New Trends in Higher Education Towards the 21st Century in Thailand*

By

Prathip M. Komolmas, f.s.g., Ph.D.

President

Assumption University

Historical background

The higher education system in Thailand can be said to have had its origin during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V 1853 - 1910) with the creation of a law school, in 1887. This was soon followed by a medical school, the Royal Pages' School for training in government administration and an engineering school. By the Royal Decree of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI 1881 - 1925) on March 26, 1916, these schools were combined to form a university known as Chulalongkorn University.[1] Thus Chulalongkorn University officially became Thailand's first university in 1916.

Soon after the Revolution of 1932, the idea of spreading knowledge of Democracy among citizens through the establishment of a higher education institution became an urgent matter. Accordingly, Parliament passed a Bill known as Thammasat University Act 1933. The university was inaugurated on June 27, 1934 as an open university with the objective of propagating the learning of law and politics to all citizens. The university was then named "Thammasat Lae Karn Muang," meaning literally, "The University of

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Moral Science and Politics."[2] The status "Open University" implied "unlimited admission to all citizens." The university maintained its status as "Open University" till 1960 when it opted for a new policy, "admission by selection."[3] Thereafter, successive governments gradually but slowly established a few more higher education institutions within the capital and provinces.

Before 1969 higher education in Thailand constituted a State monopoly, the sole prerogative of government agencies. Towards the end of the 1960s, there was a steadily growing demand for higher education. Public universities in those days could not cope with such an enormous increase in demand owing to lack of space and other facilities in their institutions. To solve the problem, the government then launched two open public universities, one in 1971 and the other in 1978, to which to the present day admission is unlimited and without any restraint, thereby guaranteeing the right of access to higher education to all citizens who hold high school certificates or the equivalent.

Just before the establishment of the two Open Public Universities, the government also passed a landmark Private College Act in 1969 under which the private sector was authorized to operate higher education institutions with the right to confer degrees. By 1984 a certain number of private colleges that had consolidated their positions as full fledged tertiary institutions were raised to a university status.

Another landmark in the history of Thailand's higher education was the establishment of the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) in 1972. Prior to the aforementioned date, all universities were the responsibility of the Office of the Prime Minister, and colleges were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. With the creation of the Ministry of University Affairs, all public and private universities and colleges came under the MUA's jurisdiction; other public colleges have remained with the Ministry of Education and a few other Ministries as well.

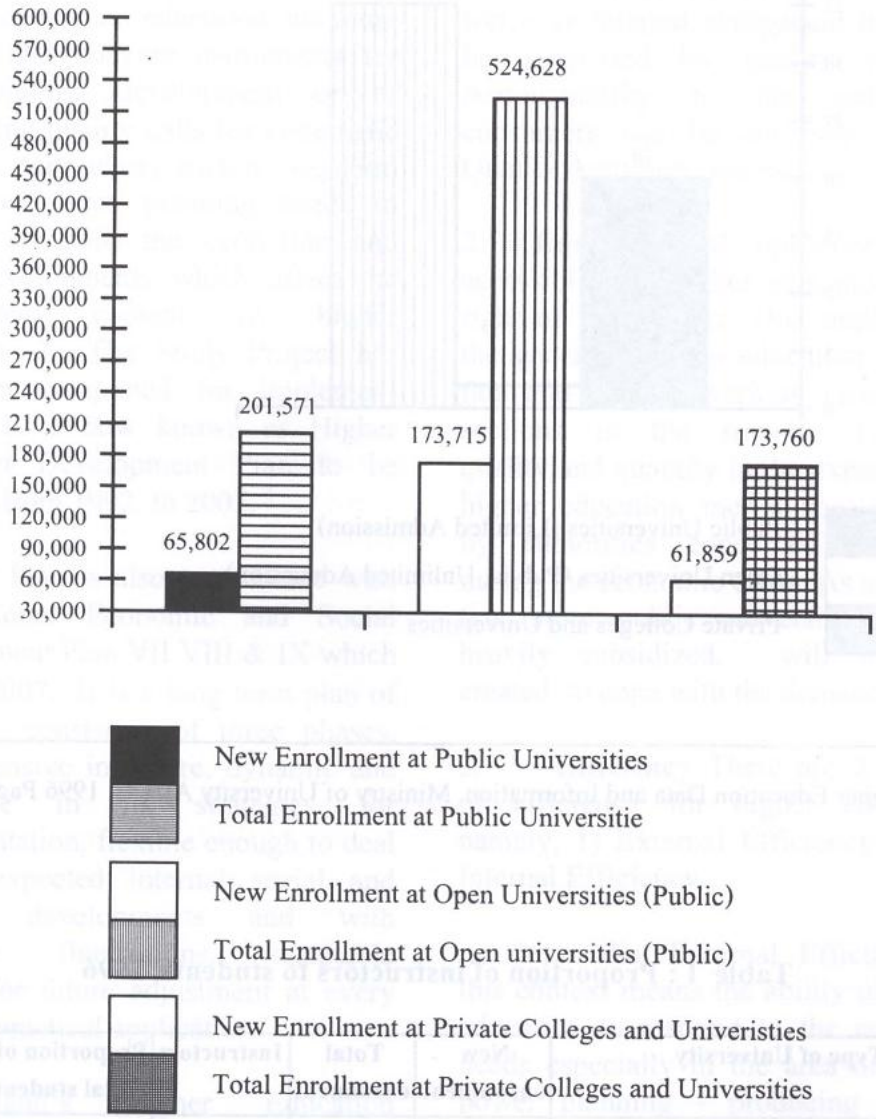
Ever since the establishment of the Ministry of University Affairs, higher education institutions spread far and wide throughout the country capable of catering to the needs of all people. (Please see Charts and Tables on following pages.)

