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## **Lifestyle Migration in Thailand: A Case Study of German Migrants in Pattaya**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the emerging phenomenon of German migration to Pattaya, a well-known tourist beach city on the east coast of the Gulf of Thailand, using lifestyle migration as a theoretical framework. The data are based on six months of ethnographic study of German communities and in-depth interviews with twelve German migrants in Pattaya. We argue that German migration to Pattaya can be conceptualized as lifestyle migration since it is a move of individuals from a more developed country to a less developed one in search of a better life. Consistent with the narrative of lifestyle migration, German migrants in Pattaya cite negative circumstances before migration and a better life after migration as their motivation. In addition, findings reveal that relationships with Thai women play an important role in the migration of German migrants, who are predominantly older males, to Pattaya. This indicates that in the case of German migration to Pattaya, lifestyle migration is gendered and closely linked to marriage migration.

### **Keywords**

Lifestyle migration, Marriage migration, German, Pattaya, Thailand

## **Introduction**

In March 2009, *Der Spiegel*, a leading German news magazine, reported a growing trend of German migration to Thailand pointing out that thousands of Germans were living in Pattaya, a tourist beach city east of Bangkok. According to the magazine article, these German migrants moved to Thailand and intended to spend the rest of their lives in the so-called “paradise,” where they lived a desirable lifestyle, enjoying freedom, alcohol, and women. Motivations for moving to Thailand varied, but the two most common reasons cited were: dissatisfaction with the homeland, and the desire to make a fresh start. These migrants’ last wish was to have their ashes buried on Pattaya beach (Osang, 2009). Today, Thailand, particularly Pattaya, is one of the top spots among German migrants. An estimated number of German nationals residing in Thailand is 30,000 (Deutscher Hilfsverein Thailand e.V., n.d.) while an estimate of those residing in Pattaya is 7,000 – 8,000 (Kubelka, 2013).

This article will discuss the relocation of German nationals to reside in Pattaya using “lifestyle migration” as a key theoretical framework. Lifestyle migration is a relatively new concept in migration studies, referring to the phenomenon in which citizens of all ages from affluent industrialized nations move either permanently or temporarily to a meaningful place in pursuit of a better quality of life (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009). This phenomenon is widespread but the literature on lifestyle migration has mainly focused on cases in Europe and the Americas (with exceptions such as Green (2014; 2015) on Western retirees in Malaysia and Indonesia and Van Laar et al. (2014) on second-home development in South Africa). In recent years, Thailand has received an increasing number of Western migrants and the trend has captured academic attention. Scholarly research that examines this new trend of the West to Thailand migration includes Howard’s (2008; 2009) survey-based studies on the motivations and experiences of Western migrants in Thailand, Maher and Lafferty’s (2014) ethnographic studies on white migrants masculinities in Thailand, and Husa et al. (2014) and Vielhaber et al. (2014)’s surveys on the extent, structure, causes and consequences of international retirement migration to Thailand. Despite explaining motivations of Western migrants in leaving their home countries for Thailand, none of these studies has adopted lifestyle migration as a conceptual framework. While the number of German migrants in Thailand has been increasing, especially older persons and retirees, academic knowledge on this group of people is very limited. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap by applying the concept of lifestyle migration to understand the case of German migration to Pattaya. Through six months of ethnographic study and in-depth interviews with 12 German migrants in Pattaya, this study finds that “a better quality of life” does play an important role in motivating German migrants to relocate to Pattaya. Yet with the over-representation of older male migrants in this form of Western-Thai mobility, German migration to Pattaya represents lifestyle migration with unique characteristics. The important

role Thai women play in motivating German men to move to Pattaya suggests that this case of lifestyle migration is gendered and closely linked to marriage migration.

### **Lifestyle migration as a conceptual framework**

According to Benson and O'Reilly (2009), lifestyle migration involves "relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, a better quality of life (ibid., p. 209). Lifestyle migration is described as a comparative project between life before and after migration and entails the re-negotiation of work-life balance, quality of life, and the freedom from prior constraints. As stated in the existing literature on lifestyle migration, motivations for migrants to move to chosen destinations encompass a more relaxed life, lower cost of living, affordable property prices, the desire to leave home country, a business opportunity, culture and a better life for their children (O'Reilly, 2007; 2009; O'Reilly & Benson, 2009). Globalization greatly facilitates the growing trend of lifestyle migration. Improved living standard, increasing wealth, advanced communication technologies and ease of transportation have contributed to this new form of mobility (Benson & O' Reilly, 2009).

