
ภาคภาษาไทย

THAI SECTION

REFLECTIONS ON THAILAND AND HAWAII*

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I. Introduction

Ever since arriving in Thailand some six months ago one persistent question has lingered in the background of my mind, "What light, if any, can a knowledge of Hawaii shed upon the experience of this strange country of the Orient?" This question is all the more pressing to the five Fulbright grantees from Hawaii whose justification for accepting the hospitality of a foreign land depends in part upon their ability to interpret America to their foreign hosts. The urgency of understanding Hawaii and of interpreting it abroad becomes especially compelling as published accounts and the personal testimony of both official and unofficial "ambassadors of good-will" increasingly represent our Islands as a "bridge between the Orient and the Occident." And now the selection by the Congress and President of the United States of the University of Hawaii as the site for a vast experiment as a "Center for Cultural and Technical Interchange between East and West" emphasizes even more strongly our obligation to discover what meaning Hawaii really has for the countries of Asia.

The initial contacts of an Island resident in a country such as Thailand impress him perhaps even more strongly with the contrasts than with the similarities to his homeland. True, he sees many of the same plants in his garden, the same breath-taking tropical sunsets, and he suffers at times from the same oppressive humidity - more oppressive in Bangkok, however, than in Honolulu. But the Islander in Bangkok is even more aware at the outset of living in a huge, sprawling metropolis situated in the center of a vast, flat plain of endless rice fields. Not only is the spoken language strange to his ears, but the written language of the signs in the shops and the streets appears equally unintelligible to him. Even the languages he hears from the familiar-looking persons of European ancestry sound unfamiliar to the monolingual American, for he is almost as likely to overhear one or another of the European languages - Dutch, Danish, Swedish, French, German, Spanish, or even Russian - as he is to hear English.

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The Islander soon learns that in contrast with the 6,400 square miles on which the 620,000 population of Hawaii reside, Thailand's approximately 200,000 square miles of land supports a population of about 25.5 millions. And while Hawaii's miniature islands are lost in the vast ocean wastes of the Pacific and derive their poetic title of "Crossroads of the Pacific" by virtue of the thousands of miles which separate them from their nearest continental neighbors, Thailand's vast land area is closely hedged about by four rival states, thus giving a more realistic and sometimes ominous significance to her reputation as the "Crossroads of Southeast Asia." One could continue with a host of other obvious differences, but that is not the principal purpose of this paper.

What basic similarities are there then between regions whose differences impress themselves so forcibly upon the observer? What justification is there for assuming that Hawaii's experience would have any special significance for Thailand, or Thailand's for Hawaii? What special value can Thai students or scholars derive from a year or two of study in Hawaii that they would not derive from a similar experience in Chicago, New York, or San Francisco? In brief, does Hawaii have any insights of vital significance to offer to Thailand which no other American community can provide?

II. The Peculiar Social Climate of Two Unlike Geographical Regions

Many Islanders would unhesitatingly respond to the foregoing questions that Hawaii's unique contribution to the entire world and its most valued message to the countries of the Orient consists of its long tradition of interracial amity and cross-cultural fraternization. It is the message eulogized in James Michener's best seller, of Hawaii's "Golden Men who see both the West and the East, who cherish the glowing past and who apprehend the obscure future." Others prefer to express the same idea in terms of what is presumed to be uniquely Hawaiian, her far-famed "aloha spirit."

The Hawaiian visitor to Thailand is likely to be a little startled to discover that, although differing somewhat in terminology, the accounts of life in this strange land carry a theme which is strikingly reminiscent of home. After living for just a few weeks in Thailand he can appreciate the enthusiastic endorsement by a "famous newspaperman," upon learning that Michener intended to by-pass the country in his grand tour of the Orient shortly after the close of the war:

If you miss Siam, you miss Asia. Siam is the sanctuary in a troubled world. Siam is the air-conditioned room in hell. The padded cell in the insane asylum. Siam is all things to all men and its girls are the most beautiful in the Orient.¹

Michener's own comments are scarcely any less enthusiastic after visiting Thailand.

