

COUNTRY REPORT

Internationalization Development of Thailand's Higher Education: Positioning Thailand as An International Education Center for The ASEAN Region

Presenter: Mrs. Chinda Tejavanija Chang
Author: Mrs. Chinda Tejavanija Chang
Affiliation: Sripatum University
Contact Information: Director
Sripatum International College
61 Phaholyothin Rd.,
Jatujak, Bangkok 10900
THAILAND
E-mail: chindatc@spu.ac.th

An Overview:

The impacts of globalization, technological advancement and trade investment liberalization under the WTO framework have prompted Thailand to play a more active role regionally and internationally. To produce quality human resources who could function well in the knowledge-based society, Thailand's Higher Education provision needs to be redirected to respond well to the global and national challenges.

Thailand's Higher Education Development Plan has been formulated and integrated into the successive Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan, interfacing educational activities to the economic, social and cultural goals of national development.

Thailand's First Long-range Plan for Higher Education Development (1990 – 2004)

The former Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) which has been changed to Commission on Higher Education (CHE) has taken the initiatives to formulate Thailand's First Long-range Plan for Higher Education Development (1990 – 2004) with more proactive and dynamic approach in responding to changing environments.

The Long-range Plan emphasizes five major dimensions of higher education development namely:

- 1) access and equity
- 2) efficiency and accountability
- 3) quality and excellence
- 4) internationalization and regionalization
- 5) privatization and corporatization

Internationalization and Regionalization:

With the rapid movement of globalization, international collaborative relationships among nations are highly valued. The internationalization and regionalization projects have been launched to meet the expected demand. The underlying strategies are to promote international education programs and encourage staff and student exchange programs with foreign institutions.

International Programs have been widely encouraged to promote International Education in Thailand. As a result, the number of international programs taught at Thai Higher Education Institutions has increased considerably.

Six Characteristics of International Programs:

Higher Education Institutions in Thailand who wish to offer International Programs should ensure that their programs possess the following characteristics to reflect the true aspect of international education:

- 1) Quality and Efficiency of Program's Administration.
- 2) International Standard of Curriculum Structure.
- 3) Qualifications and diversities of faculty members.
- 4) International and cultural diversities of student bodies.
- 5) International academic learning environment
- 6) International standard facilities and services.

International Programs offered by Thai Universities:

At present, both Thai public and private universities offer altogether 520 international programs using English as a medium of instruction both at undergraduate and graduate levels i.e.

- 176 undergraduate programs in 107 fields of study in 31 universities
- 217 master's degree programs in 174 fields of study in 29 universities
- 127 doctoral degree programs in 108 fields of study in 18 universities

Numbers of Foreign Students in Thai Higher Education:

According to the survey conducted by the National Statistic Office in October 2002, there were 4,343 foreign students in Higher Education Institutions in Thailand. Almost 50% or 2,137 of these foreign students are from the neighboring countries in Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) as follows:

- China 946
- Vietnam 619
- Burma 380
- Laos 131
- Cambodia 61
- Other: 2,206
(India, Japan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Taiwan, and U.S.A.)

Growth of Thailand's International Programs in Higher Education:

Academic year	No. Of Foreign Students	No. Of International Programs	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Ph.D	Revenue Million Baht
2001	2,500	387	128	190	69	1,250
2002	4,343	465	153	203	109	2,171
2003	4,962	520	176	217	127	2,481
2004	5,650					

The statistics showed numbers of foreign students increased substantially from 2,500 in the year 2001 to 4,962 in 2003 along with the significant increase in International Programs offered by Thailand's Higher Education Institutions which have generated as high as 2,481 million baths for Thailand in 2003. This year Thai Higher Education anticipates approximately 5,650 foreign students enrolled in Higher Education Institutions in Thailand.

Quality and Excellence : The Key Success to Internationalization Development of Thailand's Higher Education

In order to allow Thailand to play a more active and dynamic role in the Asian Pacific and to position itself as an international education center for the ASEAN region and the world community, prime importance must be emphasized to the heightening on quality and standard of the International Programs offered by both public and private Higher Education Institutions.

All public and private Higher Education Institutions must offer an international standard level of International Programs bearing in mind that quality is the key to produce qualified graduates who are capable of competing in the job market and to function fruitfully in the globalization era.