Moving in a pursuit of lifestyle to a desirable destination, lifestyle migration is partially overlapped with tourism (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; O'Reilly, 2003; O'Reilly, 2007). The literature on lifestyle migration often depicts the move of Westerners from a cold climate to sunny coastal tourist resorts (Torkington, 2010; O'Reilly, 2009). Destinations for lifestyle migration are often holiday destinations (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009) and even though not all lifestyle migrants began as a tourist, their migration is tourism-informed (Williams & Hall, 2002). Prior tourism experience was an important factor in migration decision (Husa et al, 2014; Williams & Hall, 2002). Many lifestyle migrants first visit a destination as a tourist. They like what they see and experience, fantasize about living a life of their dreams there and finally decide to migrate. Consistent with the narrative of lifestyle migration, many German migrants in Pattaya explain their relocation to the Thai beach city as an escape from the negative lifestyle in their country of origin in search for a more fulfilling way of life in Pattaya where they have visited several times as tourists.

What is not normally recognized is that lifestyle migration is a gendered process and concepts of a good life, home, belonging, community and ethnicity are highly gendered. Gender, in fact, exerts a profound and pervasive influence on lifestyle and frequently acts as a signifier for 'lifestyle,' and vice versa (Croucher, 2014, p. 21). The flow of Western migration to Thailand is a highly selective process in terms of age and gender (Husa et al., 2014).Western migrants in Thailand are predominantly male, especially elderly migrants from European countries and the USA who arrive without wives or children (Howard; 2008; 2009; Husa et al, 2014; Maher& Lafferty, 2014). Husa et al.'s (2014) study reveals that the

availability of a new Thai partner stands out as one of the main attractions to Thailand, a destination that some Westerners think is more suitable for men than for women. While lifestyle migration in other regions, for example, British lifestyle migrants in France (Benson, 2009) and British lifestyle migrants in Spain (O'Reilly, 2009) move as a family or couple, German male migrants mostly arrive in Pattaya alone. Thai women are involved in almost every aspect of German migrants' lives - especially motivation to migrate - and are an integral part of the enhanced lifestyle German migrants now enjoy. Instead of women from less affluent regions migrating as brides to more economically advanced countries, in this case it is German men who resettle far from home as husbands and sometimes fathers to Thai nationals. This study will highlight the fact that German migration to Pattaya is highly gendered and closely linked to marriage migration. Fulfillment of sex life and romantic relationship as well as forming and maintaining family life are important part of many German migrants' lives in Pattaya. This complexity and multiplicity of migration motivations and trajectories could not be captured by a simple categorization. As Trundle (2009, p. 64) stated, "In creating a new category of migrants we should be wary of such a category's strength to hide the life span developments and changes that migrant's experience".

## **Data and Methods**

This study is based on six months of ethnographic research in Pattaya, a tourist resort located on the eastern coastline of Thailand's Gulf of Siam. In 2012, the city attracted around nine million visitors from around the world (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2014) and it tends to appeal to long stay tourists rather than short-stay visitors (Pattaya City Hall; 2012). From a small fishing village, the city had become a world famous tourist town by 1959, when American troops arranged with the Thai Government to use U-Tapao airport as their base during the Vietnam War. It was not only used as a military base to supply American troops in Vietnam, but also for rest and recreation (R&R) for the soldiers (Cohen, 2003). When the US troops began to withdraw from the city in 1970, the decreasing number of American soldiers was replaced by foreign tourists from various countries (Chantavanich et al., 1999). Since then, the city has been developed intentionally to attract an influx of foreign tourists with major developments including infrastructure, services, and entertainment businesses. Therefore, the economy of Pattaya relies predominantly on tourism and the service industry. Undeniably, prostitution was a highly influential part of Pattaya's tourism image (Suntikul, 2014). Pattaya was chosen as the research site for this study because of the high number of German residents and the prominent German community in the city. The area 'North Pattaya' is known as a German village because of the high concentration of German residents with shops, restaurants, book stores and other facilities catering specifically to German customers.

