

# A Different View of Phuket

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A good system for revealing the as yet unknown attributes and behaviours of people consists of placing the subject in a totally new situation and observing their reactions to the unexpected. Most of us love to people watch but I wonder if we know why we love to people watch. I know why I do.

People can often be predictable, for example if I throw something at you then you will instinctively try to catch it and the experiment will lack any scientific or informative value since you have done nothing more than to react in a predictable manner in response to an equally routine situation. Therefore, it does not provide me with the opportunity to investigate any hidden aspects of your personality. A far better way for me to determine your personality traits would be to place you in a familiar environment but in an entirely unpredictable situation.

How can we learn, for example, if a particular store owner (all friendly and smiles as I make my purchase) might not be capable of bludgeoning me to death over the change from my shopping. The best thing, then, would be to stimulate the person's unforeseeable reactions; like lighting the blue touch paper on a firework and then standing back to observe the sparks.

I have been using several examples of this during my physiological study of Phuket to try to figure out what makes people so different. If you were to take two people and drop them into a situation where the environment and what you do to them are exactly the same, then I guarantee that those two people will react completely differently. I always wonder why that is. Is it because of the way we were brought up by our parents or is it because of our social background and the way that society has taught us to behave and react to situations. The more I think about it the more fascinated I become.

If you were to repeat the experiment with animals and put two of the same breed into identical situations then they will almost always react the same way. So when it comes to humans the differences must be things we have learned rather than things we feel instinctively. I have been using this principal during my studies in Phuket with the following results;

I pay for a can of Coke at any of the many Seven Eleven stores in Phuket when the owner is behind the till. I always wait until I am sure that the owner is serving. You can tell they are the owner as they are usually quite old and look as though they have not slept for a few days and their nerves seem on edge like they may snap at any moment. Their eyes also seem to be going around like pin balls in a pinball machine looking for people stealing things from them as opposed to the girls who work on the checkout who are blissfully unaware twittering away like sparrows to each other and generally ignoring all the customers.

I always pay for the can of Coke with a 1,000 baht note (the largest denomination in circulation) and I flatly refuse to accept the change. Even though it is a lot of money I am adamant that I will not accept the change.

I attentively observe the owner's covetousness, willing as he is to take advantage of my presumed insanity. I leave and then five minutes later I enter the shop once more, this time accompanied by a police officer, and I accuse the owner of having refused to hand over my change. I study his anger at my bad faith, his disappointment at the foiled 'rip-off scam' wondering what I have to gain from it. Fearful, perplexed, he stammers incomprehensible excuses under the suspicious stare of the policeman, who does not believe that someone would refuse to accept that kind of change. He humbly hands me the necessary amount and I magnanimously declare that I prefer to consider the unpleasant episode closed. The officer, somewhat disappointed, says "Whatever you say." I observe with satisfaction the immense relief on the shop owner's face.\*

I get into the ubiquitous Tuk Tuk Taxis and say "To Mom Tris Boathouse in Kata please." Mom Tris Boathouse is a wonderful little island institution (where I carry out a lot of the analysis of my experiments over a glass of fine wine) built on a reputation of fine dining and equally fine resting in its wonderful Hotel and breathtaking views. It seems recently to have embarked on a Regatta of its very own boat race to expand around the island.

The Tuk Tuk drivers in Phuket have a reputation for being a somewhat mafia like syndicate who routinely set inflated rates for even the shortest journey and should their fares be refused they are well known for acting collectively as judge, jury and executioner in a bid to attempt to ensure that they manage their cash flow appropriately. It is important (like any professional business) that they manage their cash flow so that their business does not suffer and they may maintain the upkeep of their large 100 decibel noise level music entertainment system and the amazing neon lights which emanate from beneath their vehicles. Well it would be simply rude not to maintain the two features which do most to attract and satisfy the customers.

When we arrive at the Mom Tris the Tuk Tuk driver, who is busy keeping his eyes on the traffic, opens his hand to collect his fare. I drop a brand new sink plug still attached to its shiny chain and a Kaffir Lime Leaf into his hand. The question is: how will the driver (a person of habitually unstable nerves) interpret this enigmatic offering?

The other ubiquitous feature of the Phuket shopping streets are the Indian Tailors who stop you enthusiastically to enquire on your clothing requirements during your visit to the Island. They are remarkably skilled at predicting your nationality by saying 'gudday mate' when they think you are from Australia, or adopting a south east London 'cockney' style accent in greeting you when they suspect you are British depending on your attire and their intuitive deductive reasoning. They are incredibly persistent and will do anything (often in groups) to get you to shake their hand and come into their shop to view the material available for a new suit or dress.

I like to test their expansive boasts and proficiency with a needle and thread on being able to make anything by requesting that they make me some cut resistant gloves for use in the entertainment industry when searching party goes upon entering the premises for sharp objects secreted about their person.

