

## Cultural Values in Thailand and Mexico: Oral Traditions, Folk Tales, and Proverbs East and West

Rosalie Giacchino-Baker  
Frederick J. Baker

California State University, San Bernardino  
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

In the process of acquiring language young people learn about their culture. Through listening and later imitating speech, they learn not only the words to label the world around them, but also the concepts and values to make sense of it. Stories of all kinds keep them spellbound. Proverbs echo in their ears. If they belong to a literate society, they listen and speak for years before internalizing the written word. If they belong to a completely or predominately oral society, their dependence on oral tradition is even more dramatic. Most adult members of any society remember what was told to them as children, especially if the format was entertaining and only incidentally informative.

All societies are organized around structures that are known by their members. Status sometimes determines the extent to which these structures are formally known, but individuals learn to find their place within the family as well as religious, political and social hierarchies. They learn to accept or reject the roles of leaders and followers.

The inculcation of these cultural values is obviously accomplished through every means at a society's disposal. This article will present examples of oral tradition, which contain cultural values for parental, religious and secular authority. The genres of folk tales and proverbs will be examined from a sociological rather than a literary perspective; cultural values not literary style will be the focus of attention.

A cross-cultural approach will be used since it provides a way to describe cultural values in both an Asian and a western country. Since Thailand and Mexico are both of great interest to the writers, (the authors have lived and worked in Thailand and Mexico over six years and speak both languages), examples of their oral traditions will be examined. Given the scope of this topic, selections of stories and sayings are in no way intended to be exhaustive. Hopefully, they will be typical without being stereotypic.

Before beginning to discuss Thailand and Mexico, we will briefly discuss the importance of oral tradition and the place of folk tales and proverbs within this tradition. Since the development of these genres is very dependent on cultural factors, the complex background of each of these countries will then be briefly acknowledged, in turn, before examining selections of their collected works. Finally, an attempt will be made to compare and contrast in summary form the unique and evolving legacies of these two countries.

The availability of written forms of folk tales and proverbs from these two countries has been a major problem in pursuing this article. As will be explained in more detail later, Mexican tales examined were collected over a period spanning more than seventy-five years, in both the U.S. and Mexico and from both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking informants. Thai tales were only available through critiques by secondary sources. Because of the obvious "unevenness" of source materials, any comparison of these genres in the oral tradition of these two countries will be tentative. It is hoped that the discussion of cultural values in the folk tales and proverbs of each country will stand on its own as a brief but authentic portrayal.

## The Importance of Oral Tradition

E. Havelock (1982) and W.J. Ong (1982) have made a resoundingly powerful case for the importance of orality within the wide range of human semiotic potential. While acknowledging the expanding function of writing, each of them is in awe of the power of primary orality. Ong mentions that only about 78 of the 3,000 languages in existence today have a literature. By implication, societies without literatures have had to rely on oral techniques to transmit their cultures. In some societies, such as that of the ancient Greeks, these oral techniques were used to retell narratives that were only recorded after many generations and countless revisions. In later societies, there was often only an educated elite that could record or read the traditions known only orally by the majority of persons.

A paradox becomes immediately obvious to anyone interested in oral tradition. "The basic orality of language is permanent" (Ong, 1982, p. 7), but the human voice is limited by time not space. "Orality, as a functioning condition of society, does not fossilize until it is written down, when it ceases to be what it originally was" (Havelock, 1982, p. 34). Any collected samples of oral tradition are, therefore, caught in the space of the written word, and changed from what was told yesterday and what might be told tomorrow.

## Oral Tradition and Literature

E. Cook (1969) places myths, legends and fairy tales, including folk tales and fables, within the tradition described above. She tells modern readers that these works are not intended to be realistic since they are not localized and are often quite fantastic in nature, with myths usually describing deities, legends describing heroes and fairy tales dealing with a world of magic. The distinction between these is sometimes blurred as will be discussed later in this article in relation to specific works. E. Cook warns today's readers to consider each story on its own merits rather than on their preconceived theories.

Keeping in mind Cook's warning not to overanalyze, and Ong's advice about not overlooking proverbs, we will now discuss references to values in the very different oral traditions of Thailand and Mexico.

