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Master Thesis

How does culture affect leadership

Case study Thailand



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“How does culture affect leadership”

“Company cultures are like country cultures. Never try to change one. Try, instead, to work with what you've got”.

Peter Drucker

“We were not born to sue, but to command”.

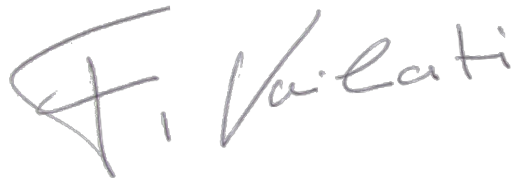
William Shakespeare (Richard II, Act I)

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Grazie mille.

A handwritten signature in grey ink, reading "F. Vailati". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Abstract

The culture is a key factor that profoundly changes our perception of the world. The cultural influences on the leadership aspects need to be taken into particular account in order to achieve an effective leadership.

The main purpose of this thesis is to provide an overview of the relationship between the culture and the way in which leadership is perceived/exercised in Thailand.

The case study is represented by the current situation in Thailand. The aim is to focus on Thai case in order to demonstrate that leadership styles cannot be imported and exercised in the same way across different cultures and countries. A leadership style may have different effects and meanings in relation to the cultural environment in which it is exercised. Understanding a culture is the essential step in order to consider the real effects of a leadership approach.

Keywords: Culture, Leadership, Thailand, Asia, Thai habits, Thai culture, Thai leadership.

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“How does culture affect leadership”

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Culture plays a primary role on the person's perception of the world. Many studies have shown that people from different cultures perceive things differently. Perception is the process by which we become aware of our environment. Culture and perception are closely related, because it is through the own culture that people view and perceive themselves and others in the environment.

The application of a leadership style cannot be an imposition but needs to consider the diversity of cultures in order to be effective. Although we live in a globalized economy in which everything is standardized, it is unlikely to find a generalization of the way culture influences leadership perception and execution.

1.2 Purposes and objectives

The objective of this thesis is to study the influence that a culture might have on leadership. As this topic is very broad and tailored on each culture, the focus chosen for this paper is Thailand. The main Thai traditions and values (i.e. family, Buddhism) have been studied in relation to their influences on a leadership perspective.

This thesis provides points of reflection about several Thai sociological aspects that could be potentially helpful, not only for an entrepreneur planning to start up a business in Thailand but also to anyone who has to manage a leadership role within Thai organizations.

1.3 Limitations

Getting and explaining a different culture is definitely a difficult task. In fact, often we try to interpret a culture starting from our own values, without considering different possible interpretations. Hereunder I listed the major limitations that I faced while dealing with this dissertation. This is an essential part to understand the structure of the thesis and the reason why some topics are explained more in depth rather than others.

1.3.1 The culture’s theme is very broad and complex

Defining a culture, in a world that has been characterized over the last few years by the rapid increase of exchange processes, connection and interdependence, is a very complex task. I am firmly convinced that the best way to provide the reader with a clear overview about the culture’s theme, it is to exclusively take into account those aspects which really contribute to define the cultural identity of a country. This means that in this dissertation I am not going to touch all the philosophical theories that have been elaborated around the meaning of “*culture*”, but I will mainly focus on the two components that seems to affect the most Thailand’s cultural identity: namely, family and religion.

1.3.2 Culture as a stereotype

In my opinion, concepts such as history, habits, religion, language and values cannot be reduced only to distinctive marks of a certain group of people, but they also have to be considered as factors that greatly differentiate the cultural identity of each person within a territorial dimension.

A person is influenced by his/her culture, but in different ways and measures. The consideration of this variability may help to think that, despite a number of common factors, each individual is unique.

1.3.3 Discovering Thai culture

Thai culture is very ancient and deeply rooted in local habits. As a consequence, it is quite difficult to collect an appropriate amount of information within a limited timeframe. Furthermore, the temperament of the Thai population, which proved to be very reserved and restrained, increased the complexity in collecting reliable and credible data. One of the most difficult parts consisted in getting what Thai people really think, as their culture sometimes pushes them to be condescending with interviewer’s ideas.

1.4 Design

This dissertation begins with a brief overview of the culture’s concept and definition. Afterwards, it develops a study upon the cultural features and some others aspects

related to culture. The focus moves then to the leadership aspects of the issue, taking into consideration the perception and execution of leadership in relation to different cultural environments.

The case study is, as said, the Thailand context, and is characterized by the analysis and understanding of the Thai culture and leadership. Finally, the way in which the leadership is perceived and practiced by Thai people is discussed and observed alongside with the theoretical part.

2. METHODOLOGY

“Nous appelons mauvais écrivain celui qui s’exprime en tenant compte d’un contexte intérieur que le lecteur ne peut connaître. L’auteur médiocre, par là, est amené à dire tout ce qui lui plaît. La grande règle de l’artiste, au contraire, est de s’oublier à moitié au profit d’une expression communicable.”

Albert Camus

The Style Guide of *“The Economist”* (pp.1), written by Johnny Grimond in 1986 stated this sentence in the introduction: *“readers are primarily interested in what you have to say. By the way in which you say it you may encourage them either to read on or to give up”*. Inspired by this vision, one of the fundamental principles followed during the drafting of this thesis was the clarity and linearity in the development of the argument.

2.1 Methodological approach and ways to collect data

After a careful examination of each and every methodological approach, I realized that the approach that better fits for this study is the system view approach. This methodological style offers a huge degree of flexibility, which makes it easier when it comes to analyze the interactions between different factors. Furthermore, this method helps the writer to better stick to the reality of what he is writing by forcing him to take the interdependence that characterizes the different elements of the reality into consideration.

The aim of this methodological view is to come up with a system model built through metaphors and analysis. The system being studied is the Thai culture and its related influences on leadership; the understanding and explanations of the reality are discussed in the last section of the thesis.

According to Arbnor and Bjerke (2009), there are two sets of data which can possibly be collected: primary and secondary. Primary data are first hand data that can be collected through face-to-face techniques, such as: interviews or discussions, or observations and experiments; secondary data comes instead from sources like books, articles, magazines, etc. In this thesis I referred to both primary and secondary data sources.

In order to have an overview of what a culture exactly is, and which are its effects on people perceptions, the first step dealt with the research for analysis of publications and theories, in order to collect as much information as possible. After that, using the same research techniques, the dissertation takes into account the analysis of perception and execution of leadership related to cultural aspects. These secondary data were researched referring to both the libraries of Linnaeus University and Burapha University.

The method to develop the case study was to collect qualitative primary and secondary data throughout publications, analysis of historical and present data, observation and conversations.

2.2 The choice of the topic

The choice of the topic is a critical step to write a thesis. This takes time and dedication in order to try to avoid making wrong and over-hurried decisions. My choice resulted from a long decisional process, which lasted for several months.

In each course of this Master degree we often discussed issues related to culture. In particular, during the Entrepreneurial Leadership course, Professor Björn Bjerke held an entire lecture about the culture and the different styles of leadership around the world. Consequently, I figured out that: (i) culture is an important factor to be considered in order to reach an effective leadership; (ii) cultural diversity could be a positive aspect and an advantage if well managed.

Notwithstanding, I was completely convinced about the validity and the appeal of the topic chosen, I was also aware that culture theme is too broad and it would have taken long time if analyzed for a number of cultures (i.e. Asian, Western, etc.). This is why I decided to put my efforts on a single culture and country: Thailand.

2.3 Why Thailand?

Why not? In the age that intellectuals like the Singaporean Kishore Mahbubani predict as *“the Asian Century”*, it is positive to focus on Asia. Having an insight in an Asian country is a *“plus”* for this research. More, Asian countries are expected to live a relevant economic growth over the next years, and that the future benchmark model for global economy will be the Asian continent. Thus, this dissertation also provides

the reader with a valuable knowledge on Thai culture applicable in international business contexts.

2.4 Writing process and style

After having analysed and collected primary data, I started having a clearer idea about my research objectives. At that point, my focus was no longer whether it made sense to approach a thesis in this field, while how to deal with this topic.

The writing style of this thesis is aimed at being easily understandable by anyone, through freshness, pragmatism and clarity. In order to comply with these values, I gave a lot of space and importance to the investigation part concerning the Thai case study. After all, I tried to link findings and conclusions starting from the results of the investigative part but taking into account also the theoretical part on the field of culture and leadership.

Fig. 1: Writing process



Source: made by the author

2.5 Qualitative data approach

This dissertation is based on qualitative data. Qualitative data are characterized by data that cannot be expressed as figures but through descriptions. Thus, these data can be observed and analyzed, but not measured. I believe that this approach is the best one for discussing about culture as it is more flexible and open to interpretation.

