

THAI(ED) TOGETHER

It has been almost a month since we stepped off the plane in Bangkok and already the culture of Thailand is becoming more comfortable. We can greet people on the street, buy our meals at the local restaurants, navigate the city, and for many even enjoy the student gym. This is not to say that our boundaries haven't been challenged. We have lived in the slum communities near campus, endured long days of class and we often succumb to the comforts of home. After sickness, stress and numerous encounters when we had to overcome the language barrier we are still holding on. We have become part of an amazing family of students from all over the United States and a compassionate staff who have been there to support us through this initial culture shock. In



Thailand we are learning so much more than any of us ever hoped to learn. The home stays have not only challenged our cultural habits but our perceptions of the world and our role in it. Through these experiences we have seen how globalization and development has plagued Thailand. This has also given us insight into the role of the United States in Thailand and on a global scale. We have met Thai citizens that work tirelessly everyday to support their family and community in this changing world. It has been less than a month but we have three more months to learn and experience the wonders of Thailand and cultivate a community of our own. We hope this newsletter gives you a glimpse of our amazing journey so

- CIEE Development and Globalization
Khon Kaen, Thailand Spring 2012

A Day in the Life

Even though we have yet to have a full, uninterrupted week in Khon Kaen, it's starting to feel more comfortable and homelike everyday. In between the village home-stays, we have pockets of 'normal' life when we continue to explore the lively, behind-campus world we now call home. Here is just a taste of our typical day:

- 8:30am, rise and shine to a beautifully sunny, 85 degree day.
- Breakfast: freshly cut, riper-than-ever fruit from the street stand so convenient and cheap you feel like you're stealing.
- 9:00am, The first brain-strain of the day: Thai language class.
- 10:30, Break: head to the coffee cart just down the road for a quick iced Thai Tea in a bag to go

literally just a bag of tea with a straw.

- 10:45, Dash back to Thai class for another hour and a half of vocabulary regurgitation.
- Noon, For lunch the options are endless: dozens of outdoor food stands and restaurants, the U-Center cafeteria just a 2-minute walk away, or The Complex, a short stroll from classes, complete with a post office, banks, university essentials, and an indoor cafeteria with noodles and rice galore.
- 1:00pm, Back to the classrooms for group unit discussions about things like how to extract the most information out of the translated exchanges we've experienced with NGO's or community members and what our learning goals are for the next home-stay.

- 6:00pm, Dinner: Never the same. Sometimes we go out for a small group reading discussions over dinner lead by the program facilitators. Other times we wander to the local night market for an even more diverse food selection and to check out the unique flea market sales our behind-campus neighborhood has to offer.

There are also several other activities available to fill our free time. The gym is a mere 5-minute walk away with 3 levels of fitness options including a weight room, cardio room, and a studio, which holds aerobics, strength training, and yoga classes daily. The ever-beautiful Plastic Lake (a.k.a. Man-Made Lake) sits less than a kilometer away from the classrooms

complete with a jogging track around the perimeter. For a casual night out, there are a number of laid-back, outdoor patio bars. They are great places to grab a nice cold drink and soak in the local music scene while listening to the live band in front of you. And for those nights when the energy is high, Funky Villa has been a go-to club to dance it out all night. With so many new places to explore, it's probably safe to say that this new home will easily keep us comfortable and pleased for the next four months.

Ellery Graves
*University of Wisconsin Madison
 International Studies*

The Irony of Development

At five-stories high filled with high-end brands and a variety of products, Central Plaza is the biggest mall in Khon Kaen. Attached there is a Robinson's, a department store similar to a Bloomingdale's or Nordstroms in the US. Literally, on the same side of the tracks of this developed site lies a railroad community, also referred to as a slum, where hundreds of families reside along a strip of the land about twenty meters away from the tracks. People in this community, and many others like it, have been living there without a (long-term) land-lease contract for the past fifty years. Without access to a lease, they have been paying too much for basic resources such as electricity and water.

Development. Is it not supposed to benefit everyone, especially "those in need?" After three weeks in Siam (commonly known as Thailand), development has only proven to me to benefit the wealthy stockholders and meanwhile exclude the needs of underserved communities. Theparak 1 is a railroad slum village in the city of Khon Kaen and the location of my second home-stay. The community thrives on unity and determination to attain "legal" land-use status in the eyes of the municipality and railroad agency, which owns the land where community members live. Community leaders have worked with members to gain respect and to be taken



Fátima Avellan

seriously in the eyes of the municipality in order to attain adequate resources. Yet, The irony of "development" angered me when I saw that Central Plaza, a "developed" realm for wealthy consumers, is right in front of railroad communities struggling to gain permanent land rights and access to resources at a fair price. However, after mindfully remembering the collective efforts and perseverance of Theparak 1 leaders and community members, I felt proud that they were actively practicing my strongest belief: the Power belongs to the People.