I allow them to take my measurements and then return the next day to see the gloves which they have made and answer all my questions about the cut resistant properties of the 'very special material' which they have used. When I ask them for reassurance about the Kevlar and cut resistant special materials and the properties within them they nod enthusiastically, rolling their eyes and nodding their heads as if they are listening to music through headphones and always say 'oh yes, oh yes, very good, best quality'.

Then when I ask them if they personally will try the gloves on and produce a very sharp small pocket knife and proceed to stab their hands with very deliberate short jerking motions (not dissimilar to a wood pecker pecking a tree) I am amazed by their reactions.

There is somewhat of an undercurrent of visitors to Phuket who do not appreciate the skills of a dedicated Tailor in producing fine garments to adorn ones body. They are predominantly male gentlemen in their late teens and early twenties from various nationalities who insist on visiting establishments (shops, restaurants, bars and banks etc in the day and also in the nighttimes when temperatures can be considerably lower) dressed merely in a pair of shorts and flip flops showing of their sweating bodies and upper torsos.

Imagine their surprise and reaction when I proceed to stand behind them and quickly pull their shorts down to their ankles to leave them naked for the whole world to behold and observe the athletic prowess which they are so eager to display to the world.

There are some very large fashionable properties in Phuket in private grounds and gated communities and I love to visit them during the evening when the owners are out having a nice meal.

It is usually quite easy to scale the walls if you are reasonably fit and get into their house and I usually await them placidly seated, smoking, drinking their booze and watching their large flat screen wall mounted television. When the owners return I harshly rebuke them, I shake my fist at them, I say "How the devil do you have the nerve to walk into my house?," paying no attention to their explanations, or paying attention (it makes no difference), I demand that they show me their deed to the house, I do not allow them to open the drawer in which they ridiculously claim the deed is since that drawer is an inalienable part of a piece of furniture which, in turn, is an inalienable part of my house and, consequently, in no way could possibly contain the deed to a house belonging to people who are strangers, suspicious characters and perhaps criminals and well-known members of the underworld, etc.

Their reactions to these various people's predicaments are enlightening and I begin for the first time to consider Buddhism and the true meaning of spiritual enlightenment and my understanding of human nature and light-headedness descends upon me.

I have only been in Phuket for one week and have had to temporarily curtail the psychological crusade as I am in Phuket Bangkok Hospital encased in plaster of Paris from the waist to the shoulders and both my arms have also been broken. I have managed to hold onto my rugged good looks and charming smile and my sense of humour is also remarkably undamaged. I have been very impressed by the facilities and the employees and care being offered in what is truly a 5 star hospital easily able to rival any of the large hotels on the island for service. I have my own large room with ensuite toilet facilities, a lovely sitting area, great views and a huge wall mounted Samsung flat screen TV with so many channels to watch. I am not able to make notes but have been able to log onto their internet system to update my internet blog and keep you all informed of what is happening. I have also been able to search for the signs of arsenic poisoning which the doctors suspect I now also have.

It is amazing what you can find out on Google, apparently it has been theorised that Napoleon Bonaparte (1769 – 1821) suffered and died from arsenic poisoning during his imprisonment on the island Oasis of Saint Helena. Forensic samples of his hair did show high levels, 13 times the normal amount, of the element. This, however, does not prove deliberate poisoning by Napoleon's enemies: copper arsenate has been used as a pigment in some wallpapers, and microbiological liberation of the arsenic into the immediate environment would be possible. The case is equivocal in the absence of clearly authenticated samples of the wallpaper. As Napoleon's body lay for nearly 20 years in a grave on the island, before being moved to its present resting place in Paris, arsenic from the soil could NOT have polluted the sample as the arsenic was found WITHIN his hair, which can only be possible when the arsenic was already in the body. Even without contaminated wallpaper or soil, commercial use of arsenic at the time provided many other routes by which Napoleon could have consumed enough arsenic to leave this forensic trace.

Anyway I have noticed that the big Burmese Porter who communicates very little but has that unusual habit of nodding at me and narrowing his eyes and then smiling when he is close by (and who I carried out a psychological experiment on when I arrived) always seems very pleased with himself when he visits me each day to bring my trolley with food on it.

He obviously has no sense of humour or understanding of the bigger scale of things and the part he has to play in my evaluation of Phuket. If only these people knew what greatness they will go on to achieve when mentioned in medical journals in years to come. I wonder also as I lay here in plaster and traction sucking my food through a straw if the greats who walked before me like Louis Pasteur and Sigmund Freud if they had moments like this when they realised they were on the brink of a true historical breakthrough.

\* Note that we are dealing in mere hypothesis. This Seven Eleven store owner would react in the manner indicated and the one in the next street perhaps would not be intimidated by the presence of the police officer and would impudently affirm that he had given me the change, etc. As can be seen, by repeating this experiment (with different shop owners and, especially, with different policemen) we can succeed in plumbing the depths of shop owners' souls. This is true to a lesser extent with respect to policemen's souls.