Furthermore, this qualitative approach is aimed at helping me to get new results and findings in the field of culture and leadership in Thailand. Gaining a unique and peculiar knowledge about the Buddhist and Thai leadership behaviors, starting from a Western point of view, is another goal of this approach.

2.6 Conversations

Primary data: during my time in Thailand I have been involved in several conversations on Thai culture and the influence that it has on leadership. The Oxford dictionary (2010) defines a conversation as *“a talk, especially an informal one, between two or more people, in which news and ideas are exchanged”*.

Culture is something very subjective and personal with an almost hidden meaning to an external eye. For this reason the conversation immediately became the most appropriate method to discern the true essence of Thai culture. People need to feel comfortable in order to be real and honest; conversations are the best method to catch people personal feelings and opinions.

In order to be sure to catch the real Thai culture and leadership, six people from different backgrounds and with an established credibility were interviewed. Obviously, every conversation took different paths depending on the background of the interlocutor. For instance, compassion and respect have been the main topics when talking to monks, while collectivism and management styles prevailed when discussing with professors and students.

To ensure a correct transcript of the conversations, I fully recorded each conversation and I replayed it several times. This helped me avoiding misunderstanding the feedback shared by the respondents, while I tried to preserve as much as possible their own thinking.

Tab. 1: List of participants to the discussion

Participants	Field of activity
Mr. Steven Bodley	University
Prof. Tuomo Rautakivi	University
Asst. Prof. Dr. Patchanee Taraseina	University
Mr. Soklin Suon	University
Son Dhammiko	Religious
Maha Vera Mahavero	Religious

Source: made by the author

2.6.1 The structure of the conversations

Despite the conversation format has been chosen in order to avoid people to be only passive, and to let them drive the discussion, some guidelines had to be defined in advance. These guidelines were then carefully selected after an insight into Thai culture, and designed on the major issue that seem influence the Thai culture and consequently the Thai leadership.

Here follows a list composed by the topics used to set up the conversations:

- Thai society, collectivistic or individualistic.
- Thai equality and hierarchy.
- Thai culture and the influence on a leadership point of view.
- The leadership style in Thai society (i.e. paternalistic, hierarchical, personal, etc.).
- The influence coming from the Western culture
- How Thai people deals with Western values, and expectations about the cultural future of Thailand.

2.7 The author's presence

During the drafting, I found myself several times having to express and describe personal experiences that would help me to demonstrate and clarify the issue. In fact, one of the main sources of information was precisely the observation of different cultural behaviors. In 1612, Galileo Galilei already emphasized the importance of the observation above everything else: *“The modern observations deprive all former*

writers of any authority, since if they had seen what we see, they would have judged as we judge” (Drake, 1957, pp.134-135). For this reason, it is not uncommon to find personal reflections and personal pronouns in every chapter of the thesis.

I have been in Thailand with the purpose to study Thai culture in relation to leadership. Giving up on expressing and describing these experiences in favor of greater objectivity would have not given the possibility to take a complete picture of the theme and to understand the strong commitment and the personal involvement I had over the last months.

2.8 Why is it important?

The thesis shows, considering Thailand as an example, how local cultures play a fundamental role in the definition of leadership styles. Thanks to globalization processes over the recent years this topic has become increasingly important. In fact, the collaboration and dialogue between different cultures went through a remarkable expansion.

Furthermore, this dissertation may be useful to better understand Thai culture and the best way to exercise an effective leadership in Thailand. Thailand is a cultural-dependent country: this means that the culture is highly integrated into society and as a consequence the respect and understanding of Thai traditions and habits represents a mandatory point for a leader dealing with Thai people.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

“To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield”

Alfred Tennyson (Ulysses)

3.1 Structure

As this thesis is aimed at analyzing and studying the influence of culture in leadership context, this literature review starts by giving a definition of culture. Following, in order to get a complete and updated overview, this concept is also analyzed as far as communication, globalization and leadership are concerned.

The case study is represented by culture and leadership in Thailand. The second part of the literature review refers to the thoughts of two researchers: Hofstede and Hall. They carefully analyzed the cultural peculiarities from an economical point of view. Following, a more sociological and anthropological vision of Thai culture is described by Komin. Last but not least, in this section there also is a focus on two cultural aspects that deeply affect Thai behavior: religion and family.

Finally, in the last part of the chapter the most common leadership styles in Asia and in Thailand are examined, and so the shared aspects with the local culture.

In summary, this chapter will address four main issues: (i) the actualization of culture, (ii) the relationship between culture and leadership, (iii) Thai culture, (iv) Thai leadership.

3.2 Culture

Culture comes from the Latin word *colere*, and refers to a set of practices related to agriculture. This refers to the development process of the human being, the gradual acquisition of the higher faculties and competences through education, such as arts, philosophy, etc. (Olivetta, 2012).

Culture is defined through different levels. The highest level is the national or regional culture (e.g. Latin, Chinese, Thai, etc.). Other types of culture can be corporate or organizational (Trompenaars & Hampden Turner, 1998). This thesis addresses the topic referring mainly to national cultures, while analyzing them under sociological and corporate views.

According to Trompenaars & Hampden Turner *“culture is the way in which a group of people solve problems and reconciles dilemmas”* (1998, pp.6). For Kluckhohn, culture refers to an acquired and transmitted pattern of shared meaning, feeling, and behavior that represent a distinctive group of people (1951). This point of view is similar to the Hofstede’s vision: *“culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another”* (2010, pp.6).

“Culture can be compared to a forest, while individuals are trees. A forest is not just a bunch of trees: it is a symbiosis of different trees, bushes, plants, insects, animals and micro-organisms, and we miss the essence of the forest if we only describe its most typical trees. In the same way, a culture cannot be satisfactorily described in terms of the characteristics of a typical individual” (Hofstede 1993. pp. 92).

There are many different definitions of culture developed in different eras and areas. According to an anthropological vision, culture, is that complex set which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, jurisprudence, custom, and any other power and habit acquired by people as a member of the society (Tylor 1871).

Culture is a huge topic that includes people’s background and tradition as well as their habits and beliefs. The influence of culture has a vital role in how people interpret actions and understands the context around them but the main part of culture is non-conscious, and this makes very difficult to reach a deep perception of it.

Trompenaars & Hampden compare culture to the layers of an onion, to be able to understand the culture is necessary to peel it and get into the deeper layers. The outer layers are only consequences of the culture; norms and values that guide us are hidden inside. What is taken as an assumptions or unquestionable reality is the real core of culture (Trompenaars & Hampden Turner, 1998).

Culture is usually something deeply rooted in people; it is not visible at a first glance. In order to understand a culture is needed to scratch the surface and to experience it for years. Knowing the dynamics of culture could be useful for two main reasons: i) first of all in being more familiar with unfamiliar behaviors; ii) secondly in knowing better ourselves and who we are (Schein, 2004).

The detailed understanding of the cultural differences and perspectives are not necessary for the development of this thesis. The interest is not to focus deeply on the diversity between Chinese, Thai, Korean or any other population. The interest consists in studying if some particular cultural aspects have an influence on the effectiveness of leadership.

3.2.1 What are the features of the culture

Once defined the notion of *culture*, it is helpful in order to reach a deep understanding of the concept to see and study the structure and the elements that formed this definition.

Following Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) we can imagine the cultural heritage as a content composed by three kinds of models: i) *the cognitive models* that guide the processes of knowledge and perception of things; ii) *the valuation models* that orient the subject to move in the reality known both in positive or negative way; iii) *the operational models* that guide the action towards a particular purpose, keeping in mind the previous two models.

In addition to these models, Schein (2004) analyzes also the objective characteristic of the culture; for him the culture could be defined by these elements: stability, depth, breadth and pattering (integration).

- *Stability*: the proof of stability lies on the fact that when any person leaves the group, the cultural identity remains. The culture is stable also because it is a reference point for people looking for meaning.
- *Depth*: culture is often not tangible and visible. The depth is related to the stability. In fact something very deep and often unconscious is very difficult to be changed.
- *Breadth*: culture influences all the tasks of a group. It is always present in our personal and corporate decisions.
- *Pattering* (integration): culture plays a primary role in creating order in an environment. It mixes in a coherent way: rituals, behaviors, values, traditions, etc.

3.2.2 The role of communication within cultures

“Un linguaggio diverso è una diversa visione della vita”.

Federico Fellini

Culture is based on communication; in fact it comes from a constant exchange of information between people. Culture can be considered as the construction of context through the communicative action (Di Luzio, Günthner & Orletti, 2001).

Misunderstandings between people of different cultures often occur. Gumperz and Tannen (1979) claims that cross-cultural interactions are very hard to build because different cultures have different language history.