Our research methods were a combination of participant observation at several meetings and group talks among members of the German community in Pattaya, non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews and informal interviews. Access was gained through the German speaking Pattaya Expats Club and Meeting Center Pattaya. We interviewed Germans who met the following criteria: male or female of German nationality, aged 18 and above, had been living in Pattaya for at least three months and were neither an employee of an international corporation nor a diplomat. We conducted 12 interviews, 11 participants of which were men and one a woman. Thus, no claims of a representative sample of all Germans in Pattaya can be made. The correspondents' ages ranged from 52 to 84 years old, and although there was initially no age limitation for the participants, those of retirement age were clearly overrepresented. During fieldwork, the young foreigners who we encountered were mostly tourists. Female Germans were relatively few and far between. The migrants' duration of stay was from three months to 20 years. Their previous employment varied, for example, business owner, government officer, engineer, skilled worker and others. Almost all of the participants lived on a pension of about 1,000 Euro – 4, 0000 Euros a month. The marital status of the male participants prior to migration to Thailand was: eight of them were divorced, two widowed, and the other was single. All male participants had established relationships with Thai women in varying forms: four participants were married to Thai women, four lived with their Thai girlfriend and three regularly visit bargirls. Only the female migrant was married to a fellow German and maintained no relationships with Thai men.

### **Leaving Germany**

The key characteristic of lifestyle migration as conceptualized by the literature is unpleasant life before migration (O'Reilly & Benson, 2009) in which migrants were dissatisfied with life in the home country and explain migration to a receiving country as a choice to search for a better way of life (Korpela, 2009; Nudrali & O'Reilly 2009; O'Reilly, 2009). Consistent with this narrative of lifestyle migration, our participants usually describe their lives in Germany as a life full of stress. Anton (no age revealed) who moved to Thailand in 1995, noted "I don't like Germany. I left Germany because I hate Germany. I'm German but I hate my country." Anton was an electrician whose life before migration was too stressful. He faced a lot of pressure from work because of German culture and explained that sometimes he felt like he couldn't breathe. Anton saw himself as different from his compatriots who are, as he described, cold, arrogant, humorless, highly disciplined and perfectionists. He didn't have a good relationship with his colleagues or his family. He lived separately from his parents since he was a teenager, had little contact with them, and now doesn't have a deep bond with them. He started to travel to Pattaya at the end of the 1980s

and kept visiting the place until 1995 when he decided to sell all he owned back home and migrate to Pattaya. The reason he migrated was because he couldn't stand the pressure and the disliked the feeling he felt at home. He stated that he hated his country of origin and that he felt comfortable in Pattaya where the relaxed atmosphere suits his easy going attitude. In his opinion, Thai people are friendly and tolerant which is completely different from people in the county he came from.

While lifestyle migrants leave their country of origin because of their unpleasant lives before migration, some of them may leave at some a vital point in life such as a serious illness, a birth or death in the family, a marriage or divorce, job loss or other employment changes (Hoey, 2009). Kevin (70), a business owner who sold his company after his divorce, is a good case in point. Kevin divorced his German wife in 2012 after being together for 33 years.

He was totally upset, sold his business and intended to escape from Germany. He explained "I wasn't thinking about anything. I had just divorced my wife. I just wanted to escape from Germany and my hometown. I sold my company. I wanted to go to a sunny place with a warm climate". He would have gone to Las Vegas, his favorite holiday destination, had his friend who owns a business in Pattaya not asked him to come and work for him as a consultant. Kevin stressed that he was sad and felt lonely because he loved his wife very much and had never been unfaithful to her. He now has a 20-something Thai girlfriend whom, according to him, he met by chance at the golf course where he plays golf with his international friends.

