The Political Economy of Internationalization of Thailand Higher Education *

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Abstract

The development of higher education in Thailand can be traced back to the late nineteenth century since King Rama V pursued modernization of the country and pushed for higher education reform. In the Cold War period, under the influence of the United States and globalization, Thailand began to internationalize its higher education system, to meet new demands. This article reviews and attempts to analyze Thailand's efforts towards internationalization from the concepts of the triangle of coordination and policy transfer/borrowing. The results are Thai higher education system has shifted from the state to the higher education oligarchy towards the market and the borrowing of educational policies is obviously seen, especially, at the political, economic, and cultural levels.

1. Introduction

The development of Thailand's higher education can be traced back to 1889, when King Chulalongkorn or King Rama V commenced the establishment of the Siam's education system, to the pursuit of state modernization. King Rama V oversaw the

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establishment of eight professional schools aimed at providing training in the fields of political science, law, education and pharmaceutical science. On March 28, 1917, Chulalongkorn University, the nation's first university, was established. Since then, Thailand's higher education progressed steadily. From an academic viewpoint, the development of Thailand's higher education system is comparable to developments in domestic politics. Before the 1970s, bureaucratic polity dominated Thailand's higher education system, with the state possessing total control over the system. However, from the Cold War era and the influence of the United States, the outbreak of student activist movements in Thailand led to the university raising direct challenges against the government. After the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Thailand's higher education system confronted the need for reform, with internationalization being a critical aspect.

After more than a decade of investment, in terms of internationalization, in what state is Thailand's higher education system currently in? This article will apply the triangle of coordination to analyze the political economy that embodied by the triangular relationship in Thailand's higher education system involving state authority, academic oligarchy, and the market. This paper argues that the higher education system has fallen under the influence of marketization and universities returned to market competition as the golden standard. Thus only by strengthening the international competitiveness of universities can reform in higher education to be achieved.

To make understanding and to analyze the reforms and internationalization of Thailand's higher education system, this article adopts the research approach of policy transfer and policy borrowing. (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996)

Accordingly, eight policy borrowing categories can be noted: 1) policy goal, 2) structure and content, 3) policy tools, 4) policy plan, 5) institution, 6) ideology, 7) concept and attitude, and 8) negative experiences. In terms of policy borrowing, the three aspects of politics, economics, and culture of borrowing are worth noting. The politics of borrowing describes the inevitable political consequences that may occur in the process (for example, issues related to legitimacy and national alliances). The

economics of borrowing refers to the assistance provided by international organizations for states to carry out economic reform. Finally, the culture of borrowing refers to cultural discussions between states, such as modernization and cultural superiority, which exist regardless of economic or political differences (Lao, 2015).

2. Internationalization of Higher Education

In the literature on higher education, internationalization and globalization are often confused and misused. Globalization is a massive political, economic and social force that pushes higher education in the new century towards internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007) as such globalization is considered as the process that influences internationalization. In simple terms, globalization transformed the landscape of internationalization, and internationalization changed education in the world (Knight, 2003). On the other hand, internationalization of higher education refers to the response of states towards globalization (Chalapati, 2007; Knight, 1999; Wit, 1999).

According to academic studies (Knight, 1999; Wit, 1999), the primary reason for internationalizing higher education consists of four aspects: academic, socio-cultural, political, and economic. Also academic analysis, four main factors could comprise the internationalization of higher education which are following as 1) faculty: selection and human resource development, and professional development of faculty; 2) student: student-oriented approach and activity oriented approach; 3) course development: the integration of global dimensions into existent courses and the integration of international and intercultural courses into the current curriculum; and 4) international strategic alliances: faculty and student exchange and joint dual-degree (Sangpikul, 2009).

In terms of strategies and plans for internationalization, four general categories can be identified: 1) academic plans: student exchange programs, recruitment of international students, visiting programs and internationalized courses; 2) academic and research collaboration: joint research projects, international conferences and forums,

and journal and book publication; 3) international relations and services: participation in international networks, oversea alumni organizations, and overseas or distance education; 4) extracurricular activity: student organizations and international and intercultural campus activities (Knight, 1999).