To be a leader in multicultural teams is needed a focus on the communicational characteristics. In accordance with Bradford 'J' Hall (2013) communicating is equivalent to the creation of meaning. Moreover he claims that the communication process is facilitated by symbols (verbal or non-verbal) helping to convey the intended meaning. Consequently the symbolism is the best and the more effective way for a leader to spread out his/her vision in a multicultural organization.

It is well known that in recent years communication and symbolism in dialogues between different cultures has become increasingly important thanks to globalization processes. In fact the collaboration and cooperation within mixed cultural context has had a considerable expansion.

3.2.3 Culture and globalization

As a consequence of globalization, the study of culture profoundly changed in certain aspects. If in the past culture was perceived as the main characteristic of a nation, nowadays culture is studied as a relational matter. The Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz argued that as a collective system of meaning, culture belong primarily to the social relationships and to the network of these relationships. Culture is regarding places only indirectly and without a logical necessity (1998).

By definition the globalization must create a common culture for the whole world, the cultural differences must become smaller and sometimes invisible. Thus, the life of international leaders is supposed to be easier. Despite that, leading a global environment requires also cross-cultural competences and a cultural intelligence difficult to be learned (Steers R. M. Et. al, 2010).

McDonald’s or Coca-Cola in terms of tastes, markets and corporate cultures are becoming similar everywhere. However, what is fundamental to point out is not to know what they are, but what are the meanings that different cultures give to them (Trompenaars & Hampden Turner, 1998). The Coca Cola Company has a worldwide markets, this tells us that to sell Coke is a business model that works in every continent but does not tell us the meaning that every culture give to this soft drink. For instance, drinking Coke could be the fulfillment of a need, the thirst, for an American but an exotic experience for a Thai.

3.2.4 Collectivistic culture vs. Individualistic culture

One of the areas that most impact the leadership is the individualism vs. collectivism. The individualistic culture, also called the cultures of “*ego*”, attribute greater importance to the freedom and the choice of the individual. The collectivist cultures, called culture of “*we*”, give greater value to shared goals, rather than individual ones (Kreitner R. Kinicki A, 2008). In collectivist cultures, it is expected that individuals overshadow their own desires and goals to encourage those of the social group to which they belong.

Triandis et al. (1995) formulated a further and more complete distinction between collectivism and individualism based on the composition of social relationship: horizontal (egalitarian) or vertical (hierarchical).

- *Horizontal individualism*: in culture like Sweden, people want to be unique and differentiate to group organizations. At the same time, they don’t look forward to reach a higher status.
- *Vertical individualism*: in these cultures (U.S.A) people tend to want acquiring a higher social status and to enter into competition with other people.
- *Horizontal collectivism*: in these societies there are: egalitarianism and strong social relationship between people. These communities give themselves common objectives and they are not willing to submit to authorities.
- *Vertical Collectivism*: The priority in these cultures (i.e. Chinese) is the prosperity of the group. People are ready to submit and renounce to some benefits if the authorities would require it.

Many researchers claim that the theories linking culture to leadership often turn out useless in countries with different cultural models from North America. Hofstede (2006) argued that leadership research are common to be based on Western values. Therefore, being the North America society based on the individualistic culture, the majority of theories would results counterproductive with countries characterized on the collectivism.

3.3 Culture and leadership

According to Lewin Kurt: *“there is no hope for creating a better world without a deeper scientific insight into the function of leadership, of culture, and of the other essentials of group life. Social life will have to be managed much more consciously than before if man shall not destroy man”* (1943; pp. 334).

Starting from Geert Hofstede and his study on the cultural influence in organizations, a number of cultural studies have tried to bridge leadership and culture. This points out that culture is one of the main issues for a leader and the success in leading an organization depends on how the cultural aspects are managed.

Edgar Schein (2004) argued that culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin. This metaphor is to explain that these two concepts are interrelated and co-exists between each other. Therefore it becomes necessary, in order to reach an effective leadership, to be an active leader that listen carefully the followers thoughts and needs (learning leader). Starting from the emergent culture of a company, a leader can choose the leadership characteristics that fit better with a particular corporate situation (Schein, 2004).

3.3.1 Weick’s vision: leaders deal with follower’s culture

Leadership occurs when a person is able to define and shape the reality of others. Despite that, leadership does not depend only on the leader's ability to affect the vision of others but it is also a process of social interaction that meets the demands of the context and cultures (Barzanò, 2008). Indeed, different cultures require a single leadership approach tailored on specific cultural characteristics.

During the process of meaning construction, a single situation can have a multitude of different meanings or counter realities, in which culture plays a primary role.

According to Weick (1995), people in order to decode and understand ambiguous and uncertain environments (sensemaking), put the stimuli extracted from the current experiences into more familiar and well-known mental constructions and framework called *frames of references*. Basically the frame of references constitutes the prior knowledge of a person resulting from past moments of socialization. It represents a tradition of values, beliefs, symbolic images of the past. This sensemaking process is greatly influenced by the culture that is one of the main affecting components of the frames of references. Consequently, leaders must have a deep understanding of the cultural impact on their job in order to manage effectively an organization.

3.2.2 Culture and the legitimization of power

The power is composed by two complementary different meanings; one of them expresses the permission to act (to may), the other one the possibility to be able to (to can). An effective leader in addition to a power position has the ability to modify certain policies within an organization (Olivetta, 2012).

Historically, it is observed that most of the centres of power are formed on the money or weapons, but despite that, the power try always to legitimize itself culturally (Olivetta, 2012). According to Gupta & Ferguson (1997), the legitimization of a state is dependent on the degree to which the population can claim to represent a specific national identity.

It is therefore evident the importance of the legitimacy of power and the role that the culture has in this process. For instance: the legitimacy of the Mao Zedong power in China was carried out by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966) that involved a radical change within the Chinese Communist Party, aimed at (without succeeding) removing traditional cultural elements from Chinese society.

In order to be a leader, a person must see his/her power recognized by their followers. It is possible to affirm that this legitimacy would require accepting and understanding the different cultures of the environment. In this regard, Giancarlo Trentini (1997) makes a distinction between head and leader. Head is the word used when the authority is imposed from the outside; leader, instead, is the term that indicates an authority conferred by followers.

3.4 Thai Culture

Thailand is the 50th largest country in the world, most nearly equal in size to Spain or Sweden. Its population comprises roughly 65 million citizens. The majority is from Thai ethnicity but there are also others origins represented at different degrees such as: Chinese, Indian, Malay, Mon, Khmer, Burmese and Lao. Referring to the religion: 94,6% of Thais are Buddhist, 4,6% are Muslim, 0,7% are Christian (Thailand at a glance, 2014).

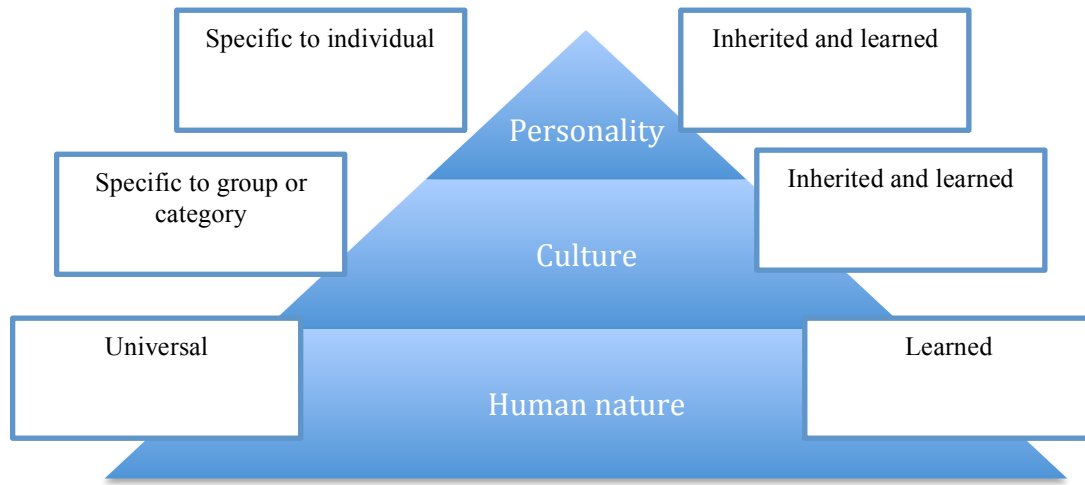
Thai culture is one of the most ancient and fascinated of the world. It has been shaped by a variety of concepts. One of the main concepts, Buddhism, was imported from abroad but shaped on Thai way of life. Others concepts, such as villages routines, are indigenous, and have remained completely unchanged since ancient times. In this context, it must be understood that unlike several countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand never lost its independency, nor never experienced the mistreatment associated to the colonial status.

