

k. Other holidays

- New Year's Day (1 Jan)
- Chinese New Year
- Labor Day (1 May)
- Coronation Day (5 May)
- Royal Ploughing Ceremony (11 May)
- Constitution Day (10 Dec)



6. Customs

a. Gestures

- **Doors** Stepping on doorsills can be a spiritual offense
- **Head** Avoid touching another person's head, as this is considered the most sacred part of the body



- **Feet** Do not point or move objects with the feet. Avoid showing the sole of your shoe. Point a single finger only at animals or objects.
- **Back and shoulders** Refrain from placing one's arms over the back of a chair in which someone is sitting or patting someone's shoulders or back
- **Smiles** Smiles show pleasure but also cover up embarrassing settings
- **Strong emotions** Avoid loud talk, boisterous and demonstrative behavior, or anger
- **Pockets** Keep hands out of pockets when talking

b. Buddhism and politics

(1) Sangha/government ties *"The organizational links between the sangha and the government are an indication of their interdependence, although the fine points of that relationship may have changed over time.*

The traditional interdependence was between religion and the monarchy. The king was, in theory, a righteous ruler, a bodhisattva (an enlightened being who, out of compassion, foregoes nirvana in order to aid others), and the protector of the religion. Because succession to the throne was problematic and the position of any king in many respects unstable, each ruler sought legitimation from the sangha. In return, he offered the religion his support.



After the king became a constitutional monarch in 1932, actual power lay in the hands of the elites, primarily the military but also the higher levels of the bureaucracy. Regardless of the political complexion of the specific persons in power (who, more often than not, had rightist views), the significance of Buddhism to the nation was never attacked. In the late 1980s, the king remained an important symbol, and public ideology insisted that religion, king, and nation were inextricably intertwined." (Country Studies--Thailand)

(2) Freedom of religion *"Freedom of religion is protected by law, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The de facto state religion is Theravada Buddhism, but other religions are not restricted.*

Members of minority religious movements are occasionally subjected to legal action. Dissident Buddhist leader Phra Potirak and 79 followers, convicted and sentenced to 2 years' probation for violating the civil law governing the Buddhist hierarchy and impersonating Buddhist monks or nuns, appealed their convictions. At year's end, all remained free and continued their official religious activities.

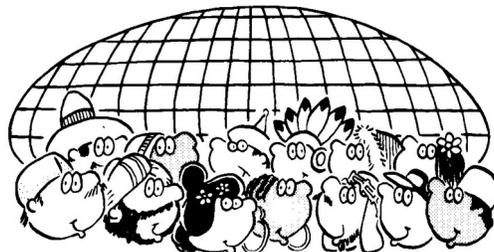


Dissemination by the Government of school textbooks containing religious information, but only on Buddhism, was reportedly a source of annoyance among religious minorities." (Report for Human Rights Practices--Thailand)

(3) Religious minorities *"Muslims represent a significant minority within the country as a whole and constitute the majority in the four southernmost provinces that border Malaysia. Although the Government has attempted to integrate the Muslim community into society through developmental efforts and expanded educational opportunities, societal discrimination remains widespread."*

c. Racial/ethnic minorities

"Progress in integrating ethnic minorities into society is limited. Undocumented hill tribe people cannot own land and are not subject to labor laws, including minimum wage requirements.

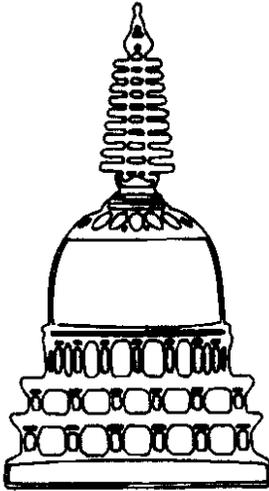


Approximately 45,000 Vietnamese who fled Indochina in the 1940's and 1950's reside in northeastern Thailand and live under a set of laws and regulations restricting their movements, residences, education, and occupations.

There are also approximately 40,000 noncitizen Chinese and their descendants who live in border areas. Very few of these people have citizenship, and the vast majority must seek permission from local authorities in order to travel outside their districts."