As Higher Education Institutions overseas has so far supplied most of internationally qualified personnel for foreign subsidiaries and Thai business in Thailand. Under the situations in which the Thai economy and business have been increasingly integrated into the global economy and business, the Thai Higher Education Institutions must be organized in such a way that it can respond to the increased need for the human resource that are capable for international business at various levels e.g. managerial, engineering and technician.*

Short and long-term strategies to upgrade the quality of instructors and the programs to meet the minimum standard set must be launched by all the public and private Higher Education Institutions. Academic excellence of International Programs in Thailand in teaching, researching as well as information and knowledge-sharing must be strengthened. These strategies may include the development of new curricula for international study, promotion of international events at the university level, participation of faculty members in international academic conferences and development of programs with an aim to promoting international collaboration and cooperation with distinguished Higher Education Institutions in foreign countries mainly U.S.A, United Kingdom or Australia. Faculty and staff should also be provided with an opportunity to visit foreign countries to broaden their horizon through Faculty and Staff Exchange Program and overseas study tour programs.

Meanwhile, Thai students enrolling in International Programs at Higher Education Institutions should be made aware of cultural diversities by all means e.g. learning in the same classes as international students, participating actively in international events at the colleges, taking foreign language courses especially Chinese and Japanese and participating in Student Exchange Program.

Quality Assurance: A National Recognition

Quality Control by setting up standard criteria to ensure minimum standards of degree of International Programs at all levels (undergraduate, graduate diploma, higher graduate diploma, and graduate) offered by Higher Education Institutions must be strictly conducted and monitored not only by the Institution through the Internal Quality Assurance system (IQA) for quality control, quality audit and quality assessment but also by the public organization – the Office of National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) for External Quality Assurance (EQA).

Role in International Educational Forum: An International Recognition

To gain international recognition, Thailand's Higher Education Institutions offering International Programs must actively engage in the following activities:

- 1) Participation in regional and international academic forums as a means to support its internationalization process.
- 2) Establish academic collaborations with distinguished and world-class Higher Education Institutions for joint-degree programs, twinning-programs, faculty and student exchange program, credit-transfer arrangement and cooperative research network to gain academic strength and recognition.
- 3) Consistent communication and cooperation with foreign institutions and education agencies.

- 4) Mobility of faculty and students within and outside the ASEAN region through the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP).
- 5) Seek official accreditations or certifications from International professional affiliations or certified bodies such as AACSB for Business Programs or American Hotel & Motel Association for Hospitality Management.
- 6) Participate or organize International Education Exhibitions or Road Shows worldwide.

Regional Cooperation: Key Strategy for Internationalization Development of Thailand's Higher Education

As Thailand's Higher Education strives to position itself as an international education center for the ASEAN region, the key strategy is for Thailand to develop international collaborative relationship and establish regional cooperation among Higher Education Institutions.

The underlying strategies are to promote international educational programs, faculty and student exchange, collaborative research, curriculum development, joint-program in cooperative education through encouraging government policy and regional agreements on trade and services under the Free Trade Area (FTA) Agreement.

In addition, Thailand's Higher Education Institutions through the support of Commission on Higher Education (CHE) should consistently establish links with other regions by means of Memorandum of Understanding linkage programs and other specially designed projects. Proactive in cooperating with its counterparts at bilateral and multi-lateral levels to promote mobility within and beyond the ASEAN region to improve the quality of human resources and higher education as a whole must be pursued by all Thai Higher Educations.

Mechanisms to facilitate and encourage Regional Cooperation: Thailand's Experiences

1) Thai Government policy and regional agreements on trade and service:

Thailand has participated in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) which is one of the multilateral trade agreements negotiated by more than a hundred countries that are now under the auspices of the World Trade Organizations (WTO) covering all types of trade in services except those supplied in the exercise of governmental authority. As such, education is one of service whose trade is subject o the GATS' provisions.

It is well-accepted by countries that education is largely a public service. Therefore, foreign education services should be viewed as complementary to government education but not as a replacement. The negotiations will offer not only a one-way street for other countries to come in but will also open doors into other countries as well.*

RECOMMENDATION:

Thai Government has to be careful in negotiations for the “ IN “ part, and must have clear policy direction for our own education system in order that all necessary conditions shall be placed on whatever greater access we may willingly allow. For the “ OUT “ part, Thai Government need vision to see what education services that Thailand is and will be capable of providing to other countries now and in the future through preserving of the local wisdom.