Though economic hardship is not the main motivation for lifestyle migration, it can be a reason for migration as well (Croucher, 2014). Although Melanie (52) also felt unsatisfied with her life in Germany, it is not only this reason that made her want to leave the country. After visiting a friend in Pattaya, Melanie and her husband considered moving to Pattaya because they liked the atmosphere. As Melanie stated, Pattaya has nice beaches and islands with a pleasant climate where she and her husband can enjoy swimming and sunbathing. In contrast to Germany, Thailand doesn't have strict rules and Thai people are relaxed. However, money is another main motivation for her. Since she and her husband will be retired in eight years or less. She started planning her future. How to have a good life during retirement when she has to live on a lower income is a question she reflects on. Moving to Pattaya presents a good solution that would allow her and her husband to live a comfortable life on a lower budget.

One of our friends moved to Pattaya and rents 100 square meters apartment with 60 square meters balcony. The rental payment each month included swimming pool where she can go swimming every day and with 24-hour security is 200 €. In Germany, that is completely ripped-off for the same kind of room and services. This is

one reason that makes us want to go to Thailand. If we get a pension, we could afford the expenses; rental payment, personal expenses, and public transport fare. We could live, based on the current situation, we don't talk about 15-20 years later, we don't know what would happen in the future, we could have a better life in Thailand with our pension due to the cost of living and cheap rental apartment. In Germany, a rent for 100 square meters apartment is about 800 €. If the pension is less than our monthly salary, we could not pay a rent in Germany. Thus, living in Thailand is a better choice. This is why we want to live here.

(Melanie, 52)

Likewise, Christian told me that he actually would love to stay in Germany had he had enough money. His 1,000 Euros pension is only a little money but its value goes much further in Thailand. He enjoys recreational activities available in Pattaya i.e. yoga, archery, and swimming, for which he could not afford in his hometown. Living a decent European standard of life in Pattaya would cost around 1,000 – 1,500 Euro a month depending on the type of accommodation and individuals' expenses (group talk on Life in Thailand, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015). Howard (2008) and Vielhaber et al. (2014) have found that stronger Western currencies enable Western migrants in Thailand to enjoy the same living standard or even a more luxurious lifestyle. Likewise, German migrants enjoy a luxury and desirable lifestyle in Pattaya where living costs are much lower than in their home country.

### **A better life in Pattaya**

What distinguishes lifestyle migration from other migration typologies is the motivation for migration. Lifestyle migrants' motivation is based on "their belief that a change of residential place will lead not simply to better opportunities in life, but rather to something which might be described as a better lifestyle and/or a more fulfilling way of life" (Torkington, 2010, p. 102). German migrants intentionally choose Pattaya after considering between life in Germany and Pattaya or in some cases between another tourist destination and Pattaya, like Sebastian (84), who decided to settle in Pattaya after comparing the cost of living between Pattaya and Spain. The participants mostly visit Pattaya several times before deciding to settle or they, at least, had experienced how life was in Pattaya. Nevertheless, life following migration was, for some German migrants, challenging. As Christian (61) explains, "It was quite difficult at the beginning. It was difficult to find friends or something to do... something I like and want to do". Thus, some German residents of Pattaya chose to live between two countries. For example, Frank (66) used to spend three months in Pattaya, then fly to Germany to spend three months in his home country, and then come back again to Pattaya for another three months. Until he was familiar with life in Pattaya, he spent six months in Pattaya and another six months in Germany in a year. German migrants who are more

settled in Pattaya only visit Germany for a short time. The longer they have lived in Pattaya, the less frequently they visit their home country. Some might start with an annual home visit at the beginning but reduce the trip home to once in two or three years after they have lived longer in Pattaya. Those who no longer have ties with their homeland like Anton, who sold everything in Germany, rarely go back to their home country.

