

## Chapter 1: Introduction to Thai Society

### Outlines:

- A Society Living in Harmony amidst Diversity
- Thai Society: Hierarchy, Status, Class, Hi-So Culture and The Patron-client System

### A Society Living in Harmony amidst Diversity

A nation with a long and rich history, Thailand has preserved its unique identity and traditions over the centuries, while also welcoming diverse cultures reaching its shores as the Kingdom increased its contacts with the outside world. Thai people are well-known for their friendliness, generosity and tolerance, regardless of gender, race and faith.

Thailand has a population of around 65 million, consisting of around 80 percent Thais, 10 percent Chinese and 3 percent Malays. The rest are minorities, including the Mons, Khmers and various hill tribes people. There are five major religions currently observed. Around 89 per cent of Thais are Buddhists of the Theravada tradition. Muslims are the second largest religious group in Thailand at around 10 per cent. Christians, mainly Catholics, represent 0.7 per cent of the population. There is also a small but influential community of Sikhs in Thailand and some Hindus living in the country's cities who are mostly engaged in retail commerce, in addition to a small Jewish community dating back to the 17th century. All these groups live in harmony and enjoy freedom to practice their respective beliefs, as guaranteed by the country's constitution. His Majesty the King, while a Buddhist, is a patron of all religions.

Underpinned by eight centuries of chronicled history that is rich in tradition going back beyond that, Thai cultural heritage is a blend of customs, from the Siamese royal court and historical tributary principalities to distinctive regional folklore. Thai culture has also been influenced by religious tenets, largely inspired by Theravada Buddhism, but also incorporating a great deal of Indian, Chinese, Khmer and other traditions from the rest of Southeast Asia and beyond. Culture, arts and religions have been upheld on the basis of freedom and integration. This has allowed the country to remain open to the outside world, ready to adopt innovations that benefit society. Culture is recognized as an

important element of the Kingdom's social fabric and its dynamic economy, enabling all citizens to uphold their virtues, to live together peacefully and to continually adapt to change.

### Thai Society

- Neither a static nor a revolutionary society, Thailand has always been able to harness the talents of its people, make effective use of its natural environment, and progress at an evolutionary pace. The tendency of the Central Thai—for centuries the controlling group in Thai society—to eliminate or suppress ethnic or religious differences was tempered by the Chakkri Dynasty, which had, for the most part, fostered toleration since assuming the monarchy in 1782. [Source: Library of Congress]
- Another traditional system of complex values and behaviors that the majority of Thai share is Theravada Buddhism. Complementing the religion were beliefs and practices assuming the existence of several types of spirits (phi) whose behavior is supposed to affect human welfare. The Buddhism of the Thai villagers, and even of poorly educated monks, often differs substantially from the canonical religion.
- Although Thai society appears homogeneous, it actually represent a compromise among various groups, which, in order to preserve their own identity, accepted certain aspects of general Thai identity, or Ekkalak Thai. As in the past, in modern Thailand the basic social and communal structure are controlled by a power elite system comprising the monarchy, the military, and upper level bureaucrats. These groups have a symbiotic relationship with the economic and business community that strongly influence decision making. As a result of modern education and international influences, however, the composition of all parts of the elite system have changed.
- On a local level, villages and other small political divisions are led by a headman. Social control is exerted largely through the Buddhist value system and gossip. Clustered communities and open houses make it easy to eavesdrop on others. Disputes are more often settled with the help of monks than by headmen. Villages

are sometimes divided into different districts with several headmen having jurisdiction over one area. In many ways the temple is biggest unifier of a community.