2) **Thailand – the Host to major regional and international educational organizations:**

During the past 15 years, Thailand’s Commission on Higher Education (CHE) then the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA), has participated actively in regional and international forums as a means to support its internationalization process. Moreover, Thailand has been designated to host major regional and international educational organizations as follows:

2.1) Under the ASEAN framework, Thailand is host to the Secretariat of the **ASEAN University Network (AUN)** which was established in November 1995. Its members are from 17 universities in the 10 ASEAN Member Countries and its dialogue partners, namely Japan, Korea, China, India, Russia and the EU to promote ASEAN awareness through Higher Education.

The main objective of AUN is to strengthen the existing network of co-operation among leading universities in ASEAN by promoting cooperation and solidarity among ASEAN scholars and academics, developing academic and professional human resources, and promoting information dissemination among the ASEAN academic community.

AUN has grown rapidly with its collaborative activities currently comprising over 20 projects including those within ASEAN and with its dialogue partners. One of the most significant project occurred on November 11, 2000 when The Network’s Board of Trustees endorsed The Bangkok Accord on AUN-QA, which aims to promote the development of Quality Assurance (QA) System as an instrument for maintaining, improving and enhancing teaching, research and the overall institutional academic standard of Higher Education Institutions of Member Universities. The AUN has given importance to recognize and respect the differences among Member Universities in their organizations and environment, including cultural aspects as well as basic resources. In the spirit of collaboration, the Members have agreed to develop standard and mechanism for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which could consequently lead to mutual recognition by Member Universities.

RECOMMENDATION:

In order to facilitate and encourage regional cooperation, the membership should not only be restricted to a few number of leading universities in the Member Countries but also extended to all Higher Education Institutions in the Member Countries both public and private who shared the same philosophy, goals and commitment to strengthen the network to promote human resource development in the ASEAN Region.

2.2) Thailand has also hosted the **Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning of Thailand (ASAIHL- Thailand)**. ASAIHL was established in January

1956 and considered the oldest regional non-governmental organization comprising more than 150 member institutions in 14 countries throughout the region. The principal goal of the organization is to enhance the capacity of member institutions to raise the quality of teaching, research and administration in internationally recognized standards of academic excellence.

The Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning of Thailand (ASAIHL – Thailand) consisting of 24 public and 10 private Higher Learning Institutions co-ordinates with ASAIHL to hold two inter-university conferences each year to provide a valuable forum for the exchange of ideas, experiences and research findings among the country's leading academics. It was through these exchanges that ASAIHL can contribute to improvements in Thailand's educational system and the country overall development.*

2.3) **Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO)**, was established in 1965 as an intergovernmental organization among Southeast Asian countries to promote cooperation in education, science and culture in the region. Besides ten Member Countries of SEAMEO namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand, SEAMEO also consists of six Associate Member Countries that include Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands and New Zealand and one Affiliate Members, the International Council for Open and Distance Education(ICDE)*

Moreover, Thailand has been chosen to host three more specialist institutions which provide regional leadership in human resource development namely:

- a) SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education (SEAMEO RIHED)
- b) SEAMEO Regional Centre for Tropical Medicine (SEAMEO TROPMED)
- c) SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO SPAFA)

RECOMMENDATION:

To encourage regional cooperation, Thailand's Higher Education Institutions should take a more proactive and dynamic approach in SEAMEO's activities and projects in strengthening understanding and cooperation in education, science, culture for a better quality of life by holding more international conferences and seminars for academics and educational administrators to use as an international forum to share new knowledge, creative thinking information and idea as well as to facilitate new linkage and network among Higher Education provision in the ASEAN region.

Asian Student Forums should also be organized hosted by Thailand's Higher Education Institutions to enhance the potential, knowledge, capability and ethics of the New Generation to create the Ideal Graduates to serve the global community.