No friend ever gave a traveler better advice....I could roam the streets at night without fear. Siam is the joyous land. Bangkok is the Paris of Asia. Never in my life have I left a land with more regret....It is a gentle and wonderful place.²

The descriptions of the Thai people by Westerners of long experience in the country invariably include some reference to their innate friendliness and gentility. Even the ancient European accounts of the Siamese, while usually centered chiefly upon the cruelty and treachery of the warring nobility, did not fail to mention the ever-ready hospitality of the humble peasantry. It is frequently said of the Thai, as it has also been said of the native Hawaiians, that "they are naturally friendly," by which is meant, of course, that the culture supports an open-handed and out-going relationship with one's fellows. This friendliness is expressed in a variety of different ways, including the widely noted practice of young men walking along touching each other's hand or finger and the characteristic expressions of welcome and cordiality on their faces. It seems likely also that the widely noted wit and humor of the Thai, which expresses itself in a "talent for repartee, wordplay, and innuendo" is closely related to their basic friendliness.

The following comment by a cautious American political scientist, except for certain local references, sounds very much as though it had been taken directly from some of the Hawaii Visitors Bureau literature.

Thailand is characterized both by the people themselves and by Western observers as "the land of happy people." They are friendly to strangers as well as neighbors; they are gay and fun-loving. Every conceivable occasion is used as an opportunity for having a good time. The many religious festivals are occasions for celebration; planting and harvesting are community projects and provide opportunities for sociability and fun; even cremations are occasions for sociability rather than mourn-

¹ James Michener, *The Voice of Asia* (New York: Bantam Books, 1951), p. 181.

² *Ibid.*, p. 186.

ing. Just as having a good time is a value highly prized, manifestations of worry or anxiety are frowned upon and are consciously and, perhaps unconsciously, suppressed. Anger, frustration or fear are emotions to be ignored or concealed. Any manifestation of emotion that interferes with smooth, pleasant relationships is to be avoided. They have a live-and-let-live philosophy.³

The care-free and fun-loving nature of the Thai people can be observed in a variety of different forms, just as it is among the native Hawaiians. An American anthropologist of some considerable experience in Thailand, after commenting on the Thai emphasis on gentle behavior, including the "avoidance of any harsh words, of overt anger or direct criticism," points out that the villagers place great emphasis on the ability to "speak humorously, to banter, and to joke," and that the model person should "be fun and be ready to have fun." When I first acquired an office at Chulalongkorn University, I was almost immediately impressed by the gales of laughter which emanated from the class-rooms and I wondered what the students could possibly find so amusing in lectures on international law or accountancy. A wise colleague, who had spent a number of years in graduate study in America, anticipated my questions by casually remarking:

Where in America or elsewhere, for that matter, would you encounter so much laughing in a college class-room? It is as though the Thai students were constantly looking for something to lighten what might otherwise prove to be a dull and burdensome experience. And no matter how dull or boring the lecture, they will find something to laugh about. It almost seems that the duller the lecture is, the more they will find that is amusing.

Even as my concentration on the writing of this paper is distracted by the shouting of students outside my office window playing soccer, I am impressed by their laughter and jovial faces even in the midst of the most active competition. I have never yet observed a single instance of real belligerence during the most vigorous play.⁴

³ Walter B. Johnson and Virginia K. White, *The Administration of Public Social Welfare Services in Thailand* (Bangkok: Institute of Public Administration, Thammasat University, 1957), p. 27.

⁴ In this, as in so many other traits, there are inevitable discrepancies between the ideal and the real, between profession and practice. Just as experience among the Hawaiians reveals the inevitable lapses from the expected standards of friendly, hospitable conduct, so among the Thai, there are the clear deviations from the ideal pattern of "live-and-let-live." This gap between cultural norms and actual practice, as one would expect, appears to be more marked in the cities and towns than in the rural areas. A youth worker with wide experience in Thailand calls attention to the competitive spirit which has been engendered in the city-centered schools and colleges and the occasional resulting fights and "near riots" at athletic events, necessitating the subsequent banning of some such affairs.

