

Thai Social Etiquette



Ministry of Culture

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Thai Social Etiquette



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Preface to the Third Edition

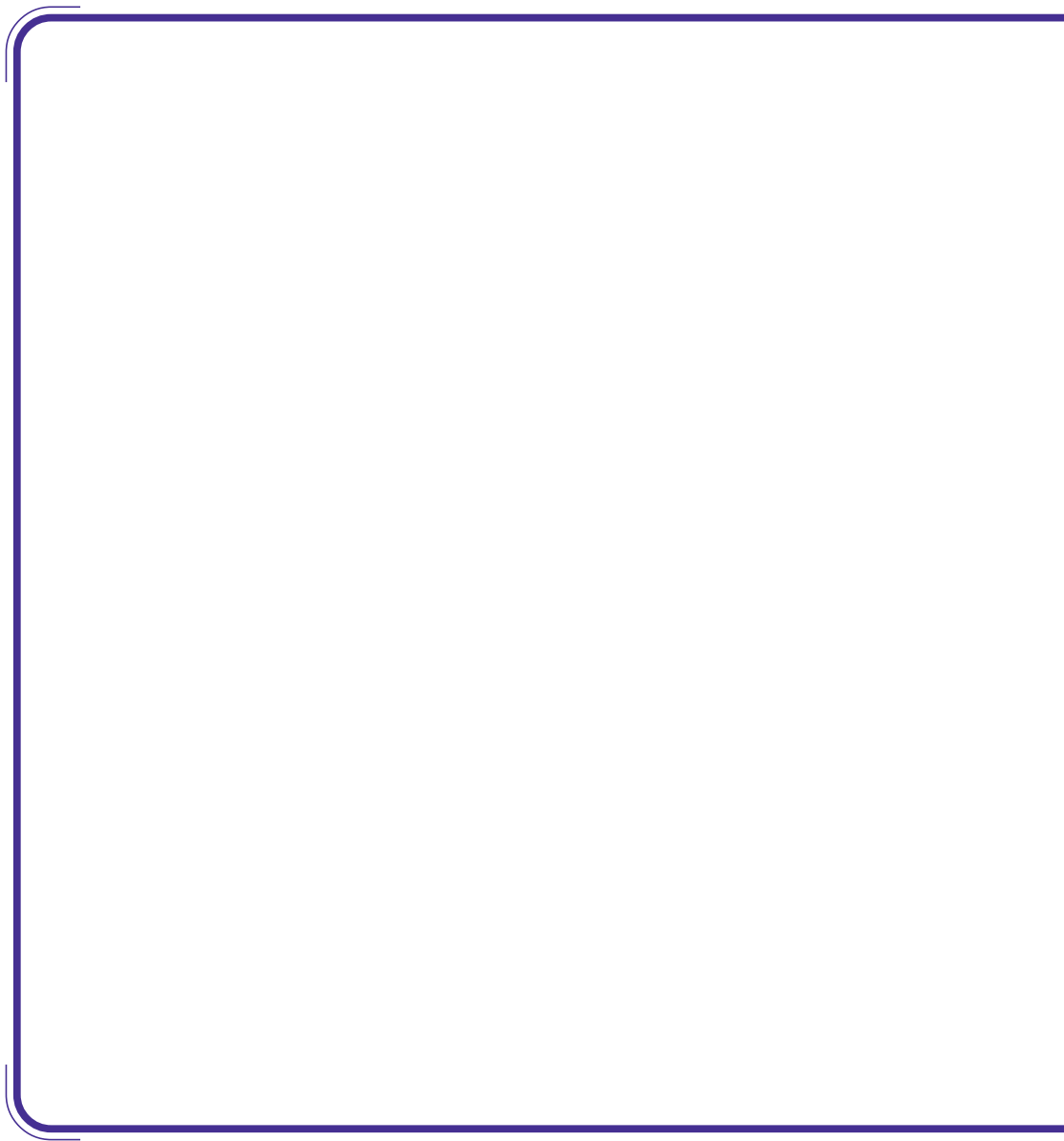
The success of the first and second edition of the book ‘Thai Social Etiquette’ enabled the Ministry of Culture to continue publishing the third edition with an aim to cover more readers in education, social and service industry sectors. The first and second edition published in 2004 and 2006 respectively with 3,000 copies in total were distributed worldwide and received good responses from the readers.

The book written by famous authors was based on information studied from published sources and old records. Its value was proved to be not simple task of writing and the result of untiring effort of the editorial working group. I feel it worth to mention and express my sincere appreciation to the editor, Khunying Maenmas Chavalit; the authors, Mrs. Pensri Kiengsiri, Mrs. Sudchit Bhinyoying and Assoc. Prof. Malithat Promathatavedi; and the cartoonist, Mr. Ohm Rachawej. My special thanks is extended to M.R. Chakrarot Chitrabongs, the former Permanent Secretary for Culture who rendered the full support in making the publication a success.

I do hope the book will be useful material for readers in focus for using as reference, understanding and consideration of the codes of conduct practiced in our society.



(Mr. Vira Rojpojchanarat)
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of culture



Preface to the Second Edition

I have great pleasure in presenting the second edition of the book of the Ministry of Culture ‘Thai Social Etiquette’ containing codes of conducts that visitors to Thailand should know. The success of the first edition of ‘Thai Social Etiquette’ clearly indicated that this book met an important need in making Thai value system globally known. The first edition published in 2004 with 2000 copies was very well received by the readers worldwide. Well-worn copies obviously justify the need for a second edition. The contents of the book remain much the same as in the first edition.

This book, designed to bring contemporary Thai behaviours to the attention of the general public, was written by famous authors based on information retrieved from published sources and old records. It is hoped that the book will provide useful reference material, particularly in respect of topics covered therein, and will help all the visitors to Thailand in prompt understanding, consideration and practice accordingly.

The writing of this book is no easy task. The effort that has gone into its preparation has been substantial. I would like to place on record my appreciation of the worthy work done by the editor, Prof. Kunying Maenmas Chavalit, the three authors, Mrs. Pensri Kiengsiri, Mrs. Sudchit Bhinyoying, Assoc. Prof. Malithat Promathatavedi and the cartoonist, Mr. Ohm Rachawej as well as staff members of the Ministry of Culture in the publication of this book. My particular thanks are due to M.R. Chakrarot Chitrabongs, Former Permanent Secretary, who has taken exceptional interest in making a success of this unique scheme. Any suggestions for its improvement will be highly appreciated as it will help the Ministry of Culture in improving its contents and presentation during the subsequent editions.



(Khunying Dhipavadee Meksawan)
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of culture

Preface

Social etiquette, written as well as unwritten, is a fundamental requirement for peaceful and sympathetic societies of all sizes and levels. Towards these ends, groups of persons - - from family size to communities, comprising a number of families, as well as ethnic cultures groups - - have created codes of conducts on relevant issues. Such codes, created by elders, religious leaders, and rulers, have been accepted and practised by the society members at large. Different communities, different societies, have had their own codes, which they expect outsiders to understand, to give due consideration, and finally to put into practice.

Thai societies have, since time immemorial, established codes of conduct to ensure cultural integration and stabilities. Such social etiquette has been, occasionally, revised to suit changing environments and to meet outside trends on social thoughts and behaviours. Some of these codes have been written, but many are verbal and transferred by demonstration and practice.

Since decades ago, places all over Thailand, not only Bangkok, have been attracting foreigners from all parts of the world, from ordinary tourists to scholars, business personnel, government officials, royal families, monarchs, prime ministers and presidents. To ensure smooth relationships between and among hosts and visitors, it is deemed necessary to publish this small book on Thai social etiquette for their information and consideration.

This book 'Thai Social Etiquette' is made possible by distinguished scholars and researchers namely Mrs. Pensri Kiengsiri, Mrs. Sudchit Bhinyoying, Assoc. Prof. Malithat Promathatavedi, and the members of the Committee on Publication of Books on Thai Social Etiquette. Their contribution is, hereby, acknowledged with much appreciation.



(M.R. Chakrarat Chitrabongs)

Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Culture

10 August 2004

Introduction

The book 'Thai Social Etiquette' is intended to inform visitors from abroad, as well as Thai persons who may come in contact with foreigners, to ensure them warm welcome, and to enable them to get an insight into Thai codes on social behaviours on various occasions and at different places.