German migrant's choice to live in Pattaya reflects their understanding of a good life which in turn shapes their migration experience. According to Vielhaber et al. (2014), tourist destinations are always preferable for Western migrants in Thailand because of the availability of desirable amenities. After living briefly in Pattaya, Sebastian (84) met his then girlfriend and moved to live with her in Isaan. He did not enjoy life in Isaan much because of the lack of international restaurants and big supermarkets where he could buy European consumer goods. The convenience and international orientation of Pattaya also fascinated Benjamin (69) who lived in Italy for 17 years with his first Thai wife and his parents who retired there. When Benjamin's parents passed away, the couple moved to Bangkok where they lived for a few years before finally divorcing. Benjamin met his current Thai wife in Bangkok. Instead of living in Bangkok, he decided to relocate to Pattaya. Benjamin noted, "Pattaya is the best place for foreigners. There is everything here; hospitals, shops, good weather, bars and everything". He also explained that he had a language barrier in Bangkok but not in Pattaya. "Everyone in Pattaya speaks English, so I don't have any problem". German migrants enjoy a comfortable life in the international environment Pattaya has to offer. Pattaya's tourist-oriented environment allows German migrants to live as if they were in Germany. They are surrounded by German-speaking people. They enjoy German food and keep up with news in Germany through German newspapers, radio and TV programs, all available in Pattaya. One of the research participants chose to live in Bangsarae, a 15 minute drive from Pattaya, because he could not stand the dirty and hectic life in Pattaya city. Still, he comes to Pattaya once or twice a week in order to catch up with other German speakers and to buy European consumer goods.

Medical care and services are another main attraction of Pattaya. Good medical facilities and specialized medical services are available mostly in big cities while rural areas often have limited resources (Lloyd-Sherlock, 2006). Pattaya offers good quality hospitals, both public and private, and language translators are available to provide help and ensure that foreign patients receive the best care. Good medical services in foreign languages are a great advantage of living in a tourist town such as Pattaya compared to what are available in other cities of Thailand, particularly in the Isaan region. Andreas (63) said he wanted to live in the northern part of Thailand like Chiang Mai but his girlfriend insisted that Pattaya is the most appropriate place for his 87 years old mother who has a heart disease and himself. "She said Pattaya has the best medical care for us. There are a lot of good quality hospitals."



Before Andreas' mother passed away, she had received the best treatment from a public hospital in Pattaya. Andreas was admitted to a hospital last year but without the help of a translator. "I have got the best translator, my girlfriend. I know she will tell me the truth". Andreas now lives his life in Pattaya happily as if he was in Germany.

If I don't see the palms I grew, I would never know I am living in Thailand. I watch German TV programs. I listen to German radio. My wife and my granddaughter speak German. And we, especially I, eat German food almost all of the time.

(Andreas, 63)

It is apparent that German migrants enjoy a positive alternative lifestyle, which is one of the fundamental features of lifestyle migration as conceptualized in the literature (O'Reilly & Benson, 2009). German migrants who live in Pattaya do not have to adjust themselves much because the international environment in Pattaya makes it easy for them to live as if they were in Germany but with a sunny climate and lower costs of living. Many of the participants emphasize that they have a better life in Pattaya. They live their lives in Pattaya with no plans and deadlines, which they had never experienced in Germany for their entire lives. They do not have to work hard like when they were in Germany and they have time to do anything they want to such as surfing the internet, gardening, walking along the beach, working out, reading, shopping, drinking beer or simply hanging out. German migrants in Pattaya have a lifestyle similar to that of the expatriates in Hua Hin and Cha-am in Husa et al.'s (2014) study, who live an easy, relaxed and stress-free yet active life. Martin noted, "I have a better life in Thailand, I am happier than when I was in Germany because I have more freedom which is good for my life" (Martin, 76). In Pattaya, German migrants are free from western norms and taboos. They can do whatever they want to, especially drinking, visiting bargirls and pairing with a young Thai woman, in many cases, much younger. In contrast to the West, Thailand lacks overt ageism (Howard, 2008, 2009). Living in Pattaya gives German migrants who are mostly in an advanced age possibilities to do what is not normally acceptable in German society: dating a young woman. Kevin stated that he would never be able to find another partner if he still lived in Germany "the advantage of living here is that I am 70 years old now but I can still have a girlfriend. You can't do that in Germany" (Kevin, 70).

