Chapter 9
Thai Higher Education: Privatization and Massification

Oliver S. Crocco

Abstract   Higher education has played a vital role in Thailand's development, politics, and society. The evolution of Thai higher education reflects the unique qualities of Thai culture while integrating important contributions from the West. From broad issues of enrollment to the specifics of what it is like to attend a Thai university, this chapter provides descriptive and analytical commentary on Thai higher education. It analyzes issues such as the challenges of private universities being treated more like competitors than partners to public higher education, how an increased focus on standardization has led to the homogeneity of higher education institutions, and inequality in Thai society resulting from the higher education system. This chapter describes the evolution of higher education in Thailand with a focus on the major trends of privatization and massification beginning in the late 1960s. It then goes on to describe and analyze a spectrum of issues related to Thai higher education such as policies, funding, quality assurance, and university life. Most importantly, this chapter identifies the key challenges facing higher education in Thailand in the future.

> Education concerns everyone, and not for a particular period, as a direct duty for a period. It is not so. From birth, one starts to learn. Growing up, one has to learn, up to higher education, as you are pursuing. We call it Udom Sueksa – full or complete education. But once you leave this institution and start working, you have to continue studying. Or you would not survive. Even those with doctoral degrees have to study further. Education is endless.
> His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej
> April 20th, 1978
> *King Bhumibol and His Enlightened Approach to Teaching*
> (Public Relations Department 2011)

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9.1   Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, the visionary reformer King Chulalongkorn the Great
(King Rama V, 1853–1910) (Prachoom 1965; Wyatt 1969) sought to implement a
modern education system in Thailand. While Western influence affected its origins
and some of its current trends like the quality assurance movement, Thai higher
education is marked by numerous uniquely Thai qualities and strategic eclecticism.
A cogent example of exceptionalism is found in Thailand's long-standing tradition
of royalty conferring degrees on university graduates, which the King of Thailand
did personally until the 1990s. As a constitutional monarchy in the politically and
culturally diverse region of Southeast Asia, Thailand continues to maintain its
unique values while embracing Western models of higher education to respond to
the enormously complex demands for higher education both within the boundaries
of Thailand and in the larger global context.

Various studies illustrate the uniqueness of Thai culture, which influences higher
education policy and practice. Hofstede et al. (2010) show that Thailand is largely a
collectivist culture, which values loyalty to one's group. In an assessment of Thai
values in organizations, Somsak and Yolles (2010) found that Thai values generally
include respect, honor, synergy, allegiance, learning, and sensibility. A unique and
defining characteristic of Thai culture is the high value placed on relationships
(Suntaree 1990; Pimpa 2008; Hofstede et al. 2010) reflected in the term, *wet rice
cooperative culture*. It is also a highly stratified society (Akin 1969). Some scholars
point to the idea of Thai exceptionalism and highlight the uniqueness of the Thai
language, that Thailand was never colonized and that Thailand has had the highest
percentage of women CEOs in the world (Fry 2014b). Thai values in conjunction
with its unique culture and history gently influence every aspect of higher education
(Chetana 2017).

This chapter seeks to describe the evolution of higher education in Thailand with
a focus on the major trends of privatization and massification. Additionally, it
addresses aspects of Thai higher education such as policies, funding, quality assur-
ance, and university life. Lastly, this chapter analyzes key challenges facing the
future of higher education in Thailand and ends with concluding reflections.

9.2   The Evolution of Higher Education in Thailand

According to the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), the history
of higher education in Thailand can be divided into three periods: the Early
Modernization Period (1889–1931), the Post-Revolution Period (1932–1949), and
the Development Planning Period (1950–present) (OHEC 2014). It is worth high-
lighting another key shift in Thai higher education with the opening of private higher
education options in 1969 followed by massification beginning with the establish-
ment of two open universities in the 1970s and accelerating in the 1990s and 2000s
with Rajabhat universities present throughout the Kingdom. For the purpose of this
chapter, this is called the Privatization and Massification Period (1969–present).

