

4. Quality of Life of Thai People

The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) has developed a Human Development Index (HDI), a quality of life measurement, based on social factors (education, life expectancy at birth and economic factors - GDP per capita). In 1990, the quality of life of Thai people stood at the “moderate” level, ranking 74th (HDI = 0.715) among 173 countries worldwide, and fourth among ASEAN member states after Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia. In 1995, the HDI ranking of Thailand rapidly jumped from 74th in 1990 to 59th among 174 nations, and stayed at the “high” level, ranking third (HDI = 0.838) among ASEAN nations, after Singapore and Brunei (Table 4.22). The major factor attributable to the higher ranking is its high level of economic growth.

After the economic crisis, the quality of life of Thai people worsened between 1998 and 2002; Thailand’s HDI dropped from “high” to “moderate” level (HDI = 0.745-0.768) and the ranking fell from 59th to 66th-76th among 174 countries and fourth among ten ASEAN member states, after Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia (Table 4.22).

Table 4.22 Human Development Indexes for Thailand and Some Other Countries, 1990-2002

Group and country	1990		1995		1998		1999		2000		2001		2002	
	Actual rank	HDI value	Actual rank	HDI value	Actual rank	HDI value	Actual rank	HDI value	Actual rank	HDI value	Actual rank	HDI value	Actual rank	HDI value
WHO/SEAR														
Thailand	74	0.715	59	0.838	76	0.745	66	0.757	70	0.762	74	0.768	76	0.768
Sri Lanka	86	0.663	90	0.716	84	0.733	81	0.735	89	0.941	99	0.730	96	0.740
Maldives	112	0.497	95	0.683	89	0.725	77	0.739	84	0.743	86	0.751	84	0.752
Indonesia	108	0.515	96	0.679	109	0.670	102	0.677	110	0.684	112	0.682	111	0.692
Myanmar	123	0.390	131	0.481	125	0.585	118	0.651	127	0.552	131	0.549	132	0.551
India	134	0.309	139	0.451	128	0.563	115	0.571	124	0.577	127	0.590	127	0.595
Bhutan	159	0.150	155	0.347	142	0.483	130	0.471	140	0.494	136	0.511	134	0.536
Nepal	152	0.170	152	0.351	144	0.474	129	0.48	142	0.490	143	0.499	140	0.504
Bangladesh	147	0.189	147	0.371	146	0.461	132	0.47	145	0.478	139	0.502	138	0.509
DPR Korea	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ASEAN														
Singapore	43	0.849	28	0.896	24	0.881	26	0.876	25	0.885	28	0.884	25	0.902
Brunei	44	0.847	35	0.880	32	0.848	32	0.857	32	0.856	31	0.872	33	0.867
Malaysia	57	0.790	60	0.834	61	0.772	56	0.774	59	0.782	58	0.790	59	0.793
Thailand	74	0.715	59	0.838	76	0.745	66	0.757	70	0.762	74	0.768	76	0.768
Philippines	92	0.603	98	0.677	77	0.744	70	0.749	77	0.754	85	0.751	83	0.753
Vietnam	115	0.472	122	0.560	108	0.671	101	0.682	109	0.688	109	0.688	112	0.691
Indonesia	108	0.515	96	0.679	109	0.670	102	0.677	110	0.684	112	0.682	111	0.692
Myanmar	123	0.390	131	0.481	125	0.585	118	0.651	127	0.552	131	0.549	132	0.551
Cambodia	148	0.186	140	0.422	136	0.512	121	0.541	130	0.543	130	0.556	130	0.568
Laos	141	0.246	136	0.465	140	0.484	131	0.476	143	0.485	135	0.525	135	0.534
World (top ten)														
Japan	1	0.983	1	0.960	1	0.935	1	0.939	1	0.942	1	0.944	1	0.956
Canada	2	0.982	2	0.946	2	0.934	2	0.936	2	0.941	2	0.942	2	0.946
Norway	3	0.979	3	0.943	3	0.929	3	0.936	3	0.940	3	0.941	3	0.946
Switzerland	4	0.978	4	0.943	4	0.929	4	0.936	4	0.939	4	0.939	4	0.943
Sweden	5	0.977	5	0.942	5	0.927	5	0.935	5	0.939	5	0.938	5	0.942
U.S.A.	6	0.976	6	0.942	6	0.926	6	0.934	6	0.939	6	0.937	6	0.942
Australia	7	0.972	7	0.941	7	0.925	7	0.932	7	0.936	7	0.937	7	0.941
France	8	0.971	8	0.940	8	0.925	8	0.931	8	0.935	8	0.937	8	0.939
Netherlands	9	0.970	9	0.939	9	0.924	9	0.928	9	0.933	9	0.932	9	0.938
U.K.	10	0.964	10	0.936	10	0.918	10	0.925	10	0.930	10	0.932	10	0.936

