Bhumibol, the world’s longest-serving monarch, enjoys a reverence seldom seen in modern times. Regarded by some as semi-divine, he is known for his lifelong dedication to helping the country’s needy. Bhumibol is a constitutional king with no formal political role, but has repeatedly brought calm in times of turbulence and is considered the country’s moral authority.

—“Thais Tickled Pink” (2007)

Deep rifts such as these are enough to paralyze any country, but in Thailand, the monarchy has historically acted as a bridging institution. It is revered not only by the elite but also in the countryside, where the king enjoys an almost divine status. Most Thais think of the monarchy as a sacred institution and Thailand has some of the world’s most stringent lèse majesté laws (which criminalize offenses against the monarch). . . . But Abhisit’s justice minister has gone a step further and suggested that the current maximum penalty for lèse majesté convictions, 15 years of imprisonment, should be extended to 25 years. This does not tally well with Abhisit’s stated commitment to liberal democracy.

Note to reader: Abhisit was the prime minister.

—Lintner, 2009, pp. 114–115

Thailand, with its population of 64 million and a land mass about equal to that of France or the states of New York and California combined, is at the crossroads of Southeast Asia. Various peoples from China and India and the bordering nations of Laos, Burma, Malaysia, and Cambodia originally populated it. All of these peoples have influenced the development of Thai culture in one way or another.
The nation itself is divided into several distinct regions. Low-lying Bangkok, one of the largest cities in the world, is one such region. Built on a delta, Bangkok is sinking at the rate of 2 inches a year and may be completely inundated within the next 100 years. Southern Thailand borders Malaysia, whereas northern Thailand borders Laos and Burma. Northern Thailand includes the city of Chiang Mai, Thailand’s second-largest city, and is home to the hill tribes, some of which move periodically from one mountainous area to another. The Thai government is trying to stop this practice, as these tribes frequently cut down trees that are hundreds of years old for firewood, and is trying to curb the logging companies in the northeast for the same reason. Excessive cutting of trees has led to erosion and sometimes mudslides, which kill the villagers living below the mountains.

About 45% of the Thai workforce is still involved in agriculture, and Thailand is one of only seven or eight food-exporting nations in the world. While food is abundant and Thai cuisine world famous, agriculture contributes only 9.9% to Thailand’s gross national product, while industry contributes 44% and services 46%. There are wide disparities in income, both within and between regions (such as Bangkok and the northeast). Thailand’s economic growth rate was extremely high for about 20 years, averaging 7% until 1997, when it was negatively affected by the Southeast Asian financial crisis of 1997. The economy has recovered, but some deep philosophical and economic divisions between groups, as described below, threaten the democratic fabric of the national government.

U.S. Americans and Thais share many similarities, but they also are quite different from one another. When Americans visit Thailand, they are frequently entranced by the friendliness of the people; the many Buddhist temples or wats; and the contrast between rural and urban life, particularly the urban life found in Bangkok, the nation’s capital. Thailand’s parliamentary, democratic system of government was heavily influenced by Britain, for until recently Thais were often educated in England rather than the United States.

In 1932 Thailand abolished the absolute monarchy. Under its rules, citizens could not touch members of the royal family. This resulted in some bizarre situations; one royal, who could not swim, drowned because numerous onlookers felt they were barred from offering a helping hand. Since 1932 the country has experienced 17 coups, 56 governments, and 16 constitutions, with the most progressive constitution taking effect in 1997. Given so many changes, it is little wonder that the most distinctive symbol in Thailand is King Bhumibol, who has been in power since 1947. The Thai kingdom was in decline until he became king upon the assassination of his older brother, King Mahidol, in 1946.

Since 1947 the king has created what is arguably the most powerful and workable kingdom in a world that increasingly views kings as anachronistic. He is a talented and sophisticated man known for his love of the arts and is himself a noted jazz composer. Most important, he symbolizes critical features of Thai culture and, it can be reasonably argued, is the glue that holds the nation together. Bhumibol is the world’s
longest-reigning monarch and, as Lintner (2009) notes, the trauma that his succession will inevitably entail will be immense.

