Thai Students’ Expectations on Their Professional Future
With a Lifelong Learning Perspective

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Lifelong learning is known and well-studied in the West, but many times the findings of studies conducted in Europe and USA are simplified to universal findings. Although the world is not that simplistic, it is often argued that the East has a more collectivistic culture while the West is leaning more towards an individualistic. Only a few studies have been conducted on the subject in the East and those studies have a macro-perspective with a focus on political and economic values, while the individual perspective is left unexplored. The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of what Thai students expect from their professional future from a lifelong learning perspective and how culture in terms of individualistic and collectivistic dimensions influences these expectations. This is a qualitative study where our empirical data come from ten semi-structured interviews, with last year’s university students in Bangkok. The findings showed that the students’ expectations are influenced by the collectivistic culture while at the same time being connected with the rapid moving society around them. This could be seen as a divided thinking between old traditions and new possibilities, between individualistic dreams and collectivistic loyalty. The findings suggest that lifelong learning in Thailand is influenced by more than just the collectivistic dimension, as previous research shows. We offer a consideration of the situation above and believe young adults are finding their own way, trying to please both sides of a complex situation.

Keywords
Lifelong learning, Students, Collectivism, Individualism, Thailand, Adult learning, Professional future.
Thailändska studenters förväntningar på deras framtida yrkesliv

Ur ett perspektiv av livslångt lärande

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Nyckelord
Livslångt lärande, Studenter, Kollektivism, Individualism, Thailand, Vuxenlärande, Informellt lärande, Yrkesliv.
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Background

Introduction
Lifelong learning is a complex concept without any clear definitions or frameworks. This gets more interesting considering how many people it affects on a daily basis. A lot of research has been conducted on the term, but there is currently no broadly agreed definition or theory to clarify the field. The complexity receives a further dimension when the expansion of lifelong learning is taken under consideration too. Recent studies in East Asia show that lifelong learning takes different shapes and has different way of institutionalizing itself depending on where the development occurs (Han, 2017). Studies have been made from a macro-perspective, and represent the voice of politics and economics (Frąckowiak, 2017). Research also shows that the perspective given might be too simplistic and generalising with as much as 92% of the research done on the topic coming from Europe or the USA (Osborne & Borkowska, 2017). Most thoughts on lifelong learning are therefore made on Western assumptions with influences of individualistic culture while the collectivist perspective is not taken into consideration (Makino & Han, 2014). Cross-cultural research is needed to gain deeper understanding of the relationship between lifelong learning and culture (Tam, 2018). To gain more attraction in the East, the field calls for a research on the topic that is multiple and rich (Osborne & Borkowska, 2017). The intention of this study is therefore to follow up on this major examination by looking closer from a micro-perspective.

The interviewees in this study are students who are about to start their career and we want to gain more knowledge about their expectations on their future learning. Lifelong learning is a phenomenon that is spreading and starting to gain more attention in the Eastern world (Osborne & Borkowska, 2017). At the same time changes in society are moving rapidly and individuals are working hard to keep up with the changes (Rosa, 2014). Lifelong learning is a subject within adult learning and education, it is under constant development and we therefore want to learn more about how this phenomenon is developing in Thailand.

Problem setting
When conducting studies we try to make the results generalisable to apply to a wider group. For example when research is conducted on adult learning, the results are generalised to adults all around the world. The problem is that most data from studies are from WEIRD West, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic societies (Heine, 2015). Therefore we really do not know much about the universal phenomena. In fact, the participants in most studies are not even representative of the West. There are arguments that a typical psychological database represents a very narrow slice of the world’s population. So how much can we really say about the phenomenon of lifelong learning in the world? The authors of a recent article from 2017 concluded that fewer than 8% of the articles from the three journals International Journal of Lifelong Education, International Review of Education and Adult Education Quarterly are conducted in the East (Osborne & Borkowska, 2017). This article also raises the issue that the Western articles in these journals are focusing on the individual competency and employment whereas the Eastern ones reflect the social collectivism culture that exists in the East which is more community-based. This means that even if a phenomenon exists worldwide, it can look
different or mean something else depending on the culture. A classic example is that of a Swedish team that conducted a research of “Indian family dinner” only to find out after the research that there is no such thing as a family dinner in that culture and the studied family dinner was staged and unnatural (Heine, 2015). It is important to have knowledge about the culture and take that knowledge into consideration when conducting a study. Another example of a theory that is not applicable worldwide is the five factor model of personality, a grand theory also known as The Big Five (Heine, 2015). Theories within lifelong learning have been criticized for defining the world as seen from a Western perspective. One specific theory that we find interesting is one that relates to the acceleration of life (Rosa, 2014). Acceleration exists in different parts of our lives, which is something that affects our learning. When society and life conditions change around us we need to develop in order to keep up with the new speed. This theory has been criticized for being too Western oriented. Rosa (2014) himself actually abstains from claiming that his theories are valid in Brazil, India or Africa. A guess from our side is that Thailand also belongs to this group.

One relevant aspect is the cultural differences in individualistic and collectivistic dimensions. It is a continuous spectrum, where we in general divide the world in the individualistic West and collectivistic East. The world is not as black and white as that, the nuances are shown both in continents and within countries. Therefore we believe a follow up on this critique is interesting, by digging deeper and learning more about its relevance.
Previous research and theories

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is a phenomenon that has drawn attention over the last century. Researchers like Jarvis (2009) claim that learning is no longer considered to occur only in school. People continue to learn all thru their lives, from the cradle to the grave. Learning is a continuous process and we need to keep learning new things in order to keep up with a constantly and rapidly changing society (Rosa, 2014). As mentioned above, lifelong learning has up until now no broadly agreed upon definition, but instead, various different theories that attempt to summarize the area adequately. One of these theories is andragogy which is of great interest when it comes to adult learning. Andragogy is a theory that demonstrates the differences between the learning of adults and the learning of children. An important difference is that andragogy is based on the concept of self-directed learning where the adult is responsible for their own learning. Andragogy is also based on the fact that adults have significantly more life experience than children and that experience is something adults use in order to learn more. Reflection and self-motivation are two additional key concepts in this theory. It is a well-established theory that has undergone examinations and endured through critiques over the years (Merriam, 2001). The strongest argument for the importance of lifelong learning is for people to keep up with changes in society both in terms of information and new knowledge (Medel-Añonuevo, 2001).

Acceleration, modernity and identity

The most interesting theory relative to this study is the one that refers to life changes in terms of acceleration (Rosa, 2014). There are three forces that affect each other, according to this theory: the technical, the social and the pace of life. Technological innovations effect our social life, which in turn affect our pace of life. Rosa (2014) describes it as a hamster wheel that keeps spinning out of control and we are moving faster and faster, without going anywhere.

Technical innovations need to be upgraded and new technologies require even more technologies to be able to work properly, resulting in a vicious circle. Technical acceleration can be defined as an intentional increase of speed in a goal oriented process. This acceleration concerns areas such as production, transportation and communication. An example of a fast acceleration without any intention of stopping or slowing down was the industrial revolution and the more recent digital revolution. There seem to be exciting innovations coming up, following this paradigm. Social acceleration often occurs at the same time as a technical one; while however the two are not identical: technical acceleration refers to acceleration in society, the social one can be described as the acceleration of society itself since it concerns different important areas like politics, economic, work life and moral orientations. Rosa (2014) describes social acceleration as a “reduction of the present”. People spend less time in the present, whereas a bigger part of their lives consist of the past and the future. Things are over before they even begin. We are required to learn to adapt to new rules, innovations and situations before we have had the time to understand the preceding ones. The pace of life is therefore accelerating and this is understood as individual acceleration. Rosa (2014) divides it into one objective part and one subjective part, where the objective part accelerates our daily life. We try to complete as many actions as possible in the shortest time possible, without allowing ourselves to stop and smell the roses. Rosa (2014) exemplifies that today’s society has changed a lot and that a newly graduated student is expected to change workplace 11 times and career path at least 2 or even, 3
times during a lifespan. One might think the technical acceleration would be of benefit in this process by adding to effectiveness and saving time, however it triggers the individual acceleration and speeds it up. We do more, yet we have the feeling that we have not done enough. We are stressed about time and deadlines, but most importantly, we are stressed about not being able to keep up with the rest of society. We are afraid of being left behind. Rosa (2014) talks about this as the subjective part of acceleration of the pace of life.