9.2.1 Early Modernization Period (1889–1931)

King Chulalongkorn the Great (King Rama V), Thailand's celebrated reformer king and modernizer, sought to use higher education to address the multifaceted and growing needs of the Siamese people and society (Wyatt 1969, 1975). A devout Buddhist, King Chulalongkorn, was known as the Royal Buddha ("Phra Putthachow Luang"). His Majesty encouraged higher learning for monks as early as 1887, with an education institution, Mahamakut, opening its doors in 1893. Over a century later in 1997, that institution was chartered as Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University with expanded programs for both ordained Buddhists and laity. This initiative set the stage for further higher education development.

Thailand's first university, Chulalongkorn University, was named in honor of King Chulalongkorn. With humble beginnings as the Royal Pages School founded in 1902, Chulalongkorn University officially became Siam's first university in 1917. During this time, two professional institutions of higher learning were founded to address other needs in Siamese society, including the School of Medicine at Siriraj Hospital in 1888 and the Ministry of Justice Law School in 1897.

9.2.2 Post-Revolution Period (1932–1949)

After the revolution in 1932, higher education expanded its political role in an attempt to promote democracy in light of reformed governmental structures. In 1934, Thammasat University, then called the University of Moral and Political Science, was founded by Dr. Pridi Banomyong (Kroekkiat and Puey 2016). This was followed in 1943 by the founding of Mahidol University (formerly the University of the Medical Sciences), Kasetsart University (formerly the Agricultural University), and Silpakorn University (formerly the Fine Arts University.) These universities were largely created to help train competent personnel in Bangkok, Thailand's political, economic, and educational center.

9.2.3 Development Planning Period (1950–1969)

This phase of higher education development saw the establishment of the National Economic Board (NEB) in 1950 (later to become the National Economic Development Board in 1959 and the National Economic and Social Development Board in 1972). Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat recognized the importance of higher education for economic and social development (Thak 2007). The prime minister initiated the spread of higher education outside of Bangkok to other regions, which included the creation of Chiang Mai University (1964) in the North, Khon Kaen University (1966) in the Northeast, and Prince of Songkla University (1967) in the

South. Vocational and technical schools were later converted to universities including King Mongkut's Institute of Technology (1971), which now has several campuses throughout Thailand.

9.2.4   Privatization and Massification Period (1969–Present)

A turning point in the history of higher education in Thailand came in 1969 with the Royal Proclamation of the Private College Act (1969), which made private higher education a legal reality. The first six private institutions given college status were Bangkok College, Pattana College, Dhurakij Pundit College, Kirk College, Sripatum College, and the Thai Chamber of Commerce College. This proclamation came in part as the result of the public sector being unable to meet the growing needs and demands for higher education throughout the nation and in part from mounting pressure for the government to relax its control over higher education. That same year, the Association of Private Higher Education Institutions of Thailand was founded (adopting this name in 1979). Higher education became more organized internally, and in 1972 the Council of University Presidents of Thailand (CUPT) was established.

In 1974, Payap University in Chiang Mai became the first accredited private college outside of greater Bangkok, and in 1984 Payap became the first fully accredited private university. Similarly, Assumption Business Administration College (ABAC) became an accredited college in 1975 and became fully accredited as Assumption University in 1990.

Since the 1990s, immense growth in higher education has occurred in both the number of universities and enrollment of students. When higher education enrollment extends beyond the elite of a nation, this trend is called massification. According to Trow's (2006) framework, massification occurs when the gross enrollment ratio (GER) in higher education is between 15% and 50% of the population of the relevant age group. Thailand reached 15% enrollment in 1982 and reached 50% enrollment in 2010. See Fig. 9.1.

Gender equity in higher education has also dramatically improved. According to the World Bank, women in higher education made up only 3% of students in 1976 but now make up nearly 60% of all students. See Fig. 9.2.