7. Cultural literacy concepts/terms The following terms, adapted from The Dictionary of Global Culture, (edited by Kwame Appiah and Henry Gates, Jr., NY: Alfred Knopf, 1997), apply to Thailand. For further information, consult The Dictionary of Global Culture.

a. Ayutthaya (ah-yood-TAH-yah)



- Thai state founded by Ramathibodi I around 1350
- Adapted influences from its neighbors, the Khmers, and India/China
- Chief religion was Theravada Buddhism
- Government was based on Hindu and Khmer ideologies
- Much of the kingdom destroyed with the invasion of the Myanmar in 1767

b. Chulalongkorn (jhoo-laah-luhg-gohn, 1858-1910)

- Son of Thai king, Mongkut, who ruled Siam from the time he was ten years old until his death
- Goal was to modernize government and social systems
- Chulalongkorn abolished slavery and indentured servitude, and institutionalized public education
- Was a strong advocate of traditional Thai culture and the fundamentals of Buddhism

c. Emerald Buddha

- Statue, in Bangkok, of the sitting Buddha
- Believed to date back to the first century
 - In 1779, Rama I placed the Emerald Buddha in its current temple location



d. Inao (EE-nou-oo)

- Thai literary form telling the cyclic tales of the hero Radan Panji or Inao
 - Originals lost but versions written by King Rama II are considered masterpieces

e. Khon drama (koohn)

- Traditional Thai masked dance begun in the thirteenth century
- Plays dramatize Hindu military and political beliefs through dance and narration
- Performances tend to be serious where actors mime silently and a narrator recites verse
- In the nineteenth century, masks replaced with painted faces
 - Masks remain sacred

f. Khun Chang Khun Phaen (kwuhn chahng kwuhn pah-ehn)

- Medieval Thai story told in oral tradition
- Poem is recited by one individual who also adds rhythm



- Poem depicts a heartfelt love triangle

g. Lakhorn (lahk-horhn)

- Form of Thai traditional drama
- Style more graceful than Khon
 - Dancers don't wear masks, are of both genders, and may speak

h. Loi Kratong (loi krah-tohng)

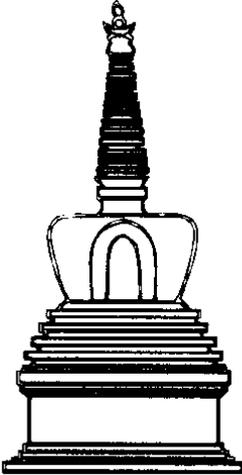
- Religious ceremony held in twelfth month of old Thai calendar, between November and December
- Floats with candles are placed in rivers to source of the waters in the Buddha's footprint
 - Fireworks and celebrations

i. Mahachat Kham Luang (MAH-hah-CHAHT khahm loo-ahng)

- "Great birth," oral traditional Thai story which represents the 547th incarnation of the Buddha
- Annual Buddhist festival is held in nearly every village for the Mahachat to be recited by the local monks
 - Epic is divided into 13 sections, each being recited by a different monk amid donations of food and gifts from the villagers

j. Mongkut (mohng-koot, 1804-1868)

- Ruler of Thailand, then known as Siam, who spent 27 years prior to his accession traveling the world as a Buddhist monk



- Mongkut attempted to establish Siam as a worldly nation
- Formed treaties with the United States and Great Britain
- Mongkut insisted on a worldly education for his children which was dramatized in the musical *The King and I* based on the memoirs of Anna Leonowens, an Englishwoman who served as governess to Mongkut's children

k. Nang drama (nahng)

- "Figures of hide", a traditional puppet dance drama with figures made from cowhides
- Term also describes films
- First performed in the fourteenth century Sukhothai period, the nang is associated with the Hindu hero Rama and his adventures

l. Nang Loi (nahng loi)

- The "Floating Maiden", an episode from the Thai epic Ramakien
 - Story tells of a war between two kings, a kidnapped wife, and white monkey, Hanuman, general of King Phra Ram's monkey army.

m. Narai the Great (nah-ri, 1632-1688)

- Thai ruler whose reign was considered the first Golden Age of Thai poetry
- Narai also had affiliations with many foreign nations, especially France
 - Jesuits made open attempts to convert the king and his kingdom, in part causing 150 years of anti-West sentiment and a closing of Thai borders

n. Phra Apahi Mani (prah ah-pi moh-nee)