2.4) **The International Institute of Trade and Development (ITD)**. Newly inaugurated in May 2003, the International Institute for Trade and Development is a non-profit public organization designed to empower developing countries with the knowledge necessary for successful participation in today's global economic environment. The ITD was

established through a cooperation agreement between the Royal Thai Government and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) during its 10th Session held in Bangkok in February 2000.

Its main objective is to provide a capacity-building mechanism for developing countries in the region so that they may better cope with the challenges and risks of globalization and further the capacity of participants from developing countries in formulating appropriate economic policies and legislative adjustments, which will complement their countries' development objectives.*

RECOMMENDATION:

Although the Institute's activities such as seminars, workshops, training and research in the areas of commercial diplomacy, globalization and liberalization and international trade and investment facilitation will be tailored mainly towards the capacity-building needs of developing of the countries, particularly those in the ASEAN region, it is recommended that Thai Government as the key organizer of this institution should offer these activities to all interested parties from public, private and non-governmental organizations from all countries in order to promote linkages between national, regional and international organizations as well as creating new networks of understanding and cooperation among participants and their associates.

2.5) **Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific (AUAP)** located at Suranaree University of Technology in Nakhorn Ratchasima was established in July, 1995 by representatives of universities in the Asia and Pacific region with the primary purpose of providing the means whereby the universities at the Asia and Pacific region as defined by UNESCO, may work together in order to discharge more effectively their responsibility provide higher education and training, to extended the frontiers of knowledge and contribute actively to the well-being of the community, to develop human resources, and preserve and enhance the cultural heritage and thus to serve the cause of socio-economic and peace.

Member universities of AUAP also work together to strengthen their institutional capacity to serve society as well as to co-operate with university bodies at the international, regional, sub-regional and national levels, as well as with intergovernmental and private bodies concerned with higher educations.

3) **Thailand's Participation in the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific(UMAP) and UCTS (UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme):**

Thailand through the Commission on Higher Education has encouraged greater mobility of faculty and students among Higher Education Institutions both public and private within and outside the ASEAN region since 1995 through the participation in the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) which aims to achieve enhanced international understanding through increased co-operation between higher education institutions, and especially through increased mobility of higher education students and staff.

Thailand has been one of the first to join hands with Australia in conducting a pilot project on UCTS (UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme) which takes UCTS. This is an important initiative, providing universities in the Asia-Pacific region with a mechanism by which they could translate the value and grade of courses which their students have undertaken when studying as exchange students at foreign universities into the programs taken at their home university. Universities participating in the Scheme have gained better understanding about the overall arrangements and more importantly, increased confidence in the quality assurance systems of their partners.

4) Thailand's Collaboration between Higher Education Provision and Private Sectors through Co-operative Education Program:

Thailand's Commission on Higher Education (CHE) has been aware of the need to produce highly qualified graduates to meet the needs of the country's social and economic development. Therefore, Cooperative Education Program has been devised as an effort to foster links between higher education and the world of work and other parts of society.

The cooperative program will take four months and participating students will also earn credits from the program. The program integrates theory and on-the-job training by taking into account trends in the world of work in economic, business and industrial sectors in order to respond to the requirements of the labor market. The ultimate goals are to develop entrepreneurial skills and to facilitate employability of graduates.

Cooperative Education also involves cooperation between Higher Education Institution and business or industrial operators to allow students to develop both academic and work-related skills in the real setting in addition to knowledge gained from classroom learning.

RECOMMENDATION:

Thailand should take an initiative to expand its Cooperative Education Program to the regional level in order to promote closer academic cooperation and coordination between Higher Education provision and private sectors especially in the major academic area such as hotel and tourism management which is one of Thailand's strength by establishing collaboration with International Hotel Chains owned by Thai business group which have operated hotels in the ASEAN region namely the Dusit Hotel & Resort Group, the Imperial Hotel Groups and the Central Hotel Group who operate hotels in various countries in the ASEAN region.

This mechanism will also promote the mobility of students in the region and enhance students' capability and skill to serve in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry which is considered an industry of cultural diversities.

Regional Cooperation in co-operative education will benefit Hospitality and Tourism Industry in the ASEAN region as a whole if Higher Education Institutions in ASEAN countries offering programs in Hospitality and Tourism Management join hands to offer co-operative education in their neighboring countries so students can learn local culture, tradition and value as well as languages to broaden their horizon and international perspectives.