However, deep philosophical and economic divisions constitute a major menace to Thailand. Many citizens would like the nation to become more democratic and less influenced by its military, many of whose leaders go into business after retirement and supposedly benefit because of their favored status and contacts. Others, on the other hand, feel that the Thai military have helped the nation enormously in dealing with border conflicts and internal security. In 2012 Bangkok experienced its greatest flooding in the past 50 years, and the army helped citizens by providing transportation, evacuations, and related activities, thereby building upon its reputation. Thailand also has one of the highest levels of economic inequality in Asia, and the gross domestic product (GDP) per citizen is only US$3,840 (for comparison, U.S. GDP is $45,592). Since 2000 the deep divisions have crystallized into two opposing groups: the yellow shirts, supportive of the establishment (the king’s color is yellow); and the red shirts, representing the more radical and more disenfranchised elements in Thai society, including the rural poor in the north and northeast and other interests. In 2011 major clashes occurred between the yellow and red shirts in Thai cities, particularly Bangkok. There were deaths on both sides but especially among the red shirts, who torched major parts of downtown Bangkok as they retreated from a military attack. Overt tension has receded, but underlying issues and problems remain.

In this chapter we will not speculate on the issue of succession to the rule of King Bhumibol. Rather, our focus is on the Thai kingdom and why it is consonant with the underlying core values of all or most Thais. The characteristics of this cultural metaphor are loose vertical hierarchy, freedom and equality, and the Thai smile.

Loose Vertical Hierarchy

Thailand is an authority-ranking culture in which vertical collectivism is emphasized. However, probably because it is at the crossroads of many competing cultures, the Thais follow far fewer rules than most authority-ranking cultures. As Harry Triandis and Michele Gelfand (1998) have shown empirically, on the cultural dimension of looseness-tightness of rules, the Thais are at the extreme end of looseness. Thus Thai culture probably holds many more contradictions and tensions than most other cultures.

Visitors to Thailand are immediately confronted with some of these contradictions. About 95% of the population is Buddhist, and there are numerous Buddhist wats in Thailand, but most Thais do not frequent them except for scattered ceremonial days. Still, Buddhist values are ingrained in the Thais, as discussed below, and are taught both in the culture at large and in the schools. Also, belief in spirits is widespread; throughout the nation are spirit houses in which residents leave food for the spirits to whom they pray. This belief in spirits is a legacy from the nation’s rural past and present.
Today hotels and other organizations are modernizing the construction of spirit houses through the use of ceramic tile instead of wood. However, this is controversial, as traditionalists believe that the spirits will visit only wood houses. As might be expected in such an environment, Thais tend to believe in fortune-telling, and each year they spend about US$63 million on visits to traditional fortune-tellers. There are even call centers devoted only to fortune-telling (Fuller, 2011b).

During the Vietnam War, U.S. Americans used Thailand as a recreational area for military personnel on leave, which helped to promote the well-known and widespread prostitution found in Thailand. This has had some very unfortunate consequences, including the fact that Thailand experienced an abnormally high rate of HIV infection. The spread of HIV has decreased significantly in recent years. However, upper-middle-class Thai women can be Victorian in their attitudes. It is not unusual for a young man to visit a girlfriend’s home on dates for many months and, when they are outside the home, for them to be escorted by an older sister or aunt.

**The King’s Role**

The king has been particularly effective in using vertical hierarchical rules to manage the nation. While the king does not involve himself in daily governmental affairs, he becomes active during times of crisis and in the past has requested that prime ministers and generals voluntarily vacate their positions of power. Nothing more needs to be said to accomplish their removal, and there is no additional discussion about it.

Similarly, until recent years, the king or members of his family handed out individual diplomas at all university graduations. Each proud graduate wanted to have his or her picture taken with the king, so two cameras were used for each photo in the event that one of them failed to record this moment. The king also appears at prominent wats for Buddhist ceremonies.

As these activities suggest, the king is very involved in the lives of Thais, and they revere him. Thais can become infuriated when the king is insulted in any way. One unfortunate visitor to Thailand became angry with a waiter in a restaurant, threw his cash payment for the meal on the floor, and stomped on it. He failed to realize that the king’s picture is found on Thai money, and an enraged Thai attacked him mercilessly because of the perceived desecration. Another unfortunate visitor ripped up his Thai money as a sign of dissatisfaction at the airport, only to be arrested and jailed for 6 months. At movie theaters, every film is preceded by a special royal anthem during which all are expected to stand. The government banned YouTube in 2007 because of a 44-second video that satirized the king, and Paul Handley’s (2006) critical biography of the king received similar treatment. Although Handley is an Australian, he went to jail and was released only when the king pardoned him.

