

The 7 Secrets To Success with Any Thai Woman...



*How To Avoid The Cultural
Misunderstandings That Can Shipwreck
Your Relationship*

Nathamon Madison

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Introduction

You've worked hard all your life to build your business and provide for your family. But it's cost you plenty. Maybe the stress and pressure contributed to the failure of your previous relationships. Your children are grown and have gone their separate ways, sending you the occasional birthday card or email (when they remember, or when they need something). It seems, sometimes, that all there is left in your life is work – and when you come home to an empty house, a microwave dinner in front of the tube, and yet another night spent alone, you realize...

There's GOT to be more to life than this!

After all, you're still young...still vital...and still have a lot of life left to live. You've got every right to expect some joy, some fun, and some fulfillment in your life. You know you've made many mistakes in the past, but you realize your life experiences have given you the wisdom to start fresh and build the kind of relationship you've always fantasized about...

A relationship based on honesty, trust, and loyalty. A relationship with a woman secure in her femininity who knows how to treat you like a man. A relationship that is a source of joy, wonder, and delight. A relationship full of passion, with a woman whose only goal in life is to make you happy. And a relationship with a woman you want to cherish, take care of, and love deeply for the rest of your life.

Maybe you've travelled to Thailand on business. You've marveled at the beauty of the country, its ancient, exotic culture, the happiness of its people (after all, Thailand IS the "Land of Smiles"), and the grace and femininity of its women.

You're intrigued at the possibility of a deep, fulfilling, and long-lasting relationship with a gentle, kind, beautiful – and sexy – Thai woman.

And you just know that once you meet her – that bright, educated, gentle, feminine lady you'd like to spend the rest of your life with -- your lonely days...and nights...will be over. You'll FINALLY KNOW you're going to live happily ever after. Game over, right?

Wrong.

After the fog of “love at first sight” clears long enough for you to regain some bit of your former sanity, the challenge of building a real relationship begins.

And building a lifetime relationship of love, trust, and happiness is hard enough between men and women born into the same culture (look at the divorce rates in your home country if you think I'm kidding). Just imagine how challenging it can be for a couple who come from cultures as different as Thailand and your home culture.

Here's the honest truth:

Any successful long-term relationship depends on trust, communication, mutual respect, and a deep understanding and willingness to let the other person be who they are. But your relationship with your newfound Thai love is going to require a little bit more.

Your success is also going to depend on curiosity, patience, humor and a generosity of spirit, as you discover the profound differences in your two cultures and how those differences show up in your everyday interactions with your Thai partner.

And this journey of cultural understanding can be one of the most exciting and rewarding journeys you'll ever take.

That's why I wrote this book. I want to share my experience with you, to help smooth the way as you explore creating the relationship of your dreams with a beautiful, gentle, feminine, sexy Thai lady.

Culture: The Key to Understanding What Makes Your Thai Lady “Tick”

It's not just the food, the art, the music, or the religion of a place that make up its culture – although those elements are certainly a part of it. “Culture” is what's operating in the background, behind every thought, word and action in a society. It's the collection of assumptions about the way life is -- that are never questioned because “everybody knows” that's “just the way things are.”

In other words, “culture” defines the ways people think, feel, and act – the attitudes, manners, and behaviors that everybody in the society accepts as true and considers to be “common sense.”

Think about how you know these things. How old were you when you learned what was “polite” and what was “impolite?” What was “permitted” and what was “forbidden?” When did you know what behavior was acceptable and what wasn't? As an adult, it seems like you've always known it, right?

Culture is learned – passed down through the generations from mother to daughter, father to son through the ages. We “acquire” our culture from infancy – and we treat our absolutes as if they were “the truth.” After all – “everybody knows” that this is how people behave.

And Thai culture could not be more different from your own!

Relationships between men and women are hard enough in any culture – because men and women are trained, raised up, and encouraged to behave in certain predictable ways to be successful in their own societies. You could even say that in any culture, men and women occupy two separate “subcultures.” Remember the “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus” books?

But throw in the different values, different rituals, different “heroes” and different symbols of vastly different societies with different histories, and you’ve got a very interesting “stew.”

In this book, I’m going to share with you seven of the most obvious cultural differences between Thailand and the West, and show you how those differences will directly impact your relationship with your Thai lady. I’ll explain how exploring, talking about, and understanding those differences can help you create the kind of passionate and life-affirming relationship that defies the odds and stands the test of time. I’ll also reveal how being judgmental and unwilling to communicate, compromise, or understand those cultural differences will doom your relationship to bitterness and failure.

I’m also going to teach you some basics about “good manners” in Thailand, to help you avoid embarrassment and make the right impression on the important Thai people you meet – like your lady, her family, her friends, her co-workers, and her boss.

I’ll share with you my intimate knowledge of Thai customs and culture. I’ll reveal (from my own experience!) the common pitfalls of Western-Thai relationships, and show you how to avoid them. I’ll help you navigate the tricky waters as you meet, date, socialize with, and (hopefully) eventually marry your ideal Thai lady.

But here's the thing. I can write about cultural differences, you can read about cultural differences, and we can discuss cultural differences until the proverbial "cows come home." You may be intelligent, enlightened, and self-aware as heck, and swear that you understand and appreciate those cultural differences. You may arrive in Thailand absolutely certain that you're prepared to face, deal with, and totally understand the differences between the Thai culture and your own.

And when you get here, you'll be shocked. (Where do you think the term "culture shock" comes from?)

It's kind of like this. You want to learn to swim. You read everything you can get your hands on about swimming. You watch movies about swimming. You attend swim meets. You interview great swimmers. You can intellectually discuss the fine points of the Australian crawl, and argue the merits of a particular kicking style. Heck, you even go to the Olympics, watch every single event, and predict the winner with 100% accuracy.

But until you actually jump into the water for the first time, you know absolutely nothing about swimming. Getting wet will be a shock to your system.

Consider me your "swimming coach" as you do your first few laps in the Thai cultural pool. I'll lead you in. I'll support you while you find your "center of gravity." And I'll cheer when you take your first few successful strokes on your own.

Before we go any further, I know you're asking yourself "who is this person, and why is she qualified to give ME all this advice?"

Why You Can Trust this Information

My name is Nathamon Madison.

I am a 30-year-old Thai woman, living with my wonderful Australian husband, Michael, in Bangkok.

When I was younger, I felt deep love for my first boyfriend and was excited about planning our life together. But the romance ended badly when he would not stop seeing his many other girlfriends. I simply couldn't turn a blind eye to it; it was completely open and shameful, and caused many arguments between us. Finally, after he hit me in the face, I realized it was NOT the relationship I wanted for the rest of my life.

I was very lucky to be introduced to Michael by a friend. I thought he was great, but I was extremely cautious. After all, many Western guys come to Bangkok to have a great time -- but there's not much chance of a real relationship -- because they have wives and girlfriends waiting for them back home. I knew I didn't want to be anyone's weekend fling.

Well, as it turns out, Michael was eligible, so we began seeing each other regularly.

What was interesting about our relationship is how open we were to talking about the many cultural differences between us, and discovering what it would take to make our relationship really work.

We read everything we could get our hands on to understand the subject better, and together we gained a deep understanding about how our respective cultures see family, love, masculinity, femininity, career, independence, achievement, and money.

We realized that unless we were prepared to understand these matters very deeply, our relationship could not survive. And we have worked hard to understand – and create a relationship that is profoundly joyful, intimate, and fulfilling.

Over the years, some of my friends and family have asked me if Michael could introduce them to a Western guy – someone with the right attitude looking for a lady to build real love with.

And the funny thing is when we visit Australia on business or holidays, Michael's friends have asked me to recommend a Thai woman to them -- someone honest, kind and feminine, to stand by him and build a life of love with him.

We knew that the love and success we share began with a friend's recommendation that we meet. And our relationship blossomed and deepened when we committed to understanding our cultural differences—the ways we look at life.

So we introduced a few friends to each other -- and I still get thanked for it!

That was how it all started.

We thought, "Wouldn't it be great if we could create a way to introduce our friends to our friends, and share all the information that has helped us – knowing it could help them, too, as they build relationships together?"

We were excited about the possibility because we knew we could help so many people --both Thai and Western – experience the real love and happiness we have built with each other.

We didn't want just another internet dating and chat site. We knew that all of our introductions must be done the "old fashioned way," person to person.

And so Meet Me Now Bangkok was born. (You can read more about Meet Me Now Bangkok toward the end of this book.) We help honest Western guys meet and get to know genuine Thai ladies of good character...and we love doing it!

How to Use this Book

As you go through this book, I encourage you to engage in a little self-reflection and keep an open mind and heart. If you've traveled to Thailand, or have any experience with Thai-Western relationships, you might recognize yourself, or someone you know, in some of the examples I share. If you've had experience with Thai culture, or embarrassed yourself by mistake, or been burned by a relationship with the wrong kind of Thai woman, see if you can recognize the key cultural differences at play.

If you've never been to Thailand, you'll want to read the chapters on the 7 cultural dimensions carefully, for an overview of the biggest challenges Westerners face when dealing with Thai people in general, and Thai ladies in particular. The 7 cultural dimensions I reveal are:

1. "Me" vs. "We" – who you are in society
2. "Some People are More Equal than Others" – What's with all the "bowing and scraping?"
3. "Control" vs. "Chaos" – How do you deal with "the unexpected" in everyday life?
4. "Masculinity" vs. "Femininity" – it's not just the individual, but a characteristic of the culture!

5. “Content vs. Context” – What do you mean, it’s obvious?
6. “On Time” or “In Time” – why you will be frustrated about “time”
7. “Doing vs. Being” – what’s more important to you?

Each chapter will open with a story as an example of the key cultural difference at play. Then I’ll share with you the differences between Western and Thai values and how people behave as a result. I’ll summarize the key differences with a chart, and then end the chapter with some suggestions about how to explore and enjoy the differences between you.

If you really want to make an impression on your Thai friends, and avoid the silly or embarrassing mistakes that can put you – and other people -- in awkward or uncomfortable positions, pay attention to the bonus chapters on manners and customs. In other words, “when in Thailand...do as the Thais do!” I’ll show you such basics as

- Meeting and greeting Thai people
- Being a “good guest” – manners for visiting Thai people and places
- “Don’t Talk with your Mouth Full” -- Thai table manners and eating customs
- “Keep your Hands and Feet to Yourself” -- Proper Thai body language
- What to wear, and when
- Common Thai attitudes and customs
 - o “Mai Pen Rai” – What? Me Worry?
 - o “Sanook” – Life is just a bowl of cherries.
 - o “Jai” – levels of the heart

- Unusual superstitions and rituals that may puzzle...or even delight you

If you're Ready to Understand...

If you're ready to understand, if you're ready to open your mind and explore these key differences, if you're ready to unlock the secrets of true passion and intimacy, read on!

If you're a real gentleman looking for a warm, lasting relationship with a trustworthy Thai lady...

A warm, loving companion – a “soul mate” to lavish your love and generosity on

Someone you can trust and build a future with

A strong, graceful, attractive and truly feminine woman who won't try to compete with you

- A woman with high morals and strong family values you can count on to be completely devoted and unquestionably loyal to you
- A woman who accepts you just the way you are, won't try to change you, and supports you in everything you do

...then reading, exploring, understanding – and experiencing firsthand -- the differences between your two cultures is an investment that will pay you dividends in the form of a fun, passionate, and loving life-long relationship!

To your future...

Nathamon

Chapter 1 – An Introduction to “Culture”

Chapter 1 – An Introduction to “Culture”

A typical modern story...

After a 16-hour flight from Los Angeles, Doug arrived at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport for the first time. Man, was he excited! Not only had his company sent him to Asia for the first time to coordinate a project, he was armed with a folder full of photos of Thai women he'd met on the internet. During the next three weeks, he was ready to methodically meet, interview, and evaluate their suitability as his “soul mate.”

Unfortunately, that folder was in his suitcase. And his suitcase wasn't on the luggage carousel. After watching the same cardboard box and battered blue Samsonite go around for the 18th time, he decided to alert the airline official in the baggage claim area, to make sure his bag could be located and sent on to his hotel.

A big, confident man, used to speaking with authority and having people “snap to,” he strode over to the airline counter and said, in a loud, assertive voice, “You need to find my bag. It's a 28” TravelPro, black in color, and it needs to be found and delivered to my hotel within the hour.”

The airline official, a woman in her mid-30s, smiled, raised her hands up, palms touching in a “prayer” position near her forehead, bowed, looked up from under her lashes, and said quietly “So sorry, Mr. But next flight from Los Angeles not until tomorrow. Maybe your suitcase is on it? You wait until tomorrow. We’ll call you if we find it.”

Doug’s frustration turned to outrage. “What do you mean, maybe?” He slapped his hand on the counter, leaning forward and raising his voice. “You get on that phone NOW, Miss, and locate my bag! What do you have a bar code on your luggage tags for?”

The airline official, still smiling, bowed again...and said, “It happens all the time. Your bag will probably be here tomorrow. And besides...the computer system is down now. I’m sorry, there’s nothing I can do. I’ll call you tomorrow if it comes. It’s best if you go to your hotel and wait.”

Doug didn’t notice that all the Thai people in the airport, plus the ones behind the counter, began to laugh nervously, and whisper behind their hands. He didn’t notice that the louder he got, and the more he waved his hands, the less help he was getting. All he noticed was that he wasn’t getting what he wanted.

And an Old Thai Story...

Doug’s situation reminds me of an old Thai story about Ko Nan-Ta-Vi-Sal, a cow. It’s a story that almost every Thai child is taught as a lesson in how to treat others.

“Once upon a time in the Kingdom, there was a farmer with a cow named Nan-Ta-Vi-Sal, whose job was to help the farmer harvest rice. One morning Nan just stood there, and would not move. There didn’t seem to be anything

wrong with him -- he looked absolutely normal – he just would not move. The farmer began shouting at Nan over and over again, instructing him to get moving and get on with his work. The louder the farmer shouted, the more Nan just stood there – doing nothing. Frustrated, the farmer began to hit Nan, trying to push him and force him to get on with his work – but still Nan would not move.

A neighbor, hearing the shouting, hurried over to see if he could be of help. When he saw that Nan was “dug in,” and would not move, in spite of being hit and shouted at by the farmer, the neighbor touched Nan gently on the back, and began speaking softly and politely in his ear, saying gently, “Nan, we need to harvest the rice so we can all eat, and we can’t do it without your help. Won’t you please help the farmer and start working now? I’m sure if you do, he will stop shouting.” At the gentle touch, soft voice, and polite request, Nan slowly began to move and started his long working day...”

The modern example of Doug arriving at the airport with missing luggage and the old example of Ko-Nan-Ta-Vi-Sal the cow both show you how easy it could be to arrive in a strange country without knowing the “rules” about how to behave – and how frustrated you could become in the process!

Doug, in these examples, is “the farmer” – and the airline official is “Nan.” The more Doug shouted and the more physically he expressed himself, the further the airline official dug in her heels, unwilling to move or take the initiative to help him.

What Doug doesn't realize is this: when visiting another country, you've got to know how to behave if you want to get things done. *Doug does not know what he needs to know.*

Now just imagine, after this rocky start at the airport, what Doug's experiences might be like as he meets, interviews, and evaluates the list of Thai ladies he has in the folder in his suitcase (if he's lucky enough to get his suitcase tomorrow!).

He knows nothing about how to get things done in Thailand.

He runs the risk of embarrassing himself...and embarrassing the Thai ladies he wants most to impress.

He knows nothing about Thai culture...and doesn't understand the thousands of years that have shaped its people.

A Little Knowledge of History is a Good Thing

If you have any desire at all to understand Thai culture, it's a good idea to know a little something about its history. After all, Thailand is an ancient country, and has been shaped by thousands of years of tradition – unlike the more modern Western country where you were raised. So bear with me while I give you the briefest of overviews of our long and rich history.

Historians and linguists disagree about just where the original Thai people came from, but there's evidence that people have been living in what is now Thailand for at least 100,000 years, and may have been the first agriculturists and metal workers in human history.

Linguistic evidence shows that early Thai people were nomadic, and settled in river valleys throughout South Asia – from the Assam region in India all the way to the Red River in Southern China, covering Laos, Cambodia, and what is now Viet Nam.

These nomadic Thai peoples were ruled by “chieftains,” and as they travelled throughout Southeast Asia, whenever they encountered a group of people already living there, the Thais were able to displace them with little to no violence. Some historians think that may be because there were already Thai roots in such places.

It’s hard to say exactly how the Thai people lived before about the 6th Century AD, because there aren’t any written histories before then. But Buddhist missionaries from India in the 3rd and 2nd Centuries BC reported traveling to a land called Suvannabhumi (Land of Gold) – and there are two cities in Thailand’s central valley that are called Suphanburi (City of Gold) and U Thong (Cradle of Gold). Most historians agree that Suvannabhumi referred to the very fertile region that reaches from southern Myanmar, across central Thailand, to eastern Cambodia.

As these nomadic people ranged through south Asia over the centuries, several early “kingdoms” rose and fell in what is now northern Thailand...influenced by the Laotian Mon people, who dominated through the 12th Century AD, and the Khmers of Cambodia, a powerful people who displaced the Mon and brought art, language, religion and court structure to the area. The Khmers called the Thais ‘Syam’, and this was how the Thai kingdom eventually came to be called Syam, or Sayam.

The three different schools of Buddhism (Brahmanism, Theravada, and Mahayana) introduced by the Khmers still influence modern Thai religious practices and court ceremonies today.

While the Khmer controlled the north, from the 8th to the 13th Centuries AD, Southern Thailand (the Malay Peninsula) was controlled by the Srivijaya Empire of Sumatra.

Starting in the 13th Century, several Thai principalities from the Mekong River valley united, and wrestled power from the Khmers in the north and the declining Srivijaya in the south, to create Sukhothai, considered by Thais to be the first true Thai kingdom. The first king, Si Intharathit, declared independence in 1238.

The Thai kings continued to grow more powerful over the next few centuries in an unbroken, 400-year succession through 34 separate kings, and by the 17th Century, the Siamese capital of Ayuthaya was one of the greatest and wealthiest cities in Asia. Traders and emissaries from China, Europe, and beyond came to this thriving seaport – and one English visitor said at the time, “Among the Asian nations, the Kingdom of Siam is the greatest. The magnificence of the Ayuthaya Court is incomparable.” At the time, London might have been considered just a village by comparison.

In 1756, after two years of fighting, the Burmese took control of Ayuthaya, burning and destroying everything sacred to the Syam, including their temples, manuscripts, and religious artifacts. But the Burmese reign was short, and Phraya Taskin, a half-Syam, half-Chinese general moved the capital to Thornburi (across the river from Bangkok) and restored order in the kingdom by 1769. Taskin, a bit of a religious fanatic, considered himself the next Buddha, and his disapproving ministers executed him.

Chao Phraya Chakri, one of Taskin’s generals, was crowned king Phra Yot Fa in 1782, moved the capitol to Bangkok, and established the Chakri Dynasty, whose monarchy has persisted throughout the years and survives today. The first two Chakri kings worked hard to restore the culture which had been decimated by the Burmese.

By the reign of the third Chakri king, Phra Nang Klao, trade with China was

developed and domestic agricultural production increased. In addition, Phra Nang Klao changed the titles of the kings, naming his predecessors Rama I and Rama II, and taking the name of Rama III for himself.

The Chakri kings undertook a series of reforms over the years, ruling as an absolute monarchy. And through skillful maneuvering, they kept Siam independent and avoided being “colonized” like their neighbors – Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam.

In 1912, during the rule of Rama VI, the first of many coup attempts by the military took place. In 1932, a group of Thai students living in Paris were finally successful at overthrowing the absolute monarchy, and established a constitutional monarchy along British lines, and a mixed civilian-military group took power. The king at the time, Rama VII, abdicated and retired to Britain without naming a successor. So the cabinet appointed his nephew, a 10-year-old boy, as Rama VIII, and left a military leader Phibul Songkhram in power from 1938 to 1945. In 1939, Siam officially became Thailand.

When Japan invaded Southeast Asia in 1941, the Thai government sided with Japan, and Phibul Songkhram declared war on the U.S. and Britain. The Thai ambassador to Washington at the time, Seni Pramoj, refused to deliver the declaration, and in 1945 after VJ Day, he became premier, only to be unseated within a year.

As a matter of fact, the next several decades saw a lot of back-and-forth between political factions and the establishment of rule by the army. Ever since 1932, every single political leader has relied on the support of the Thai military to survive – with 19 coup attempts, 10 successful coups, and 16 constitutions from 1932 to 1997 – and the most recent, bloodless coup in 2006.

In recent years, Thailand has faced great pressure on many levels: the ongoing insurgency from Muslim separatists in the Deep South, a territorial conflict with Cambodia over an ancient Khmer temple, the global economic crisis, rising oil prices and the extreme political polarization at home all contribute to a sense of political instability.

Thailand's "overheated" politics probably won't change any time soon. But the Thai people, ever resilient, took a break in June of 2006 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of King Bhumibol is the world's longest reigning monarch, marking the 60th year of his accession to the throne.

And in August 2011, Thailand defied tradition and elected their first-ever female Prime Minister, Yingluck Shinawatra

Why Should You Care?

You should care -- especially if you want the intimacy that comes from deep understanding of the woman you're in a relationship with.

As I said before, understanding a country's history can help you understand its culture -- and understanding its culture can help you understand where its people are "coming from" in your interactions with them.

Understanding where she "comes from" is critical to trust. And trust is critical to passion. And passion is critical to a lifelong relationship of love and respect.

Our Thai history has given us a deep spirituality; a reverence for ritual and ceremony; a strong, conservative respect for those who hold power (until we've had enough!); and a peculiar relationship with time, because we know all things are temporary. We know the price of conflict, and do what we can to

avoid it. Our manners in dealing with each other are strict and formal, but we don't let that damage our quest to enjoy life and have fun.

When you come face to face with the big cultural differences between you and your Thai lady (and trust me, you will), you have a choice: you can either dismiss her point of view as unimportant, superstitious, childish, weird, old-fashioned, or just plain “wrong” (and pay the price in bitterness and regret) – or you can use your experience of the differences between you to learn, explore, and grow.

After all, she is who she is because of the culture that raised her. And if you love her, understanding what makes her unique will be a source of lifelong joy.

In the next several chapters, I'll share with you seven of the widest “cultural gaps” that exist between typical Western cultures and the Thai culture. Read them. Enjoy them. Learn what you can from them.

And when you come to Thailand, or meet your ideal Thai lady, laugh with delight when they reveal themselves in your relationship!

Chapter 2 – “Me vs. We”

Chapter 2 — “Me vs. We”

Meet Greg, the Typical “All-American Guy”

Greg’s father was a small-town policeman; his mother was a high school teacher. Although they didn’t make a lot of money, his parents worked hard to make sure their kids had what they needed to “make it” in life. And they taught him that to “make it,” Greg had to rely on himself and his own skills, talents, and efforts -- that way, he wouldn’t owe anybody a thing.

Greg grew up on Little League baseball, high school football, and yearly entries into his school’s science fair. He played hard, worked hard, and studied hard. When it came time for him to go off to college, his parents couldn’t have been prouder – he earned a scholarship to help pay tuition at his local State university, where he majored in Engineering and graduated with honors, while working part-time to pay for extras like car maintenance and weekend entertainment.

When he graduated, Greg took a job at a construction company for a couple of years to earn enough money to pursue his Master’s Degree in Engineering, and saved every penny, putting off such luxuries as a new car, a better apartment, or fancy vacations until he earned his degree.

Armed with a great education and a strong work ethic, he launched his career as a Civil Engineer, working all over the country on important projects like building bridges, freeways, and tunnels. He spent weeks on the road every month, and months on the road every year, building a name and a reputation for himself and earning an income his parents could never have imagined for themselves.

He designed and built himself a custom home overlooking the ocean; bought himself a big luxury car and a sailboat; and has 50-yard-line season tickets to his city's pro-football games.

His is a typical story of "the American Dream" – he "made it" on his own, with no help from anybody. He raised himself up "by his own bootstraps" from humble beginnings to worldly success – and he's enjoying the fruits of his own labor.

When his parents talk about him, they are proud – they got their job done. They raised him to take care of himself, and he's a big success. Even though it seems like they never see him anymore, they know he's fine. And that makes them happy and gives them peace.