### Thailand's Hierarchical Society

- Traditional Thai society is organized along lines of hierarchy and patronage by people who know their place and power is divided among cliques and fiefdoms.” Social interactions are often hierarchical and defined by patron–client relationships or *bunkun*, a depth of gratitude, often a between young people and elders. Hierarchy is based on age, occupation, wealth and residence, Peasant farmers have traditionally been at the bottom of the heap, with merchant and artisans above the, and government officials above them. The Buddhist clergy is viewed as a group apart. Although society is led by a relatively small group of powerful politicians, businessmen and military personnel, social class and ranked status are largely absent. There is a great amount of social mobility in Thai society.
- The stratification of upper, middle, and lower classes is mostly based on the past social hierarchy (*sakdina*) and the family's financial powers. This social stratification is no longer enforced by contemporary law, but its presence is recognized by most Thais. There is also a distinction between urban and rural Thais. Constituting a majority of the Thai population, people in the rural villages of Thailand have led more–simple lives rooted in rich traditions, with less interference from international cultures or capitalism. Urban Thailand, on the other hand, has gained its cultural richness from the diverse social classes, ethnicities, and international cultures. The rural/urban division is still highly salient to most Thais, even though the differences have become gradually smaller due to the media, improved communication and transportation, and the migration of rural Thais to find work in big cities. Among other changes, gender and sexuality in rural villagers today have been greatly adulterated by the urban cultural images through the ubiquitous popular media. [Source: *Encyclopedia of Sexuality: Thailand (Muang Thai)* by Kittiwut Jod Taywaditep, M.D., M.A., Eli Coleman, Ph.D. and Pacharin Dumronggittigule, M.Sc., late 1990s; [www2.huberlin.de/sexology/IES/Thailand](http://www2.huberlin.de/sexology/IES/Thailand)

- Social position and the age are decisive in determining the way Thais behave towards one another. Generally the oldest or socially highest ranking person receives the most respect. Many details in way people behave depends on the social status and /or the age of the people interacting. This is reflected in the family, among friends and at work. It also explains the power of authority and how favoritism, cronyism, corruption and undemocratic structures work in Thai society. Great emphasis is placed on maintaining harmonious relations and people go through great lengths not to ruin relation which one day could become important.
- Also important is avoiding conflicts. Jai yen (literally “cool heart”) is one of the highest "precepts" in Thailand. Behind it is the belief that things are unchangeable and there is no reason to get angry or excited about things you can't change. "Mai pen rai" (“it doesn't matter”) and the dictum "Don't do anything to me and I will do nothing to you." are also keys to avoiding conflicting, keeping face, being tolerant and maintaining harmony.

### Patron–Client System in Thailand

- Cutting across rural and national strata is the system of patron– client relationships that ties specific households or individuals together as long as both patron and client sees benefits in the arrangement. In many respects, the dynamics of political and economic life are comprehensible only in terms of patron–client relations. [Source: Library of Congress, 1987]
- The patron and client relationship is more significant in the daily life of many Thai than differences in status. This link between two specific persons requires the client to render services and other kinds of support in return for protection, the use of the patron's influence on the client's behalf, and occasional favors or financial aid. The basic pattern is old, but the relationship has evolved from a social one with economic overtones to one in which economic transactions and political support are more important].
- At the village level, it is not necessary to be rich to have a client, although a wealthy family was likely to have more than one client. It is possible for an ordinary peasant (although not a landless one) to provide limited benefits to

someone less fortunate in return for certain services. Often such a relationship is arranged between kin. In the modern era, however, it is the wealthy villager who can provide benefits and expect, even demand, certain services from his client.

- In principle, a patron–client relationship lasts only so long as both parties gained something from it, and the relationship could be broken at the option of either. Often, however, the client has few alternatives and remains in the relationship in the hope of eliciting more benefits than had hitherto been forthcoming. To the extent, however, that prestige and power accrues to the person (or family) who can retain a large number of clients, the patron is motivated to provide benefits to those dependent on him.
- The patron–client relationship also links villagers and persons at other levels of the social, political, and economic orders: leading figures in the village, themselves patrons of others in the rural community, became clients of officials, politicians, or traders at the district or provincial levels. In such cases, clientship might reinforce the status of the rich villager who can, at least occasionally, call on his patron at a higher level for benefits that he might in turn use to bind his own clients to him. Just the fact that the rich villager is known to have a powerful patron outside the village could enhance his status.

### **Impact of the Patron–Client System on Thai Society**

- Most observers agreed that the patron–client relationship is pervasive in Thai society, not only at the village level but throughout the military and the bureaucracy. There is less agreement on its links to a class system and the degree to which the relationship was typically marked by social ties of affection and concern as opposed to a clearly calculated assessment of relative economic or political advantage. [Source: Library of Congress, 1987]
- Militating against solidarity, particularly at the upper and middle levels, is the continuing competition for political power and the access to economic opportunities and resources that flowed from such power. People competing for high–level positions in the military, the bureaucracy, or within the economy are engaged in a complex and shifting pattern of patron–client relationships. In this system, all but the individuals at the highest and lowest ends of a chain of such relationships are

simultaneously patrons to one or more others and clients to someone above them. A developing career is likely to put a person at different places in the chain at various stages.

