

Abstract

Social and cultural characteristics of Thailand: with the horizontal and vertical structure of relationship

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The kindness, the gratefulness to the other's good will and the concern for others are highly valued in Thai society. Thai people is apt to respect and believe the superior whose social status is higher. However, Thai society has the negative characteristics as well as the positive ones like the above. The negative characteristics are presented as the addictions to the drugs and the alcohols, the violence in everyday life, the passive and the fun seeking life-style.

The reason Thai society has the opposite characteristics as above is because Thai society is "Society of mutual relationships". Thai society is structured on the bases of the personal relationships in horizontal terms and the affectionate hierarchical relationships among peoples in vertical terms. These relationships make the positive characteristics in Thai society, and the positive ones make the negative characteristics at the same time.

Every individuals tries to make connections with much more people and higher status one. To reach the goal, Thai people concern the other's feelings and views than insist their own ones. Moreover, they try to avoid pointing out

the other's mistakes or confronting each other. Consequently, the unsolved conflicts and the accumulated emotional tensions lead to extreme violence.

However, the personal relationship is not equal but hierarchical one divided to the high and the low. The high and the low are decided by wealth, education and occupation. According to the status, people are supposed to respect and obey the superiors through different languages and behaviors. People find the gaps between the status in the everyday life. The suppressed feelings from the gaps are solved through lots of festivals and events. In the notion of Karma of Buddhism, the gaps between the status are explained by the results of moral behaviors in past lives. The passive life style is reinforced through the interpretation of karma like above. In result, people do not have an interest on their own futures. Instead of that, people are likely to depend on animism and seek for easy, simple and enjoyable life.

The positive images of Thailand are represented by "freedom", "smile" and the unity on the bases of Buddhism and monarchy. But the negative images represented by the violence, domination by power, animism are consist of the reality of Thai society. These characteristics of Thai society as the coexistence of opposite images are originated from the relationships which are constituted of Thai society.

Key Words: Thai society, personal relationships, society of relationships, the other orientation society, affectionate hierarchy, passive life-style