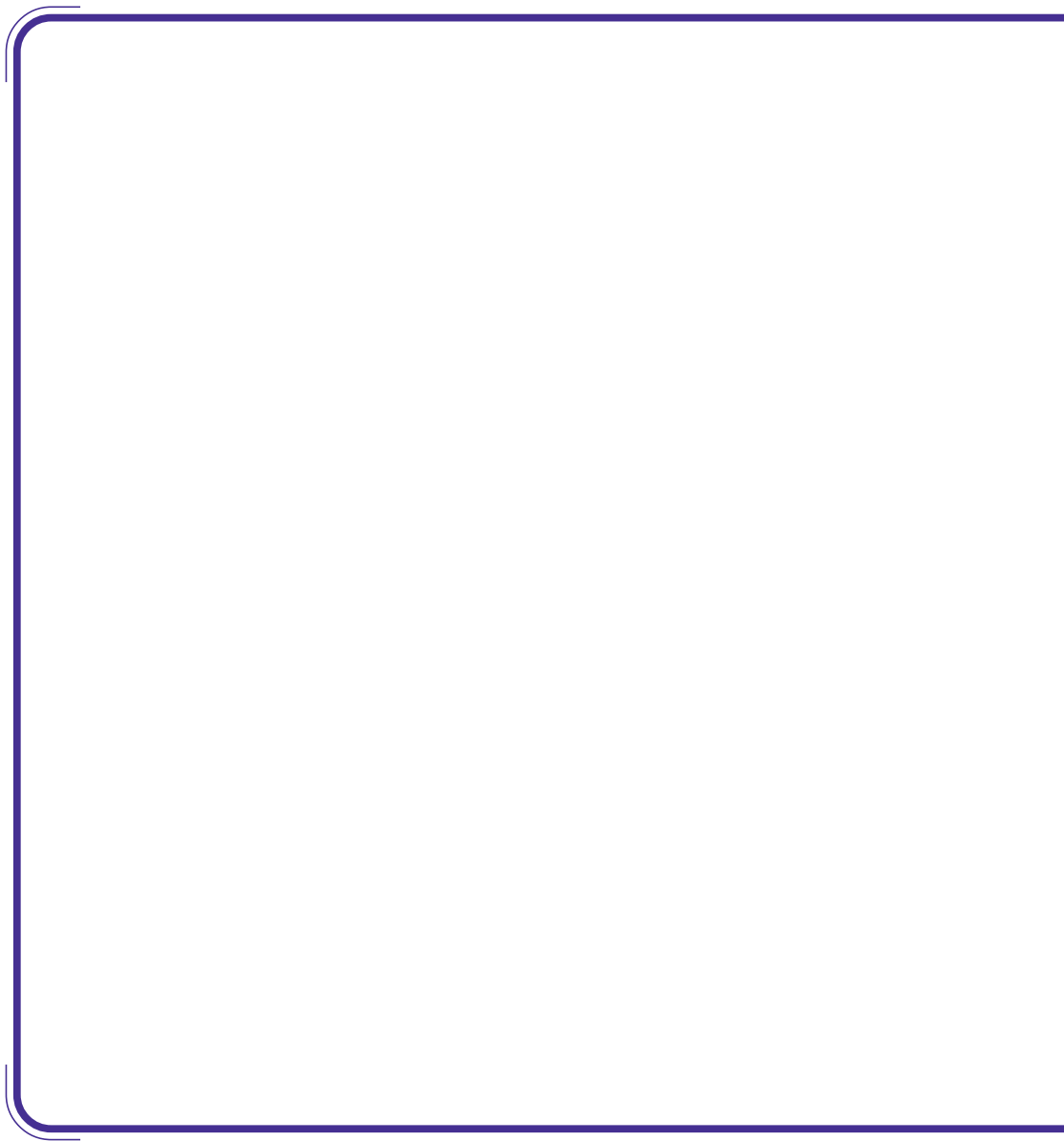
The book is divided into chapters, the subject matter of which ranges from greeting to everyday etiquette. It is intended, more or less, to be a manual, or guidelines of thinking, understanding and practising. It is suggested that recipients of this book read through the whole book first, in order to get inside the whole scenario and the dual roles of themselves as hosts and visitors, at different places and on different occasions.

Thus, whenever occasions require, each relevant chapter can be consulted. For example, when visiting a Buddhist temple and going inside the Ubosot or Chapel, *the 1st level wai* for the Buddha image (Chapter I Greeting) must be observed.

This book has not actually been created only to be read, but also to be observed and put into practice until some behaviour become, automatically, one's own natural thinking, awareness, words and behaviour. For example, Chapter VI Table Manners and Chapter VIII Everyday Etiquette should be observed at home first. Children should be taught and supervised to enable them to behave properly.

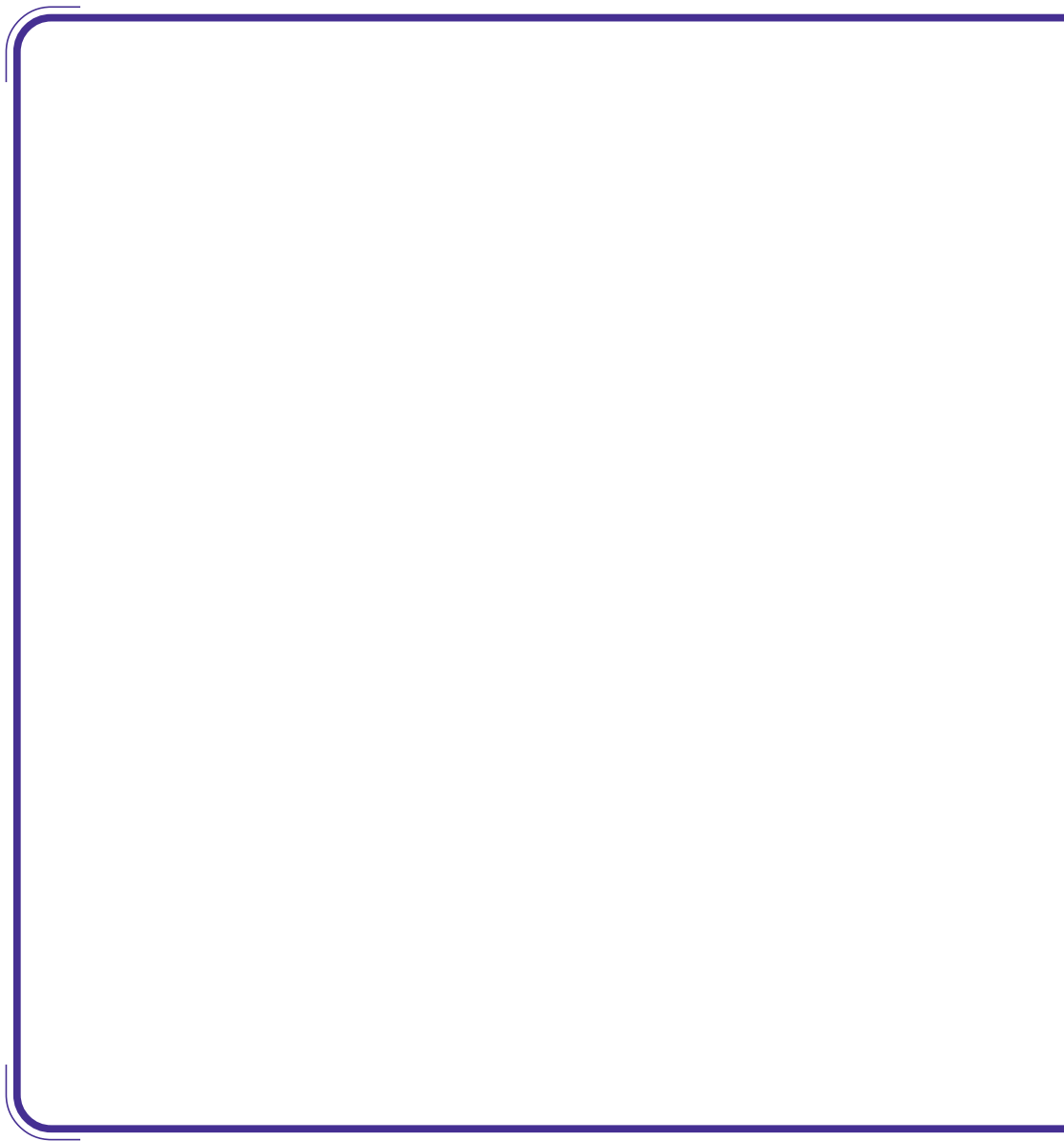


(Prof. Khunying Maenmas Chavalit)
Editor



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Chapter 1

Greeting

by Malithat Promathatavedi

Greeting

In Thailand, people in general greet one another with the word *Sawatdi*. This word can be used at all times of day. A male would add the word *krap* and a female the word *kha* after *Sawatdi* to show politeness. The word *Sawatdi* can also be used when taking leave of someone or saying good-bye.

If the persons are friends or about the same age, the word *Sawatdi* alone is sufficient for greeting. A *wai* is a gesture of pressing the palms together in the position of a budding lotus at chest level, with the fingertips touching the tip of the nose. There are three levels of *wai*.



fig. 1

1. For the Buddha images or the monks only

Raise the pressed palms until the thumbs touch the space between the eyebrows and the fingertips touch the hairline at the forehead. The tips of the index fingers are pressed against the forehead, not tilting to the left or right. This is the 1st level *wai*.

2. For parents, teachers, senior relatives, and the elderly

Raise the pressed palms until the thumbs touch the tip of the nose and the fingertips touch the space between the eyebrows. This is the 2nd level *wai*.



fig. 2

3. For respected persons in general including persons of the same status

Let the pressed palms touch the lower part of the face, with the tips of the thumbs touching the tip of the chin and the tips of the index fingers touching the nose. Bow the head a little without stooping for both male and female. This is the 3rd level *wai*.



fig. 3

❖ It should be noted that the level of bowing or stooping depends on status and seniority of both parties. The person greeted should *rap wai* or acknowledge the *wai* from a less senior person by pressing the palms

together at chest level with the fingertips at the chin, head bowing a little. The *rap wai* should generally be performed as a gesture of mutual respect.

Paying respect

There are three institutions that the Thai people regard highly and must therefore pay proper respect.

1. The Nation, represented by the National Flag. When the National Anthem is played at the raising or lowering of the National Flag, a person should pay respect by standing still, facing the flag. When the anthem is over, bow the head once.



fig. 4

2. The Religion, represented by the **Triple Gems: *Buddha, Dharma*** (Buddha's teaching), and ***Sangkha*** (the monks). Usually the traditional way to pay respect to the **Triple Gems** is by performing the ***Benchangkhapradit krap***, which is done by going down on the knees with palms pressed together, with the five parts of the body: the knees, the elbows, and the forehead touching the ground or the floor, unless the place or situation does not make it possible to do so. Then a simple *wai* or *krap* is enough.

i. Performing the *Benchangkhapradit krap* – There are three steps in doing the ***Benchangkhapradit krap*** as follows.

1st step: When properly seated, press the palms together at chest level with the tips of the fingers about 45° from the chest. The arms should not be too far away or too close to the body. This gesture is called ***anchuli***.