- Given the fluctuations in the fortunes of individuals (to which the patron–client system contributes), patrons and clients, particularly at the higher levels, have to make judgments as to the benefits accruing to them from their relationship. Moreover, a client has to assess present and potential sources of power and the extent to which their support and services are reciprocated by the current or alternative patrons. It is not uncommon in this system for both patrons and clients to shift allegiances. Patrons often have several clients, but there are no real bonds between the clients of a single patron.

### Development of the Thai Social System

- The rural areas, where most Thai live, have been affected by change for many decades, especially since the mid–nineteenth century, when the impact of European economic and political activity was first felt. The full effects of change started to become manifest in the 1930s. Among the factors reflecting and creating change in local social patterns was the coup of 1932, which brought military and bureaucratic elites into power and extended the power of the central government more effectively than before into rural areas. More important in its cumulative effect, however, was the rapid growth of the population and the consequent shortage of land, which led to the development of occupations outside agriculture and the emergence of a rural and small–town bourgeoisie. [Source: Library of Congress]
- At the national level, society was stratified at the beginning of the twentieth century into three classes—kin of the reigning king and his immediate predecessors, government officials (often nobles granted their particular status by the king), and, by far the largest group, the peasantry. These classes comprised a social system in which those who had political power and status also had prestige and access to wealth. Buddhist monks had a special status outside this system.

Also outside the system were the Chinese, who were largely laborers and small traders in the early twentieth century.

- As the twentieth century progressed, the government bureaucracy proliferated. A growing number in the higher ranks had their origins outside the hereditary nobility, as did the upper ranks of the expanding armed forces. By the 1960s, the military and the bureaucracy included persons from several levels of the social and economic hierarchy. Directly or indirectly, the military and bureaucratic elites disposed of power and economic resources, the latter often in combination with those Chinese who controlled the major business enterprises of Thailand.
- Hereditary nobles retained high status, but they no longer wielded power and did not match some of the members of the military oligarchy in wealth. Monkhood remained a source of special status and was an avenue of social mobility for persons of rural origin with talent and a willingness to give part or all of their lives to the sangha; but monkhood was less and less attractive to urbanites or to those who had access to other avenues to power, wealth, and status. After World War II, an incipient urban middle class and an urban proletariat also emerged, particularly in Bangkok, partly in response to a commercial and tourist boom generated by the presence of large numbers of foreigners, particularly Americans.
- Still outside the social system, in the sense that their direct access to political power was restricted and that their sense of a worthwhile career differed from that of most Thai, were the Chinese. Members of other non-Thai ethnic groups could occasionally make a place for themselves in the middle or upper reaches of Thai society by assimilating Thai culture. The Chinese were less able to do so until the 1960s and 1970s, when they began to move into the upper bureaucracy in larger numbers.

### Class and Status in Thailand

- Although in the 1980s the hierarchy of social status or prestige and the hierarchy of political and economic power in the rural community overlapped, a disjunction of sorts existed between them at the national level. A rich villager—other things being equal—wielded political and economic power and had prestige. In the national system, the hierarchy of status began with the hereditary nobility—the royal family and the holders of royal titles. None of these people were poor; the royal family owned much land and some of its members had political influence. The royal family was not part of the ruling class, however, nor did it control the economy. The ruling class consisted of several levels, the uppermost of which comprised the military and, to a lesser extent, the bureaucratic elite. [Source: Library of Congress.
- In general, the Thai accorded high status to those who wielded power, and the prestige accorded the highest bureaucrats was consistent with a historical pattern, even if in modern times these bureaucrats were rarely members of the royal family. Whether the position of the military was fully legitimated in the eyes of most Thai was uncertain. The military was given deference, but it was not clear that its members were freely accorded esteem.
- Below the military and bureaucratic elites were those in high government posts who performed the tasks requiring considerable knowledge, technical competence, or simply experience in the ways of bureaucracy. Like the bureaucratic elites, these upper middle level bureaucrats were well educated, often holding undergraduate or graduate degrees from foreign universities. From the point of view of the Thai, such officeholders had much prestige even if they were not the primary wielders of power.
- Positions at the highest levels of the military and the bureaucracy brought very good incomes to those holding them. Often these positions provided access to other sources of income, including large landholdings and other real estate, or participation in the actual ownership of businesses, often in conjunction with Chinese businessmen. With some exceptions, the latter exercised day-to-day control of financial, commercial, and industrial organizations and institutions.