On the other hand, there are factors of successful internationalization as 1) political reality and national security: for example, terrorism makes the acquisition in the US more difficult; 2) government policy and education cost: policies concerning tuition and visa application fee affect the willingness of foreign students to study abroad; 3) increase in domestic demand: more students choose to study abroad or enter international programs at home; 4) English ability: an increasing number of courses use English as the working language; 5) internationalized curriculum: students are increasingly receptive of international programs; 6) E-learning: distance education certificates from international programs are increasingly recognized; 7) private sector: private education is the fastest growing sector in terms of higher education in the world; 8) quality guarantee and control: insurance of the quality of higher education is an important issue (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The listed variables can be further integrated into three significant factors: external factors: policies, alliances, and market; internal factors: strategy, personnel and budget; and innovation: international and intercultural curriculum (Nilphan, 2005).

3. The Development and Reform of Thailand's Higher Education

A strong higher education system is critical for sustainable growth and development of a state. Higher education plays an essential role in the creation and delivery of new knowledge and the nurturing of students who can respond to the pressure of global competition (World Bank, 2010). Modern education in Thailand originated during the reign of King Rama V (Chulalongkorn, 1868-1910). Under Chulalongkorn, Siam had adopted the European system of higher education and

initiated the National Education Plan (Nitungkorn, 2001). In 1887, Siam established its first central authority for managing 38 schools, 81 teachers and 1,994 students (World Bank, 2010), and in 1892, Ministry of Education was officially established (OEC, 2017). Since then, higher education was regarded as an essential institution for the development of professional bureaucrats (Fry & Bi, 2013), and facilitated Thailand's successful transformation into a modern state.

In 1917, Siam established its first university, Chulalongkorn University, an institution named after King Rama V. In 1932, after the kingdom's transition into a constitutional democracy, several other professional schools were established, including Thammasat University (1933; law and politics), Mahidol University (1942; medical science), Silkaporn University (1942; fine art), and Kasetsart University (1943; agricultural science). In the 1960s, following the succession of General Sarit Thanarat as the Prime Minister of Thailand, and noting the goal of developing educated personnel outside Bangkok to push back the invasion of communism, the Thai government subsequently established Chiang Mai University in northern region (1964), Khon Kaen University in the northeastern region (1964) and Prince of Songkla University in southern region (1967).

After the end of World War II, Thailand began adopting the US higher education model; comprehensive universities began emerging, which signaled the popularization of higher education from elites to ordinary individuals. In the 1960s and 1970s, the number of higher education institutions increased, including National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) and King Mongkut's Institute of Technology (KMIT). In addition, Ramkhamhaeng University and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University – the open-admissions universities aimed at the further popularization of higher education.– were respectively established in 1971 and 1979 (OHEC, 2013). In this period, the Thai higher education system demonstrated three characteristics: 1) an emphasis on national development; 2) an emphasis on

technological education in response to the need of industry; and 3) an emphasis on the relationship between education and the market (Lao, 2015).

In 2004, Thailand adopted the Rajabhat University Act, an act that upgraded teacher's college to the university level in the hope of supporting regional development. In the same vein, Thailand also upgraded the Rajamangala Institute of Technology into the Rajamangala University of Technology and integrated professional colleges that spanned 40 campuses into nine technology universities. As of September 2015, Thailand boasts 156 higher education institutions, including 81 national universities (including professional universities, autonomous universities, Pathumwan Institute of Technology, normal universities and technology universities) and 75 private universities and colleges. In any sense, the massive expansion of Thailand's higher education system from merely five universities before the 1960s to 156 universities and colleges in 2015 is a wonder. Unfortunately, while the number of education institutions proliferated, the number of university and college students dropped due to Thailand's slow economy and low birth rate among other reasons. The number of university and college students fell from 2,054,426 in 2006 to 1,970,644 in 2009, and by 2015, the number continued to fall to 1,851,653 (OEC, 2017; Sinlarat, 2014). Such a trend heightened the pressure of competition among schools, which began to turn to the student pool beyond the national border, in the hope of increasing its competitiveness at home through internationalization.