Thailand's Higher Education Development Plan (1992 - 2007)

Towards the end of the Fifth Economic and Social Development Plan in 1987, there were signs that the country was heading towards new development policies - becoming an industry based economy. In response to the country's man-power needs for impending change in the new context of socio economic development plan, the Ministry of University Affairs launched in April 1987, with the cabinet's approval, a Study Project on the role of higher education institutions in the task of nation building. To meet

Chart I : Number of Students at Public Universities and Private Universities during academic year 1996

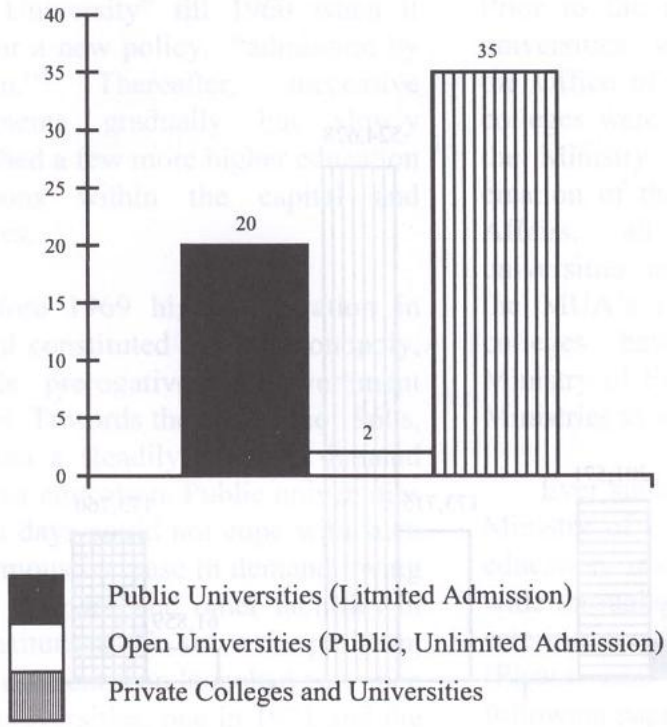
(These statistics do not include college students under the Ministry of Educatioon)



Source : Higher Education Data and Information, Ministry of Univeristy Affairs, 1996, Page 2-3

N.B Before the creation of the Ministry of University Affairs, there were only 17 higher education institutions with a student body of 67,848.