Fátima Avellan
*Occidental College
 Environmental Policy*

Time to Adjust

Coming into this program I was oblivious as to what an “alternative education” entailed. While talking to other students in the program about their initial reactions, I learned that they too shared this sentiment. Most of us come from traditional models of education structured around lectures and standardized testing. The journey we have all embarked on through the CIEE Development and Globalization program in Khon Kaen, Thailand is far from traditional. Although we do have a series of baseline lectures and Thai classes throughout each unit, the DG program stresses the idea that all students should take ownership of their own education through a “people-to-people” approach of learning.

The program also provides a lot of space for us to discover our own individual learning styles and how these styles play out in a structured, group environment. We have done many activities that help us to discover what these styles may be including a very popular “element” activity, which allowed each member of the group to identify their personality with one of the elements earth, water, fire and wind. I very accurately identified with earth based on

my loyalty and attention to detail. These activities are meant to strengthen the student group as a whole and improve our ability to effectively learn as a group. So far this has been successful but we still have three months to test the waters.

One way the program accomplishes this is through frequent home stays in villages throughout northeast Thailand, an educational experience that transcends the boundaries of the classroom. The alternative education model also encourages students to engage in group and peer learning as well as developing our own learning styles. Before and after each home-stay group discussions are planned and facilitated by the students. The final projects for the semester will also be completed in groups on a topic chosen by the students. As a group we are able to use these spaces to craft our own learning. The amount of group discussions and the lack of staff structured space has been frustrating for many students, myself included. However, I believe that as the program continues the level of comfort with this alternative mode of education will increase. We just need time to adjust.

MavaMarie Cooper
University of Michigan
International Studies

Khun Pood Pa Sa Thai Dai Mai (Can you speak Thai)?



Molly Johnson

Thai class day one: “*Doo na kha, fang na kha, mai pood kha* (Listen, look and don’t speak!)” We sat there, concentrating. “Ok, I remember what that means, this is going to be okay”, I silently reassured myself. When Thai class really began, there was suddenly a deluge of Thai words, tones, letters, and no English. What had we gotten ourselves into? We were not even able to take notes until our Thai professor gave us the “okay”. The hardest part was this “okay” could come an hour later. I remember sitting in Thai class those first days and feeling the words I had just thought I’d learned slide right back out of my head. Sometimes our professor would ask me a question about something we had just learned, and I simply could not respond. Would this alternative style of teaching work? Could we ever learn Thai with no English spoken and greatly limited

note taking?

Actually, yes. While at first, it seemed insurmountably difficult, I personally feel that our Thai is improving at an unusually fast rate. We have only been in Thailand for three weeks, yet with a few tries, we are able to get by in a surprising number of situations. I remember the first time we all saw the Thai alphabet: the room seemed to fill with an overall feeling of dread. Yet just the other day, we played a game in class that had us all writing in Thai. Our professor would say a Thai word and then we would write what she said in Thai. In our class, everyone managed to get at least one word right. Since we came to Thailand with no knowledge of speaking or writing Thai, that moment when we could actually write some Thai words made me realize how far we had come.

This style of learning a language, with minimal note taking and only Thai spoken, definitely has its frustrations. I'm sure we have all wished at some point that we could simply write the word down after we hear it. There have been times when we all wished the

professor would just explain the new vocabulary to us in English, not pictures. In the other language classes I have taken, I have always been able to take notes at any time and in any amount. I have always been able to speak and ask questions in English. I had thought that was the best way to learn. Yet in that last class, I realized how well the alternative teaching style was actually working. With no English spoken in class, it forces us to think and understand in Thai. We are constantly interacting with each other in the language we hope to learn. In my view, this alternative education style is working well, frustrations and all. From what I hear, good frustrations are what this program is all about.

Hannah Kitchel
Bates College
Environmental Science

The Group Dynamic

Given the structure of the program, our group of twenty students are constantly working, discussing, planning, reflecting, and relaxing together. Therefore, understanding group dynamics and individual roles within a group is critical to a successful semester. Fortunately, the program has offered many opportunities to evaluate personalities, strengths, weaknesses, and group participation skills.