As officials and bureaucrats chronically served as part-time instructors in national universities (in the early period, more than 80% of all bureaucrats served as part-time instructors; the number dropped to 31% in 1973), the Thai higher education system was highly controlled, and great obstacles stood before the path of reform. However, changes in the atmosphere and low birth rate meant that Thailand's higher education system had to adjust towards the market. Many educators hoped the government could

relax its control and grant universities and colleges with more independence to train students who can meet the market demands.

According to previous studies (Fry & Bi, 2013; Kirtikara, 2001; Nitungkorn, 2001; OEC, 2003; Praphamontripong, 2010; Sinthunava, 2009), issues on development that the higher education system faced, which in turn established the primary context for reform, include: the lack of coordination in objectives in past education policies; expansions in fundamental education, economic growth and other institutional factors increased the social demand for higher education; improvements in information technology that required higher education reform in order to meet the ideal of lifelong learning and develop competitive skilled labor; limited interaction between the higher education system and economic departments in the past; increased interstate competition as a result of globalization put pressure on the higher education system to reform; competition for public resources after the 1997 economic crisis, which in turn exposed the narrow concentration of the budget and skilled labor; the demand for more efficient response towards changes at home and abroad, particularly against the arcane management structure; shortage of a state institution for supervising and supporting the higher education system; regional imbalance and inequity in the Thai education system.

In 1999, the National Education Act or NEA (1999) noted that the three principles of lifelong learning, community participation and the continued development of knowledge and the learning process. The NEA provided the driving force for a new wave of higher education reforms that include: reorganization of the education administrative system; autonomy of education institutions; redistribution of resource and investment for education; the use and accountability of public resources; quality assurance and evaluation of higher education; and participation of the private sector (Kirtikara, 2001; Sinthunava, 2009; Nitungkorn, 2001).

Meanwhile, according to regulations, on July 7, 2003, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of University Affairs, and the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) – the chief authorities for education affairs – were integrated into a single ministry with six subordinate offices (Chalapati, 2007; Sirichana, 2002): Office of the Minister, Office of the Permanent Secretary, Office of the Education Council, Office of the Basic Education Commission, Office of the Vocational Education Commission, and Office of the Commission on Higher Education (OCHE).

Directly related with higher education, the OCHE is responsible for 1) providing policy suggestions and plans for the advancement of higher education, 2) establishing standards compatible with international demands, 3) suggesting resource redistribution structure for higher education, and 4) supervising and evaluating the management of higher education (OHEC, 2013).

4. Internationalization of Thailand's Higher Education System: Past and Present

Thai universities have four functions and missions that are related to the internationalization of higher education (Mayot, 2001; Nilphan, 2005): teaching, research, service and cultural literacy. Regarding teaching and research, universities in Thailand aim to increase the global competitiveness of graduates; increase the number of international programs; increase academic exchange and cooperation with universities and colleges abroad; advance research ability and understanding of related fields abroad; and advance mutual cultural understanding through international cooperation. Service refers to the strengthening of service activities and improvement in knowledge sharing with foreign institutions through international cooperation; while in terms of cultural literacy, universities seek to increase student understanding of intercultural developments and support the establishment of Thai cultural centers and Thai study programs abroad.

On the outset, the goal of Thailand's internationalization of its higher education was to respond to the changing environment under globalization. As the First 15 Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education of Thailand (1990-2004) points out, the internationalization of higher education should aim at attracting international attention towards Thai universities and colleges, increasing the status and economic competitiveness of Thailand in the international community, and improving and maintaining Thailand's national image and relations with other countries (Nilphan, 2005). Also, other aspects that are emphasized include 1) opportunity and equality, 2) efficiency and accountability, 3) quality and excellence, 4) internationalization and regionalization, and 5) privatization and entrepreneurship (Chang, 2004b). Corresponding to the established goals, in 1991, Thailand convened the first national forum on the internationalization of higher education.