For foreigners Thais are seen as simple and extremely pleasant people. One of the possible explanations of the typical Thai values and behaviors can be the Buddhist belief of the re-birth: the way in which you act in this life can influence your next life. During the life a person should collect good deeds and honorable behaviors in order to aspire in a great next life. As a consequence of this belief and of the general behavioral temperament Thais are in general very responsible and welcoming people open towards the indigents and willing to provide help.

3.4.1 Hofstede cultural dimensions: Thailand

Geert Hofstede is one of the pioneers in the researches about cross-cultural groups and organizations; he has played a key role in developing a framework in order to evaluate and differentiate national cultures in organizations. Culture for Hofstede is different from both the human nature than the individual's personality; hereunder it is shown the distinction between the different levels of mind programming according to Hofstede thinking.

Fig. 2: mental programming by Hofstede



Source: Adapted from Hofstede, G. (2010, pp.6).

His most well-known study is a survey carried out by analyzing more than 100,000 IBM employees in various countries around the world, which has allowed him to compare the main cultural differences. The five parameters analyzed by Hofstede in order to assess the organizational culture of countries are: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and long-term orientation (Hofstede, 2001). To give an exemplification, following there is a table representing these five dimensions for some Western and Asian countries.

Tab. 2: Hofstede's indices of cultural dimensions (a selected sample).

Country	Masculinity	Power distance	Individualism	Uncertainty avoidance	Long term orientation
<i>Thailand</i>	34	64	20	64	56
<i>Philippines</i>	64	94	32	44	19
<i>China</i>	66	80	20	40	118
<i>Sweden</i>	5	31	71	29	33
<i>Italy</i>	70	50	70	35	
<i>Germany</i>	66	35	67	65	31
<i>USA</i>	62	40	91	46	29

Source: Adapted from The Hofstede centre

Concerning the Hofstede’s studies on Thailand, below are analyzed the five parameters among the Thai society. Furthermore a table that indicates the behavioral differences between opposite societies accompanies the three aspects that have the greater importance in the definition of Thai culture.

- *Masculinity/femininity*: Thai society has a very low level of masculinity. Thailand is greatly below the average compared to the rest of Asia and the whole World. According to Hofstede, this outcome is helpful to strength the traditional roles of men and women in the society (Hofstede, 2001).

In the table are listed the main characteristic of a gender equality society in contrast with a non-equality society.

Tab. 3: Equality vs. non-equality society.

HIGH GENDER EQUALITY SOCIETY	LOW GENDER EQUALITY SOCIETY
More women in power positions	Less women in power position
High status in the society	Low status in the society
Important role in the group decision	Marginal role in the group decision
High rate of working women	Low rate of working women
Less distinction based on gender in working environment	More distinction based on gender in working environment
High rate of female education	Low rate of female education
Level of education similar between men and women	Level of education different between men and women

Source: Adapted from Olivetta E. (2012, pp. 100).

- *Power distance*: This dimension expresses how a community accepts and condescends towards the authority, the power differences and the privileges. Hofstede pointed out Thailand as a very power distance society. There is huge inequality between people of different social position; subordinates have a very low grade of independency and they expect indications on what has to be done by superiors (Hofstede, 2001). Morakul and Wu (2001) argued that Thai are willing to embrace strong leaders and hierarchical order.

The following table compares the main differences between societies with a high power distance index against those with a low power distance.

Tab. 4: High power distance vs. low power distance.

PARAMETERS	HIGH POWER DISTANCE	LOW POWER DISTANCE
Social inequalities	Differentiated society divided into classes.	Society with a large middle class
Base of power	Base of power are stable and rare.	Base of power are transitional and sharable
Role of power	Power as a carrier of social order, harmony and stability roles.	Power associated with corruption, coercion and domination.
Social ladder flexibility	Limited ascending mobility.	High ascending mobility.
Information control	The information is circumscribed.	The information is shared.
Governance	Different groups have different involvements and democracy does not guarantee equality of opportunity.	All groups have equal involvement and democracy ensures equal opportunity and development for all.
Native orientation and independence	Strong external historical influences and recent independence.	Strong internal historical influences and longtime independence.
Civil freedom	Civil liberties are weak and public corruption is high.	Civil liberties are strong and public corruption is low.
Resources and abilities	Only few people have access to resources, and abilities that contribute to human development and life expectancy.	Mass availability of tools, resources and capacity to undertake independent business ventures, as a result of a widespread access to education.
Consumption	Growing consumption indices and high need for resources coordination.	Indices of consumption mature and high purchasing power per capita.

Source: Adapted from Olivetta E. (2012, pp. 86-87).

- *Individualism/collectivism:* Thailand result with a low level of individualism as a strong collectivistic society. The Thai society encourages taking responsibility for the other group members (Hofstede, 1984). In Thailand, one of the core values is loyalty. People are integrated from birth into strong social and cohesive group where they are protected in return of their full loyalty (Hofstede, 2001).

In the table below are analyzed the characteristics of collectivistic and individualistic society.

Tab. 5: Collectivism vs. individualism

CULTURE WITH AN HIGH LEVEL OF COLLECTIVISM	CULTURE WITH A LOW LEVEL OF COLLECTIVISM
Individuals are integrated in highly cohesive groups. We	Everyone has to take care of himself and of his family. I
The objectives of the group prevail over individual goals.	Individual goals prevail over those of the group
Social behavior is strongly determined by the duties and obligations.	The behavior is determined by the ideas and personal needs.
Importance of relationships. It is often developed countryside.	Importance of rationality. It is often developed industry.
Life is slower. There are lower indices of heart attack.	Life is more frenetic. There are higher indices of heart attack.
Low individual wealth Large families	High individual wealth Small families
Less importance to love in order to marry. Few divorces.	More importance to love in order to marry. More divorces.
Non direct communication Group activities	Direct communication Individual activities
People have fewer social relationships, but more durable and deep.	People have more social relationships, but less durable and less deep.
Clear distinction between in-group and out-group	Less distinction between in-group and out-group

Source: Adapted from Olivetta E. (2012, pp.108).

- *Uncertainty avoidance:* Thailand has a low level of tolerance for uncertainty. This means that in general the population is risk adverse. As a consequence, Thai people suspiciously sees radical and unexpected changes. The hypothetical changing action has to be slow and carefully explained in order to be accepted by people and society.

- *Long-term orientation*: Thailand has a quite high figure in this dimension although not extreme; this means that the country has a long-term commitments and respect for tradition. Moreover, it means that the daily hard work is expected to be rewarded in the long term.

3.4.2 The Hall's dimension

Another useful study for analyzing cultures is the high/low context dimension introduced by Edward T. Hall in 1976. This refers to the communication approach between individuals (direct or indirect). According to Hall (1976), certain cultures tend to communicate in an explicit way while some others prefer an indirect way:

- The individualistic cultures, (i.e. European and American) represent the low context dimension and are characterized by direct communication (i.e. face-to-face confrontation and open discussion). Low context cultures are dominated by individualism, with low involvement of other people. As a consequence, the communication is impersonal.
- The collectivistic cultures (i.e. Thai and, in general, Asian cultures) are on the other side characterized by the high context dimension. Indeed, the message flows easier within Asian organizations thanks to the existing relationships between groups. High context dimension can be described through strong relationships between group members. Here, people communicate messages with an embedded meaning in the context (Hall, 1976). For instance, the relationship between brothers can be compared to this type of communication: often just a particular way to look or way to move can be perceived by them as a communication with a hidden meaning.

3.4.3 The Komin Study

Suntaree Komin developed a research about *“psychology of Thai people”* (1990). She confirmed that Thai society has characterized by an articulated hierarchy. Komin has a totally different thought respect Hofstede referring to the collectivistic culture in Thailand, she claims that Thailand is an individualistic country based on the relationship between people. In order to describe the values that represent in the best way Thailand she find out nine main features of the Thai culture (these values are

ranked in order of importance):

- *Ego orientation*: the ego of Thais is highly developed. They are extremely independent people with a lot of self-esteem. The dignity is a fundamental value and the family represents an important part of their life.
- *Grateful relationship orientation*: Thais are honest and sincere in their relationship with other people. They are usual to make favors and provide help without expecting a reward back.
- *Smooth interpersonal relationship orientation*: the main traits that represent Thais are: kindness, politeness, humbleness, etc. These skills are fundamental in order to build stable and peaceful relationships.
- *Flexibility and adjustment orientation*: this is the main reason about the huge problem of corruption. According to Komin Thai people is guided by the situations rather than the rules. They care more about flexibility than honesty.
- *Religion – Physical orientation*: the most widespread religion in Thailand is Theravada Buddhism. For Thais is common to relate religion to ceremonies referring community, job, home etc.
- *Education and competence orientation*: Thais consider the education as the way to reach a higher social status. The main goal is not to be well educated but is to get as more prestige as possible.
- *Interdependence orientation*: Thai culture is characterized by the cooperation between people. A sort of interdependence looks existing within the community.
- *Fun and pleasure orientation*: Thais wants to enjoy the life as much as possible. Sometimes the excess of this value bring to a lack of commitment in the working life.
- *Achievement-task orientation*: usually Thai people are more inclined to social and easygoing life. This is the reason why this value is ranked as the last one. Furthermore the word “*ambition*” has a negative meaning in Thai dictionary. Notwithstanding, it is widely recognized by many authors that the achievement value has becoming more important during last years; the triggering factor is attributable to the movement of many people from the countryside to urban areas.