2nd step: Raise the pressed palms and bow the head a little to allow the thumbs to touch the space between the brows and the fingertips to touch the hairline. This gesture is called ***wantha***.



fig. 5

3rd step: Prostrating, for a male this is done by bowing and letting the hands and arms touch the floor. When the hands are laid bare on the floor, the thumbs should be about one *khuep* (measurement from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the middle finger when the hand is fully spread out) apart, leaving some space for the forehead to touch the floor. Both elbows should be placed next to the

knees. A female should do the same except that the elbows can be placed on the knees, not next to them. This gesture is called *krap*.

The *Benchangkhapradit krap* should be done slowly three times. After that go back to the *wantha* gesture one more time and then lower the hands to signify that the *krap* is over.

The *Benchangkhapradit krap* is used to pay respect to both the Buddha images and the monks. Take notice whether one should crawl on the knees or walk in at a proper distance before sitting down to perform the *krap*. After it is done, one should crawl back on the Knees at a suitable distance before standing up and backing out. It is improper to stand up right after performing the *krap* and walk out with one's back towards the monks.

ii. Paying respect to the monks - If the monks are sitting on the floor or on other forms of seats, the *Benchangkhapradit krap* should be done. If it is inconvenient to do so just do the *wai* with the thumbs touching the space between the eyebrows. In case the monks are standing or walking past, just do a *wai*. In good taste, shoes should be removed before paying the monks the *krap* or *wai*.

When a monk is delivering a sermon, respect should be paid to the *Dharma* by keeping the palms pressed at chest level during that time. When the preaching is over, raise the hands until the tips of the thumbs touch the space between the eyebrows and let out the word *sathu*. When having a conversation with a monk, always keep palms pressed at chest level all the time whether standing or sitting, no matter whether the monk is less senior than the person. Status of the monks should not be taken into consideration. The monks with proper observance of religious precepts and morals all deserve respect regardless of their seniority.

3. The Monarchy, represented by the King and members of the Royal Family.

When His Majesty the King is traveling in a vehicle, respect should be paid to him by standing and bowing, or saluting, or paying him a *krap* or *wai*, as the situation or circumstance may allow. If he is walking along the carpeted path, people should stand properly and pay him respect. If His Majesty addresses someone, that person should keep his pressed palms between the chest and answer him, paying him another respect after he has moved away.

At a formal function where people are seated or standing in the King's audience, everyone must rise when His Majesty walks past, paying respect to him with a bow or a curtsy. When the King's Anthem is played, remain standing until it is over, then make another bow or curtsy before sitting down. Before His Majesty takes his seat, the audience must bow or curtsy once and remain standing until he is properly seated, then make another bow or curtsy before sitting down politely. If it is necessary for one to leave his/her seat in the King's audience, make a bow or curtsy each time, and do it again when returning to the seat.

❖ If granted an informal audience, Thai traditional way of crawling on the knees and paying respect to His Majesty with a *krap* is more suitable. Shoes must not be worn. When approaching His Majesty, *krap* with the hands raised once and crawl near him at a proper distance, not directly facing him, and make another *krap*. Then prostrate oneself with hands still pressed together. If His Majesty addresses someone, the person must look up and answer him. When leaving His Majesty's audience, *krap* with the hands raised once and crawl backward at a proper distance. Make another *krap* before standing up.

❖ When being bestowed something by His Majesty in a formal ceremony, bow or curtsy and approach him at a proper distance, then bow or curtsy one more time. Then bend the left knee and raise the right hand to do the *ao ngan*, an ancient custom of paying respect to show that one was not carrying a weapon in the Kings presence. The *ao ngan*, is performed by raising the right hand forward at about 45° from the body, with the fingers close together, then move the hand up and down quickly from the wrist up. When the hand returns to the original level, turn the palm up to receive the presentation. If the award is small in size,



fig. 6

take it with the right hand alone, the left hand being kept close to the body. If the award is big, receive it with both hands by raising the left hand almost at the same time with the right hand, except that the left hand needs not perform the *ao ngan*.

❖ Things to be presented to His Majesty the King must always be placed on raised trays, except for things that are too big or unsuitable to be placed on a tray. If the gifts are to be presented to several members of the Royal Family, they must be placed on separate trays. The raised trays may be lined or covered with cloth, usually silk, satin or lace. When the presenter's name is announced, the person must rise and hold the tray at waist level, make a bow or curtsy, then walk towards His Majesty and bow or curtsy once more before bending the left knee with the right knee raised.

Then lean forward to present the gift by holding the stem of the tray. After His Majesty has accepted the gift, stand up and retreat one step, then bow or curtsy. Take three more steps backward and bow or curtsy once more before returning to the seat. Bow or curtsy another time before sitting down.



fig. 7

❖ Dress code should be in accordance with that issued by the Bureau of the Royal Household with regards to the occasions and the ceremonies. Black or black and white should not be worn except at funeral-related ceremonies. Proper Royal Decorations must be worn at formal functions. Do not wear dark glasses, smoke cigarette, chat, make loud noises, or do anything considered to be impolite while in His Majesty's presence. Each time His Majesty leaves his seat to perform the royal activities in the ceremony, the audience must rise and bow or curtsy.



fig. 8

❖ Respect should be paid to places as well, especially places of worship or palaces. Revealing dresses, shorts, or sandals are not allowed and considered improper in these places. Shoes must be removed before entering a temple. Normally a guest would remove his/her shoes before entering the inside of a house. ♣

Chapter II

Visit

by Sudchit Bhinyoying

Greeting

There is an old adage in Thailand that, 'Whoever comes to our house will be welcome.' This saying clearly portrays the spirit of hospitality long exists in the country.

Thus, many visitors to the country are often highly impressed to find that the Thais always smile and extend to them warm hospitality wherever they go. Being kind-hearted and happy by nature, most Thais find the presence of visitors a good will and therefore they respond positively to that gesture.

However, it is considered good manners for visitors to know what to do and not to do during the visit. As all visits start with visiting calls - - formal and non-formal - - let's divide the categories of visiting calls into Formal or Business, Informal or Home, and Royal Audience.

Formal or Business Visit

As soon as you decide that an occasion has arisen for the visit, perhaps within a month of the intended visit, a letter requesting an appointment for formal/business call must be sent, and if possible, a phone call may follow to enquire about the date and time of appointment.

❖ On the appointed day, the visitor should arrive at the appointed place a little earlier, but not too early, for the visit. Granted the traffic congestion in Bangkok, the visitor may report to the secretary of the host a few minutes before the appointed time. The visitor may be ushered to take a seat in a room adjoining the office of the host. There he will wait until he is informed that he is being called in.

❖ It is a normal practice to keep in mind the limitation of time and the workload of the host. A formal visit will not last very long. Introduction and pleasantries are exchanged with a cordial expression of continuing contacts. Then the visitor takes leave.

❖ Visiting cards may be exchanged, in addition to the one given prior to the visit. Modern business cards contain, in addition to the usual address and phone number, a mobile phone and facsimile number and e-mail address.



fig. 9

❖ A day or two after the visit, some callers prefer to write a letter thanking the host for the cordial reception, expressing his wishes to continue the relationship and contacts in the future.

Informal/Home Visit

Some visitors from abroad have expressed opinions that the Thais are not fond of inviting foreign friends to their home. They prefer to entertain in hotels or restaurants, leaving their home life a mystery to the visitors. This is not always true in many cases.

❖ The reasons behind the reluctance to invite visitors to their houses may be the desire to please the visitors more. Thailand has a vast array of good hotels and restaurants where food and services are superb and at affordable prices. To initiate the visitors to the better taste of Thailand, the host may feel that it is an occasion to call for professional cooking and service in pleasant surroundings. Thus the entertainment mostly takes place not at home but outside.

❖ Whether invited to the house or somewhere else, the visitor may bring in a little present for the host. In the olden days, the Thais always brought home-made food or desserts to the house of the host. Nowadays, modern social etiquette is more widely applied. So a bottle of wine, a hamper of fresh fruits and canned food, a pound or two of freshly-made cakes or a small tray of Thai traditional sweets is always appreciated.



fig. 10

❖ Although punctuality may not be strictly observed as in the case of business call, the invitee should keep in mind not to arrive at the home of the host too early or too late. Arriving too early may bring embarrassment to the host and the hostess, as everything for your reception may not yet be properly arranged. Arriving too late may cause some problems. If the call is combined with a party, other guests may have already started their meals, thinking that, due to some unforeseen circumstances, you are unable to attend. There may be little food left on the

table and as you have just arrived, the hostess may have to frantically find something to serve you.

❖ The length of time to be spent at such informal visit depends on the wishes of the host. If there is no party involved, just a private call at the house of the host, fifteen to twenty minutes should suffice. If meals are provided and you know full well that the host needs to get up early for the next day, not more than three hours should be spent at his home.



fig. 11

❖ Remember that good manners should be observed throughout the whole session. Sitting with one leg over the other knee or with legs stretching out may mean relaxation in Western culture, but in Thailand it implies impropriety or even disrespect. Talking with very active body language such as hand waving or arms and legs moving this way and that is not advised. Standing in close proximity to a seated elderly or more senior person in a manner called by the Thais as *kham hua phuyai* or towering over the head of the older person is something a well brought-up person will never do. Likewise, it is not proper to talk to the person sitting or

standing away from you with more senior persons sitting or standing between the two



fig. 12



fig. 13

of you because that will mean *phut kham hua phuyai* or talking with words flying over the head of the elderly.

Royal Audience

If you are called to a Royal Audience with Their Majesties the King and the Queen or any members of the Royal Family, contact the Bureau of Royal Household, the Office of His Majesty's Principle Private Secretary, Her Majesty the Queen's Personal Affairs Division, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's Personal Affairs

Division, or Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn's Personal Affairs Division for the exact manners you have to undertake while under the Royal Audience.