## Thailand

For more than seven hundred years, Thais have governed themselves as a monarchy, ruled by a king who is recognized as both a secular and religious leader. Because this Southeast Asian country has never been colonized, it is appropriately named Thailand, meaning Land of the Free. Because Thai culture has developed without the restraints of a colonial power does not mean that it has not been influenced by its contacts with other groups. From their origins in southern China, the Thais brought strong animistic beliefs and their fundamental love of life. From their contacts with the Khmer civilization at Angkor they learned of Hinayana Buddhism as well as Hinduism, both of which stress distancing oneself from the passions of life. These sometimes conflicting philosophies have somehow melded in the Thai personality, forming a unique culture with rich oral traditions.

Any discussion of these oral traditions must be prefaced by the fact that the Thai farmer still represents the heart of Thailand. This quote from King Ram Kamhaeng as inscribed in stone in 1283 is still valid today: "This land of Thai is good. In the waters are fish; in the fields is rice...Whoever wants to play, plays. Whoever wants to laugh, laughs. Whoever wants to sing, sings." This notion of freedom through the bounty of nature is part of the independent Thai character.

This past century has seen more and more contact with Western traditions. In characteristic fashion, Thais accept discriminately what best fits their culture. The values of the Western world are making faster inroads in Bangkok than in villages. Even in Bangkok, however, the concept of values has uniquely Thai interpretations, which we will attempt to examine through examples of oral tradition.

J.M. Cadet (1971) is typical of many foreign researchers when, with tongue in cheek, he states that the single drawback to Thailand's history of freedom is the difficult access to Thai culture that is experienced by non-Thais. If not considered ethnocentrically, his comment is an accurate statement of the frustration felt by many foreigners who would like to learn about Thailand but who find a very limited number of books and articles published in other languages about Thailand. As a Pali and Sanskrit based language the Thai language is not one that is casually learned to do limited research.

The rich oral traditions of Thailand, ranging from the epic Ramakien to the bawdy song banter (mawlam) of Northeast Thailand, are obvious to anyone who has lived there for any length of time. It is only within the past forty years or so, however, that folk tales and proverbs have begun to be recorded in English. Most of these collections have been published by individuals or universities in Bangkok and are relatively unavailable even at major libraries outside of Thailand. For the most part, the interested reader can only find references to folk tales that are mentioned in books on Thai culture, history and modern literature. With these acknowledged limitations, we will nevertheless attempt to give a brief idea of how the concept of values is treated in Thai oral tradition, especially proverbs.

There seem to be two groups of writers who deal with Thai oral tradition as part of their independent disciplines. Anthropologists look at these traditions as an important way of examining Thai culture. R. Benedict's Thai Culture and Behavior remained unpublished as a wartime study when it was written in 1943. Cornell University has printed it several times since then, the latest publication being in 1963. It stands as an amazing feat of cultural anthropology done via literary research and interviews with Thai expatriates by someone who never visited Thailand. K.P. Landon (1949) provides another useful resource in the area of religious oral traditions that have blended the influences of animism, Buddhism and Hinduism. P. A. Rajadhon (1961) describes oral formulas in everyday Thai rituals that have not changed in generations.

A second group of writers discuss oral tradition from a slightly different perspective. They describe it both as an antecedent to literary history and as a mirror of sociological changes. W. Sitwasariyanon (1958), for example, discusses the influences of oral tradition on modern literary trends. Through his novels as well as other writings, K. Pramroj, one of Thailand's most renowned men of letters, has been instrumental in helping Thais meet the challenges of modern living by both recalling their proud oral traditions and calling for new literary expressions. H. Phillips (1987) briefly discusses oral tradition in the introduction to his book, which analyzes modern literature not from a stylistic perspective but as a way to understand Thai society.

As explained by R. Benedict (1963): "The groundwork of all Siamese institutions and habits is a reverence for authority" (p. 28). Since the idea of values often has some base in family structure, we will start with an examination of how the Thai family is viewed in oral tradition. Second, religious values will be discussed via its representation in distinct religious traditions of animism, Hinduism and Hinayana Buddhism. Third, Thai views of secular values will be presented. Once again, given the scope of this topic and the limitations of original source material, the examples cited should only be considered an invitation to further exploration in this area.

## Family

In general, the Thai nuclear family plays a more important role than the extended family as a valuing structure. The extended family, however, is more influential than it is in the United States. Thai children all learn to find their place within the hierarchy of relatives. Both sex and age serve very important functions, which are taught, to children through language itself as well as through stories and proverbs. Since it has been argued that age is more important than sex in determining values via status (Benedict, 1963), age will be discussed before the important consideration of gender.