3.4.4 The impact of Buddhism on Thai culture

Siddhattha Gotama (Buddha) was born as a Prince in the south of Nepal around 2.500 years ago. When he understood that life's pleasures vanish quickly, he started to look for the lasting happiness. After several years of attempts he succeeded in the mind purification and he discovered the timeless truth of existence. For the rest of his life he was engaged in helping and teaching others how to reach the real happiness (Culture and religion information sheet: Buddhism, 2012).

Today, there are two main Buddhist trends: Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant form of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Burma and Laos. Theravada, the *"teaching of the elders"*, has particular icons, culture and teachings that permit to be identified. For instance: the monks wear a saffron robe and the scriptural language is Pali that comes from a dialect of the north of India (Sucitto, 2012).

Buddhists claims people create the world giving value and meaning to things. They believe also that people do not see things in the real way, their true nature. This would be a carrier of sufferance and pain (Wisadavet, 2002). In accordance with Shr Heng Lyu (2012) the basic mission of a Buddhist (both Theravada and Mahayana) is *"cease all unwholesome conduct, do only what is good, and purify your mind"*:

- The first part of the sentence, *"cease to unwholesome conduct"*, means to respect and take care of ourselves and others in order to not do anything that causes pain and suffering. Moreover it is also suggested to avoid toxic behaviors and actions for both mind and body (i.e. drinking alcohol, drogues, etc.). When we act in a correct and fair way the benefit do not concern only the self but also all the people that surround our environment.
- The second part of the sentence, *"do only what is good"*, invites to behave well and to be scrupulous in examining the situations that create suffering in order to find quickly a remedy. For instance, being always nervous leads to a loss of friends causing sufferance. This must be dealt with an effort in changing the way to face others people.
- The last part of the sentence *"purifying the mind"*, means to become more open to others and to leave an egocentric vision of life. When there are

conflicts, people should give up the points of view based on the "ego". This would lead to a more rational vision, essential to easily solve issues.

Buddhism profoundly affects the lives of Thais. Buddhists generally avoid contradictions, disagreeing or refusing requests in a direct way. For them there are different ways to say "no". Being indirect and not explicit is considered polite. Furthermore, criticized a behavior in public is considered a humiliation that can affect the reputation of a person (Culture and religion information sheet: Buddhism, 2012).

This accommodating behavior is typical of the collectivistic cultures; following Hofstede (2010): *"the word no is seldom used, because saying "no" is a confrontation; "you may be right" and "we will think about it" are examples of polite ways of turning down a request. In the same vein, the word yes should not necessarily be inferred as an approval, since it is used to maintain the line of communication: "yes, I heard you" is the meaning it has in Japan"* (p. 106-107).

Thailand is commonly known as *"the land of smile"*, due to the extremely friendly approach of its population. They are kind and smiling not only in the relationships with foreigners, but also in their daily life. This cordiality is a classic example of the influence of Buddhism on the population. To analyze the Thai lifestyle, the Buddhist influences should be taken into special consideration (Milizia, 2012).

3.4.5 The role of family in the Thai culture

There is an old Thai proverb that can easily explain alone the relationships within Thai family: *"loog mai mai klai ton lon"* (we are what our parents are). This proverb underlines the strong devotion and attachment that Thais have towards their own family members.

Family is considered a core value of Thai culture. The social inequality that characterizes Thailand is present also in the relationship within parents and children. As a consequence the respect and deference in dealing with parents are taught from an early age to Thais (Iamsudha & Hale, 2003).

The relationship with the family is very rigid and based on authority, even after the period of childhood, the young Thais cannot freely express to their parents their opinions and feelings. Even if the son/daughter do not agree with the parents, usually they prefer to adopt the parents' suggestions in order to show respect and gratitude (Iamsudha & Hale, 2003).

Furthermore, in most adult age when a son gets married, he has the duty to visit his relatives on a regular basis; he should also help them in their business or send a financial contribution. A similar argument can be argued for Thai women; in fact they and their husbands should preferably buy a house close to their parents in order to take care of them. Particular duties are also assigned to the youngest daughter; she has the main responsibility for taking care of them very closely until the end of their life (Bechstedt, 2002).

Pinyuchon and Gray (1997) studied the Thai relationships and they write about six elements that affect Thai family:

- I. *Religious beliefs*: one of the basic Buddhist teachings taught that a good person treat his/her parents well. The parents are the ones who gave the life to their children and for that the children should show gratitude and respect.
- II. *Rural and urban environment*: the lifestyle and traditions of Thais that live in countryside are very different compared to the Thais who live in cities. Urban areas are much more culturally similar to the West part of the world; here the time spent together within family members is dramatically less than in rural communities.
- III. *Family relationships*: an important point to emphasize is the fact that it is very common for a child to remain living with their parents, in the same house, until the day of his/her wedding. This fact has many implications in explaining the close relationship between parents and children.
- IV. *Social values*: the Thai social values influence people's behavior. For instance, children remain for the lifetime in a dependent position to the will of their parents; they cannot make important decisions without the prior consensus of parents.
- V. *Masculine and feminine roles*: each family member has a certain role in the family organization. The father is the main person, a leader that has to take all the major decisions. The mother has to think of family' needs and she must also support her husband in his decisions.
- VI. *Sexuality*: for parents sexuality is a very delicate topic. Usually, they avoid the issue with children even though they are worried.

3.5 Asian leadership

Asian leadership is largely different than e.g. Western one. This leadership is characterized by a paternalistic leadership, which is essentially based on the unconditional trust between followers and leader. Paternalistic leaders mix benevolence with authority. It looks like the father-son relationship. The paternalistic leadership is widespread and effective in the majority of Asian countries (Pye 1985). Notwithstanding the theoretical construction of the paternalistic leadership is the same all over the world, the Asian way to practice this leadership style is quite different from the autocratic idea of Western countries. Unlike an autocratic leader, an Asian paternalistic leader inquires and consults his subordinates, listens to their ideas and tends to keep harmony within the organization (Tjosvold et al. 1997). He has a moral obligation to use his power not for exploiting and controlling, but to protect the subordinates (Pye 1985).

According to Rhein (2013) it is necessary to be aware of the fact that different cultures require specific leadership style. He claims, that leadership styles in Western countries cannot be interpreted as the same in the eastern countries. Furthermore, he points out that in Western organizations there is a clear distinction between working and personal life. The leaders of these organizations know their duties affect only the working life of employees. On the other hand, in Asian organizations the power of leaders has larger boundaries, private and working life are more integrated. This depends mainly on the collectivist culture that characterizes these countries.

3.6 Thai leadership

Thailand is a new industrialized country (NIC); according to the World Bank (Bhaopichitr & Thitisakmongkol, 2014), Thai economy has been recovering slowly from the “*global crises*” compared to China or Malaysia. Despite that the GDP of Thailand has grown in 2013 by 3 percent.