Still another facet of Thai culture bears a striking resemblance to values frequently noted in Hawaii, perhaps more notably among the immigrant peoples. Thai culture emphasizes an inner quietness of spirit, referred to as "being *choey*" or having a "cool heart," a quality which enables the individual to accept life including its crises, with some degree of calm and dignity.

To be *choey* is to be without anxiety, to rest at ease, survey and weigh the situation, accept cheerfully what must be, and then take advantage of the circumstances, including the stupidity of others. The maintenance of a "cool heart" is supported by an attitude epitomized in the common phrase *mai pen rai* meaning "it's of no importance," "never mind." The expression is more than a phrase; it symbolizes a defence mechanism for minimizing events which might otherwise disturb a "cool heart."⁵

The Hawaiian reader will immediately recognize an approximate parallel in the Island expression of "cool head," which apparently springs from basic values in all established cultures, stressing the universal necessity of accepting that which cannot be avoided. The common expression among Japanese immigrants and even among their second and third generation, children, *shikata ga nai* (it can't be helped), unquestionably has its fatalistic counterparts among the other immigrant cultures in Hawaii. Among the mounting numbers of those in process of becoming "Hawaiianized," the Island admonition of "cool head" is the effective expression of the need of all humans to acquire and maintain some degree of dignity and calm in the face of life's crises.

Various explanations for the peculiar traits of character discovered thus far among the peoples in Thailand and in Hawaii appear in the scholarly literature of both areas. First to be mentioned, although certainly not to be taken very seriously, is the proposition in the literature on both Thailand and Hawaii that a tropical or semi-tropical climate has exhausted all the natural vigor from the native dispositions of both the Thai and the Hawaiians. Supposedly, too, all those from hardier climates who have succumbed to the enticements of ease and comfort in these lands have likewise fallen prey to the enervating influence of the climate on both temperament and character. As it is said of the *malihini* in Hawaii who has

⁵ James N. Mosel, "Thai Administrative Behavior," in William J. Siffin (ed.), *Toward the Comparative Study of Public Administration* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1957), p. 300.

finally achieved *kamaaina* status, "the iron in his blood has turned to lead in his pants." The easy-going, gentle disposition of the natives is simply interpreted as a lack of the vigor and aggressiveness which characterizes people who live under more invigorating climatic conditions.

In Thailand, the pervasive influence of the Buddhist religion, with its emphasis on tolerance and benevolence, is commonly given credit for the relative absence of anger or aggressive behavior. In a population which is 95 per cent Buddhist, it is not unreasonable to expect that the prevailing religion would have a notable impact on daily life, and it is probably true, as more than one observer has recognized, that Hinayana (or Theravada) Buddhism in Thailand "is more than a religion; it is a way of life and its values and activities are interwoven into everyday living."⁶ The interpretation by a Thai colleague at Chula of some of the basic elements in Thai culture and character in terms of religion is obviously credible.

According to Buddhism, life is a series of sufferings. These are natural and therefore inevitable. Brooding over them would not lighten one's sorrow; on the contrary, it doubles the suffering. A wise man should therefore take all the tribulations in stride: ignore them, if possible, or treat them with indifference. This attitude leads to equanimity of mind--a "quiet heart." Why get excited if anything goes wrong; why not keep a "cool head" and try to laugh it off?

This will perhaps explain such expressions as *mai pen rai* or being *choey* in life. It also helps to understand why a quiet man is, in the eyes of the Thai people, a good man; why inertia or lack of initiative is a common trait.

When a Westerner speaks of the Thai as fun-loving, he means that they seek fun or pleasure as an end in itself. The fact is that they try to avoid anything that is not fun or pleasure. It is a negative approach of attempting to negate the existence of suffering. Carried to the highest point of perfection, both suffering and joys are sublimated and one attains "nirvana," the supreme state of indifference to either pain or suffering.