Greg's dad recently had to take an early retirement due to a work injury, and the last thing he would want is to worry Greg. Although it's getting harder for him to get around, Greg's dad doesn't even tell him about it. After all, Greg's got his own life and he's entitled to live it without worrying about his parents. They've got some money put by – they'll (probably) be okay. And besides, what parents in their right mind would even think to ask their full-grown son for help?

Now Meet Mali, a Typical Thai Lady

Mali's father was a policeman in a small Thai city, and her mother was a teacher at the local high school. Although they didn't make a lot of money, they did everything they could to make sure their own parents enjoyed a good life in their later years, even moving them into their home when they became too old and fragile to live independently.

And Mali's parents gave their children what they needed to "make it" in life. They taught her that to "make it," Mali had to rely on help from everyone in her family, and repay them without question for the sacrifices they made on her behalf. She grew up in a house full of people, including not only her parents and her brothers and sisters, but her aging grandparents, an aunt and uncle, and several cousins.

Mali grew up studying hard and working hard – not for herself or to pursue her own interests, but to gain a better ability to help her parents. When it became obvious that she was intelligent and studious enough to attend University, her family, including her parents, her grandparents, her older brothers, her aunts and her uncles all contributed the money for tuition and books. After all, their investment in Mali was an investment in their own futures.

When she graduated University, Mali took a job at an international firm in Bangkok, where she earned a good income – enough to rent a small apartment she shared with her sister. She had enough money left over to repay her parents a little bit each month and send gifts to her grandparents, aunts and uncles. She saved what she could against the time she would be asked to help pay for her younger brother's education.

Hers is a "typical" story. She "made it" by the grace of her family, who sacrificed for her to create a better life. She's grateful, knowing she could

never have succeeded on her own without their help. And she's happy to share what she has earned with her family and contribute to their success and reputation.

When her parents talk about her, they are proud – they got their job done. They have raised a dutiful, helpful, grateful daughter, and that means they've been a great success. Her degree has earned them status in their community and respect from their neighbors. They see Mali every weekend, look forward to the gifts she brings, and brag about her prosperity to their neighbors. That makes them happy, and gives them peace.

Mali's dad was recently injured, and had to retire early from the police force. He lets Mali know right away, knowing she will do whatever she needs to do to be a good daughter and take care of her mother should anything happen to him. They are proud they can go to her for financial help. After all, what parents in their right mind would even think NOT to ask their grown daughter for help?

The Cultural Divide: “Me” vs. “We”

There's a cultural “value” at work here – and that value is the tension between “individualism” on one side and “collectivism” on the other – in other words, the pull between “Me” vs. “We.” All cultures have a preference for one or the other.

In cultures where the focus is on “me,” those cultures that are more “individualistic,” the bonds between individuals are loose. Everybody is expected to look after themselves, to take care of their own needs, and look after their own immediate families. Working together in a group might be important, but everybody has the right to his own opinion and his own self-expression.

On the other side, where cultures focus more on “we,” from the time people are born they are bonded tightly to a group, usually extending beyond the immediate family to include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. The group protects the individuals in it, in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

In other words, most Western cultures believe that individual success is the basis for a strong, stable society – the Thai culture believes that family (or group) success is at the heart of a strong, stable society.

Let’s explore this “cultural divide” in a little bit more detail.

The Western Value: “Me”

If like Greg, you were born in the U.S.A. – or in the U.K., Australia, Germany, Canada, or any other modern “Western” country – you can count on the fact that you were brought up in a more “Me” oriented culture than Thailand.

In a “Me” culture, your parents raised you to be independent -- to become “your own man.” They stressed and celebrated your individual achievement. They encouraged you to stand on your own two feet and take care of yourself.

If they were good parents, they loved you unconditionally, and gave you whatever resources they could to equip you to be successful on your own so they could get you out of the house as quickly as possible. After all, in the “Me” culture, any man who continues to live with his parents once he’s made it on his own is somehow flawed.

In the course of your education, you “learned how to learn,” and pursued studies that interested you as an individual, knowing that the higher the degrees you earned, the more self-respect you experienced.

You learned to speak your mind, stand up for your opinions, and defend your principles.

In the world of work, your “Me” culture emphasizes a relationship between employers and employees based on mutual benefit, and getting a raise or a promotion depends on your skills, abilities, and ability to follow the rules.

Your parents celebrated when you struck out on your own, knowing they had raised you successfully. As an adult, nothing is as sacred to you as being true to yourself, living life on your own terms, and “taking care of your own.”

In your “Me” culture, it’s so important to make it on your own that if YOU have kids, you pass that drive on to them, instilling in them how important it is to be an individual – to be “their own person.”

If you ever become unable to take care of yourself, the last place you will want to look for help is from your adult kids. You’d feel tremendous shame, maybe even humiliation, at the thought of asking your grown children for help.

And in your “Me” culture, you expect a right to your own privacy. After all, it’s your life, and nobody’s business but your own.

Making the best life you can, living up to your own potential, and pursuing your own interests are the highest goals you can achieve.

In your “Me” culture, that’s “just the way it is.” It’s “right.” It’s “true” that the individual is the most important element of a successful society. Nobody questions it. Everybody knows it. Right?

The Thai Value: “We”

In her “We” culture, your Thai lady’s parents raised her to be a dutiful daughter, to put aside her own needs to support the needs of the family, extending out to grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They stressed family achievement, family status, and family interests. They encouraged her to be a kind, loving, and willing participant in building the family’s success.

If they were good parents, they trained her to love her family unconditionally, sharing whatever resources she could to help the family succeed and thrive. They taught her there was no need to “make it on her own” – that if she was loyal, they would always protect and provide for her.

In the course of her education, her whole purpose was to learn something useful – to learn how to “do” a skill that would be of value to her family. And she knows that any degrees or certifications she earns over the course of her education add esteem and status to her family.

She learned to avoid conflict, seek the peace, and preserve harmony by withholding any personal opinions that might cause offense to the group.

In the world of work, her Thai “We” culture creates relationships between bosses and employees that are almost paternalistic, with the boss taking on the role of an elder “family” member and the employee assuming the role of a dutiful daughter. Promotions, raises, and status are given out based on her membership in the right “group” or the status of her family.

Her family celebrated when she grew into a respectful, dutiful adult, knowing they had raised her successfully. As an adult, nothing is as sacred to her as being true to her family and helping them in whatever ways she can. And in her “We” culture, any woman who demands to leave the nest and make it on

her own is somehow flawed. Her parents are proud of her for continuing to live at home and help them.

In her “We” culture, it’s so important to be loyal to and support the extended family that if SHE has kids, she’ll pass that drive on to them, instilling in them the importance of being subservient to the family.

If she, as a parent, ever becomes unable to take care of herself, the first place she’ll want to look for help is from her adult kids. And as an adult child, she’ll feel uncomfortable, even humiliated, at the thought of asking for help from her parents.

In her Thai “We” culture, there is no such thing as privacy. The group (her extended family) has the right to pry into any area of her life (or anyone else’s, for that matter) that interests them.

A harmonious relationship and peaceful consensus with her family or “group” are the highest goals she can achieve.

In her world, that’s “just the way it is.” It’s “right.” It’s “true” that the family is the most important element of a successful society. Nobody questions it. Everybody knows it.

The “Me” vs. “We” Dimension – A Summary Chart

In a “Me” Culture Like Yours...	In a “We” Culture Like Hers...
You were raised to take care only of yourself and your immediate (nuclear) family	She was born into an extended family who will always protect her in exchange for loyalty
Your identity is based on who you are as an individual	Her identity is based on the family group or social network to which she belongs
Speaking your mind is a characteristic of an honest person	Harmony should always be maintained and direct confrontations avoided
You are expected to act on your own behalf	She is expected to act in the interests of her “group” and powerful others
You are expected to have your own opinion	Her opinions are driven by the “group” she belongs to
Your individual interests prevail over collective interests	Collective interests prevail over her individual interests
The purpose of your education is to learn how to “learn”	The purpose of her education is to learn how to “do”
Diplomas increase your economic worth and/or self-respect	Diplomas increase her status and allow her (and her group) to enter higher status groups

Your relationship with your boss (or employees) is a contract based on mutual advantage	Her relationship with her boss (or employees) is perceived in moral terms, like a family link
Hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on your skills and rules only	Hiring and promotion decisions take her "in-group" into account
You have (and everyone else has) a right to privacy	The group has the right to invade her (and everyone else's) private life
The highest goal of your life is self-actualization	The highest goal of her life is harmony and consensus in society

Adapted from: G. Hofstede, Culture's Consequences.

How you'll Discover this "Me" vs. "We" Difference

What circumstances might come up where you'll see this difference between "Me" and "We" rearing its ugly head?

1. **As early on your first date, perhaps.** You might ask her, in a gentlemanly attempt to express grace and generosity and good manners, "Where would you like to go for dinner?" That simple question shows your own cultural bias – that simple question comes from YOUR values -- that you **value her opinion as an individual.**

When she giggles shyly, looks down, and says "up to you," you'll probably think she actually means that! And if she doesn't eat a bite, you'll be mystified at why she didn't speak up in favor of another restaurant, unaware that it is **her cultural bias to defer to the wishes of the group or more "powerful" individual** – in this case, you.

2. **If you become assertive about your own opinion to her, or in front of her friends or family.** You could be in a social situation with her friends or her family, and say something as simple as "I think these dried shrimp are horrible, terrible, no-good nasty things! How on earth can you people eat them like popcorn?" in what to you is a normal, confident, manly tone of voice. That's **YOUR cultural bias – to express your opinion, stand firm on it, and defend it against all comers.**

When she (and the other people) laugh, change the subject, or ignore you, you'll probably be mystified. It's **HER cultural bias to avoid conflict in any form**, and from that bias it's good manners to keep your opinion to yourself, or avoid the confrontation entirely by simply eating something else to maintain harmony within the group.

3. When (not if!) her relatives ask you “personal” questions. You might feel like it’s horribly rude when her mother or her aunt ask you bluntly “How much money do you make?” You’ll feel “violated,” – maybe even get visibly uncomfortable. That’s **YOUR cultural bias** – it’s private, and you have an absolute right to your privacy.

When she (or her relatives) press you for what you consider to be “private” information about yourself, that’s **HER cultural bias** – as part of the group, there is truly no such thing as privacy!

4. If she asks you for money for gifts or help for her family. This is where Thai women earn a really bad “rap” – Westerners simply don’t understand the deep cultural difference at work here. It’s **YOUR culture to assume that others, particularly older family members, can take care of themselves**. Not only that, you consider it “rude” or worry that she’s taking advantage of you when she asks for financial help!

When she asks you directly for money, or tells you that her father is sick or her mother could use a new stove or her uncle needs to replace his motorbike, it’s **HER culture to assume that you will help them** – cheerfully and willingly! After all, you’re now part of her “group” and that’s what people do!

5. When you want some quiet time alone with yourself. You, as a Western man, may need to take some time to pursue your own hobby, your own interests, or just sit and watch a football game or boxing match on TV. It’s **YOUR cultural bias to assume that everyone needs to spend some time alone**. It keeps you sane, balanced, and healthy.

When she “invades your man-cave,” chattering away while you’re trying to adjust the carburetor or interrupts your TV time to ask if you want to eat, it’s **HER cultural bias to assume you need company**. After all, you need to be with the group to be sane, balanced and healthy.

What to do When “Me” and “We” Collide

When these cultural biases for the individual versus the group crash into each other (and they will!), what will help you most is something easy to say but difficult to do: **become aware that it’s not personal!**

Since you’re coming from a background where expressing yourself and your own opinion is natural, healthy, and right – and she’s coming from a culture where expressing herself and her own opinion is unnatural, unhealthy, and wrong – the burden is on you to be self-aware. And from that place of self-awareness, **express yourself gently, calmly, and lightly**.

Tell her about your awareness of the differences between you. Show her you respect her concern for the group, by not being too aggressive or forceful when you communicate. Express how much you appreciate her desire to “not make waves” and her concern for your well-being.

And oh so gently declare your “boundaries.” Explain about the concept of privacy – that you are uncomfortable discussing some things in public. Help her understand that your desire to spend time alone doesn’t mean you’re angry or unhappy with her. Set limits about how much money you have available to help her family. Encourage her to ask for what she wants, express her opinion, or take time for herself – and reassure her that doing so will not upset you, make you angry, or make you care less for her.

Awareness, patience, and calm are the attitudes that will help you most!

Chapter 3 - “Some People are More Equal than Others”

Chapter 3 - “Some People are More Equal than Others”

So let’s talk about the second key cultural difference – the nature of power, how it shows up in the way people act toward each other, and how it will impact your relationship with your Thai lady.

Meet Philip, a “Regular Australian Guy”

Born and raised in Melbourne, Philip is as good a guy as you’d ever want to meet, and an “Aussie” to the core. He believes that everyone in life deserves a fair shake, and nobody is better than anybody else. He calls his boss by his first name; teases his mother mercilessly; argues politics vigorously with his dad; and when the situation calls for it, he can “butt heads” with his older sister, with whom he is extremely close.

He’s politically ambivalent, but can argue both sides in almost any discussion of current events. He votes “the man,” not “the party.” It’s been years since he’s been to church, and when he’s met “men of the cloth,” he’s been uncomfortable with what he considers their “pompous and self-righteous superiority.”

Although he’s a senior manager for his company, when he’s out in the field with his guys, he drives a beat-up truck, shows up in jeans and a work shirt,

and can hoist a beer and crack a joke with the best of them after hours. He knows that he's got their respect because he's earned it, having worked his way up from the bottom – he's been where they are and hasn't forgotten. He regularly asks for their input when he makes decisions, and listens when they have problems with their work or solutions that would make it more effective.

Around the house, he's not afraid to pitch in – he can whip up an omelet, iron his own shirts, and when pressed, clean the bathrooms and keep his place from looking like a complete disaster. He'd had a cleaning woman in to help, but he'd been hard pressed to know how to give her "orders," treating her more like an auntie and preferring that she call him "Phil" when they sat together over coffee during her work breaks.

Phil knows that he's anyone's equal – and that through hard work, education, and ambition anybody can raise their station in life. Likewise he knows that the rich and powerful can fall from grace in a heartbeat with just one wrong turn in the stock market – after all, they put their trousers on one leg at a time just like he does.

For Phil, life is good. He's secure. He doesn't have anything to "prove" to anybody about his power or his position.

Meet Lia, a Typical Thai Woman

Born and raised in a middle-class suburb in Bangkok, Lia is a decent, hard-working, and easygoing woman, typical of those of her "station" in life. She's as Thai as Thai can be, grateful for her status in life and the privileges it has given her. She is deferential and subservient to her boss, calling him Mr. Li; she spends her visits to her parents' home cleaning and doing chores unbidden; and when the situation calls for it, she will defer to the opinions of her older brother, who she respects deeply.

She's politically loyal, voting the way her family has always voted, for the party that helps them maintain their station in life. She visits the Buddhist temple in her neighborhood frequently, and makes offerings at the little shrines dotted throughout her neighborhood. When she meets a monk, she gives a deep "wai" of respect for his commitment to living his life according to the Noble Truths.

She's a manager at her company, and when she visits her workers in the field she makes sure to arrive in a way that reinforces her role as a superior. She has her driver wash and wax the car, dresses in her best, most formal conservative suit, and allows her subordinates to offer respect by bringing her tea, giving her the best chair, and arranging the conference room so her authority is reinforced. She is a good boss, and issues instructions in a kind, benevolent way, knowing her employees will do the best they can because it is their role to do as they are told.

Because her family, her position at work, and her salary demand it, she has household help. She knows she doesn't even need to ask – her apartment will be sparkling and spotless every evening when she gets home from work and dinner will be waiting for her. Yet when she visits her family, she is unafraid to do what she can to make sure her parents' home is spotless and sparkling, knowing it is a sign of a respectful daughter to be of service to her parents.

Lia knows that not everyone is equal. Their station in life is predetermined, based on their birth and their family. And she knows she's fortunate – her good education, her hard work, and her family connections have helped her secure her place in the "dance" of power.

For Lia, life is good. She is secure. She knows how to use the trappings and rituals of power to communicate her status within her culture, as well as who

to defer to and when.

The Cultural Divide: “Equality” vs. “Power”

When Philip and Lia married after their whirlwind courtship, they soon began to get on each other's nerves, especially in social settings. Used to more assertive, self-confident women, Phil is alarmed at Lia's tendency to act “superior” to some people, yet put herself down sometimes, especially when she visits her family, her boss, or his friends and family.

It makes him particularly uncomfortable when they're visiting his older sister, where Lia acts more like a servant than a guest, offering to do his sister's laundry, clean the bathrooms, do the cooking, and take every opportunity to let his older sister completely dominate her.

“My sister can be pretty self-absorbed,” he says. “We are close, but Lia acts like my sister is a queen or a goddess or something. Lia goes way beyond just good guest manners and lets my sister take advantage of her. It's embarrassing, and I'm irritated that my sister thinks my wife is somebody she can walk all over.”

For her part, Lia can't understand how Phil can be so disrespectful to his older sister. When he brought up how much Lia was doing to help – in front of everybody – she was embarrassed, hurt, and so angry that she had to apologize to Phil's sister for his bad behavior. “His sister is older, so he needs to be a better brother,” she says. “I didn't realize how rude he could be until I saw how he acts with his sister and her family.”

What's at work here is something called the “Power Dynamic.” Your Western culture has a much smaller “power distance” than her Thai culture. What does that mean? It means that her culture views the dynamics of power and the

inequalities in society differently than yours does. Power, and the perception of power, drives how people treat each other. Let's take a look.

The Western Value: Equality is at the heart of a strong, stable society

In almost any modern Western country, whether it's European, North American, or Australian, people are raised to believe that everyone is basically equal – that no one is “better” than anybody else. In other words, they are born “equal,” and how they live their lives can affect their level of power, status, or wealth. And equality is “right” and “good.” It's at the heart of a strong, stable society.

Even in older European cultures like Great Britain where there's still a rich and powerful monarchy people still think of themselves as equal, knowing they can influence their own level of power, status, or wealth by educating themselves, working hard, and moving freely within the limits of their society.

As a matter of fact, Western cultures tend to believe that whenever there is inequality in society it is a problem to be dealt with – through laws, regulations, and education – so that the value of equality is maintained and all people are treated equally (at least on the surface).

In your culture, it's likely that the “power gap” between the rich or privileged and the regular guy is small – even though there are always people with more privilege, wealth and power than others.

In the example above, Phil knows that his sister is his equal. He knows that Lia is his sister's equal. He's therefore startled – even shocked – that Lia would intentionally put herself in a subservient position to his sister and NOT treat her as an equal! He's also a bit disgusted that his sister seems to be

enjoying a “power trip” over Lia – even though she laughs it off as a lark.

But there’s more to this “power dynamic” than that.

In your relationship with a Thai woman, you will be assigned the role of “more powerful” – not only because of your unique status as a foreigner (or “farang”) but also because in Thai society, men have more power than women. They are the head of the family. That’s just the way it is. You might be uncomfortable in this position, having had more experience with Western women who are used to asserting themselves, participating in decision-making, and standing up for themselves as equals.

And if you get too uncomfortable, you’ll want to talk about it and resolve it as equals. Why? Because in your culture, when something needs to change, people get together and discuss the situation as equals until a solution evolves. The discussions might get loud or boisterous, but when a change needs to happen, it’s usually accomplished through “evolution” – that is, without violence.

In your culture, you might feel uncomfortable “throwing your weight around” with all the trappings of power, no matter what your position or job title. It’s just bad manners to flaunt your status in most Western countries.

The Thai Value: Inequality is the way society achieves “balance”

Thai people know that inequality is found in every level of society – whether it’s a small rural village or a large complex city. Not everyone has the same status, the same power over others, or the same wealth. In other words, people are born “unequal,” and nothing they will ever do can change it. Their level of power, status, or wealth is a lifelong “given.” And inequality is “right”

and “good.” It’s the way society achieves and maintains balance.

As a matter of fact, Thais expect there to be inequality. They are comfortable with the certainty that not everyone is equal, or should be treated equally. In the Thai culture, the “power gap” between the rich or privileged and the regular guy is huge – and everybody accepts it.

In the example above, Lia experiences her relationship with Phil’s family as a hierarchy: she is subservient to her husband. And both of them are subservient to his older sister, who will always be more powerful because she is older. Lia is startled – even shocked – at how little respect and deference Phil gives his sister and embarrassed that Phil is so ignorant of the power dynamic that is clearly obvious to her!

In her relationship with a Western man, a Thai woman will defer to him as “more powerful.” That’s just the way it is. As long as the man behaves reasonably and is kind in his exercise of authority, there is balance. But if he abuses his position of power, look out! See, in Thailand, if people begin to feel that things are “out of balance,” the only way to change it is through “revolution.” Just recall Thailand’s recent history from Chapter 1!

She expects not only to defer to you as more “powerful” than she is, but also that you defer to the people who are important in her culture – her boss, her elders, monks, or other people with higher status.

She expects you will act according to your role – showing the “trappings of power” when it’s appropriate, and expressing deference or subservience when it’s necessary. In her culture, she expects to be able to brag about your status, her status, and how important you are.

The “Equality” versus “Power” Dimension – a Summary Chart

In an “Equal” Culture like Yours...	In a “Power” Culture like Hers...
People are basically equal, and expect to be treated equally	People are basically unequal, and expect to be treated according to their status
Since people are basically equal, it's important to act in ways that reinforce the notion of equality	Since people are basically unequal, it's important to act in ways that reinforce your position in the hierarchy
Everybody should have equal rights	The powerful should have privileges and “more” rights than the powerless
People can “rise above” their station through hard work and achievement	People accept their station in life, and nothing they do can change it
Your personal power and influence are based on your achievements, your expertise, your formal position, and your ability to give rewards	Her personal power and influence are determined by her family, her friends, her charisma, and her/their ability to use force
It is “bad manners” to show off your personal power and status – it's important to look less powerful than you are	It is expected that she will show off her personal power and status – it's important to look as powerful as she can
Decision-making is a “democratic” process	Decision-making is an “authoritarian” process

The way to change an unpopular system is to change the rules, through conversation and negotiation (evolution)	The way to change an unpopular system is by changing the people at the top (revolution)
Parents treat children as equals, and children treat parents as equal in your culture	In Thailand, parents teach children obedience, and children treat their parents with respect, even into adulthood
Your teachers expect you to take initiative in school – debate, discussion, and “arguing” is encouraged	Her teachers expect to take all the initiative in school – debate, discussion, and “arguing” are forbidden
Power is decentralized in your culture, held by many people	Power is centralized in the hands of a few people in her culture
Your subordinates expect to be consulted about decisions	Her subordinates expect to be told what to do
Your ideal boss is a resourceful “democrat”	Her ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat or “good father”
The use of power should be “legitimate” and it is always subject to evaluation of good or evil	Might makes right: whoever holds the power is right and good
Prevailing religions and philosophical systems in your culture stress	Prevailing religions and philosophical systems in Prevailing religions and

equality	philosophical systems in Thailand stress hierarchy and stratification
The political spectrum in your culture has a strong center and weak right and left wings	The political spectrum in Thailand has a weak center and strong right and left wings

Adapted from: G. Hofstede, Culture's Consequences.

How you'll Discover this "Equality" vs. "Power" Difference

1. In the way Thais in general and your lady in particular, greet others.

If you've spent any time at all in Thailand, you'll no doubt have noticed the "wai" – the charming Thai custom of greeting people by placing your hands in a palm-touching, almost prayer-like gesture close to your chest, accompanied by a nod or bow of the head. If you've never been in Thailand before, you'll see that gesture everywhere you go. But what might escape most Western eyes are the subtle variations found to be found in that simple gesture.

Pay close attention, and you'll notice that when greeting some people the hands are moved closer to the head – even up as far as the forehead – and the nods or bows are deeper. And in greeting others, the hands are moved closer to the center of the body, and only the slightest nod accompanies the gesture. Those are physical clues to the other person's status in the hierarchy. The higher the hands toward the head, and the deeper the nod, the more status and respect is being shown to the person being greeted. In greeting a person of more equal status, the hands are closer to the chest. And even more interestingly, the "wai" of someone of lower status than you need not always be returned!

Although you'll be given the benefit of the doubt if you're new to Thailand or Thai culture, as your relationship deepens with your Thai lady, she'll begin to expect you to understand these subtleties. When you meet people who are important (and therefore of higher status) to her, like her boss, her parents, her priest – even authority figures like policemen and government officials – she will expect you to show the same respect she does, and will become embarrassed – even offended -- if you don't. If her uncle is an alcoholic; if her brother is a degenerate gambler; if the policeman is corrupt – you, as a Westerner, feel justified in showing your disrespect. After all, to you respect is earned.