B.L. Whorf (1956) argued that culture is transmitted through language. Although his theories are still controversial, it would be difficult to dismiss the importance of this fact when faced with the reality that it is impossible to say the word brother or sister in Thai without indicating if the person is younger or older than you are. Aunts and uncles are sometimes referred to as the older or younger brothers or sisters of a mother or father. Everyone knows by days or weeks who is older than whom and deference is made accordingly. Language itself establishes age as a determinant of authority. The gap between generations is impossible to breach, and parents are respected without question. This respect is then transferred later in life to anyone in a position of legitimate authority. When dealing with translations of folk tales or proverbs that include the words elder or younger, Western readers or listeners have to remember the importance of these simple words indicating age in Thai culture. Translations that omit these words leave out vital cultural nuances.

Gender roles are also brought out through linguistic and oral traditions. Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism, as practiced by Thais, provides in theory an inferior status to women since monk hood is limited to men. Thai families function with fathers as titular heads. Legal structures are not entirely patriarchal, however, since girls inherit property from their mothers, and boys inherit it from their fathers. Thailand prides itself on the freedom women have compared to other countries of Asia.

As in the Western tradition, young boys enjoy games and stories, which stress action and aggression. Benedict (1963) relates a story at the turn of the century in which Thai boys talked about "Jack the Giant Killer" not being "fierce" enough. This same attitude is prevalent today, as Thai boys adore the most violent films that the United States and Japan can produce. A favorite game of Thai boys that has continued for generations is the flying of uniquely Thai kites that are called male and female kites. The object of the game is for the large male kites to cleverly overpower the more easily maneuvered, small female kites.

Ambivalent views of women are shown in these sometimes-contradictory proverbs. "Man is paddy; woman is rice" indicates male superiority because of his ability to provide the seed to reproduce. Thai men claim to choose wives carefully as helpmates until death as shown in this proverb: "A play friend is not equal to a die friend and a boy friend is not equal to a girl friend." That is to say, women are recognized as faithful companions who, like die friends and unlike play friends, do not desert in the time of need. Thais are realists, however, and know that some women do not live up to these expectations. Proverbs, which admit this, include: "A male elephant, a crocodile, and a loving wife, put not your trust in these." "Three days absence from home and your wife is another's." According to Benedict (1963), wives who act as younger sisters, older sisters or mothers are considered to be good. Those who assume male roles and attempt to domineer or compete with their husbands are considered to be bad. On a somewhat humorous note, Thai men are warned by a proverb to be careful of the family from which his intended bride comes: "When you look over an elephant, look at its tail; when you look over a girl, look at her mother (and grandmother, as well)". (Supposedly an elephant's tail is an indication of lineage.)

The positive tension between men and women in the Thai family and social structure does indicate the active roles of both sexes. Gender roles are much more difficult to define than age differentiation within Thai family structure.

### **Religious Authority**

Three different religious philosophies contribute to oral tradition in Thailand: animism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Animist beliefs permeate every level of society and are reflected in many Buddhist rituals. Although there are references to these having been recorded in story form (W. Siwasarianon, 1958; P. Rajadon, 1961), the writers are only familiar with them through personal experience or through hearing or reading descriptions of ceremonies.

Ghosts (pii) play a recognized role in everyday Thai life. Spirits are classified as good or evil mainly depending on how they died. Those who had violent or accidental deaths are generally feared and avoided. Many traditions revolve around ways to trick these spirits. Good spirits, on the other hand, are invited to inhabit specially built spirit houses that are placed outside of structures ranging from elegant hotels to humble thatched homes. Often led by Buddhist monks, Thais present offerings and prayers to these good spirits in the hope that they will protect them from the evil spirits. These spirits are blamed for everything from insanity to temporarily strange behavior. Thais wear amulets (often blessed by Buddhist priests) to protect them from such misfortune and to bring them the good luck of good spirits.