During orientation, the group did an activity with the descriptive name "cloth flip." Everyone stands on a piece of cloth and as a group the cloth has to be flipped over without anyone touching the floor in any way. Multiple strategies were used until it was finally successful. Afterwards, we reflected on what each person brought to the strategizing period and how the process went as a whole.

Additionally, in a beautiful forest temple, the group got together and learned about the Thai belief that each person is characterized by an element of water, fire, earth, or wind. The discussion of the

characteristics of each element group generated an understanding of how different people deal with conflict and confrontation. For instance, I personally identified most with water. From the discussion I realized which way is best for me to approach challenges, and also saw others who were similar to me and those who were drawn to totally different methods. Activities like these not only bond the group but also allow for reflection on individual strengths and areas in need of improvement. Ultimately, this creates a strong group dynamic that helps generate an understanding of the group at both the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels.

Anaise Williams
University of Rochester
Biology/Anthropology

Setting the Stage

Globalization means many things, but one might view it as an increasing interconnectedness between peoples around the world. Unfortunately, as I have begun to see here in Thailand, it also means a disconnect between traditional and modern ways of living. In our first home-stay in Nong Yang Lan, we stayed with a community that is almost completely self-sustaining: members grow and sell their own rice, sugar cane, fruits, vegetables, and raise their own livestock.

The cultivation of rice is particularly crucial to the livelihood of the village and requires skills and techniques passed down from generation to generation. However, as some of the villagers expressed in our exchange, most of the Nong Yang Lan youth leave to seek work elsewhere. Not only does this make necessary an insertion into the materialist sphere of globalized Thailand and a loss of community values, but it also means that a generation of youth will not learn how to cultivate the land like generations before them. If this pattern continues and Nong Yang Lan's ability to produce rice is lost to other industries, then the village might cease to exist in the not too distant future.

This is one of the perspectives the CIEE Development and Globalization Khon Kaen, Thailand is attempting to show us this semester: the effects of development and globalization on a local scale. While rarely a happy topic of exploration, my experiences are not of hopeless and helpless villages. I am privileged enough to see communities that are fighting for their own rights and for control over their own lives. In the next three months my group and I have several more home-stays, and we look forward to seeing more community empowerment and the effects of development and globalization mediated by grassroots change.

Alex Acuña
Occidental College
Urban and Environmental Policy

7 Fun Facts About Thailand

1. The shape of the country is often described as an elephant's head.
2. Over 6000 7-Elevens exist in Thailand.
3. Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that was never colonized.
4. Thailand is the leading exporter of rice throughout the world.
5. Thailand has a royal monarchy and H.M. the King of Thailand was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
6. If you have a sweet tooth, Thailand is the place to be! There are sweets of all sorts, colors and sizes and sweetened condensed milk is a key ingredient in many delicious desserts.
7. The Thai version of Bangkok's name currently holds the Guinness record for having the longest name of a city. Apparently "Bangkok" is just the short version because the city's ceremonial name is "Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Yuthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Piman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit" (it helps if you sing the name!)

Rachel Pricer
University of Richmond
International Development/
French

A Shared Sense of Community

Since the program began, I have lived in two Thai communities so dissimilar that it was difficult to find a commonality. Nong Yang Lan village is a farming community that prides itself for its self-sufficiency. Farmers grow rice and several cash crops, but they also grow their own food. On the other hand, Theparak 1 is a slum community located next to the state-owned railroad. The villages hold a variety of occupations, from scavenging to selling fruits. Despite the differences, a sense of community permeates through both places, which both of my host fathers pointed out to me.

My father, Phau Khard, from Nong Yang Lan village is a rice farmer. During my short stay in the



Molly Johnson

village, he took me and another DG student around the village and described his way of life. He showed us all the food that the villagers grow and oftentimes he would pick fruits for us to try. What I found spectacular was that he would frequently pick fruits from trees that were not on his property. He would casually stroll by a house, greet a member of that household, and take whatever he needed. There was a sense that food belonged to the community, not to individuals. Phau Khard asked us if we could take food from other people's homes in the US. From my own experience, I answered in the negative. When asked about his travels into the city, he stated that he could only live in the city for a few days because people were always in a rush and the city lacked the warmth that can easily be found in a small rural village.

However, a sense of community could also be found in an urban setting. Unlike Nong Yang Lan village, Theparak 1 is densely packed with houses, most of which are constructed from brick and cement, not wood. Phau Wichai, my host father, asked me if houses were built like this in the US. Coming from a suburb, I told him no. He then asked if people helped their neighbors in the event of a fire. I told him that I did not know my neighbors and that I would not be compelled to help them. His inquiries reflected his pride in his community. People do not just live next to each other, but they take care of one another.