In relation to these accelerations, Rosa (2014) also describes different categories of deceleration: natural limits of speed, oases of deceleration, deceleration as dysfunctional by-products of acceleration, intentional deceleration and structural and cultural consolidation. For example, our bodies’ physical limits, religious and moral restrictions, traffic jams, yoga and meditation are different kinds of decelerations. Rosa (2014) believes it is impossible to escape acceleration as long as the world follows a capitalistic system. Drawing from Karl Marx’s theories, Rosa also thinks that capitalism may lead to alienation from work. Rosa (2014) does not think people are alienated from their inner true self, but believes we lack the ability to live comfortably in our world; instead, we are withdrawn from the dimension of space, time, society and practice. Rosa (2014) refers to this as the economic motor and explains that technical acceleration changes our perception of time and space. More specifically, the increasing speed in transportation has led us to think that the world is smaller because of the fact that the delivery time is shorter. When the pace of society increases, so does the fear of being left behind and not being able to keep up with the new speed. A person needs time to learn something new and that necessary time differs from person to person. To learn a new profession or a new tool requires time and practice. The rapid changes in society can lead to people not having the time to learn things profoundly. It takes time to familiarise oneself with something new, if you constantly have to learn new things at work instead of having the time to practicing your acquired knowledge, this can have the opposite effect leading to feelings of disassociation, or as Rosa puts it, alienation from our own actions. We do not feel comfortable with our own actions because everything changes so fast and we do not have the time to create a routine. To learn something new we need to reflect and in order to reflect we need time. Therefore, this explains why the phenomenon of the acceleration can be problematic.

Moreover, Rosa (2014) describes different forms of alienations. Social acceleration is a source of mobility and flexibility when it comes to spatiality but it can lead to a form of alienation from the space around us and material things that occupy said space. The opposite from this form of alienation could be described as feeling at home. We are comfortable with the things around us and associate them with our own identity, they have been there for a long time and we are not willing to change them any time soon. Another type of alienation Rosa (2014) describes is alienation from things: things we consume and things we produce. We are more likely to feel something for an object we have spent time with. It does not really matter if we like the object or not, we will still feel a connection to it. By fixing and mending material things, like a hole in your jeans or polishing a pair of shoes makes us more likely to develop a sentimental attachment to said item or thing, which in turn makes it harder for us to throw the thing away. It has become part of our history and in turn, harder for us to separate from. Alienation from our actions refers to situations when we do something we do not want to do but we do regardless. We practice these actions even though we know we do not have to. For instance, while we might not want or have to check on our Facebook account the minute we wake up, many of us do anyway.
Individualism versus Collectivism

As mentioned in the introduction, different cultural phenomena exist around the globe and a simple thing as a family dinner can be presented in very different ways. One survey study conducted between 1968 and 1973 within the field of culture produced groundbreaking findings that are still relevant today (Hofstede, 1983). Fifty countries and 116,000 questionnaires resulted in four main findings, explained with the cultural dimensions theory. The basic dimensions, according to the theory, are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism and masculinity versus femininity. Power distance refers to the strength of social hierarchy and how power is distributed equally or unequally within an organization or institution. The dimension of individualism versus collectivism refers to the degree to which people in a society are integrated within and into groups; in individualistic societies there are lose ties whereas a collectivistic society has more tightly-integrated relationships. Uncertainty avoidance measures the tolerance for ambiguity in societies. Masculinity versus femininity measures the gap between male and female values. In 1991, a fifth dimension surfaced, the long-term orientation, which describes the importance of the future in comparison to the past (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). In 2010, a sixth dimension, indulgence versus restraint, was confirmed. This latest dimension describes how tolerant a society is regarding pleasure (Hofstede, 2011). This can be described as the difference between gratification versus control of basic human desires in relation to the joys of life. These dimensions show how cultures can differ in different aspects. Understandably, the dimensions are not “either or”, but a continuum spectrum. In our research, the most interesting cultural dimension is individualism versus collectivism.

Chart 1. Ten differences between individualism and collectivism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Collectivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is supposed to take care of him- or herself and his or her immediate family only</td>
<td>People are born into extended families or clans which protect them in exchange for loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I”-consciousness</td>
<td>“We”-consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right of privacy</td>
<td>Stress on belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking one’s mind is healthy</td>
<td>Harmony should always be maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others classified as individuals</td>
<td>Others classified as in-group or out-group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal opinion expected: one person one vote</td>
<td>Opinions and votes predetermined by in-group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgression of norms lead to guilt feelings</td>
<td>Transgression of norms leads to shame feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages in which the word &quot;I&quot; is indispensable</td>
<td>Language in which the word “I” is avoided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of education is learning how to learn</td>
<td>Purpose of education is learning how to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task prevails over relationship</td>
<td>Relationship prevails over task</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Individualism tends to prevail in developed and western countries, while collectivism prevails in less developed and eastern countries. There are results on the individualistic index for 76 countries (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). For example, the most individualistic countries are the United States, Australia and Great Britain while the most collectivistic are Panama, Ecuador and Guatemala. Thailand has a rank 58-63 and is a deemed a very collectivistic country. Cultures are not static and some argue that technical acceleration might help accelerate the changes of cultural dimensions and make different cultures gradually similar. Other arguments claim that there is no proof for that and that the changes, if any, might as well make the cultures more diverse (Hofstede, 2011).
East and West

In 2017 Osborne and Borkowska wrote “A European lens upon adult and lifelong learning in Asia” where they compare and investigate the differences of lifelong learning in Western and Eastern parts of the world. The authors seek to evaluate the distinctiveness of lifelong learning policies. They want to see if the developments of this field in Asia have been influenced by practices elsewhere in the world, especially in Europe. The authors are comparing different parts of the world by statistics of participation of lifelong learning. The material for the analysis is from three journals: the International Journal of Lifelong Education, the International Review of Education and Adult Education Quarterly, each edited in the West. Only the articles from the past 10 years, between 2006 and 2016, are involved when generating the database from these three journals. The main findings in this article are that fewer than 8% of the articles from these three journals are Asian. Western articles are focusing on the individual competency and employment, though the Eastern ones reflect the social collectivism culture that exists in the East and are more community-based. The authors of the article divide the finding in three major themes: policy narratives, community-based learning and well-being of elderly people. They also raise the subject of formal education in Thailand and quote UNESCO (UNESCO, 2015) that:

35% of Thailand’s population aged 25 years and older did not complete primary education, 22% completed primary [International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 1], 11% finished lower secondary (ISCED 2) and 14% finished upper secondary (ISCED 3). (p. 30).

The lack of formal education makes basic-skills in rural areas highly prioritized. In Asia and also in Europe there is a desire to promote citizen well-being, both economically and in terms of their health. Adult education is considered as something important, especially in this aging society (Han, 2001). For example, there are programs in Asia that include building green gardens to reduce pollutions, organizing secure school trips for students and developing food banks which are all projects with a clear interest in developing the community within a collectivity philosophy, compared to Europe which has a more individualistic approach. Investigations about similarities and differences in lifelong learning has been made between six different Asian countries, including Korea, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand and the Philippines. This paper is a meta-analysis from different research done in countries mentioned above. The article demonstrates that despite the diversity in political as well as cultural, economic and educational areas, there are many similarities in how lifelong learning systems are shaped in these countries. A part of the gathered force comes from the needs of the global economy and the author wants to highlight the influence this has on the countries in this examined area. The six countries are categorized into three groups, in an attempt to find similarities in creating their national lifelong learning system. The first group consists of Korea and Japan, second one is Hong Kong and Singapore and third is Thailand and the Philippines. The countries are matched according to population size and economic structure. The groups differ on how far they have come and the different paths they have taken when creating lifelong learning systems in their respective countries. In 2001 Thailand did not have any national education system, but instead the country had non-formal local networks that worked with adult learning. The focus of these local networks was on basic lifelong learning such as literacy and community-based skills.

Previous research show that lifelong learning in Thailand does not have the same history as for example lifelong learning in Sweden with our folk high schools (Osborne & Borkowska, 2017). This is an interesting aspect of the subject as the lifelong learning phenomenon is spreading through the world but not necessarily from West to East. Lifelong learning comes in different variations. For
example in North America adult learning refers to the learning of senior citizens but lifelong learning as a phenomenon involves other part of society:

Traditionally career development has been a collaborative, shared responsibility between the employee and the employer. Recently more of the burden of career development has fallen on the shoulders of the worker. In the United States, workers are facing increasing amounts of uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Workers no longer expect to be hired early in their lives and remain with the same employer until they retire. The global economy has forced workers in the United States to take responsibility for their career plans. These recent developments have caused workers to develop new ways of thinking about their careers. (Han, 2001, p.87).