Points to Remember

❖ Although the outdoor temperature in Thailand is always on the high side, once inside a room or a building, it is always cooler than outside because of the air-conditioning system. People tend to dress with materials suitable for that degree of temperature.



fig. 14

❖ Locally made materials are beautiful as well as comfortable to wear. Therefore, it is not uncommon to see people of higher social position, especially the ladies, wearing clothes made of materials from upcountry regions of the country. The most popular material that can be worn on any occasion is Thai silk, which comes in various colours and textures. Some are suitable for men's suits and some for ladies' dresses.

❖ Newcomers to the country normally have to call on dignitaries or social and business contacts. The first impression they create in the eyes of the hosts is very important. The way they dress not only portrays partial characteristics of the wearers but also an expression of respect to the hosts.

Here in Thailand, modern western style suits and dresses are accepted, unless otherwise specified. ♣

Chapter III

Ceremony

by Malithat Promathatavedi

❖ There are several types of ceremonies in connection with birth, graduation, marriage, ordination, death, as well as ceremonies that are performed for the propagation of fertility and auspiciousness, and other ceremonies that are religious in nature in Thai society.

❖ If there is an invitation card, one should answer whether or not to attend. If the ceremony is announced publicly, there is no need to answer.

❖ Dress code depends on the nature of the ceremony whether formal or informal, and the time when it is held. If it is festive, especially a wedding, black or mauve is frowned upon as black is the colour of mourning and mauve is the colour of widows. The Western 'chic little black dress' is considered improper.

❖ When arriving at the ceremony, respect should be paid to the host or the one presiding over the ceremony with the proper *krap* or *wai*. Then pay respect to the Buddha image, if one is installed, three times in the *Benchangkhapradit* posture.

❖ When the monks are chanting, keep palms pressed at chest level all through and no conversation should be carried on. To present or receive something to/from a monk, one should kneel. A male can hand or receive things directly to/from the monk's



fig. 15



fig. 16

hand, but a female is not supposed to touch any part of the monk. For this purpose, the monk would spread a piece of cloth before him and the woman would place whatever to be presented to him on it. The monk may drop some token like a small Buddha image or amulet in her hand without touching it. Make a *wai* every time when presenting or receiving things.

❖ Before eating a meal, the monks must be offered the food first. Usually the monks attending a ceremony eat together at a specially prepared table or place. Senior or high-ranking monks have their food served individually on raised-trays.

❖ At a Thai-style wedding ceremony, guests, usually older than the bride and groom,

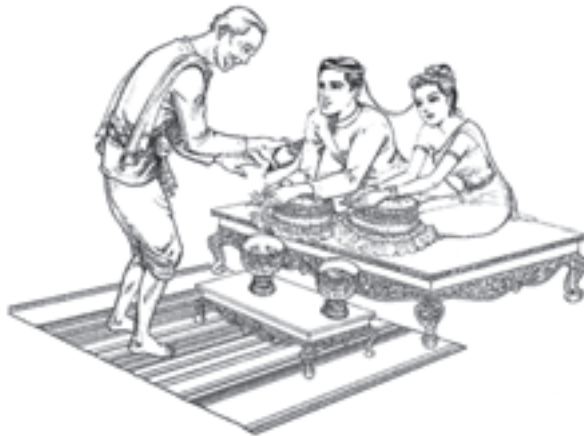


fig. 17

are invited to pour lustral water on the couple's hands from a conch and give them a blessing. There is no specific rule whether to pour the water on the bride's or the groom's hand first. Some guests may prefer to pour the water on the party with whom they are more familiar first. As soon as one finishes, step aside to make room for other guests.

❖ There are three rites involving a funeral. The first one is the bathing rite. Often this is performed at a temple. As the rite is sometimes spontaneous, some guests may not have known beforehand and thus are not properly dressed in black, the colour of mourning. This is acceptable. If the deceased receives a royally-sponsored ceremony, after

the royal lustral water has been delivered, no one else can bathe the body. Usually the water is poured over the hand of the deceased, accompanied by a *wai*.

❖ The second rite is the chanting for the deceased, the duration of which can be three to seven nights. This rite is held, sometime right after the bathing rite, around seven o'clock at most temples. Women should wear black and refrain from putting on too much make-up or jewellery.

❖ It is customary to send a wreath of fresh or artificial flowers, or an offering of money to show condolence to the host. After greeting the host, guests then enter the



fig. 18

pavilion to pay respect to the Buddha image first by performing the *krap* three times, then paying one *krap* to the deceased, now placed in a coffin. A joss-stick may also be lit. The host for each night of the chanting lights the candle and joss-sticks and pays homage to the Buddha image to signify that the rite has begun. Four monks perform three rounds of chanting, then take a break during which time guests may be served refreshments or snacks. Then the fourth and final round of chanting is performed. While the monks are chanting, the guests should refrain from talking and pay attention. Make a *wai* when the monks arrive and leave. Sometimes when attending the chanting rite for a friend's parent, people tend to forget that it is a sombre occasion, not a class reunion, and chat all through the chanting.

❖ The third rite involves the funeral. The body is kept for a certain period, 50 days, 100 days, or one year, depending on the family. It is customary to attend a funeral without being formally invited.

The cremation takes place at a temple and the burial at a cemetery. If it is a royally-sponsored funeral presided over by His Majesty the King or other members of the Royal Family, guests should arrive not less than one hour before time. At the sound of the bugles, signifying that His Majesty has arrived, rise to greet him. Remain standing until His Majesty has taken his seat. After His Majesty has presented the saffron robes to the officiating monks, lit the pyre, and returned to be seated, the guests, according to ranks and protocol, may then put the *dok mai chan* (artificial flowers made from fragrant wood shavings) as offerings into the fire. When descending from the crematorium, bow or curtsy before His Majesty then return to the seats. Souvenirs of the funeral in the form of books about the deceased or other tokens are distributed, usually when the guests come down from the crematorium. Women should wear hose and long skirts at royally-sponsored funerals. When His Majesty takes his leave, remain standing. ♣

Chapter IV

Meeting

by Sudchit Bhinyoying

A meeting or a seminar is an opportunity for a number of participants to attend and discuss certain issues. To avoid confusion and complexity, proper etiquette should be observed.

1. confirmation
2. paper
3. participation



fig. 19

❖ First of all, the invitation to participate in the seminar must be replied to ensure the participant's seat in the seminar. Many people ignore this point, thinking that the organizers must be prepared to accommodate them. Remember that the number of attendants is as important as the agenda to be discussed.

❖ If there are papers to be presented at the seminar, make sure that such papers are dispatched to the organizers in time for the preparation of the seminar. Details as to the accommodation required or number of persons accompanying you (some seminars/meetings allow participants to bring companions for the accommodation but not to the seminar itself) should be provided. If you have preference or particularities in the area of food (e.g. vegetarian, pork-free, beef-free, seafood-free, allergy-free), this must also be mentioned.

❖ Once one has replied that one accepts the invitation to participate in the seminar, one has to be prepared to contribute to the success of the seminar and to make the time spent at the seminar as fruitful as possible. If one is assigned to deliver a speech or present a paper for discussion, the time allotted for the purpose should be strictly kept, or else the whole timetable will collapse. Many speakers or resource persons are often carried away while talking, becoming a microphone maniac person who would not let go of the microphone despite several warnings from the moderator. Remember that the time gained by one person will mean the time lost for another person. Perhaps the following tips will help to remind seminar/meeting participants of what should be done during that occasion.

Punctuality

This counts for all occasions. One has to be punctual when entering the hall of the seminar and punctual as speaker or debater. Some people want to show off and like to keep the limelight on them by standing up frequently and asking lengthy questions that may not be relevant to the issues discussed at the time to annoyance of other

participants. Remember that the time and effort of other people also matter. This is an opportunity to share ideas and experiences, not a podium where deliberations are monopolized.

Attire

Any meeting or seminar is a formal or semi-formal occasion, business-wise. Attire that demonstrates your ability to grasp the importance of the occasion will be of course more favourable to wear than fashionable clothes that call for wearing on other occasions. A dark colour or soft colour suit or national dress, if not too conspicuous, is advisable. Leave it for some other time even though you prefer to have the tank top or short, short skirts to make you feel at ease, wholesome and up-to-date.

Interrelationship

Although this is not quite an occasion for socializing, the acquaintances and friendship fostered here will come as a great help when you pursue further work in this area. So be friendly, helpful and considerate towards other participants.

Contribution

A seminar or a meeting is not a lecture class where you attend only to be informed. There must be an exchange of ideas, knowledge

and experiences, questions and answers to clarify the issues concerned, in order to make the whole session worthwhile. Keep your shyness to yourself and try to contribute and demonstrate your ability as much as possible. ♣



fig. 20

Chapter V

Theatre

by Malithat Promathavedi

Dress code depends on the type of the performance one is attending. For gala concert or performance presided over by members of the Royal Family, formal attire or evening dress should be worn, not T-shirts or jeans and sandals! If it is a rock concert, casual attire is permissible.

