

Cultural variability
complexity hostility
heterogeneity
interdependence
history e...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the twentieth century, the culture of the Central Tai came to dominate the national culture. The military dictator, Phibun, passed a number of Cultural Mandates that promoted a centralized national culture and identity. Other mandates promoted the use of the national dress and the national language.

The Ministry of Education played an important role in expanding the national culture. The military government that seized power in 1976 viewed the national identity as something that had to be defended against Western cultural influences. A National Culture Commission was established in 1979 to coordinate efforts to defend the national culture. Those efforts were closely linked to national security and occurred against the backdrop of a communist insurgency that involved members of ethnic minorities.

In the 1980s, a revival of regional and local identities began, especially in the northern and northeastern regions where there was a resurgence of local foods, celebrations, and styles of traditional dress. Democratic reforms and moves to devolve power since the early 1990s have allowed this process to accelerate. The sense of national identity is no longer viewed as precluding local and regional identities.

Ethnic Relations. Thailand often is portrayed as a culturally homogeneous country, but there are approximately seventy-five distinct ethnolinguistic groups. The Central Tai is the dominant ethnic group and accounts for 36 percent of the population. The Thai-Lao and Lanna Tai, who together account for about 40 percent of the population, were not assimilated into the national culture until the twentieth century.

There have been Chinese in Thailand for centuries. In the nineteenth century, their numbers more than doubled until they constituted about 10 percent of the population. Along with Westerners, the Chinese merchant class dominated the economy in the nineteenth century, especially with the exportation of rice. In the early twentieth century, the Chinese established their own educational institutions, resulting in antipathy toward them under the nationalistic Phibun regime, which blamed the Chinese for the country's economic problems. In 1938, the Phibun government taxed the Chinese, limited the use of their language in schools, and closed most Chinese-language newspapers. Chinese immigration came to a virtual halt. While anti-Chinese sentiment remained strong, by the 1970s virtually all the Chinese had Thai citizenship. With the growth of a more open and democratic society in the 1990s, the Chinese began to express their culture openly.

Since it came under Thai control in 1786, the Malay Muslim population has posed difficulties for the Thai state. This region has mounted numerous rebellions against central authority over the past two centuries. In 1948, the Phibun regime banned Malay and Islamic organizations, sparking a rebellion that was violently crushed. Education has been a point of conflict between Thai authorities and the Malay Muslims since the government introduced compulsory education in 1921. As a result, many Muslims sent their children to Malaysia and other Muslim countries to be educated. In the 1960s, returning students joined various independence movements. Guerrilla activities in the south reached their height between 1970 and 1975.

Counterinsurgency operations failed to end support for the separatists. In the

late 1980s, the national political environment changed with greater sensitivity to the Muslim religion and culture. The civilian government elected in 1992 initiated reforms to ease tension in the Muslim south.

The Thai government treats the Khmer as part of a generic northeastern Thai ethnic category called Isan. Efforts to assimilate the Khmer into the national culture in the 1960s and 1970s were spurred by concern over their support for communist insurgents in the northeast. In the 1990s there was a cultural revival among the Khmer in the northeast that included the formation of dance and music groups to promote Khmer culture. The hill tribes in the north, with the exception of the Lawa and Karen, are relatively recent immigrants. The majority of hill tribe members did not become citizens until recently and lacked political rights. These hill tribes have faced economic difficulties related to their lack of land rights. The authorities generally have viewed them as primitive peoples. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was encroachment on their land by lowlanders, who believed that their presence was a key factor in environmental degradation in highland areas. Proponents of rights for the tribes in the 1990s led to the granting of citizenship for the hill tribes. Nevertheless, there are many conflicts, including those involving corrupt government officials and business interests that are attempting to exploit highland resources. (Source: [http://www. everyculture. com](http://www.everyculture.com))

Belief systems: Buddhism is the primary religion in Thailand with more than 90% of the population being Buddhist. There is small numbers of other religions including Islam, Christian and Hindu. In rural areas especially, Buddhism is closely entwined with other belief systems. The majority of the population follows Theravada Buddhism, the oldest form of Buddhism that <https://assignbuster.com/cultural-variability-complexity-hostility-heterogeneity-interdependence-history-essay/>

was originally developed in India and based on the four noble truths that Lord Buddha had realised in order to become enlightened.

