



Thai People: A Deep Psychological Profile

Description



Old school friends of my wife (second from the left). We live in rural Thailand and I often go a week or more at a time. I swim in a sea of green curry.

Let's go deep into a psychological profile of Thai people. They eat strange foods, celebrate their holiest days (Songkran) with huge water fights, never wear shoes inside a house, and never ever get mad in public.

Hmmm.... Just who are these Thai people anyway?

A Little Personal Info

I never expected to know a Thai person. I never expected to live in Thailand. I never expected to own a Thai business and work side by side with Thai people. I never expected to have a son named Gua. I never intended to read Thai. I really, really never ever expected I'd marry a Thai woman named Waranya, but I did.

Over the years (decades to be more accurate) I've gotten to know Thai people-my wife, family and close friends. It's like I've been hooked up to an IV that has continuously fed me "Thainess" over most of my adult life.

So, as a White American, born and raised in Northern Ohio to a middle class family, I know something about Thai people.

Let's Get Freudian

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Photo Above: A Tai-Yai woman in the mountains outside of Chiang Rai. I know Dr. Freud would go for off a big tapioca root.

I know what Thai people want in life. I know their dreams. I know their fears. I know them.

Thais want the same things from life that Americans do. Or Aussies do. Or The Brits do. Or Nigerians do. Or Japanese do. Or Syrians do. You could go on and on.

They want good schools for their kids. They want to be able to see a doctor when they're sick. They want clean water. They want a nice house. They want to live in peace without political/religious strife. They want good food. They want a good job. You could go on and on.

Thai people want the same things as us Westerners when you consider the big picture. People are pretty much the same the world over, rich or poor, black, white, yellow or brown. And that goes for Thais and Americans.

Consider this: Xenophobia is a disease (currently reaching epidemic proportions in some regions of the U.S.), and if left untreated can often metastasize into racism.

Again, if you cut through the fish sauce and green curry, you'll find Thai people are pretty much just like you and me. Many Americans would find that fact anathema. *'What?!?! These little, poor, brown people are like me?!?! No way!!!'* Sorry to burst your bubble, but they're pretty much the same as you and me-family, religion, culture and country. Pretty much in that order too.

That Thai Smile

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This woman was showing me her silkworms near Kalasin. I begged her to smile for the camera. She showed her bottom teeth.

Oh stop it right now with the smile stuff. Yes, Thais have an optimistic disposition and are extremely polite in public compared to Americans, but I haven't noticed any permanent smiles cemented on their faces.

When I recently traveled to New York for the first time, I expected everyone to be rude. But New

Yorkers were polite and helped me out when needed with a smile. I recently traveled to Paris for the first time and really expected Parisians to be abnoxious and rude. Wrong again. Parisians were very helpful and smiled a lot. *Paris seems a more smiley city than Bangkok.*

Thais smile about as much as anyone else. No more. No less. See, we're back to that main point that Thais are just like you and me.

Of course the Thai bell hop smiles at you. And the concierge. And the tour operator. And the restaurant manager. And the shop keeper. And the bar girl. And the...you fill in the blank. I live in Los Angeles, easily the rudest city in the world, and all those people will also smile at you.

The "Thai smile" was a brilliant ad campaign started by the Thai Ministry of Tourism about 40 years ago.

Mai Ben Rai



Oh stop it again with the "mai ben rai" stuff! The whole concept of "mai ben rai" as a happy-go-lucky Thai lifestyle is total BS and one of the silliest notions that White people have dreamed up about Thais.

Properly translated "mai ben rai" just means "that's OK", "no problem" or "never mind". Nothing more. It's not a lifestyle credo of Thai people. I wrote a blog entry entitled "[Mai Ben Rai...NOT!](#)" that goes into great detail about this unfortunate stereotype.

Thai's are not happy-go-lucky. Stop patting them on the head. It's completely made up nonsense by tourists and tour companies that are seeking/selling a "Disneyland" experience to their Thai vacation.

A terrible drought ravaged Esaan (Northeast Thailand) two years ago. That's where my pillow makers live and their main occupation is rice farming. The farmers were losing their rice crops. Wells were

going dry. The anxiety and fear on their faces and in their voices was palpable. No “mai ben rai” attitude there.

My wife’s family had to care for a loved one who was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and who eventually died. No “mai ben rai” attitude there. And no smiles either.

When a teacher informed us that our 13 year old niece had a boyfriend, the family went into a panic! Trust me...there was no “mai ben rai” attitude with that news.

Thais are no more happy-go-lucky than Americans. There we go again with that thing about people pretty much being the same.

Thai Respect



A Thai woman with her grandchildren in Si-Sa-Ket. Her hopes for her grandchildren are the same as

Thais do want respect, but they often don't get it. Here's a quick story.

A few years back, a customer wrote me who was interested in buying a pair of fisherman pants. She

inquired if my Thai pillow/fish pant business employed child workers and if the children went to school.

I assured her that no children worked making pillows and that education is compulsory in Thailand. I even offered to give her the cell phone numbers or email addresses of a few pillow makers, but she couldn't speak Thai and really wasn't that interested in pursuing the issue. Just asking the question satisfied her. She purchased a pair of fisherman pants.

The next time I was in Esaan with the pillow makers I mention this email I had received. All the pillow makers were angry and insulted by her well-meaning question. "What kind of mother does she think I am?", was a common response." "My daughter loves her school! It's a good school!" was another.

While I knew the pillow makers would take my customer's email as a slight, I underestimated their anger. Thais don't want to be condescended toward, just like Americans don't nor anybody else. Hmm...that sameness thing keeps rearing its head.

A Profound Conclusion

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Maybe the key to understanding Thai people is respect. Nothing more. Nothing Less. If you respect them as individuals, you'll quickly see them as pretty much the same as you.

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1. The Siamese Puzzle Box

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Date Created

January 2018

Author

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