- Famous Thai novel written by the poet Sunthon Phu (1786-1855)
 - Young prince meets giants, mermaids, dragons, and other mythical adventures

o. Ramkhamhaeng inscription (rahm-kahm-hayng)

- Thai alphabet created by King Ramkhamhaeng the Great in 1283
- King invented marks to indicate tone and form of letters on patterns from the Mon and Khmer alphabets
- Ramkhamhaeng derived 44 consonants, 32 vowels, and five tonal diacritical marks
 - Alphabet used for the first time in 1292 for stone inscription of the story of a peaceful kingdom and worthy ruler

p. Ramakien (rah-mah-kee-ehn)

- Thai version of the Indian epic *Ramayana*
- Originally oral tradition, first written in 1797 by King Rama I
- Poem is 3,000 pages long
- Epic praised for its preservation of medieval Thai culture



q. Sukhothai (soo-khoh-ti)

- Powerful Thai state founded in 1220
- Strong Buddhist presence
- Best-known for sculpture and ceramics depicting the Buddha
 - State fell under Ayutthaya rule in 1378

r. Sunthon Phu (soon-tahn poo, 1787-1855)

- Famous Thai poet, patronized by four kings and held in high esteem by peasantry for his works on simple life, worthy toil, and needs of the poor
- Greatest work the epic *Phra Apahi Mani*

s. Taksin, King (tahk-sihn, r. 1768-82)

- After the destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767 by the Burmese, Taksin--with support from the Chinese--recaptured enough land to crown himself king of a new Thai state



- Initially considered a visionary, vision later seen as madness when he became paranoid and suspicious
- Finally overthrown when attempted to force Buddhist monks to bow to him as a god

t. Thai poetic tradition

- Poetry is Thailand's oral tradition
- Tonal language--where words of the same pronunciation have different meanings by the level of tone spoken--wasn't written until 1283
- Themes for poetry are mainly religious, concentrating on Hindu and Buddhist beliefs
 - Poets lived on royal patronage rather than proceeds from their poetry



8. Resources for Further Study

a. Cross-cultural resources

Cooper, Robert and Nanthapa. Culture Shock! Thailand. (ISBN 1-55868-055-1), Portland, Oregon: Graphic Arts Center Publishing, 1990.

Beg, borrow, or purchase any book in this series. Highly recommended by the Overseas Briefing Center, U.S. Department of State. Detailed, in-depth treatment of issues.

Cummings, Joe. Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit--Thailand. Berkeley, Calif: Lonely Planet, 1992.

The best, by far, of readily accessible travel guides. Detailed information is presented in a manageable, easily used manner. Don't leave for Thailand without this text.

Fieg, John Paul and Elizabeth Mortlock. A Common Core--Thais and Americans. (ISBN 0-933-662-80-7), Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc., 1989.

Recommended by the Overseas Briefing Center. The handbooks published by Intercultural Press are academically and popularly valued.

Hoefer, Hans. Insight Guides--Thailand. Singapore: APA Publications, 1993. AISO--Thai 915.93 T364

Aesthetically pleasing presentations of history, peoples, places, foods and travel tips. The beautiful photographs, in National Geographic manner, make this a visually appealing series.

Tonkin, Derek and Visnu Kongsiri. The Simple Guide to Customs and Etiquette in Thailand. (ISBN 1-86034-045-8), Kent, England: Global Books, Ltd., 1996.

Highly recommended by the Overseas Briefing Center of the U.S. Department of State. Less detailed than the Culture Shock! series, but a highly readable treatment.

**b. Biography, novels,
literature, poetry**



Landon, Margaret Dorothea. Anna and the King of Siam. New York: The John Day Co., [1944].

⇒ Bosun Library: General DS581.L2 & Leisure LAN

Based on the earlier books written by Anna Leonowens on her time as governess to the children of King Mongkut. Believed by historians to be quite dramatized, the work nonetheless aids in understanding a king torn between his own culture and keeping his country free.

Moffat, Abbot Low. Mongkut, The King of Siam. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, [1961].

⇒ Bosun Library: General CT13.05 M6

A very personal account of Mongkut's true personality and struggles with keeping Siam independent of Western sovereignty. Written with the aid of Mongkut's nephews and his personal writings.

