ABSTRACT. Comparisons of quality of life (QOL) measures across cultures of countries in different stages of economic development have been very scarce. This study attempts to fill the void in the literature by investigating the level of overall life satisfaction and satisfaction with various domains of lives of Thais and Americans. Additionally, the relationships between satisfaction with domains of life and overall life satisfaction in each culture have been explored. The results of this study indicate that Thais are less satisfied with their lives in general and most of the domains of their lives than Americans. However, both Thais and Americans tend to be more satisfied with their personal domains of lives than environmental domains of lives. In addition, satisfaction with material possessions is found to contribute significantly to overall life satisfaction of Thais but not Americans. This suggests that material wealth or economic development is still a vital mechanism for enhancing QOL of people in Thailand, but is not important for enhancing QOL of people in the U.S.

INTRODUCTION

Many studies on assessment of QOL by using objective and subjective indicators have been conducted in the US and other advanced countries (see for instance, the reviews of QOL research by Schuessler and Fisher, 1985, a review of research on social indicators and the QOL by Palys and Little, 1980, a review of research on subjective well-being in general by Diener, 1984). Unfortunately, relatively few studies on QOL has been carried out in developing countries including Thailand. Those that have looked at developing countries have used mostly an objective well-being (social indicator research) rather than subjective well-being indicator (ESCAP, 1990). Particularly, the first report on social indicators entitled “Recent Social Trends in the US” issued by President Hoover’s Committee on Social Trends in 1933 whereas the first report on social indicators issued by the Development Studies and Information Division, Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board in 1975, forty two years later. In addition, the first major QOL study in the US using subjective measures is the research on mental illness and health by Gurin, Veroff and Feld (1960) whereas an early major study in Thailand is the research on QOL as indicated by overall
life satisfaction and satisfaction with various domains of life (Leelakul-

Quality of life (QOL) has been increasingly accepted as an ultimate
goal of development among various developing countries. Unfortu-
nately, according to Liu (1976, p. 10), there are as many QOL defini-
tions as there are people. Measures used for monitoring QOL can be
classified into two categories which are objective indicators and subjec-
tive indicators. The simple objective indicators generally adopted by the
economist are income and GNP (Samuelson, 1973; Suranyi-Unger,
1981). However, income and GNP do not adequately represent the
concerns of a society. Besides economic aspect, social and environ-
mental aspects as indicated by, for instance, infant and child mortality
rate, literacy rate and crime rate should also be important concerns of
a society (Baster, 1985; Singer, 1971; Elgin et al., 1974). Although,
objective indicators are relatively easily defined and quantified, they are
typically measured over specific geographical areas without accounting
for the wide variation of the QOL of individuals within the selected
geographical areas such as unequal distribution of income to the rich
and the poor. Additionally, objective environmental conditions (e.g.,
number of doctors per capita) are merely the inputs to be judged by
individuals in that environment and that they are a “quantity of life” not
“quality of life” (Carley, 1981). The resulting subjective judgment
reflects QOL. In a broader sense, many researchers suggest that QOL
is a person’s sense of well-being, his or her satisfaction or dissatisfaction
with life (Dalkey and Rourke, 1976; Andrews and Withey, 1976,
Campbell et al., 1976; Scheer, 1980) and this is the notion adopted in
this study.

Cross national studies on QOL are relatively fewer in number than
national studies and the comparisons are usually done among countries
in Western societies (e.g., Ferriss, 1975; Riffault and Rabier, 1977;
Andrews and Inglehart, 1979; Commission of the European Commu-
nities, 1980). Previous studies have shown that people in the countries
with higher income are not necessarily happier than people in the
countries with lower income (Gallup, 1976; ESCAP, 1990, p. 6).
Therefore, this study seeks to compare the QOL of Americans and
Thais and investigate the influences of satisfaction with various domains
of life on QOL or overall life satisfaction of Americans and Thais.