In Europe we have a broad perception of lifelong learning which focuses on the future. On other continents it might be difficult to see the existence due to the fact that it is vague or it does not exist at all (Han, 2017). Lifelong learning is strongly connected to political and economic concepts in Europe and North America, although divided between the individualistic dimension with its attention on individual development and closely linked to socioeconomic factors. Countries with a more collectivistic approach tend to develop lifelong learning systems aimed towards concepts about community and family oriented projects which helps to develop the life of the residents (Frąckowiak, 2017). There are arguments which state that lifelong learning is affected by culture and at the same time that the culture is affected by lifelong learning. The relationships between these two are complex and there are three dimensions that can explain this: the first one is about learning patterns, the second refers to the connection between what people learn and their behavior and the third is about the pace of cultural change being entwined with lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is often mentioned within a positive context, but there are some critiques on the subject. Some argue that lifelong learning stresses the fact that individuals are never enough, that we have to learn new things and constantly develop in order to accommodate the rapid changes of society, and that the human being is incomplete and always late, struggling to keep up.

**Lifelong learning polices in Thailand**

Research has found that the policies of lifelong learning in Europe and Asia are very similar, even though the history and traditions differ a lot (Luka & Sungsri, 2015). The findings of a comparative study between Latvia in Europe and Thailand in Asia are that despite the countries’ geographical location and differences in educational system, they share similar policies. The authors argue that the concept of lifelong learning has been recognized in Thailand since 1940 and has been in the National Education Plan since 1977. The biggest reform however was in 1999 when the National Education Act proposed that lifelong education should be a principle and framework for organizing the whole education system. There has been a distinctive difference between the terms lifelong learning and lifelong education in Thailand. The terms have similar meanings but education is usually used when describing organizers or providers of education, which includes provision and services to learn. Learning is usually used when looking at the learners from an educational activity point of view. Other authors argue that there has been a transformation towards the term lifelong learning, leaving lifelong education behind (Charungkaittikul & Henschke, 2014).

The concept of lifelong education in Thailand is similar to UNESCOs (1968) which many countries follow. The definition of lifelong education in The National Education Act is quoted as “a combination of all kinds and all forms of education - formal education, non-formal education and informal education, with the aim for developing quality of life for people continuously throughout their lives” (cited in Luka & Sungsri, 2015, p. 532).
The Office of Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion Commission (short the Office or ONIE) provides non-formal and informal education for every age group after school age (Luka & Sungsr, 2015). Non-formal education is divided into three activates. The first one is about basic and general non-formal education, such as basic education equivalent to formal education up to upper secondary education. The second type of activity is vocational training in different fields, for example mechanics, ceramics or cooking. These activities are community based. The third and last category is the provision of knowledge and information of quality of life improvement such as health and personal hygiene, basic law awareness and prevention of drug misuse (Luka & Sungsr, 2015). Examples of informal education are on the other hand, museums, local libraries and knowledge through different kinds of media, such as the internet and television. The importance of lifelong learning lies in that it creates a learning society, it is also based on the fact that knowledge nowadays is considered as a country’s most valued asset and primary source of power. A learning society includes among others, learners, learning providers, resources as well as lifelong learning activities (Charungkaittikul & Henschke, 2014).

The different acts and plans within lifelong learning in Thailand (National Education Act, National Education Act Amendment, Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act) push Thailand further towards developing a learning society and therefore global competitiveness (Charungkaittikul & Henschke, 2014). In order for a country to transform into a learning society, its members must become aware of the significance and the necessity of learning, they need to be eager to learn and also be capable of creating their own learning processes (Charungkaittikul, 2011). Thailand is part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which is a group of nations in Asia that comprise a formation similar to the EU. The countries of ASEAN have agreed that the high global competition requires basic literacy and that reading, in particular, is essential to national development. These countries need to become learning societies to compete with other Asian countries such as Japan and China. However developing a learning society can prove both challenging and time consuming, there is no quick-fix and it is an ongoing process (Charungkaittikul & Henschke, 2014). Thailand is yet to become a learning society although there are movements and activities that steer the country towards that direction. It is in transition from a rural to an urban society. In order to succeed, there are suggestions that efforts should be made to engage the Thai people in intellectual development (Charungkaittikul & Henschke, 2014). However, there is an imbalance between rural and urban communities that results in unequal opportunities regarding accessing knowledge as well as essential learning resources. The evaluation of ONIE shows that ONIE is a key agency in charge of promoting learning among the people. The participants include workers aged 15-59, which can be problematic when their learning needs are on different levels. Another challenge with ONIE is that study results are difficult to examine. ONIE instructs educational management which is designed to make people physically, mentally, intellectually and emotionally healthy (Charungkaittikul, 2016).
Research questions

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of what Thai students expect from their professional future, from a lifelong learning perspective and how the culture in terms of individualistic and collectivistic dimensions influence these expectations. The purpose of the study will be answered with the following research questions:

- How does the potential dividing line between collectivistic and individualistic dimensions express itself in relation to lifelong learning?
- What expectations do the students have on their professional future?

Method

Methodological background

Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation of the world. We want to make the incomprehensible comprehensible. An important part of this perspective is that we can never understand something objectively because we already have an understanding and preconceived notion of a situation (Thomassen, 2007). Different philosophers have effected and changed the direction of hermeneutics, with one of them being Gadamer who changed the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle describes the concept that a specific understanding is often the source of the next understanding within a new interpretation of a matter. Gadamer turned the focus to the interpreter and this new direction was an attempt to try to understand more about the human beings’ essence by gaining a clearer understanding about individuals’ past and the effect that this has got on their present. Our knowledge is made from history, and we always have our preunderstanding when interpreting what someone else is saying. There is therefore no true understanding, although we can always try to explain it (Thomassen, 2007).

Interviews is a popular way of collecting data when conducting qualitative research. An interview study is divided into seven steps (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). The first one is deciding a theme for the study and discussing how and why you will execute it. The second step is planning, while the third is conducting the interviews. Next comes the forth which is the transcription of the interview and then fifth, the analysis. The sixth step is verification and finally, the seventh and last step is to report. It is important not to be biased and not think ahead of what you want to find. You need to have an open mind and be neutral without having a forgone conclusion. This process begins with observation and leads to a theory. The inductive way is very close to the empiric (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The opposite of this would be a deductive process where the researcher works from theories within an area and uses a hypothesis when trying to conduct new knowledge (Bryman, 2011). A deductive research is often described as a top-down process and is commonly used in quantitative studies.
Sample

The sampling of a study is crucial in determining what kind of results you will get as a researcher (Bryman, 2011). The population in this study is last year students at a university in Bangkok. Our contact person in Thailand, who is also a student at the same university, supported us in organising the interviews. Our selection group consists of 10 undergraduate students who are all currently studying at the same university. Eight of the interviewees are acquaints or classmates of our contact person and the remaining two were recommendations from people already interviewed. The selection group in this study is selected by convenience or, from what is known as, a snowball sample. One difficulty when selecting the interviewees out of convenience is that the generalizability in the study becomes low when the sample is not representative of all students (Bryman, 2011). In this study, the benefits weighed heavier in forms of time and money saved, compared to what it would have taken to draw a sample out of probability.

Approach

Our study has a qualitative approach and we used semi-structured interviews as a method for collecting data. Interviews are one of the most important sources within qualitative research (Bryman, 2011). How the interview questions are phrased is crucial to enhance clarity among participants. It is also crucial for the interviewers to get all the answers they need. An advantage in interviews as a method is that they are goal oriented and can be formed to fit every respondent (Yin, 2007). Our selection group consists of 10 undergraduate students in Bangkok. The participants are students from Thailand as we were hoping to gain an understanding from the future workforce in Thailand. Every interview was scheduled for one hour and with the intention to feel more like a discussion where the interviewees hopefully would open up and share their thoughts. The interviews were held in the university area, between or after the students’ classes. They were held in conference or study rooms in order to be uninterrupted and undisturbed by outsiders. Our contact person helped us arrange the appropriate time and place and the scheduling of the interviews was rather informal. Our contact person also contacted the respondents and booked an interview one or a few days ahead. When meeting with the respondents, the one who held the interviews briefly informed about the study and handed over the information form for the respondent to read and sign (Appendix 1). The interviews were semi-structured which means that we had some questions and themes prepared for the interview, but we were able to rephrase the questions and ask follow-up questions depending on each and every respondent (Bryman, 2011). The types of research questions that are suitable for a qualitative interview are about life stories, experiences and thoughts.