Sources: Human Development Report, 1993-2004.

Since 1994, UNDP has additionally developed a “Human Poverty Index” (HPI) to reflect the national performance of developing countries in improving their population’s quality of life, based on the percentage of population dying before the age of 40, the percentage of illiterate adults, and the percentage of people deprived of health care. In 1995, Thailand’s HPI was 11.9, ranking second among Asian developing countries (Table 4.23).

During the economic crisis, the HPI of Thailand rose to 18.7 due to an increase in the number of poor people; but after the crisis was over, the Thai HPI improves, dropping to 13.1 in 2002 (Table 4.23).

Table 4.23 Human Poverty Indexes for Thailand and Some Other Countries, 1995-2002

Group/ Country	1995			Group/ Country	1997			Group/ Country	1999			Group/ Country	2002		
	HDI rank	Group rank	HDI value		HDI rank	Group rank	HDI value		HDI rank	Group rank	HDI value		HDI rank	Group rank	HDI value
WHO/SEAR				WHO/SEAR				WHO/SEAR				WHO/SEAR			
Thailand	59	1	11.9	Thailand	29	1	18.7	Thailand	21	1	14	Thailand	22	2	13.1
Indonesia	96	2	20.2	Indonesia	46	4	27.7	Indonesia	38	4	21.3	Indonesia	35	3	17.8
India	139	5	35.9	India	59	6	35.9	India	55	6	34.3	India	48	6	31.4
DPR Korea	-	-	-	DPR Korea	-	-	-	DPR Korea	-	-	-	DPR Korea	-	-	-
Sri Lanka	90	3	20.6	Sri Lanka	33	2	20.4	Sri Lanka	31	3	18	Sri Lanka	36	4	18.2
Maldives	-	-	-	Maldives	43	3	25.4	Maldives	25	2	15.8	Maldives	17	1	11.4
Myanmar	131	4	27.5	Myanmar	55	5	32.3	Myanmar	43	5	28	Myanmar	45	5	25.4
Bhutan	155	6	44.9	Bhutan	70	7	41.8	Bhutan	-	-	-	Bhutan	-	-	-
Nepal	-	-	-	Nepal	85	9	51.9	Nepal	77	8	44.2	Nepal	69	7	41.2
Bungladesh	-	-	-	Bungladesh	73	8	44.4	Bungladesh	73	7	43.3	Bungladesh	72	8	42.2
ASEAN				ASEAN				ASEAN				ASEAN			
Singapore	28	1	6.5	Singapore	-	-	-	Singapore	-	-	-	Singapore	6	1	6.3
Malaysia	-	-	-	Malaysia	18	1	14.2	Malaysia	13	1	10.9	Malaysia	-	-	-
Thailand	59	2	11.9	Thailand	29	3	18.7	Thailand	21	2	14.0	Thailand	22	2	13.1
Philippines	98	3	17.7	Philippines	20	2	16.3	Philippines	23	3	14.7	Philippines	28	3	15.0
Indonesia	96	4	20.2	Indonesia	46	4	27.7	Indonesia	38	4	21.3	Indonesia	35	4	17.8
Brunei	-	-	-	Brunei	-	-	-	Brunei	-	-	-	Brunei	-	-	-
Vietnam	122	5	26.1	Vietnam	51	5	28.7	Vietnam	45	6	29.1	Vietnam	41	5	20.0
Myanmar	131	6	27.5	Myanmar	55	6	32.3	Myanmar	43	5	28	Myanmar	45	6	25.4
Cambodia	140	8	39.9	Cambodia	-	-	-	Cambodia	78	8	45	Cambodia	74	8	42.6
Laos	136	7	39.4	Laos	66	7	38.9	Laos	66	7	39.9	Laos	66	7	40.3