The Mahayana variant of Buddhism, as practiced by a large portion of Hawaii's population, is frequently credited with having a "quieting" influence on choleric temperaments and as contributing to the kindly, courteous, and tolerant conduct of Hawaii's immigrant Japanese.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

Undoubtedly the somewhat nebulous "aloha spirit" is the most popular theory to explain not only the care-free, fun-loving, and friendly qualities among the natives but also the harmonious relationships which have supposedly spread from among the Hawaiians to dominate the whole of Island life. There can be no question as to the well-grounded tradition of hospitality and mutual aid in Hawaiian culture, nor of the easy-going temperament which expresses itself in a readiness to enjoy and to share life's goods as they come, without too much regard for the possible worries of the morrow, and the term "aloha" serves as an effective symbol to reflect these basic dispositions. Insofar as the concept of the aloha spirit serves to keep alive this tradition and these dispositions, it is obviously a factor which must be reckoned with in social analysis. Certainly the aloha spirit is not only exalted but sometimes virtually worshipped among some of the native Hawaiians and it is widely idealized in the wider Hawaiian community. Merely to give the name of aloha or the aloha spirit to these tendencies, however is neither to interpret their origin nor to adequately analyze their function.

More basic, however, in the sense of being more widespread than the cultural influences of any of the factors thus far mentioned - Buddhism, the "cool heart," "the cool head," or the aloha spirit in either Thailand or Hawaii - is a fundamental way of life which both Thailand and Hawaii share with large portions of the contemporary world. Wherever human society is organized on the basis of small, culturally homogeneous, and economically self-sufficient village communities - said still to represent three-quarters of the human race⁷ - life tends inevitably to assume an intimate, face-to-face relationship in which friendliness and hospitality become basic rules of existence. As sociologists now pretty generally recognize, man's capacity for entering imaginatively into the experience of others - what constitutes, in fact, his human nature as distinct from his animal nature - is a product of life within a small, primary group setting as provided within the village, neighborhood, or the family. The firmly established traditions of kindly, cordial association among people regardless of their race or station, insofar as they persist in both Thailand and Hawaii, are the strong survivals of village values in a world rapidly becoming dominated by the individualistic values of the market-place.

Both regions are, in fact, gradually losing what was once thought to constitute their distinctive "spiritual qualities," Hawaii perhaps more rapidly than Thailand. The

⁷ Robert Redfield, *The Little Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 3.

growth of an industrialized economy, with its emphasis upon efficiency and individual achievement and success, tends inevitably to coincide with a decline in the intimacy and hospitality ordinarily associated with the old order in both Hawaii and Thailand. The nostalgic reference by an American social worker to the "good old days" of Thai hospitality and its loss in more recent days is strikingly reminiscent of similar observations in Hawaii.

Traditionally the Thai family welcomes to its home and provides for relatives and friends in difficult circumstances. With the present problem in meeting living standards, this resource for the needy is rapidly disappearing from the Thai scene. Many of our informants drew sharply contrasting pictures between what they and their parents were able to do for individuals and families in need. One person said that in years past his father seldom supported less than four families. The son, whose earnings double his father's, has difficulty supporting his own family. Observers are certain that begging has increased by sizeable proportions in Bangkok during the past few years.⁸

Insofar as the "little community" around the world is increasingly absorbed within the widening influence of the metropolis, whether it be Bangkok, Honolulu, Seattle, New York, or London, we stand to lose one of the natural supports of the kindness, sympathy, and gentility which most of us like to regard as central in human nature. If the human spirit is not to be poorer thereby, some other, perhaps consciously devised, matrix of human nature will have to take its place.

III. Common Transformations

A second element of similarity between Thailand and Hawaii is just as easily recognized, but more difficult to define. Despite the more obvious differences between them, there are common historical antecedents which have left a strong imprint on the two communities of the present day. One might stress, for example, the historical accidents that saved both peoples from the clear colonial fate of most of their neighbors at a time when the nations of Western Europe were extending their empires to include most of Southeast Asia and the islands of the Pacific, but this is a theme much too complicated to unravel in this paper. It is

⁸ Henry M. Graham and Juanita K. Graham, *Some Changes in Thai Family Life* (Bangkok: Institute of Public Administration, Thammasat University, 1958), p. 19. This study is almost wholly confined to the changes occurring in Bangkok.

worth noting in passing, however, that both areas are somewhat unique in their respective regions in maintaining political independence throughout most of the nineteenth century and hereby a strong tradition of freedom which persists to the present.

