

# **Human Sciences Encounters in Phnom-Penh: Past Presentations: The expat life with a local wife**

## **The expat life with a local wife: Western male settlement in Thailand and how state policies shape migration in the region Some insights for Cambodia**

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This research explores the trend of western men migrating to northeast Thailand and settling there at least semi-permanently with Thai wives or partners. Thailand has long attracted western men, after a leisure and sex industry developed in the wake of the Vietnam War. As a result, Thailand has become a top sex tourist destination in the world as well as being a popular source of brides for transnational marriages facilitated by the internet. Both of these industries have historically generated relationships between Thai women and western men that have often resulted in the women migrating abroad. However, growing numbers of western men in relationships with Thai women are now the ones who undertake a move of residence. In many cases, they settle in big cities or tourist locales, but others move to their partner's home village in more remote provinces. This research, which draws on ethnographic PhD fieldwork, examines not only the motivations and imaginings of the men who settle in Thailand, but also how those expectations of people and place are experienced over time. Additionally, by comparing Thai and Cambodian state policies regarding marriage, visas and property ownership, this paper will discuss how these policies may end up shaping future relationships and migration patterns in the region.