

Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad Program
The Exploration of the Great Mekong Economic Region Countries

Curriculum Project

Nancy Schick
111 La Senda Rd.
Los Alamos, NM 87544
505.672.9064 (H)
505.663.2555 (W)
n.schick@laschools.net

Topic: Maintaining Cohesion and Order in a Society in Transition

Objectives:

1. To define cohesion and order and assess their significance in modern societies
2. To examine the factors that contribute to cohesion and order in contemporary Thai society
3. To examine challenges to the maintenance of cohesion and order, using Thailand as the model for a society in transition
4. To analyze the solutions proposed to deal with these challenges
5. To examine contemporary American society by examining the factors promoting and hindering cohesion and order in the United States

Procedures for instructor: (Note – Teachers need to make decisions about which of these to use, considering time restrictions and the makeup of the classes with which they will use this unit.)

1. To set the stage, read aloud the excerpt from S.J. Perelman – *A Humorist in Bangkok*. Ask students what impressions they get of Bangkok from this reading.
2. Have a student(s) read aloud Ulysses' speech from *Troilus and Cressida*. Discuss what Shakespeare, who wrote 400 years ago, said about the need for order in society.
3. Work with the class to determine a working definition for both cohesion and order. Discuss the role of these concepts in contemporary America. List five ways that Americans maintain cohesion and order.
4. Deliver a brief lecture about contemporary Thailand based on teacher's reading and personal experience. Introduce the pillars that support cohesion and order in Thai society: Buddhism, the monarchy, and respect for family and superiors.
5. Show photos. Ask students to list what they see that demonstrates the ways in which Thai society maintains cohesion and order.
6. Religion and order in Thailand
 - a. Review with students the discussion from *Buddhism and Thai People*. Ask them to explain the role of religion in maintaining cohesion and order
 - b. What is the relationship between the dominant Thai religion and the Thai state/monarchy?

- c. Compare to the situation in the U.S.
7. The Monarchy
- a. Have students read the short excerpts on the monarchy from the Royal Project Foundation and Paribatra. How does the Thai view of their king differ from the American perspective on the president?
 - b. Read and discuss the article *Nobless Oblige*.
 - c. Examine Klausner's essay: *His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej: An Appreciation*
8. Continue with an analysis of how the Thai government, the media, and others reinforce the need for cohesion and order.
- a. Use these materials:
 - 1) Bangkok Post photo of carved candle festival
 - 2) article about Asalha Puja Day
 - b. Ask students what the role of literature can be in enforcing a society's norms. Read aloud the poem *Nirat Phra Pathom* and discuss the role that a poem like this can play in reinforcing societal values.
 - c. Ask students to find an example of a poem that has been used to reinforce these norms in American society (for ex. – *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*. Ask students if they see a difference in this process in the two nations. Discuss the tension between religious and secular values in the U.S.
 - d. Examine some of the advertisements that recently appeared in Thai newspapers. In what ways do they enforce the standards of Thai society.
 - e. Compare to ads from American papers.
9. Education: What is the role of schools in enforcing societal norms including cohesion and order?
- a. Review the photos of Thai schools. What standards are being reinforced here?
 - b. List the ways in which American schools play the same role.
 - c. Read excerpts from the Thai education reform bills. Locate copies of state reform legislation in the U.S. and/or federal reform legislation. Compare.
10. What are the challenges faced by modern societies that tend to undermine cohesion and order?
- a. Show photos/ads from Thai newspapers.
 - 1) Tigers Bra Lift
 - 2) Hot spots for coffee and e-mail
 - 3) movie ad
 - b. Have students read article on *Helping children screen out bad influences*.
 - c. Read and discuss Klausner's essay *The Weakest link*
 - d. Read and discuss *Thaksin Flirts with Dictatorship*.
 - e. Ask students to bring in editorials that decry corruption in American and articles/photos/advertisements that indicate a challenge to cohesion and order. Compare to the Thai examples. How can we account for similarities and differences?
11. How do the Thais combat the decline of cohesion and order in their society? Examine these. How do Americans confront the same problem? What are the similarities and differences?
- a. *Culture Buses* – Klausner

- b. Thai vital for our growth
 - c. Pupils wearing hair longer...
 - d. Government bans TV ads
 - e. Corruption get thee behind us
12. In conclusion ---
- a. assign article *Foolog Yourself for Fun*. Develop a list of questions for students to address concerning the problems that modernizing nations face in maintaining cohesion and order.
 - b. Klausner – *Reflections on Thai Culture in Transition* – read and interpret these poems
 - c. Concluding Activity – based on Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*.

Materials Used to Prepare This Project

1. Barium, IAN. “Fooling Yourself for Fun.” Travelers’ Tales – Thailand. Eds. James O’Reilly and Larry Habegger. San Francisco: Travelers’ Tales. 2002. 365-380.
2. Cadoret, Anne-Valerie, et.al., eds. Thailand. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 2001.
3. Chandra-ngarm, Saeng. Buddhism and Thai People. Chiang Mai: Ming Muang Printing Press. 2001.
4. Klausner, William J. Thai Culture in Transition. Bangkok: The Siam Society. 2002.
5. Kurlantzick. “Democracy Endangered: Thailand’s Thaksin Flirts with Dictatorship.” Current History Sept.2003: 285-290.
6. Office of the National Education Commission. Office of the Prime Minister. Education in Thailand 2002/2003.
7. Office of the National Education Commission, Office of the Prime Minister. National Education Act. 1999.
8. Parabatra, M.R. Sukhumbhand. Some Reflections on the Thai Monarchy. Jan 2003
9. Public Relations Department. University Brochure. Chiang Rai: Mae Fah Luang University.
10. Putnam, Robert. “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital.” Journal of Democracy January 1995: 65-78.
11. Rajadhon, Tanun Anuman. Thai Politics. (notes distributed at lecture-“The Seminar on the Exploration of the Great Mekong Economic Region Countries.” July 10, 2003.)
12. The Royal Project Foundation. Chiang Mai.
13. Shakespeare. William. Troilus and Cressida, Act I, Scene 3.