A more readily identified common pattern in the two countries is the transition already mentioned from "peasant or folk community to plural society" and all that ordinarily goes with such a significant change in the mode of living. The revolutionary transformation of Hawaii within a century and a half from a stone-age culture to one of the most advanced capitalistic economies is a story with which most observers are at least moderately acquainted, and it is of course closely related to the decline of the aloha spirit mentioned earlier. The displacement of the centuries-old self-sufficient, peasant economy in Thailand by one involving specialized production and competition within a world market has proceeded much less rapidly than in Hawaii,⁹ but essentially the same sort of adjustments are required and are taking place. We have the means here of calling attention to only a few of the many parallels which suggest themselves to the observer of the two scenes.

One of the most interesting phases of this economic transformation which has been or is taking place in both areas—for the process is incomplete in both Thailand and Hawaii—is the existence of and the gradual breaking down of caste and class barriers. The most striking evidence of caste barriers which still existed to some degree in Hawaii thirty years ago were those associated with or remnants from a highly stratified plantation economy. There was still a marked tendency at that time to identify all Haoles (white Europeans or Americans) as persons of superior rank, endowed somehow by nature to lead and direct and certainly not intended for demeaning physical labor. The immigrant groups, such as the Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos, which has been brought into the country to provide labor on the plantations, on the other hand, were inclined to concede to the Haoles a superior status as being their God-given due. Even in Honolulu the plantation tradition was still so well entrenched that a Haole college professor could not mow his own lawn without inviting raised eyebrows and questioning comments as doing that which only non-Haoles ought to do.

Bangkok, thirty years later, provides many examples of formidable status rather than class distinctions of a type which once existed in Hawaii but have now largely broken

⁹ This gap between Thailand and Hawaii is partially reflected in the relatively low ratio of less than ten per cent of the former's population residing in urban centers as compared with more than 70 per cent in Hawaii.

down under the democratizing influences of the city and its associated movements and institutions. The status distinctions in Thailand, of course, are the survivals of an earlier social order dating back to the twelfth century, in which "each person's social position was fixed solely by his formally assigned position in the political hierarchy."¹⁰ This was the period which established the pattern, still religiously observed in Thai life; of giving a great show of deference to those above one in status or position, whether it be king, prince, teacher, priest, or headman. The Western professor in Thailand, for example, is likely mistakenly to assume that the low deferential bowing which he observes from the students as he passes up and down the halls is directed to him as a person, whereas it is the position or the status to which honor is being shown.¹¹

A further illustration of the same principle is found in the fact that public meetings, and particularly the launching of any new venture, require the presence of some person of considerable social prestige, if only to grace the occasion by his presence, but preferably to say a few words on its behalf or perhaps to serve as chairman. The tendency of junior staff members to defer to their superiors in status—a disposition to be found of course in any society but more highly developed in a heavily bureaucratized society such as Thailand's—underlies the widely noted reticence of most Thais in public discussions. This hesitance to speak out disappears completely when the social situation involves only persons of approximately equal status.

As more than one observer has noted, Thai society operates from the top downward, much as it did thirty or forty years ago on Hawaii's plantation, when the manager was a virtual lord of the manor, whose word was law. This gives rise to a diffidence about making decisions without first securing the approval of one's superior which impresses Westerners as contributing to a reduced efficiency and a lackadaisical attitude among the Thai. Although the following quotation refers primarily to the political situation, the principle involved applies with equal force in other spheres of life.

It is traditional that sociopolitical change be initiated by the top political leadership—the King during the early absolute monarchy, the King and royal princes during the later absolute monarchy, and today by a small "junta" of the

¹⁰ Mosel, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

¹¹ Actually there is a good deal of friendly camaraderie between professors and their students of which the foreign observer is frequently quite unaware. Similarly it should be noted that most of the status distinctions which frequently impress the *farang* in Thailand most markedly apply only to public occasions where the external forms are always most prominent and that such distinctions are greatly minimized in normal circumstances by the essential friendliness of Thai living.

political elite. ... The flow of social and political influence in Thailand has always been a one-way street—from top to bottom - with very little feedback in the upward direction.¹²

The same observer calls attention to the fact that this type of social structure lends structure itself to rapid social change, once it has been initiated by the right people, and it also leads to selective and critical rather than wholesale and uncritical borrowing from other cultures.