Thais find their cultural roots in structured hierarchy of Hinduism as well as the unpredictable and magical world of animism. The most famous of the many Hindu legends adapted by the Thais is the Indian epic, the "Ramayana," which has been the base for four versions of the Thai national epic, the "Ramakien". This classic relates the mythical stories of the battles of the god-king Ram against the demon Totsagan for the possession of Ram's wife whose role remains passive. Children learn the stories at home from their parents and later study them in school. Classical painting, sculpture, dance and drama are all based on this epic which also has modern versions in comic strips, films and magazine condensations. According to Cadet, no version of the Ramakien has ever been translated into English in its entirety.

Buddhism, as a philosophy, permeates all oral and literary traditions in Thailand. The king of Thailand is today viewed as the unquestionably holy guardian of Buddhism with Thai monks as advisors. Thais have given their unique cultural interpretation to many of the precepts of Buddhism. This proverb explains merit-making which is at the heart of Thai Buddhism: "In this world everything changes except good deeds and bad deeds; these follow you as the shadow follows the body." Thais see themselves not only as responsible for doing good and enjoying life but for patiently accepting things as they are. They admit that this sometimes requires careful balancing of values.

As explained by Benedict (1963), anger and other passions "heat" the heart and disturb the good life. She quotes this moral lesson from a folk tale: "The force of anger is like a forest fire; if one has not sufficient sense to stamp it out at once, it is likely to spread until it becomes a calamity..."(p. 37). As noted by H.P. Phillips (undated monograph), Thais operate through "a relatively explicit and unquestioned set of standards of what is proper, desirable, or appropriate behavior" (p. 1). He explains that these standards are set by the Buddhist and non-Buddhist (animistic and Hindu) traditions, which form the basis for their actions. Some of these have been explained with examples from oral traditions.

## Secular Authority

Age is not the only important factor in determining social hierarchy. Since it has functioned as a monarchy since its beginnings as a country, Thailand has well-established traditions dealing with rank. Just as with age, the Thai language itself reflects the deference paid to status. There are four ways to say the pronoun "you" that are common in everyday speech. Usage depends on perceived status. There is an entirely different vocabulary, including a separate, highly defined set of pronouns that is used both for and by those of noble rank.

Through the figure of a beloved king and a respected royal family, the authority of a monarch stands as a stabilizing force in the social hierarchy of Thailand. The change from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy in the middle of the twentieth century seems only to have solidified the genuine acceptance of his authority by villagers as well as residents of Bangkok.

The dichotomy between superior and inferior is very important when discussing how Thais view themselves in societal settings. As was shown when considering parental values, "superiors are not people from whom one demands assistance and toward whom one feels resentment if it is not forthcoming; they are 'second parents' to whom one owes all" (Benedict, 1963, p. 28). The Thai notion of valuing will always place an older person above a younger one except when there is an obvious difference in rank.

This does not mean to imply that Thais are not realists in social, political or business settings. Their strongly hierarchical sense of values does not negate their acknowledgement of initiative. They value ability and cleverness in everyday situations, but cleverness always includes knowing the parameters set by one's place in society. Business and political dealings are acknowledged areas with fewer restrictions.

In this sense, Thais seem to value the "cool heart" of someone who can turn the situation to his advantage without becoming noticeably involved emotionally. A popular Thai proverb reflects this value in the oral tradition: "Keep muddy waters inside while you put clear water outside". Either a superior or an inferior must channel anger in any social situation. The established order in society must be maintained.

## Mexico

Carlos Fuentes speaks and writes eloquently of the uninterrupted vitality of Latin America. In an address delivered at the Claremont Graduate School (1989), he referred to its polycultural, multiracial heritage by using the name Indo-Afro-Ibero America. (He actually could have included some form of the word Asiatic since the first settlers to North and South America crossed the Aleutian Straits from Asia.) As a respected diplomat and literary giant, he called on Mexico and those countries in this hemisphere sharing a common cultural continuity to draw on themselves for models.

Although it is well beyond our scope to analyze the complexities of the heritage that Fuentes justifiably promotes, any attempt to discuss Mexican oral tradition must at least briefly acknowledge the contributions of Indian and Iberian cultures which are continually recreating the Mexican identity. From the Archaics to the Mayans to the Aztecs, the native populations of Mexico form the backbone of the Mexican character. F. Toor (1985) claims that descendants of at least 51 different native ethnic groups still live in Mexico. She explains that their traditions of values vary due to the influences of other cultures and modernization.