The use of such laws has increased markedly in recent years, while some elements within the red-shirt faction are pushing for the abolition of such laws. Although members of this faction respect the king for all that he has accomplished over his long
tenure, they feel he should not be treated as a demigod, and they are particularly worried about the continuation of such laws after King Bhumibol retires. Given his advanced age, such a retirement is inevitable in the near future (Fuller, 2011a).

The essence of a paternalistic authority-ranking culture is a dynamic, two-way relationship between a superior and others. Kren cai, or taking the other person's feelings into account, is a key concept in Thailand. All of the actions of the king reflect this orientation, and both feelings and obligations are two-way or circular in nature. Kren cai is similar to the Japanese concept of amae or looking to others for security and assurance. Thais are very sensitive to feelings and clearly recognize nuances of behaviors that the typical U.S. American does not recognize. Similarly, Thais are adept at sorting themselves out in a reception line by status, even though they may not have met previously. In one instance, a male and a female doctoral student were invited to dinner at a U.S. American professor's home, and one of them—in this case, the female—kept emphasizing that her family was of a much higher social status in Thailand than the other student's. Such behavior is low in egalitarian cultures, but in authority-ranking cultures its frequency is much higher. Ironically, the female Thai student had confided to the professor that she would like to meet other Thais, and the dinner was arranged specifically to facilitate the introduction.

As might be expected in an authority-ranking culture, members of the military are also important players. Many generals have business interests. There is a good amount of corruption in Thailand, at least in part because of the extremely complex social class structure involving competing interests of different groups. As suggested above, these include businesspeople, the military, the politicians, the king, the rural poor, trade unions, and others. On the 2011 Index of Economic Freedom, developed by the Heritage Foundation and published yearly in the Wall Street Journal, Thailand ranks 62nd of 179 nations (T. Miller, 2011). The Index includes 10 separate measures, including fiscal soundness, openness to trade and investment, government size, business and labor regulation, property rights, corruption, monetary stability, and financial competition.

**Personal and Family Interactions**

Rather than shake hands, although the handshake is becoming more common, particularly in international business, Thais tend to wai to one another: They hold both hands together as if in prayer and bow their heads to greet each another. Bowing lower than the other person signifies lower social status, and bowing at the same level signifies equality in social class ranking. Sometimes a superior will just nod the head, and at other times he will complete an attenuated wai that is scarcely noticeable. Supposedly, this pattern of the wai and its relation to social class structure emerged when someone conquered in battle would show the victor that he was totally subservient; his bow to the victor exposed his head to any blow that the victor wanted to administer. If a blow was not administered, the victor was signalling that a two-way
relationship of fealty had been born, but one in which there was a clear superior and a clear inferior. Thus it is not surprising that at public ceremonies, such as university graduations, anyone who wants to leave before the king must do so in an unobtrusive manner, making sure that he or she is lower than the king at all times.

In relationships within families, this vertical ranking also prevails. Many Chinese Thai families live in a compound comprised of several homes, one for the father and mother and one each for married family members. They meet at night and at other times in a common area in the center. Typically, at least one night per week, there is a large family gathering and dinner. The oldest son usually is the major decision maker in the family business if the father has retired, and the younger sons serve as vice presidents. If one of the sons is not very effective, he will retain the title but be assisted by either an in-law or outsider who will be the real decision maker in that part of the business. The family frequently rewards such important outsiders after several years by subsidizing the creation of their own businesses, thus strengthening the family’s business network. This Chinese-Thai approach to business is based on the traditional Chinese practice of guanxi, which can be translated as having relationships. An invisible web of obligations is established through such practices. To be without guanxi is problematic in a person’s life, as it signifies that the individual has no relations and, implicitly, cannot be fully trusted.

Furthermore, each family emphasizes this hierarchical ranking. One young woman who received her MBA in the United States did not want to return to Thailand and marry a man she had known since childhood, but she did so when her mother said, “If you don’t return and marry him, I never want to see you again.” However, the young woman and her mother did follow the dictates of loose authority ranking, agreeing that she would not have children for 5 years; if the marriage did not live up to expectations, she could divorce her husband and remarry, which in fact she did. In another situation, a Chinese Thai family met to discuss an emergency problem: A younger female member of the family was very unhappy in the United States at a university in which she had just enrolled. In this instance, a family member was immediately dispatched to bring her home.

An Educational Tradition

This form of vertical ranking is exemplified in the flower ceremony held in universities once a year. For decades Buddhist monks were the educators in Thailand, and the ceremony originated in their schools. A U.S. Fulbright professor was so startled by this ceremony that he wrote the following description:

Today, students paid homage to their professors—a symbolic celebration of rather common significance to them. I found it an astonishing phenomenon.