Although the livelihoods within both communities differed, the atmospheres were generally light and positive. People stopped by for quick chats or a short rest while children ran and played along the road. Safety did not seem to be a big concern since the community members all looked after each other. Coming from a neighborhood where people do not know each other, I was pleased with the warmth and unity that both communities offered.

Mina Dinh
Williams College
History

The Gift that Keeps on Giving: Thai Food in Home-stays

When you are a guest in someone else's home it is common to feel besieged with hospitality. The same goes when you are a CIEE Development and Globalization student and staying in the local areas of Northeastern Thailand with host families. Going into this program I was not aware of how hospitable the families would be and how that correlated with the food culture in Thailand. No matter what meal it was, an assortment of food from sticky rice to assorted meats and spicy side dishes were sprawled out on the tables. Food is not just something that comes out of a box in Thailand: it is a way of life and a product of many *Mae's* (Mom's) hard days work. A meal is not spent in front of the TV either; rather it is a time for appreciation of each other's company. It is as if I am not allowed to leave the table hungry and my family continues cutting up rose apples or giving me more helpings of rice. Being a very timid Thai eater, I tend to feel plagued in these situations. The abundance of plates, different meats, and vegetables that fill the table are intimidating for me, especially when *Yai* (grandma) is staring me down. I find myself

using the Thai vocabulary of "*Chan im*" (I'm full) most frequently while staying with my host families.

Regardless of my poor inflection, I continue to tell my family that I am full but I find that they never cease to provide me with snacks throughout the day. During our week in Theparak 1, it was completely normal for some of the girls in my group to be provided with snack bags and lunch bags prepared by their *Mae's*. So often in the United States we focus on being thin and eating well that the love behind food can be non-existent. My time in Thailand so far has revolutionized my definition of food. It is a product of love and hard work, not something that is just going to add to your waistline. Food in Thailand is also a calling for community and collaboration. The persistency of my host family and their food may have been overwhelming, but the good times that we had over food truly served as the gift that keeps on giving.

Brenna Kelly
Providence College
International Studies

Reliving My Childhood in Thailand

For most of my childhood I grew up in small communities at Nageli Borana, Ethiopia and Mandera, Kenya. Literally, in both of the small communities I lived in, everyone knew about you and took you in as their own. Coming into this program I am reliving those childhood memories. So far into the program there have been two home-stays; one in a rural village area and the other in an urban slum community in Khon Kaen, Thailand. I am reliving my childhood memories in another continent. Both home-stays have been two wonderful experiences that I am grateful I have been given the chance to experience in Thailand.

During the home-stay, I remember waking up to the sounds of hens' early morning wake-up call. Growing up I was always surrounded with homes open and rarely closed to community members.

Children would be running and playing from one home to the other. I have seen in both communities laughter among elders and youth as the day comes to an end when the sun would set. We would all sit on the floor and eat together with our hands. Where there was hardship, the community was there to lend a helping hand. Even when you are full and a guest, food just kept on coming. Living in the States I barely experience that sense of community. After living in my neighborhood for ten years, my family and I know all of our neighbors on our block. Getting the chance to regain those memories is amazing. I do not want to go back to United States. If I do then I hope to rebuild those memories in my community again.

Fatuma Youb
University of Minnesota
Geography

Tongue Un-Tied

It can be said that language is a reflection of culture, which is very true in Thailand where soothing phrases and passive terms defuse an already non-confrontational society.

In Thailand, there is a response for every situation that involves embarrassment, conflict, or confusion and it is only three little words: *mai pen rai*. This phrase means “it doesn’t matter” and is pervasive within Thai culture as it smoothes over any avoidable tension. I most often hear this phrase from the *Ajaans* (professors) during Thai Language class when a student cannot pronounce a word correctly, but I’ve also heard it following spilled drinks and attempts at cooking with my *Mae*. It is a comforting phrase, but it can also hide irritation, which is difficult for a farang to pick up.