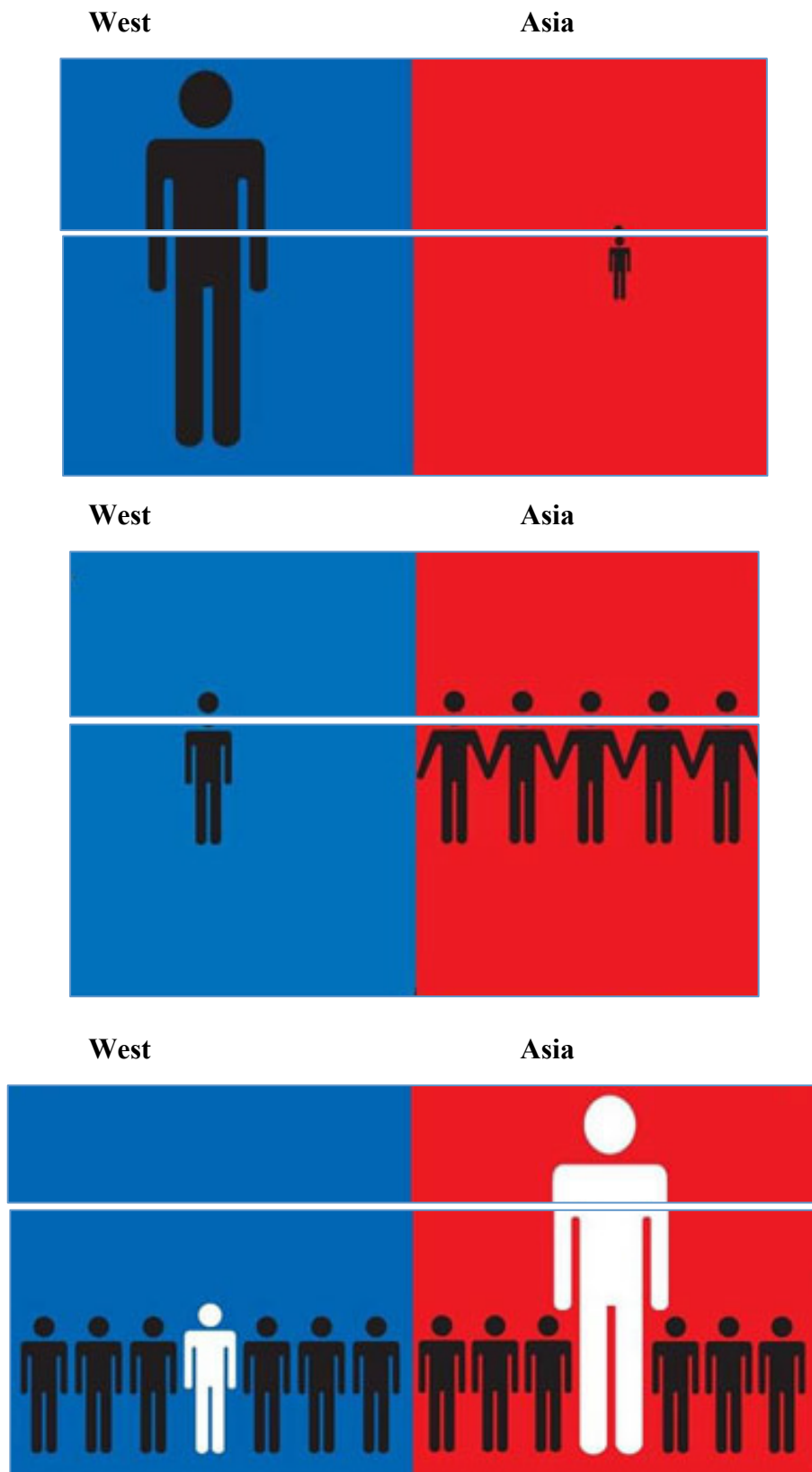
Thanks to constant economic growth, an increasing number of international and multinational firms are investing in Thailand. These organizations do not only bring huge investments, but also new cultures and new ways to face and solve problems affecting Thai organizations.

Referring to the traditional aspects of Thai leaders, it is possible to make a comparison between the Asian paternalistic leadership and the role played by the king of Thailand. Thai people are very respectful of the king. The king is the person who embodies what it means to be Thai and represents the nation in his person (Fong, 2009). The propaganda sees the king as the stoic representative and the father of the nation. He is a transcendental “*super partes*” figure; people look at him as a “*quasi-divinity*” that embodies all the virtues of Thailand (Fong, 2009).

Philip Hallinger (2004) has completed a recent study on Thai leadership. He argues that in Thailand followers tend to accept the orders of their leaders in the same way that a teacher accepts the orders from the dean. Hallinger (2004) claims also that Thais think inappropriate and rude to question the authority of the leader.

To summarize, there are three figures that easily symbolizes the main characteristics differentiating the Asian leadership styles (including the ones which are more common in Thailand) from the Western ones. The first two images represent two of the aspects characterizing the concept of collectivism vs. individualism: the importance of the “*single*” (weak in Asia and strong in the Western countries) and the importance of the collective (strong in Asia and weak in the Western countries). The third image represents instead the tight Asian hierarchy compared to the flat hierarchy which is common in Western countries: in the red part the hypothetical boss is pictured big as at least three times the dimension of followers while in the blue part he/she is pictured just a bit bigger than followers highlighting the substantial equality within an organization.

Fig. 3.4.5 leadership differences between West and Asia.



Source: Adapted from McGill M. (2011, pp.7-9)

4. CONVERSATIONS

“Les conversations ressemblent aux voyages qu'on fait sur l'eau: on s'écarte de la terre sans presque le sentir, et l'on ne s'aperçoit qu'on a quitté le bord que quand on est déjà bien loin”.

Nicolas de Chamfort

This thesis is the result of a long research. It is also the story of a journey in Thailand, a country in which, I realized, a foreigner arrives absolutely unprepared. All my experiences in many other countries have turned totally useless in Thailand. Discovering the real Thais, that part hidden behind the smile of courtesy offered to all tourists and adventurers was my final goal.

The Thai saying “*kwam lub mai mee nai loke*” invites to do not hide what cannot be hidden. But the majority of Thais are very reserved and they are not willing to reveal themselves and their traditions. Being so difficult to go deep in discussions with Thais, I have learnt that the best way to analyse them is through the observation. In fact Thais reveal themselves by little things; to notice these little things are needed a lot of patience and curiosity.

This chapter contains and summarizes all the conversations had during the study of Thai culture and leadership. Although there is not a well-defined structure which is equal for all the conversations, the main topics covered are: the influences of Thai culture in the society, individualism vs. collectivism, the most common Thai leadership styles and finally the westernization of traditional culture.

In order to reach a high grade of reality, the sample of participants has been mixed. People of different age, ethnicity and social background have then been part of this project. The thread that connects all these testimonies is their experience with Thai culture either in the role of leader or follower than in the role of observer.

4.1 Academic conversations

The first four conversations concern the academic environment; both foreigners and Thais who attend for different reasons the academic life at Burapha University are part of this subchapter. Despite their thoughts are very different from each other, much can be deduced from the mix of these opinions.

4.1.1 Mr. Steven Bodley: he is an Australian English professor at Burapha University that has been living in Thailand since 21 years. He can speak fluent Thai, some years ago he converted to Buddhism and he is perfectly integrated into the social fabric of Thailand. Mr. Bodley is the right person who can see the Thai life style from a detached and external perspective. He claims that in Thai society the inequalities are accepted as a norm, they accept their life condition and they consider events as external to their force or control. Most people need to be guided and to feel part of a social group.

A high level of democracy is still lacking in Thai culture. The society accepts a tight hierarchy between people characterized by authority and privileges. It is a hierarchy society dominated by few people. Many are in a situation of relative poverty while a minority has an enormous power. In order to describe the Thai society he refers to the Eiffel Tower in Paris: the base is very wide but the top is very narrow.

A very complex social ladder characterizes Thailand; from this ladder is easy to get in but also to get out. Mr. Bodley argues that anyway there are many opportunities to climb the social ladder, but few have the determination to do so.

Furthermore, he also emphasizes the fact that language is a fundamental aspect of culture that profoundly influences the leadership. Some languages such as German are direct and lead to a very clear and effective leadership, other languages such as Thai are indirect and there is a need for more control to make sure that any orders have been interpreted in an exact way by followers.

Keywords: need to be guided, inequalities, tight hierarchy, and opportunities.

4.1.2 Prof. Tuomo Rautakivi: he is lecturer at the Graduate School of Public Administration of Burapha University. In accordance with him Thais are moving towards a strongly individualistic culture with a focus on the self. They care about what happens to them or at their closest people (e.g. family, best friends).

He argues that Europe and in particular Scandinavian countries are much more collectivistic than Thailand. The facts that support his argumentation are, for example, all the services offered for free or just with a small fee by the Scandinavian system (i.e. chorus, hockey, football, dance, etc.). While, for instance, in Sweden these activities are low cost because supported by private or public organizations, in Thailand the same activities are extremely expensive. This fact confirms the Thai

individualistic attitude: for individualistic countries these activities are not seen as useful for the collective but as mere business.

Finally, Mr. Rautakivi pointed culture as a characteristic that can become a burden in the interactions with others or in the approach to innovation. This is the case of Thailand: being so heavy the Thai cultural heritage, Thais seem to have difficulty in thinking outside their culture.

Keywords: personalistic orientation, strong culture and “*selfishness*”.

4.1.3 Asst. Prof. Dr. Patchanee Taraseina: she is the dean of the Graduate School of Public Administration at Burapha University. She claims that being an effective leader in Thailand is crucial because often there are disordered and chaotic situations to be managed. She found herself in a similar situation when she accepted his tenure as dean at Burapha University. The planning and empowering have been the key points used in reforming her department while meetings and direct communication have been the tools where she focused the changing action. She describes her leadership style as supportive and rewarding: she is available to listen to followers' problems and she provides recognition and compliments for followers' good performance.