❖ Get to the theatre at least fifteen minutes before the performance starts and be punctual. If you are late, try to be as quiet as possible when going to your seat. It is very rude and disturbing to hear the sounds of heels clicking against the steps. Be considerate to the rest of the audience. The best way is to wait until intermission to enter. There is a close-circuit TV anyway. If you have to walk past people to get to your seat, apologize to them for the inconvenience.



fig. 21

❖ Do not wear jewellery that makes jingling noise when you move around.



fig. 22

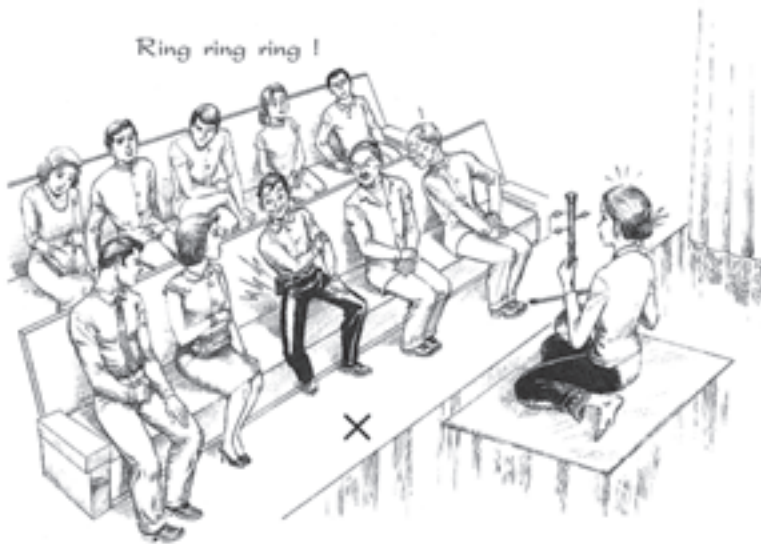


fig. 23

❖ Turn off all kinds of communication devices. If you have some business to attend to, do it at home. The sound of a cell phone ringing during the performance, especially a classical concert, is intolerable and very offensive, most of all to the artist or the maestro.

❖ Rise when the King's Anthem is played at the beginning or the end of the performance.

❖ Wait for the dignitary to be seated

before taking your seat.

❖ Do not take any food or drink into a concert hall.

❖ Do not disturb the person sitting in front of you by rapping his/her seat, or blocking the view of the person sitting behind you by constantly moving your head.

❖ Photograph taking or taping is usually not allowed, as there is a matter of copyright involved. At least, no flash is to be used.



fig. 24

❖ Do not talk during the performance. People around you do not need to hear your comment or explanation. A theatre is not a lecture room.

❖ Children under five should not be

taken to a performance. They are too young to understand or appreciate the aesthetic beauty of the art, and may disturb the audience with their crying. The parents should make a sacrifice if they have small children. Let them stay home where they belong. It is a lot



fig. 25



fig. 26

better for their health and the audience's peace of mind.

- ❖ If you need to go to the restroom during a performance, try to be as quiet as possible. It is better to wait until the intermission.

- ❖ Wait in line for the use of the restroom.

- ❖ when you hear the buzzer signifying that the performance is to be resumed, return to your seat promptly.

- ❖ When you want to appreciate the performance by clapping, be sure to know

when to clap. If you are attending a jazz concert, it is all right to clap at certain

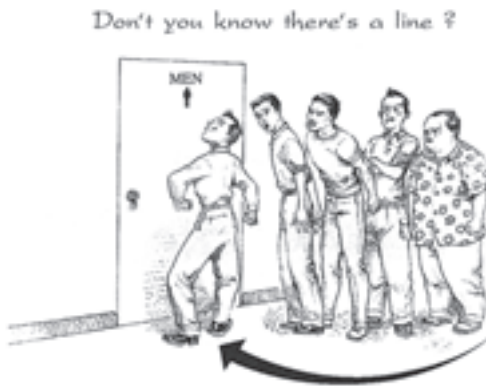


fig. 27

moments when you feel that the performers are absolutely doing a great job. It is otherwise with classical music, especially a concerto which is divided into movements. You have to wait until the whole piece is over before clapping, not right after each movement. Clapping at the wrong moment shows ignorance on the part of the audience and also irritates the conductor whose job is

unnecessarily interrupted. A safe way is to wait for other people to clap first or for the conductor to put down his baton and turn to bow to the audience.

❖ Do not leave a performance until it is over even though you do not enjoy it, for the sake of courtesy to the artists. ♣

Chapter VI

Table Manners

by Pensri Kiengsiri

Since eating is an everyday routine that we go through at least three times a day, table manners are important for us to know and to practice. When people have good table manners, they are not embarrassing for other people at the same table to look at.

Good table manners should be instilled into children in the family from their young age. Once they have learnt how to eat properly in the family, when they find themselves at banquets, if they observe just a few more rules in good table manners, they will be considered fine people who know what to do and what to say at parties.

Basic Table Manners in the Family

The Time to Come to the Table, and to Leave

❖ If the family head prefers the whole family to come to the table first, before anyone starts eating, his family members

should try not to be late in coming. Some people have the habit of being so ‘pleasantly absorbed’ in what they are doing that they almost always are late at the dining table, making other member sick.

❖ We should avoid doing this and also avoid the habit of leaving the table sooner than the rest of the family. Lunch time or dinner time is when we converse, ask about each other’s welfare and exchange news. To be so openly disinterested is to show and foster an undesirable, uncaring attitude.



fig. 28

The Proper Way to Sit

- ❖ We should not lean forward and rest on the dining table.
- ❖ We should not put our elbows on the table.
- ❖ We should not lean back till we look immodest.
- ❖ We should not swing our weight onto just two legs or one leg of the chair causing it to weaken or to break.



fig. 29

The Use of a Common or Serving Spoon

A serving spoon is of great importance. We should have a serving spoon in every common dish from which everyone may take another portion after the first serving. This is not only for the sake of cleanliness but also to protect everyone from getting an infection if a sick, virus-carrying person happens to be enjoying the same meal.



fig. 30

The Proper Way of using Forks and Spoons

- ❖ While using a fork and a spoon to eat, if any piece of food sticks to either of the utensils, one should not knock the two poor things together to cause the morsel to

fall off, thus making unwanted music (clanging) for other people at the table. The thing to do is use either the fork or the spoon to scrape off the morsel from its partner.

❖ You should notice if there is a common serving spoon or not. If it is there, do not use your own personal spoon or fork to spoon up, or pick up food from the common serving dish. It is also important not to pick and choose, touching this piece and that piece of food, and then picking up yet another piece! Especially if you do this with the personal spoon that has gone into your mouth several times! The best thing to do is ask for a serving spoon if it is not there.

❖ Do not convey to your mouth too big a mouthful. This may leave some rice or other food particle saying hello to people from upon or somewhere around your lips.

❖ Make good use of your napkin or paper napkin.



fig. 31

The Proper way of Using Chopsticks

❖ Whether you use chopsticks to eat inside or outside your home, you should not lift up your bowl of rice and use the two chopsticks to push rice into your mouth. Nowadays it is no longer done because it does not look good. What most people do is hold the chopsticks so that the two ends are together, then use these ends to spoon up some decent amount of rice and convey the rice to the mouth. It is wrong to dip your chopsticks into the big common bowl of soup groping in the bowl for a piece of chicken or mushroom in the soup! This is washing your chopsticks in the soup meant for everybody!

❖ In eating things like noodles, do not clamp up a big cluster of the noodles, thus getting a terribly big mouthful, which, to make it worse, is equipped with short and long hanging ends. Pinch up only a decent amount of the noodles and the hanging ends will not be too many or too long. This way, you may need to turn the chopsticks round two or three times only to get a neat lump around them, to convey nicely to your mouth.

❖ What should be strongly forbidden and yet not realized by some well-meaning



fig. 32

people is using their chopsticks to pick up food for someone near them. Nobody likes eating something touched by chopsticks that have gone into another person's mouth several times!

Eating Manners

Nobody wants to see the shape or colour of food in your mouth, especially when it is being mixed with saliva, so do not open your mouth as you chew or eat. For the same

reason, it is just as bad to speak when there is food in your mouth, and also because doing this makes your voice sound 'unclean'.

❖ There should not be an audible sound in food chewing or soup drinking.

❖ When some delicacy looks really appetizing to you, do not spoon out a great portion. Consider what you are leaving behind. Is it enough to share among the rest of the people who get to it after you?



fig. 33

❖ When you want things like salt and pepper shakers, do not reach out in front or over people near you but ask them to pass them to you. Having used them, look near and around to see if anyone else would like to have them, instead of just happily leaving them within your own reach for your convenience alone.

❖ When asked to pass anything to anyone at the dining table, pass it. Do not take the liberty to use it first. If you want anything, take it before someone asks you to pass that thing to him.

❖ When you have spooned out something for yourself, look around to see if anyone else is waiting for it, or would like to have it next. That person may be far at the other end. Pass it to him or to someone near you to pass it on to him. You will be surprised at the number of people to whom it never occurs to take care of someone near them, much less a person farther away at one end of the dining table.

❖ In some families, the dining table is a round one with a smaller revolving inner part for placing, say about 5 to 6 dishes, to be enjoyed by the whole family. When seated at such a table, you should look before setting the revolving part into motion to get what you want, because someone may have already done so before you. When you see this, just wait your turn. But there are some thoughtless people who just boldly stop the motion and get what they want first, as the dish they eye is about to pass them! Another thing is, if you do not look first, someone may be in the act of spooning out something and then the revolving part goes off suddenly and that person is left with the common spoon in his hand in the air! Very embarrassing!

❖ If there is a piece of bone or something you need to take out of your mouth, do not spit or bend your head down to drop it directly from your mouth onto your plate. Use your spoon to receive it from your mouth and place it at the edge of your plate.

❖ In eating, sit up straight and bring the spoon or the fork up to your mouth in a dignified way instead of bending your head down to a lowered spoon or fork.



fig. 34

❖ After eating, put your fork and spoon together. But before this, use them to gather what remains on your plate together and leave it at the middle of your plate.

❖ Unless it is necessary, avoid the use of a toothpick. If it is necessary, use it and avoid picking something out from between your teeth by using your fingers!

❖ Be quick in using the toothpick. It is not a pretty sight so do not indulge too long in it. And never, never leave the toothpick poised in between your lips, daring everyone to look at you.

❖ If most other people have finished eating but you have not and the maids are already taking away the dinner plates, leave your fork and spoon apart on your plate so that they will know and not come to take your plate away. But you should not take too long to eat and hold up the dessert, making other people have to wait a long while, especially when you are at a rather formal party.



fig. 35

Drinking Manners.