### **The role of Thai women**

Similar to other studies on Western male migrants in Thailand (for example, Howard 2008, 2009; Mahler & Lafferty, 2014), this study found that for many divorced elderly male migrants, the lure of often far younger Thai women who are willing to satisfy their masculine

desires is what attracts them to Thailand. In Thailand, Western male migrants in an advanced age can once again date, remarry, and settle down with a woman. As stated earlier, almost all of the German participants in this study were divorced or widowed. Pattaya, a place full of young and attractive Thai women, offers great opportunities for Western men to find a woman to be with—from a bargirl to long term girlfriend and marital partner. Robert (71) for example, bought a package tour to Thailand for the first time in 1980 and kept visiting Pattaya every two or three years to visit bargirls. The more often he visited Pattaya, the more he saw opportunities for a self-managed tour. He learned how to live in Pattaya affordably. Besides, he noted that life in Pattaya was completely different from his life in Germany where he lived alone after divorcing his German wife. When visiting Pattaya, he had a great time going out with many Thai women and never felt lonely. He was determined to settle in Pattaya once he had saved enough money. After working very hard for many years in Germany, he finally migrated to Pattaya in 1998 and married a Thai woman seven years ago.

There are many German-Thai couples who have lived together in Germany and some German husbands decide to move to Thailand partly because of the Thai spouse's desire to spend the rest of her life in her home country. This happens at a point of time when the German husband undergoes changes in his life. The compatibility between the wife's desire to return home and the husband's desire for a change leads to the migration of the couple to Thailand, often in their later life. Since the German husbands are typically in their late fifties or sixties when they decide to leave Germany, they no longer have responsibilities back home and are ready to start a new life. Philip (58) and his Thai wife are an example of such a couple who moved from Germany to Pattaya. Phillip had been divorced from two German ex-wives when he met his current Thai wife during her visit in Germany in around 1999-2000. He flew back and forth between Germany and Thailand as the relationship blossomed. He finally married her in 2003 and the couple settled in Germany. He knew his wife's life in Germany was not easy. She deeply missed her home country and her family. He would have loved to spend his twilight years in either Germany or the US if not for his Thai partner. Moving to Thailand was a big decision for him. The only reason he moved to Pattaya was because of his wife.

We moved to Thailand because of my wife. She had a massage shop (in Germany) and her hands, arms and bonesached. She wanted to take a break in Thailand. So we talked and I said if she wanted to leave for Thailand, we had to do it now when I didn't have to work anymore. If I were 65 or 70 years old I would not give it a try.

(Philip, 58)

Having spent a year in Thailand he realized he does not belong here. However, he feels that this is the only thing he can do for his wife. He recounted that his wife patiently lived

in Germany for him for more than ten years and now it should be his turn to do something for her. Although he wants to go back to Germany, he will let his wife decide their future “Will we move back or will we stay here? I don’t know. It depends on my wife. I begged her to live in Germany for 14 years. Now it is her turn” (Phillip, 58).

Robert and Philip’s migration stories are not atypical and they reveal a close connection between lifestyle migration and marriage migration in the case of German migration to Pattaya. Enjoying sexual freedom and escaping loneliness in Germany constitute a better life in Thailand for Robert who later settled down in a marriage with a Thai woman. German husbands of Thai return migrants relocate to Thailand at an important point in life and gain an improved quality of life similar to residential tourists and lifestyle migrants in other studies. For German husbands of Thai women in Pattaya, the quality of life remains the same or even better than their lives in Germany. Although Phillip does not enjoy his life in Pattaya much, he could not deny that his way of life is now more relaxed and free. If lifestyle migration is presented as “a route to a better and more fulfilling way of life (O’ Reilly & Benson, 2009)”, German migrants in Pattaya who migrate because of Thai women should be part of this phenomenon as well.

According to Croucher (2014), gender plays a vital role in the lifestyle migration and concepts of a good life, home, belonging, community and ethnicity are highly gendered. Gender, in fact, “exerts a profound and pervasive influence on lifestyle and frequently acts as a signifier for ‘lifestyle,’ and vice versa” (Croucher, 2014, p.21). Croucher (2014) pointed out that certain groups of lifestyle migrants are motivated by their desire to negotiate with and emancipate themselves from gender constraints in their country of origin. Although scholarly works on gender and lifestyle migration often focus on female migrants (e.g. Croucher 2014; Blue, 2000; O’Reilly, 2000), male lifestyle migrants’ motivations and experiences are also gendered. Men migrate to achieve a desirable gendered role such as a breadwinner (Wilde-Menozzi, 2003; Croucher, 2014). For Western male migrants in Maher & Lafferty’s (2014) study, living in Thailand provides them a sense of empowerment and a chance not always possible in their home country to perform the role of a real white man who provides for the family.