In the Seventh National Higher Education Development Plan (1992-1996), Thailand stressed the importance of increasing economic, technological and cultural cooperation with other countries, and the vital role of the higher education system in the plan. Universities and colleges were deemed with the tasks of providing support for both regional and domestic research activities and academic exchanges abroad (Nilphan, 2005). In the succeeding Eighth National Development Plan, Thailand emphasized internationalization and regionalization and established three dominant objectives: (1) improve the international competency of Thailand's higher education system, (2) increase the international competitiveness of university faculty and students, and (3) establish Thailand as a leader in academic development in Southeast Asia (Nilphan, 2005).

Aside from severely damaging domestic politics and Thai economy and society on various fronts, the Asian Financial Crisis also generated a crisis in the Thai higher education system. A decrease in the number of student enrollment indirectly contributed to the massive reduction in education revenue, which fell from 299.6 billion

Baht in 1997 to 196.8 billion Baht in 1998 (Achava-Amrung, 2002). Nonetheless, while financial turmoil caused the Thai government to slightly waver in its internationalization policy (Lavankura, 2013), some factors indirectly created opportunities for the internationalization of higher education as well.

In the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education of Thailand (2008-2022), Thailand positioned itself as the leader of higher education in ASEAN and learned from the development experience of Europe (McBride, 2012). The second 15- year plan consists of two parts. Part one describes the influence of the global economy and local community on the society and higher education system of Thailand centered on seven issues, including (1) demographic change, (2) energy and environment, (3) employment, (4) political conflict and violence, (5) local distribution of power, (6) student and young adult, and (7) "sufficiency economy" as proposed by Rama IX. Part two outlines effective response towards issues related to higher education, including: 1) the connection between primary, professional and higher education, 2) popularization of higher education institutions, 3) academic governance and management, 4) state competitiveness, 5) education budget, 6) human resource development of instructors, 7) reinforcement of university networks, 8) education planning in the southern regions of Thailand, and 9) infrastructural establishments in higher education (World Bank, 2010; OHEC, 2013). The Thai education authority hoped to boost the number of international students in the country from 20,000 to 100,000 people through the plan (Lek, 2014). The following sections detail the internationalization of Thailand's higher education from different aspects.

Regarding international programs established in Thailand, in 2004, Thailand hosted 520 programs, including 176 undergraduate programs, 217 graduate studies programs and 127 doctoral programs (Chang, 2004a). The number increased annually, and by 2012, Thailand hosted 1,017 international programs. By 2013, the number of international programs peaked at an unprecedented 1,044 programs (OHEC, 2014).

However, in 2014, the number of programs took a large fall to 769, including 247 undergraduate programs, 270 graduate studies programs and 224 doctoral programs (OEC, 2017; OHEC, 2015). Public institutions offered most programs. The sharp decrease in international programs has a severe impact on the internationalization of Thailand's higher education.

Finally, in terms of cooperation agreements signed between Thailand and other countries, in 2011, Thai universities concluded 2,171 memorandum of understanding (MoU) with foreign institutions, with Kasetsart University leading the way with 295 agreements, followed by Thammasat University (259), Mahidol University (233), Chulalongkorn University (190) and Khon Kaen University (185). Regarding national distribution, Japan was the leading country, with 372 MoUs, followed by China (300), the US (270), Australia (148) and France (102).