2. In socializing, the positions people assume as they seat themselves.

If you visit your Thai lady's family in their home, for example, pay particular attention to how people arrange themselves. Notice that older family members (mother, dad, grandma, grandpa, elderly auntie or uncle) take the chairs. Children (even adult children) will often seat themselves on the floor, keeping their heads lower than those of the older, higher-status relatives to show respect.

3. In decision-making, the avoidance of stating a preference. Just like in the last chapter, the most obvious way this power dimension will show up is in the shy way she'll say, "It's up to you" to whatever opinion you ask her to voice. After all, you have the higher status, more power – therefore the decision must be yours and it would be "out of place" or bad manners for her to make it or presume to make it for you – even if the decision concerns her directly. In other words, her quiet, deferential, and shy behavior is actually deference in reaction to your higher status and position.

4. **In taking initiative to change the circumstances of life.** Should you make any suggestions that your Thai lady friend take steps to improve her education, take classes for her own amusement, look for a better job, or take any initiative at all to change the circumstances of her life, she may resist – thinking that doing so is acting outside the boundaries of her status. Many Western men who have taken their Thai brides to live outside Thailand have been mystified at what seems like “laziness” – it’s actually the deep culture shock of being asked to take power over her own life that seems to paralyze her!
5. **In the way the Thai people talk about their king, their government, and other people of high position.** You may think the Thai deference and the respect they pay to high government officials and religious leaders are irrational – and to you it probably is. As an example, remember how the U.S. culture treated its president for being unfaithful to his wife? He was mocked, ridiculed, and publically humiliated with lurid descriptions of his private parts. In Thailand, such behavior of an important official would not only be politely ignored – it would be expected. Nobody would openly express such disrespect for such an important man – it would be considered extremely bad manners.
6. **In the ways she (or her family) brag about status.** Face it, when you marry a Thai woman, her status and that of her family might rise in the eyes of their friends and neighbors. After all, as a “farang,” you have that “Hollywood mystique,” whether you think you deserve it or not! Her mother might brag about the new stove you bought for their apartment, telling everybody how much you paid for it. Her father might boast of the high cost of the jewelry you gave his unworthy daughter. And she might even show off the new watch, computer, or

other gift, telling her friends, “He spends so much money on me.”

Rather than being embarrassed at the flaunting of the value of those gifts, realize it’s normal and natural in Thai culture to make a show of status and power and enjoy their symbols.

What to do When “Equality” and “Power” Collide

It may be tempting to take advantage of the power you hold “over” your Thai partner. Who wouldn’t want to be treated with such deference, such obedience, such service? But beware. Part of this “power dynamic” is the Thai tendency to have a “long fuse” and an even longer memory. Her cultural upbringing will drive her to tolerate your bad behavior only so long – until the only way to resolve it will not be through conversation or negotiation, but through “replacing the person at the top” – YOU.

If you can be patient, understanding, and flexible, you can gently introduce these key cultural differences and discuss them with your Thai partner, rather than argue about who is right and who is wrong. Part of the joy of any relationship is exploring your differences – rather than just sharing what you already have in common.

Learn from her the subtleties of showing respect – and teach her how to feel comfortable “sharing” power with you by making her know you won’t be angry with her for assuming her opinions, wants or desires are as important in the relationship as yours.

Chapter 4 – Dealing with Uncertainty: Control or Tolerance?

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Meet Kurt, a “Typical” German Engineer

Born, raised, and educated in Germany, Kurt is cheerful, polite, efficient and precise. Growing up traveling on the enviable railway system in his native country, which publishes its “on-time” record for every commuter to see and set their watches by, he is used to the physical, social, and commercial systems around him functioning like clockwork.

He’s used to people following traffic rules – after all, the Autobahn (the modern expressway) was created in his country. He’s used to service people making – and keeping – appointments, repairing what needs to be repaired on the date and time agreed upon. He’s used to orderly queues at the bank, each person taking his turn. He’s used to spotlessly clean restaurants (and restrooms). And he’s used to immediate responses to any type of customer complaint.

Kurt worked hard, studied hard, and fulfilled every expectation required to rise in his company. He’s an excellent manager, giving precise directives and expecting precise results from his team, usually based on intelligent collaboration. When his company transferred him to their Asia headquarters in

Bangkok, Kurt was excited at the possibility, but anxious about the change. After all, Kurt had travelled all over the world. But Bangkok made him especially nervous.

Although everyone smiled, and was outwardly polite, he just couldn't figure out how or why things worked in this country! People made appointments and didn't keep them. Driving was terrifying, with the crush of taxis, tuk-tuks, bicycles, oxen and pedestrians spilling through the streets in random chaos. It was weeks before his telephone service worked – and the electricity would often go off mysteriously for hours at a time.

When he complained to the telephone company and the electric company, the customer service people were gentle and smiling – agreeing to send someone out “immediately” – but they never came when they said they would. When he returned to complain a second time, all he got was an inscrutable smile and a non-committal *“mai pen rai.”*

He is, by nature, intolerant of chaos and uncertainty. It makes him extremely uncomfortable. He just doesn't know how to “be” when he can't control the outcome.

Now Meet Kan, a Typical Thai Professional

Born, raised, and educated in Bangkok, Kan is cheerful, polite, helpful as she can be, and accepting of the uncertainty of daily life. Growing up in the sprawl of Bangkok with its mix of wealth and poverty existing side by side, she is used to the hectic traffic and unreliable physical, social, and commercial systems that function when they do, and fall apart with regularity. At least they try.

She's used to surviving with very few “rules,” and she knows that the rules

only apply to the people who don't have the status, relationships, or power to break them openly. She also knows that when she has bad luck, or when things break or don't work the way they should, that's just the way life is. She knows when the telephone repair people tell her they'll be there later today that somebody or something more important might prevent them from coming. That's okay. They'll get to her when they can. *"Mai pen rai."*

Kan worked hard, studied hard, and had the family connections to earn her a well-paying job as a manager in an export company. She's an excellent boss, direct and clear with her subordinates, whom she trusts to do exactly as she says. At work, when she deals with foreigners like Kurt, she is puzzled by how upset they seem to get about the way things work in Bangkok. No matter how much she smiles, how gently she tries to explain, the farangs just don't seem to "get" that everything will turn out the way it turns out, and getting upset about it is not healthy.

She understands in her heart that life is full of uncertainty and chaos, and accepts that. She knows good things and bad things happen in spite of her desire that they turn out any particular way. That's *"mai pen rai,"* it doesn't matter, it will be okay, there's nothing to be done to change it. Just accept the way it is and move on.

She is, by nature, relaxed, at ease, and tolerant of uncertainty. As a matter of fact, she is calm while the uncertainty of the world swirls around her. She knows exactly how to "be" when things don't work out the way she expects.

The Cultural Divide: "Control" vs. "Tolerance"

There's no doubt about it. Life is uncertain. And uncertainty makes people nervous. Every culture on earth has evolved its own ways to help people deal with the stress and anxiety of uncertainty, and those ways involve some

combination of three approaches: **technology, rules and regulations, and religion**. Cultures “manage” the uncertainty of nature with technology; develop rules and regulations to “manage” the uncertainty of human behavior; and use religion and its rituals to “manage” what you might call the luck of life.

If you were raised in Australia, Canada, the U.S. the U.K., or other Anglo-Celtic culture, chances are you don’t tolerate “uncertainty” or the inability to control your circumstances very well. Your culture uses **rules, laws, and technology** to help people cope with the stress and anxiety of uncertainty and make them feel safe from danger.

You might come from a place where there are laws designed to protect you—motorcycle helmet laws, food safety regulations, guard rails on the highway, warning signs about wet floors or road construction, zoning restrictions in buildings and neighborhoods—all kinds of rules and regulations and laws to keep you “safe” from accidental harm. You might be like Kurt -- somebody who expects that people will follow the rules, be on time, and do what they say they will do when they say they will do it – all so that you feel a sense of “control” and safety in the face of life’s uncertainty.

In Thailand, you can ride without a helmet, sell your own homemade food by the side of the road, and raise chickens in your back yard no matter where you live – there aren’t hundreds of laws and dozens of government agencies whose only job is to keep you safe. Thais know that life is inherently dangerous – and it’s your “karma” to take whatever misfortune comes. You see, in Thailand, the anxiety and stress about the uncertainty and unpredictability of life are most obviously managed by **religion** – in particular, the Buddhist way of looking at the world.

The Western Value: “Control”

In your modern Western culture, you have a much lower tolerance for uncertainty than we Thais have. You seem to think that uncertainty in life is a constant threat that you must be protected from – and feel anxious or stressed when you're faced with new circumstances or unfamiliar situations. After all, what is new or different might actually be dangerous!

Most Western cultures have created laws, **regulations**, or **technology** to help get a handle on the anxiety or stress they feel about uncertainty. And the culture develops rigid rules of behavior that everyone follows so nobody is uncomfortable.

And in most Western countries, it's perfectly acceptable to become emotional, assertive, or even aggressive when your expectations about certainty are not met. If you're standing in a queue at the bank and someone cuts in front of you, it's perfectly appropriate to express your outrage that they didn't "follow the rules" and the people around you will probably agree. If you're in the checkout line at the grocery store that says "10 items or less" and the guy in front of you has 18 items, you have every right to get annoyed and express that annoyance, even if it's just to mutter under your breath. Everybody around you agrees anyway, and shares your annoyance at the ill-mannered jerk that breaks "the rules."

Westerners tend to ease (or maybe even add to!) the stress of life's uncertainty with an inner drive to keep busy, to work hard, to build up a stockpile of money and possessions that you think will protect you from an uncertain future. It is normal, natural, and "right" to be precise and punctual – after all, that protects you and those around you from ambiguity and lets them know you can be depended on NOT to add to their uncertainty.

Chances are that in your culture, everyone values "law and order" and looks

to institutions of government (local, regional, and state) for even-handed justice applied to everybody equally. Lawbreakers – criminals – are vilified as sinful and bad and should be punished until they repent their evil ways.

Your culture puts its faith in experts and specialists who have “the Truth” and your home country may think of itself as the “greatest nation on earth.” That exceptionalism makes you proud and allows you to be secure in knowing you are smarter, better, more capable than others.

You know in your heart that if you work hard and follow the rules you can prevent bad things from happening and achieve safety and security for yourself and your loved ones. After all, that’s how life is supposed to work, right?

The Thai Value: Tolerance or “*Mai Pen Rai*”

The point of view about uncertainty in Thailand can be summed up in three words: *mai pen rai*, which can be translated loosely as “never mind,” or “no big deal,” or “don’t sweat the small stuff.” Crash the car? *Mai pen rai*. Termites are invading the garage and threatening to eat it whole? *Mai pen rai*.

And mai pen rai is a reflection of Thailand’s Buddhist roots. Your culture tries to control uncertainty with laws, regulations and technology – we Thais deal with the stress or anxiety about uncertainty using **religion** – in this case, Theravada Buddhism, practiced by over 95% of the country.

Now I don’t want this chapter to be a full course on Buddhism, but understanding the basics might just help you understand some of the “odd” things you’ll see all around you in Thailand – in shops, on street corners, and even in your Thai lady friend’s home. If you can recognize that it’s all about how we deal with uncertainty, perhaps things won’t seem so strange to you.

Buddhism 101 – The Basics

Buddhism has at its heart, four basic premises – called the “Noble Truths.” They are:

1. All life is suffering.
2. The cause of all suffering is desire.
3. Therefore, the cure for suffering is to eliminate desire.
4. The way to eliminate desire is to follow “The Eightfold Path.”

The Eightfold Path is the practice of:

- a. Right Understanding
- b. Right Thought
- c. Right Speech
- d. Right Action
- e. Right Livelihood
- f. Right Effort
- g. Right Mindfulness
- h. Right Concentration

Another essential of Buddhism is the Law of *Karma* – the idea that your present condition (whether you’re happy or suffering) is a direct result of all of your past actions. If bad things are happening to you, it’s the result of your past bad actions. If you focus on doing good things (making merits), you can improve your chances that good things will happen to you. I know it sounds simple – but it’s pretty similar to the Christian idea that you “reap what you sow” and the law in physics that says for every action there is an equal and

opposite reaction. In other words, Karma is nothing more than the law of cause and effect, or balance.

And perhaps more unusual to a Westerner is the Buddhist idea that there are *six “realms” of existence* – gods, demigods, human beings, animals, hungry (or restless) ghosts, and the hells. That means that everything has a life essence – the Buddha, the minor gods, people, cows, flies, ants, trees, tomatoes, grass, dead ancestors, rocks, mountains...everything is alive. It is part of the cycle of life, and the law of Karma implies that a life form is what it is because of some past action.

Buddhists believe that the only way to elevate your position in the cycle of life is by improving your Karma – and you improve your Karma by consciously “making merits.”

What Buddhism Has to do with Tolerating Uncertainty

Since “all life is suffering” and “the root of all suffering is desire,” we Thais approach uncertainty as the basic state of life, the universe, and everything. It’s not that uncertainty doesn’t make us anxious or stressful – we just take each day as it comes and have **religious** rituals that help us deal with that stress and anxiety and give us an inner sense of well-being.

Within the Thai culture, we readily express our emotions of joy and sadness and have no problem expressing those emotions in public. But we do not become assertive, outraged, or aggressive when someone breaks the rules. If someone cuts in front of us in traffic, or at the bank, or at the grocery store – well, “*mai pen rai*.” They must clearly be on a more important mission than ours.

We do not fill our time with “busy-ness” – we fill our time with whatever comes

next into focus. That's why if you make an appointment to get your plumbing fixed, and someone "more important" to the plumber (his father-in-law, his sister's boss, or the local magistrate) comes into his shop right after you, the Thai plumber's priorities will shift to accommodate this new event. He does not want to risk offending this "important" person – nor does he want to risk offending you by telling you he has to change your appointment. All of us then shift with this new event, realizing that our time will come eventually. *Mai pen rai.*

Since we use religion to deal with uncertainty, we rely less on "law and order" than you do. We rely on each person to be responsible for his or her own karma and the "paybacks" it presents for bad behavior. We also know that who you are, who you know, and who you are related to colors any consequences you will face for breaking the law. *Mai pen rai.*

Our culture puts its faith in common sense and in the "eightfold path" of right action, etc., that will allow us to live a good life and minimize the bad things that might happen. We are more tolerant of people who are different, ideas that are different, and cultures that are different, finding the differences interesting or amusing, rather than threatening or scary.

We know in our hearts that if we "make merits" we can hope to create good luck and prevent bad luck, but ultimately, the nature of life is to be out of our control.

The “Control” vs. “Tolerance” Dimension – A Summary Chart

In a “Control” Culture Like Yours...	In a “Tolerance” Culture Like Hers...
You feel the uncertainty of life as a continuous “threat” that you must fight	She feels that uncertainty is a normal fact of life and accepts each day is as it comes
Your culture is more “high stress” and most people have underlying feelings of anxiety	Her culture is more “low stress” and most people have underlying feelings of well-being
You are free in your culture to express aggression and “vent” your emotions at proper times and places	People in her culture are not free to express aggression or “vent” their emotions – especially in public
You can freely accept familiar risks, but might fear ambiguous situations or unfamiliar risks	She is comfortable in ambiguous situations and with unfamiliar risks
Your culture sees the “different” as “dangerous”	Her culture sees the “different” as “curious”
Your culture stresses the need for rules, even if they will never work	Her culture stresses that there should not be more rules than strictly necessary
Your culture gives you the emotional need to be busy and the inner urge to work hard	Her culture gives her the emotional acceptance of time as a framework for orientation
Precision and punctuality come naturally to you	Precision and punctuality have to be learned by people in her culture

Your culture tends to suppress “deviant” ideas and behavior and resist innovation	Her culture tends to tolerate “deviant” and innovative ideas and behavior
Your culture presents many and precise laws and rules that everybody should obey and whose consequences apply equally to everyone	Her culture presents few and general laws and rules whose consequences are adjusted according to the rule breaker’s position or relationships
If rules cannot be respected, we are sinners and should repent	If rules cannot be respected, they should be changed
Conservatism, extremism, law and order are valued in your culture	Tolerance, moderation, and acceptance are valued in her culture
Nationalism, xenophobia, repression of minorities is more common in your culture	Regionalism, internationalism, attempts at integration of minorities is more common in her culture
Your culture believes in experts and specialists	Her culture believes in generalists and common sense
The idea that “there is only one Truth and we have it” is more common in your culture	The idea that “one group’s truth should not be imposed on others” is more common in her culture
Good outcomes are based on hard work and following the rules; bad outcomes are based on failure to work hard and not following the rules	Good and bad outcomes are based on “luck” or karma, and nothing we do can control what happens to us

Adapted from: G. Hofstede, Culture’s Consequences.

How you'll Discover this "Control" vs. "Tolerance" Difference

When you're in Bangkok – or anywhere else in Thailand for that matter – you'll notice little shrines to the Buddha on virtually every street corner. You'll see Thai people almost unconsciously making a "wai" every time they pass one. That's a way to practice "right mindfulness" to stay focused on the Buddhist idea of eliminating desire.

1. You might also notice little "houses" that look almost like mailboxes or birdhouses in everyone's garden or terrace. Those little houses are for the spirits – the gods, demigods, and ghosts that to Thai people are very real and very present. And beyond the spirit houses, Thai people are very precise about what can or cannot be planted in the garden or on the terrace, as certain plants attract more unpleasant spirits or unhappy ghosts than others. It's a way for them to practice "right action."
2. Your Thai lady will want to make sure there is a place in her home to honor the spirits of her deceased family members – who are real and present to her. She might erect a little shrine in the corner and furnish it with a statue of the Buddha, photos of the relatives in question, and incense, flowers, or food offerings. Whatever you do, don't touch the shrine or move things around! You might think it's "just superstition" – but to her, the shrine is an important way to stay connected to her family and express her respect, and it has been precisely arranged, prayed over, and "cleansed."
3. You might also find her attitude about misfortune a little "strange" – perhaps she is too casual about not wearing a seatbelt in the car, or too "laid back" in her reaction to a fender-bender. Maybe she laughs when you hit your thumb with a hammer or trip on the stairs.

Remember, when bad things happen to her – or to you --it's all "Karma," the natural balancing result of some previous action.

4. You, as a foreigner (or *farang*) might misunderstand and misapply *mai pen rai*. If you knock over her shrine, touch a spirit house, step over someone's food at a picnic, pat someone on the head, point your feet at someone, or sit on a Buddha statue, *mai pen rai* is an inappropriate reaction on your part! There are many cultural and behavioral "taboos" – and all of them are designed to keep things in balance, to keep good things happening and to prevent bad things from happening. I'll share some of them with you later on in this book.

What to do when "Control" and "Tolerance" Collide

As soon as you understand that each of you looks at and deals differently with life's uncertainty, you'll be able to talk – and maybe even laugh – about the way you were each trained to cope with feeling "out of control." Just like in the previous two chapters, it's not personal. It's not about who's right and who's wrong. It's cultural programming.

As you get to know your Thai lady, ask her to explain the rituals that mean so much to her. Ask her about the cultural "taboos" that help the Thai people deal with uncertainty and balance their karma. Take time to explain to her, patiently, gently, calmly why it's important to you that "rules" be followed and "order" be observed.

If you're spending any time in Thailand, you'll be presented many opportunities every single day that will try your patience and challenge your inner programming for control. With your Thai lady, and the other Thai people you meet, keep in mind that expressing frustration, annoyance, or outrage at the way things work (or don't work) will not make them work any better or

faster.

It might well be that learning to adopt a little “tolerance” will be as good for your health and well-being as her learning to adopt a little more “control!”

If you’re open, curious, and willing to understand, you’ll find that your different approaches to uncertainty can also be a source of delight and fun, rather than a source of conflict!

Chapter 5 -- “Achievement” vs. “Nurturance:” the Masculinity/Femininity Dimension

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Meet Ian, a British “Superman”

Ian, in his late 40s, is a senior manager at his firm, and working in its Asia office in Bangkok. He’s basically a good guy, but some would call him a “workaholic.”

He’s up every day at the crack of dawn to run his 5 kilometers before work. After his shower, he reads the business section of the paper over breakfast, jumps in the car for the 60-minute drive into the office, where he spends anywhere between 10 and 12 hours in meetings, phone calls, site visits, and negotiations. He spends frequent evenings at “working dinners,” entertaining clients and colleagues from out of town. He often goes in on weekends to catch up on the inevitable paperwork and budget reports his superiors in the UK demand every week. All told, he spends an average of 80 hours a week doing his job, for which he is extremely well-paid.

He’s politically conservative, highly competitive, and has little patience for those who are not as ambitious as he is. He views every meeting of a new acquaintance as a chance to show off his superior intellect and “world-class”

debating skills.

His fellow Britons consider him a bit of a “superman,” as he represents the best that men in his country could hope to achieve. He’s pulled himself up by his own bootstraps, lives life on his own terms, and has a hard time respecting anyone who can’t rise on his own merits or hold his own in an argument.

Meet Pia, a Thai “Superwoman”

Pia, in her mid-30s, is a senior manager at her firm, working at the Asia headquarters of an international firm in Bangkok. She’s a good woman, liked and admired by her friends, her family, and her colleagues at work.

She’s up every day at the crack of dawn to help her sister (with whom she lives) cook breakfast for the family and get her nieces and nephews off to school. During breakfast, she helps them with their homework and listens to them chatter about their school activities.

After breakfast, she showers and jumps in the car for the 60-minute drive into the office, where she puts in her steady 8-to-5 hours in meetings, phone calls, site visits, and negotiations. Once in a while, if there are visiting VIPs, she’ll be invited to attend a “working dinner,” but for the most part, she’s home by 7 p.m., ready to spend an enjoyable evening with her sister, her sister’s husband and his parents, and her nieces and nephews.

She rarely goes in to work on the weekends, preferring to spend the time in the company of her family or her many friends. All told, she spends an average of 40 hours a week doing her job, for which she is adequately paid.

She’s politically ambivalent, extremely cooperative, and patient with people

who have abilities different from hers. She views every meeting of a new acquaintance as an opportunity to add to her interesting circle of friends and contacts, and listens carefully to understand their points of view.

Her fellow Thais consider her a bit of a “superwoman,” as she represents the best that women in her country can hope to achieve. Her family helped her get a good education, and arranged the introductions necessary to secure her a good job in a good company. She’s eager to return the favor by helping her nieces and nephews, and happy to express her gratitude to those who have helped her succeed.

The Cultural Divide: “Achievement vs. Nurturance...or “Masculinity” vs. “Femininity”

In previous chapters, I’ve shown you that cultural attitudes in the West are often almost opposite those in Thailand. The West has a focus on the individual, and Thailand focuses on the group, for example. In the West, the society works to eliminate the stress of uncertainty by focusing on rules and regulations, and in Thailand that stress is relieved through the rituals of religion. In a similar way, your Western culture is more achievement-oriented, or “masculine,” while her Thai culture is more nurturing, or “feminine.”

I’m not talking here about the obvious differences between individual men and women, or the ways in which boy children or girl children are “trained” in their gender roles. I’m talking about what the culture values, and how people are trained to behave within it.

If a culture values achievement, assertiveness, and “fighting to win,” it is said to be “more masculine.” And if a culture values harmony, nurturance, and “compromising to win,” it is said to be more “feminine.”

The masculinity-femininity dimension isn't just about how families teach their children the appropriate way to behave according to their gender. In other words, it is the culture that is masculine or feminine, not just the men and women within it. Both men and women hold "tougher" values in masculine countries and more "tender" values in feminine ones

Your Western culture, whether it's Australian, American, British, or Canadian, tends to value and reward behavior that can be said to be more masculine. Everyone -- man, woman, or child -- is trained to value achievement, accomplishment, assertiveness, and competence. It's why many Western men complain that the women of their home culture are "too aggressive."

Her Thai culture tends to value harmony and balance above all else, and reinforces behavior that can be said to be more feminine. Everyone -- man, woman, or child -- is trained to value peace, community, and nurturance over individual accomplishment. As a matter of fact, even being singled out for reward or praise is actually embarrassing, as it elevates her "out" of the group to which she belongs!

Whether a culture is masculine or feminine determines what jobs are held by men, what jobs are held by women, and how much the culture values that work. For example, in more masculine cultures, there is more of a distinction between what jobs are "for men" and what jobs are "for women," with the jobs traditionally held by women perceived as less valuable somehow. In American football, for example, a star player can earn millions of dollars a year – but the head cheerleader who supports the team earns only a fraction of what he makes. After all, her value is to support the success of the stronger, male player.