Alternatively, *jai yen yen* or “cool your heart” is a phrase used to calm down an upset person. This response reflects the ideals of Theravada Buddhism, 95% of the population’s belief system. The idea is that the body and this life are impermanent and that worrying is a frivolous pursuit. To “cool your heart” is to practice Buddhism in the most basic and subtle

The Dichotomy of the Human Body in Thai Culture

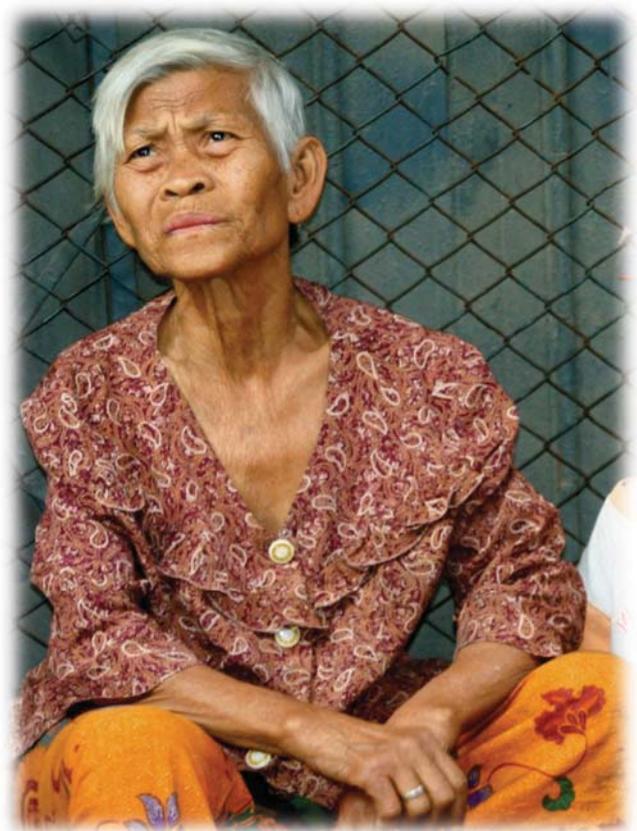
When I chose to study abroad in Thailand, I expected the challenge of cultural differences—the tonal language, the spicy foods, squat toilets—but I hadn’t thought about the differences in body language. I was aware that in many Asian households people left their shoes on the front doorstep. I also noticed in photos that people sat with their legs tucked behind them. I observed that in worshipping the Buddha, people often knelt and put their foreheads on the ground, but I wasn’t aware that these practices are grounded in a strong cultural belief of the hierarchy within the human body.

Here in Thailand, the feet are regarded as the lowest and dirtiest part of the body. They touch the ground all day and stand on squat toilets.

way, avoiding suffering from trifling matters. There is no need to overreact when pain and sadness, and even happiness, do not last.

It is difficult to say whether Thai culture impacted the language or the language solidified cultural ideals, but it is easy for me to see that the two are connected. The “easy-going” nature of Thailand can be heard in its words.

Taryn Orona
Beloit College
Environmental Studies



Rachel Pricer

Consequently, while sitting, it is considered rude when someone stretches their feet out or points their soles at another person or the Buddha. After learning this, I thought it would be uncomfortable to tuck my feet back when sitting on the floor (which we do often). Although it is not the most pleasant way to sit for hours, I understand the aversion to having dirty feet pointed at me, especially since it is an insult comparable to “flipping the bird” in America. Since the feet are viewed as profane, it is also disrespectful

to pick things up or point with the feet. Likewise, before entering a house it is considered good etiquette to remove one's shoes.

The head, on the opposite end of the hierarchy from the feet, has cultural practices associated with its sanctity. As the head is considered where intelligence and spirituality reside, it is the most venerated part of the human body. To honor this, the Thai people greet others with the *wai*, which is pressing the palms together and bowing, making a connection with the head and the hands. Where the hands touch the head also has meaning in the Thai culture—the higher the class or more respected the person being greeted is, the higher on the face the hands touch. Because the head is so respected, it is seen as rude to touch another person on the head, or to even sit on a pillow used for sleep.

It took me a few days to absorb the idea of one body part being regarded in such contrast to another, but I now participate in these practices. Instead of waving when I greet someone, or shaking his or her hand, I will *wai* almost instinctively. Although I have caught myself entering my room with my shoes on, it is slowly becoming habit to remove them before walking through the door. Once I saw beyond the physical acts themselves and understood the connection of some spiritual beliefs imbuing the body with a hierarchy, (demons living under the earth and good spirits living in the sky) these Thai traditions became an easier cultural difference to which I could adapt. These new customs may be tough to give up when I make my way back to the states.

Julia Bowman
Whitman College
Sociology

Orange is the New Pink

Of all the wonders and sites to see in Khon Kaen, from temples to the Grand Palace, fresh fruit markets to wafting smells of barbequed meat, one would not suspect to find themselves sitting in a college auditorium watching Thai students act out iconic Elle Woods and her quest for love in *Legally Blonde, The Musical*. That is where I found myself and most remarkably, the Thai students sang every note and spoke every word in English.