Religion and Buddhism in particular plays a very important role in the every day life of the people of Thailand. The image of Buddhist temples both old and new literally dotted across the landscape is one of the most enduring images visitors take home with them. Whether travelling through lush green countryside or exploring small back lanes in Bangkok, there will always be a temple to interrupt the scene.

The temple takes a prominent place within the local community and often provides necessary services as well as being the main place of worship where people will go to pay respects to the Buddha and receive the blessing of monks. Many people attend the temple regularly for meditation and sessions of chanting from the texts.

Religious and other beliefs play a very strong part in the decisions of every day life of the Thai people and it is not uncommon for people from all levels of society to consult fortune tellers prior to making important decisions.

Students attending exams might pay respects at a shrine in University grounds before sitting the exam and before moving into a new house several monks from the local temple may be invited to provide a $\frac{1}{2}$ house blessing $\frac{1}{2}$ ceremony or $\frac{1}{2}$ tambun baan $\frac{1}{2}$ to ensure a positive atmosphere presides. (source: <http://www.destination-asia.com>)

Values:

Marriage. In general, individuals find their own marriage partners, although the choice of a spouse may be influenced by one's family among the wealthy. The value of goods provided to the couple and elaborateness of the wedding ceremony vary with the wealth of the families of the couple.

Polygyny was common among the elite in the past but is now rare, although wealthy and powerful men often have a de facto second wife known as a minor wife. Divorce is not difficult and is usually a matter of a couple ceasing to live together and dividing their property.

Domestic Unit: The ideal is for a married couple to establish its own household as soon as possible. However, especially among poorer couples, residence with the parents of the husband or wife is common. The nuclear family is the core of the domestic unit, but it often includes members of the extended family. Including unmarried siblings, widowed parents, and more distant unmarried or widowed male and female relatives. The husband is nominally the head of the household, but the wife has considerable authority. Female members of the household are responsible for most domestic chores.

Inheritance: Property generally is divided equally among the children after the parents die. However, it is common practice for one child, usually the youngest daughter, to assume primary responsibility for looking after the parents in their old age, and this person inherits the family home.

Kin Groups: The Central Tai reckon descent bilaterally. Various forms of kin groups may be formed. The most common type is formed by siblings, married children, and sometimes more distant relatives living in a

multihousehold compound. Members of these groups may share domestic and other tasks. Sometimes larger kin groups encompass several compounds to form a hamlet cluster. In some instances, a hamlet cluster forms around a wealthy and powerful individual. (Source: <http://www.everyculture.com>)

Aesthetic:

As a virulently nationalist country that was never colonized, Thailand can be assumed to possess its own traditional set of aesthetic standards. Those original standards were developed by the accumulation of the subjective cultures of the creative figments of the individual consciousnesses of the Thai people over the centuries. Taking the 1970s as a decade before the onset of rapid economic growth and industrialization, the aesthetic standard of the time can be used as the popular aesthetic standard based on the subjective culture of the Thai people before any major extraneous influences had entered the calculation (Pongsudhirak 2008). Now let us imagine a Thai woman of about 25 years of age thinking about the ideal standard of beauty, an example of popular aesthetics, for a woman her age in the Thailand of the early 1970s. Her standard would be based on two main influences, namely, her individual creative figment, subjective culture, and the contemporary collective standard, the objective culture. Taking into consideration that she was undertaking that mental exercise in the early 1970s it is reasonable to assume that the product of the exercise would be the following standard or closely similar to it: A beautiful woman has smooth light brown skin with a golden shine to it, is about one meter sixty centimeters tall, has strong small dark eyes, long dark straight hair, a small round nose, and a strong healthy

<https://assignbuster.com/cultural-variability-complexity-hostility-heterogeneity-interdependence-history-essay/>

complexion. It is clear that the previous description greatly differs from the one provided at the beginning of this essay. How did one system of popular aesthetics turn into another? The following sections will provide a qualitative explanation of how the change came about. As previously mentioned, Thailand before the 1970s did not have a very developed market economy nor much influence from abroad (Somwung Pitiyanuwat 2005; Tong Chee Kiong 2001; Tow 2000; Wyatt 2003). However, that started to change in the 1970s with the influx of American soldiers and other concerned parties due to the war in Indochina and the warming of the Cold War (Neher 2002). The first change was internal and it was the formation of a truly national market of products and of ideas. This was partly spontaneous and partly promoted by the central government (Mulder 2000). A national culture was promoted based on the objective culture of Bangkok. The result, was the predictable subjugation of local popular aesthetic standards in favor of a popular standard imposed by the objective culture derived from the subjective culture of the inhabitants of the capital. The change could be seen by the promotion of Central Thai fashion and also by promoting a standard of beauty based on the ethnic features of Central Thais rather than those of ethnic minorities such as Malays, Mon and other Hill Tribe groups (McCargo 2008). By the late 1970s the hegemony of the Capital's popular aesthetics was assured. At that point the objective culture of Bangkok

became the objective culture of Thailand (Mulder 2000).