The widespread use in Thailand of domestic servants, arranged in a strict hierarchy within the household, is strikingly similar to Hawaii's social structure during the height of the plantation era, but is a luxury which can no longer be afforded there. Every wealthy family in Thailand has its company of retainers consisting of one or more cooks, amahs, gardeners, chauffeurs, butlers, and other house servants, each of whom is jealous of his own rights, duties, and responsibilities and would resist being assigned the tasks of another type of servant. Less affluent households may have to be content with one or two servants with correspondingly more diversified talents and responsibilities. The almost invariable use, at least in western households, of such feudal terms of address by the servants toward their employers as "Master" or "Madame" and of terms of reference to the servants as "boy" or "coolie" leave no possible doubt of the status distinctions between them.

The Westerners fit into the Thai social structure in a manner roughly comparable to that of the Haole in Hawaiian society a generation ago. Despite the absence of European colonialism in the strict sense of the word in both Hawaii and Thailand, in both areas the Westerners have exercised notable leadership in industry and commerce quite out of proportion to their numbers. Consequently they have been in a position literally to purchase a social position to which they would not otherwise be entitled. In Thailand this expresses itself in a tendency to maintain a somewhat lavish household, at least in comparison with the low material plane of living among the great majority of the Thais. It has come to be assumed of Westerners in general in Thailand, as it was of Haoles in Hawaii up until World War II, that they must by that fact alone be people of wealth and influence.

It is said that Thai taxi drivers have five different rates according to which passengers are charged: the lowest to Thais, the next lowest to Thais traveling with

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 281.

Westerners, the next higher to Westerners who can speak Thai, the next higher to Westerners in general who cannot speak Thai, and the highest of all to non-Thai-speaking Americans. The lavish expenditures of Western tourists and especially of Americans, both tourists and those in the employ of our government, has led to the widespread impression that they all have wealth in great abundance. Westerners, for example, find it difficult to walk for exercise along the streets of Bangkok or other towns or villages because every taxi or samlor (three-wheeler) driver will stop to pick them up, it being inconceivable that any Westerner could be so poor as to resort to walking for pleasure or as to be unwilling to pay the cost of a taxi ride. There is enough substance to the stereotyped conception of the affluent American riding in cool comfort in his handsome black Buick, air-conditioned perhaps and driven by a Thai chauffeur, that some Americans speak of being uncomfortable in riding the public buses - not because they are crowded or hot but because of a sense of not living up to what is expected of them.

Another interesting phase of the transformation from a subsistence type of folk or peasant community to one organized primarily on the basis of commerce and trade, such as has been or is now taking place in both Hawaii and Thailand is a shift in the basic philosophy of life. The declining influence of the spirit of hospitality and mutual aid, as its natural locale in the small villages and towns is invaded by the expanding world of trade and commerce, is of course a significant part of this process. We have observed in an earlier section how this proceeds more rapidly in Hawaii than in Thailand.

A phase of this same process which still confuses and frustrates both Western and Thai observers is at least partially clarified by Hawaii's experience of an earlier day. During the greater part of the plantation era in Hawaii, the common complaint of the planters was that life in the Islands was "too easy for the natives," they were too easily satisfied with the simple life of a fish and poi subsistence, and they lacked the ambition, the initiative, and the other qualities essential in the world which the planters were about to bring into being. The almost universally accepted assumption among Westerners that the native Hawaiians were "too innately lazy," to provide the necessary laborers on the plantations was one of the important reasons for importing workers from many different parts of the world and thus creating the basis of Hawaii's present multi-racial population. The fact that they could and did work long and strenuously when engaged in some activity of paramount interest to them, but that

they could recognize no valid reason for accepting a regime of steady and uninterrupted toil under a hot sun when all their simple needs could be quite adequately satisfied by a few hours of labor in the taro patch during the cool of early morning or evening, did not carry weight with the Haole observers. After generations of association with the commercially minded Haoles and the various immigrant groups with a long experience in trading activities, the Hawaiians have only partially absorbed the competitive spirit of the West. Those who have retained most of their ancestral culture, including the aloha spirit, by remaining most isolated from the new world around them, are also most subject to the critical comments of outsiders as being "lacking in ambition, happy-go-lucky, and downright lazy."