Chart II : Number of Public Universities and Private Universities during academic year 1996



Source : Higher Education Data and Information, Ministry of University Affairs, 1996 Page 2-3

Table I : Proportion of instructors to students, 1996

Type of University	New enrollment	Total enrolment	Instructors	Proportion of instructor to total student ecrollemnt
Public Universities (Limited Admission)	65,802	201,571	17,119	1 : 11.77
Open Universities (Public, Unlimited Admission)	173,715	524,628	1,359	1 : 386.04
Private Colleges and Universities	61,859	173,760	6,096	1 : 28.50

Source : Annual Report, Ministry of University Affairs.

the exigencies of the globalization process and rapid change in development policies, the Study Project was undertaken by a competent commission in line with UNESCO's suggestion: "The task of transforming systems of higher education into more efficient and relevant instruments for socio-economic development or of maintaining quality calls for systematic planning, particularly with a long-term perspective. Such planning needs to conform to both the economic and social developments which affect the form and content of higher education..." The Study Project has just been completed for implementation. It is now known as Higher Education Development Plan to be effective from 1992 to 2007. [4]

This Plan is also to coincide with the National Economic and Social Development Plan VII VIII & IX which ends in 2007. It is a long term plan of 15 years, consisting of three phases, comprehensive in nature, dynamic and aggressive in its strategies for implementation, flexible enough to deal with unexpected internal social and political developments and with economic fluctuations, adaptable enough for future adjustment at every phase of practical application.

Thailand's Higher Education Development Plan (1992-2007) has for its goals the attainment of competencies in 5 key areas which may be briefly presented as follows:

1. **Excellence** Excellence in teaching and learning in line with local culture and wisdom for a sustainable future, excellence in academic and applied research for the country's self-sufficiency and sustainable development. Higher Education meet high standards of quality, of which teaching forms an integral component that must be supported by quality research. Accountability to the public as consumers can be achieved through Quality Assurance practice.

2. **Equity** Equal opportunity and accessibility to higher education is the right of all citizens. This implies that the system of higher education must be fair and just to various groups and sections in the society. Therefore quality and quantity in the expansion of higher education merits special study by authorities concerned especially during the economic crisis. As a result a few more public universities, to be heavily subsidized, will soon be created to cope with the demand.

3. **Efficiency** There are 2 aspects of efficiency for higher education, namely, 1) External Efficiency and 2) Internal Efficiency.

Inter alia, External Efficiency in this context means the ability of higher education to respond to the country's needs especially in the area of man - power planning - producing enough engineers, scientists, and technicians, for the country's fast becoming industry - based economy in line with the then current development policies.

Internal Efficiency implies cost effectiveness in management, particul-

arly, the management of public universities and the optimization in the use of scarce resources. This has many pertinent implications. Hence an emphasis on enlargement of institutional autonomy, institutional leadership for academic excellence and effectiveness, training in the management of scarce resources, decentralization and deregulation.

4. **Internaionalization of Higher Education** In the atmosphere of globalisation and an interdependent world, Thailand's higher education institutions have to rethink their roles in relation to other academic institutions especially those of their neighboring countries. Hence, academic exchange programs, international student exchange programs, Asian studies, and a host of others.

5. **Privatization of Higher Education** Participation ,in the sense of partnership, of private sector in the management of higher education as an enterprise, privatization of public universities with entrepreneurial aspects, and new roles of the Ministry of University Affairs in matters of deregulation, academic freedom and enlargement of institutional autonomy.

Problems and Issues in Higher Education

As all higher education institutions are in the second phase of implementation of the Higher Education Development Plan (1992 - 2007), a number of issues have been raised which are briefly addressed here.

Thai higher education in crisis

Reflecting on the growing interdependence on a world scale of international and national economies, as well as the need to adopt a global approach in order to sharpen the competitive edge of the country, a good number of prominent social critiques as well as educators have voiced their concerns for the quality of Thai higher education. For example, on the occasion of the 22nd anniversary celebration of the Ministry for University Affairs' foundation, Mr. Anand Panyarachun, a former Prime Minister, addressed a large gathering of academics on the question of quality of higher education. He made some key points:[5]

- low academic standards. lower than those of Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan
- graduates have poor command of the English language
- lack of right understanding of basic concept of democracy among the faculty, staff and students
- faculty members being narrow-minded cannot cooperate together
- though the university is a community of scholars but the faculty have slavish mentality

Dr. Pravet Vasi, a medical doctor and educator, also a Magssaysay winner, strongly criticised the country's prevailing education system at all levels as lacking in intelligence and wisdom,

incapable of stimulating intellectual and free inquiry.[6]

Other critics blame the higher education system for having been patterned on the Western type of education producing graduates to serve a Western type of economy and promote western ideas and values thereby becoming irrelevant in solving the country's economic crisis and to the enhancement of the country's identity and national heritage.