Dr. Taraseina considers essential the recognition of the subordinates' merits through generous rewards: more motivated people are more efficient. From her point of view, Thais are not really money oriented and therefore a mix of rewards including both money and non-economic benefits (travel, job positions) are considered ideal.

Following Dr. Taraseina, Thais and especially the younger generation are quickly changing towards European and American values. This would be an attitude present in large cities (e.g. Bangkok).

In rural areas, instead, collectivism is still very popular and people are simple and honest. As demonstration of what argued she put into the foreground two still deep-rooted tradition in rural Thailand. One of these consist in leaving inside a wooden cabin a drinking water jug for strangers that are thirsty in a remote area; another tradition is to help each other, within the local community, for the funeral expenses of a community member.

Keywords: empowerment, sense of community and different values between rural and urban.

4.1.4 Mr. Soklin Suon: he is a Cambodian government employee, who works in the tax offices of Phonon Penh. He is currently studying a postgraduate course in Thailand in order to get updated in his job.

With regard to the social interactions with Thais he shows himself a bit skeptical giving confidence to Thai strangers. He thinks that their culture pushes them to be very friendly but often behind the kindness there are hidden interests. He claims that Thai society is quite individualistic; it consists in a mix of Asian and Western values. He points out the many Cambodian immigrants who come to seek fortune in Thailand, being the salaries and the life conditions better than Cambodia. Thai businessmen make profit on these people offering lower salary respect the average of Thailand. So, he argues that often for Thais sometimes making profit is a fundamental value that goes beyond the common good. This does not means that Thais are not fair and aggressive but in order to deal with them a person should be very careful if he/she wants to get valuable contractual conditions

Keywords: negotiation abilities, mix of Asian and Western values, false appearances.

4.2 Religious conversations

Being the Buddhist influence so strong in the Thai behaviors and culture, this part try to investigate the Buddhist values and leadership. Two discussions formed this subchapter; the protagonists are monks' leader in their temples and represent the thinking of the all monks' local community.

4.2.1 Son Dhammiko: he is a senior monk who lives in a community in the remote countryside of the Chonburi province. He argues that Thai culture is collectivist because people are willing to help each other. The leadership inside the temple is very similar to the leadership outside. He makes a comparison between the Buddhist structure in Thailand and the Thai government: they are organized in the same way on a provincial and regional base. He claims that Buddhism profoundly influences the Thai life-style and for this reasons the leadership inside the temple is often a reflection of Thai society. As a consequence Thai society is very hierarchical and to become a leader is required the popular consensus in addition to many years of study.

According to his point of view, the society is changing very quickly especially in the younger generations. He is in favor of globalization and the opening of young Thais to the Western cultures, but he also thinks that in order to do not get lost, they should also take into consideration their culture, identity and tradition.

Keywords: collectivism, Buddhism dependent, tight hierarchy, democracy and importance of identity.

4.2.2 Maha Vera Mahavero (Phra Kroo Soravichai): he is a monk with a prominent position in an important Buddhist school in the province of Chonburi. He is very wise and respected in his community. He calls “*thainess*” the main characteristic of the Thai identity that consist in following the base of the culture.

He considers Thailand both collectivistic than individualistic, the social collectivistic aspects are strongly present in Thai society, but also the individual, in particular in urban area, has a growing role. One of the collectivistic behaviors that he points out is the extreme respect for the elders; young people tend to be devoted and to listen carefully to the elders. Elders have a leadership role in Thailand, being the point of reference for young generations. Even monks have a system based on the seniority inside the temples.

According to Buddhism, one more essential value that forms Thai culture is the compassion. The compassion is the most widespread value all over the Thailand and takes its roots from the Buddhism teaching. Elders should lead young generations through patience and compassion.

He claims that leadership in temples is very similar to the leadership in Thai society: there is a very complex and articulated social ladder and each person in this framework have particular duties and responsibilities. The respect of people and other monks must be gained through the everyday work; if people that live around the temple do not accept a monk as a leader they will reject the whole temple.

The leadership inside temples is almost military with very strict rules; if the compassion, that is the value of reference, doesn't work, the punishment is the next step in order to solve a very serious issue. The monks with lower position have to follow and support monks in higher position, their contribute is expected and fundamental for the efficiency of the temple.

Western culture deeply affects Thai traditional culture, people start to think and dress differently respect the past. Change is normal in a society, he accepts the modernity but he highlight also that not everything old-fashion and traditional must be a wrong aspect to be changed.

Keywords: elders respect, seniority, devotion, compassion, strict leadership and strong culture.

4.3 Personal reflections

What I realized is that Thais are not willing to explain their culture and traditions to strangers. On the other side, they are willing to let people experience the Thai lifestyle in order to fully understand the real essence of Thailand.

It cannot be argued about Thai culture and Thai leadership without taking into account the religious aspect and then the Buddhism. It profoundly affects Thai society because it indicates to people the values to be followed. Buddhism is the mirror of Thailand: hierarchy, respect, military educations, fairness, kindness, willingness in helping others, are the key words to describe the main Thai values.

During my time in Thailand, I have been to many temples and in many ceremonies, what impressed me most is the extreme subjugation of the younger and inexperienced monks compared to the elderly. The way in which the monks pray express the hierarchy inside the temple, with the disposition during ceremonies running from the more experts (usually the oldest) to the less experts (usually the youngest). The same hierarchy is present in the audience: the heads of the families are in the first row of the temple and in the most comfortable chairs, all others people are behind them.

Furthermore, the demonstration of the hierarchical superiority of the monks, even to the most important personality present, is expressed by the fact that their meal is offered by the audience and consumed during the prayer in front of them. Only when the ceremony is finished, the audience is allowed to eat what the monks have left. Monks, usually eat all together but when the meal is over everyone go back to their role and young monks show devotion to the older ones helping them in their jobs. It can be pointed out that this hierarchical attitude based only on the age (and sometimes on the experience) is likely to compromise a fair meritocratic system based on merit.

The sense of community is another tangible aspect of Thai society also represented in Buddhist temples. It is not uncommon to find children, even very young, living with

monks because the birth family, part of the local Buddhist community, lacks the financial resources to support their children. Monks raised children with their strict educational system made by sacrifices and punishments, but they leave open the option of becoming monk or not in the future. This is a clear example of the vision and the idea of collectivism in Thailand.

Thais are both collectivist and individualist: collectivism is widespread in the family circle and in the local communities; individualism is common outside of these closer relationships. The fact that in urban areas people are more individualistic is the clear deduction of what is stated above, that is to say outside of their community everybody takes care of him/herself.

In Thai countryside a really deep-rooted tradition consist in having a dinner (often a sort of barbecue) along with the closest member of a community. This is the occasion to talk with the people of the same area (e.g. neighbor; friends; relatives) and strength the relationships between them. I had the chance to experience it; we cooked for at least six hours a traditional cake in a bamboo. I observed how the purpose of the dinner was not to eat a sophisticated cake but it was to create a sense of community, people opened themselves to each other talking and discussing about frivolous and soft topic. These discussions, even if sometimes without any sense, help to create a feeling of equality and community between people. This also explains the reason why in the urban area the values are becoming more individualistic and aligned to Western values; in fact these old traditions does not exist anymore there.

Actually in Thailand seems that two kinds of values are co-existing. One it is more close to the Western values and widespread in the large cities (e.g. Bangkok) the other one is traditional and still present in the countryside. Manage in an effective way these two opposed forced is probably the main challenge for the future leaders in Thailand.

Thai society is rapidly changing; especially the young generations and people from urban areas are more close to Western values. But what it is clear is that the basic values on which Thai culture is based: respect, compassion and hierarchy are still present in all generations and in all contexts, what is changing it is only the degree of their importance in Thai society.

5. FINDINGS

“We do not see things as they are; we see things as we are”.

(Talmud Bavli)

We have now completed an overview about Thai culture and its influences on Thai leaders. The result is that many cultural aspects analyzed are reflected in the concept of Thai leadership. For instance:

- The centrality of the family calls the paternalistic leadership. In fact the same concepts of respect, hierarchy, trust and protection forming the Thai family are mirrored in the Asian conception of paternalistic leadership.
- The religious teachings based on the value of compassion, call on the other side some of the main values of Thai organizations, such as: respect, loyalty, trust and obedience.

Generally speaking we found out that the factors considered appropriate to the recognition of the leader’s authority are culturally defined. It is clear the main role of culture in the definition of leadership. According to Eraldo Olivetta (2012) the understanding of leadership is implicitly influenced by the culture; in fact whether there is a cultural change, the characteristics deemed necessary for an effective leadership tend to vary as well. The specific cultural boundaries of acceptability of the leader’s actions and behaviors are marked by the cultural values of a nation or society.

