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COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE VALUES OF THAILAND

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Superstition & Supernature as Opposed to Work Ethic

The major deep-rooted cause and most common motivation behind every underdeveloped country is always superstition and supernature. Fantastic marvellous literature of supernatural and superhuman deeds abounds : driving force at work is always divine justice ; solution or ending of a novel or a movie is always through an unseen mysterious power or anything besides Man's doing.

Likewise in real life, lottery, horse gamble and the make-a-wish are an order of the day. A person sets his eye on having a windfall by inheriting a fortune from his ancestors, or winning the lottery without doing any work or

exercising his brain in improving his performance. He either waits for good fortune to come his way and makes a wish to a sacred shrine, the Erawan Phra Phrom or a Buddhist monk, or consults an astrologer. A student preparing for a university entrance exam or planning to go abroad, a civil servant eyeing a long-delayed promotion, a woman wanting to be some well-heeled fellow's wife, a would-wed couple or their parents all invariably make a wish and consult the star and the auspicious time. The great moments in life, birth, wedding, house building, funeral and foundation stone laying have to be meticulously planned to assure good luck and prosperity. This is done regardless of practicality, common sense, extortionate expenses and untold inconvenience not only to oneself but also to others.

This belief that man's destiny is in God's or the mysterious power's hand contrasts with the Western 'man controls his own destiny'. In Western Literature, the ending or final solution is brought about by man solving the problem : any shortcomings or obstacles lying in his way or hindering whatever he wants to achieve are overcome through his own doing. In the 19th century U.S.A., depicted in films and in reality, life was hard and miserable when man was pitched against first the inclement elements, later the encroaching industrialization, urbanization and human contention. For to copy a developed country it is best to copy it before it became developed or industrialized ; to copy materialism in full bloom blinds us to toil, hardship and sacrifice which engender prosperity.

Work ethic, prime mover in a developed country, brings in its wake production, competition, invention and the practice of 'trial and error' and the 'survival of the fittest'. People do not hesitate to change or to try out new things, fearless of mistakes, since mistakes the best lessons for development teach them their weaknesses and strengths and what is right and wrong. Westerners or developed countries' citizens enter an open competition in which the physically and intelligently fittest are winners.

The good examples of work ethic can also be found in Japan, China and Korea. In Japan, even monks and children in the family cannot get their allowances if they do not work. The Chinese practise of slaving the whole year with the only holiday and fun time on the Chinese New Year days is lost on the Thai fun lovers without attempt at imitation. In fact tales abound of the Chinese coming to Thailand 'with only a pillow and a mat' to their name who after ten years turn into millionaires cutting respectable figures in high society. And of a destitute Chinese family watching a hung salted fish, eating simple boiled rice, feeding on the appetite of watching the fish without touching it, before they are off on another round of work.

Connectionism and Seniority as Opposed to Merit

A bane in Thai society, connectionism is the main way by which people are admitted in schools, jobs and are promoted or carry out their business. Usually this rule of thumb operates in such a way that a person, after earning a Master's degree from the U.S.A., is given a job or promotion because he is a friend, a cousin, next of kin, a friend's friend, relative's friend and so on.

Civil service promotions are entirely based on seniority alone : on paper criteria are seniority and performance but in actual practice only seniority holds the sway. This results in many young officers are deprived of key positions which badly need speedy execution and quick decision-making. This anachronistic chronic ill is totally illogical for two counts : a human best performs both physically and mentally at the age of the age of 25-45 ; second the older the human is the more averse to change he grows and the worse he performs. In order to optimize performance, changes are necessary and the more options or alternatives there are open the better the operation will be.

Their substitute, merit, means the best man is in control, to be judged by his knowledge, knowhow and ability to get things done regardless of his age or upbringing. Bureaucracy, like business, has to get the most result or output out of the lowest input or cost. Consequently, the job and assignment has to go to the best suitable man who does his job well and gives the greatest return in the operation in terms of money or otherwise.