The Thai students did not stop with speaking English, but delved further by adopting and imitating the American roles they played. Strutting in with high heels, Elle's Delta Nu girlfriends wore short dresses resembling stereotypes of sorority girls while the men roamed across stage gesturing with every part of their body, even the pelvis. While in particular instances the musical seemed too risqué for the audience, I could not help but wonder if it was a mechanism for Thai youths to shed their modesty with greater liberty in choice of dress and body language. When compared to American culture, Thais seem to emulate a greater level of modesty. In the case of the musical, blatant pelvis thrusts and shoulder bearing by women are anomalies of Thai culture, which has a

conservative, more so than America, code of conduct. Thus it is as if the play was a catalyst for some "cultural revolution" producing a transformation in the cultural norms of attitude and dress. Quite possibly, I am over analyzing the matter for which the students were merely adopting their characters persona' as great actors do. Whichever interpretation one takes, *Legally Blonde, The Musical* provides a momentary snapshot of cultural norms as redefined by Thai youth.

Jennifer Lopez
Whitman College
Sociology



Taryn Orona

Beauty Around the World

Through my experiences in Thailand thus far, I have noticed that there is a difference in what is deemed attractive here compared to what is deemed attractive in America. In Thailand, there is more modesty than what I have experienced in the US. Here it is seen as more appropriate to wear pants or long skirts than shorts and tank tops even though it is ninety degrees. Some women do wear short shorts and mini skirts but it is a rarity. A representation of these standards is the Khon Kaen University student dress, which consists of the knee length black skirt and a white button down for girls and black dress pants and a white button down for the boys.

In Thailand, many people think it is attractive to have pale skin. I first noticed this as I was sitting in my taxi on the way to the hotel from the Bangkok airport. Many of the advertisements use Caucasian women or extremely fair-skinned Asian women. Also when I watch television I am flooded with commercials for skin whitener. In these commercials women are shown putting on skin-whitening cream and then with a sudden chiming of music, they are whiter and therefore more beautiful. I have noticed

this personally while I was at a home-stay in a rural village. Women would touch my arm as well as my friend's and say *suai*, which means beautiful. Teenage girls would put their arms next to ours to compare our skin colors, laugh, and yet still look frustrated. But then, they would call my pale complexion sexy, something that has never happened in the US. Back home, things are the opposite. Many Americans crave tan skin. We go to tanning salons, consume self-tanner, and lay out in the sun for hours to achieve that "warm, healthy glow."

A fair complexion is not the only thing that some find attractive in Thailand. From cultural readings and my experiences with villagers, having a large, pointy nose seems to be too. Thais generally have much flatter noses than people from the West. Pale skin and a large pointy nose are coveted because they are so foreign to people here. This is not at all a strange phenomenon. Beauty is a socially constructed concept; its definition changes from culture to culture. Many people are attracted to things that are exotic to them. Thais are no different.

Morgan Washburn

Loras College

Social Work/Sociology

Cultural Pains

Departing from the oh-so-familiar safe space of your own culture and tradition is a difficult prospect. Whether a traveler is ill prepared, ignorant, or simply forgetful, walking into another culture presents surprises, mistakes, and both internal and external conflict.

Braving the drastic difference of Thai culture and its hierarchy of the body is a prime example. In Thailand, perception of certain body parts such as the head and feet, and the placement or positioning of the body are keen differences between Thai and American culture. Thai culture regards the foot to be the dirtiest and lowliest part of the body, while the head is viewed as the most respected body part and held in the highest regard. Stemming from this fundamental breakdown of the two main body parts,

body position is a major part of Thai culture. For example, sitting down at the dinner table, at a temple, or in the presence of the Buddha or the King one must always point their feet away. Additionally, when approaching the King, an individual must also be prostrate with the head lowered to the ground. This demonstrates that the King's feet have more respect than a common person's head.

For me, diving into this cultural difference has been very difficult. Sitting down on hard surfaces for extended periods of time is taxing on my body. My legs fall asleep and I need to change position every few minutes. Sooner or later I become consumed by this disrespect averse mindset only to create my own mental soundproof brick wall that prevents me from fully comprehending thoughts and opinions made at exchanges or even at dinner. Regardless of low levels of flexibility or pain tolerance, I have been subjected

to the expectation of sitting in the most respectful position until I simply cannot bear the back pain anymore.

Fortunately, I feel that I am slowly adopting this cultural difference. The wonder of the chair or doing morning stretches gives me a competitive advantage to absorb new and interesting information.