In sum, based on academic analysis and the previous discussion, we can notice that Thailand's internationalization of its higher education mainly revolves around four concepts: 1) English ability, 2) faculty and student mobility, 3) development of international programs, and (4) an emphasis on global awareness for participation in a globalized world (McBride, 2012). Noting the internationalization of Thailand's higher education over the past decades, several aspects continue to demand for improvement, including 1) a lack in English competency, 2) shortage in budget and imbalance in resource distribution, 3) inefficiency of internationalization policies, and 4) lack of faculty and students who can compete on the international level (McBride, 2012).

5. Policy Borrowing and the Triangle of Coordination in Thailand's Higher Education

When discussing the national issue of higher education, the "triangle of coordination" proposed by Burton Clark (1983) serves as a useful analytical framework. According to Clark, the higher education system is basically at the center of a coordination triangle formed by state authority, the market, and academic oligarchy. State authority can be subdivided into the categories of bureaucratic authority and political authority; academic oligarchy consists of established scholars and schools; the market denotes informal institutions such as the consumer market (student preference), labor market (faculty) and institution market (prestige of institution) (Lavankura, 2013). Each higher education system is located differently in the triangle of coordination depending on domestic conditions. For example, the US system is located near the market while the Japanese system is situated between the market and academic oligarchy. The British system sits near academic oligarchy while the French system sits between state authority and academic oligarchy.
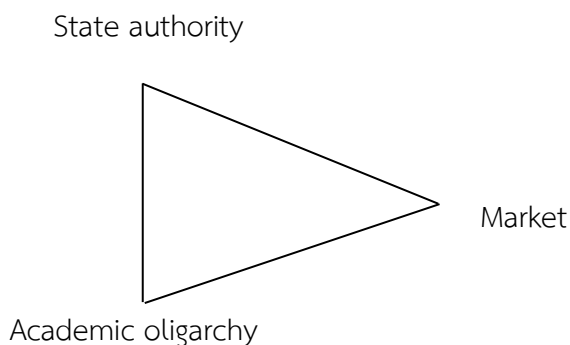

Figure 1: Triangle of Coordination

According to academic analysis, the development of higher education in Thailand was similar to the development of the country's political system (Lavankura, 2017). In the historical phase (1900 – 1970s), as bureaucratic polity characterized

Thailand (Riggs, 1996), the bureaucracy not only directed the development of Thailand's political economy, it was also at the helm of the higher education system – the education system was under state control. In this period, national universities mainly served as training institutions for bureaucrats, a phenomenon that could be observed from Mahidol University's focus on training bureaucrats who specialize in medical science, Kasetsart University's concern for training bureaucrats in the agricultural science, and Silkaporn University's focus on the fine arts.

Following the transformation to constitutional monarchy in 1932, the Thai government fell under the control of the military, which in turn dominated the higher education system. Later on, in the 1970s, great change swept over Thailand – the Thai economy began to take off, democratization commenced, and bureaucratic influence weakened steadily. Civil society expanded, evidenced by the emergence of politicians elected by the mass, technocrats, civil officials, academics and a growing middle class. The triangle of coordination changed at this time; analysis of the higher education system shifted from bureaucratic polity to neo-pluralism and institutionalism (Lavankura, 2017). In other words, Thailand began to relax its higher education system, and the state lifted its control on universities and colleges.