### Chinese and Class and Status in Thailand

- The social status of the Chinese economic elite has traditionally been ambiguous. After World War II, a limited number of Chinese business families, who had begun as middlemen financing aspects of agricultural production and marketing, became bankers and industrial and commercial entrepreneurs. These families had considerable economic power, and they clearly influenced some political decisions through the Thai military and bureaucrats with whom they had connections. Whether the Thai in general granted them the prestige ordinarily given to those holding high posts in government was another matter. [Source: Library of Congress]
- These Chinese businessmen should be distinguished from the many Thai in the military and the civil bureaucracy who had Chinese ancestry. In many cases, this Chinese ancestry was several generations removed. In any case, such individuals were considered Thai, operated chiefly in a Thai social and cultural milieu, and were evaluated on the same social scale as other Thai.
- Until the 1970s, persons who were fully Chinese entered the bureaucracy only at the middle levels or, if higher, as technical staff. This was in part a matter of Thai policy, in part a matter of Chinese orientation. The Chinese were not indifferent to political power or administrative skill as desirable qualities or as sources of prestige, but they adapted to the limits imposed by their minority status. Within the Chinese community there was a hierarchy of political influence, and there were organizations (ranging from chambers of commerce to community groups and mutual aid societies) in which Chinese had the opportunity to exercise their power and skills. Even there, however, political power and prestige flowed to those who had been successful as entrepreneurs, whereas among the Thai, achievement in the military or the bureaucracy preceded access to significant economic opportunities or resources. Chinese in the economic elite who moved into important positions in Chinese-centered organizations or, occasionally, other organizations, not only gained prestige within the Chinese community but also became the links between that community and Thai elites, particularly with respect to the establishment of economic ties.

- By the early 1970s, significant numbers of Chinese had been admitted to the higher bureaucracy. According to one analyst, they held roughly 30 percent of the posts in the special grades (upper ranks) at that time. Presumably they were the sons and daughters of wealthy entrepreneurs and had acquired the higher education necessary for admission to the bureaucracy's upper ranks.

### Different Classes in Thailand

- According to the Library of Congress in the 1980s: “Below the hereditary nobility and the ruling class was a socially and occupationally heterogeneous middle class that emerged in the years after World War II, especially after 1960. Its members were diverse with respect to their control over wealth, their social status, and their access to power. The simplest distinction within this amorphous category was based partially on income and partially on occupation, but subcategories thus drawn were rather mixed. The wealthier segment of this middle class (for convenience, the upper middle class) consisted of bureaucrats and military men at middle levels (including higher provincial officials), salaried administrative and managerial workers in private enterprise, middle-level businessmen, provincial notables and landlords living in provincial towns, and professionals. A much larger group, the petty bourgeoisie, comprised those who provided a range of services, largely in Bangkok, to the ruling class, the upper middle class, and to tourists and other foreigners. Often this petty bourgeoisie consisted of small-scale independent businessmen, some of them shop owners, others furnishing their services contractually. Some were salaried clerical staff. Both upper and lower segments of this middle category include many Chinese as well as Thai. [Source: Library of Congress]
- In the Thai scale of values, higher prestige tended to be accorded to those in government employment and perhaps to those in the professions. The private sector as a source of substantial income was a relatively new idea to the Thai, however, and their scale of values might change as an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie began seeking to have its status validated. In any case, the elements in the upper segment of this middle category could be said to share the same outlook and values or the same political status implied in the notion of class. The position of

bureaucrats and notables (middle-level businessmen and landowners) who lived in provincial towns was of particular interest. On their home ground they exercised considerable power, formally and informally, but they owed this power at least in part to their connections, usually as clients to patrons in Bangkok, although they in turn had clients at lower levels.