In more feminine cultures like Thailand, everyone is taught to be more modest

and unassuming. Assertive behavior or the “pursuit of excellence,” which are so appreciated in masculine cultures, are qualities that are looked down on or made fun of in feminine ones. If you’ve accomplished something or achieved excellence, in a feminine culture you just keep it to yourself.

And the distinction about what jobs are “for men” and what jobs are “for women” is much smaller – everyone has a role to play in the world of work. Whether it was a male or a female periodontitis who built your tooth implant, or your mother or your father who does the grocery shopping and cooking – it doesn’t matter in the grand scheme of things.

Let’s dig a little deeper to discover the subtle differences between your two cultures.

The Western Value: Achievement (Masculinity)

In masculine cultures all over the world children are taught to admire the strong and ambitious. Popular fictional heroes (many of them created by Hollywood) are “Batman” or “Rambo” or “The Terminator” – whether you were raised in London or Chicago or Toronto or Sydney.

In your Western culture, your teachers most likely praised the best students for their academic performance in public, and gave out awards for achievement. Both male and female students learned to be competitive that way, and that the best way to succeed was to be visible and verbal to stand out from the crowd. By the time a child from your culture finishes primary school, he or she has learned that it is a horrible thing to fail.

In the West, for the most part, boys and girls are raised to deal with their emotions differently, too. Boys are raised NOT to cry. Boys are raised to “fight back” if they are attacked. Such behavior as crying or avoiding a fight are

serious enough to earn a Western boy some severe mocking – they mark him as “a sissy” or “a weakling,” or worse -- and such a boy is not respected.

Girls in the West, on the other hand, are raised to express their “tender” feelings – it’s okay to cry. But they are raised to suppress their aggression and are not expected to “fight back” or “stand up for themselves” when attacked. At the same time, they are competitive – competitive over the attention of boys, competitive over clothing, over good grades in school, and competitive about being “popular.”

When it comes to the workplace, that same competitive spirit is encouraged in your culture. You are expected to stand up for yourself, argue your position, and compete for promotions – and to be verbal and visible about it all. Promotions, earnings, and “perks” are awarded to those who are the most competitive and achievement-oriented. And business is seen as a “game” where there are winners and losers.

And in some Western cultures – maybe even yours – people who can argue loudly and passionately are admired, whether it’s in the living room, at a business meeting, or in a public restaurant. Some may even consider arguing a sport – after raising voices, pounding tables, and hurling insults at each other, the “opponents” declare a winner, slap each other on the back and go out for a beer as if nothing happened!

In terms of how its governments function, more masculine countries spend a large part of their budget to ensure they can “win” any conflict, with more money going to weapons and arms than to social programs like health care or education. It’s as if the whole purpose of national government is to win – at any cost. (Just look at how viciously the political parties in your home country attack each other, for example!)

Your Western culture tends to value the idea of “Living to Work.” To be productive. To accomplish something. And to do so in a louder, more public way. It’s not a bad thing – it’s just a more “masculine” way of viewing the world.

The Thai Value: Nurturance (Femininity)

In feminine cultures all over the world, children learn to admire and experience sympathy for the “underdog” or the anti- hero. (The popular “Shrek” movies come to mind.)

In her Thai culture, teachers rarely praise rarely praise individual achievements or academic performance because it’s considered impolite to elevate one student over another. In her schools, it’s more likely that students cooperate with one another, rather than compete for attention, as friendliness is considered more importance than individual “brilliance” or good grades. As a matter of fact, failing in school is not seen as nearly so important a tragedy as it is in the West.

In a feminine culture like Thailand, boys and girls are raised to deal with their emotions in a similar way – both boys and girls, for example, are “permitted” to cry or express their tender feelings. They are also encouraged to express happiness and warmth – just not too exuberantly! And both boys and girls are discouraged from openly expressing any kind of anger, aggression, or hostility toward anyone – it is seen as a disturbance of peace and harmony, and very bad manners.

That “feminine” drive toward harmony and cooperation are also seen in the Thai workplace, where the idea of individual achievement is suppressed to maintain a sense of solidarity and unity. If any conflicts arise, they are not dealt with openly or directly – instead, we Thais tend to avoid arguments

altogether – or negotiate and compromise until a solution that works for everybody emerges (meaning that sometimes conflicts take much longer to resolve themselves!)

We would never think to argue loudly, attack or denigrate somebody for their opinion, or make everyone uncomfortable by making a public scene. People who do argue openly, loudly, passionately raising their voices and pounding the table are, to us Thais, embarrassing not only themselves but everybody else as well.

Our feminine culture also expresses itself differently to yours in terms of how our government works and spends its money. We do not spend a large amount of our national income on weapons or arms – but we do spend a tremendous amount of government time talking, negotiating, forming subcommittees of committees to study whether the issue should be studied at all!

And don't let the fact that there have been more than 16 coups d'état in Thailand make you think it's particularly dangerous here – nearly every single coup, even those involving the military, have been described as “friendly changes in government.”

Our Thai culture tends to value “Working to Live.” To get along with one another. To enjoy family life. To live in harmony with the world, in a quiet, peaceful, and happy way. It's not a bad thing – it's just a more “feminine” way of looking at the world.

The “Achievement” vs. “Nurturance” Dimension – a Summary Chart

In Your Western, More “Masculine” Culture...	In Her Thai, More “Feminine” Culture...
In Western cultures, the purpose of life is to work	In the Thai culture, the purpose of work is to live
Your culture values material success and progress	Her culture values caring for others and the preservation of the group
Men are supposed to be ambitious, tough and assertive, and talking about your accomplishments is expected in your culture	Everyone is supposed to be modest, and they tend to avoid “boasting” and keep their achievements quiet in her culture
Women are supposed to be tender and to take care of relationships	Both men and women are allowed to be tender and concerned with relationships
Girls cry, and shouldn’t fight – even if attacked; boys don’t cry, and are expected to fight back when attacked	Both boys and girls are allowed to cry and neither should fight
Your culture sympathizes with and supports the strong	Her culture sympathizes with and helps the weak
In your culture, failing in school is a disaster	In her culture, failing in school is a minor accident
Boys and girls study different	Boys and girls study the same

subjects and play different sports	subjects and play the same sports
Managers are expected to be assertive and decisive	Managers are expected to use intuition and strive for consensus
In a Western workplace, the stress is on equity, competition among colleagues, and performance	In a Thai workplace, the stress is on equality, solidarity, and quality of work life
Your culture believes that conflicts are best resolved by fighting them out	Her culture believes that conflicts are best avoided – but if they arise, are best resolved by compromise and negotiation
In your culture, arguments are conducted openly, verbally, and sometimes loudly until one side “wins”	In her culture, arguments are suppressed until a solution that is best for the group emerges on its own
Your culture believes that a “performance” society is ideal	Her culture believes that a “welfare” society is ideal
“Women’s liberation” means women should have equal access to work that has been available traditionally only to men	“Women’s liberation” means that both men and women should contribute equally at home and at work
Everyone is expected to express their opinion and stand up for themselves	Everyone is expected to suppress their opinion for the good of the group

Maintenance of economic growth should have highest priority	Preservation of the environment should have highest priority
Your culture believes that government should spend a relatively large proportion of its budget on weapons and the military	Her culture believes that government should spend a relatively small proportion of its budget on weapons and the military
Dominant religions in your culture stress the masculinity of God	The dominant religion in her culture stresses the complementarity of the sexes

Adapted from: G. Hofstede, Culture's Consequences.

How you'll Discover this "Masculinity" vs. "Femininity" Cultural Difference

1. You will quickly discover that your Thai partner will not openly argue with you or compete with you in conversation – and sometimes she won't even venture an opinion. She truly thinks that doing so will create disharmony, and she'll either sacrifice her own needs to keep your relationship in balance, or she'll offer "passive resistance" instead of openly disagreeing with you.

You'll ask her, for example, what she would like to do this weekend and she'll demure and say "I don't know," "Whatever you want to do," or "You decide." She'll never tell you she hates football, or that she would rather spend a quiet day in the park than hanging out while you and your friends drink beer and debate politics. Many Western guys are enchanted by this behavior at first – then mystified – then frustrated because they "can't figure out what the heck she wants."

2. She will expect you to be as concerned about her wellbeing and the

balance in your relationship as she is. After all, in her culture, both men and women participate more equally in such matters and make sure that all of their relationships are harmonious.

What to do When “Achievement” and “Nurturance” Collide

As a friend of mine once told me, “When my husband is acting hard, I find it best to react by being soft.” In other words, in your relationship with your Thai lady, you might have to be extra aware of when you are being too “hard” in your approach to life, because you can count on her to react by being too “soft.” You may never know she has a problem with your behavior or your decisions unless you are willing to reassure her that it’s okay for her to openly express her opinions, wishes and needs – that you won’t get angry if she does.

The whole “masculine-feminine” thing is more about working together to find the perfect balance in your relationship than it is about who’s right and who’s wrong, or turning yourself into some kind of “girly man” to adapt to her feminine cultural approach. If you find that balance, your relationship is bound to be deep, profound, and a source of quiet joy to you both.

Chapter 6 -- “Content vs. Context” – Why Your Two Cultures Communicate so Differently (and so often misunderstand each other!)

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Meet Mark...

Mark, an executive in his mid-40s, began dating again two years after a brutal divorce. He tried the club scene in his native Atlanta, but found the women there too young, too immature, and too self-absorbed for his liking. He met fit, attractive women his own age in his local athletic club, and spent some pleasant evenings going out for a bite to eat after a workout. He dated a few women he met through his professional network, and gradually developed a relationship with someone special.

His company sent him on a business trip to Asia, and he was intrigued by the experience and the people he met in Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, and especially in Bangkok. The lush landscapes, beautiful beaches, impressive art and history, and the contrast of ancient culture with modern architecture touched something in his soul.

He met Jen, a lovely Thai woman in her 30s, during one of his business calls and invited her to lunch. He found her exotic, charming, intelligent and funny

– and saw her a few more times during his short visit. They exchanged email addresses, and when he returned to Atlanta, they kept up a lively correspondence that ultimately turned into online chat and the occasional phone call.

He enjoyed her friendship – that’s what he considered it – and when his business took him back to Thailand, he called to see if she would accompany him on a three-day visit to Chang Mai in the North and act as his guide and interpreter.

He was amused by her insistence that he meet her parents and ask their permission for her to go on the trip, finding it “quaint” and “old fashioned.” When he arrived at her parents’ home, he was charmed by the formality of their welcome – not only were her parents there, but her grandparents, a few aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews – and they had laid out quite the welcome feast.

To make conversation, he chatted about his business, his divorce, and his growing love of Thailand and its culture. He spoke about his search for a life partner, and how he had been dating several women and that he thought he might have found someone special -- in Atlanta – that he would bring with him on his next trip to Thailand and that he was sure she would enjoy it as much as he did!

He told them what a good friend Jen had been to him, how much he enjoyed her company and what a help it would be if she could accompany him up north. He didn’t notice how cold and quiet the room got, how shocked Jen was, or how angry her father looked.

When he noticed how quiet she was in the car on the way back to her home,

and asked what was wrong, he knew something terrible had happened – but he didn't know what.

He didn't realize the huge misunderstanding and loss of face he had created for Jen or her family by just being himself.

Meet Jen...

A dedicated executive secretary in her mid-30s, Jen wasn't interested in marrying any of the Thai men she had dated. One relationship that looked promising had ended badly when she found he was seeing other women on the side and unwilling to give them up to marry her.

In her work, she met many businessmen from other countries, finding them exotic, handsome, and intriguing. When she met Mark, she found his easygoing personality fun, his accent amusing, and his love of Thailand charming. She hesitated at first when he invited her to lunch, worrying what her friends would think of her for going out in public with a “farang” – but he was so kind and gracious, she didn't see the harm in it. That first lunch turned into a few more dates during his short visit.

The more she saw him, the more she began to hope he was as attracted to her as she was to him. She enjoyed his company, and delighted in showing him around Bangkok and telling him stories about her culture. She gave him her email address when he asked, and promised to write to him when he returned home to Atlanta. As their correspondence continued and turned into online chats and the occasional phone call, she knew he was serious about her.

When he called and asked her to come away with him to Chang Mai, she knew it was time to tell her parents about the relationship and get their

blessing. After all, he wouldn't ask her to come with him if he wasn't serious about her. Her parents and grandparents planned a meal to honor him and welcome the relationship –her mother had even begun planning for the wedding, bragging to the neighbors about how lucky Jen was to have found a handsome, rich, kind farang to take care of her and the family.

When Jen introduced Mark to her parents, she was excited to have all her relatives and important neighbors there. As Mark chatted about his business, everyone nodded pleasantly. But when he started talking about his divorce, his dating other women, and his having found someone in Atlanta, Jen felt the world crack beneath her. She was humiliated. She was sorry for the anger, disappointment, and embarrassment her parents must be feeling. She was so shocked she didn't even hear Mark say how much he appreciated her friendship and her help.

She was so shocked, embarrassed, and humiliated that she could not speak when Mark drove her home.

Jen didn't realize her part in the huge misunderstanding that had led to such a loss of face.

The Cultural Divide: “Content vs. Context” in Communicating

I want to reassure you that, like the other dimensions we've talked about, neither Mark nor Jen is “right.” The way they were brought up, the values they were taught, and the culture they were raised in all shape what feels “right” or “natural” to them. And your Western culture, whether it's American, British, Australian, or Northern-European, couldn't be farther on the spectrum from Asian cultures, most especially the Thai culture, when it comes to communication.

Without getting too academic, I can describe the differences between your Western way of communicating and our Thai way of communicating by using the word “context.”

Context, when used to describe communication, means the background or the circumstances that add to or define meaning.

All cultures in the world fall along a scale of “low-context” to “high context” with regard to communicating. At one end are the “high context” cultures – many of which are found in Asia, Latin America, and among native people in Australia and North and South America. At the other end of the scale are the “low context” cultures, which include the U.S., the U.K., Australia, Northern Europe, and Canada.

In high context cultures, people “get” meaning in any communication from the background and circumstances where the communication is occurring. In low context cultures, people “get” meaning from the actual words, facial expressions and gestures used when communicating. In other words, we can call the opposite ends of the spectrum “Context” and “Content.”

So what does this really mean?

Westerners who come from “low context” cultures depend on the content of a conversation for meaning. When people don’t understand each other, more, bigger, and different words, gestures, and facial expression are pulled out to add content around the message until the other person “gets it.”

On the other hand, people who come from “high context” cultures depend on the relationships, the circumstances, and the background of a situation for meaning. People are assumed to understand the background, and if they

misunderstand each other, they tend to spend more time observing the context in order to “get it.”

One of the challenges you'll face if you get involved in a relationship with a Thai lady – or any Thai person, for that matter – is that the pace and rhythm of the conversations you have will be different than when you communicate with people from your own culture. You are used to conversations that are highly verbal, with lots of detail carried by words, and lots of back-and-forth. It might seem to you that the flow of information in conversations you have with Thai people is slower, more awkward, or somehow evasive.

And one of the challenges any Thai person will have in communicating with you as a Westerner is that they might find you noisy, brash, or unsophisticated because you don't pay enough attention to the circumstances, setting, or background where the communicating is happening. It seems that you say too much, interrupt too often, and are in a hurry.

Even as a Thai woman, I am having a hard time communicating this dimension, because I come from a culture where meaning is simply “understood.” But here's an example that may be helpful.

It's like this: A Western conversation is like a Ping-Pong match – fast paced, reactionary, and sharp. Each player reacts instinctively when it is his “turn” – putting his own individual spin on the return – and causing the other player to adjust and react. The rhythm is fast and predictable.

A Thai conversation is more like a golf game – slow, planned, and smooth. You survey the territory, select the appropriate club, tee up, judge the wind conditions, settle into your physical stance, adjust your grip, and then swing. The onlookers utter a hushed “ooooohhh,” and wait for the ball to settle into

place before the other player tees up to repeat the preparation and take his turn. The rhythm is slow, controlled, and dependent on the course.

Some researchers say that cultures that are more individualistic (“me” cultures) tend to be content-focused (low context) communicators; and those that are more collectivist (“we” cultures) are more context-focused (high context) communicators. For sure this is the case in Thailand.

Since our individual selves are bound up in a sort of “group-think,” we already grow up suppressing our individual wants, needs, desires, and emotions in favor of what’s best for the group. Our focus is on our interrelatedness, so we don’t want to say or do anything that disturbs the harmony of the groups we belong to (family, friends, or colleagues) because those relationships are the very basis of our survival and our success.

And since in your Western culture you were trained to think of yourself as an individual, you grow up learning to express your individual wants, needs, desires, and emotions openly. Your focus is on your individuality, so you don’t want to suppress your self-expression or submit your will to the groups you belong to. Ultimately your survival and success are based on being a strong individual.

Let’s look a little deeper at the differences.

The Western Value: “Content” over “Context”

When you listen to the way Thai people interact with each other for the first time, you may think that what is being said is the real message. That’s because that’s “natural” or “right” in your own culture.

From childhood, you grew up learning how to be articulate, to rely on words to

convey your meaning. When there's a misunderstanding, you're trained that more, better, longer (or louder) words will help the other person understand.

As a Westerner, you've been trained as a "low context" communicator to speak your mind, get to the point quickly and directly, and use your tone of voice and gestures to add emphasis to the words you speak. If any of those three things is missing or confusing, you're likely to misunderstand. And if you misunderstand, you're likely to discuss the misunderstanding directly.

You also are trained to expect that if somebody has something to say, they'll say it – directly – using words, tone of voice, and gestures to express themselves.

What you say is what you mean. Words, sentences, grammar, tone, and gestures carry your message, the context is hardly relevant and there is no such thing as a "hidden meaning." You say what you mean, mean what you say, and that's that. And it's not typical for Westerners to engage in any kind of self-reflection about whether the way they communicate is effective or not.

If there's any sort of conflict, you confront it directly, and use words to come up with a solution. When you criticize someone or something, you are more likely to do it directly and formally – often times in writing (like Letters to the Editor, complaints to customer service, and so on). Even in the workplace, when Westerners "coach" poor performers, it's done in words, then written down and "signed as understood."

And it's also not uncommon for Americans, British, Australians, or other low-context communicators to casually make promises or commitments they have no intention of keeping. After all, yours is an individualistic culture – and when push comes to shove, you'll act in your own interests and look after yourself

before considering the welfare of the group and the relationships within it. “Talk is cheap” is a common expression in most Western cultures. And your relationships are more fluid, more superficial, and more temporary than ours in Thailand.

A low context/high content culture like yours can seem complex or overwhelming to people from high context cultures like Thailand, because it relies so heavily on what is said over how it’s said. And to a Westerner, high context cultures seem oblique and mysterious because of their focus on how something is said and almost more important, on what is not said. Many Westerners find it challenging to work within the boundaries of older, higher-context cultures – Westerners are much better equipped to deal with what is new and unfamiliar.

So in looking at the example from Mark’s perspective, he was perfectly honest. He was just being himself. After all, he never said anything about a long-term relationship, much less marriage. As far as he was concerned, he didn’t make any promises. He took his relationship with Jen as a “friendship,” no more and no less, and treated her as he would treat any woman he was fond of in his own culture. But in his “low context” way, he couldn’t see the forest for the trees.

The Thai Value: “Context” over “Content”

In a high context culture like ours, what is being said is not necessarily the most important element of the message. The most important element is the context or the setting of the communicators.

We’ve been trained to keep our emotions and opinions to ourselves, and we rely on the situation or circumstances to give us permission to express ourselves. We pay more attention to the “why” behind the words, letting each

situation determine what gets said out loud and what doesn't.

We don't need lots of language with lots of detail. Why? Because we assume that the person we're talking to already knows what we mean, given our shared internal beliefs and the context the conversation is occurring in.

In Thailand, the words are often the least important part of the message – it's the environment, or the background against which people are communicating that is most important. And paying more attention to the background is “right” and “natural” in Thailand. We are trained that there is no need for lots of words because everybody involved in the conversation already understand the situation. You can almost say that we pay more attention to what is *not* said.

In a high-context culture like ours, people are deeply involved with one another. The bonds between people start with our families and spread outward to our friends, colleagues, and community, and those bonds between us consist of expectations, commitment, and mutual goodwill. Rather than being fluid, superficial, and temporary, our relationships are life-long, very deep and very permanent.

In our culture, when you give your word it's a promise that other people take very seriously. Many times, the first promise you make to someone can begin a relationship that lasts the rest of your life – so we are very conservative and careful when forming new relationships. That explains why it's so common for us to begin relationships based on a strong introduction by someone we know and trust – whether it's a new business colleague or a new romantic relationship.

We Thai people try to avoid direct confrontation (often by suppressing

ourselves) so we can maintain social harmony and intimate bonds between people. We are expected to be polite, friendly, and cordial, no matter how we are feeling. That may help you understand why we may appear to be indirect – or why when it looks like someone might be offended we change the subject or make a joke to avoid the chance of an open disagreement. You could almost say that we deal with “personality clashes,” minor disagreements, or individual preferences by pretending they don’t even exist.

For us to show disagreement or anger in public is dishonorable because it can cause us (or far worse, the other person) to “lose face.” If we bring some criticism up or acknowledge that there is a problem, then we must take action to correct it – and action is a very, very serious thing.

Because we so often suppress ourselves, we cut our friends and family slack, and pretend that conflict doesn’t exist, our feelings of grievance can pile up over time and might “explode” suddenly and escalate out of control over something that might seem insignificant (like the straw that broke the camel’s back). Westerners, on the other hand, are more used to alleviating the stress as it comes – so when a Thai friend has finally had enough and is set off by something “trivial,” the Westerner is stunned by the violence of the reaction.

We are comfortable and know how to be creative within our old system and rules, but we find new and unfamiliar situations (like new cultures) challenging, so we tend to withdraw and observe rather than barge into something we don’t understand.

From Jen’s point of view, the relationship between her and Mark was obvious. After all, his actions spoke louder to her than his words. He maintained contact with her; he asked her to spend days away from home with him; and when he agreed to come ask for her family’s permission to go away with him,

it was obvious to her that his intentions were for a long-term serious relationship. She was just being herself – who she was raised to be in her “high context” culture – when she read Marks’s intentions.

The “Content” vs. “Context” Dimensions – a Summary Chart

What Western “Low-Context” Communicators Think about Thai “High-Context” Communicators	What Thai “High-Context” Communicators Think about Western “Low-Context” Communicators
They do not speak	They talk too much
They avoid situations of talking	They always talk first
They only want to talk to close acquaintances	They talk to strangers or people they don’t know
They play down their own abilities	They think they can predict the future
They act as if they expect things to be given to them	They brag about themselves
They deny planning	They don’t help people even when they can
They avoid direct questions	They always talk about what is going to happen later

They never start a conversation	They ask too many questions
They talk off the topic	They always interrupt
They never say anything about themselves	They only talk about what they are interested in
They are slow to take a turn in talking	They don't give others a chance to talk
They talk with a flat tone of voice	They are always getting excited when they talk
They are too indirect, inexplicit	They aren't careful when they talk
They don't make sense and they just leave without saying anything	They ask questions in unusual places about things or people

Source: Ronald Scollon and Suzanne Wong-Scollon, "Athabaskan-English Interethnic Communication," Cultural Communication and Intercultural Contact Donal Carbaugh (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1990).

How you'll Discover this "Content" vs. "Context" Cultural Difference

Many misunderstandings have happened in Thai/Western relationships because the people involved just don't understand this dimension. It is not too hard to readily recognize it though, once the difference becomes obvious.

1. When you introduce your Thai lady to people you know, or to any unfamiliar setting, she may appear shy, withdrawn, or even reluctant to participate. It's a group to which she does not belong, and she will need to take time to observe, soak up, and understand the whole

situation before she will feel comfortable enough to speak up.

If the situation involves any of your louder, rowdier friends, it will be even worse – since the volume, aggressive verbal point-scoring, arguing, swearing, or other antics you are so used to may feel uncomfortable or even hostile to her. She won't tell you, and you won't be able to pick up non-verbal cues from her facial expression or tone of voice, either, because she's been trained to keep a neutral presence in the face of an unfamiliar social setting until the situation plays itself out and becomes obvious to her.