Unfortunately, without chairs or stretches I am simply left struggling with frustration, pain, and confusion in this land of the hierarchy of the body.

Kyle Overman
*University of Michigan
 International Studies*

Hospitalization in the Land of Smiles



Molly Johnson

“I’m not feeling very good.”
 “Do you want to go to the hospital?”

Definitely an interesting line of questioning back home in the States, but visiting the hospital appears to be a cultural norm here in Thailand. Speaking as one of the four members of our CIEE

Development and Globalization team to already experience hospitalization, I can see why. With the high level of healthcare and an exchange rate working in favor of the US dollar, it’s a wonder why you would not visit when feeling under the weather.

According to the 2006 MD Anderson article “More Americans Seeking Surgery Abroad,” US healthcare consumers now frequently travel to Southeast Asia for surgical procedures and a little R&R. Astonishingly, all of this can be accomplished for a comparable price to the same surgery stateside. Thailand’s international hospitals hold approximately 30-50% foreigners, called farangs in Thai, in this boom of medical tourism.

As a farang who spent time hooked up to IVs both in the US and in Thailand, I attest to the comparable level of healthcare, but more importantly, I attest to the power of a smile. While my doctor spoke English, most of my nurses did not. The warmth of their smiles despite my complete inability to communicate in Thai beyond “hello” and “thank you” brought a sense of relief to any potential fears about hospitalization. Even with the drab walls and bland food, as to be expected in any hospital, Khon Kaen Ram Hospital showed me how a smile transcends language barriers and momentary physical pain, creating a sense of home even halfway across the world.

Molly Johnson
*Texas Christian University
 Management*

Hands On Eating

Fay and I arrive in Nong Waeng village just as our host mom sets the table. The mosquitoes are active and the fluorescent lighting spotlights the family dog, snoring next to our meal. Mom brings us glasses of water and opens a basket of sticky rice. As she sits on the edge of the table, she waits for us to begin. I glance at Fay. During orientation we had been introduced to the etiquette of Isaan hands-on dining:

- Take a small piece of sticky rice from the basket
- Flatten and press this piece of rice between the thumb and pointer and middle fingers so as to make a circle
- Use the thumb to gently press the rice piece, creating a small curve in the center

- Hold the rice by the same three fingers
- Dip the rice into the dish of choice
- Next extend the thumb, pulling the vegetables/meat/egg/gloriousness of the Isaan meal towards the well-crafted piece of rice
- Take everything, again, by those three fingers and eat
- Begin again

It is go-time, and I put these once theoretical steps into practice. Fay and I move slowly through each step, following them meticulously. Carefully we measure the rice to dish ratio. First bite down. We look, hopefully, to our host mom. She smiles, and I let out a breath. I smile too: hands-on learning.

Hadley Mowe
Whitman College
Religious Studies

Diet Changes

I have known for months that my way of life would change drastically upon arriving to Thailand. Days before embarking on my journey, I sat down with my mother to discuss these upcoming changes. We talked about the hot weather and the alternative-learning element of my chosen program. We talked about the new people I would meet as well as the dorm and home-stays I would live in. But we were forgetting one critical change that now has become a prominent theme of my abroad experience: food.

I have never really reflected on my eating habits as a central part of my life. I do know, however, that breakfast is my favorite meal of the day. Even if I wake up at three o'clock in the afternoon, I always go straight for those fried eggs and that juicy bacon. Generally, I'm not a picky eater, but as I roll up on my fourth week in Isaan, it has become apparent to me that perhaps I am. Here are some reflections on my food experiences here thus far:

Breakfast foods as I know them do not exist here! Or I do not yet know where to find them. On my first home-stay, I was served an entire fried fish, a different kind of fish soup, a dish of mixed

vegetables, and a lot of rice. On my second home-stay, I was served some chicken fried rice and grilled chicken. While I am not complaining about the deliciousness of these meals, I must admit that it has been rather interesting trying to communicate to my home-stay mothers that I cannot always eat an entire animal at 7am.



Coral Keegan

All food somehow becomes spicy. Even when the dish itself is not originally spicy, at least four different kinds of spicy sauce are provided in which to douse one's food.

When all else fails, eat rice. Rice is everywhere,

served with every meal. If you don't enjoy the entire fish on the table with its eyeballs still looking at you, just go for that rice drizzled in sauce, and you will get by just fine.