The influx of foreign capital and soldiers during the late 70s and early 80s introduced a new system of popular aesthetics, mostly based on American

and Global standards of beauty and fashion. The change can be seen in the <https://assignbuster.com/cultural-variability-complexity-hostility-heterogeneity-interdependence-history-essay/>

material side of objective culture produced during those years. Billboards showed taller women with lighter skin. The ideal nose became longer and pointier. Objective Western, American, culture had clearly entered into a dialectical relationship with Thai, Central, objective culture to create something new. The synthesis of the thesis, Central Thai

beauty, and the antithesis, Western, American, beauty created a completely new and unique system of popular aesthetics. Children of mixed couples, one ethnic Thai or Chinese and one White foreigner, closely resembled the ideal beauty prescribed by the new system of popular aesthetics. Evidence to the previously mentioned assertion, can be found by taking a look at some of the celebrities who rose to stardom during the early 80s and 90s. Most of them were half western and the few who weren't underwent surgical procedures to make their features closer to the ideal. A good example of a beneficiary of the aforementioned shift in popular aesthetics was the half Thai half American singer Tata Young Tall, with western features, and flawless English, she rose to fame riding on the wave of the Central Thai/Western synthesis of popular aesthetics in the 1990s. Needless to say, the majority of the population did not resemble the ideal beauty represented by the synthesis of Western and Central Thai popular aesthetics.

Popular aesthetics for men took a similar path to that of women in terms of the standardization of Central Thai traits for the entire country. Nevertheless, standards for men were not as influenced by Western objective culture than those for women. That is not to say that men's popular aesthetics did not undergo any changes. The year 2000 can be considered to be a turning point for men's popular aesthetics in Thailand. Due to the rise of regional

<https://assignbuster.com/cultural-variability-complexity-hostility-heterogeneity-interdependence-history-essay/>

powers such as Japan and South Korea during the second part of the 1990s and the greater regional identity that was engendered due to the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, more interregional trade of material and objective culture was undertaken (Tow 2000). Thailand had always been an important recipient of Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese Foreign Direct Investment but it was only after 2000 that those countries also started exporting their culture (von Feigenblatt 2007; Togo 2005). Korean Pop Bands, Japanese Comics, Taiwanese Divas, all started to flood Bangkok. Once again the hegemonic popular aesthetics provided by the synthesis of Central Thai and Western elements came under attack by images of metrosexual Korean and Japanese males. Androgyny was the trend in East Asia at the time, both in dress and in physical traits and that standard set by East Asian Popular aesthetics came into contact with the popular aesthetics previously prevalent in Thailand for males. A new dialectic ensued with the Central Thai/Western standard in opposition to the Androgynous standard from the East. The synthesis of the two was a popular aesthetics that closely resembles the traits of Central Thai males with a little more make-up and lighter skin.

It can be argued that the two sets of popular aesthetics that developed in Thailand are far removed from the subjective culture of the majority of the population. The average Thai woman lives in the countryside, is around one meter sixty, has wide hips, short and wide nose, dark skin and small dark eyes. Her male counterpart is also around one meter sixty, has a short and wide nose, dark skin, and hairy eye brows. It is easy to see how his or her subjective culture would deviate from the popular aesthetics currently

prevalent in Thailand. The result is that his and her subjective culture is not only constrained by Thai national objective culture but also by the many layers of foreign objective culture that have merged dialectically with Thai national objective culture. In theory one can predict that many men and women will feel unhappy about their appearance and in practice one can see that Bangkok is becoming the plastic surgery capital of the world.

Considering that Thailand is still a developing country and that the majority of the population lives in the provinces, it is reasonable to assert that few benefit from the present popular aesthetics with the notable exceptions of plastic surgeons and the few capitalists who control the media and fashion industries.

(Source: www.krepublishers.com)