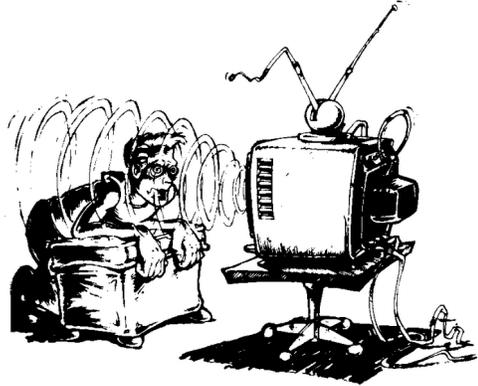
Sisuk, Pratuang. Nawi Jisen: Humorous Reminiscences of Life in the Thai Navy. Bangkok: Snnakpim Bongot, 1979.

⇒ Aiso Library: Thailand THA 895.91-/-8303 S623 1979

Wells, Kenneth Elmer. Thai Buddhism: Its Rites and Activities. Distributors: The Christian Bookstore, 1960.

⇒ Bosun Library: General BL1443.4 .W4

c. News articles



"Seni Pramoj, 92, Is Dead; Thai Defied Japan on War." New York Times, 28 July 1997, p. C20.

Obituary of the Thai Ambassador to Washington in 1942 who organized a guerrilla force to fight Japanese forces occupying Thailand. After the war, the United States did not treat Thailand as a defeated enemy, in part because of Mr. Pramoj's work.

Mydans, Seth. "Hard Times Make Thais Look Back to Lost Past." New York Times, 1 Nov 1997, p. A4.

Column describing the resurgence of traditional religious expression in Thailand. "The cult of worship of Rama V, or Chulalongkorn, King of Siam...is growing."

Mydans, Seth. "Hellbent on Progress, Thais Sidestep Priesthood." New York Times, 11 Mar 1996, p. A3.

Article on the continuing impact of urban pressures on Thailand's religious monasteries. Kasem Wayamo's "abbreviated two-week stint of fasting and meditation--his father spent four months as a monk--was a concession to the fast pace of modern Thailand and the impatience of his employers at a factory where he works as an electrician."

Mydans, Seth. "In Thai Camps, Fear of Burmese Troops Grows." New York Times, 3 Mar 1997, p. A5.

Account of attacks on refugees along the Myanmar/Thailand 1,000 mile long border.

Mydans, Seth. "In Thailand, Once Asia's Tiger, Anger Boils." New York Times, 17 Sep 1997, p. A3.

Account of difficulties experienced by Thailand's people in the wake of recent economic downturns.

WuDunn, Sheryl. "Asian Economies, Once a Miracle, Now Muddled." New York Times, 30 Aug 1997, p. A1.

Descriptions of continuing impact of Asia's economic "fizzle." The Thai market has lost some 70 percent of its value from a peak in 1994.



"Take a Road Trip."

Vocabulary List: Thailand

Bun Bang Fai (Boon buhng fi) Thai Rocket Festival, tied to the rain ceremony predating Buddhism, intended to bring good crops

Chakri Day (jhah-kree) Thai national holiday remembering Rama I's enthronement in 1782. Rama I founded the Chakri Dynasty, which continues--though without an absolute monarchy status--to this day.

Chao (jou-oh) Guardian spirits in Thai folk practice, of which the most important is the *chao thi*, or guardian of the house compound.

Chulalongkorn (jhoo-laah-luhg-gohn, 1858-1910) Son of Thai king, Mongkut, who ruled Siam from the time he was ten years old until his death. Continued his father's attempts at preventing European colonization by promoting Siam as a worldly civilization. Goal was to modernize government and social systems. Was a strong advocate of traditional Thai culture and the fundamentals of Buddhism.

Emerald Buddha Statue, in Bangkok, of the sitting Buddha is considered a national symbol. Believed to date back to the first century, though was not found until 1436 in Northern Thailand. In 1779, Rama I placed the Emerald Buddha in its current location

Khmer (kah-mehn) Ethnic group in Thailand and found throughout parts of Southeast Asia. Two groups of Khmer are distinguished in Thailand--long-time inhabitants more recent arrivals.

Magha Puja (mah-KAH boo-chah) Buddhist celebration of ordination of 1,250 monks in Rajagrha, India by Gautama Buddha. Temple sermons, chants, and merit-making activities take place on this day

Mon (mahn) Thai ethnic group, perhaps the first Theravada Buddhists in Southeast Asia, and the founders in the seventh century of the kingdom of Haripunjaya which greatly influenced the development of Thai culture.