Despite the foregoing critical assessment, however, so far there has not been any known scientific research or study on the quality of higher education in Thailand. Moreover, one should bear in mind that "quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept which depends to a large extent on the contextual setting of a given system, institutional mission, or conditions and standards within a given discipline".

Quality Assurance Practice

Up to now public universities are almost independent of the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) in matters of academic activities, whereas, private institutions are under strict control particularly in matters of academic standards. To solve this discrepancy and also to maintain high academic standards in all institutions, on a par with international standards of excellence, as well as to render accountability to the public, the Ministry of University Affairs has issued directives on Quality Assurance (QA) to be put into practice by all higher education institutions. Accordingly, each institution has to have its own internal mechanism of Quality Control (QC), while, at the same time, being subject to an external mechanism of control through Quality Auditing (Qau) and Quality Assessment (Qas) in all areas of production factors and activities, i.e. teaching, curriculum, qualifications of instructors, student-teacher ratio, library, equipment, educational technologies, environment conducive to learning and student activities, educational evaluation, research, to name the most important.

The above directives are controversial in nature, not only in Thailand but elsewhere in the academic world at large. Some public university administrators are not willing to comply since public universities have been accustomed to enjoying the privilege of broad academic freedom and autonomy even long before the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) was created. Moreover, it is a well known fact in academic circles around the world how world class universities, for example, in the US, that excel in research have been accused of negligence and ineffectiveness in teaching the undergraduate class. It is a paradox that the rewards that brought them fame and name are gained at the expense of students' learning. At the announcement of Stanford University's vision for the second century of its foundation in 1990, the President of the

University earnestly urged the faculties to reflect on "recommitment to teaching." Likewise, many other top rank universities voice their great concern in the same way.[7] As for private universities, this is another set of regulations to be observed but which will work for the better advantage of all if fair play is the rule of the game. However, according to a Matichon Newspaper's report on July 16, 1997, it appeared that public opinion is rather skeptical of university administrators' willingness to cooperate with the MUA in this matter. Implementation of MUA directives by public university administrators is likely to be met with resistance. They prefer the status quo, their long standing autonomy and privilege. Doubtless, other well established professional bodies may feel threatened by this new sort of accreditation agencies to do quality auditing and quality assessing instead. In the opinion of many academics, these professionals, because of their conservatism and outdated knowledge in the face of new scientific progress, have become irrelevant to do quality assessment of the professional school.

Management of Resources

In consequence of the economic collapse in 1997-98, the educational budget for academic year 1998-99 is likely to suffer a cut despite the government's assurance to the contrary. Rie Atagi has rightly concluded, "While the government announced that it was attempting to maintain its budget for education, the 1998 budget decreased for the first time this century, by 1.4 percent. Considering that the budget increased by 22 percent from 1996 to 1997, and the inflation rate in 1998 is expected to be 11 percent, the decrease is significant. In higher education alone, 2 percent of the budget was cut.[8]"

Table 1 Ministry of University Affairs budget in comparison to budget expenditures and education sector budget, 1996 fiscal year.

Item	Million baht	Percentage (%)
1. Budget expenditures	843,200	100.00
2. Education sector budget	171,914	20.39
3. MUA* budget	31,613	3.75
3.1 Operational budget	19,368	(61.27 %)
3.2 Investment budget	12,245	(38.73 %)

* MUA = Ministry of University Affairs

Table 2 Ministry of University Affairs classified by programme, 1996 fiscal year.