We tried our questions and interview scheme in a pilot study a few weeks before beginning the main study in Thailand. Irini was the one to conduct the interview, an easy choice based on the fact that she was the one that was going to do the interviews in Thailand. We thought this would be a good opportunity for practice. Jenny observed and took notes but did not actively participate or contribute in any ways to avoid influencing the situation. We were aware that a third person in the room could change the balance and feel unnatural, but that was a risk we were willing to take considering the benefits that we believed we could end up with. The interview took place at Jenny’s home and the respondent is a master student at KTH in Stockholm and is soon to graduate and ready to search for jobs. We tried to find a respondent with similar qualities as the ones we are interviewing for our study. The interview was conducted in English as an opportunity for practice but also to be as close to the main study as possible. Irini performed the interview according to the plan and started by letting the
respondent read the information form. She turned on the recorder and began the interview. It lasted for about 20 minutes, which was a bit shorter than expected and one of the things we took notice of and wanted to develop before the main study started.

Like we said, the interview was semi-structured and the questions that Irini asked that had not been part of the prepared interview scheme were noted by Jenny, which included follow-up questions that lead to more elaborated answers and understandings. These notes helped us develop the question scheme once more. After the interview the three of us, interviewer, respondent and observer, discussed what was good and what we needed to develop. The first thing we agreed upon was that we thought the interviews should start by Irini pointing out that there is no time-pressure, no right or wrong answer and that it is okay to take as much time as needed to answer the questions. Irini expressed that she felt relaxed with the situation and the responder confirmed this when he said: “She gave a professional impression” (March 6, 2018). The discussion that followed focused on how to gain a deeper understanding about lifelong learning and how we can add or change some of the questions to lead the interview in the direction we want. It was a rewarding discussion and we pointed out questions and follow-ups like: Can you tell me about a project you have done that you are proud of? What did you learn from that project? Questions like that resulted in voluminous data and highlighted areas we believed were to become interesting for the analysis. Another theme that came up for discussion was questions about motivation. That was something we had not thought about before and that we thought might lead to interesting approach for the research. After the interview we also got comments on the question scheme from our supervisor, some helpful input that we took under consideration when developing the scheme. After the first interview made in Thailand, we added and changed some questions that we felt would gain fuller and more relevant answers. 10 interviews were held during two weeks and lasted between 28 and 58 minutes. Afterwards they were recorded and transcribed. We looked at the transcribed interviews from a lifelong learning perspective and tried with the help of a thematic approach make important implicit parts visible.

**Analysis**

To use an inductive process in the study is difficult since we always have preconceived expectations and thoughts on what to find. With that in mind we tried to be as open-minded and close to the empiricism as possible when starting our analysis of the data. We approached our data by using a thematic analysis, which is one of the most widely used methods in qualitative studies (Bryman, 2011). Thematic analysis is described as a way of identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis is made up of 6 steps where it all begins with familiarizing yourself with your data; this includes transcriptions, reading and re-reading the data over and over. In step 2, the coding begins and the data is organized into meaningful groups which in step 3 will develop into themes. In step 4, the review of the identified themes follows, and by the end of this phase, themes and the relationship among themes are easily detectable. Step 5 is all about defining and refining, by going back and forward to find the essence of each and every theme. Once all these steps are completed, the report is the sixth and final step (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After transcribing the interviews we listen to them and read them over. When starting to code we highlighted different parts of the text in color in order to keep them separated. At this stage we had not yet named the different codes. So far we were in an inductive process. A process that is data-driven and also described as a bottom up way of handling data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When entering step 3 our codes were ready to be matched and developed into themes. Many of our thoughts and ideas were
about culture. In order to sort out our thoughts and to keep focused on lifelong learning, we connected these thoughts about culture with already existing theories on the cultural subject. By doing so, we could keep our attention on the analysis in relation to lifelong learning but with another dimension; that of collectivist and individualistic cultural thinking. Therefore, we would not call this a pure inductive process neither a true theoretically driven one. This led us to an abductive process when handling our data. When writing the report we used the concept of quote-comment-analyzing which according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) highlights the essence of the empiricism. We tried this in our pilot study and we realized that by baring this in mind and with a bit of practice, it is easier to keep concentrated on and respectful to the empirics of the respondent and on what has been said during the interviews.

**Research quality**

When doing a qualitative study, one difficulty is to not be blinded by the theories. It is impossible to be totally objective without any expectations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We all perceive and think differently which is problematic in order to have a fair study. What is understood and observed by one researcher, another could pass without any notice. In a qualitative study, the quality depends on the concepts of reliability and authenticity. The reliability concept can be divided into four distinct measures: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmation (Bryman, 2011). In this part of the paper, we will explain these four measures and discuss how they apply to our study.

In order for the study to have high credibility, it is important for the researchers to adhere to existing rules. The second vital part for making the study credible is to give the results to the people involved in the study in order for them to comment on (Bryman, 2011). In our study, we have followed the rules and guidelines for doing a qualitative study when it comes to the four ethical principles and the information we have got from our teachers, contact person, supervisor and literature. Therefore we can quite safely claim that our study has a rather strong credibility. After the written report we have not had any contact with our respondents. The respondents have not read the analysis or the result of this paper and they have not had the possibility to comment on the results. By letting them do that and take their comments into consideration, our study would have gained even more credibility.

On the other hand, the transferability of a study refers to how well the results of the study can be used or applied in other environments and situations (Bryman, 2011). Our study is conducted on a group of young adults in Thailand and it is understandably not deemed to be transferable to any individuals beyond that. We do however believe that we have interviewed a number of respondents which has allowed for a collection of answers that vary, different points of view equals a broader perspective. The focus of the study is on students in Thailand thus the respondents are all young adults in their twenties. Since being a student in Thailand could be considered a privilege due to the expensive cost of the tuition fees, we understand that the responses from the respondents are not representative for all young adults in Thailand. We believe that the results of this study might be transferable to university students in other parts of Asia and even in other parts of the world where there is a dividing line between collective and individualistic culture.

The dependability of a study depends on how carefully and detailed the steps of the research process are described. The dependability also varies according to how correct the conclusions of the study are (Bryman, 2011). We believe that we have described the research process carefully and we stand true to the findings. The dependability of our study is therefore strong.
To be able to confirm a study the researchers should not have been affected by their own expectations. The researchers should have acted in good faith (Bryman, 2011). Since we had no idea about the culture and the common opinion in Thailand, we had no expectations regarding what answers we would get; this makes the confirmation of the study high. On the other hand, as mentioned in the methodological part of this report, we are well aware that we always carry our prejudices and that every thought we have is biased from earlier experiences and with this comes stereotypical thinking and prejudice. In order to minimize this, we discussed our concerns and prejudged opinions. We also read a book on cultural psychology to gain a deeper understanding where we came across valuable tips on how to think and behave (Heine, 2015) including us reminding the respondents that we might not be familiar with cultural norms or ways of thinking in order to minimize the misunderstandings and misconceptions.

**Ethical considerations**

Research ethics are under constant development and there are always new things to take into account as research topics change and new methods are being used (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). It is therefore important to find a balance while considering different conflicting interests. It is generally the interests of knowledge and integrity that have to find the right balance. Research ethics are a big part of being a researcher, although most of the rules and norms you need to follow are nothing out of the ordinary and they apply in everyday life too. You have to be truthful, open and transparent. Respect is key to implementing the report through interviews (Bryman, 2011). By being well prepared for the interview and the analysis that followed, we wanted to minimize the risk of preconceived rulings, to be able to see past public opinion and avoid reproducing prejudice. Ethical questions have been a theme during the whole report and some of the stages that we prepare for were associated with the seven research stages (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014; Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). During the planning phase, it was important to prepare and collect the completed consent forms from the interviewees. We were also sensitive about interviewees’ personal situations that could affect them like example stress before, during or after the completed interviews. Confidentiality had high priority, as in both the storage of transcriptions as well as the transcription itself. The names in this report are fictional and we try to be as loyal as possible in the results towards the respondents’ oral statements. Some of the quotes in the result are manipulated so they do not reveal the person behind them and consideration has been given so this happens in a way that does not affect or distort the result itself. During the analysis phase, the ethical dilemmas were based on how deep we were allowed to analyze the interview and the interviewees too.