Meanwhile, civil society expanded while the influence of the market began entering the higher education system. Externally, the Thai society and economy were changing, and business sought skilled labor provided by the domestic education system. Domestically, universities and colleges underwent administrative reform while private institutions began to emerge; higher education returned to the tenet of market competition (Nilphan, 2005).
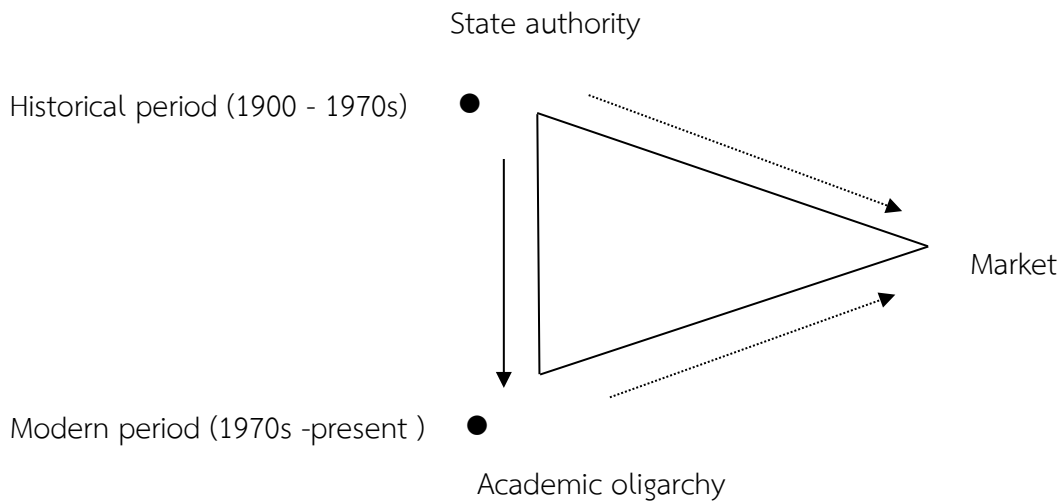
State authority

Historical period (1900 - 1970s)

Market

Modern period (1970s -present)

Academic oligarchy

Figure 2: Triangle of Coordination in Thailand's Higher Education System

　　　　Through the previous analysis, we can observe that after the 1970s, the influence of the market-induced Thai universities to return to market competition. Meanwhile, the Asian Financial Crisis produced pressure for reform in higher education. Under such condition, whether in terms of recruitment of international students, Thai students studying abroad, cooperation agreements with foreign institutions or establishment of international programs, Thai universities have continued to strengthen their global competitiveness in recent years. Nonetheless, challenges from globalization and low birth rate remain, with the internationalization of higher education demonstrating itself as the potential solution.

Table 1: Policy Borrowing in Thailand's Higher Education

Policy Borrowing	Time	Main Reforms
politics of borrowing	contemporary period (end of the 19th century to the 1950s)	1889-1909 ：establishment of 8 professional schools 1917 ：establishment of Chulalongkorn University 1930s ：establishment of 4 professional schools
economics of borrowing	education expansion period (the 1950s – 1970s)	1960s ：expansion of regional economy 1969 ：passing of private school law 1973、1976 ：student movement 1970s ：establishment of two open universities
culture of borrowing	globalization and internationalization period (1990-1996) after the adoption of the National Education Plan (1999 -present)	1990 ：first higher education development plan 1996 ：higher education conference on Thailand in the age of globalization 1997 ：Asian Financial Crisis 1999 ：adoption of the national education law 2005 ：second higher education development plan

Source: Lao, 2015

generate what may be termed as "education policy borrowing" (Fry & Bi, 2013). In the borrowing process, one finds change to the position of the higher education system in the triangle of coordination. Table 1 identifies the critical developments in Thailand's policy borrowing in higher education since the end of the 19th century.

6. Conclusion

Thai higher education was influenced and established by the bureaucracy. The government has been dominated in higher education development system. Even

though, Thailand experienced the great shifting from absolute monarchy to constitutional democracy, higher education in the kingdom was remaining under bureaucrat controls. However, there was a shifting in higher education system thereafter the wave of democratization, ending of cold war era and rising of students' movement. Those reasons stimulated the government to loosen the control of the education system. Therefore, it has been dramatically improved during the time.

Nevertheless, the financial crisis in 1997, higher education began to respond through the market-oriented internationalization. It could be seen that the triangle of coordinating in the Thai higher education system has shifted from the state to the higher education oligarchy towards the market. On the other hand, although, Thailand is a country that has not been colonized in Southeast Asia, after the promotion of Thailand's higher education system by King Chulalongkorn, it can be found that the major powers from western influenced the main higher education policies. It is found that the borrowing of educational policies is obviously seen, especially, at the political, economic and cultural levels.

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