2. If you ask your Thai friend to talk about herself – at all – she may not say much. After all, in a context focused culture like hers, the individual takes second place to the group as a whole. There's a saying that the nail that sticks up the highest gets hammered the hardest, and she will not want to stick her head up. She may not even know how!
3. If you are invited out for the evening with a group of her family or friends, you may be presented with the check – without any advance warning or conversation about it at all. You'll misunderstand – big time – and think that they are freeloading or taking advantage of you. If you're not careful, your face will give your shock or dismay away if your words of protest don't. Here's the deal – it's a typical matter of “context.” When (not if) it happens to you, it's a signal from the group that they've accepted you and are giving you the honor of demonstrating your commitment to the group's well-being, and in Thailand that's a high honor indeed. What's in the background or context in this situation is a deeply held Thai value called *naam jai* (generosity of the heart) and something every single Thai

understands without having to say a word about it. (In Chapter 9 I'll explain more about the concept of *naam jai* and how deeply it penetrates Thai society).

What to do when “Content” and “Context” Collide

Here's the bottom line. In your relationship with a Thai partner, you'll have plenty of opportunities to misunderstand one another. That's a fact of life in any relationship. But if you can start to recognize that a lot of your misunderstandings boil down to just a matter of communication “style,” you might be able to avoid some of them.

As the more “verbal” half of your relationship, you might have to slow yourself down to make this work. Speak more slowly and deliberately. Gently encourage her to express herself, and acknowledge her when she does. After all, she's lived her whole life in a “high context” culture. When she does open up, listen slowly and patiently. Don't interrupt. Pause to consider what she's said carefully before you respond to it. “Listen between the lines.”

If you are the one who does not understand a situation in Thailand, ask your partner as gently as you can to explain it to you, to fill in the background or tell you about why people are talking and behaving the way they are.

That may sound like you're going to have to do most of the “work” – but trust me. It's just as hard for her to be open and verbal as it is for you to be quiet and thoughtful! And besides, you're the one reading this book.

I promise that if you can really take in the power of the differences in your communication styles, you'll be able to transform your relationship. If you can “talk about the way you talk,” you'll be able to create an atmosphere where both of you can learn from each other, and grow much closer in understanding. And if you're closer in understanding, your relationship can become much more intimate than you ever imagined was possible.

Chapter 7 -- “On Time” vs. “In Time”

Chapter 7 -- “On Time” vs. “In Time”

Meet Evan...

Evan is, by almost every Western standard, a successful businessman. He is a creature of habit. You might say his watch determines his every move – as well as his mental state – as he navigates the priorities his work presents.

Here’s a typical day:

- 5:30 a.m. Evan wakes up, puts on his exercise gear, and goes for his daily two-mile run
- 6:00 a.m. He gets home, pours himself a glass of juice to help him cool down, and puts the coffee on to brew while he shaves, showers, and dresses for the day.
- 6:30 a.m. He whips up some breakfast, turns on CNN for the news, and scans the paper while he eats
- 7:10 a.m. Evan gets in the car, turns on the radio for the traffic report, and heads for the office – frequently checking his watch and making bets with himself about whether the traffic will interfere with his typical 7:50 arrival.
- 8:00 a.m. He boots up the computer, checks his email, and spends the first half hour of his day checking his schedule, organizing the files he

will need, and jotting a “to do” list to accomplish by the end of the day.

- 9:00 a.m. Since it’s Monday, there’s a staff meeting, that he’s scheduled to last precisely 45 minutes, to give himself time to get to his 10:00 meeting with the Director.
- 11:30 a.m. Evan is on the road hoping to make his 12:00 lunch appointment with a prominent supplier with time to spare – after all, his afternoon is packed with two more supplier meetings, and if he can arrive early, he’ll be able to save time and better predict on-time starts for his other two meetings.
- 6:00 p.m. He was in luck today, and feels good about his productivity. Evan spends 30 minutes crossing things off his “to do” list, reviewing his email, and giving silent thanks for his exceptional secretary for skillfully diverting anyone and anything that might have interfered with his day.
- 6:45 p.m. Evan’s out the door, and headed home – again, listening to the traffic reports on the radio to make sure he takes the most efficient way home so he can arrive in time for the 7:30 p.m. news program he watches every night.
- 10:45 p.m. It’s “lights out” for this busy, responsible, self-controlled and productive guy.

Evan wouldn’t last a week doing business in Bangkok!

Meet Dao...

Dao is, by Thai standards, a very successful businesswoman. She recognizes her success lies in navigating through and maintaining the many complex relationships her business involves, and she sets her priorities accordingly. You might even say the health of those relationships determines her every

move – along with her mental state. So she knows her primary task is to strategically nurture those relationships that will help her and her business the most. Here's a typical day:

- 5:30 a.m. Dao wakes up, puts on her exercise gear, and goes for her daily two-mile run with her colleague, Kim
- 6:20 a.m. She arrives home a few minutes later than usual, because Kim asked for her advice about an upcoming negotiation with one of their suppliers. She was happy to give it, as Kim had done her many kindnesses in the past and had been instrumental in more than one successful transaction in Dao's business. She quickly downs a glass of juice to help her cool down, and puts the kettle on to heat while she showers, and dresses for the day.
- 6:45 a.m. She whips up some breakfast, and calls her mother for her daily chat while she eats.
- 7:30 a.m. Her chat with her mother took longer than usual, as there was a lot of gossip about the neighbors and their children – as well as some news about her brother-in-law and his new job with an influential company. Although Dao will be late for work, the chat with her mother was productive, and the news about her brother-in-law will be useful to Dao's business. She gets in the car and heads for the office, knowing she will arrive in time to check her email and make sure everything is order for her staff.
- 8:15 a.m. She boots up the computer, checks her email, and receives visits from her staff members who come in one by one to greet her and ask for direction for the day.

- 9:00 a.m. Since it's Monday, there's a staff meeting that she thinks might last about an hour. She waits until all the staff is assembled, and then arrives at 9:15 – only to learn that the regional Director of her firm is expected for an unannounced visit in a few minutes. She quickly dismisses the meeting, and issues instructions for everybody to prepare for this important person.
- 11:30 a.m. Although she had promised to call one of her local clients at 10:00, she postpones the call to make sure everything was in order for the Director's visit. She is delighted to order lunch, organize the seating, and spends a happy afternoon chatting with the Director.
- 6:00 p.m. She was in luck today, and feels good about her productivity. The Director stayed most of the day, and she showed him the progress of her team. She knows the appointments she had with three of her clients can happen tomorrow and that they will understand being displaced by someone as important as her Director. She spends a few minutes catching up on her emails and phone calls.
- 6:45 p.m. Dao's out the door, and headed home – when her cell phone rings. Her most important client is on the phone suggesting they meet for a quick meeting over dinner. Dao declines, as she has invited her parents to her home this evening. The client understands, and they promise to meet some time tomorrow.
- 10:45 p.m. It's "lights out" for this busy, responsible, happy and successful Thai woman.

The Cultural Divide: “On Time” vs. “In Time”

Evan’s and Dao’s stories above should demonstrate that you and your Thai partner will probably have completely opposite concepts of time – and understanding the difference between “on time” and “in time” will help you deal with the frustration that this may cause in both of you.

The goal of this chapter is to help you understand that while you may be a stickler for being on time – to meetings, to work, to parties, to dinner – that doesn’t make you more “right” or more “responsible” in her eyes. At the same time, understanding and appreciating her more circular approach to time can help you avoid arguments and misunderstandings -- maybe even help you relieve some of the tension or anxiety your differences can cause.

In general you, as a Westerner, think of time as a line. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. You place every person, every task, and every priority onto that line of time, constantly measuring your progress along it.

You are always looking toward the future – and at your watch – to measure your progress along that “line” of time. You concentrate on “one thing at a time” and structure the spaces around you (like your office) to support the privacy and concentration you need to make things happen “in the right order.”

You experience time as a constant, rigid, predictable thing. It’s almost sacred to you.

On the other hand, we Thais experience time as a constantly-shifting sphere that changes shape and holds everything at once. It has no beginning, no middle, and no end. Within the sphere of time, we pay the most attention to the people and relationships within that sphere that are most important to us.

We are rooted in the past (remember our respect for our elders?), and we recognize that the cycle of life is always bringing us events in the present that can best be handled in traditional ways. We are also focused on the present, wanting to experience each moment – we don't participate just because it might help us in the future, we participate because there's some immediate pleasure to be found. Our important relationships are almost sacred to us.

We experience time as flexible, bending and flowing according to the relationships we have and how important they are in our lives now. We are more accommodating to the “now” of the present relationship than we are to any unpredictable future, no matter how bright it might seem.

Let's explore our different perceptions of time in a little more detail.

The Western Value: “On Time”

If time is a line, and every event or task falls somewhere on that line, then only one of two things is possible: it is “on time” or it's not. You can accommodate “early,” but “late” drives you crazy – after all, if one is “early,” there's always room to be on time. Once you're late, you're late and you can never recover the time you “lost.”

And if time is a line and every task falls on somewhere on it, it's only obvious that you can “only do one thing at a time” or concentrate on “one thing at a time.” It's a natural law in Western cultures that everybody accepts as real. And everybody knows that the most important thing to focus on is the job at hand.

With such a linear focus on time, it's important in your culture to “stick to the schedule.” Your work requires deadlines, plans and schedules. In your culture, you can rely on the predictability of buses, trains, and airplanes

based on their schedules, and be reasonably certain that the 3:00 from Heathrow will not be leaving at 2:30 just because everybody is aboard. And if the captain announces an unspecified delay while the mechanics look over some problem in the cockpit, there's a collective groan among the passengers. After all, they've got appointments to keep at the other end, and being late is not only rude, it will throw everybody else off schedule.

This linear outlook about time also means that you require focus and concentration to get each task done in its proper order. And for you to focus and concentrate, you establish a fence around your privacy and expect other people to respect your boundaries. At the same time, your culture probably presents you with unwritten rules that everybody knows about respecting the privacy and concentration of other people. You are hesitant to interrupt, apologize if you do, and feel terrible at disturbing the other person at their work.

Not only do you think of time like a line, you think of it as a real “thing” – as if it's a resource like money or water. True, you can measure time (like you can measure those other things), but I hate to tell you this: time is not concrete or physical – no matter what your watch says! Therefore you can't spend it, save it, invest it, kill it or waste it – but you speak and act like you can. Not only that, you get extremely anxious or experience stress when you think you've somehow “lost” time.

Your Western linear approach to time is all geared toward the future. You think “if I spend or invest this time now, I'll get some reward or payoff in the future.” And because everything happens for you along the line, your relationships come and go – in time. You say hello, focus your time and energy on this relationship right here, and when it's time, you say goodbye and move on to the next one. In other words, in most Western cultures, relationships with other

people are short-term or short-lived. And everybody's OK with that.

Because relationships in Western culture tend to be shorter term, it's important that nobody "owe" anybody anything. There's a great respect for private property, and most Westerners are uncomfortable borrowing or lending except in very formal transactions (like buying a house or car). Think about advice you may have got from your parents or grandparents – or even popular proverbs in your culture: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," or "quick to borrow is slow to pay," or "before borrowing from a friend, consider which you need more" all point to a sense of shame or dishonor in lending and borrowing.

Even in your formal borrowing and lending relationships (like with banks or credit card companies) the idea that you are encouraged to pay "on time" and penalized for paying "late" originates with the Western idea that time is a concrete, fixed thing that cannot be violated.

The Thai Value: "In Time"

If time is a shape-shifting sphere that contains every event or task, then anything is possible – because everything exists "in time." In such a sphere, "early" and "late" are concepts that are only relevant when compared with everything else.

And if time is a sphere, it becomes possible to focus on many things at once as they slide into and out of your perception simultaneously. It's a natural thing in Thailand to be able to focus on many things at once – and those born to our culture accept it as "real." After all, everybody knows that you shift time to accommodate relationships, which are always more important than whatever task is at hand.

With such a “spherical” focus on time, it’s important in Thai culture to shift the schedule to be more available to those people that are most important to us. Deadlines, plans and schedules are Western concepts that have been brought into those Thai businesses that deal with Westerners – but as a rule, no Thai in his or her right mind pays any attention to them. If the bus fills up before its scheduled departure time, it leaves. And if the plane’s pilot announces an unspecified delay, nobody is particularly troubled by it. After all, “stuff happens” and we shift ourselves to accommodate – as do those people expecting us at the other end.

This spherical focus also allows us to work on many things at once – we hold all tasks as being pretty much equal, and their priority determined by who is asking for them, not by some (to us) arbitrary number on the clock.

Because our priorities are relationship-based, we don’t build the same privacy fences around ourselves or our work – we bend and shift and don’t feel the need to be alone in order to concentrate and get something done. Our culture informs us that it’s okay to interrupt others – especially if their lower on the “power” pecking order than we are – so we do not apologize or worry so much. And we expect (and welcome) interruptions to our work by those who are higher in the pecking order.

Our focus in time is rooted in the past, and based on the present. We are an old, traditional, and conservative culture and prefer our old ways of dealing with situations as they occur in the present. We “know” that time is nothing more than a continuous present, which calls us forth to respond in whatever way supports the people and relationships closest to us right now, without worrying too much about the future. After all, our relationships are long-term – lasting not only throughout our lifetimes but perhaps going back generations in the past.

And because we are so focused on relationships and how important they are to our well-being, we happily borrow and lend – anything and everything we can – to help those closest to us whether they are family, friends, or close co-workers. After all, we know that as much as we would like to “go it alone,” it is very difficult to succeed at anything without help. Some of our proverbs about borrowing or lending are more about being helpful: “benevolence supports the world,” or “water depends on a boat; a tiger depends on the forest” or even “Have a heart of mercy toward each other.”

Our long-term relationship helps us further focus events in time by thinking strategically whenever we are faced with an interruption or a request for help. Many times, doing a favor for someone is actually the beginning of a lifelong relationship!

“On Time” vs. “In Time” – a Summary Chart

Westerners -- “On Time”	Thai People -- “In Time”
People from your cultures tend to focus on and do one thing at a time	People from the Thai culture tend to focus on and do many things at the same time
Westerners concentrate on the job and are disturbed by any interruption to their concentration	We Thais are highly distractible and willing to accommodate interruptions
You take such time commitments as deadlines, schedules, and plans very seriously	We think of such time commitments as deadlines, schedules, and plans as something to aim for and achieve if possible

Westerners, as generally “Low Context” communicators need information in order to move forward	Thais, as generally “High Context” communicators consider we already have the information we need to move forward
Your primary commitment, as a Westerner, is more likely to be the job at hand	Our primary commitment, as Thais, is more likely to be the people and relationships at hand
Most Westerners stick to the plan	Most Thais change plans easily and often
Westerners tend to be concerned about allowing others privacy and not disturbing them, and follow rules about consideration and privacy	Thais are more concerned with our close relationships (our family, friends, and business associates) than with we are with privacy
As a Westerner, you show great respect for private property and seldom borrow or lend	As Thais, we borrow and lend things easily and often
Your culture emphasizes promptness with everyone	Our culture bases the need for promptness upon the relationship
Westerners are more accustomed to short-term relationships	We Thais are more accustomed to strong, long-term relationships

How you'll Discover this "On Time" vs. "In Time" Cultural Difference

1. Your Thai lady will be fun-loving, living in the present, devoted to your relationship, yet very traditional in her reactions to day to day events. She will value her relationships to her family and friends above all else – even if you have made concrete plans to be somewhere at a specific time.
2. You can count on the fact that she will change her mind easily and often to accommodate the shifting demands of the important people in her life. She will willingly share her time, her space, her possessions (and maybe even yours!) with people that are close to her. And she may show little regard for your personal space, your privacy, or your previous commitments.
3. When you are together, she will shower you with attention – regardless of whether it's convenient or not. After all, right her in this moment, you are here and you are the most important relationship in her life (right now). You might, for example, be completely absorbed in a football match on TV – or in the garage tinkering with your car – or at your desk at home catching up on work after hours – and she will camp out with you, happily chatting away, asking you if you want or need anything, and completely oblivious to your desire for some privacy or "alone time."
4. She will probably have a hard time understanding your need to control events and put them in their "proper order." If friends or relatives drop by at 10:00 pm, she'll think nothing of breaking out the pots and pans to whip up a little something to eat – regardless of whether you just finished dinner. Or if you arrange to meet

somewhere at a prearranged time, for an event that requires lots of planning (like dinner reservations, theater tickets, or an organized tour), if you count on somebody or something she considers more important interrupting those plans, you won't be disappointed.

5. All of this you might eventually find frustrating. But what will frustrate her about you is your rigidity – planning your life around your watch or the calendar. She will not understand your need to keep areas of your home, your office, your life private. Your insistence on “planning for the future” might fall on deaf ears. She might think of you as selfish, stubborn, or hard – even though what you are doing makes perfect sense to you in the long term. She may be hurt by your unwillingness to be interrupted when you are concentrating on a task, assuming that you don't value the relationship the same way she does.

What to do When “On Time” and “In Time” Collide

If you are in a relationship with a Thai lady, you will have to negotiate matters of time and space honestly and openly.

First, it's going to require exploring each other's concept or definition of time.

You might want to start by asking her how she views time commitments, listening carefully to her answers without judging them as “right” or “wrong.”

Once you're clear about her definition, offer her yours. Explain gently and patiently how important being on time is to you – and more important – WHY it matters so much. And set your boundaries about the privacy of your space, your office, or your things so that she is clear about what the limits are. Help her understand your need for privacy does not mean that you don't love,

appreciate, or value her and her company.

You might have to let go of some rigidity and open yourself up to more flexibility by keeping your plans fluid or letting them go altogether. You might even find that letting go of your watch once in a while can be a great way to relieve anxiety and live more in the present.

She might have to be encouraged to make some plans for the future – and carry them through. That simple act that you take so much for granted might make her feel safer and more secure.

Together you can create an approach to time that works for both of you, and adds to your appreciation of the uncertainty of life.

Chapter 8 -- “To Be...or To Do...?” THAT is the Question

Chapter 8 -- “To Be...or To Do...?” THAT is the Question

Meet Roy...

Roy is an “up by his bootstraps” kind of guy, who is ambitious, industrious, and can’t sit still. He is a dynamo at work, task-oriented and energetic. He claims that part of his “secret to success” is that he doesn’t tolerate idleness in himself – or anybody else for that matter. His every waking moment is filled with activity, whether he’s at work or at home. He feels uncomfortable and even guilty when he’s not doing something to be productive.

His profession doesn’t require hard physical work – it’s mostly mental – but it does require a degree of precision to be able to plan, execute, evaluate and report on the results of his team. He starts each month with a list of goals to accomplish, sets weekly targets, and generates a detailed to do list for himself every single day.

He is a fair but tough boss who evaluates his team based on their productivity and manages them by their results. They know he will hold them accountable for every deadline missed or mistake made, and demand documentation for every lesson learned. At work, Roy doesn’t have time or tolerance for idle chit-chat or overt socializing. Every conversation and every activity has one

purpose only – to move the progress of the job forward.

Away from work, Roy is just as busy. Not only is he a skilled handyman, he's a fair carpenter and woodworker. There's always something to do around the house, and evenings after work, once he's grabbed a bite of dinner and checked out the evening news, he goes out to the garage to repair something, refinish something, or plan his next project.

During his free weekends, he'll take on one major project or another – never stopping to admire the progress he's making or taking a minute to just enjoy a sense of accomplishment. Friends will drop by once in a while, but unless they're interested in picking up a paintbrush or holding a wrench while they talk, Roy doesn't have much time for them.

Roy's first wife left him after 15 years of feeling ignored, shut out, and pressured to spend every moment with him engaged in some type of "productive" activity. She says that she started felt guilty for wanting to take time to do anything Roy called "frivolous" like watching a sunset, spending a lazy Sunday with the crossword puzzle and the comics, taking a ballroom dance class just for fun, or doing anything that didn't produce some kind of concrete "result."

Roy defends himself by saying (to anyone who might ask) that he considers the purpose of life to be *getting things done*. He believes that the worth of a man is contained in the results he has produced throughout his life.

Roy, approaching 50, is starting to feel mortal and realize he is alone. His constant activity, though satisfying, doesn't produce much joy. He knows there is something "missing" in his life. He'd like to find a good woman to spend the rest of his years with but he's worried that he's too old to change

his ways.

Meet Tola...

Tola is a Thai woman with many accomplishments to her credit. The first in her family to achieve a university education, she has a good job with a reputable company, and many friends. Her job as a manager is fun. It allows her to meet and get to know people from all over the world, as well as to help the members of her team learn the skills and make the connections that will help them move up in the company just like she has.

Her job is not a physical one, it's mostly mental. It requires her ability to hand out tasks to her team according to their abilities and interests, and make sure that they all get along at work while they get things done. Tola realizes that to meet the company goals her team has to collaborate and be happy with their work, and she knows they're all doing the best they can to please her because they understand how lucky they are to be working at such an impressive company.

She is a fair boss, well-liked not only by her team but by her superiors who count on Tola to preserve the company's traditions and reputation for quality. She takes the time to get to know her team members individually and offer them any help she can, realizing that they will respond by helping her and doing her favors when she asks. She enjoys hearing about their families and loves to gossip, tease, and laugh with them. When someone makes a mistake or misses a deadline, she understands it's because life is unpredictable, not because the person is somehow incompetent or lazy.

Away from work, Tola pursues many interests and has many friends. She enjoys playing the piano and has a gift for Zen brush painting – but will interrupt her practice the minute a friend calls to suggest something fun to do.

Considered a very modern Thai woman, she loves exploring new restaurants and seeing the latest trendy films, but when her parents call to ask her to visit, she easily steps into the traditional role of “daughter,” helping them by bringing gifts, cooking a meal, or entertaining their grandchildren in her Bangkok apartment.

Tola’s first husband, a prominent and well-connected businessman, left her after 10 years because she tired of quietly accepting his pursuit of other women, so common in her culture. The last straw was when his latest girlfriend called one weekend while he and Tola were dining with her parents. Humiliated, Tola had erupted in sobs and fallen to her knees to beg him to stop seeing other women, but he had roughly pulled her up by the arm and told her it was over between them. Her parents, shocked by this obvious disrespect, intervened and told him he was no longer welcome in their home.

She defends herself by telling her friends and family that it was her bad luck to have married him in the first place – it must have happened so she could repay a Karmic debt. After all, she knows the purpose of life is to accept what comes and use it to achieve balance and serenity.

Tola would like to get married again eventually. While she enjoys her job, her hobbies, and her friends and family, she would like to meet someone special who will love, protect, and respect her. She longs to find a good man with a joyful heart and a generous nature.

The Cultural Divide: “To Do” vs. “To Be”

Let me begin this chapter by asking you a question: Is life a collection of events to be experienced, or is it a series of problems to be solved?

If you paid attention to the chapter about Time, you’ll remember that your

culture views time as linear and sequential...everything that happens falls along that line. And the focus of that line is the future. Therefore you, as a Western guy, will probably answer that life consists of a series of problems and it is your job to solve them in the correct order.

According to your Western culture (whether it's American, Australian, British, or northern European), your job is to spend your life making something of yourself – to produce, to be useful, to contribute. You may have been raised with the idea that “idle hands are the devil's playground,” and feel you must fill every day with “doing.” Your life is probably fast, hectic, and stressful as a result.

Your culture is a Doing culture.

We Thais, on the other hand, with our cultural focus on time as a shifting sphere that holds all things simultaneously, would answer that life is a collection of events to be experienced, and it is our task to “be” – no matter what life presents to us. And our focus is the present, colored by the past.

Therefore our job in life, according to our culture, is to seek harmony, balance, and participation – and enjoy the rhythm of life as it occurs, instead of trying to “change” or “improve” it. We have been raised with the idea that all events are driven by Karma and are pretty much inevitable, so we fill our days with contemplation, reflection and deepening our inner understanding of the “status quo.” Our lives (Bangkok excepted!) are slower, more relaxed, and more playful as a result.

The Thai culture is a Being culture.

Here are a few more questions that will help you see the difference between

your “Doing” culture and our “Being” culture more clearly:

1. Which is better: a fast-paced life or a slow-paced life?
2. Do you judge people according to how much they do, how much they accomplish, and how productive they are?
3. Does “not doing something productive” mean you are a lazy (and therefore bad) person?
4. Is it possible to change the circumstances of your life? Can anyone?
5. What’s more important: to work well or to play well?

As a typical Westerner, your answers would be pretty predictable. You’d prefer a fast-paced and productive life, and your culture would approve. After all, isn’t “sloth” (laziness) one of the 7 Deadly Sins? And if you are American, you were brought up to believe in your heart that anybody can change their own circumstances if they work hard enough and long enough at it. You might even feel guilty if you take time off to sit and stare at the landscape, sneak off for an afternoon nap, or even take a vacation.