During a conversation with our official contact person in Thailand we got informed that appearance and especially how you dress could be crucial to gain someone’s trust in Thailand. Students at public universities use school uniforms and dress codes are rather strict. Therefore we made sure to be respectful to these norms and guidelines. By keeping this in mind and always acting with respect of the individuals involved, we hope and we think we have acted with respect throughout the project.
Findings and Analysis

We would like to highlight our most interesting findings. We will be doing this by looking from an Eastern perspective and simultaneously taking into consideration characteristic collectivistic types of behavior. Our focus is always on the students, their thoughts and expectations of their future learning, what will come after they graduate as well as their desires for the future. Hofstede (2011) separates individualistic and collectivistic behavior by pointing out ten differences and, based on these, our intention is to gain a better understanding on how the collectivistic culture interacts with the students’ lifelong learning. We do not believe all differences are important for the result of this study and therefore some of them are left unanalyzed. One of the keywords that are used differently between eastern and western cultures is the word “I”. When going over our transcriptions we realized that our respondents did not follow the collectivistic way since they were using the word “I” a great deal. Then again, we came to conclude that the reason their language was in a certain way was because of our question-scheme (see appendix 2). We set the tone and the language of the interview when asking the questions, which obviously were influenced by our culture, which is more individualistic. Another part of the collectivistic culture is the “we”-consciousness. The word I was an often mentioned word during the interview, but so was the word we. In situations where, for us Westerners, it would be natural to think under the prism of I (Hofstede, 1983), the respondents used the word we. One such example occurred when the interviewees talked about decisions concerning choice of school or where they would live in the future. The focus was we-orientated and statements like “we want this” and “we think this” were commonly expressed.

People are born into extended families, which protect them in exchanges for loyalty

In a collectivistic culture, family and the environments are more involved in one’s life, compared to in an individualistic culture (Hofstede, 2011). The parents support their children financially until they create their own families, and when they are older, the tables are turned and it is the children’s time to support the parents. With that in mind, the family is involved with all decisions one takes in life. In this study this is especially obvious when it comes to motivation. The drive to do a good job or to be successful comes primarily from within the family and not from inner motivation.

Obviously my parents motivate me to do a good job because I just want them to retire later on and have a good life because I want to look after them. Because the past 20 years they gave me the best life. And compare to others, I mean I don’t look at people who are higher because sometimes if you look at people who are higher you start thinking ‘Why don’t I have this or that’. You should be proud of yourself and look at the people of the street a lot. Then you see that they didn’t have a chance at all in life. Not to be in a good school or anything even if some of them are really good kids but they don’t have an opportunity at all. So my parents are my motivation. (Lee, 20)

Here Lee explains that the main motivation to do a good job is her family because she wants to be able to financially support them later on. During the interviews it showed that this is common in a collectivistic culture. This is how the support goes, you give and you take. This tradition makes much sense when the family is running a business. You are working in your family’s business and when you are old enough, you take over it and support your parents.
Honestly I want to be able to take care of my mum and my brother. The financial stability and stuff like that. I don’t feel like I need to have the highest paying job or anything but I wish I will have a job and to be able to buy a house to my mum, that would be the ultimate goal. (Kim, 21)

This reinforces that the norm within the collectivistic culture, including these young adults, is to provide for your family and this is a strong motivation. The world is becoming more and more individualistic though, and in an individualistic culture you are only supposed to take care of yourself and your immediate family, meaning your children and partner (Hofstede, 2011). You are also expected to “follow your dreams” and do something for yourself that is easier if you do not have to think about a whole clan. In this aspect we can see insights of an individualistic thinking even from our respondents.

My father always asks me if I am happy with my life. ‘Are you happy? Are you happy?’ He has taught me that you have to love what you do, otherwise you will not have the motivation to do it. Find something that you love and be good at it so that is my plan. I don’t know exactly what I want to do but I know I want to be able to do what I want to do, exactly how I want to do it. I want a good life. (Hong, 23)

This example shows that not only the respondent, but also the generation before, has started to think in a more individualistic way. Business ideas that last over time are becoming fewer and fewer because in today's society things change fast (Rosa, 2014). The question is, if the classic family business as inheritance will even survive in the long run or if the next generation has to come up with something new. This can seem as much more work because even though we see a shift in inheritance of family businesses, people are still supposed to take care of their extended family. Starting something new on your own and at the same time take care of a collective can seem contradictory, or at least, very difficult to do.

**Stress on belonging**

A distinguish difference between an individualistic and a collectivistic point of view is the stress on belonging. Where in a collectivistic society the belongingness is important, but in an individualistic society the right of privacy is valued more (Hofstede, 2011). As mentioned above, there can be a contradiction between wanting to follow your dream and also need to take care of your family. This is a problem today’s generation is facing, being torn between the old traditions and the new expectations on their lives. Since a dream does not necessary mean an income that can provide for a whole extended family it can be difficult to maintain both sides.

I am always asking myself if I am happy. Are you happy? What would make you happy? I am telling myself that is the most important thing. I want to work with my passion and I want to like what I am doing not just doing it because it is a job. I want to be able to travel and stuff with my work. So I need to have a good enough stable base so I can dream around like this. I want to be satisfied and happy and feel content with who I am and what I do. I don’t feel like I have to have the highest paying job because honestly for me what is most important is that I want to be happy with what I do and where I am. I want to be able to move around as I want to. (Hong, 23)

Hong is pointing out the importance of being an individual and focusing on your own happiness. The interviewees talk about following their dreams and passions, working with things that make them happy. Many times during the interviews the phrase “money is not important” is stated. We believe they mean that or at least they want to believe that. Although no respondent actually says that money is important, the discussion always involve money in terms of providing for their family and maintaining a high quality of life. They are torn between a changing society and loyalty towards the family. They wish to influence the future and not only be part of it. They talk in terms of dreams and...
hope but keep coming back to their duty to support their family. In this part we see clear signs of an individualistic influence, although once again the core of collectivistic belonging is deeply rooted.

**Harmony should always be maintained**

In collectivistic cultures it is important to maintain harmony, in everyday life but also at work. This is in opposition to the individualistic way where you should speak your mind and tell surroundings about your opinion (Hofstede, 2011). If you are raised in a collectivistic culture it is more important that people around you get along and stay friends and by not always raising your voice or feeling the urge to let other people know what you think, conflicts can be avoided.

My manager came one day and said that if you come back you don’t need to send me your resume, I will approve you as a staff. I couldn’t tell her that I didn’t want that even if I knew in my heart that I wouldn't want to do hotel. So I told her thank you for the good opportunity. I will take it back and think about it. Because you never know what your future will be like. I wouldn’t tell her thanks but I will still go for my goals. (Lee, 20)

Lee is telling us about the importance of contact, building networks and remaining a good relationship. She explains that the experience of the internship has led her to a future job offer. In a situation where she did not want the job offered and knew she would not change her mind, it was important for her to give a polite answer and show respect. Even though the internship was not a workplace Lee could see herself working at after graduation, she appreciated the offer and valued the new line of network it provided for her. Respect, kindness and caring for the collective are messages that permeate all interviews. From an individual perspective it can almost seem a little bit too perfect and well-polished, so when a conversation rises about different opinions and speaking one’s mind, it feels refreshing.

But sometimes you have to be strict to do your job. In Thailand you always have to respect the elders but this is not always positive for work. For example it was one situation at work, it was a nice restaurant, the dishes were full but I did not want them to show for the costumers so I put them behind the bar. My colleague told me I could not do that and in Thai custom I should listen to him because he is an older man. I thought he was wrong so I talked back and told him my opinion. I said if we move the dishes now it will be a lot of noise and it’s not professional to the guests. (Lin, 19)

Lin told us that it felt good standing up for herself and that she truly believed her way of acting was the right one. She is proud of this situation at work and feels like it led to something useful. It made her understand that you are not always right just because you are older and that her suggestions might be just as good as someone else’s. One can interpret that this statement expresses that the progress has to go forward although the harmony might suffer when doing so. This can be understood as an eye-opening moment and a situation where Lin shifted side from a collectivistic standing towards a more individualistic.