The Monarchy From Concluding Remarks The Royal Project Foundation

If the operation can be carried on as being planned, it means that we have rightly followed His Majesty’s footsteps which lead eventually to sustainable development of the high mountain areas. With the knowledge gained on the development of new technology, the hill tribes can better earn their living to a certain extent. These people will be good citizens who love the country and realize the condition of operation which they are proud of. They

also perceive and are conscious that only by the Grace of His Majesty so they can stay in the watershed areas. With training on the concepts of marketing and crop growing to serve the market demand, the hill tribes thus have better standard of living, love the lands provided for them and their descendants for earning and living happily ever after. (19)

From M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra Some Reflections on the Thai Monarchy

1. The king is not only the political leader of the state but also himself both the state and society. He is the most important centre of the society and is the mechanism of change and development. Any change in society for the better or worse... is dependent on the ruler's virtues or lack of virtues. One can perhaps say that the ruler is the universe unto himself because he is responsible not only for the consequences of his use of political power but also for changes in nature itself. (Sombat Chantornvong. "Thai Political and Social Thoughts" qtd. on p.4)

2. The king has a very clear and consistent conception of what is good for his subjects, a conception which is very much based on tradition.

'The first thing is security, that is the security of the people... And then after that we must have law and order... At the same time we must have enough food to eat, ... these are essential things. And then we must have social order and more things of the heart, that means that we must be good people, so that there won't be disorder, because people who are good don't create trouble so much. So we must have religion.' (from BBC documentary: Soul of the Nation."1979.) (17)

Education

From The National Education Act

Education shall aim at the full development of the Thai people in all aspects: physical and mental health; intellect; knowledge; morality; integrity; and desirable way of life so as to be able to live in harmony with other people. (4)

From Education in Thailand 2002/2003

The National Education Plan focuses on the integration of all aspects of the quality of life. It emphasizes human-centred development and an integrated and holistic scheme of education, religion, art and culture. In this regard, Thai people shall attain full development in terms of physical and spiritual health, intellect, morality and integrity as well as a desirable way of life that focuses on living in harmony with other people.

From Mae Fah Luang University

MFLU graduates should be academically sound ... while having been to carry out their assigned responsibilities with intelligence and morality. They should be creative and able to consistently develop and adjust themselves to the jobs, be aware of the importance of conservation and preservation of environment, and have good human relations and moral values to lead their livelihood. They should be forward looking in line with the directions of the international community, uphold the Thai identity, and attach high priority to the benefits of the nation. (4)

From Knopf Guide Thailand
 Sunthorn Phu, often regarded as Thailand's greatest poet
Nirat Phra Pathom (early 19th Century)

At last we arrive at the Pagoda of the Sleeping Buddha's Temple.
 It stands alone and high on a hill;
 Colossally solid like a parapet,
 Mounted on a manmade promontory.
 It was constructed with sharp corners, showing the front gable,
 Covered with a thin sheet of tin up to the top,
 Stretching staunch and seamless in brick-and-stucco walls,
 Wrought with time-honored and meticulous workmanship.
 We walk around the Pagoda at the base,
 Seeing deer's traces and hearing wild cocks crowing.
 The spot is overgrown with wild creepers,
 Winding and sticking in a thick green cluster.
 We see secluded cubicles built for monks
 Who may take shelter in their pilgrimages.
 We are moved by their ardent faith.
 At the stairs, we gaze up at the slope:
 It's so steep that our faces remain unturned.
 That must be the way to heaven when we die.
 We make an effort to help one another upward.
 Once reaching the upper level, we are high spirited.
 Pity my sons who also come up.
 They are not so tired as adults, though.
 We hold candles in reverential attitude
 And walk clockwise around the Pagoda
 Three times according to ceremonious practice.
 Then we sit down and pay respects.
 We offer incense sticks, candles, and flowers,
 Also the candles entrusted to us by many others.
 The owners had already made their wishes.
 May they keep their beauty to the end.
 May they be happy, every one of them,
 Until they become enlightened by faith.
 I've brought these candles with a desire
 To be related to them in every life to come.
 May our mutual love materialize now
 And, in the future, may it be complete.
 I salute the Pagoda of the Holy Relics.
 May the true religious live forever.
 I make merit, so the Buddha helps me
 Increase my power to attain enlightenment.
 And I'd like my words, my book,
 To preserve, till the end of time and heaven,
 Southorn, the scribe who belongs
 To the King of the White Elephant. (128)

Reflections On Thai Culture in Transition
from William Klausner

Principles dangling
from a clothesline
Politician's dirty linen ...

For eons
heads have been bowed
either in reflection or obeisance ...

The jungle sighed
and held its breath,
sensing and intruder in its midst

In transition:
Serene strolls or mad dashes
down Frost's less traveled paths ...

Life is a neverending treasure hunt
for truths
lost in translation (275-281)