

Expanding the Horizons of Tertiary Education in Thailand

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Abstract

The formal history of tertiary education in Thailand spans a period of approximately one hundred years from the time of Rama V, however, its roots can be traced back even further and to the influence of a highly gifted and influential courtier who acted as mentor to Prince Mongkut, and later on his death as King Rama IV, was Regent to Prince Chulalongkorn during his minority. The first university was established as if a government department and managed in many respects externally. A debate that rages in the minds of many is whether this model is still appropriate given that universities the world over now tend to be less bureaucratically controlled to the point of being “autonomous”. Their success or failure depends on their success in a competitive educational market place.

Through archival research and a network of informants this paper looks at the current management structure of universities in Thailand, and further, considers the extent to which, given the level of external controls, they are able to respond to the challenges of the 21st century. The changing demographics within Thailand, challenges of climate change, is sufficient attention now being given to the environmental sciences that by their very nature are trans-disciplinary.

The conclusions suggest that while regional universities, that are for the most part the newer universities, have a strong focus on environmental issues which range from water quality and supply, management of pollution, agri-science, food security and horticulture while the older, longer established universities have tended to focus on business management, engineering, architecture and the medical, dental, veterinary and related disciplines without crossing committing to dedicated environmental courses. It is suggested that supplementing each of these traditional disciplines with a compatible environmental dimension would enrich the national curriculum and enhance Thailand's quest to raise its overall educational standards from a global perspective.