**Opinions and votes predetermined by in-group**

Family and the surroundings affect many parts of one’s life, something which is valid for both within collectivistic and individualistic societies (Hofstede, 2011). As mentioned above, maintaining the harmony is important in the collectivistic thinking and it is easiest preserved when people have the same opinions as one another. The opposite of this is the individualistic aspect, meaning that every person has its individual voice and vote. The majority of the interviewees do not yet know what they are going to do for a living in the future. They have already made a decision on what they want to study, but from what we understand that is not the same as choosing a career for them. When we look
upon this with the perspective of lifelong learning we have different paths to choose from and our life is not determined by the early career choices we make in life. A couple of decades ago, our destiny in terms of work life was often decided without the involvement of the individual's thought (Rosa, 2014). If your father was a bricklayer, you would with high certainty grow up to be a bricklayer too. If your parents owned a farm, you would without question take over the farm when your parents were not capable to do so any longer. This is still a topic discussed in Thailand, although if you are studying at a university you are without exceptions a privilege individual and with this privilege come many choices.

I know in many families, friends of mine and their parents have never worked. It is still their grandparents who support the whole family. But I do not believe you can go on with that for too long. I believe that the third or fourth generation has to start working or doing something else. Because the money are going to run out from the family, right? (Kim, 21)

Not that long ago this was the way your life was determined in Thailand. If your family owned a business you were supposed to work and then operate that business when you were older. This is still a common future for young adults in Thailand but there are also other possible outcomes. One possible way to understand this is by the means of the social acceleration. In the past we worked at the same place throughout our lives, although now we are expected to change not only the physical workplace but also our duties and tasks (Rosa, 2014). We are supposed to adapt and learn new skills in all steps of our lives.

I know I want to work with something creative. Like I don't want to be on stage or in front of the camera, I want to work behind the scene with books or marketing or film or something else. It is a certain direction but I still have a lot of different possibilities. Another dream I have is opening my own restaurant. Cocking is a big passion I have, that many people do not know. (Nussara, 20)

From this quote, we are able to understand that even though you choose your education you have many more choices to make. First of all you will have to inquire into what you can do with you education and what you want to use it for. Then you have to decide where you want to do it, which also includes questions of where you want to live and if you are willing to move. Without even noticing the wheel has started to turn and the acceleration is a fact.

In previous generations, people started off their careers at the workplace they had done their internship and more often than not, the first workplace also became the last one. Rosa (2014) exemplifies that today’s society has changed a lot and that a newly graduated student is expected to change workplace 11 times and change career path at least 2-3 times during a lifespan. Rosas (2014) assumptions are made from an individualistic perspective but our findings seem to support his thoughts of career changes during a lifetime. Although we agree on the consequence of his reasoning, we believe our findings have a more collectivistic background. At first this might seem like a decision made from an individualistic perspective but when looking closer, there are always different ways of reasoning when making a decision. We do not believe this is an easy choice anywhere in the world but by adding a cultural perspective we gain a deeper understanding of what lies behind when making decisions for your future. “Big choices”, like, for example, when you take a decision about your education in Thailand, is a collective concern and more people than just yourself are supposed to have an opinion on. One of the respondents told us about his dreams of living and working in other countries, but at the end of the day, he knows he has to live in Thailand because that is what his mother wants and he cannot be away from his family for long. This scenario did not seem unfair to him because he knows that the only correct way is to be with his family even though he has other dreams. The most important part is the opinion of the in-group. To make your parents proud and be able to support them are two of the main goals in life for our respondents.
My biggest role model is definitely my father. He has a business and I think I have learnt a lot from him and I know he wants the best for me. He has taught me to always fight and never give up. Even if I fail I should not be sad, I should just try harder and do it better the next time. You should never see yourself as a loser in the game and give up. If you lose you have to continue fighting even if the problem is hard. And one day you will win the game. Just be patient and continue to work for the goal you want to do. So when deciding about important things I value his opinion very much. (Kim, 21)

We also understand the strong bond within the in-group when the respondents shared that their role models are their parents. They mention that they have learnt a lot from their parents and that they are being pushed by them, which in their opinion, is solely a positive thing.

One risk when doing something to please someone else, as, for example, choose to work in the family business because your parents think that is the best way to go, is that it might lead to a feeling of alienation from your actions since you do not do what you really want. Alienation is and has for long been a problem in the West (Rosa, 2014). We work for salary and become alienated from the product or production. We cannot state that we see the same problem for the interviewees. Although the decision is not entirely theirs to make, we are under the impression that they work for a higher purpose. One can argue that they work for money, but not for money itself. They work to support their family and to make their parents proud. The collectivistic culture is built that way. There is no “I”, only “We”. To be part of a group, and have such a strong in-group cohesion is the norm and what is desirable (Hofstede, 2011). Therefore we cannot express that people from a collectivistic culture feel alienation to the same extent as people from an individualistic culture. Similarly, we do not see any signs of individualistic behavior when the interviewees have a strong collectivistic attitude when it comes to opinions and votes.

Transgression of norms lead to shame feelings

Doing something wrong or cross a line can have negative consequences in all cultures, but the main difference between an individualistic and a collectivistic culture is that it may lead to feelings of guilt versus shame (Hofstede, 2011). In the West, misbehaving or stepping out of the norm often results in feeling guilt whereas in the East the feeling is shame instead. The expression of “not losing face” is very common and people value the reputation of the family very high. One respondent, Nussara, shared a personal story of when she was younger and misbehaved. Her parents were concerned that she would end up taking the wrong path so in order to save the family’s face, and not damage the reputation of the family, the parents sent Nussara to another continent to find new company and break free from the troubles in Thailand. It was interesting that Nussara, so many years later, expressed that she still felt ashamed of her behaviour even though everything worked out.

All I know is that I do not want to be stuck behind a desk. You know? I want to be free and I definitely do not want to go to the same office all day, every day. I cannot think of anything worse. I know it's uncommon to think like this. Do you think I am weird thinking that way? (Sai, 21)

Feelings of shame come in different shapes and do not only connect to actions but they can also occur in relation to thoughts (Hofstede, 2011). Sai raises a question of uncertainty when thinking against the norm and continues to build on the fact that feelings of shame are strong when you do something contradictory to the norms. He describes that his feelings about being an employee is not a common feeling, although most of the interviewees agree with what he is telling us. We interpret this feeling as a feeling of something new, something the generations before him have not been able to dream of. The interviewees are well aware of the continuous changes in society. They know that they have to keep up with technology and upcoming innovations to be able to keep performing a good job.
You have to adapt to the society and because you don’t know how it will look in the future. It is hard to have a plan now because I don’t know what the changes will look like. Of course it would be easier to know everything now, but it wouldn’t be so much fun and there would not be any surprises. It is more fun to try to figure out what will happen next and what I can do with it or maybe I can change what will happen. Right now I know how to manage the sales on the website and what is needed to make new customers and keep the ones I already have. But in the future maybe this will not work and I have to come up with new ways. (Hong, 23)

Here we can interpret that Hong is agreeing with the rest of the interviewees about the phenomenon of lifelong learning and the sharing thoughts that learning will continue after school. He also added some thoughts about the society around us and that we are going to have to adapt to the changes to be able to keep up. There are arguments by Rosa (2014) that the main reason why acceleration is happening and increasing in speed is grounded in capitalism. As long as we live in a capitalistic society, acceleration will be a fact, because the thing that keeps capitalism alive is the consuming. Since we are most likely to still live in a capitalistic world in the upcoming generations, Hong’s idea of the unknown future can be seen as truthful also from a collectivistic perspective. According to Rosa (2014), changing norms is a part of acceleration. From a collectivistic point of view we believe this might lead to feelings of shame. Feelings of shame are heavy to bear and we consider that the students want to find a way to change the norms but without losing face. The interviewees are describing a future where they are able to simultaneously support their families and follow their dreams.

I see myself as an owner in the future. Because in life nobody wants to be an employee for somebody else or an organization. Which of course in the first step of your life, if your parents don’t own a company you will have to be someone small in a company but later on you can grow from your experiences. Because once you have experience then you can grow. (Lin, 19)

Lin refers to the classic employment, to start small in the business and then grow, as something not wishful for her. The goal is to be her own boss, however that will come after some years of experience. From our experience, in the West, to be self-employed and have your own company can be seen as something stressful and energy consuming. The view of being your own boss in Thailand seems to have a different rumor.