Programme	Million baht	Percentage (%)
Total	31,612	100.00
1. Higher Education Administration	8,656	27.38
2. Education Service	12,667	40.07
3. Higher Educational Quality Improvement	2,262	7.15
4. Religion, Fine Arts, and Cultural Promotion	125	0.4
5. Research for Higher Education	1,050	3.32
6. Academic Service to Public	336	1.06
7. Student Affairs	1,307	4.14
8. AIDS Prevention and Control	243	0.77
9. Public Health Administration	223	0.71
10. Public Health Service	4,731	14.97
11. Manpower Development	8	0.02
12. Accelerated Development for Five Southern Provinces	4	0.01

Source: Annual Report, Ministry of University Affairs

Table 3 Budget expenditures of Ministry of University Affairs classified by public universities/ institutions, 1996 fiscal year.

University/Institution	1996			1997		
		Baht	%		Baht	%
	Total	31,612,586,800	100.00	Total	36,762,183,900	100.00
	Total enrollment			Total enrollment		
1. Chulalongkorn University	23,227	4,087,980,900	12.9	24,281	4,344,449,900	11.82
2. Kasetsart Univerisity	22,324	2,277,346,200	7.2	24,145	2,441,052,800	6.64
3. Khon Kaen University	13,739	2,395,368,500	7.6	15,857	2,778,997,000	7.56
4. Chaeng Mai University	18,198	2,423,361,200	7.7	18,944	2,628,379,600	7.15
5. Thammasat University	20,132	1,590,370,000	5.0	20,770	1,944,456,000	5.29
6. Naresuan University	6,966	789,654,700	2.5	8,387	964,574,300	2.62
7. Burapha University	6,205	842,096,000	2.7	7,167	925,596,500	2.52

8. Mahasarakham University	3,689	239,390,700	0.8	6,875	499,620,400	1.36
9. Mahidol University	16,153	5,103,731,900	16.1	21,441	5,332,621,800	14.51
10. Ramkhamhaeng University	259,959	880,711,900	2.8	319,739	1,110,572,800	3.02
11. Sri Nakharinwirot University	11,499	1,533,634,000	4.8	8,638	1,721,770,500	4.68
12. Silpakorn University	5,400	744,880,000	2.3	5,353	831,288,600	2.26
13. Prince of Songkla University	12,045	1,893,780,800	6.0	13,016	2,210,032,000	6.02
14. Sukhothai Thammatirat Open Univerisity	216,891	369,985,800	1.2	211,643	398,241,600	1.08
15. Maejo Institute of Agricultural Technology	4,935	552,237,500	1.7	5,363	555,451,600	1.51
16. Ubonratchathani University	1,244	475,243,600	1.5	1,619	518,346,900	1.41
17. King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Chaokhuntaharn Ladkrabang	10,829	916,253,200	2.9	12,260	993,687,200	2.70
18. King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Thonburi	5,941	653,430,300	2.1	6,671	831,796,000	2.26
19. King Mongkut's Institute of Technology North Bangkok	11,610	601,196,800	1.9	12,296	751,252,200	2.04
20. The National Institute of Development Administration	8,144	286,048,800	0.9	9,077	437,512,900	1.19
21. Suranaree Technology University	4,677	701,983,700	2.2	4,832	691,352,100	1.88
22. Walailak University	-	669,915,700	2.1	-	1,817,980,600	4.95
23. Office of the Permanent Secretary for University Affairs	-	1,583,984,600	5.0	-	2,033,150,600	5.53

Source : Annual Report, Ministry of University Affairs

In view of limited resources as shown in the charts, among the major questions for consideration, (also suggested by UNESCO) in the long-term planning for the development of Thailand's higher education are:

– How much of the nation's wealth can be devoted to higher education, both to sustain and maintain current activities and to facilitate future development ?

– Who should bear the costs, and in what proportion?

– How should the available resources be allocated to institutions and courses ?[9]

The above questions have occupied the minds of the Public University administrators for decades especially after the announcement of the Higher Education Development Plan (1992-2007). The continuing pressure for rapid expansion in student enrolment in public universities has political implications for the Ministry of University Affairs despite the fact that the country already has 2 Public Open Universities with unlimited admissions plus a lot more private universities which were supposed, at one time, to satisfy the demand for higher education.