It is ironic that the earliest historians of these native ethnic groups should have been Spanish conquerors whose societal values were so different. It is reasonable to speculate how the philosophy of these members of hierarchical religious and political societies colored their accounts of Indian traditions. From the priests who wrote their first accounts shortly following the 1521 Conquest up to modern times, it seems that Indian values have been largely interpreted in print by outsiders.

C. Fuentes (1989) also stressed Mexico's strong link to a Western European heritage through its Spanish colonizers. He traced this influence back through the Greeks, Romans, Jews and Arabs, and paid special attention to the role of the monarchy, the distribution of power and wealth and the influence of the Catholic Church. He explained that after the Mexican revolutions which began in 1910, his country continued its process of cultural synthesis since "cultures condition us and we condition cultures" (Fuentes, 1989). In the absence of a colonial power, the model of political authority has vacillated from "strong men" who filled in political vacuums to charismatic leaders promoting democracy.

With this background, it is now possible to look at some Mexican stories and proverbs, which deal with values in family, religious and secular contexts. Since there is no single, major anthology of Mexican folk literature, collections from different regions, especially Jalisco, have been consulted (H. Wheeler, 1943). Interestingly enough, some of the most enthusiastic collectors of folk literature have done their studies north of the border among Chicanos in New Mexico, Texas, Arizona and California (A.J. Campos, 1977; A.M. Perales, 1972; J. Piggott, 1973). Most of these oral traditions are recorded in Spanish, but some are given in English translations. A few of them were told in native languages and then translated into English.

As mentioned earlier, the distinction between types of folk tales becomes easily blurred. Some are simply called "cuentos" or stories and are clearly not intended as truth. Others are referred to as "leyendas" or "historias" and have more of an aura if not evidence of truth. F. Toor (1985) states that all of them seem to serve three basic functions: "to keep alive ancient events and traditions; to furnish examples or to rationalize and sanction conduct; and to amuse" (p. 467). All three of these three functions were observed in the works examined.

## Family

The Mexican view of a man as authority figure in the home dominates most of the folk tales examined. This holds true in those that describe relationships between husbands and wives as well as those that deal with fathers and children. In stories collected in conversations with modern natives in Mexico, man's dominion over woman is established by fascinating local versions that either mirror or precede Biblical stories of the Garden of Eden, "The First People" (Toor, 1985, p. 494) and Noah's ark, "The Huichol Deluge Legend" (Toor, p. 497; Piggott, p. 68). The interviewee for the first of these believed that this story predated the arrival of the Spanish.

Based on this fundamental male dominance that is justified historically through oral tradition, some stories rationalize the beating of wives. "The Two Friends" (Wheeler, 1943, p. 91) describes submission of women as the natural order as two men compare notes on how to train wives by beating them and getting drunk. A man who was good to the wife who served him was shown the error of his ways when he visited her in hell where she was being punished for not having suffered enough on earth. ("A Story of the underworld: What happens to a wife whose husband does not beat her", Toor, p. 479).

Wives seem to be primarily viewed as passive or evil creatures who require a husband's vigilant attention, especially in the presence of other males. In "Why the Hikuli is so far away,"

women's natural role is described as working in the fields, carrying water, making tortillas and carrying heavy things. Both "The King's decree" (Wheeler, p. 6) and "Three challenges for King Solomon" (Wheeler, p. 99) deal with riddles where a dog is identified as a friend and a wife as an enemy. In "The Organ boy" (Wheeler, p. 60) a woman proves herself untrustworthy by tricking her jealous husband and putting a cardboard image of herself on the balcony while she runs away with her lover. This story is an unusual example, however, since the woman somehow escapes punishment for her transgression.

There appear to be countless variations on the theme of a father setting up a contest in which children compete to be heirs (male, of course). The father sets the rules, sometimes in riddle form, and sons take turns in order of their births. The youngest of three sons who takes the advice of some humble creature or who acts out of sincere conviction is invariably named the winner. "The three brothers and the toad" (Toor, p. 476; Piggott, p. 101), and "The three sons" (Wheeler, p. 65) are examples of this type of fatherly behavior. In a few cases daughters provided examples of devotion, but these seem to involve respectful obedience rather than aggressive competition. The Mexican version of Beauty and the Beast (Wheeler, p. 78; Piggott, p. 78) and "The girl who dropped flowers and pearls from her mouth" (Wheeler, p. 144) seem to demonstrate this tendency. Even goodness doesn't always seem to triumph for women as in the story of "The Three Sisters" (Wheeler, p. 146), a Sleeping Beauty type of tale where the good princess is thrown down a well after a poisoned apple and comb fail to kill her. The prince ends up marrying one of her wicked sisters.

