

UNIT 1

Thai Social Values and Beliefs

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Explain key Thai social values in English
- Describe major Thai beliefs to foreigners
- Use appropriate language functions to express cultural concepts and give examples
- Present information about Thai values and beliefs clearly and confidently

Warm-Up activities

Activity A: Answer the following questions.

1. What values are important in Thai society?

2. How do Thai people show respect?

3. What makes Thai culture different from Western culture?

4. Can you think of examples of Thai social values in daily life?

Vocabulary Study

Activity B: Match each term with definition.

Term	Definition
1. Kreng jai	a. Peaceful and cooperative relationships
2. Hierarchy	b. Being considerate of others
3. Dignity	c. System of ranking people
4. Harmony	d. Self-respect and honor
5. Monarchy	e. National pride
6. Superstition	f. A deep respect for the Royal Family
7. Patriotism	g. Welcoming and friendly
8. Generosity and hospitality	h. Connected to the belief of ghosts and spirits

Activity C: Complete these sentences with vocabulary words from activity B.

1. Thai people practice _____ by not asking for help directly.
2. _____ for elders is very important in Thai culture.
3. Thai society has a clear social _____ based on age and position.
4. Thai culture values group _____ over individual needs.
5. Thailand is a land of _____. It is customary for people to consult a fortune teller or monk for an auspicious date.

Reading

Thai society is built on several important values that guide people's behavior and relationships. These values create a unique culture that may be different from Western cultures.

Respect and Hierarchy

Respect is the most fundamental value in Thai culture. Thai people show respect to those who are older, have higher social positions, or are more educated. This creates a clear social hierarchy where everyone knows their place. For example, students must show respect to teachers, younger siblings must respect older siblings, and employees must respect their bosses. This respect is shown through language, body language, and behavior. Thai people use different words and tones when speaking to seniors versus peers.

Kreng Jai: A Unique Thai Concept

"Kreng jai" is a Thai word that has no direct English translation. It means being considerate of others and not wanting to cause them trouble or discomfort. Thai people practice kreng jai in many situations. For instance, a Thai person might not ask for help even when they need it because they feel kreng jai about bothering someone. They might also refuse an invitation at first, even if they want to accept it, out of kreng jai. This value sometimes makes Thai people indirect in their communication.

Saving Face and Dignity

Thai people place great importance on "saving face" - avoiding embarrassment for themselves and others. Public criticism or confrontation is considered very inappropriate because it causes someone to "lose face." In Thai culture, if you disagree with someone, you should do it privately and politely. This value is closely connected to dignity. Thai people work hard to maintain their own dignity and help others maintain theirs.

Collectivism and Harmony

Unlike Western cultures that emphasize individualism, Thai culture is collectivist. This means that group needs and harmony are more important than individual desires. Thai people prefer to avoid conflict and maintain peaceful relationships. Family opinions are very important when making decisions. In Thai workplaces, team harmony is often valued more

than individual achievement. This value creates strong family and community bonds but can sometimes discourage people from speaking their own opinions.

These values shape every aspect of Thai life, from family relationships to business interactions. Understanding these values is essential for anyone who wants to communicate effectively with Thai people.

Activity D: True/False Statements

1. ___ Respect is the most fundamental value in Thai culture.
2. ___ “Kreng jai” is easy to translate into English.
3. ___ Thai people always say “no” directly when they disagree.
4. ___ Public criticism is acceptable in Thai culture.
5. ___ Thai culture values group harmony over individual success.
6. ___ Thai people use the same language with everyone.
7. ___ “Saving face” means avoiding embarrassment.
8. ___ Individualism is more important than collectivism in Thai culture.

Language Focus: How to explain Thai culture in English?

Function 1: Explaining Concepts

Pattern	Example
In Thai culture, ___ means ___	In Thai culture, “kreng jai” means being considerate of others.
___ is a concept that ___	“Saving face” is a concept that involves avoiding embarrassment.
___ refers to ___	Respect refers to showing honor to people of higher status.

Function 2: Giving Examples

Pattern	Example
For example, ___ For instance, ___	For example, Thai students stand up when teachers enter the classroom. For instance, younger people always “Wai” their elders first.
A good example of this is ___	A good example of this is how Thai people refuse offers several times before accepting.
You can see this when ___	You can see this when Thai people avoid saying “no” directly.

Function 1 + Function 2

- In Thai culture, “respect” means well-mannered to elders. For example, younger people must use polite language when speaking to elders.
- “Hierarchy” refers to young people should show respect towards elderly people. You can see this when staffs talk to their manager.

Activity E: Match each explanation with the best example.

Explanations:

- A. Thai people practice kreng jai
- B. Saving face is very important
- C. Thai culture emphasizes respect for elders
- D. Thai people value harmony
- E. Indirect communication is often used to preserve feelings.

Examples:

1. ____ Thai people avoid arguing in public places.
2. ____ Children use “kha/krab” when speaking to parents.
3. ____ People don’t criticize others in front of a group.
4. ____ Thai people may not ask for help even when they need it.
5. ____ Instead of saying a direct “No” to a party invitation, a friend says, “I am not sure yet, let me see if I can make it.”

Activity F: Create your own explanation.

1. Wai

2. Mai Pen Rai (It’s OK.)

3. Superstitions

4. Hospitality

5. Gratitude

Speaking Practice

Choose one of these topics to create advice for foreigners coming to Thailand.

- Meeting Thai people for the first time
- Working with Thai colleagues
- Visiting a Thai family
- Making Thai friends

Your advice should:

- Mention Thai values (respect, kreng jai, saving face, etc.)
- Explain WHY this advice is important
- Give specific examples

Discussion:

- What should foreigners do?
- What should they avoid doing?
- Why is this important in Thai culture?
- What might happen if they don't follow this advice?

Example Advice Format:

“When working with Thai colleagues, remember that Thai people value harmony. For example, don't criticize someone in front of others because it makes them lose face. Instead, give feedback privately and politely.”