Mongkut (mohng-koot, 1804-1868) Ruler of Thailand, then known as Siam, who spent 27 years prior to his accession traveling the world as a Buddhist monk. Mongkut understood the advances of the imperialistic West and attempted to establish Siam as a worldly nation. Formed treaties with the United States and Great Britain. Mongkut insisted on a worldly education for his children which was dramatized in the musical *The King and I* based on the memoirs of Anna Leonowens, an Englishwoman who served as governess to Mongkut's children.

Phi (pee) Spirits, common in Thailand, thought to have power over human beings. The category includes spirits believed to have a permanent existence and others that are reincarnations of deceased human beings.

Ramakien (rah-mah-kee-ehn) Thai version of the Indian epic *Ramayana*. Originally oral tradition, first written in 1797 by King Rama I. Poem is 3,000 pages long providing subject matter for the other arts including drama, painting, and sculpture.

Ramkhamhaeng inscription (rahm-kahm-hayng) Thai alphabet created by King Ramkhamhaeng the Great in 1283. King invented marks to indicate tone and based form of letters on patterns from the Mon and Khmer alphabets. Ramkhamhaeng derived 44 consonants, 32 vowels, and five tonal diacritical marks.

Tod Kathin (tahd kah-teehn) Robe offering month marking the end of the Buddhist Lent. Begins the pilgrimage season wherein adherents go to temples and bring food and gifts (new robes) to monks.

Review Quiz: Thailand



Part 1--Multiple Choice Place the letter of the most correct answer in the blank provided.

1. _____ Most Buddhists in Thailand follow the _____ school of thought.

- a. Zen
- b. Tantra
- c. Theravada

2. _____ In Buddhism, practice avoiding taking life, stealing, lying, illicit sex and drinking alcohol is called following the

- a. five precepts.
- b. middle way.
- c. golden path.

3. _____ In Thailand, _____ ceremonies for birth, death and marriage rites often complement Buddhist belief.

- a. Taoist
- b. Hindu
- c. Jain

4. _____ A Thai Buddhist temple is often called a

- a. wat.
- b. sanctuary.
- c. church.

5. _____ In what region of Thailand are most Muslims found?

- a. Northern highlands
- b. Central plains
- c. Southern provinces

6. _____ played a significant role in the transmission of Western ideas to Thailand.

- a. Missions
- b. Educators
- c. The Industrial Revolution

7. _____ The mountains of northern and northwestern Thailand are known as the _____ because of the illegal opium production.

- a. Highland Joint
- b. Golden Triangle
- c. District of Doom

8. _____ What minority ethnic group strongly influenced the development of Thai culture?

- a. Khmer
- b. Karen
- c. Mon

9. _____ About _____ percent of the Thai population is Chinese.

- a. 6
- b. 11
- c. 17

10. _____ What Broadway musical is the subject of Thailand's Rama V?

- a. Pirates of Penzance
- b. The King and I
- c. Hair

Part 2--True/False Place a T or an F in the blank provided.



1. _____ For many Thailand peoples, the world is inhabited by _____ a variety of spirits to aid or deter a person's well-being.

2. _____ Up to 40 percent of Thailand men spend some time--up to three months--as Buddhist monks.

3. _____ Monks and nuns join monastic communities for purely spiritual reasons.
4. _____ Once in a monastery, monk behavior is expected to follow appropriate rules and piety.
5. _____ Chinese religious expression in Thailand is largely a mix drawing from various traditions.
6. _____ In Thailand, the Islamic faith is integrated with many beliefs and practices not customary with Islam.
7. _____ Economic necessity is often seen as a reason for prostitution in Thailand.
8. _____ Waso is the Buddhist celebration honoring the ordination of 1,250 monks in India by Gautama Buddha.
9. _____ When in Thailand, locals often keep their hands in pockets while talking as this demonstrates comfort and ease.
10. _____ Within Thai politics, there is often an interdependence between monks and elected government officials.



"I challenge all of you, to follow the example of excellence, to [internalize your] role as ambassadors for our Navy's core values of honor, courage and commitment."
Honorable John Dalton, Secretary of the Navy