The family structure in Mexico extends to include godparents as well as biological relationships. Very complex arrangements are made for adults to sponsor children at key points in their lives, especially religious ceremonies. These sponsors thereby enter into a special relationship with not only the child but also the child's parents who share responsibility for religious training. Although some of the duties are purely ceremonial, godparents do assume some authority over the child. Folk tales praise those who honor these bonds and set very extreme cases as the only acceptable ones for dishonoring godparents. In "A fiendish compadre gets caught" (Campos, 1977, p. 119) and "Rich and poor compadres" (Wheeler, p. 159) and "The two compadres" (Wheeler, p. 160), only attempted robbery or murder seem to be sufficient to break the bonds.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the family structure as presented in the "cuentos" and supported by the proverbs is headed by a strong male authority figure. Mothers are seen as passive, hardworking and nurturing. If they in any way deviate from this model they are considered unfit, and in extreme cases, evil. Once again, it must be remembered that the characterization in these stories is not intended to be multi-dimensional so that the view listeners or readers get of family valuing roles is quite stereotypic. These simple descriptions serve as easily remembered models.

### Religious Values

Except in creation myths, Mexican folk tales describe religious figures, whether gods, saints or priests, with what can seem to some outsiders as irreverence. Realism and, in some cases, cynicism are the prevailing mentality when considering authorities that are generally labeled sacred.

Contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church, of which most Mexicans are members, there seems to be little hierarchy of status accorded to God the Father, Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints or even the devil, for that matter. The panoply of religious figures is granted respect and allegiance based on need and personal inclination, in the tradition of pagan deities. Some saints are highly revered almost by individuals, villages or entire regions of the country. Second only to devotion given to Mary is that awarded to San Martin and San Antonio.

Perhaps more commonly in stories recorded from Mexican oral tradition, Christ and the saints appear as humans who do things like get drunk and play tricks on each other and on men and women. Such is the case in "The wicked Christ" (Toor, p. 479). It is no wonder that in the tale, "The hungry peasant, God and death" (Toor, p. 492), a starving farmer refuses to share his chicken with God who claims it as His right as Lord. The peasant says:

You are very bad to the poor. You only give to those you like. To some you give haciendas, palaces, trains, carriages, horses; to others, like me, nothing. You have never even given me enough to eat. So I shall not give you any chicken.

When the devil makes the same request of him, the farmer answers in this way:

To you I shall give some chicken, because you are just. You, yes, you take away the fat and thin ones, old and young, poor and rich. You make no distinctions nor show any favoritism. To you, yes, I shall give some of my chicken. (p. 494)

This same mistrust of God is extended to his priests. After confessing his sins and being told that intention is enough to ensure his guilt, the penitent assures the priest that his intention to contribute to the church should also be enough.

A priest in a pulpit seems to be especially vulnerable to attack. In "The miraculous feather" (Wheeler, p. 56), a priest who blows a feather in the direction of his congregation says that the person on whose head it rests will go to hell. Neither God nor his saints nor his avowed servants seem to be viewed with complete trust in the framework of oral tradition which stands as an interesting juxtaposition to the sincere devotion of many Mexican Catholics.

### Secular Values

After centuries of colonial rule, it is not surprising that Mexican oral tradition portrays kings as manipulative and greedy. Most of the stories examined present rulers as men who systematically abused their power at the expense of the poor and even of the rich who dared to oppose them. The extreme examples are the versions of stories about kings who insisted on marrying their own daughters. "The eyes of the princess" (Wheeler, p. 100), "The king and the queen" (Wheeler, p. 104), and "The prince and the mule" (Wheeler, p. 114) all use the theme of an unscrupulous king whose power is only foiled by magical intervention to save the virtue of the princesses. All stories end with princesses safe but with little respect for the king.