In a large auditorium, representatives from each department within the Faculty crawled up, in the manner of Asian supplication, and gave beautiful floral
offerings to their “Aacaan” (professors). Their choral chants asked for blessing and showed gratitude. Their speeches asked for forgiveness for any disrespect or non-fulfillment of expectation. They promised to work diligently.

In a moment of paradox, I remembered I must not forget to pay the premium on my professional liability insurance this year. (George, 1987, p. 5)

Still, Thais implicitly recognize both the humor in this ceremony and the loose nature of authority ranking practiced in their nation. While many students make such declarations, they have difficulty honoring them.

Education in Thailand, as in other authority-ranking cultures such as Japan, has historically stressed memorization and the taking of copious notes in lectures. Discussion is not emphasized. If a student asks a professor a question and the professor does not know the answer, the professor may well give an incorrect answer that the student will dutifully record, even though the student is aware that the answer is incorrect. In this way face is saved for both people. One U.S. business professor could not get his Thai students to respond to a direct question, so he assigned teams in class in which one member per team reported to the class the group’s answers to the questions posed by the professor. Interactions began to become more informal and tension-free once this format was employed. This is consistent with an authority-ranking culture that stresses collectivism. A similar pattern of authority-ranking behavior involving managers and employees can be found in some traditional Thai firms, but it is less common in the multinationals and larger firms now operating in Thailand. Similarly, many MBA programs in Thailand tend to stress Western-style case discussion and interaction, which does involve individual student responses to a professor’s direct questions.

**Ethnic Relations**

The looseness of rules is reflected in generally positive relationships between the two main ethnic groups in Thailand, the Chinese and the ethnic Thais. About 80% of the population is composed of ethnic Thais, and they are powerful in politics and the military. Another 10% of the population is composed of the ethnic Chinese, who generally believe in Confucianism and, to some extent, Taoism (for an explanation of Confucianism and Taoism, see Chapter 25). The ethnic Chinese tend to own prosperous family-run firms, most of which are relatively small in size. A good amount of intermarriage takes place between these two groups, and some Thais argue that they are more liberal and accepting than their counterparts in other nations, even those in Southeast Asia.

One reason for the high rate of intermarriage is that these two groups are compatible in terms of the overlapping religious and ethical perspectives of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. This is not always the case; discrimination and hostility to some ethnic groups exist, but seemingly to a much smaller extent than in most nations.
In short, the king’s actions are consistent with the core values of the authority-ranking Thais. He does, however, respect the loose nature of the rules, as evidenced by his hands-off policy on daily governmental affairs and related issues.

**Freedom and Equality**

Thailand means “land of freedom,” and the name is apt, as it is the only nation in Southeast Asia—and one of the very few in the world—that has never been conquered. In the 1700s the Thai army was in grave danger during a war with Burma, but its leader, Taksin, reorganized the remaining 500 soldiers and led a brilliant counterattack. Taksin became king and established the capital in Bangkok. Later, he went insane and was replaced by a king from whom the current king traces his lineage directly.

**A Military Tradition**

With Thailand bordering several nations, the Thais have always been concerned about their military strength, and Thai soldiers are well trained, many of them in the United States and Australia. The military is involved in governmental affairs, even to the extent of overthrowing elected governments. However, the king’s word is followed by all, including the military, so much so that leaders will relinquish power to citizens when the king requests it. It would be difficult for Thailand if the military were weak, given the complex region in which Thailand resides, and the issue is the balance between civilian and military rule.

The king has always been physically fit and exercises regularly, and some of the rapport he enjoys with the military may stem from this fact. However, he has experienced some major medical issues in recent years. His son served in the military for many years, but the Thais are not fond of him, probably because of the carefree lifestyle he has chosen rather than the ideal lifestyle exemplified by his father.

Westerners are frequently perplexed by the contradictions of Thai behavior. On the one hand it reflects authority ranking. But it also reflects pride stemming from the tradition of freedom from foreign domination. Even during World War II, Japan did not invade Thailand because of a diplomatic agreement motivated in large part by the Japanese fear of a drawn-out and costly confrontation with the fabled Thai military. However, the Thais did allow the Japanese military to use captured soldiers in the construction of the railroad linking Burma (now Myanmar) and Thailand, as immortalized in the classic film *Bridge on the River Kwai*.