Fig. 6: culture affects Leadership style



Source: made by the author

It is possible to argue that leading an organization requires the understanding of two types of cultures, both corporate and national. Nevertheless, corporate culture is definitely highly influenced by the major national cultures represented within organizations. The findings drawn from this dissertation are mainly concerning Thai national culture but they can be addressed both to a sociological and corporate perspective. These findings can be useful to help leaders in the construction of an effective leadership style to be applied in Thai organizations or in multinational companies within Thai members.

As far as Thai sociological aspects are concerned, we found out the true nature of this country: Thailand is seen as a peaceful and hierarchical society. Although political and social turmoil are quite frequent there is a great aversion against violent situation and mediation/negotiation skills are common within its population. The discussions collected have strongly reinforced this profile and highlighted the importance of compassion in Thai culture.

In addition, it emerges also that despite the political and economic changes have impacted the whole South East Asia over the past decades, the values of traditional culture have remained almost unchanged and static. As Kenichi Ohmae argues, *"the contents of kitchens and closets may change, but the core mechanisms by which cultures maintain their identity and socialize their young remain largely untouched"* (1995, pp. 30).

Referring to the traditions and habits of Thailand under a business leadership perspective, the country seems to have some cultural characteristics reflected in its common leadership styles (i.e. the strict concept of seniority, the tight and vertical hierarchy and the deep attachment to the native family) that represents a disadvantage compared to the culture of Western countries. Strict and omnipresent traditional values can indeed limit and obstruct the relationship between the economic development and the development of appropriate effective management practices in line with international standards.

To sum up, a rooted and *"heavy"* culture such as the Thai one is definitely an important element of identity for a society but also an obstacle towards progress and change. Being a leader in a Thai organization does not only mean following global changes in corporate management but also, at the same time, dealing with the strong local culture.

Thus, leading a Thai organization also means adapting and understanding many aspects of local traditions and habits. However, some of these appear negative and difficult to accept within international standards. For example, a Western leader cannot easily adapt to the relationship between leader and followers which is common in Thailand: that is to say accepting an unequal relationship between people; this is a concept very far to the Western ideology of equality.

6. CONCLUSIONS

"Ogni errore ci indica uno scoglio da evitare mentre non ogni scoperta ci indica una via da seguire".

Giovanni Vailati

The methods of management and the ways in which leaders drive a company diverge in the different regions and countries around the world (Steers R. M. Et. al, 2010). Leadership Theories usually do not take into account cultural differences but only give general and universal indications. The way in which leadership is practiced tends instead to consider the different cultures. In accordance to Hofstede (1993) unique cultural features require unique management and leadership styles. He claims also that the management theorists who look outside their context and so outside their country will find the local foreign habits, cultures and ways of organizing: weird, not effective, and sometimes even immoral. What is considered standard in one country can be negative or unacceptable in another country (Steers R. M. Et. al, 2010). The on-going globalization process requires an understanding of the differences between people.

The fact that the foreign management methods are different from those used in the own country does not mean that they are not functional or even better. Hofstede (1993) in order to express the chance to learn from different cultures and to bring the more useful teachings in the own country, take the example of American management theories. These theories, in fact, are mostly of European origin and have been used in the United States improving them year after year.

Despite the positive aspects of a multicultural approach, having to deal with different cultures often brings leaders wondering how to face with some of the tensions, complexities and contradictions that inevitably are developing within a multicultural environment. As demonstrated in this thesis each culture is unique and for this reason a leader must take into account some specific cultural aspects in order to lead an organization. There are no general leadership styles to be applied globally in every country: what is effective in one country may be a failure in another. We can anyway find two general behaviors that can help leaders to make sense and to avoid complexity in dealing with different cultures:

- I. *Avoid to over-stereotyped*: leaders who are able to understand how culture influences the behavior of followers and who are able to understand what behaviors are driven by culture are more capable to find effective solutions in dealing with multicultural environment. The main problem in studying a culture is making an extreme simplification of a community: an oversimplification that does not allow seeing small but fundamental characteristics of a culture can be equally damaging to not consider at all the differences between cultures.
- II. *Be open minded and neutral in studying a culture*: there are no good or bad cultures; there are only positive or negative perceptions on certain aspects. A leader to be effective, must look without prejudice to the different cultures and appreciate the positive aspects of them.

In addition to these behaviours, a leader should be familiar with the cultures that are present in his/her organization. According to Wright and Mischel (1987) management practices congruent with the national cultural values bring to more predictable behaviors in organizations.

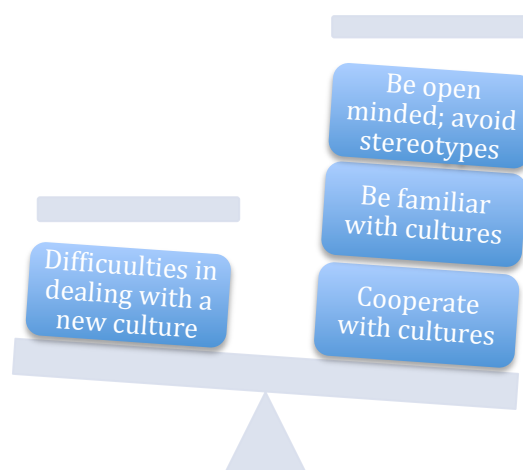
In order to lead in a multicultural environment, three strategies are fundamental to understand in depth a culture and then to reach the leadership effectiveness:

- I. *Understand how different cultures work and their main characteristics*: knowing the followers expectations for a leader in different cultures is a necessary step to achieve success. For this reason it is fundamental to learn the differences of each single cultures and how these affect people's behavior.
- II. *Understand and create an effective communication system with people from different cultures*: every culture perceives the environment in a unique way, understanding how followers perceive the leader's guidelines can be useful for leading across cultures.
- III. *Understand how the diversity can be an advantage, pointing out the positive aspects of each culture and avoiding the negative ones*: Chinese or Thai leaders/followers acts in a totally different way respect the European ones. A leader can emphasize the positive aspects of different cultures creating synergies within a multicultural team.

Finally it is important to be aware that changing a culture is a hard challenge, what can be done more easily, it is to cooperate with a culture and changing some behaviour that does not represents the cultural core values but they are only consequences of it. Kim H. Krisco argued: *“when people talk about cultural change, what they really want is behaviour change. When someone talks about changing the culture, what most people hear is changing core beliefs, which is nearly impossible”* (1997, pp. 110).

History teaches that most of the forced cultural changes have been a failure and often they have also led discontent within the population. For instance, one example has been the *“italianizzazione”* (italianization), as a consequence of the *“Treaty of Saint Germain”* that declared the unification of South Tyrol to Italy, at the end of the First World War (Di Nolfo, 2000). Despite these territories had always been Austrians; after 1919 they were subject to a profound cultural revolution starting from the change of the name from South Tyrol to Alto Adige and the laws that prohibited German language in primary schools. Teachers, in response to these nationalist laws organized themselves, encouraged by the local population, in clandestine schools (*katakombenschule*) in an attempt to maintain their roots and culture.

Fig. 7: Leaders deal with cultures



Source: made by the author

To conclude I would like to highlight a reflection. The results of this dissertation indicate that leadership styles are strongly influenced by the local culture and habits. The Thai case study showed the multiple similarities existing between the Thai culture and the dominant model of leadership in Thailand. It can therefore be argued that, in order to manage an organization, carefully learning about the local culture can be necessary to know how to apply an effective leadership style in line with the local context.

In addition, it is also possible to claim that leaders of multicultural organizations can also use a similar approach to face difficulties when leading different national cultures. Indeed, leaders who have to deal with different cultural backgrounds and interact with both followers and leaders of different origin could be more effective if prepared to deal with the different habits and values characterizing different cultures. An effective leader cannot ignore the knowledge of cultures. Being unfamiliar with local cultures in an international organization is not an acceptable excuse to justify a failure. Often, in fact, a failure is attributed to the lack of personal multicultural skills and abilities (Steers R. M. Et. al, 2010).

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8. APPENDIX

Conversations details and dates:

- Mr. Steven Bodley: the conversation was hold personally on March 8, 2014.
- Prof. Tuomo Rautakivi: the conversation was hold personally on March 22, 2014.
- Asst. Prof. Dr. Patchanee Taraseina: the conversation was hold personally on April 4, 2014.
- Mr. Soklin Suon: the conversation was hold personally on March 16, 2014.
- Son Dhammiko: the conversation was hold personally on March 25, 2014.
- Maha Vera Mahavero (Phra Kroo Soravichai): the conversation was hold personally on March 25, 2014.