Very much the same comments are made about the great mass of the Thai people today. The most common criticisms of the Thais by Westerners today sound strikingly like those levelled against the Hawaiians a century ago, but possessing certainly no greater justification - that they are "lazy, too easy going, content to live on a low material plane." One well-known and competent Western observer, while repeating some of these stereotyped reactions from the West, points out with more than usual insight the basis for the behavior which is thus adversely criticized:

A story long current among Bangkok foreigners relates that a Siamese who was indignant that his people should be described as "incorrigibly idle" could only offer as a counter-characterization that they were "incurably indolent." Unless Siamese were in desperate straits they would not hire out their services. The bounty of tropical nature made it superfluous for them to work for the necessities of life; they wanted to be their own masters and to be under no compulsion - except that imposed by nature - in regard to hours and place....They found congenial the irregularity of the rice-farming season.¹³

Anyone who had observed the Thai peasants in the fields at planting or harvesting time might question the statement that it was "superfluous for them to work for the necessities of life," but there are periods of leisure and relaxation for the numerous other sources of enjoyment of life. Like the Hawaiians and most other folk and peasant peoples, they have not been able to discover any good reasons for abandoning the many satisfactions

¹³ Virginia Thompson, *Labor Problems in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University, 1947), p 216.

of their traditional way of living for the unpleasant drudgery of a wage existence and the questionable gains of the few material comforts it might buy.

Another set of observers of the Thai scene express the same viewpoint with a slightly different emphasis.

The Thai have been called lazy, a judgment that expresses a partial truth, namely, that the Thai generally are unaggressive and fond of fun and leisure; they think it absurd to work hard just to add to one's store. Life is to be enjoyed, not endured, and a Thai is capable of intense concentration and energy when a project appeals to him or is regarded as important To harvest a successful rice crop the farmers work as long and as hard as conditions require, but they can see little merit in working merely to accumulate more wealth.¹⁴

In almost every respect, except the reference to rice, the above comment might have been made of the Hawaiians a generation or two ago.

As in Hawaii, solid advancements in modern technology, commerce, and industry in Thailand have required the importation of large numbers of peasants from areas where the struggle for existence was severe and people were therefore willing to accept the conditions of labor which the more fortunate natives could afford to reject. The Chinese have constituted the largest single group of immigrants, amounting as early as 1825 to an estimated 4.8 per cent of the total population of Thailand and mounting in 1955 to 11.3 per cent.¹⁵ The entire population of foreign ancestry, estimated in 1957 to consist of 3,000,000 Chinese, 670,000 Malays, 185,000 Cambodians, 60,000 Indians and Pakistanis, 60,000 Mon, 60,000 Karens, 25,000 Vietnamese, 5,000 Westerners, and 150,000 others,¹⁶ represented only 18.4 per cent of the total, but it is from among this small minority, and particularly the Chinese, Indians, and Westerners that the great bulk of the business leadership and industrial skill is drawn.

¹⁴ Wendell Blanchard and others, *Thailand, Its People, Its Society, and Its Culture* (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1957), p 17.

¹⁵ G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), pp. 79, 182.