As you are drinking, your eyes should be looking down on your glass instead of roaming the dining room. There is no need to look up just because someone starts speaking. For a lady, check often and clean off any lipstick traces on your glass.



fig. 36

Manners in Conversation

❖ While conversing at the dining table, if someone asks you a question and you need to give an answer quickly while there is food in your mouth, use your tongue to push the food to one side of your mouth toward the



fig. 37

inner side of one cheek and speak. You will see that your voice sounds reasonably clear and clean. If you happen to be the one who asks a question, turn away and this will make a person with food in his mouth know that you can wait till he is more ready to speak.



fig. 38

❖ You should not speak about something dirty or draw up a vision that is not pretty, such as talk about worms in a garbage, someone being sick and throwing up, the condition of someone down with diarrhea or constipation. You should also train yourself and your children not to have to visit the rest room directly before or after eating.

❖ To sneeze, turn your face away from the table and cover your mouth with the napkin or with your hand. After that, say 'Excuse me.'

❖ When other people are speaking, do not break in. Do not irritate or argue strongly with anyone at the dining table. If one or both of you get upset and leave the table, it is bad for you both physically and mentally. It also worries people who care about you who are sharing the same meal.

Manners in Eating Fruit

There are certain kinds of fruit that are not easy to handle and yet served unpeeled. We should pay attention to how to deal with at least four kinds of fruit.

❖ *Ngo* (rambutan) has a red hairy skin. Halve the skin with your fruit knife. Then take the fruit out and convey it to your mouth with the dessert fork. If it is too big, you should cut it right through into halves before eating it.

❖ Mangosteen. Halve the dark skin and pull the top part of the skin off. Use your fork to pick up the fruit for eating. Some people fork up the whole round circle of 5-6 cloves of the mangosteen in one mouthful. If the fruit is big, the eatable part can be quite large and it does not help one to look very well-mannered in eating.

❖ Durian. In the old time, people ate durian with their hands. But this kind of fruit, if over-ripe can be quite soft and messy. It is best to eat durian using knife and fork.

❖ Oranges. In eating fruit with seeds, like oranges, when you want to take each seed out of your mouth, lift up your dessert fork to receive the seed and place it at the edge of your plate. Seeds should not go directly from your mouth to your plate.

Manners in Eating desserts

Some desserts are in syrup or in sweetened coconut milk. As when you are eating or drinking soup, see that you do not make a juicy noise while enjoying each mouthful. If the host lets you take out your own portion, leave enough of the dessert for other people after you.

Table Manners at a Sitting Down Thai or Chinese Banquet

For the Invited Guests

When invited to a meal, be it at the host's home or in a restaurant, do not arrive too early, or it may cause inconvenience to your host, especially if the party is in his home and he is not quite ready. You can always tarry a few minutes in your car.

- ❖ Bring a present as a friendly gesture. But what you bring should not be too big or costly especially if the host is in the position to favour you in business etc., because it may be looked upon as a bribe.

- ❖ Wait to be seated at the dining table.

- ❖ Remember all the good table manners you have at home.

The Kind of Conversation not to Make

- ❖ Do not speak almost all the time to the person on one side, leaving the person on your other side mute for long stretches.

- ❖ Do not speak too many times to someone across the table if the table is a round one. Craning your neck to talk too often to someone far or quite far away from you at any kind of table should not be done.

- ❖ Do not act as if some person at the table is not there. If you do not know any of the guests, mention it to the host and he will do the needed introduction. The atmosphere will then be light and relaxing for everyone.

- ❖ Do not speak almost all the time about yourself, your great achievements or your wonderful, adorable children or grandchildren.

- ❖ Do not talk shop for a long time, thus boring other people and excluding them from the conversation. It is surprising to see how many people love showing off. I was recently at a party of ten people and saw two guests

who had recently attended an opera. They went on and on about the opera for even more than ten minutes while the rest of us had to just wait and listen. Though not a single one of us joined in, they just went on and on.

- ❖ Do not engage someone in conversation with you and you only, till he hardly has time to talk to other people.

- ❖ Although you are close to someone at the feast, do not ask him anything personal. He is not close to everyone at the table!

- ❖ Do not gossip about or bad-mouth anyone who is not there.

- ❖ Do not speak mockingly or derisively about or to anyone sitting there with you.

- ❖ If your small children or grandchildren are invited too, see that they are not noisy. Tell them beforehand that they should not walk about or run about as if the host's home were their own.

The Kind of Conversation to Make

- ❖ Bring in a wholesome subject that is not likely to touch anyone personally.

- ❖ Distribute your friendly, socializing questions to more than just a few people.

- ❖ When you talk, look at many people. Do not look only in one direction, making some people feel left out.

- ❖ If everyone becomes quiet, initiate a new topic of conversation.

Some Important Points to Remember

If you have good table manners in your own home, eating with guests is nothing difficult. However, there are a number of things that you should remember not to do.

- ❖ Do not begin eating before your host. Some very well mannered Thais will not even eat before an elderly fellow guest.

- ❖ If the meal is in a restaurant, do not give a direct order to the waiter for some dish or dishes. You are not the host!

❖ Do not inform your host, without being asked, what delicacy you would like to have.

❖ A crunchy appetizer is usually brought in a small dish before the main dishes arrive. Do not scoop up half of it. It is meant for ten people, not two, around the table to whet their appetite.

❖ If you need anything, it is more polite to inform your host and not wave for the waiter yourself.

❖ Do not get into a bad mood with a waiter no matter how he acts, e.g. he is not attentive, he is slow in serving you, etc.

❖ Remember to keep your mouth closed as you chew your food, to refrain from speaking when your mouth is full and to turn away from the table, putting your hand over your mouth to cough or sneeze.

❖ Do not wrestle with a tough piece of food trying to cut it into two smaller pieces till it shoots across the room or the table.

❖ Do not lift the soup bowl up and drink from it.

❖ Do not lick your lips or your fingers.

❖ Do not criticise a dish that you do not like. Some other people may like it.

❖ Do not forget to put in a good word when some dish is nice and tasty.

❖ Do not place your chopsticks over the rice bowl if there is a stand for them or a plate under the rice bowl.

❖ When a waiter asks about dessert, do not order it if the host has already refused to order, saying that he could not eat anything more, and if he has not invited you to order.

❖ Do not eat too quickly and then sit looking at other people while they eat, thus embarrassing them.

❖ Do not lean over to look at the bill to see how much the host pays for that meal.

❖ Do not forget to thank the host before leaving.

For the Host

Some Important Points to Remember

Whether the party is at your own home or in a restaurant, finish with preparing the meal and yourself about ten minutes before the time you invited your guests to arrive.

- ❖ Do not show uneasiness if someone arrives too soon. Sometimes it is difficult to know what the traffic is going to be like.

- ❖ At home, if you have enough time, it is friendly to offer a drink before the meal.

- ❖ See to the seating of your guests, not only to honour the main guest but also to see that a minor guest has someone to speak to.

- ❖ See that no one is left out, in conversation and other things.

- ❖ See that no one is unnecessarily made to feel less important.

- ❖ See that your guests are offered a second serving of rice or other things.

- ❖ See that the different kinds of food get replenished, especially if you have a lot of people at the meal.

- ❖ If you host in a restaurant, and children at some nearby table make too much noise, ask the head-waiter, called 'captain' in Bangkok, to go speak to the adults at that table.

- ❖ Do not lose your temper with the waiter or anyone else because this will make your guests uncomfortable.

Table Manners at a Thai or an Asian Buffet Banquet

For the Invited Guests

- ❖ Go to see and greet your host first before mingling in and starting to eat.

- ❖ Stand in a line to take the food. Though you know someone already standing at the head of the line, you have no right to push yourself in behind that person.

- ❖ Do not be too long or too loud conversing while standing in the line.

❖ Do not pick up a plate and other eating utensils, passing them to a friend who will go directly to the food, thus forestalling other people in the line.

❖ When someone is taking some food, do not reach over his arm or let your hand reach from under his arm to get the dish you like. Wait your turn.

❖ Do not take an overflowing supply of delicacies, fruit, cakes, etc. You can always go back for more.

❖ At the table, spread out your napkin over your lap. On getting away for a while, leave the napkin on your seat. When eating is over, fold it reasonably well and put it on the table.

❖ Do not order too many kinds of hot (full of chillies) dishes.

❖ Have some vegetarian foods for those who need them.

❖ Order sufficient amount of food for the number of people invited.

❖ Do not omit tea or coffee for after the meal (some people do) and offer a refill at least once if the party is in your home. If it is in a restaurant, tell the waiters to see to this.

Table Manners at a Sitting Down Banquet, Western Style.

For the Invited Guests

When you are invited to a sitting-down Western style meal, be it in a hotel, a restaurant or in your host's home, there are manners to be kept.

❖ Be formally, or informally dressed, according to what is specified about the attire. But always be cleanly and politely dressed.

❖ Bringing with you a cake or a bottle of wine is a gesture your host will appreciate.

❖ Whenever invited to have a drink, do not just blurt out about what you want but ask what the host has and then choose to order from what he has.

❖ If the dinner is formal, when a waiter comes your way offering to take food from his tray to serve you, do not ask for many pieces at once, especially if they are big. He usually comes round again.

❖ Knives, forks and spoons should be picked up for use from the outside first. The ones nearest to your plate are used last.

❖ Soupspoons are round. If you are not used to drinking your soup from the side of this spoon like Westerners, do not worry. As long as you do not make noise when you drink the soup, it is fine.

❖ When eating bread, use your hand to break off a piece enough for one mouthful. Then butter it using a butter knife, and hand the piece to your mouth. Do not butter the whole big piece and cut it into many pieces from the beginning. Apart from the bread, be careful not to use your fingers in eating.

❖ When eating spaghetti, use your fork to wind a small amount up neatly before conveying it to your mouth.