Overall, the food here in Isaan is very yummy indeed. There is a lot of fresh produce and homegrown rice. I find that often my entire day revolves around eating, because there is so much I am eager to try. Additionally, our home-stay families constantly feed us. Food becomes the most common language. As we share it, we strive to break down

barriers of miscommunication. I have forgotten what hunger even feels like, because I am quite literally always eating or being offered food. However, while I am in the process of parting with my love, the classic American breakfast, I still cannot bring myself to eat spicy chicken first thing in the morning. I hope to overcome this pickiness. I suppose only time will tell.

Abby Friedman
Kenyon College
Religious Studies

Eating to Live or Living to Eat?



Coral Keegan

Walking down any city street in Thailand is an assault to my senses. Motorcycles whiz by, tuk tuks honk their horns, and thousands of colors from the various wares being sold attack the eyes. However, most striking among the sensory overload are the intense smells of the street food. The diversity and amount of food that can be consumed at any one time is limitless.

To my right a vendor shoos away flies from the fish she is selling, which are still alive with mouths agape as they lie on display. Another woman walks down the street with her cart of various Asian fruits including pears, rose apples, fresh coconut, ripe and unripe mangoes, and many more. For 20 Bhat (less than one dollar) she will quickly slice whatever you choose and bag it for you. Walk a few feet further to find a vendor flipping noodles in a large wok. You can hear them sizzle as a plume of smoke rises from

the wok when he adds copious amounts of pepper. It seems that anything without spice is just boring to a Thai.

In order to compliment a fast-paced city life, almost anything can be found on a stick. Meats, in particular, seem to come exclusively on sticks. Anything from grilled pork to chicken and hot dogs to chicken organs can be found skewered and ready on any street corner. I have personally found the orgasmic, and probably coronary failure-inducing, sausage on a stick to be the best.

However, the most intriguing item that I have found among these eclectic streetside carts have been insects of various shapes and sizes. Crickets, larvae, and cockroaches all make an appearance. For those brave enough to try, you will be pleasantly surprised to find that the crickets may offer an alternative to the potato chip craving which is sure to set in after a few weeks in the program. On the other hand, the cockroaches are an acquired taste. With each bite the taste changes, eventually becoming fruity and tangy by the time you reach mid thorax. Eating one of these little beauties is sure to be a one-time experience for me.

In my experience, Thailand has a food centric culture and it seems that you could eat here for a lifetime and yet still find new things to try. Each region adds its own spin to every dish, further adding to the diversity. Two weeks into the trip, my bucket list of "Thai foods to try" just keeps growing.

Coral Keegan
Georgetown University
Science, Technology and International Affairs

Self Sufficiency: Pho Yu Pho

Since our arrival in Thailand we have been surrounded by food: eating it, growing it, going to agricultural fairs and food stalls. However, what has stood out to me is not simply the fact that food is always near by, but that food also seems to come from nearby. Food has become more than just a cultural exchange, but rather a political and social way to maintain self-sufficiency in an increasingly urban and globalized world.

The first village we visited, Nong Waeng Lan, was a primarily agricultural village comprised of an older generation of farmers and the grandchildren they take care of. Working age people were glaringly absent, a figure lost to urban migration. These farmers worried that they may be the last generation of farmers, a generation that organizes their calendars according to rice harvests and has warehouses devoted to storing rice to the scale of road-salt warehouses. However, despite this recent shift in livelihood, personal gardens remain a vital part of

life. In Nong Yang Lan it was no surprise that each house had an edible garden and what we would call a "neighborhood garden share" that made basic fruits and vegetables easily accessible. Gardens were not the first thing I was expecting to see in the Nong Yang slum on the outskirts of Khon Kaen, but they were there too. Edible gardens literally lined the railroad tracks, where a few yards behind them the slums began.

You cannot ignore food in Thailand. However, it is easy to take food at face value, as a delicious and necessary cultural reflection. Yet it is also an inherently political tool. It is a tool that allows the communities that are most marginalized by globalization and free trade agreements to empower themselves and to maintain their quality of life, as well as customs and cultures.

Fay Walker

Occidental College

International Affairs and World Diplomacy

Newsletter Editors:

Taryn Orona

MavaMarie Cooper

Hadley Mowe

Fátima Avellan

Julia Bowman

Ellery Graves



Fay Walker

CIEE Development and Globalization Khon Kaen, Thailand Staff:

Dr. David Streckfuss, Program Director

dstreckfuss@yahoo.com

Arunee Sriruksa, Assistant Resident Director

arunee@yahoo.com

Jintana Rattanakhemakorn, Language Director

jeabjin@yahoo.com

John Mark Belardo, Field Study Coordinator

jmbelardo@gmail.com