Also, Thais see themselves as equal to Westerners because of this tradition and expect to be treated accordingly. Thus both freedom and equality are key components of Thai culture. As indicated previously, in the relationship between superiors and subordinates, there are obligations on both sides, and even Thai subordinates expect to be treated with respect.
Thai Boxing

Thai fighting, particularly Thai boxing, is a unique manifestation and expression of freedom, equality, military prowess, and, interestingly, the relationships between males and females. The roots of Thai boxing can be found in the experiences of the Chinese, who immigrated to Thailand 800 years ago and were forced to fight marauding tribes with a formless style of combat using head, teeth, fists, knees, ankles, and elbows (muay Thai). This hand-to-hand combat is still part of the military training.

Modern Thai boxing, as practiced in the two major stadiums in Bangkok, is something to behold. Light gloves are worn, and kicking is permitted. There are typically 10 fights per night, each of which lasts 5 rounds of 3 minutes each. Each stadium is small, holding only about 1,000 customers, almost all of whom are males, but many other Thais stand outside and follow the action intently by radio and, in some cases, television. Before a fight, each fighter performs a small ritual indicating the school or philosophy of fighting in which he has been trained. An Asian band plays throughout each round, but slowly in the first two rounds. In the third round, the band increases its sound and speed, thus exciting the crowd, and many fans rise excitedly and begin to place bets through the use of hand movements. In some ways, this behavior is similar to that surrounding the Balinese cockfight (see Geertz, 1973).

About 50% or more of the fights do not go the full five rounds, as the fighting is bone chilling; knockouts are common. While some people are repelled by Thai boxing, the Thais have excelled at it and have produced many famous champions. As an expression of military prowess, Thai boxing is outstanding. It also symbolizes how far Thais are willing to go to preserve freedom and equality. Separation of sexes, which can be Victorian at times, also occurs during Thai boxing matches.

The Thai Smile

Anyone who has visited Thailand for even a few days can be dazzled by the friendliness of the Thais, and the Thai smile is legendary. Some of this demeanor comes directly from the Thai practice of Buddhism. There are two general streams of Buddhism, one of which, Theravada Buddhism, emphasizes an internal focus and meditation more than the other (see H. Smith, 1991). Theravada Buddhism is widely practiced in Thailand.

The Impact of Buddhism

Thai Buddhism, given its inward focus, stresses the key concept of the “middle way,” which emphasizes keeping emotions and even body movements under control. The Thais believe that anger and emotionality lead to more anger and more emotionality, which restricts freedom due to the fact that individuals engage in activities that they
would otherwise avoid. Thais tend to be sophisticated diplomats and negotiators because of these beliefs. Similarly, the king is reserved during his public appearances. He does not use emotional approaches and arguments, as do many of his counterparts throughout the world.

The Thais, as Buddhists, believe in karma or the concept that one’s behavior leads to consequences. Thus Thais believe that behavior in this life determines the life form an individual will assume in the next life and that one lives many life cycles. Behaving inappropriately toward others, including subordinates or superiors, helps to determine the next life form. For example, Buddhist monks frequently rescue dogs, as many Buddhists believe that dogs were formerly humans who were assigned to a lower life form due to misbehavior in a past life. However, if a person has a disability such as being one-legged, some Thais may avoid that person because of the bad karma that supposedly led to this manner of punishment. In one instance, Thai workers in an open-group setting arranged their chairs and desks so as to exclude such an individual from having any contact with them.

Furthermore, as might be expected in a face-saving culture, Thais hate to say no directly. They use statements such as “We’ll need to think it over,” and “That may be a problem,” as a proxy for no. Many Westerners spend months negotiating a particular issue only to realize belatedly that a slight movement of the shoulder is the equivalent of saying no. When negotiating with Westerners, Thais prefer to emphasize personal relationships and to make the contract of secondary importance, even to the extent of not using a contract at all. In one instance, negotiators from Northrop Grumman negotiated effectively with their Thai counterparts until they indicated that company lawyers would be joining the discussions, at which time the Thais—both politicians and businesspeople—became unavailable through any form of communication.

**Smiles in Context**

No matter what happens, however, the Thai will keep smiling. Thus a smile should not be interpreted as conveying deep friendship; rather, it is a mechanism for making life pleasant and avoiding difficulties that might lead to the dreaded expression of negative emotions. Thais, in fact, genuinely dislike complainers, including demanding Western tourists, and will avoid them. In contrast, Israelis complain about many things at parties that have come to be called “gripping parties,” but they still have a good time (see Chapter 20).