Many cases in point come to mind : a gold medallist or winning athlete has recently become younger than in the past. Muhammad Ali was the Olympic gold medallist at 19 ; woman tennis Champion Chris Evert caused such a stir and won such a wide acclaim on the sports scene also at 19 ; Saensak Muengsurin became world champion at 23. In the academic field many American professors are in the 30s ; in political leadership and statesmanship Jimmy Carter, Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt were comparatively young in their 40s when they first came to power or started the ascent to their eminence.

The leave-it-to-chance contrasted with the developed country's 'man controls his own destiny' produces a lot of phenomena in the Thai lives. Since life is transient and this present life is a mere fleeting moment in the universal order ours, according to this thinking, is not to do things, to take action or control nature. The Thai--with some exceptions--does not want to solve problems and likewise does not bother to take any initiative on any incident.

To this is added one's personal merit sprung from one's previous existence and thus one's suffering is one's own doing from in the past and no use anyone else doing anything about it. Since the citizen's privation, suffering and injustice is interpreted as results from his own actions in his past lives, it is not becoming anyone else and the government to raise any hue or cry, come to his rescue or to take any action to remedy that evil. Result : the government is not so much concerned with the value of life of its citizens ; there is no guarantee of

decent life and equal opportunity to strike out a bright future and self-improvement for its citizens. Three things very basic and the first priorities in developed countries are not given attention by the government in a South East Asian developing country : housing, schooling and hospital. In Thailand for the last 20 years only few government schools have been added : schooling like housing is left to the private sector, which operates both of them for profits.

In light of Thailand remaining in the bottom 40 countries among the 150 countries on earth, it is of necessity like it is or not that change we must at all cost. By change is meant mainly attitude and the people's sense of value. In this computer world of lightning communication, we have to trade and contact with other countries. It is necessary that in both politics and business we have not only to search ourselves and know our own minds but also know what the others think or what move they are going to make. If we are not equal to them in mentality, way of thinking and problem solutions, how can we survive in this world of international contacts, this world of traumatic constant competition ? We shall definitely be infinitely exploited and conned and shall lose to others in political dealings and business transactions alike.

We must Change

Of paramount importance, work ethic has to supplant superstition and luck : nobody can be successful in life without hard work, determination and sacrifice. This is substantiated by a myriad examples of individuals and countries. A self-made millionaire has reached the pinnacle of his life through sweats, toil and brain. Every developed country, Japan, Israel, the U.S.A., England and Germany has enriched and industrialized itself through its people's hard work, perseverance, trial and errors, fortitude and competition.

Commerce and international relations have at their services more and more complex and intricate machineries which able, resourceful and expert men are

needed to operate. This new generation of men do not only have to be familiar with their systems and operation procedures, but have also to know for what purposes such systems and machineries are formulated and manufactured in the first place. Natural resources play a second role to human resource in national development : many countries like Israel and Japan have nothing in comparison with Thailand in terms of natural resources but beat her manifold in human resource.

Even oil rich Arab countries took stock of themselves only nine years ago, when they pited their wits against the white exploiters by nationalizing oil refineries and then jacking up prices tenfold. The Arab oil, a good case in point to illustrate superiority of human quality over wealth, is that oil has been there underground for centuries and has for a long time been dug up and sold by white capitalists who got a lion's share of the profit. It was not until after 20 years that wise Arabs began to put two and two together and renegotiate the benefit more than the foreigners. The pioneer and first mastermind in this connection is no other worthy person than the Harvard graduated Sheikh Yamani, the current Saudi Arabian Oil Minister.

Our 'wait and see' attitude has to change to the 'do or die'; the sideline observer's role has to swop with the 'in the thick of things' participant's and the man of action's. Examples have shown that through procrastination and wait-and-see, we ruin many projects and lose many markets. We lost the markets in the Middle East and China ; we fail miserably in negotiations and deals with Japan on bilateral trade.