The development of two open universities, Ramkhamhaeng University (1971) and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) (1979), contributed to massification (Amara 1973). Both are open admissions universities available to those with high school degrees of any age to attend. Unlike Ramkhamhaeng which has regular classrooms and courses, STOU is an open distance university "without walls." Students can study via radio, TV, correspondence, and the Internet. While providing far greater access to higher education, these open universities have low graduation rates primarily because students have to be highly motivated and able to work independently to graduate. However, being a graduate of an open university
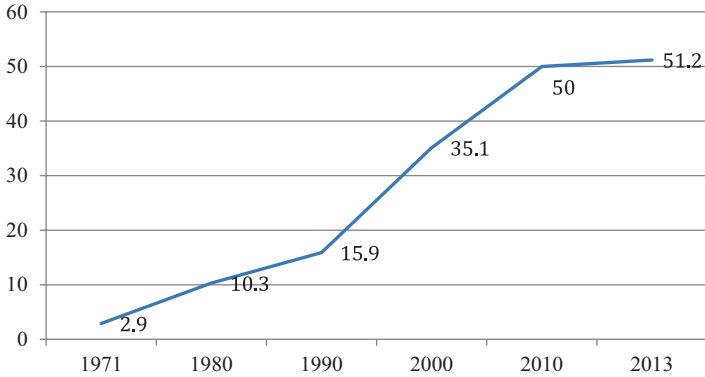
Fig. 9.1 Gross enrollment ratio
Source: World Bank. 2015. Gross enrollment ratio. Tertiary (ISCED 6 and 7). Total is the total enrollment in tertiary education (ISCED 6 and 7), regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the total population of the 5-year age group continuing on after leaving secondary school
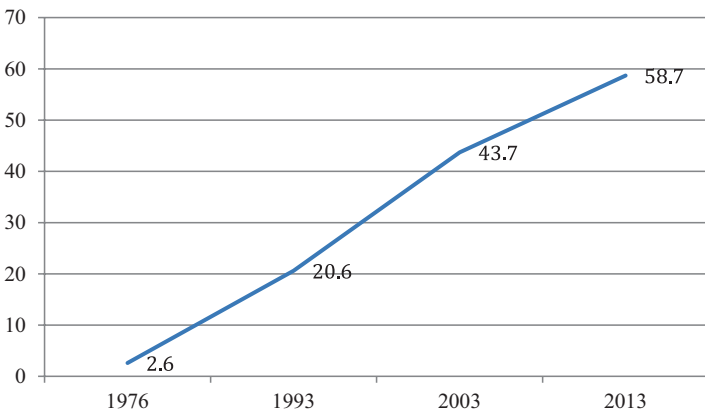

Fig. 9.2 Gross enrollment ratio over time (female)
Source: World Bank. 2015. Gross female enrollment in tertiary education (ISCED 6 and 7), regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the total female population of the 5-year age group continuing on from secondary school leaving

does signal to potential employers that graduates have attractive traits related to persistence and perseverance (Spence 1974).

Demand for higher education within the job market has continued to rise in Thailand (Rangel Delgado et al. 2012). To address this demand, many postsecondary institutes were converted to universities. Rajabhat Institutes, previously called *Wittayalai Khru* (วิทยาลัยครู) (teachers colleges) which traditionally emphasized teacher training, became full-fledged universities offering courses and degrees in many fields with the passing of the Rajabhat University Act (2004) (Ruangchai 2001). There are now 38 Rajabhat universities. Rajabhat universities function as

separate legal entities but network together. One expressed goal of the Act is to "exchange personnel and resources." As part of this process, Rajabhat universities administer doctoral degrees using staff from various Rajabhat and other universities throughout the Kingdom (Neubauer and Prompilai 2016). On November 8, 2015, there was a special graduation ceremony, where Udon Rajabhat University and Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University in the remote Northeast granted 58 doctoral degrees. Among recipients was Dr. Rosarin Apahung, a primary school math teacher in remote Bueng Kan Province (the nation's newest 77th province). This important ceremony in which these proud new doctorates received their degrees personally from the Crown Prince certainly reflects the theme of the massification of higher education and how the Rajabhat universities serve those in remote areas. Similarly, Rajamangala Institutes of Technology, which traditionally focused on technological education, were converted to universities in 2003 (OHEC 2013).

Increased access to higher education has led to a rapid expansion of the higher education sector in both number of students and institutions. As one UNESCO report on graduate education in Asia put it, there have been two trends, one of "expanding out" with increased access as well as "expanding up" with the creation of more graduate degree programs to match the increase in demand (UNESCO-UIS 2014). Graduate education has yielded more university faculty resulting in the ratio of instructors to students to decrease from 38:1 to 20:1 in the last 10 years (UNESCO Institute of Statistics as cited by Chaiyuth 2013). While massification has led to increased access to higher education throughout the country, the rate of enrollment growth appears to be slowing down, which is leading to some universities closing departments for financial reasons (Dumrongkiat 2016).