¹⁶ Wendell Blanchard and others, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

Because of their striking success in many different types of commercial and industrial enterprises in Thailand, as well as their marked disposition to retain the language and culture of the homeland,¹⁷ the Chinese have been subject at various times to a considerable amount of criticism from their Thai neighbors. It has frequently been said in the past and one still hears the comment in private that the Chinese would take possession of the country, if they were not kept under control by governmental action. With the virtual cessation of further immigration from China and the normal functioning of Thai influences around them, the Chinese are gradually becoming assimilated in much the same way that Hawaii's Chinese were earlier absorbed within the larger community around them.¹⁸

IV. Conclusion

Briefly stated, the purpose of this paper has been to seek at least a partial answer to some of the questions posed in the introduction. If only as a means of justifying my own good fortune in spending an academic year in Thailand, it has seemed important to seek some rational answer to the questions which my colleagues at Chulalongkorn are constantly asking me about Hawaii and the other questions which I anticipate my friends at home may put to me about Thailand on my return.

During the first few weeks of my residence in Thailand, the dominant impression gained was one of the exotic character of most that I saw, heard, smelled, or even tasted, and even after six months of living in Thailand, that impression still remains prominent. Gradually, however, there began to emerge a sense that underneath the bizarre exterior of much that I saw and heard were familiar trends and processes at work, and what I have attempted

¹⁷ Although these are traits which we commonly identify with Chinese, they are found also among other ethnic groups, especially when they are in a country other than their own. Their success in trade and their cultural aloofness are both functions in part of their role as strangers. cf. A. W. Lind, "Adjustment Patterns among the Jamaican Chinese," *Social and Economic Studies*, VII, No. 2 (June, 1958), pp. 158-62.

¹⁸ We sometimes forget that each of the various immigrant groups in Hawaii has at some time been regarded as a potential threat to the welfare of the country because they "got out of place" in the socio-economic structure of the Islands and/or they persisted in the retention of sharply contrasted cultural practices from the homeland.

to do in this paper is merely to record some of the more pronounced of these impressions - for that is all that I can claim for them. Once this venture of seeking to find the familiar in the midst of what appears to be wholly unfamiliar gets underway, it acquires a fascination quite as that which travel or adventure normally provide. The mere fact of similarity between Hawaii and Thailand is, of course, not in itself of any particular significance. Many of the similarities which come to mind are purely accidental or merely coincidental. The prospect of discovering similarities which spring from common pre-conditions and for which a common "cause" may hopefully be extracted, is, of course, the ultimate objective of the social scientist's search.

The similarities, outlined briefly in the second section, in the social climate between two grossly dissimilar geographical regions are of the type which naturally catch the eye of most observers of the social scene and for which the separate explanations or "causes" mentioned later - physical climate, religion, philosophy, or culture - also somewhat naturally suggest themselves. While recognizing the possible significance of each of these factors in either area, it is obvious that no one of them alone could adequately explain the common phenomenon in both regions.

A more plausible and all-embracing explanation for the supposedly unique qualities of the easy-going friendliness and tolerance encountered in both Thailand and Hawaii is found in the theory of its being primarily a deeply rooted heritage from an intimate, primary-group type of existence. This is, moreover, a type of human relationship which is normal and natural within any society where life is organized in terms of small, economically self-sufficient communities, but it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain in either Hawaii or Thailand, or anywhere else, as the individualistic and competitive patterns of life in large urban communities extend their range of influence. A variety of other common social characteristics of Thailand and Hawaii, including the appearance and the subsequent undermining of caste and status barriers, likewise find at least a partial explanation in this theme of a world-wide transition from folk or peasant life to commercially oriented city life.

The foregoing reflections have emerged from a very brief period of observation in Thailand and a very much longer one in Hawaii. Quite inevitably the experience in Hawaii has therefore colored to some degree what has been uncovered in Thailand. If, however,

these reflections contain the germ of an idea deserving of closer examination, it is to emphasize further the use of Hawaii as the locale in which processes of universal significance can be examined under something approximating laboratory conditions. Quite conceivably Hawaii's usefulness as a center of cultural and technical interchange may extend beyond the East and West, of which we ordinarily speak but whose limits we can no longer accurately define, and we may be able to test the hypothesis that "Hawaii telescopes, both in time and space and under conditions permitting close observation, the basic processes which operate *throughout the world* as diverse peoples and cultures are drawn together into a new community of economic and social interdependence."

© **He who exalts himself does not rise high**

Lao-tse

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