Thailand's Strengths to Position Itself as An International Education Center for the ASEAN Region:

1) Political Stability :

The current Government under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, with its majority in the House of Representatives allow Thailand to have the political stability. The current Government is expected to run the country for at least another eight years.

2) Diversity:

Thailand's Higher Education Institutions both public and private offer many levels of international programs for Bachelor's and Master's Degree as well as Doctorate programs in business management, economics, social sciences, engineering, medicine and nursing. Higher Education in Thailand also acts as a hub for the ASEAN region , with renowned specializations in agriculture, fishery, tourism and service business .

Also available are short and specially designed courses which are popular among foreign students and range between 1- 9 months. Courses include cooking of Thai and International food, Thai traditional massage, herbal and spa treatment and hotel services, fashion design and tailor.

3) Regional Accessibility:

Thailand's geographical location serves as the gateway to South East Asia and the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). Bangkok is a regional hub for air traveling making Thailand highly accessible.

4) Affordability:

Many choose to study in Thailand because the costs of travel and living expenses are substantially lower than elsewhere as are education fees.

5) An International Environment:

Thailand is host to many embassies and consulates, as well as regional and international organizations including:

- Association of South East Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL)
- Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization- Regional Center for Higher Education Development (SEAMEO RIHED)
- ASEAN University Network Secretariat (AUNS)
- International Institute of Trade and Development (ITD)

6) The Natural Environment:

Thailand ensures good weather all year round while it enjoys abundance of places of cultural and historical interest and beautiful beaches, island and national parks. Moreover, Thailand is well-recognized as one of the world's major tourist destinations.

7) Freedom for all Races, Religions and Cultures:

As Thailand's name means Land of Freedom, Thai people regardless of their race or color, have enjoyed their freedom in selecting their religion, belief and cultural traditions.

This freedom is also extended to all foreigners and foreign students working and studying in Thailand.

8) Safety and Security:

Thailand is considered one of the country in South East Asia who enjoy safety and security due to the political stability and non-racial discrimination policy and practice.

9) Thai Hospitality:

Thai people are well-appreciated for their warmth, friendliness and most of all, their hospitality which has been one among the other precious Thai cultural heritages. Foreign faculty members and students in Thailand will definitely have memorable life-time experiences and enjoy the hospitality of their colleagues, students, friends and service staff.

Conclusion:

The Internationalization Development of Thailand's Higher Education is positively reflected in the rapid expansion of international programs at Higher Education Institutions. However, in order for Thailand to position itself as an international education center in the ASEAN region, prime importance must be heightened on the Quality and Standard of the International Programs offered by higher education provision.

Moreover, the International Programs must truly reflect the international aspects in the program quality and efficiency of program's administration, the curriculum structure, the instructors, the student body, the academic learning environment, cultural diversities, facilities and services.

The key strategy is to develop international collaborative relationship and establish regional cooperation in Higher Education aiming at promoting international education programs, faculty and student exchange, collaborative research, curriculum development, joint programs in cooperative education with multi-national corporations and business sectors through encouraging government policy and regional agreements on trade and services under the Free Trade Area (FTA) Agreement.

References

Bureau of Higher Education Standards (2002), **All in One: Policies, QA, and Cooperation**, Bangkok: Ministry of University Affairs.

Bureau of Higher Education Standards, **Standard Criteria of Thai Higher Education**, Bangkok: Ministry of University Affairs.

Division of International Cooperation, Ministry of University Affairs, (2003), **International Programs in Thailand 2003**.

Division of International Cooperation, Ministry of University Affairs, **Thai Higher Education Review** (July – September 2002)

Division of International Cooperation, Ministry of University Affairs, **Thai Higher Education Review** (January – March 2003)

Division of International Cooperation, Ministry of University Affairs, **Thai Higher Education Review** (April – June 2003)

Department of Export Promotion, Ministry of Commerce, **Thailand International Education Exhibition 2004**.

Ministry of University Affairs (2000), **International Programs in Thai Higher Education Institutions**

Khanthachai, N (2002), **The Fulbright's Roles in Promoting Cooperation and Collaboration between Higher Educational Institutions in Thailand and the United States**.

URL: www.depthai.go.th

URL: www.inter.mua.go.th