A typical Thai would answer those questions very differently. Life is life, with its own rhythm and pace. We hold monks who devote their lives to silence and contemplation in the highest regard – knowing that they are experiencing the fullness of life’s events by just letting them be and adjusting themselves to the circumstances. We grow up knowing and believing in our hearts that life is an unpredictable kaleidoscope of which we are only a part, and that no amount of will or effort will change our circumstances. We are able to see the

joy in combining work with play, and don't view either one of them as more important than the other.

Let's look at some examples:

Roy and Tola are discussing one of Roy's friends. Roy says, "I really respect Frank. He's worked his way up from nothing, and owns three businesses – he's a self-taught genius, and everything he touches is a success. Sure, he can be a bit of a bastard sometimes, but it's all aimed at getting results as fast as he can – and he's brilliant at it." In Roy's description, you can see how much he admires what Frank does. The goals he pursues. The results he gets. The "doing" that is Frank.

Tola describes Frank differently: "Roy's friend Frank is unhappy, arrogant, and hurtful to people with his words." His "doing-ness" is not as important to her – it's how he is "being" that strikes her as his most important characteristic.

Here's another example. Let's say you're working in Thailand, running an office that employs many Thai workers. Your American company has brought a serious climate of "work is for work" into Bangkok, and you are finding yourself frustrated by how much time the Thai workers spend chatting, socializing, and making and receiving personal phone calls – in other words, they're not paying attention to the "task at hand" and clearly having too much fun. It's pretty easy to see that your Thai workers are "being" at work, rather than "doing" the work.

Let's look at the differences in a little more detail.

The Western Value: "To Do"

If you come from an "Anglo" culture like the USA, the UK, Australia, or

Canada, “Doing” is a very powerful characteristic of your culture, and it is important for everybody to be constantly productive, planning, executing, and evaluating all the time. Conventional wisdom in your culture is that doing is what creates success – and if you don’t do enough, you’ll never succeed. Everybody in your culture knows that. It’s the “truth” about the way life is.

For example, look at how important it is in your culture when you meet somebody for the first time, to find out what they “do” so you can figure out who they are and whether they are worthy of your respect. Even in your language not only is “how do you do?” a formal greeting, (with “how are you doing?” as the informal version), “what do you do for a living?” is one of the most common icebreakers in any conversation you have with strangers. To illustrate that point, imagine you are meeting three people for the first time. You find out that one is a senior executive at an oil company; the other is a forklift operator at a manufacturing plant; the third is unemployed. Which one is most worthy of your respect?

As a matter of fact, just being “unemployed” can feel humiliating for somebody in your “doing” culture, because after all, the deep perception is that if you’re doing nothing, you are nothing.

In Monday morning conversations with your friends, don’t you always ask “what did you do over the weekend?” When you call your friends or family on the phone, isn’t one of the questions you ask “what are you/have you been doing?” Even in school, one of your early assignments was probably to write a 1000 word essay on what you did on your summer holiday.

Westerners tend to look at time as either a precious resource to be managed or an enemy to be conquered – and “doing,” being future-oriented, helps you measure your “progress” so you can move on to the next thing, and the next

thing, and the next. This focus on doing is almost like an endless game of “Beat the Clock” – a marathon you’ll never win. But at least doing something proves you’re contributing to your society and not being a burden to anybody.

At work, you focus on work, investing your energy in organizing, planning, doing, and documenting what you’ve done so you can leave a trail of proof behind you to demonstrate your worth. Not only that, many organizations have taken it one step further and adopted formal policies for organizing, planning, and documenting – calling it “continuous quality improvement” or “standard operating procedures.” The how of doing is important to document, so that people will “save time” by not having to figure things out for themselves over and over again.

Since work time is for work and “getting things done,” socializing or taking time for personal phone calls or emails is not only frowned upon, in some companies it’s a reason for discipline. After all, in a Western culture, the employer is paying for his employee’s “time” and the whole purpose of work is to accomplish something.

The orientation to doing can be so strong within your culture that you aren’t able to even see the possibility of living any other way. But there are many cultures that do not share your point of view, and Thailand is one of them. If you expect there to be conflicts or misunderstandings about “Doing vs. Being,” you will never be disappointed!

The Thai Value: “To Be”

In Thailand, “Being” is a powerful characteristic of our culture, and we value inaction and acceptance of the way things are more than we value being busy for its own sake. After all, everything is subject to the law of Karma or fate and we are powerless to control, change, or stop the wheel. So we focus

on controlling or changing ourselves from the inside, instead.

We don't determine a person's worth by what they "do" – we evaluate them based on how they are "being" and who they "are" (including who their family is, who their employer is, and what their status is in the hierarchy).

The Thai culture is less hectic and more relaxed, because we are driven less by the desire to get something done than we are to just participate in life the way it shows up and live each day as it comes. Another way of saying it is that sometimes the journey is more important to us than the destination – sometimes working to achieve a goal is more important than actually achieving it – because through the journey, through the work itself, we grow and expand internally as we adjust ourselves to the circumstances that present themselves.

We look at time as boundaryless and eternal, almost as if just "Being" expands time so we can be more fully present in each moment of now. There is no guilt or shame attached to "doing nothing" – after all, life always presents us something new to do in its own time and at its own pace. And our focus is on being at peace with that.

We have a hard time distinguishing "work time" from "play time" and will bring a sense of play into the workplace that some Westerners might find difficult to deal with. We'll chat, laugh, joke, gossip, and generally enjoy the camaraderie of our co-workers while we're at work because what's most important to us is not "how" the work gets done but the end product. Our pride is not in the result, but in the process we go through to achieve it.

An example comes to mind, told to me by a Northern European manager of a machine shop that employed Thai workers in his international engineering

company. The Thai machinists would sit barefoot in a circle on the machine shop floor, laughing, gossiping and joking as they passed around the tools and collaborated about how to make a particular part. A new supervisor (also European) saw the barefoot Thai men sitting on the floor, and sternly pointed at the workbench, indicating THAT was the proper way and the proper place to work with the tools – and pointed out that not wearing safety shoes was a violation of the standard operating procedures. When he returned a few hours later, it was to find the Thai workers wearing their safety shoes, yet sitting in a circle on the workbench itself, laughing, joking and collaborating as before – and producing beautifully machined parts.

“Doing” vs. “Being” -- a Summary Chart

Western Cultures are about Doing	The Thai Culture is about Being
“Not doing anything” means you are lazy and a bad person	“Not doing anything” does not necessarily mean you aren’t contributing or are somehow a bad person
You believe that you can change anything if you just “do” enough	We believe that things are the way they are, and they will stay that way until they’re not
You believe that doing things (activity) enhances your sense of Self	We believe that inactivity (contemplation, meditation, etc.) enhances our sense of Self
You believe that life should be planned, organized, fast-paced and	We believe that life should be leisurely and contemplative, taking

productive	each moment as it comes
You hold that work is an end in itself, it's good for you and it gives your life meaning	We hold work is a means to an end, no better or worse than not working
Your culture holds work time and leisure time as separate – work is for work, and play is for play	The Thai culture holds no distinction between work and leisure – and we believe they can coexist
Your culture believes that you should always be doing something to improve how work gets done	The Thai culture believes that the end product is more important than how it gets produced
The procedures of activity are important and should be formalized	The ideal of the activity is important
Your culture believes that Man is above the physical world -- and it is subject to his will.	Thais believe that Man is only part of the physical world – and cannot be separated from it

Adapted from: G. Hofstede, Culture's Consequences. International Differences in Work-Related Values. 1980. Sage Publications and G.Hofstede, Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind, 1991, McGraw-Hill.

How you'll Discover this “Doing” vs. “Being” Cultural Difference

1. In your relationships with a Thai woman, you will no doubt become frustrated or confused by the difference in focus between your “doing” and her “being.” Sometimes it might feel like you’ve run full speed into a brick wall – you want or need something done, and you

need it done now – and her Thai reaction will be relaxed, slow, and maybe even circular in trying to help you get your needs met. And sometimes it might seem that the more you push, the slower things get!

2. If you spend any time at all with your Thai lady's friends or family, you'll no doubt notice that they spend a lot of time discussing what to do together, but deferring or avoiding making any decision about it. That might frustrate a typical, action-oriented Western guy like you who is used to making a decision, following a plan, and sticking to the schedule. For us, that discussion and deference/avoidance dance is part of the "now" and we enjoy it just as much as we'd enjoy going wherever it is we end up. To your Thai lady and her friends or family, the dance is the way they demonstrate their joy in being together.
3. When you try to schedule or organize help from the cable company, the electric company, or the phone company, you'll be just one of the many delightful events occurring in that particular professional's day. Today at 4:00 pm might mean today...or it could mean next Wednesday...or even next month. It doesn't mean they won't get to your problem, it's just that in the shifting kaleidoscope of their day your task is continually reprioritized according to what's happening "right now. "The service person will smile politely and promise you the moon – after all, you are an honored customer – and if he can't deliver what he's promised he'll be oh so sorry, then he'll make you another promise and have you leave his shop happy. Whether you get your services or repairs as promised has nothing to do with your sense of urgency, your negotiating skills, or the other person's feeling you are not important.

What to do when “Doing” and “Being” Collide

In spite of your frustration, it's important to relax – it's not personal. Doing and Being are just different ways of looking at and reacting to the world.

If you can be willing to slow down and give more thoughtful consideration to the end result you're looking for than to the way it gets done, you might be surprised at the decrease in your heart rate and your sense of stress. That slowing down and thoughtful consideration might not be typical of your culture, and it might be hard for you to learn. But if you can remind yourself to practice, over time you might find yourself taking a much more leisurely (and healthier!) approach to life.

If you are in a relationship with a Thai lady, the most important skill to develop is patience, as you struggle to get things done and she struggles to make you happy the only way she knows how – by being present with you. You may need to show her why doing a particular thing a particular way is important to you; or explain to her the reasons you bring work home or need to schedule leisure time with her in advance.

If you can be calm, kind, and patient, over time she may find herself empowered to take action in situations she never would have before.

Chapter 9 – Impress your Thai Lady by Understanding
Some Thai Customs – and How They're Influenced by
the 7 Dimensions of Culture

Chapter 9 – Impress your Thai Lady by Understanding Some Thai Customs – and How They’re Influenced by the 7 Dimensions of Culture

Introduction

If you’ve stuck with me through the first 8 chapters of this book, you now know more about our culture than 90% of the Westerners who visit Thailand. You understand:

- We are more of a “we” society than a “me” society
- We pay attention to status and power and understand that “some people are more equal than others”
- We have a high tolerance for uncertainty and are tolerant of what to you might seem like “chaos”
- We are more “nurturance” oriented than “achievement” oriented
- We pay more attention to the setting (or the context) of communication than we do to the words (or the content) of

communication

- We operate “in time” rather than “on time” – taking a more fluid and flexible approach to life over a rigid, linear approach
- We are devoted to “being” in life rather than “doing” life

And these 7 “dimensions of culture” influence our everyday life in Thailand. They are revealed in the way we treat each other, and they combine to create the common customs you’ll observe if you spend any time here.

Although Thailand is called “the Land of Smiles,” and we emphasize tolerance and hospitality, we are a very old culture. And we are actually more formal than most of the other Asian cultures, as Thailand has never been colonized. Our customs and manners are more “pure.”

We tend to be quite conservative – and the more middle-class or upper-class we are, the more attention we pay to formal manners and behavior. We’ll cut you some slack because you are a Westerner, and we’ll forgive your social clumsiness or occasional “lack of manners” – but if you’re dating a Thai woman, you need to be aware that your behavior will affect her.

Where you go, who you hang out with, how you act in public, and even what you wear are all important to women of good families here. (And that’s who you’re interested in meeting, right?) So you’ll want to respect the fact that Thai society is not as open as you might be used to, and make sure you don’t put your Thai lady friend in the awkward position of possibly losing the respect of her peers.

I’d like to share some of the most common – yet most important – customs

with you. That way, when you come for a visit or to meet and date the lovely Thai women, you can avoid embarrassing yourself and make the best possible first impression.

Greetings! The How and Why of the “Wai”

If you’ve never been to Thailand before, chances are you will be charmed by the warm welcome you experience from the Thai people when you arrive. And from your first minutes in the country, you’ll observe the way we greet you (and each other). It’s a gesture, called the *wai*.

The *wai* is a gesture you make by placing your palms together (like you are praying) and holding your hands close to your chest with your fingertips close to your chin, while nodding or bowing your head. And if somebody wais you, you *wai* them back.

But to really understand the *wai* and properly execute it, you have to keep in mind two cultural dimensions -- that not everybody is equal – and that we pay more attention to the context than to the content when communicating. Here’s what I mean.

The wai is not only a greeting, the way you do it communicates that you understand the other person’s status (Remember? Actions speak louder than words in our culture.) The wai is always initiated by a person of lower status to a person of higher status.

Younger people offer a wai to older people; students offer a wai to teachers; employees offer a wai to employers; hosts offer a wai to guests; the taxi driver offers the wai to you. And everybody offers a wai to the king, to monks, or to people who are regarded universally as more important.

Where you put your hands and how deeply you bow depends entirely on how important the person is. And how you return it depends on your status. Here are the finer points of doing a proper wai:

1. The deepest or strongest wai is reserved only for monks. Instead of holding your touching palms close to your chest, you raise them up so that your thumbs touch the space between your eyebrows, and you bow very deeply and stoop so your head and shoulders are lower than the monk's.
2. If you're greeting an elderly or senior person, your thumbs should touch your nose and your fingertips should touch between your eyebrows, and you bow deeply.
3. And for anybody else you respect (including people that have the same status as you), your hands are close to your chest with your fingertips near your chin as you nod your head.

The universal greeting is to say "*sawatdi*" (sah – wah – dee) any time of the day. As a man, you would add the word "*khrap*" – "sah-wah-dee-khrap." Women will say "sah-wah-dee-kha." Very close friends might not wai each other, only offering these words of greeting whether it's early in the morning or late at night.

And one more piece to the manners of meeting and greeting people is the polite way to use their names. During social, business, or formal events, we do not usually call people by their first name or nickname until we know them well. And we don't use their last names. Instead, we use the title "*Khun*" in front of their first name. If your name is Greg Wilson, and we are meeting you for the first time, we'll address you as "*Khun Greg*." We're calling you, in

effect, “Mr. Greg.” And we won’t call you just “Greg” until we know you well.

So if you master the wai, and remember the name courtesy when you meet someone for the first time (like any Thai ladies you date or people you’d like to do business with), you will make a very good first impression!

“Face” – How to Give It, How to Keep It, and How to Lose It

As a Westerner, you’re used to speaking your mind, giving your opinions, arguing your point of view directly, and expressing yourself openly as an individual. You trust that if what you say or do offends the other person, it’s “every man for himself” -- that the other person will confront the issue, speak up assertively, argue back, or defend himself just as openly. Your behavior shows your culture’s individual, masculine, content-oriented focus.

As Thais, we’re used to suppressing our feelings, keeping our opinions and points of view to ourselves, and expressing ourselves indirectly. We trust that what we say or do does not offend the other person, and if it does, we are horrified. The other person will not tell us directly that they are offended, but we will sense it from his or her behavior. We avoid confrontation and take a more indirect approach. After all, actions speak louder than words. Our culture has a we-oriented, feminine, context-oriented focus.

Our drive is to maintain balance and harmony. Recognizing that some people have more power than others and demonstrating through our words and actions that we respect their place in the hierarchy is the way we maintain that balance.

And that gives rise to the whole idea of “face.” It’s a subtle and delicate issue – but something all of us Thais know by instinct. It’s a hard concept to define for a Westerner so he can really understand it. As a matter of fact, many

scholars throughout history have claimed it's literally untranslatable. But let me give it a try.

You can think of “face” as a person's sense of self-worth. It's similar to their reputation, image, prestige, or dignity. It's the respectability a person can claim from others based on his or her position in the group.

The idea of “face” has everything to do with the person's feelings of value, because as a “we” society our most important value is belonging and fitting in. And we don't want to jeopardize our belonging by doing anything that harms anyone else in the group.

In addition to reinforcing the “we” nature of our society, the concept of “face” reinforces the power hierarchy we Thais hold so dear. We “know” that not everyone is equal, and our every action is designed to respect and reinforce the hierarchy and people's positions in it. After all, that's the way we maintain balance and harmony. So we control our inner feelings, suppress our opinions, and surrender to our place in the hierarchy.

The best way to define “face” may be to give you a few examples to help you understand.

When you are with your Thai lady and her friends, they will spend a lot of time negotiating and deciding where to go for the evening, with nobody volunteering a concrete suggestion or making a decision. People will suggest many alternatives indirectly: “The new restaurant on the river has a nice view – and the trees in the park are in blossom” is about as direct as typical Thai would ever be. Someone else would “argue” or “counter” that indirect suggestion by saying something like, “Yes...and the new hotel also has a very lovely bar with live music.” A conversation like this can go on for quite a

while...and often eat up the whole evening. The group of friends considers each person as an equal. It would be very rude for one person to assume he or she has any right to assert an opinion or make the decision. If he or she did, they would lose the respect of the group (who would think, "Who does he think he is, telling us what to do!")

Here's another example. If you are visiting a Thai home and make a comment about the food you are served, like, "I've never liked shrimp – they make me break out in a sweat." In your culture, that comment would not be an issue. Your Thai host, however, would interpret your remark as a personal criticism, no matter how innocently you meant it. Your host would "lose face" for offending you by offering something you cannot eat. And if the home in question belongs to your Thai girlfriend's parents, SHE would lose face by bringing you – the one who caused her parents such an embarrassing loss of face.

If you are in a long-term relationship or marriage with a Thai woman, and you ask her to do something, she'll say "yes," whether she understands what you want her to do or not. Why? It's not her being deceptive. It's her protecting your dignity and authority (your "face") by not asking you questions about what she perceives to be your command. If she doesn't understand what you've asked, she dare not say so, because you might think she's criticizing the way you gave instructions. She'll do her best to try to figure out what you meant on her own, and when she doesn't produce the result you wanted, she'll make the fault her own – to help you save face.

We go out of our way to express consideration for another person, not wanting to cause them trouble, or hurt their feelings. And because we are contextual in the way we communicate, nobody ever has to say a word about it.

Saving face, or allowing others to save face, means we do not criticize people openly. We find indirect, non-verbal ways to soften what we perceive as a negative message. If you criticize her friends, her family, her work, or her home – particularly in public – you cause your Thai lady friend to lose face. Even if you criticize her ideas or her opinions, she will assume that means you are criticizing her personally, and will feel a humiliating loss of face.

A friend of mine, married to an American, visited her husband's sister in the U.S. To welcome her brother and his Thai wife, the sister bought some Thai food mixes from the grocery store, and prepared what she thought was a real Thai meal. It was horrible – the curry was bland, the noodles nothing but a pile of glue, and the salad tasteless. But rather than complain about it and cause her new husband and his sister to lose face, my friend thanked her American sister-in-law for being so thoughtful and kind, and offered to teach her a favorite recipe for Panang curry the next night. My friend took her sister-in-law to the local Asian grocery, pointed out the right herbs and spices, and helped her buy the ingredients. Not only that, my friend gave her sister-in-law a huge, full-color Thai cookbook as a thank-you gift at the end of their visit.

All to avoid complaining directly about a horrible meal and causing her new husband and his older sister to lose face!

So how do you work your way back into someone's good graces if you've caused them to lose face?

First and foremost, you cannot do it directly and assertively, especially in public! You must do it subtly, non-verbally, indirectly. Offering a deep wai and a heartfelt apology (in private) would be a good start. We Thais are a tolerant and forgiving people – especially because we know you are a Westerner and aren't accustomed to our ways.

If you follow up your apology with a gift to make amends, so much the better. If you've caused a person to lose face in public, quietly and ceremoniously offering a gift in public might be the best way to make fix your mistake.

Here's the best advice I can offer you as you navigate your way through this delicate and subtle idea of "face." Be sensitive to your surroundings. Be aware of the relationships in the background of your interactions with people. And keep your sense of humor.

After all, we will probably forgive you for any mistakes you might make.

The "Heart" of the Matter –The Many Faces of *Jai*

We Thais use the word *jai* many times each day to describe the quality of someone's heart. *Jai* literally means "heart." It is such an important part of our culture that understanding it will be critical to your success in developing a deep, long-lasting relationship with any Thai woman.

The spirit of generosity: *Naam Jai*

Naam Jai literally means "water from the heart." Think about generosity and goodwill flowing between people and you'll understand *naam jai* as one of the strongest value judgments we ever make about other people. *Naam jai* refers to generosity, a willingness to demonstrate that you are capable of caring for other people and share the "water of your heart" with them.

Many a Western man is suspicious of *naam jai*, thinking his Thai lady friend is only after him for the money or trying to take advantage of him financially. While there are probably just as many dishonest women in Thailand as there are in your own country, if you can understand the importance of *naam jai*, maybe you can put your suspicions to rest.

In our previous book, we gave the example of a friend of ours who went to dinner with a Thai lady and her family. He was shocked when, at the end of the lavish restaurant meal, he was presented with the check while everyone at the table nodded and smiled at him. He thought he was being taken advantage of, and resented the assumption that because he was a rich Westerner he was supposed to pay.

He didn't understand the concept of *naam jai*. When he was presented with the bill, everyone considered it an honor. The Thai people were indicating they accepted him into the group, and were giving him the opportunity to express his generosity and ability to provide for them – his *naam jai*. No wonder he was suspicious and resentful! If he had known about *naam jai* before going out to dinner, he might have reacted differently. He might have even been pleased at being accepted and honored.

In some Western cultures, if a group goes out to dinner, there is a “ritual” of arguing over the check. It's just for show. “Let me get it,” says one person. “No, let me,” says the other. “I insist,” says a third. In the end, they negotiate – “OK, I'll pay and you can cover the tip,” or “OK, but I'll get it next time.” In Thailand, nobody would think about arguing when someone picks up the check. Depriving him of expressing his *naam jai* would cause him to lose face!

Here's another example, taken from a typical Thai workplace. Let's say that a Thai manager asks her secretary to work overtime long into the evening to finish an important project. At the end of the evening, the manager drives her secretary home – even though she lives in the opposite direction the manager is going. The next morning, the secretary will brag to all her friends that her boss has “*big naam jai*.” And the secretary will feel honored to be able to reciprocate her boss' generosity any time she can.

Another aspect of naam jai that Westerners often don't understand is that if you demonstrate your generosity with Thai people often, they will feel honor-bound to reciprocate.

The spirit of sympathy: *Hen Jai*

You can translate *hen jai* literally as seeing someone's heart – and the concept of *hen jai* is that of sympathy, or “feeling with” somebody. But beyond just feeling bad for someone, *hen jai* requires acting out of sympathy. For example, let's say you see your Thai friend struggling to carry packages upstairs to her apartment. To be *hen jai* is to help her carry them – or carry them all yourself. Or you see her elderly grandfather struggling to remove a rock from the garden and roll up your sleeves to move the rock yourself. That's *hen jai*.

An example from the workplace might be this: a company board of directors finds they have to cut expenses. Instead of firing or laying off 10% of their staff, the board votes to cut their own salaries to make the savings, demonstrating their *hen jai* – and securing their employees' loyalty.

The spirit of cruelty: *Jai Dum*

Jai dum can be translated as “lack of heart,” and is used when someone is cruel or lacks humanity. One example might be this: Let's say that the Western husband of a Thai woman will not allow her to give leftover food to the street dogs in their neighborhood. He is concerned that the dogs will start hanging around and making a mess near his home. He is not concerned about his wife's feelings or how they could reach a compromise. His wife might gossip with her family that her husband is *jai dum* – that he is cruel and lacks humanity.

Another example that might cause a Thai person to consider someone *jai*

dum is when they don't willingly and cheerfully offer help to another who obviously needs it. Let's say he witnesses a child falling from his bicycle. A *jai dum* person might say, "I don't know the child, it's none of my business, and I don't want that child or his family hanging around me asking me for favors."

The spirit of charity: *Jai Boon*

When someone is *jai boon*, they are generous and full of merit. They give away or donate whatever they have to others, or do good works for people. If their neighbors have been severely affected by a flood or other natural disaster, someone who generously offers aid, comfort, money, or food is said to have big *jai boon*.