Sources: Human Development Reports, 1998-2004.

Note: For 1995, HDI was used instead as HPI was not used for ranking purposes for that year.

Since 2002, UNDP has used the Human Achievement Index (HAI) to measure the extent to which Thailand has been able to develop human resources at the regional and provincial levels. The measurement is based on eight dimensions: health, education, employment, income, residence and the environment, family life and community, transport and communications, and participation. As the HAI covers several dimensions, it can better reflect the development level than the HDI. For 2003, it was found that Thailand's HAI was at the middle level (0.6163); the highest level being noted for the central region and Bangkok's neighbouring provinces, whereas the HAI for the Northeast and North was lowest. However, by province the HAI for Phuket was highest (Table 4.24).

Table 4.24 Human Achievement Indexes by Region and for Top Five Provinces, 2003

HAI by region		HAI by province			
Region	HAI rank	HAI value	Province	HAI rank	HAI value
Whole Kingdom		0.6163	Phuket	1	0.7175
Bangkok	1	0.6731	Nonthaburi	2	0.7060
Five provinces around Bangkok	2	0.6627	Chon Buri	3	0.7006
East	3	0.6429	Nakhon	4	0.6804
Central	4	0.6352	Pathom		
West	5	0.6259	Songkhla	5	0.6788
South	6	0.6178			
North	7	0.5868			
Northeast	8	0.5379			

Source: Human Achievement Report, Thailand, 2003. UNDP.

5. Values, Beliefs and Culture

5.1 Consumption and Lifestyle Values

The 2003 ABAC Poll survey on spending of students/teenagers in Bangkok revealed that 43.7% of them liked to buy brand-name goods and 33.5% of them based their selection criteria on product's model and "high taste". This has resulted in Thai people's overspending and consuming unnecessary items, some of which might be hazardous to health such as tobacco, alcohol and narcotics.

The media tends to play a role in shaping Thai people's lifestyle and leisure-time spending, particularly television and the Internet, while radio seems to be less significant in this regard (Table 4.25).

Table 4.25 Leisure-Time Spending of Thai People by Administrative Region, 2001

Time spending category	Time spent by each person, hours/day		
	Municipal areas	Non-municipal areas	Whole country
- Watching TV or VDO tapes	3.2	2.7	2.9
- Searching info from the Internet	2.0	1.7	1.9
- Going to sports, movies, music events	1.7	1.8	1.8
- Socializing	1.8	1.7	1.7
- Doing hobbies	1.6	1.5	1.6
- Playing games	1.7	1.5	1.6
- Playing sports	1.5	1.5	1.5
- Listening to music/radio	1.5	1.4	1.4

Source: Report on Survey of Leisure-Time Spending among People Aged 10 Years and Over. National Statistical Office.

5.2 Beliefs and Culture

A survey on the participation of 2,177 Thai Buddhists aged 15-20 years in 14 representative provinces nationwide in religious activities, conducted by the Rajabhat Institute at Suan Dusit in 2003, revealed that 39.4% of them went to a Buddhist monastery once or twice a year; 76.2% never prayed prior to sleeping at night. Besides, a lot of them lacked morality and tended to compete with, or took advantage of, each other or were more likely to become individualistic in trying to seek more political and financial powers. And unfortunately, the Thai culture relating to solicitude and respect for seniority tends to be diminishing to the level that a plan on conserving Thai culture has to be developed.