Evidently, one of the problems is the question of financing. Studying at private universities costs 10 times more than studying at public universities. Moreover, academic standards, in general, whether at private universities or Public Open Universities are not well appreciated by a good many people whose preference is for the so-called prestigious degrees for their children. To solve the question of financing by the government, many have suggested that public universities should shift the burden to the parents who need prestigious degrees and charge higher fees to cover the costs for good quality education. But public universities dare not do this for fear of political repercussions.

Besides financing, pressures for higher education institutions to serve an increasing broad range of functions demand efficient and effective management of resources. To respond to such exigencies of demand, public university administrators and university councils, generally, are in agreement to adopt a strategy of "self-regulation." This approach is also being adopted by a number of European universities. Central to this issue is cost effectiveness in the management of limited resources and the unit cost per student in operation so that the university can harness saved resources for better utilization.

The strategy of self-regulation and deregulation is based on the idea that the enlargement of institutional autonomy will result in an improvement of the performance of the higher education system.[10] For example, a lot of problems concerning personnel management could be eliminated. It is a well known fact that public university teachers, all having official status, cannot be easily taken to task or be accountable for ineffectiveness or

inefficiency. For this reason, faculty and staff members in many universities are resisting this self-regulation approach. Their main objection is the question of personal security.

The enlargement of institutional autonomy implies also that university administrators and the administration can state their own activities. Crucial to this strategy is the freedom to administer the block grant allocated by the government and to charge an additional fee on educational services. This is assumed to result in a better adjustment to, and even an anticipation of, changing social and economic conditions.

The strategy of self-regulation has an insinuating connotation in Thailand's higher education system.. it means bluntly as "out of bureaucratic system." At the moment, opinions among the academics are divided. So far, only two public universities have gone out of the bureaucratic system of control. Hopefully and eventually, every public university will opt for self-regulation.

Privatization of Higher Education

The concept of privatizaion is rather new and did not appear in economic literature until after the Conservative government of Margaret thatcher made it the linchpin of the government's economic policy in 1979.[11]

UNESCO tells us that "there appears to be a world wide trend, in both the industrialized and developing countries, towards what has termed the "privatization" of public higher education. This push towards privatization of public higher education has been supported by two inter-related factors: 1) inability or reluctance of national governments to fund expansion in higher education beyond current levels of public support; and 2) pressure on higher education institutions to support expansion and diversification resources outside the public weal." (p. 85)[12]

Definitely, "privatization does not mean turning public higher education institutions into private ones. Rather, the term refers to the intrusion of marketplace discipline into the public higher education arena."[13] In other words, privatization implies looking for sources of funding higher education from the private sector or that institutions themselves becoming more entrepreneurial in their management.

In Thailand, the idea of privatization was gradually growing into a concept while the Economic and Social Development Plans were being formulated. Between 1959 and 1991, during the Economic and Social Development Plan I & VI, the Thai Government has consistently been trying to reduce its role in economic matters while, at the same time, administrative reform in the management of public enterprises has been proposed by succeeding cabinets. After the oil crisis in 1973, financial problems were aggravated by managerial inefficiencies and loopholes

in the collection of revenues. Because of this experience, the idea of using private sector management disciplines to solve state enterprises' problems has been gaining acceptance ever since.

In order to keep pace with the then booming Thai economy, the Thai Government of 1989 adopted the "Privatization Policy" as a key concept and cornerstone for the sustainable development of the nation. Accordingly, human resource development has become a pivotal issue in the implementation of this policy, especially in high technology application areas.

Accordingly, on the 22 nd March 1995, the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, Ministry of University Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, submitted to the Cabinet for approval the outlines of official policies concerning "State's Aid for Investment in Education by Private Sector"

The four Ministries have given the following objectives as the rationale to support their policies,

1. To provide educational opportunities to the needy or indigent students at all levels.
2. To sharpen the competitive edge for Thailand, human resource development being the key to economic success.
3. The Gross National Product for the year 1994 increased by 52.67 per cent compared to figures for 1990 while the Gross Domestic Product increased at an average rate of 8.8 per cent per annum.
4. The country's investment in high technology areas and rapid expansion in service industry make it imperative for the government to invest in education.[14]

Accordingly, 20,000 million baht was allotted to the Building and Equipment Fund for educational establishments outside Bangkok Metropolitan parameters, and another 20,000 million baht for scholarship loans.