Once the Spanish had left their country, Mexicans continued to cast the same critical eye on some of those supposedly fighting for the rights of the peasants. Folk heroes, whom those in power often considered to be bandits, are common characters in oral tradition. "The legend of Agustin Lorenzo" paints an admiring portrait of a child's vendetta against a landowner for beating his grandfather. Because of his "holy" mission, there is a magical intervention, which allows him to grow up quickly, get a horse, gather a small army and get his revenge. This same magic makes him immune to bullets as he steals silver from the government to distribute as needed to the poor. It is only through the deceit of a blond woman that he was betrayed into the hands of the government from which he managed to escape with seven quarts of lead in him.

Pancho Villa has aroused perhaps more imagination in oral tradition than any other popular but brutal leader. As explained in "Legends about Pancho Villa" (Toor, p. 512), this folk hero avenges the rape of his sister by a landowner by killing this landowner on the day he finally marries his sister. Villa is said to have sold his soul to the devil in exchange for which the devil gave him the power to dominate people. This power supposedly enabled him to get young men who were willing to act as his slaves. His horse, Lucifer, is described as the devil himself who used his powers to help his master. To the peasant mentality, Villa represented a way of escaping from the domination of the rich gentry. They could find some comfort in the stories of his kindness to the poor. When confronted with the facts of his brutality, they sought supernatural explanations.

Proverbs tend to portray this same outright distrust of absolute authority figures such as kings (and their modern counterparts). A questioning ambivalence is reserved for popular leaders who do not always live up to public trust but will most likely never be punished. A peasant is warned to stay out of the affairs of power and money and to mind his own business.

"Palabra de rey no vuelve atras."  
A king can't go back on his word.

En la tierra de los ciegos, el tuerto es rey."  
In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.

"Yerba mala no se muere y si muere no hace falta."  
Weeds don't die, and if they die, they aren't missed.

"Nunca preguntes lo que no te importa."  
Never question what doesn't concern you.

"Con dinero baila el chango."  
It is for money that the monkey dances.

"Sola la cruz no roba."  
Only the cross doesn't steal (because its hands aren't free).

Secular power seems to be treated rather cynically in Mexican oral tradition as recorded in stories and proverbs. Common people sensed themselves to be powerless in the face of the historical domination of kings who were sometimes good but whose evil actions and intentions could only be counteracted by supernatural elements. As landowners became their more direct enemies during the revolutionary periods, banditos became folk heroes whose exploits raised them above the ranks of their original peasant status. These folk heroes, however, did not seem immune from the contradictory natures of evil and good. It seems that the popular power that banditos symbolized was too important to be disowned simply because of their brutality. Oral tradition blames the devil for the evil in their souls and continues to venerate these folk heroes for the popular power they wielded that gave vicarious pleasure to the general population.

Women's ideal role within the family is portrayed as that of an obedient and nurturing wife and mother. Any deviation from this model is labeled as warranting increased male domination. Evil women are always punished not only in this life but into eternity, following in the tradition of Indian goddesses who continue to wail on earth because of misfortunes they suffered. Stories of spirits such as La Llorona and La Malinche are among the most commonly repeated and remembered in modern times. Parents use the negative role model of the deviant woman as presented in these "cuentos" to scare children into obedience.

Religious authority is viewed from a very realistic and often skeptical perspective in these Mexican stories. Christian gods are treated like Indian gods with human inconsistencies and weaknesses. Saints often achieve god-like status because they have been credited with helping poor people in need. The devil is handled with both fear and respect because he is credited with the power of evil as well as a certain impartiality in the treatment of all humans. Priests bear the brunt of realistic humor in representations that include tales of greed and ineptitude. In the stories examined, religious authority is generally viewed with irreverence bordering on cynicism.

Folk stories and proverbs are an important part of Mexican oral tradition. While entertaining the listener or reader, they keep traditional stories alive, and rationalize and sanction accepted behavior. In the case of stories and proverbs about values, both adults and children are reminded of their traditional place in the family as well as in their religious and secular societies.

### Conclusion

Through the lens of secondary source material, it has been shown that the Thai concepts of family, religious, and secular values can be found in the oral traditions of folk tales and proverbs. While the discussion of Mexican concepts of values can be directly supported by citations from *cuENTOS* and *proverbios*, in the case of Thailand, it was necessary to supplement recorded oral tradition with material provided by both Thai and American anthropological and literary sources. Although this in many ways weakens direct comparisons, the following tentative observations are offered.