This role of Western male providers for an extended family of a Thai wife is not always liberating. Many German men, though not all, complained about their wife’s family members who repeatedly asked them for money. For some male German migrants, living in Pattaya instead of in their wives’ communities in Isaan helps mitigate the tension between them and their Thai in-laws. Phillip (58) was always upset with his wife’s family. During the time they were in Germany, his wife sent monthly remittances to support her large extended family. She was the youngest of nine children. One of her brothers wanted to run in a local election and asked Phillip and his wife for 50,000 Baht. When Phillip refused to give the

money, he immediately had a serious problem with his wife's family. In Thai society, men are expected to provide financial support to their girlfriend and Thai women are also expected to support her family as a dutiful daughter. Thus Western men who cohabit with Thais may face this repeated request for money which can lead to a problem in their relationships with Thai partners (Howard, 2008; Maher & Lafferty, 2014). Andreas and his Thai partner agreed to live in Pattaya in order to avoid such problem. The couple had lived together in Germany for eight years before they moved to Thailand in 2008. Andreas's partner worked very hard in order to support her big family in Isaan. It was her idea to build a house and settle in Pattaya in order to avoid future conflicts between Andreas and her family members. The couple sends money to the wife's family monthly and takes care of the entire family. While Thompson, Kittisaand Smutkupt (2016) argued that Western male partners of Isaan women have settled in Isaan and assumed the identity of sons-in-law to counter the sex tourist stereotype, this study found that German men who are with Isaan partners intentionally choose to live in Pattaya to keep a distance from the wives' families. They might spend a few days visiting their wives' families and return to Pattaya where they can live a German life equipped with Western services and amenities free from the bother of the Thai partner's family.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of lifestyle migration is useful for understanding German migration to Thailand. Given their motivations to migrate in search of a better life, German migrants in Pattaya could be partly described as lifestyle migrants. In addition, this study found that German migration to Pattaya is highly gendered in that a vast majority of the migrants are male over the age of 55. Existing relationships with Thai women or the desire to meet Thai women for sexual and romantic relationships motivated many of the migrants to relocate to Pattaya. Our findings are consistent with Croucher's (2014) argument that gender plays a vital role in lifestyle migration and that concepts of a good life, home, belonging, community and ethnicity are highly gendered. Gender, in fact, "exerts a profound and pervasive influence on lifestyle and frequently acts as a signifier for 'lifestyle,' and vice versa" (Croucher, 2014, p. 21). The important role Thai women play in German migration to Pattaya suggests that this trend of migration is closely linked to marriage migration, which is in turn directly or indirectly linked to international sex tourism in Thailand. The interconnection between lifestyle migration and marriage migration in the case of German migrants in Pattaya reveals that a new migration category 'lifestyle migration' is just one dimension that does not fully capture the complexity of migration experiences and motivations.

Further research will be needed to understand the growing phenomenon of lifestyle migration to Thailand. So far, Thai local and national governments have promoted lifestyle migration, or its other names—retirement migration and long-stay tourism, as an economic development strategy. We have not fully understood social and economic implications of this new trend of tourism/migration in Thailand. Our findings suggest that German migrants prefer to reside in tourist areas among other migrants and tourists. They only have limited interactions with local people and the host society. Relationships with the locals are superficial and founded mostly on monetary exchanges. As Cohen (1977) proposed, the interactions between the expatriates and the locals are at the same level of the social contact between the locals and the tourists. The drawback of living comfortably in a tourist 'bubble' like Pattaya is that migrants are not motivated to integrate into the host society and will remain outsiders no matter how long they live in the country. The feeling of not belonging is also caused by Thai immigration policy that does not recognize permanent resident status of most Western migrants who need to renew their visa every year or so. The emerging phenomenon of lifestyle migration in Thailand will contribute to increasing diversity in Thai society and we need to know more about its implications.

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