**Purpose of education is learning how to do**

Until now we have found that the culture between collectivistic and individualistic societies can differ quite a lot. The purpose of education is not an exception. In the West, the foundation of education is to learn how to learn, while in the East the core of education is to learn how to do (Hofstede, 2011). This differentiation lays the foundation of the expectations of the students’ own learning in their future. Even though there are expectations about continuing learning, none of the respondents mentions anything about a course or any other form of formal learning when thinking about their future. This is a part of the interviews that we think is worth highlighting and can been seen as a confirmation of the view that lifelong learning comes in different shapes. Our understanding is that the shared perception of the interviewees is that they will continue learning and that the learning will come from experiences.

I’m looking forward to real life experiences and real situations, because here in school you do things and you know you going to get graded on, right? But in the real life it’s going to affect someone. So maybe how to be like a proper professional. That is important to me. I want to be a professional in a certain area and really skilled, I think that’s going to come afterwards. I think now I’m just learning just a little bit of everything but then in the future, I will have the proper real skills cause I’m going to build on it from job to job. (Kim, 21)
Above, Kim is referring to real life as a future timeframe where she will learn real skills. Real skills in this context seem to be skills you need to be able to accomplish your work. When students are talking about real skills, the attention is on practical and hands-on skills, experiences that will help them have a better job. In school, they see internships as the best place to learn and although they do talk about theory as something positive, they do not regard it as something useful. We look at this as either a one step- or a two-step way of reaching your goal. In the collectivistic way the purpose of education is learning how to do. The individualistic way is learning how to learn (Hofstede, 2011). Does this mean you have to learn more things in a collectivistic society to accomplish the same task? We consider that to be a reasonable assumption; learning how to learn means you gather a broader perspective and you focus on developing your ability to analyze. Instead of seeing every task as a separate problem you come up with strategies on how to problem-solve in general. When this is put in relation to social acceleration, we believe that the individualistic and the collectivist mindset affect the speed differently. When Rosa (2014) describes acceleration, one part is not learning an occupation for a lifetime but being able to keep up with the changes, both in terms of changing workplace but also being able to learn a new occupation altogether. We believe this is easier from an individualistic point of view. By focusing on learning how to learn you are able to use your skills within other areas than the initial one. You do not need to do it all over again.

On the other hand, when looking from a collectivist’s perspective, acceleration might be slower because the collectivistic society also stands for teamwork and not having to manage everything on your own. Therefore, you take care of your part and rely on the collective to work as a whole. We believe this means you do not always have to learn everything on your own, the teamwork takes care of that for you.

I will run the business and I will hire people to do different jobs, if I need help with the economics I will hire an accountant, if I need help with a case I will hire a lawyer and so on. I do not have to do everything, there is always someone who can do it better. (Sai, 21)

Sai’s goal is to learn how to run a business. That is what he needs to be good at and that is enough. His way of achieving this is through working experiences. During the interviews we realized that employment does not include or entail the same for us as for the interviewees. For us, employment corresponds to a stable income, health insurance and equal amount of rights as obligations. It did not take long for us to realize that the interviewees did not have predominantly positive thoughts about being employed. First of all, they see it as a way of learning more, as a way of learning enough to start their own business and become their own boss. Getting a job with an income is never the goal itself; it is just a stop on the way when trying to reach your main goal.

I’ll probably have a first job like office work to have experience but I know I won’t like it because already sitting in the class and studying is already exhausting for me and boring. But I feel like I need to do something before because I can’t just go and start my own business, I don’t have any experience or anything. I’ll probably do internship, after that I get a job and then start my own maybe 5 years later. (Nussara, 20)

Students from Sweden could probably say the exact same thing. With the one significant difference, they would not think owning a business was a way of achieving stability or a way to decrease stress. Starting your own company in Sweden is about fulfilling your dream and materialising your ideas, in spite of the fact that it is only a few of us who think it will mean less work or minor stress. We think this is very interesting. In a world where time flies and there never seem to be enough hours in one day, the solution for these students is to start their own business.
Relationship prevails over task

Living in the West means that you have most certainly heard the expression “do not mix business with pleasure”. There is something about people not wanting to be too personal at their workplace; it can even be seen as unprofessional if you bring your problems outside of work or personal emotions into the workplace. This can be explained by that task prevails over relationship in individualistic cultures. On the contrary, in collectivistic cultures, relationship prevails over task (Hofstede, 2011). This could mean that in an individualistic culture, in a scenario where a disagreement within your team at work occurs, you would argue for your opinion because the most important part is for the task to be completed and in a correct way. You would not be too concerned about hurting your teammates’ feelings.

Even if you are in the best company ever and the name stands out really high but if your environment is so bad you just work there. For example like in a hotel you work ten hours a day. Those ten hours will feel like one year if you have a bad environment or nobody motivates you when you feel down, or if you don’t have friends. Because in the end, friends are important. (Nussara, 20)

Nussara is pointing out the most central parts of work; she describes the importance of people. Teamwork is a recurring theme during the interviews. The interviewees describe the tasks and duties, although they commonly include through mentioning other individuals in the same sentence. We see this as a confirmation that the relationship prevails over task for our interviewees which is in line with previous research (Hofstede, 2011).

What is important to me is the workplace, people, communication, how I communicate with others. Because it’s not about money. So probably the workplace and the people I associate with. If they are nice, if they are not nice then I feel like all those other things do not matter anymore. Money doesn’t even buy nice people. I want an environment and team that makes me feel good. It’s not always good to work with your best friends but to work with people who give you as much as you give them. A good team that establish or accomplish what is need to be done. (Kim, 21)

When looking at the phenomenon of putting either task or relationships first from a perspective of acceleration it gets more interesting. If we accept Rosa’s (2014) assumption that acceleration cannot be stopped, is it then possible to keep up with the acceleration without putting the tasks first? The answer would be no, as we believe that it might be easier to keep up with acceleration when being task-oriented. The acceleration equals change and in order for that to happen, norms have to break, traditions has to change and tasks needs to develop. All of which we believe is much easier in a task-oriented society, where relationships are not prioritized. Arguably, this dimension has two sides and we are open to the possibility that a relationship-oriented mindset could potentially help individuals handle acceleration in a better way. That could essentially mean that a relationship-oriented culture might work in a decelerating way. This might be an unknown part of the deceleration theory (Rosa, 2014) that has not gained attention in the West, due to the existing cultural differences.
Discussion

Findings

It is important to remember that we are all different people, with different hopes, dreams and expectations. Behaviour and norms that are inhabited from a young age will follow us throughout our lives. Early in this paper we established with help from previous research, that lifelong learning occurs in different variations depending on where it is developing (Han, 2017). We think this is very interesting from a macro-perspective, and believe that it gets even more interesting when looking at it from an individual’s perspective. Programs, laws, history and politics are all involved in lifelong learnings’ development in society and creates a path of multiple directions. We chose to look at how lifelong learning in Thailand is making use of a collectivistic and an individualistic dimension of culture. We believe that many of the qualities that we see regarding lifelong learning are related to this dimension of the culture in Thailand.

How does the potential dividing line between collectivistic and individualistic dimensions express itself?

According to our findings related to the first three dimensions of cultural differences, People are born into extended families, which protect them in exchange for loyalty, Stress on belonging and Harmony should always be maintained, we see signs that the interviewees are starting to think and act more in line with an individualistic approach. As research has shown before (Hofstede, 2011), loyalty towards the extended family is strong in a collectivistic culture and the students in this study are no exception to that statement. A big part of their motivation for the future lies on the happiness of the collective. With this in mind, we believe we can see a trace of a more individualistic approach in forms of caring for your own wellbeing and looking after your own interests. This dimension goes along with the stress of belonging and when starting to think more about your own interests, it is a fine line to still be as involved in the collective as expected. Many of our respondents’ thoughts about hopes and dreams are about themselves but at the same time they do not forget about their need to earn money in order to support the family. The interviewees describe old norms and values where it is important to respect elders. Additionally, they are touching on the subject of their own voice being heard as well as the value and importance of this. We see this as a transgression from harmony to speaking your mind. In relation to maintaining harmony, the result of the study suggests a shift towards a more individualistic thinking. When the students express their opinions, they feel good about themselves, they believe their point is worth-raising and their contribution is worth-mentioning. By doing so, they are exhausting the collectivistic harmony and the individualistic dimension profits from this way of acting.

What expectations do the students have on their professional future?