The concept of *jai boon* is rooted in our Buddhist culture, as doing good works in this life helps us in the next. And if a person demonstrates his *naam jai* often enough, he is elevated in the eyes of other people as *jai boon*, or charitable. A person with big *jai boon* will receive loyalty, respect, and favors from those he has helped.

The spirit of comfort: *Sabai Jai*

Sabai literally means comfortable, easygoing, or "laid back." *Sabai jai* is a wonderful quality to develop – it means you are easy to be with, comfortable and relaxed. There is a saying in Thailand that *sabai jai* is the true Thai person.

You will see or hear the phrase *sabai jai* often during your visit to Thailand – in connection with advertising bank loans, home improvement stores – even insurance companies. *Sabai jai* is one of the most highly valued qualities any product or service can offer.

The spirit of understanding: *Kao Jai*

If you've read this far, and are starting to get the idea about the many faces of *jai*, I can congratulate you and say you've got *kao jai* – understanding! And when you come to Thailand and can demonstrate *jai's* many faces, I'll know you've got it!

Thai Attitudes about Money

Here's a Thai story that illustrates our attitudes about money:

A man came into a large sum of money and asked the Monk what he should do with his good fortune. The Monk told him that as a good citizen, he should divide his money into four parts and use it as follows:

Use the first part to pay back debts

Put the second part under ground

Put the third part into the mouth of the Cobra

And throw the fourth part into the water.

Not understanding, the man asked the Monk to elaborate. The Monk said "You must translate the symbols into reality. Let me explain the rationale:

"The first part is to pay back debts. Since your parents have raised you, provided you with an education, put food on the table, and gave you a place to sleep, you owe them a debt. Thus when you are able you must pay them back. To be a good citizen, you must repay all your debts."

The monk continued. "Putting the second part of your fortune underground means investing it for your future.

"Putting the third part into in the mouth of Cobra means setting money aside

for your children, to give them the same upbringing, food, shelter, and education you received. The reason I refer to your children as the “Cobra” is that you never know how they will turn out – they might be worse than you expect!

The man’s eyes sparkled as he listened. The Monk said, “The last portion is to be thrown into the water. What that means is that after you have already set aside the money for your debts, your future, and the raising of your children, only then you can enjoy life. Spending money to enjoy life is like throwing money into the water -- because you may never get any return from it.”

The man smiled, realizing he had just received an invaluable education in financial management!

The above story is not only a good example of sound financial management; it’s a perfect illustration of the Buddhist concept of *Dharma*, or “natural law.” Dharma can be thought of as a system of ethics and behavior that determine the “right action” of an individual – and help to keep a group stable and functioning.

To experience *kao jai* about Thais and money, you need to see how the “we,” “nurturing,” and “in time” cultural dimensions work together with our Buddhist concept of merit making, Dharma, and “*jai*” to shape our attitudes.

Let’s review those cultural dimensions to set up our explanation.

1. As a “we” culture, the wellbeing of the group and the relationships within it is our most important value. (You come from more of a “me” culture, where your personal wellbeing is most important).

2. As a “nurturing,” or more feminine culture, our lens is tuned to taking care of others. (As an “achievement,” or more masculine culture, your lens is tuned to action, personal goals, and individual success).
3. As an “in time” culture, our focus is on an ever-evolving “now” that is influenced by the past. (As an “on-time” culture, your focus is on making plans for the future).
4. We have many facets of “*jai*,” or “heart” – and treating others with compassion and humanity is among our strongest cultural values – regardless of where those other people fall in the hierarchy of position and power.
5. And in Buddhism we emphasize “merit making,” or doing good works to atone for our past Karma and store up good Karma for the next life.

Given these cultural points of view, our attitudes about money are very different from yours.

We view money a little like we view time – getting it, holding on to it, sharing it, spending it – it’s temporary and financial conditions shift and change with “now.” If we have an excess of money, it’s only right that we use it to help the group, or those people who are closest to us. After all, we are driven to make sure everyone is cared for. We happily give what we have, lend when we can, and ask for help when we need it.

In contrast, you view money like you view time – getting it, holding on to it, sharing it, spending it – it’s all part of a permanent line aimed at the future. Just like time, you save it, invest it, waste it, lose it. If you have an excess of

money, it's only right that you use it to secure your future from uncertainty. After all, you're driven to make sure you can take care of yourself. You are cautious about giving and lending, and asking for help somehow means you are a bad person.

If my best friend needs help to replace her cell phone, I'll happily give her money to help her buy a new one. If my mother needs medical attention, of course I'll help pay her doctor bills. If my coworker needs bus fare, I won't think twice about paying her way. And if I'm among my friends for a meal out, I'm happy to share my resources and demonstrate my *naam jai*, knowing that my generosity will be rewarded – either by my friends or in the next life. After all, the worst thing someone can ever say about me is that I am *jai dun*.

If your best friend needs help to replace his cell phone, you'll happily point him in the direction of a cheaper supplier, and leave him to replace it on his own. If your mother needs medical attention, you make sure her insurance company pays her medical bills. If you're among your friends for a meal out, you'll participate in the negotiation dance of "Let me...no let ME..." and arrive at a fair distribution of the bill. You are happy to demonstrate your control over your own resources, knowing that you've been fair and conservative – and protecting yourself in the process. After all, the worst thing someone can ever say about you is that you are careless with money.

The average Thai man in his 40s has an extensive network of friends, family and contacts he can rely on for help in a crisis, funding for a project, or care in his old age. The average 40-year-old from your culture has a plan for his financial future, goes to an institution like a bank or other lending institution for help in funding a project, and relies on insurance to care for him in his old age.

But here's where your culture and our culture might be very similar. Both of us want to demonstrate our prosperity by showing off just a little. When somebody in your culture becomes very prosperous, it's not uncommon for them to buy "toys" that show their prosperity to the world: watches, cars, gadgets, homes, or vacations all let people know you've "made it." It's the same in Thailand. Jewelry, cars, clothing, and so on let other people see that we've been very lucky and telegraph our prosperity to people.

This difference in money attitude can definitely affect any relationship you form with a Thai woman. (As a matter of fact, even in your culture disagreements about money are among the most common reasons for divorce!)

So here are a few words of warning...and advice.

If you are lucky enough to find a Thai lady you want to spend the rest of your life with, talk about money early on in your relationship. You'll need to respect where she's coming from in her desire to be generous (with YOUR money) – but you'll also need to help her understand your point of view.

You see, she will consider your money as a resource she can freely share, and might not understand your limitations. As a matter of fact, no matter how much money you make, you will be seen as very wealthy in Thailand (and you are, comparing your salary to the average Thai person). And because you are wealthy, you will be expected to freely share what you have with the group that you and your Thai wife is part of (friends, parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins...). After all, it's what a Thai would do.

And because you are clearly "rich" by Thai standards, she will want to show off her status a little bit. Jewelry, gadgets, or other signs of your "wealth" will

be expected – not only for her, but for her friends and family.

The Internet is full of stories about how some Western guy got scammed by some Thai “gold digger” girl. And the stories are very sad...very dramatic. The Thai girlfriend asks for money to build her parents a new house. Her father needs surgery. Her brother needs a new motorbike. Her sister needs help paying for school. Her friend is being beaten and needs financial help to find a new place to live. She needs to send a monthly donation to her father to thank him for sacrificing to raise her.

I think the truth lies somewhere in the middle. It could just be that the Western guy and the Thai woman never understood one another’s positions about money and how it works in life.

If you are to build a strong, healthy relationship with a Thai woman, you’ll need to be very kind while being honest about your limitations. Explain to her that in your life, you are the sole source of your money – that you don’t have a network of friends and extended family that freely help you financially. Share with her your need to plan and save for your future.

At the same time, to express your *naam jai*, you might consider giving your Thai wife an allowance that she can freely share however she sees fit. And if you can get her to understand your money mindset, consider asking her to help you manage and invest it! She’s very likely to become an excellent account and will gladly join you in managing your resources.

“Smile -- Pass it On!” -- Sanook

If you spend any time at all in Thailand, you’re bound to hear the word “*sanook*” or see it on shops, in restaurants, on television, on billboards – throughout the country.

Even though we Thais share an old, conservative, and conventional culture, we are also committed to enjoying life and we love to laugh. “*Sanook*” is hard to translate, but it’s the spirit of fun behind almost everything we do – as well as the way we preserve harmony, relieve tension, and help people keep “face” in spite of difficult circumstances.

Sanook is a shared sense of play, amusement, and joy that occurs among people. It can be spontaneous – the quick, spontaneous flash of humor shared by a group – or more formal, like the humor we find in theater, television, or advertising.

We Thais love spontaneous expressions of *sanook*. People who are quick-witted and clever enough to find just the right thing to say at just the right time to make everyone laugh are dear to us. They help us keep life in perspective. They help us alleviate stress. The right funny response to an awkward situation helps everybody involved save face.

But more than just laughter, *sanook* is a cultural ritual in Thailand that can puzzle Westerners. For example, if you’re working on your car and you bang your head while crawling out from under it, your first reaction might be to swear. Your Thai friends’ first reaction will be to laugh. Or if you’re walking upstairs with arms full of groceries and your shopping bag bursts, spilling oranges down two flights of stairs, you’ll react with frustration – maybe even anger. Your Thai friends will laugh.

That laughter is *sanook*. It’s a way of dealing with the “stuff” that happens in life that’s like old-fashioned slapstick comedy. Your Thai friends are not laughing to ridicule you. They’re not laughing because it’s funny your head is bleeding or your oranges have come to rest two flights below. They’re laughing to help you keep your dignity. They’re laughing to relieve the tension,

stress, and frustration. They're laughing to help keep the group in balance. They're laughing at the wonders of "now." And they're laughing as a way to avoid the discomfort of conflict or confrontation.

When you embarrass yourself in Thailand (and you will), be prepared to laugh. And realize that the laughter of *sanook* is often a much healthier response.

Chapter 10 - Everyday Manners and Common Courtesy

Chapter 10 - Everyday Manners and Common Courtesy

Introduction: When in Thailand, Do as the Thais Do!

By now it's probably clear to you that culture and customs in Thailand can be complicated, and therefore our social etiquette or "manners" can seem difficult for you as a Westerner to understand.

We are raised from an early age to recognize high and low status. We instinctively know how to speak and behave based on the kinds of relationships we have with people. A person's age, sex, profession, or level of status and power will determine what we say and how we act – because manners and the ways people speak change depending on who we're talking to.

But not only are we trained to recognize "high and low" social relationships, we are also raised to be grateful. We do not forget good deeds done to us, and we look for opportunities to return the favor. We learn to be tolerant, patient, always well-mannered and considerate.

We are also taught to be very respectful of people's feelings and preserve their dignity. So we are very conscious of not being rude, unkind, or

unnecessarily direct or blunt with our honesty.

As a Westerner visiting Thailand, you can expect a warm and friendly welcome, plenty of sanook, and generous treatment by your hosts. Learning about our culture, and a little bit about the common courtesy of everyday “good manners” will be very much appreciated, and will help you enjoy your travels here even more.

Learning the common courtesies, though, is a little bit more complicated than just shaking hands and speaking politely. In Thailand in order to be a person with good manners, you have to be constantly aware and very careful about almost every gesture, movement, or word spoken!

If you’ve never travelled to Thailand before, you might easily get confused by all the different behavior here – and take offense when none is intended. Worse still, without a basic understanding you might appear rude or offend the very people you’re trying to impress the most!

And isn’t there a common phrase in your culture? “You never get a second chance to make a first impression!”

Let me help you make a great first impression on anybody you meet in Thailand -- by explaining some of the everyday courtesies and common good manners that will help smoothe your way.

Show Respect with your Body Language

As I explained earlier in this book, Thailand is a “high context” culture – meaning we pay the most attention in any conversation to what is NOT said. In other words, actions speak louder than words. That’s why I’m starting this discussion about manners with body language – the unspoken part of

communication that speaks the loudest to us.

Westerners tend to make bigger, broader gestures with their hands, raise their voices to be understood, and allow their feelings to show on their faces. We Thais are used to keeping our body language – our gestures, voices, and facial expressions under control – so we may be a little harder for you to “read.”

Keep Your Hands to Yourself

In Bangkok, most Thai people have adapted to the Western handshake as a greeting. But it's an accommodation to your ways, not natural for us. So if you stick out your hand when you're introduced to a Thai person, don't expect a firm, hearty, three-pump handshake in return. That's because we Thais do not touch each other in public. We greet each other with a wai, the position of our hands and the nod of our head indicating our respect for the other person's status and position. (See Chapter 9.)

And depending on the culture you come from, or your family origins, you might be comfortable touching people to show your warmth, concern, or good intentions toward them. A pat on the shoulder or a touch on the arm may be very natural for you. But in Thailand such gestures can be horribly misunderstood -- no matter how kind or honest your intention. Particularly if they occur in public, and particularly if you, a man, are touching a Thai woman.

In our culture, it is considered extremely impolite for a man to touch a woman in public, and a woman is likely to be highly insulted. But because she's trained to keep her body language under control, you might never know how insulting or rude your behavior has seemed to her.

So if you're dating a Thai woman, visiting friends, or just appreciating children playing in the park, keep your hands to yourself. Do not express your goodwill or friendliness or warmth with even an innocent touch on the back of the hand, until your relationship is firmly established and you know each other very very well.

And for sure, don't expect a big hug hello or a kiss goodbye from someone you've just met!

"Mind Your Head!"

It is very important for you to understand that we Thais consider the head the most sacred part of the body. Never...ever...touch a Thai person's head, regardless of their age. Not even a baby's!

This reverence for the head also applies to religious images or statues. So never...ever...touch a Buddha figure or a statue of the king or other revered person on the head.

And since we're on the subject of "minding your head," it might be important for you to know that when you are talking with a Thai person, nodding does not mean that person agrees with you. When they nod, it's to indicate that they are listening to you. And there you have a potential misunderstanding! If you want to make sure they agree with you or understand what you are saying, ask them gently what they think about it. DON'T ask "do you agree?" or "do you understand?" Because the Thai person will not risk losing face or causing you to lose face by admitting they don't.

"Keep your Feet to Yourself!"

Just like the head is the most sacred part of the body, the feet are the lowliest and dirtiest part of the body. They are used only for walking. They get dirty

working in the fields, walking on the streets, and they pick up all kinds of debris.

We Thais are accustomed to removing our shoes before going indoors. And once the shoes are off, our feet are tucked away out of sight. We do not rest them on the coffee table. We do not use them to point at something. We do not use them to kick the cupboard door closed. When we sit down, we do not jiggle our foot up and down. We make sure that wherever we are, the soles of our feet are not pointing at anyone. And we do not hold our feet up to indicate we want a pedicure!

A Western guy we know invited his Thai girlfriend's parents to his home for the first time. When he sat down on the sofa and put his feet up on the table, her parents were so horrified they fled the apartment and refused to speak to him again. It's not an exaggeration to say that being ignorant of "foot etiquette" can cause great offense and cost you the very goodwill you want!

Respect Your Elders

We Thais show respect to elderly or more senior people non-verbally. First, there is a difference in the greeting – the depth of the bow and the higher placement of the hands in making the wai signifies greater respect (see Chapter 9). But so does our physical position to them when we're in the same room together.

For example, if an elderly person (or other higher-status person) is seated, we would never stand near them with our head higher than theirs. No well-brought-up Thai person would! Instead, we would either sit at their feet or crouch so that our head is lower than theirs.

Likewise, it is not proper to talk to someone with more senior persons sitting or

standing between you. That will mean you are talking over the head of the senior person, and no Thai with good manners wants to do that.

Show Respect with your Conversational Skills

While we Thais will certainly delight in you just being yourself, if you really want to make a good impression you might want to pay more attention to what you say and how you say it in conversations – and be a bit more sensitive to your environment than you are used to. Here are some tips:

Keep Your Voice Down!

By nature, Westerners talk louder than we do. It's just part of your outgoing, exuberant nature. And some Western cultures are just naturally louder than others. Americans and Australians, for example, are louder than the British or Canadians. Not right or wrong, just different. And, comically, some Westerners seem to think that talking louder helps people understand them better.

But in Thailand, loudness is often a signal of anger or conflict – something we try our best to avoid. If you are introduced to someone for the first time, or are in a group of Thai people, be careful with the volume of your voice so people won't misunderstand and think you are too aggressive or rude.

Watch Your Language!

No matter how common it may be in your language, swearing, cursing, or bad language is not common here, and is considered extremely hurtful and offensive. Whether we understand the words or not, just the sound of cursing is unmistakable to us. It sounds violent, angry, ugly and aggressive, and it makes us extremely uncomfortable.

We have friends from parts of the world where swearing is considered a

colorful art form. But it's taken me a long time to get used to hearing it and not getting offended or taking it personally.

Another thing about language that's difficult for us Thais to understand is sarcasm or irony. The key to sarcasm is creating two different messages – one with your tone of voice, and the other with your words. Left to our own devices, we Thais pay attention to the tone of your voice and the expression on your face – not to the words you are using. So the finer points of sarcasm are lost on us, and we are likely to misunderstand or take offense.

Don't Argue!

Earlier in this book, when we talked about the differences between Thai and Western attitudes of “me” vs. “we,” and “nurturing” vs. “achievement,” I pointed out that in your culture standing up for yourself, expressing your opinion, stating your personal preference, and arguing for your point of view are natural, right, and expected. Some Westerners even seem to enjoy “arguing for sport.”

But we Thais prefer to blend in, avoid direct argument or confrontation, and generally do whatever we need to do to smooth over a situation and achieve peace, harmony, and agreement. We see raised voices, confrontational language (like “How can you say something so stupid!”) as aggressive, rude, and thoughtless.

So it's important when you're conversing with Thai people that you show more respect for others than you claim for yourself. I'm not asking you to “go against your grain.” You can show respect for someone else's point of view without giving up your own. All you have to do is say something like “I see what you mean,” or “I understand that's important to you” and you've avoided an argument altogether!

Listen More than you Speak!

In a book on Thai social etiquette published by our Ministry of Culture in 2007, the following advice is offered to be considered a person of good manners:

- A well-mannered person will not boast and sing his own praises. Nor will he say things to put down other people. He does not criticize anyone openly and does not give advice without being invited to do so.
- He does not interrupt or make noise when people are speaking.
- He avoids talking about important issues such as religion, political differences, etc., which can cause dispute.
- He keeps quiet when a person is making a speech, when someone at a panel discussion is speaking and when he attends a concert.

If you think about it, this advice is probably not much different than the advice you'd get by an etiquette expert in your own country! As a matter of fact, the American author Mark Twain is famous for saying, "It's better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt."

Pay Attention to Who You're Talking To!

A good conversationalist in any culture pays attention to the people he's speaking with. He looks them in the eye. He lets them finish what they are saying. He does not talk shop with someone and exclude others from joining in the conversation. A thoughtful conversationalist introduces subjects that suit the people around him, considering their age, their sex, their level of understanding and education, as well as their social status. And a thoughtful conversationalist steers the conversation away from anything that could cause

disharmony – like politics, religion, or other highly-charged subjects.

You wouldn't talk nuclear physics in a group of farmers. You wouldn't talk about pornography with your grandparents. And you wouldn't argue the merits of Christianity with a Buddhist monk.

In other words, the art of good conversation depends on paying attention, being thoughtful, and considering the impact of your words and behavior on the people around you.

In the last chapter, I shared with you our custom of referring to people with the prefix "*khun*" to show respect. If you are speaking to anyone, male or female, that you don't know well, use "*khun*" before their given name in conversations.

Dress for Success

While the climate in Thailand is always hot, humid, and sultry, we Thais tend to dress more conservatively than you do in the West, especially in Bangkok. While you may be very comfortable in shorts and a t-shirt when you visit, you won't see many Thais dressed that way!

It relates to the whole "high context" dimension of our culture. The way you are dressed communicates volumes to us – not only your social status and prosperity, but also your level of respect for the place or person you are visiting. So it's important to dress for success.

That means clean, tidy, well-fitting clothing. No baggy pants that hang below your backside. No shabby t-shirts. And because you'll be taking off your shoes often when you visit homes, temples, and tourist attractions, make sure there are no holes in your socks, too!

Any conservative Western “smart casual” clothing will work here – with a standard business suit and tie for formal business occasions.

Luckily, clothing made in Thailand is particularly beautiful and comfortable to wear. You will see people of higher social position, especially the ladies, wearing traditional clothing made in the upcountry regions. And both Thai women and Thai men wear clothing made of the famous Thai silk, which is very comfortable and breathable in our hot climate.

On the beaches you will not see skimpy bikinis or “Speedo” type swimsuits. Our modesty and conservatism dictates that we are appropriately covered. Many times you’ll see Thai people swimming in shorts and t-shirts – even the women. And if you visit the countryside, rural people who bathe in the rivers are even dressed while bathing!

If you have any doubts about what to wear when, you won’t go wrong by being too conservative. You can take comfort in the fact that most restaurants, shops, and businesses in Bangkok are air conditioned.

Be a Good Guest

We say in Thailand “Whoever comes to our house will be welcome.” This clearly expresses our spirit of hospitality.

Visitors to Thailand are always impressed by our warmth, our smiles, and our light-hearted kindness – and we enjoy entertaining them and showing them our beautiful country.

But there is another saying: “When you visit someone’s home, be small...and let your host make you big.”

It is always considered good manners when guests know how to act during a visit – what to do and what not to do – so that you do not embarrass yourself or cause your host discomfort.

Social Visits or Outings

It may seem like Thais are reluctant to invite Westerners to their homes – but it's not because they want to leave their home lives a mystery to you. It's actually that we want to please you more. We think that taking you to a good restaurant or other place where there are professional cooks and pleasant surroundings lets us show off and makes you feel more special. And because there is superb food at reasonable prices, we feel it might be a better initiation to the tastes of Thailand to go out, rather than entertain at home.

Regardless of whether you are invited out to a restaurant or over to someone's home, it's customary for guests to bring a small present for the host as a token of thanks. It could be something as small as a box of sweets or bottle of wine – or as elaborate as a fruit basket or selection of gourmet goods. Regardless, this small “host” or “hostess” gift is always appreciated and accepted with great ceremony.

You should be punctual – arrive on time, whether your Thai host is on time or not. We will always expect you as the Westerner to be on time. But whatever you do, don't arrive too early, because it might embarrass the host or hostess. And of course arriving late may cause awkwardness (if the visit involves a meal, for example) and cause the host or hostess to stress or make an undue fuss over you.

If you are just making a social call, don't plan on staying more than 15 minutes or half an hour. If you know that your host or hostess is planning to serve a meal, allow about three hours for the visit – and be sensitive about

non-verbal cues that it's time to go, especially if you know your host has to get up early the next day!

While visiting, keep in mind what I've already told you about good manners. Dress appropriately. Show respect with your body language and conversation. (Pay attention to big gestures, loud voice, or animated facial expression, as well as the seniority, age, or status of the people you are visiting.)

Visiting Sacred Places

In addition to knowing good guest manners when visiting or socializing, it's also important to know what is acceptable behavior when you visit temples, shrines, palaces or other sacred places during your time in Thailand. The best advice I can offer is to observe what the Thais are doing, and let that be your guide.

First, it's very important to dress respectfully. Part of that includes removing your hat or your dark glasses when you enter, and also take off your shoes.

As you pass a respected object like a Buddha image or a portrait of the king, it is customary to pause and pay respect – usually by giving a wai or bowing your head briefly in front of the object.

The other way to pay respect is with a lowered voice, and control of your body. For example, if you have a cold, or need to clear your throat or blow your nose, do it quietly, out of sight in the restroom. To spit or blow your nose in the presence of other people, especially at a sacred place, is shocking and uncouth.

A Word about Saying “No” to Hospitality

If you are new to Thailand and here for the first time, you might receive so many offers of hospitality that you may have to turn some of them down to regain your energy and strength.

Of course you can decline any invitation, but you should make sure to do it politely so you don't send a “leave me alone” message. If you are tired from jet lag, just thank them for the invitation and explain gently that you need to rest. If (like many foreigners) you experience digestive difficulties from the local food or water, politely let your host know. They will understand, because it happens often. The more gracious you are with your thanks for the invitation, and the gentler you are with your explanation for declining, the more likely it is you'll be invited again.

Being a Good Host

Just like there's etiquette and protocol when being a good guest, there's a polite way of being a good host.

Whether your guests are visiting you at home, over dinner in a restaurant, or during a social gathering, you as the host have the responsibility to greet each guest (remember the wai!) and make sure they are comfortable. It's correct to offer them something to drink (tea, water, soft drinks, or coffee). If you are offering liquor, do not just offer it to the gentlemen – offer to the ladies as well.