- There was also a lower urban stratum, but this too was heterogeneous. On the one hand, there were the more or less steady wage workers in commercial and industrial enterprises, mainly in Bangkok (and in mining outside Bangkok). On the other hand, there were large numbers of persons, like the wage workers, often from rural areas, who had no steady work and sought to eke out a living by offering their services as unskilled labor.
- There were two other urban groups that were not part of the status hierarchy. Just as the monks of a village Wat were outside the local rural system of stratification but enjoyed a special status, so too was the hierarchy of the sangha, the highest elements of which were located in Bangkok. Within the monkhood, the supreme patriarch and the Council of Elders exercised considerable authority, and they were given a great deal of deference by laymen, even those in the royal family and the ruling class. They did not have significant power outside the sangha, although some monks have had a substantial impact on politics.
- Also outside the urban status hierarchy--but sometimes with higher incomes than those in the upper middle class and themselves requiring the services of those in the lower middle category--were the many men and women engaged in illegal activities that were nonetheless countenanced or protected. Among them were prostitutes, pimps, and narcotics dealers. In the mid-1980s, the number of women in Bangkok estimated to be engaged in prostitution or in related services ranged from 100,000 to 1 million. Some observers noted that prostitution was firmly entrenched in modern Thailand as a result of historical, economic, and social factors. The majority of Bangkok prostitutes were rural migrants providing economic support to relatives back in the country, which was expected of Thai daughters within the extended stem family system. In other words, Thai prostitutes were not fleeing from a family background or rural society that oppressed women in conventional ways but were engaging in an entrepreneurial

move designed to sustain the family units of the rural economy, which had come under increasing pressure. Since these women usually did not reveal the source of their remittances back to the village, their families could retain or gain status based upon their earnings.

### Modernization and Changes in Thai Society

- As Thailand became more active in world trade and the international community in general, the traditional practice of measuring status by the extent of landholdings became less meaningful. Although the Buddhist sangha (monastic community) and the royal family remained the largest landholders, they were no longer the richest elements in society. Their wealth was often surpassed by that of members of the business community and the bureaucracy (including the military), who derived their growing affluence from diverse sources. [Source: Library of Congress]
- Commerce and other economic endeavors had always had a place in Thai society, but it was only in the late twentieth century that income derived by means other than landholding became socially acceptable. In modern Thailand, entrepreneurs, educated civil servants, and career military officers were all accepted into the elite ranks. This expansion of the ruling elite was reflected in the growing influence of elected members of the National Assembly. More kinds of people had the opportunity to participate in the shaping of Thai society after 1973; however, the gap continued to widen between rich and poor.
- As it made the transition from less developed country to industrialized state, Thailand often was cited as one of the success stories of the Third World. Although Thailand benefited from modernization, being a rapidly developing nation was not without problems and costs. One problem related to increased urbanization and a growing market economy was the heightened desire for more consumer products at the expense of locally made goods, services, and recreational activities. The growing incidence of violent crime, divorce, prostitution, and drug addiction also could be attributed in part to increased urbanization. Modernization was also changing the traditional ways by which individual Thai improved their economic and social condition. A university education, for example, used to virtually guarantee financial betterment; by the late 1980s, however, large numbers of

liberal arts graduates were either unemployed or underemployed. Modernization also hurt the rural Thai. Previously, their access to housing, forests, and usable water sources had been a given. By the 1980s, however, environmental destruction and a growing scarcity of arable land made it increasingly difficult for the rural Thai to be relatively independent of the government.

- Another cost of modernization was loss of security by some, including the elderly and Thailand's Buddhist monks, who previously had had an assured place in Thai society. Care of and respect for the elderly had once been the responsibility of the immediate or extended family, but by the 1980s Thailand was beginning to build public and private senior citizen centers. Before World War II, the local monks and the sangha had been the main source of advice and information; in the 1980s, civil servants were often better equipped to attend to the needs of the people in an increasingly urban society.

### **Social Mobility in Thailand**

- The expansion of the bureaucracy and the military and the movement of the Thai into a rapidly growing private sector created opportunities for social mobility, although the major part of the population remained rural workers or moved into low-level occupations in the urban labor force. Associated with upward mobility, given the Thai orientation toward bureaucratic careers, was the availability of education. Expansion of education facilities beyond the secondary level occurred in the early 1970s. In 1961, for example, about 42,000 full-time and part-time students were enrolled in 6 higher education institutions, but by 1972 there were roughly 72,000 in more than a dozen institutions. The oldest and most prestigious universities, such as Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, and Mahidol, were in Bangkok. Many students attended universities outside Thailand, but these were more likely to be the children of Thai or Chinese who had already attained a fairly high socioeconomic position. [Source: Library of Congress]
- Education was necessary for entry into the bureaucracy, but other capabilities or characteristics, including political reliability and involvement in the patron-client system, also played a part in upward mobility within the bureaucracy. In the

military, the system played perhaps a greater role than education. Military expertise as such did not seem to be an important consideration.