❖ If bread and buns are put on the table in a large basket for all, hand the basket to

a lady or an elderly person near you first and then take a piece for yourself. After this, place the basket away from you, where other people can reach it easily.

❖ Do not spoon up something that is still very hot and blow on it as if you were in such a hurry to eat that you could not wait.

❖ When eating something delicious or very much to your liking, do not break off a piece of bread and use it to scrape up the last drop on your plate.

❖ When stirring your tea or coffee, do not let your spoon touch the side of the cup or it will make a lot of noise.

For the Host

❖ See that your dining room is bright and airy.

❖ If the day or night is sultry, turn on the air conditioner.

❖ The number of guests should be just right for the size of the table. Do not squeeze your guests together till they feel uncomfortable.

❖ Use a tablecloth or plate mats, and napkins.

❖ The service set should not be of disagreeing variety.

❖ Glasses for water and other kinds of drinks are on the right of each person's plate. These glasses should be in place before guests come to the table.

❖ Hard drinks should be offered to ladies too, not only to gentlemen.

❖ See that the centre-piece flowers are in a low vase and not hiding a part of someone's face from the person that he is speaking to.

❖ For a night banquet, candles on the table can look romantic and festive.

❖ For eight people upward, there should be two sets of salt and pepper-shakers, each set at each end of the table.

❖ Know the correct protocol in seating you guests. Apart from seating the guest of honour near you, plan it so that everyone has someone he knows not too far away from him.

❖ It is good to seat men and women alternately for them to socialize.

❖ Instruct your maids or waiters to begin by serving an elderly guest first, or start with the guest of honour and then go round. The waiter should approach from the left.

❖ If bread is served and you have butter knives, let them be used.

❖ If brandy is offered after the meal, there is no need to place the brandy glasses on the table from the beginning.

❖ When someone comes with a present, do not directly put it away for your own family to enjoy later, but see if he intends to let it be enjoyed by the people there.

❖ Do not spoil the atmosphere by chiding your inferiors in front of your guests.

❖ When guests are leaving, unless you need to be looking after those who are not yet leaving, go to the front door and see them off warmly.

Table Manners at a Buffet Banquet, Western Style.

For the invited guests:

Most of the manners to be observed are similar to those given in the Thai or Asian Buffet Banquet.

❖ There are a few more points to remember such as the use of eating utensils

which, the food being non-Asian, differ to a certain extent. However, this is sufficiently discussed in Table Manners at a Sitting-down banquet, Western style.

For the Host

Similarly, the main difference here is that the food is Western and served Western style. So provide the eating utensils and keep well-mannered accordingly. ♣

Chapter VII

Correspondence

by Sudchit Bhinyoying

Proper etiquette for the host and the invitee

Once you decide to host a reception, a party or banquet for a number of guests, it is imperative that you send them invitation cards. Such cards should not be sent too early

(several weeks before the actual date of the party) and not too close to the date of the party (for example, one day before the date of the party). Allow some time for the invitee to reply. In most cases, cards are sent out about two weeks before the date of the party.

Example of invitation card



The Permanent Secretary for Culture
cordially invites you to a reception
in celebration of the Annual Thai Art Exhibition
on Friday, 9th July, 2003
at seven o'clock
at the Small Hall, Thailand Cultural Centre.

Dress: Casual

R.S.V.P
0 2247 0013 ext. 1411

Example of informal invitation

55/67 Ratchadaphisek Road,
Bangkok 10310

9 July 2003

Dear Khun Sipphan,

My wife and I are going to celebrate our thirtieth wedding anniversary this coming August.

It would be a great pleasure for us if you could come and join us on this very important occasion for our family. The party will be held at the Grand Ballroom, Grand Ratchadaphisek Hotel, Ratchadaphisek Road, at 6.30 p.m., 25 August 2003.

We look forward to seeing you that evening

Sincerely,
Seri Songtham

Although the invitation is marked R.S.V.P. (the abbreviation for French “Répondez, s’il vous plait” = please reply), some people may not reply. It is therefore acceptable if the secretary of the host makes a phone call to the invitee on the day or the day prior to the reception to enquire about attendance.

Sometimes, for an informal function, the host may write an informal letter of invitation, giving the date, time and location of the event, describing the event and including directions and relevant details. He may also close by encouraging the invitee to attend.

Notes for invitational letters, acceptance or refusal of such letters:

❖ If the invitation is purely a social event, a handwritten note will be appropriate. Typed letters will be appropriate if the invitation is in some respect a business or semi-formal event.

❖ Some people may issue the invitation on ‘regrets only’ basis. In such cases, the person invited has to reply when he/she is not able to attend.

(This is only an example. The tone and the content of the letter may vary according to the degree of close relationship between the sender and the invitee.)

Example of thank-you letter for hospitality

5888 Chula Road
Bangkok 10500

9 July 2003

Dear Suda,

Thank you very much for all the kind hospitality that you and Somsak your husband showed to me during my stay in Bangkok. I truly enjoyed my tour of your beautiful city and the sumptuous dinner you gave me at your place.

I certainly hope to see you again when you come to visit your children in London. Again, please accept my heartfelt thanks to you both for making my trip such an enjoyable one.

Sincerely,
William Strand

Example of condolence letter

9 July 2003

Dear Darini,

I was very sorry to hear of Thanet's death. I extend to you my heartfelt sympathy.

I remember meeting Thanet the evening you and he attended a concert at the Thailand Cultural Centre. Thanet was most helpful with so many things. As I was new to Thailand, he took the trouble to explain to me several matters that I do not understand. He also invited me to visit his summer home in Hua Hin the following weekend. Unfortunately, I had to go to Laos on business trip and therefore had to decline the invitation.

I am sure your children are taking good care of you. Please tell them to call me up when they go back to school in England.

Sincerely,
William Strand

Chapter VIII

Everyday Etiquette

by Pensri Kiengsiri

In Thai society, where seniority is given much importance and politeness to everyone is stressed, in order to be a person with good manners, one must be aware and careful of almost every gesture or movement, and also of almost every word or sentence one utters.

This may sound like a difficult thing to do, but it is not. Since you grow up with the daily teaching of older members in your family, you soon get used to the required good manners. The points made here are therefore, for some people, more or less only as



fig. 39

reminders. Yet they are good for non-Thais to know if they have to associate a good deal with Thai people, work, or intend to live for some time in Thailand.

It is of utmost importance to remember from the very beginning that Thais consider the head sacred. Never, never touch a Thai person's head or the head of any respected, revered image or statue. On the other hand, the foot is considered a lowly thing. One does not use one's foot to point out anything to anyone, much worse touch someone with the foot to get attention.

Manners in Greeting

Thais give a respectful *wai* when we meet our older relatives, friends or acquaintances. We put the palms of our hands together and raise them up, at chest level for equals, nose level for people older or whom we respect, and forehead level for people we highly respect. As you do this, you should bend your head down a little to the raised hands.

❖ Younger people are expected to give older people a *wai* first. The latter then return the *wai*, at chest level. Being older, they do not need to bend their heads.

Manners in Standing

The following is not acceptable especially if done in the presence of people older than you or your superiors at work, or in society.

❖ Standing with legs apart, with hands in pockets, with arms folded across the chest, with hands on hips, with hands together at the back, in a leaning position, blocking someone from something he needs to see, blocking a passageway and towering over an older person who is sitting.



fig. 40



fig. 41

Manners in Walking

- ❖ Walk in a natural, relaxed manner, taking steps that are neither too long nor too short.

- ❖ In walking, good manners mean you do not do the following:

 - Turn your body this way and that way.

 - Move your head about.

 - Put an arm around someone's neck.

 - Put your hands in your trouser pockets.

 - Show absent-mindedness, straying into people's way or blocking a passage.

 - Walk in front of your boss or superior as if you were leading him.

- ❖ In walking, when an older person is going in the opposite direction to your direction, if you meet him in a narrow passage, e.g. on a staircase, near or in a doorway, stand aside and let him go first.

- ❖ Refrain from holding hands in public as it may have undesirable implication.

- ❖ We should stand in a straight position. However, when speaking to an older or a respected person, we should bend forward a little to show respect.

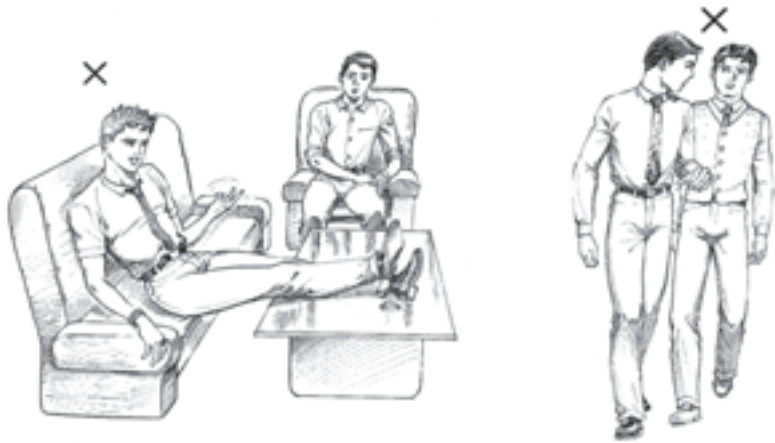


fig. 42

Manners in Sitting

- ❖ Neck straight
- ❖ Back not turned to your senior
- ❖ Knees not hugged
- ❖ Legs and arms not sprawled out
- ❖ Legs together, uncrossed
- ❖ Foot not pointing to any person
- ❖ Foot not on a table
- ❖ Foot not shaking
- ❖ Seat not higher than that of a senior

or a superior.

Manners in Lying down

A well-mannered Thai will not lie in a public area, or lie in his home with his foot pointing to anyone, or remain lying when he is spoken to by someone older than him. He will not lie down in the presence of a lady or a new acquaintance.

