnic identity salience depends on time of year. She feels most Hmong in November and December—the month leading up to, and of, Hmong New Year. The other 10 months of the year, she “just focuses on herself.” Another participant goes through periods of dying her hair blonde when she “wants to be white” and then dying it back to black when she feels distant from her cultural roots. In this instance, hair color is a symbolic marker of her cultural identity, and modifying her hair color is a way of tuning her cultural identity based on her needs at the time.

This compartmentalization of and alternation between Hmong and American custom complexes left many participants feeling that they lived in a state of perpetual limbo. The constant alternation between wholly distinct identities represented a substantial barrier to the development of a unified identity. Participants described their cultural identity confusion in vivid language and imagery. One participant described being Hmong American as akin to living “in purgatory.” Another suggested that Hmong and American cultures are “like fire and water;” still another that they are “at war with each other.” One participant who felt caught between two worlds explained, “I just want to be me! But...who is me?” Hmong participants longed for an integrated identity, but largely experienced that as an impossibility.

Though fraught, compartmentalization offered a feasible route for participants to keep their Hmong heritage culture alive while fitting into largely European American society. This calls to mind LaFromboise et al.’s (1993) hallmark paper, in which they write that “...the more an individual is able to maintain active and effective relationships through alternation between both cultures, the less difficulty he or she will have in acquiring and maintaining competency in both cultures” (p. 402). Compartmentalization and alternation enable competency in

both cultures, even if they come with risks for individual cultural identity development.

Cultural Brokerage

The overwhelming majority of our participants engaged, or attempted to engage, in cultural brokerage. This included the brokerage of skills (most often, language translation) and the brokerage of values (e.g., ideal parenting strategies, gender egalitarianism, and an awareness of mental health) to scaffold their parents' participation in American culture.

Value brokerage commonly took the form of Hmong youth attempting to incorporate what they learned at school in the home environment. One participant invoked concepts she had learned in her college parenting course to share an alternative way of parenting with her father. She recalled one specific incident:

My dad, he doesn't approve of my brother's girlfriend. [My sisters and I] were telling my dad, "Maybe you should listen to him." So we're basically telling him—we're telling him to listen, we're telling my dad to listen to my brother. Because of the things we've learned in class, you know, like active listening and stuff like that. But my father, he was like, "No, I'm the parent, so he should listen to me."

As was the case for this participant, the attempted value brokerage was not always successful.

This example speaks to challenges associated with cultural brokerage: the conflict and stress that it engenders. Parents were not often open to hearing about alternative ways of parenting, approaches to gender roles, and views of mental health. They typically deemed their child's attempted brokerage as an affront to their parental authority, which caused tension in the family dynamic. Cultural brokerage was also stressful for youth who acted as brokers. Participants recounted childhood stories in which they were asked to translate complex documents and vocabulary. In some cases, they did not understand what they were being asked to translate but did not want to disappoint their parents, which caused stress and family conflict.

In the context of immigration, like globalization, cultural brokerage enables the maintenance and transformation of traditional power structures. Where Hmong youth obliged with language translation, they upheld their parents' wishes and age-based hierarchy. Yet the other forms of cultural brokerage in which they engaged point to their attempts at socializing their parents toward American practices and ideologies.

Lingering Questions and Future Directions

As a result of globalization and immigration, young people around the world endorse multiple custom complexes. When possible, custom complexes are integrated; when integration is impossible or undesirable, custom complexes are compartmentalized and brokered. In the paragraphs that follow, we note key takeaways and pressing questions facing the field of acculturation.

1. Remote and proximal acculturation are often treated and studied as distinct phenomena, but because parallel psychological processes underpin them, they are useful to study in tandem. Importantly, proximal and remote acculturation also co-occur. Particularly when barriers exist to remote enculturation (or learning one's heritage culture from afar; Ferguson et al., 2016), as it does for Hmong youth who do not have a "home country" per se, proximally acculturated youth may be inclined to remotely acculturate. (Consider here the example of Hmong youth acculturating to Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Thai, and Indian cultures.) We need to know more about how remote and proximal acculturation processes intersect to influence the cultural identity development of bicultural youth.
2. Young people often compartmentalize local and global custom complexes (in the case of remote acculturation) and heritage and majority custom complexes (in the case of proximal acculturation). Many young people engage in micro-level alternation, switching between cultural frames based on circumstance (e.g., language switching) throughout the day. Young people also engage in macro-level alternation, switching between cultural frames and identities

over much longer periods of time (e.g., by divvying up the year, or the life course). We need to know more about these forms of alternation and their adaptiveness. Research suggests that alternation and cultural frame-switching can be adaptive ways of managing multiple sets of expectations (Ferguson et al., 2020; LaFromboise et al., 1993). Based on evidence discussed in this paper, however, we expect that alternation (micro- and macro-level alike) is adaptive when agentic and maladaptive when imposed.

3. Although integration and compartmentalization are often treated as individual-level traits (e.g., Berry, 1995; Chen et al., 2008; Hsiao & Wittig, 2008), individuals in fact employ multiple identity styles, depending on the feasibility of integrating particular cultural practices or values. We suspect that the compartmentalization of a great many custom complexes engenders cultural identity confusion, and is therefore less adaptive than circumstantial compartmentalization.
4. Research suggests that cultural brokerage presents opportunities for proximally and remotely acculturated youth (Guan et al., 2014; McKenzie, Rooney, et al., 2019), yet this paper highlights that cultural brokerage is also a source of internal stress and anxiety and interpersonal problems. For whom, and in what contexts, is cultural brokerage adaptive?
5. What other psychological strategies do young people employ to manage multiple custom complexes? Are negotiation strategies domain specific? Do—and how do—negotiation strategies change across the life course?

Conclusion

This chapter draws attention to the shared psychological strategies that youth who are bicultural by way of globalization and immigration employ to manage multiple sets of custom complexes. When it is impossible or undesirable for two custom complexes to be integrated, young people compartmentalize and alternate between the two distinct custom complexes. Importantly, young people also effect (or attempt to effect) cultural change by brokering new custom complexes to their parents. In

totality, this chapter connects remote and proximal acculturation fields of study, and draws attention to opportunities and challenges facing remotely and proximally acculturated youth.

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