Both Thai and Mexican family values are based on a patriarchal model. Father figures are seen as powerful and dominant in the oral traditions of both cultures, but Mexican stories seem to present a more inflexible picture in which fathers are always right. Mothers are viewed as subservient in the two cultures, but Thai females are more often recognized as intelligent helpmates rather than simply nurturers and physical workers. Catholic influence seems to figure strongly in Mexican folklore, which assigns the role of temptress to all of Eve's descendants. Buddhism has no tenets which stress the basically evil nature of man as promoted by women. The unfaithfulness of women can be found, however, as a theme in Thai stories and proverbs.

From an outsider's perspective, religious values are treated irreverently in Mexican stories and proverbs. Neither God, nor His saints, nor the representatives of His church are seen as above reproach. Buddhism does not provide as many targets. God is not personified the way He is in the Christian tradition. There is no highly institutionalized church in Thailand to attack since most Thai men become monks at some point and then reenter secular lives. Highly respected figures, like the King, whom the Thais regard as a holy guardian of Buddhism, are not viewed as "touchable" even in folklore.

Mexico's history as a colonized nation colors its view of secular values. Because of the suffering of its native populations, there is a strong theme of distrust in folklore dealing with figures ranging from kings to governors. When the Spanish were evicted, an attitude of distrust prevailed towards those who assumed any leadership role. Since banditos came from the lower class and ostensibly fought against oppressors, they receive more favorable treatment in oral tradition than many elected officials.

Thailand has never had to fight an outside oppressor, and so does not seem to have the tradition of unaccepted authority that is the basis for Mexican tales of opposition to oppression. No folktales were found dealing with secular leaders in Thailand. The role of the king in

Thailand is revered since it is highly associated with Buddhism. Village headmen share leadership functions according to age and status. Modern appointed officials like governors tend to be looked upon philosophically. Politicization of urban populations is a recent phenomenon.

The role of status could be found in both Thai and Mexican traditions. In folklore, peasants in both countries recognize their place within the established social order. Mexican *cuentos* seemed to give peasants a way to achieve status through magic or merit.

The strong emphasis on age as a factor in respect seems to belong more to the Eastern than the Western tradition. Although birth order was mentioned in Mexican stories as a factor of inheritance, age difference does not assume the linguistic and cultural significance that it does in Thailand.

The concept of values evolves differently in each culture and can be seen in family, religious and secular structures. Oral traditions reflect these structures as part of the everyday experiences of people. On the basis of uneven samples of folktales and proverbs, the most that can be said is that the folklore of Thailand and Mexico reflect their very different cultures. As more Thai tales are translated and more Mexican *cuentos* are recorded, it will perhaps be possible to pursue a more in-depth study of similarities and differences.

### References

- Benedict, R. (1963). Thai culture and behavior. An unpublished war time study dated September 1943. Data Paper: Number 4. Southeast Asia Program. Department of Asian Studies. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University.
- Cadet, J.M. (1970). The Ramakien. The Thai epic. Tokyo: Kodansha International.
- Campos, A.J. (1977). Mexican folk tales. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press.
- Cook, E. (1969). The ordinary and the fabulous. An introduction to myths, legends and fairy tales for teachers and storytellers. Cambridge: The University Press.
- Fuentes, C. (1989). Lecture presented at the Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California.
- Havelock, E. (1982). The literate revolution in Greece and its cultural consequences. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Landon, K.P. (1949). Southeast Asia. Crossroads of religions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ong, W.J. (1982). Orality and literacy. The technologizing of the word. London: Methuen.
- Perales, A.O. La lechuza. Cuentos de mi barrio. San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company.
- Phillips, H.P. (1987). Modern Thai literature with and ethnographic interpretation. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Phillips, H.P. (undated monograph). Literature on Thai personality.
- Piggott, J. (1976). Mexican Folk Tales. New York: Crane Russak.
- Rajadon, P. A. (1961). Life and ritual in old Siam. New Haven: Hraf Press.
- Siwasariyanon, W. (Ed.) (1958). Aspects and Facets of Thailand. Bangkok: Public Relations Department.
- Toor, F. (1985). A treasury of Mexican folkways. The customs, myths, folklore, traditions, beliefs, fiestas, dances and songs of the Mexican people. New York: Bonanza Books.
- Wheeler, H.T. Tales from Jalisco, Mexico. (1943). Philadelphia: American Folklore Society.
- Whorf, B.L. (1956). Language, thought and reality. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.