- The sangha offered a special avenue of social mobility to some of the sons of the peasants at the base of Thailand's socioeconomic pyramid. Positions in the upper tiers were filled by examination, and monks were offered higher education at two Buddhist universities (Mahachulalongkorn and Mahamongkut), which by the 1960s included significant secular components in their curricula. The Buddhist education system provided support for its talented students through the highest level; access to these opportunities by villagers might reflect the declining interest among the urban classes and the provincial middle group in a career in the sangha. The social mobility achieved through the sangha was not necessarily limited to those who were lifetime monks. Monks who left the sangha in their thirties and forties could legitimately enter other careers, and their education and experience in the sangha were helpful.
- By the mid-1970s, the number of aspirants to the bureaucracy with undergraduate and even graduate degrees had begun to exceed the number of openings. Moreover, the economy was no longer expanding as it had in the 1960s and early 1970s. Opportunities for upward mobility had lessened in the early 1980s, and children of families already established in the upper or middle reaches of the socioeconomic system were able to maintain their head start in a system that was no longer growing so rapidly.

### Hi-So Culture in Thailand

- What's hi-so? "Not that easy to define anymore," says Thailand Tatler editor-in-chief Naphalai Areesorn. "In the past it used to be the family you come from which set your social status," she explains. "And in Thailand – which is a country with a royal family – we have established families that can trace their line way back to the initial days of the Chakri dynasty." Now, Naphalai continues, there's new money – especially during the Thaksin Shinawatra days when many Thais became rich. And there's the social climber. Usually they are the wannabes who incessantly patronise high society functions and get themselves photographed ceaselessly (because they are eccentric or dress outstandingly) and then sort of

get themselves into the hi-so circle, although their “background is not quite what it should be”]

- For a description of a hi-so, return to the first page of The Nation’s search result and click on the article “Two women take over husbands’ political roles”, which was published on Jan 12. Towards the end, the article states: “Pojaman (Damapong – her maiden name, which she reverted to after divorcing Thaksin Shinawatra) might look like any rich madam with her big hairstyle, neatly cut dress and designer handbag. “She also loves to shop at upscale department stores. But what makes her stand out from the hi-so crowd is the strong political network she has built since the premiership of her husband.”
- Well, the days of big hairdos are gone. The khunying (Thai slang for a woman which Lonely Planet characterises as having “Imelda Marcos helmet hairdos, jewel-toned Thai silk and thick pancake make-up”) has now gone modern. “The khunyings have lowered the height of their hair,” adds Naphalai, who joined Thailand Tattler as a contributing editor when the magazine was launched 17 years ago.
- Being a hi-so comes with a certain look. “Don’t forget, within this crowd, there is a lot of keeping up with the Joneses. If you – especially a hi-so wannabe – want to be accepted by them, you have to look like them,” explains Naphalai, who is the perfect source to give the low-down on Thai high society. Designer dress is a must. “If it is not designer wear, then it must be (made of) Thai silk,” she adds. A must-have accessory is designer handbags – at the least, Hermes’ Kelly or Birkin. But it is not all about international designer labels. The in-thing is high-end made-in-Thailand labels such as Asava (a new brand by a designer who is in the hi-so circle), Disaya or Munchu’s.
- Ostentatiousness separates the Thai hi-so from her southern counterpart, the Malaysian socialite. Thai hi-so tends to be more ostentatious, observes Naphalai, who is familiar with the Malaysian social scene as she lived in Kuala Lumpur in the 1960s when her father was Bangkok Bank manager. “Thais tend to show off. Malaysians – and I know some very wealthy Malaysian Chinese – don’t seem to care so much about having to put up with appearances,” she observes. “The wealth is there but Malaysians do not have the need to display their wealth.”

- How ostentatious is the Thai hi-so? She's dripping with the biggest stones in a social function that does not require her to wear all the jewellery in her safety box. "When one piece of jewellery is enough to draw attention, there are people who wear jewellery on their ears, neck, wrists, fingers ... everywhere," laments Naphalai. "In Thailand being frugal is not always considered a positive value." Eeeem, sounds like the Mak Datins (who are Malaysia's equivalent of the khunyings). The other difference is that Malaysian socialites are less fashionable than their Thai counterparts. KLites tend to dress more simply than Bangkokians, notes Naphalai, who does not consider herself a hi-so. A hi-so, she adds, is very quick to own the latest trend so that she can wear it and show it off"

**Reference:**

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