A Thai person usually says prayers at the Buddha Image altar or in bed before lying down. He will never lie with his feet pointing toward the Buddha image.



fig. 43

Manners in Clothes-wearing

Some people are not very clear about what to wear on different occasions. Thus it is important to know from a young age the right kind of clothes to wear for when, or we may unwittingly be criticized. For example, if you wear shabby or unclean clothes to a formal birthday party in a grand hotel, the birthday gentleman or lady may take your behaviour as a personal insult to him or her.

❖ When at home and a visitor comes, do not welcome him in your nightclothes.

❖ Do not wear T-shirts, shorts and slippers to any function, especially to a temple.

❖ Be reasonably well dressed when you go out shopping.

❖ Wear a party dress for afternoon tea party or cocktails.

❖ Men wearing suits should have at least one button done up.

❖ Men do not roll up their sleeves as if getting ready for a fight.



fig. 44

Manners in Making a Conversation

A well-mannered person will not boast and sing his own praises. Nor will he say things to put down other people. He does not criticise anyone openly and does not give advice without being invited to do so.

- ❖ He does not ask personal questions such as: How is your ex-wife/husband now? How much do you weigh? How old are you? How much is your salary?

- ❖ And he does not get personal saying things like: I see you've gained weight. You've become so dark.

- ❖ He does not show that he is well acquainted with someone by calling that person by his father's name. This is greatly impolite and yet some people do it.

- ❖ He does not interrupt or make noise when people are speaking.

- ❖ When asked about something, he does not walk away at the same time as he answers, and he always answers when spoken to.

- ❖ He looks at the person he is speaking to.

- ❖ He does not use impolite words, dirty words and does not swear.

- ❖ He does not yawn when in company.

- ❖ He does not make fun of other people or get sarcastic.

- ❖ He does not gossip.

- ❖ He does not talk shop with someone and exclude others from joining in the conversation.

❖ He brings in a subject that suits the people he is conversing with, giving consideration to their age, sex, character, education, financial or social status, etc.

❖ He avoids talking about important issues such as religion, political differences, etc., which can cause dispute.

❖ He keeps quiet when a person is making a speech, when someone at a panel discussion is speaking and when he attends a concert.

Manners in Making a Telephone Conversation

❖ When using a public telephone, or when in a home that has only one telephone, do not be too long if there are people waiting to use the phone after you. Even if there is no one waiting, a person somewhere may be trying to reach that number.

❖ Do not be too loud on the telephone.

❖ If someone calls you, do not keep him waiting too long and do not put down the phone first. The caller may have some other things to say.

❖ If you do the calling, do not call till you are ready to speak. It is bad manners to let your secretary call someone and keep that person waiting for you for a long while.

❖ In using a cell phone, if you are not alone, do not speak loudly to disturb other people's peace or thinking. Switch off your cell phone at concerts, at important functions or at speech making parties.

Manners in Making a Speech

If you are invited to be a speaker, choose the subject that you know well. It is good manners to do some research to add interesting matter to your speech, and not deliver it with a vague knowledge, without much authority on the subject chosen. A speaker who does not know enough and does not research enough can be seen through easily, and people who come to listen to him will be disappointed, feeling sorry for the loss of their precious time.

Manners in Speaking at a Debate

A debate in which speakers are meant to differ in opinions can turn into an unpleasant happening, unless the moderator is very smart

and knows how to prevent the speakers from being carried away and from quarrelling. In Thailand, I have seen this happen once, with my own eyes in a television programme, in which the debaters started insulting each other.

Nowadays we try to avoid such a happening and people arrange what they call *yaw-wathi*, instead of a debate. This Thai word means praise-speech. In a *yaw-wathi* you have praising groups. For example, you invite three singers and three musicians to speak. The singers try to convince listeners that it is much better to be musicians than singers, and the musicians have to argue, saying that it is much better to be singers.

Manners in Speaking at a Panel Discussion

- ❖ Speak in the time given for each speaker and do not take minutes from another speaker's time. This is bad manners.

- ❖ Do not use rude words, sarcastic words, or make fun of whichever sex or age.

- ❖ When the first round of speaking is over, in the second round, know that lesser time is given for each speaker. Do not use another speaker's time.

- ❖ Likewise, when the time comes for questions from the floor, if you are invited to answer the first question, do not make another speech out of the answer or there will not be time for the numerous other questions waiting to be answered.

- ❖ If you are the moderator, see that each speaker uses only his own given time to speak and not steal another speaker's time.

- ❖ Be unbiased, summing up a speaker's speech very well but not caring to do much for the other speakers.

- ❖ Do not voice your own opinion. Some moderators do and are quite long about it. You are not the invited speaker.

- ❖ Be not long and boring when you sum things up.

Manners when in Company

- ❖ Do not scratch here and scratch there.

- ❖ Do not flap your shirt, or your skirt if you are a woman.

- ❖ Do not tease or joke excessively.

- ❖ Do not touch someone else's personal belongings.

- ❖ Do not stare at anyone for long.

- ❖ Do not look at a person from head to foot.

- ❖ Know when to say **excuse me** and when to say **thank you**.

- ❖ Know how to give a good seat to an elderly person.

- ❖ Do not leave without seeking out the host and saying a proper good-bye after thanking him.



fig. 45

Manners in Visiting

- ❖ Always call and inform the person about your intended visit, and once you have named the time, be punctual.

- ❖ Do not visit other people too often.

- ❖ In each visit do not overstay.

- ❖ Know the right time to visit, e.g. in the afternoon, at weekends, etc. One should not visit near mealtimes, at work time or nap times for elderly people.

- ❖ Unless you are on very good terms with the people you visit, do not tag along someone they do not know just because that person is your friend.

- ❖ Greet the host with a *wai* as you see him and say good-bye with another *wai* when you are leaving.

- ❖ There are also proper manners that should be observed by the person visited.

- ❖ On knowing that your visitor has arrived, do not keep him waiting too long.

- ❖ Do not look at him from head to foot.
- ❖ Welcome him willingly so that he feels comfortable.
- ❖ Greet him at least with a cup of tea or coffee.
- ❖ Do not show displeasure with anyone in your home in front of him.
- ❖ Do not whisper to anyone in front of him. (Where there are more than two people, this should not be done anyway, no matter by whom, no matter where.)
- ❖ Do not keep on talking about what he knows very little of, or is not interested in.
- ❖ Do not monopolize the conversation. Do some listening.
- ❖ See him off to the door as he takes his leave.

Manners in Visiting Sacred Places

❖ In any country there are places considered sacred by the citizens of that country. To visit such a place, e.g. a temple or a palace, you should be respectably

dressed. You should remove your hat if you are wearing one and also take off your shoes. The best thing to do is to observe what the people who get there before you are doing.

❖ As you are going to walk past a respected object, such as Buddha's image, or the King's portrait, you should stop a while and pay respect, either by giving a *wai* or bending your head in front of the image or the portrait.

❖ You should not be wearing dark glasses. If you really need to wear them, take the glasses off as you enter the place.

❖ If you have a terrible cold with plenty of phlegm to spit out, do so quietly in a rest room. Do not spit in any public place or in the home in the presence of other people or they will be shocked.

Manners in Making Introductions

❖ Always introduce a man to a woman, a younger person to an older person, a lesser-in-rank to a superior-in-rank, etc. The lesser one will do the *wai* first and the superior one will give him a *wai* in return.



fig. 46

❖ In an introduction, Western style, a lady is privileged to extend her hand first. If she chooses not to extend it, a man should not just grab it. If she does extend it, the man should not just take her hand and let his hand go limp.

Manners in Public Places

❖ Do not comb or brush your hair in public places, such as when you sit by a swimming pool or sit chatting with a number of friends.

❖ Do not apply make-up in public where anyone can keep looking at you.

❖ Do not pick your teeth. Much worse, push the toothpick further into your mouth so that your lips become lop-sided, or leave the toothpick stuck in your mouth for any length of time.

❖ Do not pick your nose, your eye or your ear in front of people.

❖ Do not start a quarrel easily and make a scene of yourself.

❖ When there is a waiting line for any service, join at the end of the line and do not push yourself in at the head or anywhere else in the line. Where there are a number of toilets, a single line should be kept. In some places, people spread out to wait in front of the many doors. This often ends up with the person who comes first getting the use of a toilet after the one who arrives there third or fourth.

❖ See to personal cleanliness and make yourself acceptable where cleanliness and neatness are concerned, be you at home or outside your home.

❖ Converse in a lowered tone, not noisily or boldly, attracting attention.

❖ You probably see by now that Thai social relationship is quite a complicated thing. This in turn affects Thai social etiquette. This is because, as stated in the book called **Forms of Courtesy among ASEAN Member Countries**, ‘Thai people differentiate between high and low social status, young and old, male and female, strong and weak, master and servant, senior and junior, and rich and poor. The manner and use of language in and between these social groups are different. Thai children are taught in their early years about these “high and low” social relationships.’

Apart from all the good manners listed here, Thais also stress the importance of being a grateful person. We teach our children not to forget a good deed done to them, and also to find an opportunity to reciprocate. In Thailand, one can hardly find a person who is not full of gratitude to his parents. Having been raised with love and devotion by their parents, Thai children are very willing to take care of them in return in their old age.

We also teach our children to be very considerate of people’s feelings, and not to let rudeness or unkindness prevail just in order to be unnecessarily honest. If your friend has only this one dress to wear to a party and she asks you whether it looks nice on her, though it really looks terrible on her, you should be well-mannered enough and kind enough not to say so.

Tolerance can be applied. In Thai families, children are taught to be patient and to tolerate events and people in the best way they can, if it is not beyond their ability to do so. They are encouraged to be always well-mannered and considerate.

If you understand our general etiquette and the deeper structure underlying it, you will not find it hard to gain lifelong Thai friends.



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