In April 1996 freshmen, both from Public and Private universities who came from low income group (below baht 120,000 per annum) were granted scholarship loans (approximately 76,000 baht per annum) comprising tuition fees, books, board and lodging. In 1997, a modification was made in the definition of "low income group" so as to include those families whose earning per year is less than Bht 300,000.00 thereby providing access to more students for scholarship loan. Furthermore, this benefit was also extended to high school students.

Tax exemption upon the income and other privileges are being granted to investors in private education. Deregulation procedures will be enforced to facilitate the implementation of these policies.

Also in May 1997, despite the economic slump and the fluctuation of

Thai currency, the government has just approved a request by the Ministry of University Affairs to set a fund of Bht 2,000 million for Personnel Development to cover instructors in private colleges and universities. From now on, instructors in private higher education institutions can have access to loans to further their education and training abroad. Thus, human resource development policy for economic growth and industrialization of the country is in full swing.

Now that the country has just moved from an economic slump in 1997 to an economic collapse in 1998, it is yet to be seen whether such a grand scale subsidy to human resource development will be affected. So far scholarship loan for needy students is still functioning very well into the third year without interruption while yearly allocation of budget to public universities has been tightly controlled and somewhat curtailed. As for other educational funds, it is doubtful whether this grand scheme can be implemented to the full despite IMF's assurance for education priorities.

Today governments and other critics are telling people in higher education that they must find new sources of funds, or at least explore those already common in other parts of the world. The question is not merely one of acquiring new resources, but the organizational, educational, and philosophical consequences of both seeking and finding such funds. (p.92)

Internationalization of Higher Education

> For many years, higher education institutions have encouraged international cooperation and the free flow of ideas and professional personnel between countries. They have appreciated that science and scholarship do not recognize national boundaries and that progress in research will be facilitated by effective international sharing of ideas and discoveries.[15]

In an atmosphere of internationalization, the need to promote such cooperation is even greater today than in the past. Besides, there is also a clear message from around the academic world that such cooperation must be founded on the principle of partnership among equals. In the opinion of Jane Knight of the Canadian Bureau for International Education, this implies that achieving international standards by higher education institutions should be a key rationale for internationalization.

In line with this rationale, the Ministry of University Affairs, in its Annual Report 1997, has reiterated its determination to upgrade standards and competencies of higher education institutions to meet international standards in academic and administrative matters. Also it is determined to promote Thai higher education institutions to play an active role in the Asian region and the world.[16] Accordingly, the following are some of

the projects launched by the MUA :

1. UMAP; University Mobility in Asia and The Pacific, promoting students and faculties to do research at graduate level or receive training from countries in the region.

2. Thai University Administrators Shadowing. This project financially supports university middle management to undergo training in higher education management from well known universities in England and Australia.

3. Area Studies Centers. This project promotes higher education institutions to establish centers for Area Studies in their own institutions. The objectives of the centers are to be data based for pertinent information in economics, politics, and sociology. For example, Center for Australian Studies at Kasetsart University, APEC Studies at Thammasat University, European Studies at Chulalongkorn University, etc.

4. New roles for Thai higher education institutions in the Asian region. Higher Education institutions having expertise in their specific fields of studies are encouraged to develop mutual assistance projects with other institutions in the Asian region especially in Indochina. Worthy of mention in this regard are collaborative assistance given to Agricultural College in Laos by Khonkhen University, agricultural development project between Agricultural University of Hue in Vietnam and Chiangmai University.

5. Existing collaboration between higher education institutions and international agencies in the region is to be strengthened, for example, APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation), ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), ASAIHL (Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning), AUN (ASEAN University Network)

6. Asian Center for Higher Education. Another ambitious project being prepared by the Ministry of University Affairs is to make Thailand the center for higher education in the region. There are many constraints in this regard. For example, Thai being the medium of instruction in almost all universities in Thailand except for one or two. However, a few international programs of studies do exist here and there. Moreover, Thai language is not international enough to attract vast numbers of foreign students.