Make sure that everyone has a seat (if necessary), and pay attention to seating people according to their age and status. At the same time, as a good host you want to make sure not to make anyone feel unwelcome, inferior, or uncomfortable.

Make sure that everyone is included in the conversation, and try to steer conversation away from controversial or emotionally difficult topics. And limit your business “shop talk” if there are guests who know nothing about your business.

If you are serving food, keep an eye out to see that everyone is offered second helpings. And if you are dining in a restaurant, as the host, you should be the one who interacts with the waiter and “captain” to make sure your guests are comfortable and have everything they need.

When you are offered a gift as the host, ask the guest if you should open it so everyone can see and enjoy it. Don't just tuck it away to open later.

And as your guests leave, escort them to the door and see them off graciously (with a *wai!*).

Gift Giving

We Thais often demonstrate our gratitude and friendship by giving little gifts or souvenirs. And when you are visiting Thailand, meeting people, and going on dates, giving a gift or small souvenir will be warmly received.

Such gifts don't have to be significant or expensive. It's enough that you are thoughtful. Some ideas for appropriate tokens of appreciation are:

- A memento that represents your home country or the place you came from. (If you are from Canada, some maple candy or something with a maple leaf on it; if you are from Australia, a boomerang or small koala or kangaroo figurine; if you are from the UK, some English Breakfast or other specialty tea.)

- A small box of chocolates or bouquet of flowers
- A book, if you know the person loves books
- Music cds or mp3s
- Golf balls or other golf accessories (you can even get them imprinted with the recipient's name)
- Small specialty handicrafts
- Special tea, coffee, wine, jam, or other food item unique your country

Be careful not to spend too much, as your gift represents your goodwill. If you spend too much, it might be seen as an attempt to intimidate or expect something of like value in return.

Everyday Table Manners

Since eating is something everybody does at least three times a day, it's important to know and practice good table manners so we do not embarrass ourselves or make the people we're eating with uncomfortable.

First, most meals in Thailand are served "family style" – that is, a meal will consist of several dishes that everyone shares. Each dish will be accompanied by its own serving spoon that everyone uses.

The silverware we use at most meals is a fork and spoon. Knives are not necessary, as most Thai dishes are prepared with meat and vegetables cut into bite-sized pieces already. Contrary to many Western expectations, we do not use chopsticks except (like you) when we're eating Chinese food.

Basic table manners seem to be almost the same everywhere, so if you visit Thailand and bring your best table manners with you, you won't go wrong. Just in case you've forgotten, here are some reminders:

- Do not begin eating until your host or hostess begins. If you are the host, you begin eating first.
- Since our meals are served family style, there will be enough for everybody. Therefore there is no need to dish yourself up a huge serving – better to take several small servings
- Do not take large bites or let noodles hang off your lips to slurp up
- Do not speak with your mouth full
- Do not make noise while chewing or swallowing
- Use your spoon and fork quietly, and avoid clanging them together on the plate
- When someone asks you to pass a dish, pass it without stopping to serve yourself first
- If you are in a restaurant, it's better to request what you need from your host, rather than interact with the waiter yourself
- If you are served something you don't like, don't complain. Those who do like it will feel insulted. Simply push it aside and say nothing.
- If you find a dish particularly tasty, don't hesitate to say so! It will make your host happy.
- When serving yourself, pay attention to see if anyone else would like some, and offer to pass it. That demonstrates your concern for others who might be seated further down the table than they can reach.
- Do not use your own spoon, fork, or chopsticks to serve yourself from the common dish. If there is no serving spoon, good manners dictate that you ask for one.
- Sit up straight, and do not slouch back or hunch over your plate. This can be difficult if you are eating rice or noodles with chopsticks, but it

is bad manners and undignified to hold the bowl or plate up to your face and just shovel food in.

- Keep your elbows off the table
- Use your serviette frequently – and do not lick your fingers or your lips
- If you need to remove something from your mouth (like a seed or a bone), use your spoon and drop the offending item on the side of your plate
- When you have finished eating, use your fork and spoon to gather whatever is left on your plate to the center, then place your fork and spoon together at 5:30 on the plate.
- Unless it is absolutely necessary, do not use a toothpick at the table. If you must, be quick and discreet.
- If the dishes are already being cleared away and you have not finished eating, signal that you are not finished by keeping your fork and spoon apart on your plate.
- If you are served something unfamiliar and are uncertain how to eat it (like some tropical fruits – mangosteen, durian, rambutan, etc.), watch how the others at your table are tackling it, and do as they do
- Do not forget to thank your host before you leave!

Thai table manners are not complicated as long as you realize that in eating together, everyone should be comfortable! Just bring the manners your mother taught you with you when you come to visit.

Chapter 11 – Thoughts On Dating, Courtship, and Marriage – Thai Style

Chapter 11 – Thoughts On Dating, Courtship, and Marriage – Thai Style

Introduction

I assume you're reading this book because you're interested in meeting, dating, and getting to know a lovely, honest, Thai woman of good background.

You're a decent, hardworking guy who wants to find that special someone to spend the rest of your life with. Someone you want to love, care for, and protect – who will offer you love, companionship, and loyalty in return.

And you may even be considering a visit to Thailand to participate in our Thai Lady Dating Events™ to find her.

I'm happy to help. After all, it's what I do.

I want to make sure you have enough information about Thai customs, culture, and tradition so that you won't be surprised, shocked, or confused by how we look at dating, courtship, and marriage – to ease your mind and prepare you for the experience.

So here's an overview of what to expect as you date, court, or marry a Thai woman. Right now, it's intellectual – you're reading words on a page. But when you're ready to come to Thailand and pursue your dream, I hope you'll find these words helpful.

Just know that once you get here, my staff and I will walk with you through the process personally, coach you about what to say and do, and help you navigate your way toward the woman of your dreams!

On Dating

Let's face it – we Thais are pretty old-fashioned.

Typically, a Thai woman of good family is introduced to prospective suitors by someone she knows well.

In the old days, a girl would be introduced to a suitable boy by her parents or grandparents. Any outings would be closely supervised and chaperoned by the girl's family, to preserve her reputation and guarantee her good moral character. (Think about that scene in the original Godfather movie...when Michael Corleone meets the girl in Sicily and her relatives accompany them everywhere they go until they get married.)

Times have changed in Thailand...a little...with respect to dating. These days, an eligible woman of good character is still introduced by someone she knows well. Our culture is an ancient one, and we have modernized slowly while keeping our traditions very much alive. So an honest woman with a good reputation will rely on the recommendation of a good friend, a sister or cousin, or a trusted business colleague to introduce her to an eligible man.

A well-brought-up Thai lady will never directly approach a man she is

interested in. That would be too forward, and might send the wrong kind of message about her character. If she's interested in meeting him, she'll hint at it to someone in her "group" and wait for them to make the introduction.

Such an introduction will usually take place in a public place where she's among friends. If the man and woman are interested in each other, they won't express it openly. They'll just arrange to be out in the same group of friends or colleagues at the same time. They'll get to know each other in the safety of the group, where each of them can observe the other's behavior, manners, and personality to decide whether they want to take their relationship further. (Remember the discussion about "high context?")

So the idea of "dating" is still a bit foreign to us.

We won't meet a guy in a coffee shop, decide we like each other instantly, and hop in a car alone together to go out to dinner or a movie. (And any Thai woman who does may not be who you think she is!) For a respectable Thai lady to be seen alone with a man will, at the least, be a source of gossip and speculation.

And many women from upper-middle-class families will worry about their reputations if they're seen alone with a Western guy – assuming that people will think they're easy or cheap or worse.

Instead, we'll enjoy group outings to parks, museums, restaurants, temples – on sightseeing trips, cruises on the river, trips to the market – anything fun and lighthearted that we can experience as a group.

Over time, as the couple gets to know each other on these social outings, it will start to become obvious to everybody else in the group that there is

“something in the air” between them. Their family, friends, or colleagues will have seen that the couple is acting respectfully toward one another, and will begin to accept the idea that they are becoming a “couple.”

But even though they like and are attracted to each other, the couple won't show it physically. You won't see them holding hands, hugging each other hello or goodbye, or kissing each other on the cheek – especially not in public! That just doesn't happen much in this culture. But there will be plenty of secret glances. Hidden smiles. Inside jokes. And gradually increasing time alone.

It's also not common for men and women who are dating each other to jump into bed right away. First of all, we suffer from the old-fashioned “double standard,” where the man is expected to be worldly and experienced, and brag about his conquests. The woman is expected to be chaste, modest, and coy. It's a dance as old as time. The man will try everything in his power to seduce his girlfriend, and she will try everything in her power to resist.

If a woman gives in to seduction, she will always worry that her reputation will suffer as her boyfriend might brag about it. Unlike in your culture, it's just not common for a Thai woman to have more than a couple of sexual partners in her lifetime. If it becomes common knowledge that she's slept around, she is considered “damaged goods” and men of good character will not consider her suitable as a wife (no matter how many women they have slept with themselves).

Consider – this is in modern Thailand! Not what you're used to is it?

(Note: I'm NOT going to talk here about the bar girls, the go-go dancers, or the other fast girls you'll find in the typical tourist areas. That subject was

covered pretty thoroughly in our first book, and by now, I'm pretty sure that's not the kind of woman you're interested in meeting.)

So dating in Thailand can be a long, slow, social process that's designed to allow men and women to get to know each other in a safe, secure environment among friends. And the Thai couple will not specifically refer to one another as "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" – they're "friends" until the relationship deepens.

If the couple finds they are compatible, from a similar background, with common tastes and interests – and if they enjoy each other's company, they'll move on to the next stage – courtship.

On Courtship

When a couple has arrived at the courtship stage, it's pretty much common knowledge that they're serious about each other. Their friends and family will accept the fact that they want to be alone together occasionally, and will start speculating about when the marriage might take place. Her family will tease her, drop hints, or talk about a future marriage as if it's inevitable.

If the couple has dated for a long time, everyone will assume they're already having sex (whether they are or not), but you won't be able to tell based on how they treat each other in public. You still won't see them holding hands, making out, hugging each other or kissing in public. We're just that conservative a society – in spite of our reputation as a sexual playground for tourists. (In spite of the publicity about sex tourism in Thailand, the women who work in the sex industry account for less than five percent of the entire female population).

And we're still trapped by the old "double standard" – where men are

expected to play around, make sexual conquests, and have many partners before (and during) dating, courtship and marriage, but women are expected to be more chaste and modest and inexperienced. So the woman will still guard her reputation and behave modestly in public.

During courtship, there will come a time when it's appropriate for the man to meet the woman's parents, which in Thailand is a Very Big Deal. Meeting the parents is kind of the universal signal that the couple is very serious about each other and intends to marry – they are now more than “friends” – they are serious about each other.

A woman takes a very big risk when she introduces her boyfriend to her parents.

“Meeting the Parents” means that she is introducing them to the man who will protect and care for her (and her family) for the rest of their lives. Introducing her boyfriend to her parents is also an unspoken statement that she is sleeping with him, so sex in a way becomes “public” – at least acknowledged.

It also means that she is putting her future reputation on the line. If the couple breaks up, it won't matter who was at fault or what kind of a jerk he was – she is the one who will lose face. Everybody will assume the fault was hers, and if she has had more than one or two serious boyfriends, she will be considered “worn out” or “easy.”

And in many ways, “meeting the parents” is more of a ritual – in the Thai language we say the woman is bringing her boyfriend to be “inspected by her parents,” or to “prostrate (bow) before her parents,” or to “debut” before her parents.

When the man meets the woman's parents, he will be judged on his appearance, his character, and his *naam jai*. He will be presented with many opportunities to demonstrate his willingness and ability to not only care for and support the woman but also to help support her family. The parents might take the couple out to a restaurant or on a shopping excursion so the man can pick up the check or buy gifts for the family – willingly, cheerfully, and proudly demonstrating his *naam jai* as well as his intentions.

The longer and more serious the relationship becomes, the more the man will participate in the care and feeding of the woman's family. It's the Thai way. After all, we are a "we" society, belonging is important to us, and we view money as a way to express that belonging.

In Thailand, a male fiancée is happy and proud to share his wealth with his girlfriend's family, as it adds not only to his prestige but theirs as well. He gives without asking – helping her parents fix up their home; putting her sister or her brother through school; helping pay for the cousin's dentistry—whatever he can do to illustrate his belonging to and support of the family.

Sometimes during a "meet the parents" visit, a man might be expected to announce an *engagement ceremony* right there on the spot, to show his commitment and put his resources on the line.

An engagement ceremony is one that requires the man to make a big show of demonstrating his ability to take care of the woman and her family. He does that by offering a "bride price," called a *sin sot* in Thai. Different from a "dowry," the goods or money a woman brings into the marriage, the "bride price" is a sum of money paid to the bride's family – in Thailand it's customary to offer gold or cash.

Offering this *sin sot* publically at an engagement ceremony is a way for the parents to gain prestige by showing off how prosperous their new prospective son-in-law is, as well as how desirable and attractive their daughter is. It also allows the man to feel proud of his ability to take care of them.

The amount of the bride price is usually negotiated between the girl's parents and a trusted go-between who acts on the man's behalf. After all, because her parents are older, it wouldn't be appropriate for a young man to speak on his own behalf. So most Thai men will send their parents or an older relative. The negotiation takes many things into account in order to establish the right *sin sot*:

1. How desirable is the woman? Is she pretty? Popular? Well-educated?
2. How "fresh" is the woman? Is she divorced? Widowed? Pregnant?
3. How much can the man afford? What is his profession? Is he well-educated? What are his prospects?

The woman's parents and the man's spokesperson will negotiate back and forth and arrive at an amount that satisfies everybody. And many times all this negotiating takes place before the man even meets the woman's parents!

Westerners have a hard time understanding this concept, because the *sin sot* seems to them to be like "buying" a wife. But to us, it's a normal and natural part of our tradition. We also know that many times it's just a big game of saving and maintaining face for everybody concerned. For example, the woman's parents may already be prosperous enough to understand the couple is just starting out. So they will set a bride price big enough for everybody to impress everybody else – then quietly give the money and gold

to the couple once they are married.

On Marriage

Thai wedding customs vary from region to region, but a wedding is typically an all-day affair with lots of ceremony, eating, and drinking!

The morning of the wedding day is taken up with a blessing of the wedding site (the bride's or groom's home, or the facility where the wedding will be held) by a monk. Then the couple will register their marriage – either by visiting the government office or having the officials visit them at the wedding site. These two formalities are usually followed by lunch for everybody concerned.

In the afternoon, the bride's and groom's family will gather for the official ceremony. The couple will sit together on a dais or on the floor, with their hands held in the *wai* position, and the most senior person attending will drape a flower lei around their hands and wash them with water from a conch shell to wish them blessings and good luck. Close relatives, close friends, or other special guests will be invited to do the same, each one washing the couple's hands from the shell. Anyone invited to participate in this ritual considers it a high honor.

A big wedding party or reception then takes place in the evening, and it's not uncommon to have between 100 and 300 people there for dinner and drinks. As guests arrive, they sign the guest book and present their wedding gifts in a specified area, then proceed to dinner. As the meal is winding down, a Master of Ceremonies (usually a very close friend) will invite the couple to the center of the room (or a dais) to receive flowers from the groom's parents.

The formalities include speeches by a guest of honor (a senior relative or honored person from the community), the presentation and cutting of a wedding cake, and “photo ops” with the bride and groom that everyone participates in. It’s also not uncommon for the bridegroom to participate in many toasts with his friends – turning the wedding night into an occasion for more than slight drunkenness!

Once the couple is married, they assume their role within their families.

The new husband will continue to be called upon to support his wife’s family in many ways – by giving gifts, helping with projects, or supporting younger family members. After all, giving is how we show “love” in Thailand.

But I’ve mentioned in the two previous sections – on dating and courtship – that Thailand is a land of “double standards” for men and women. So not all Thai weddings end “happily ever after.” It’s not uncommon for men to take a mistress – or two – and support them financially as well. As a matter of fact, some men view taking on a “second wife” or mistress as a sign of prestige and power.

That leaves the Thai wife in an uncomfortable position. She cannot complain directly about it, or she will risk her husband’s displeasure. And should she confront her husband and make demands that he give up his womanizing, it is not uncommon for Thai husbands to become abusive.

Her mother, her aunts, or her older sisters are not likely to support her – and might instead blame her for not being a good enough wife. As long as the husband is providing financial support and gifts, he is fulfilling his role – and the wife’s role is to accept her husband as authority in her life.

Believe it or not, that's why many good Thai women are becoming more interested in Western men as possible husbands. You have a reputation for being more faithful, more honest, and less violent than Thai men. Thai women view Westerners as more "Hollywood" – with your pale skin, interesting accents, and foreign ways.

Just like everywhere else in the world, Thai women are looking for a good, solid, kind man who will love and care for them for the rest of their lives.

Chapter 12 - Conclusion

Chapter 12 - Conclusion

In this book I've shared cultural secrets that I hope will help you develop loving, long-lasting, and profound relationships with a Thai partner. Let me summarize with a reminder – and a word or two of advice – about each of the 7 key cultural dimensions you will encounter in your relationship:

- **“Me vs. We”**

You value being “your own man” – she values being part of the group. Once you're committed to your relationship, you become part of a “group” that includes her family, her friends, and yours. If she asks for money, gifts, or favors for her family, remember it's not about greed or selfishness – it's about sharing and demonstrating love for her and her group. Make sure to discuss and agree on the limits of your generosity.

- **Not Everyone is Equal**

She is born of a culture that respects and values the distribution of power – some have it, some don't. You are from a culture that values equality. She may be horrified at how casually you treat people she

sees as “powerful” – you may be equally horrified at how deferential she can be to people you see as equals. If you honestly discuss your differences, you’ll find a way to “meet in the middle.” Just remember not to abuse the power she gives you – paybacks are painful!

- **“Control vs. Tolerance”**

Your culture stresses the importance of controlling things – people, animals, machines, even life. Her culture stresses that life is uncertain, and that’s okay. For a happy, rewarding relationship, it will be important for you to recognize that you can’t control everything – and for her to recognize that there are some things that it’s all right to assert herself about. Again, patience and honest conversation can help you work out a compromise.

- **“Achievement vs. Nurturance”**

Remember the concept of “masculinity” or “femininity” applies to your respective cultures, not your personalities. Your masculine culture values aggression, argument, and fighting for what’s right, while hers values harmony, compromise, and collaboration to find what’s right. You may find that you have much to teach each other!

- **“High-context” vs. “Low-context” Communication**

She was raised to pay more attention to what’s going on in the background of communication, rather to the words that are said. You were raised to speak your mind, get to the point, and say your piece. Her insight can be valuable to you, offering you clues that might help you communicate better. Your willingness to be open can be helpful

to her, teaching her that it's okay to tell you what's on her mind rather than making you guess.

- “On Time” vs. “In Time”

You see time as a line, as something you can organize, save, spend, or waste. Deadlines, appointments, and schedules (and your watch) run your life. She sees time as a sphere that holds many events simultaneously, and as a flow that brings different experiences into the present. It's important that you share why your schedule, your deadline, or your appointment deserves punctuality – and understand that she may have a larger tolerance for being “late” than you do!

- “Doing vs. Being”

She comes from a very old culture that values being over doing. You come from a relatively young culture that emphasizes the value of doing and achievement. Recognize that she may take longer to achieve a goal because to her, the journey is the most important part of any undertaking. And learn to slow down and appreciate the way life unfolds.

In addition to the 7 cultural dimensions, you're going to find plenty of chances to explore your differences in regard to everything from the way we greet one another to the way we regard marriage.

- The “Why” of “*Wai*”

You discovered that the way we greet each other is driven by the

subtle differences between “high context” and “low context” communication. The universal greeting, the wai, is offered from one equal to another and from a person of lower position to one of higher position. Where you hold your hands (close to the chest or higher up toward the face) and how deeply you nod your head communicate volumes about acknowledging the difference of status between people. Not only that, it’s a lovely and charming way to say hello, thank you, or goodbye!

- **Face – How to Give it, How to Save It, and How to Lose It**

You saw that a large hidden motivator of the ways Thai people interact with one another has to do with the idea of “face” – or honor, dignity, and pride. As a “we” culture that believes more in nurturance than aggression, we Thais make sure that we don’t give offense willingly to other people, and are horrified even at the possibility we might give offense. What may look to you like indirectness, avoidance, or even “lying” is nothing more than our sincere desire to maintain balance and harmony within our groups, and allow everyone to “save face.”

- **The “Heart” of the Matter – The Many Faces of *Jai***

Naam jai, or generosity, is a driving force of everyday life in Thailand. We look for reasons to be generous, because it’s the way we express our love and gratitude for the relationships that are important to us. We have many faces of “*jai*,” or ways of talking about the quality of someone’s heart. If you’re in a relationship with a Thai woman, you’ll be expected to be generous as a way of expressing your power, status, and inclusion in the group. Just protect yourself by setting

limits in advance so you don't feel taken advantage of.

- **Thai Attitudes about Money**

You saw that we Thais regard money as our currency of relatedness. We see it as a constant flow between and among people, and when we have it we give it. Likewise, when we don't have it, we ask. We don't see it as a limited resource to protect, the same way you do. With your Thai partner it will be very important to talk early on in your relationship about the meaning of money, and communicate your limits and the reasons for them. Once she understands that you are the only source of money in your life, she'll be more likely to support you in protecting and preserving it!

- **"Smile – Pass it On!" – *Sanook***

Sanook is the spirit of humor we use to relieve tension, save face, and express balance in Thai society. Far from "laughing at you," we Thais "laugh with you" to help you recover from any social awkwardness or innocent mistakes. You'll experience sanook in many ways during your visit to Thailand – when you're out among friends, attending the theater, or even watching TV.

- **Everyday Manners and Common Courtesy**

I've shared with you everything from table manners to proper visiting behavior – so I won't summarize it all here. The bottom line is this: if you bring the best manners your mother or your grandmother taught you about being a "gentleman," you'll do just fine. While our system of manners and etiquette might seem complex, we Thais are a

forgiving people. If you apologize or make amends for committing a social mistake, we'll understand.

- **Thoughts on Dating, Courtship and Marriage**

In Thailand, dating and courtship are more formal and ritualized than you are probably used to. We prefer getting to know people of the opposite sex in group settings where we feel safe and comfortable, rather than being seen alone, one-on-one, with a man we don't know well. And perhaps more importantly, we are not accustomed to touching or being touched by members of the opposite sex in public – no matter how innocent. So when you're dating a Thai woman, be respectful and keep your distance – she will expect you to try to seduce her, and she will try her best to resist, in a game that's as old as time. And when she invites you home to “meet the parents,” you'll know she's got big plans for your future!

I would love to help you navigate the tricky cultural waters as you meet, get to know, and explore the possibility of marrying a lovely, honest, feminine Thai woman. It's why I started Meet Me Now Bangkok™. My Australian husband Michael and I have confronted, explored, and resolved many of the issues in this book. And we are delighted when we can share the happiness and success we've found with each other with decent, honest Western guys like you and trustworthy, genuine, and lovely Thai women.

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About the Author

Nathamon Madison is the CEO and owner of *Meet Me Now Bangkok Co., Ltd.*, which owns and operates Thai Lady Date Finder™ and Thai Lady Dating Events™ tours.

Nathamon was born and raised in Thailand and she and husband Michael Madison have been together for 7 years.

From her own personal experience, she is living proof of the possibility of fulfillment and excitement in a loving, lasting relationship between a Thai woman and a Western man.

A born matchmaker, Nathamon has a true passion for introducing genuine people looking for a lifelong, sustaining and supportive relationship. She enjoys investigating and explaining the differences between Thai and Western worldviews and how they impact the expectations in relationships.

What started as introducing friends to each other has grown into a thriving business. While the platform has evolved from a few living room conversations into a large organization, Nathamon runs her business from the same basic principle: introducing serious people that she feels she “knows” and can really vouch for.

About Meet Me Now Bangkok Co.Ltd.

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You're welcome to drop in for a chat and a coffee during normal office hours.

Please Note: We are not involved in the sex industry in any respect. You will not be taken on any sex tours. You should have no expectation of any "sex for money" exchange whatsoever. Only people looking for a trustworthy, loving, long term relationship should consider us.

Acknowledgements

Thanks, once again, to Jan Pedersen for her wonderful help in putting my notes and thoughts into a legible manuscript.

Thanks to Michael for helping keep things on track.

Thank you to present and future members for your trust. To your success!

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