However, the Thai smile can be genuine and, as is common in collectivistic cultures, must be evaluated in terms of the context or situation. For example, Thais love to have *sanuk* or fun, and they punctuate the workday with periods of fun group activity. If work is boring and monotonous, Thais may quit, especially if periods of *sanuk* are denied. Japanese firms sometimes pay Thai workers less than do U.S. firms and work them longer hours, but they ensure that the workday is broken up by such periods of respite.
As this discussion suggests, Thais have a different conception of time than Westerners. Being Buddhist, they do not make sharp distinctions between the past, present, and future. In Buddhism time is only one circle, not three. In his first MBA class at Thammasat University, Martin Gannon arrived at 5:50 p.m., one half hour before the class period, to make sure everything was prepared, but the first Thai student did not appear until 7:00 p.m. and the last student to arrive did so at 8:00 p.m. Given his U.S. orientation, Gannon complained about this behavior, but one smiling Thai student confided, “We love to start class on Thai time and quit on American time.” It was difficult to respond to this comment.

Accepting Things as They Are

Another, related Thai belief is captured in the virtually untranslatable phrase mai pen rai. Essentially, this means that humans have little if any control over nature, technology, and many other forces. Carol Hollinger (1967/1977), a U.S. high school teacher in Thailand, fell in love with Thai culture, particularly this aspect of it, and titled her book Mai Pen Rai Means Never Mind. This phrase does not signify a acceptance of a fatalistic view of life, sometimes found among conservative Muslims or Christians. Rather, it is an acceptance of things as they are and the willingness to make life as pleasant as possible regardless of life’s circumstances. When Thais use this phrase, they tend to flash their distinctive smiles, and even that small action immediately lessens the magnitude of the problem, whatever it is.

The royal family, and particularly the king, follows a similar pattern of behavior. Although serious, the king enjoys parties and performs his own jazz compositions at them. He clearly is happy interacting with all types of people and will smile through boring ceremonies that other international leaders would not even think of attending. As indicated previously, throughout his life he has maintained excellent physical conditioning, although his health has been declining in recent years. Given the many onerous duties that he must perform while smiling, such conditioning has probably been critical.

John Fieg (Fieg & Mortlock, 1976/1989) has captured the essence of Thai culture and the three characteristics highlighted in this chapter (loose authority ranking, freedom and equality, and the Thai smile) in his classic study comparing Thais and U.S. Americans. In both cultures there is a love of freedom, a dislike of pomposity, and a pragmatic outlook. But the differences are significant, and Fieg uses the image of a rubber band to highlight Thai values, attitudes, and behaviors. When the rubber band is held loosely between the fingers, its looseness is comparable to the manner in which most Thais interact with one another during the day. However, as suggested previously, Thais also have a complex status system in which relationships are vertical and hierarchical. Once this status system is activated in any way—for example, a superior giving a direct order to a subordinate—Thais tend to respond immediately to its dictates, and so the rubber band tightens. As soon as the
demands of the status system have been met, Thais can return to looser and more liberated behavioral patterns.

To describe U.S. Americans, in contrast, Fieg uses a string held tightly between the fingers for most of the day. Periodically the string is loosened, but U.S. Americans do not enjoy the same degree of behavioral freedom that Thais experience; that is, the string can never be as loose as the rubber band. In the achievement-oriented society of the United States, many internal and external controls motivate individuals. Examples of external control include the numerous legal, accounting, and governmental forms that U.S. Americans routinely fill out. Imbuing children with the desire to work hard and to respond enthusiastically to the demands of the Protestant work ethic reflects internal control. Such internal and external control is present in Thailand to a much lower degree than in the United States.

As indicated previously, Thailand experienced severe economic difficulties starting in 1997 when the value of its currency was halved. The new constitution in 1997 addressed the need for change, focusing on such issues as democratic election reforms and the elimination of bribes. There are frequently more than 1,000 protests against the government each year, prompting the Economist to portray Thailand as a “land of frowns” (E. McBride, 2002). Such activity is to be expected as a nation’s educational level and wealth increase and the nation’s citizens express a desire for popular elections rather than military-influenced dominance. Still, at the personal level, the Thai smile is one cultural characteristic that remains unchanged.

In sum, Thailand is a fascinating nation, and its core values overlap with those of the United States. But it is clearly different from the United States, and the Thai kingdom is an apt metaphor for capturing the essential features of this land of freedom.