Previous research suggests that lifelong learning and culture are interrelated in many levels (Frąckowiak, 2017). Our findings supports that one dimension, Purpose of education is learning how to do, is still very influenced by collectivism. This dimension is closely connected to education, starting from a very young age and following throughout the lifespan. As we established before, lifelong learning in the East has focused on community-based learning and practical skills (Osborne & Borkowska, 2017), both of which are associated with the collectivistic culture. This could be one possible explanation for the lack of influence from individualism which is an interesting finding in
relation to previous research that shows that the world is becoming a more individualistic place over all.

During the interviews it became clear that the students have expectations about their future learning and they all think that they will continue learning after school. They do not see learning as something that will stop or something that only takes place in school. They talk about school as one part of life, but talk about what will come after as the real life. They believe in experience-based learning. The learning is practical and obvious, in the sense that it is concrete. The internship is often the first work-experience but the first job after graduation is seen as a place and time to gain new knowledge. The students are expecting to learn and gain experience through work in order to be able to run their own business in the future. Since they do not have the knowledge and experience to do this directly after graduation, they see every workplace as an opportunity to collect information and values for future use. The students expectations on their future lifelong learning is characterized by a strong collectivistic side. With this in mind we found it interesting that we did not see any signs of expected alienation. Alienation in relation to work activities is a common consequence in the West (Rosa, 2014). Our findings suggest that in a collectivistic mindset, where your extended family is highly prioritized and the aim is to support them financially, this kind of alienation is not expanded in the same extent. We believe these individuals have a higher goal than just working for a salary. The phenomenon of money is always in the background, never fully spoken of but nevertheless not forgotten. Money is not just money, it is a way of fitting in and finding your place in society. This might help individuals who are dealing with feelings of alienation. When looking at money from a collectivistic perspective it is easier to think of something bigger than “just money”, it is loyalty, harmony and caring all in one.

The theory of acceleration is grounded in a rapidly changing society (Rosa, 2014). This is also shown in this study, where the situations of young adults are changing in relation to previous expectations of taking over the family business. The tradition in Asian culture is to take over the family business and then pass it on to the next generation. That could be an explanation as to why most of the respondents aspire to be owners and view self-employment as something positive whilst working for someone else does not seem as appealing. The reality for these individuals is that there is either no family business to inherit or the business has to change in order to fit the modern trends of the market. The norms are changing and a common response within collectivistic culture is the feeling of shame. Our findings imply that these individuals are trying to find their own way through these changes. Their expectation for the future is to start their own business so that they can “please” the acceleration and still remain able to support their parents without the feeling of shame, in spite of the fact that they are breaking the norms.

The part of our study that involves the dimension Relationship prevails over task shows similar findings as previous studies (Hofstede, 2011). The respondents express strong opinions in line with the collectivistic culture. Relationships are highly valued and always prioritised. When doing so, the task comes in second, a fact which is not in line with the theory of acceleration. We believe that possibly, when looking from a collectivistic perspective, that this dimension does not let the changes in society accelerate as fast as when influenced by individualism. This might be seen as a deceleration that has not yet been explored due to the strong western approach on previous research done on the subject.

We believe the students lifelong learning will continue as a part of society’s acceleration. Many times through the interviews it becomes clear that the collectivistic culture is an important part of the interviewees’ work and life. When they are talking about learning, it is often through the collective and when they tell us about their expectations about learning, it is often summed down to the
collective. When they talk about how they learn, they talk in terms of teamwork and when they talk about why they learn they talk about their parents and their desire to give back. Everything they do, they do as a team and if the team is not working, they will struggle completing the task. Among all these collectivistic behaviours, a glimpse of individualistic thinking is showing. In Thailand it is shameful to break norms, but that is where we believe this is leaning towards. There is a dividing line between the collectivistic and the individualistic dimensions. They are talking about dreams, dreams of self-fulfilling and not for someone else. By starting their own company they are able to both follow their dreams and hopefully take care of their families.

**Method**

In this study, we used semi-structured interviews to collect data. Interviews might be seen as a simple method, you only need a recorder and a respondent and you are good to go. What we learned during the pilot study that there is more to it than that. An interview needs careful preparation and practice to gain interesting and reliable data; therefore we are grateful we conducted the pilot study before the main study had begun. Our pilot study confirmed our choice of research design. By develop our question scheme and practicing interview techniques, we think we were able to collect the data needed to answer our research questions and respond to the aim of the study. One thought was to do a survey, where we would ask the respondents to fill out questionnaires as a method for collecting data. This method has many similarities to structured interviews but not as many with semi-structured interviews. If we were to use questionnaires, we would have to ask fewer open questions, as it is usually easier to answer when writing. It would also have to be shorter as the risk of the respondent getting tired during the procedure is higher. We would probably be able to include more respondent but the answers would presumably not be as rich as the interviews held face to face. The interviews were also held in English which is not the native language for either the respondents or us. Therefore, we believe that semi-structured interviews were the best choice because of the fact that we were able to explain and help the respondent, if anything was unclear. With face-to-face interviews we were able to ask follow-up questions and pick up loose ends. Another benefit was not suffering from any loss of respondents, since it is much easier to ignore filling out a paper than not show up on agreed appointment. During an interview, you can see communication that is non-verbal; body language and gestures could say more than words. Unfortunately this non-verbal communication does not get caught on tape and therefore not on the transcription. On the other hand though, the pitch and energy of the respondent was caught on tape and we believe that helped us during the analysis.

Our research questions and therefore our interview scheme came from within an individualistic perspective. After evaluation, we realised that this was not optimal and something we would change if we were to follow up on this study in the future. The questions were “I”-focused and we believe some answers are unnatural and can be understood as enforced or influenced by this fact.
Conclusion

The findings show that the student’s expectations are influenced by the collectivistic culture and at the same time they are connected with the rapidly moving society around them. This could be viewed as conflicting ways of thinking between old traditions and new possibilities, between individualistic dreams and collectivistic loyalty. The findings suggest that lifelong learning in Thailand is influenced by more than just the collectivist dimension. We offer a consideration of the situation above and believe young adults are finding their own way, trying to please both sides of a complex situation.

Further research

The interviewees feel stressed about fitting in, they want to follow their dreams and at the same time they need to support their family. With that said, it would be interesting to follow up these young individuals to see if they will manage to have an income to support their family and also being able to fulfill their personal goals and dreams. We see signs that our interviewees are influenced by both elements of collectivism and individualism. The young individuals live in Bangkok and therefore it would be interesting to do further research on the topic of lifelong learning in Thailand, focusing on the rural surroundings outside the Thai capital.
References


Appendix

Appendix 1 - Information form

Hi,

We are two students from Stockholm University that are studying our last semester at the department of education with a direction for human resources. We are currently writing our bachelor thesis.

The aim of the thesis is to gain a deeper understanding on the expectations undergraduates students have on their professional future.

For this study we will do semi-structured interviews, which means that we have an interview scheme with open questions we will ask. The interviews will be audio recorded.

We are obligated to inform you about the ethical criteria we are taking into count. The participation in the study is voluntary and you can decide if you want to take part in the study or not. You also have the right to terminate your participation whenever you want with no further explanation and if so, we will not use any material we have collected during your participation. The information we collect will be used in this study only. The information will be confidential and anonymized. Only us, Irini and Jenny, will be handling the collected material. If you have any questions about the study, please contact us or our supervisor for more information.

Best regards,

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Informed consent form
☐ Yes, I want to participate in this study.
☐ No, I do not want to participate in this study

.................................................... ....................................................
Date/Signature Name in block letters
Appendix 2 - Interview scheme

Background:
Can you please start by telling me about yourself?
What are you studying/how long have you been a student?

Work experience:
Can you tell me about your work experience?
  - What did you think of that?
  - How come?
  - How did you feel about working there?
Can you tell me about an achievement at work that you are proud of?
  - What did you learn from it?
Can you tell me about an achievement at work that did not turn out the way you expected?
  - What did you learn from it?

Work expectations:
What are your expectations on your professional future?
What is important when you going to look for a job?
What is a good workplace to you?
How would you describe a bad workplace?
What is a good manager to you?
How would you describe a bad manager?
What motivates you to do a good job?
What makes you lose your motivation?

Future learning:
Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
Do you think your education has taught you enough for your future work?
How do you think your education will last over time?
What do you think of that?
What are your expectations on your future learning?
What kind of new knowledge do you think you will gain in the future?
How do you think you will learn it?
Do you have any role models?

Is there anything else you would like to share?