In some ways, the above projects which require heavy investment in order to obtain the end result both in materials and qualified personnel will have to suffer a set back owing to the recent economic collapse. Thus the internationalization process as envisaged by the Ministry of University Affairs will slow down for some time to come.

Despite the above constraints, however, many public and private

universities have taken their own initiatives to internationalize their institutions through faculty and student exchange programs. In the case of private colleges and universities, all academic cooperation and agreements with non-Thai institutions must have the approval of the Ministry of University Affairs before becoming effective. Right now, inter-university joint degree programs especially with British institutions are very active. In fact, quite a number of Western higher education institutions are very aggressive in exporting their education services, not only in Thailand but throughout Southeast Asia as well. Furthermore, the Ministry of University Affairs has not only encouraged but actually invited some Western universities to establish their sister institutions in the country. This is done, argues the MUA, in order to internationalize Thai higher education and to prevent Thai families from sending their children abroad.

In internationalizing higher education institutions in the Asian region, one should bear in mind that English literacy and fluency, which is a prerequisite for meaningful cooperation, is still a major constraint for quite a number of institutions to render such exchange programs and other academic cooperation, feasible, practical and viable. However, in the case of Thailand, this is understandable since Thailand has always remained independent and has never been colonized by the West; it has its own distinct culture and written language. Moreover, as recently as less than ten years ago, the Ministry of University Affairs issued mandatory directives to all higher education institutions to employ Thai, the only national language, as the medium of instruction.[17] Though such directives have not yet been revoked, however, they are ignored in practice nowadays by officials themselves as the process of internationalization is gaining ground in the country.

As we move towards a century of cooperation, internalization of higher education is becoming an integral part of the education system itself. This is so because "preparing future leaders and citizens for a highly interdependent world, requires a higher education system where internationalization promotes cultural diversity and fosters intercultural understanding, respect, and tolerance among peoples. Such internationalization of higher education contributes to building more than economically competitive and politically powerful regional blocks: it represents a commitment to international solidarity, human security and helps to build a climate of global peace."[18]

Personnel Development

The Economic and Social Development Plan VIII (1996 - 2000) has just been launched. Along with this plan, the Eight National Education Development Plan has also been effected, in which personnel development is specially emphasized. Accordingly, towards the end of the

Plan, all higher education institutions are required to have reached an ideal number of qualified faculty. For example, an ideal ratio of degree holders among faculty members should be Ph.D. : MA : BA = 6.5: 3: 0.5 Because of the economic collapse, it is to be wondered whether such an ambitious plan will ever be realized in the near future. Since the economic crisis, public universities have to curtail budget for personnel training and further education in Western countries. As for private institutions, the Personnel Development Fund of Bht 2000 million originally allocated to private universities for loan, at the launching of the Eight Education Development Plan, has as yet to materialize. Rumour has it that it, too, will suffer from budget cuts.

To keep pace with the internationalization and globalization process and the ever widening fields of sciences and academic disciplines, faculty members, at all levels, need to be trained and retrained in the practice of new sciences and the applications of technologies. Because of economic constraint, quality education – teaching and research – and advancement of knowledge in all higher education institutions across the country may suffer a setback for some time to come.

Concluding Remarks

The Economic and Social Development Plan VIII (1997 - 2002) has envisaged a key role played by higher education institutions in the economic, social and cultural development of the country. The Plan will have to be modified to accommodate the new reality of the economic crisis; so also is the Higher Education Development Plan (1992 - 2007).

However, what is crucial to the higher education system during the next 5 years or so is how to go about adopting a strategy of self-regulation and the enlargement of institutional autonomy for institutional efficiency and effectiveness in the face of scarce resources As a consequence and in the eventuality of new reality, management education and training activities especially for public university administrators will be imperative. As for private universities, they will have to learn how to cope with rising costs and student mobility, and, how to envision a new strategy to respond to the quantitative expansion of public higher education institutions.

NOTES

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2. Thammasat University Background and Specific Information
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