9.2.5   Classifying Higher Education Institutions

There is a diversity of institutions considered to be higher education. The Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC) oversees 157 higher education institutions (OHEC 2016) (see Table 9.1).

There is significant diversity among universities, but many of the Thai government's initiatives in higher education revolve around the public sector and its nine flagship universities: Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, Kasetsart University, Mahidol University, Chiang Mai University, Khon Kaen University, Prince of Songkla University, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, and Suranaree University of Technology (Douglass and Hawkins 2017). These nine universities were named national research universities in 2011 by the Higher Education Commission. They are especially valued for their ability to contribute to research and have been given abundant government funding. There are nine Thai universities in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2016–2017), with Mahidol at the top, largely due to their research and related citations; however, none of these universities are in the top 500 (*Times Higher Education* 2016). While university ranking systems often offer an inadequate picture of a university, an increased focus on publishing research in international journals certainly increases rankings (Fry 2013).

Table 9.1 Genres of
universities in Thailand

Type of university	Total
Limited admission public universities	11
Open admission universities	2
Autonomous universities[a]	21
Private higher education institutions	75
Rajabhat universities	38
Rajamangala Universities of Technology	9
Community College Institute[b]	1
Total	**157**

Source: OHEC 2016
[a]Many of the autonomous universities are also limited admission
[b]Previously there were 20 community colleges which were consolidated into the Community College Institute by the Community College Act (2015)

Thai universities fare much better in terms of the Times Higher Education Asia University Rankings in which 10 Thai institutions are in the top 300. King Mongkut Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (ranked in the 181–190 band), Kasetsart University, and King Mongkut Institute of Technology North Bangkok (251–300 band) just joined this group. In this ranking system, Mahidol is top ranked, no. 97, followed by King Mongkut University of Technology – Thonburi (101–110 band), Chulalongkorn University (151–160 band), Chiang Mai University (171–180 band), Suranaree University of Technology (181–190 band), Khon Kaen University, and Prince of Songkla University (both in the 201–250 band) (The Nation 2017) (see Asia University Rankings (2018)).

Thailand's performance in these rankings is adversely affected by the nature of Thailand's university climates. Because of the low salaries of university professors (see 9.3.4), many have to spend time moonlighting or doing extra teaching on weekends. Also for a variety of reasons, writing textbooks (unlike in the USA or Japan) is counted as "research" but such time-consuming work doesn't count in international rankings. It is also difficult for Thai faculty members to engage in longer-term research which may have important returns. Finally, with Thailand never have been colonized and, thus, Thai scholars with weaker English language skills, it is difficult for many faculty members to publish internationally. Publications in Thai are not recognized in international ranking systems.

Autonomous universities are public universities that have been granted a higher degree of institutional independence by the government. There are currently 23 autonomous universities, the first of which was Suranaree University of Technology (1990) in Korat. Autonomous universities establish their own internal governance and receive funding through block grants from the government instead of a rigid line-item budget. Each university's council is responsible for its

internal affairs in compliance with OHEC's quality assurance policies. The gradual transition for some public universities into autonomous universities has been thoroughly analyzed by Rattana (2015a, b) and Wasan (2014). Autonomous universities are occasionally viewed with skepticism, but some autonomous universities, like Mahidol, have proven highly successful in producing research (see Chap. 10).

Phuket Community College (PCC) was the first experimental community college founded in 1973 as part of Prince of Songkla University. A lack of demand due to no provision for credit transfer between the college and universities forced PCC to stop accepting students. The decentralization of higher education as the result of the 1997 constitution gave way to the founding of ten community colleges in 2002 with another ten having being added since then (Pattanida and Maki 2009; Tanom 2012). Community colleges have increased access by offering 2-year associate degrees in fields such as community development, local government, agriculture, and business computing. These degrees are low cost, support local development needs, and are suited for working adults. Challenges remain for community colleges, which are experiencing declining enrollment with the rise of universities, and salary disparities of community college graduates as compared to university graduates (Tanom 2012).

One framework for the classification of higher education institutions is the *International Standard Classification of Education* (ISCED) published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1997 and then again in 2011. According to the ISCED 2011 framework, there are four levels of education: ISCED level 5 (short-cycle tertiary education), ISCED 6 (bachelor's degree or equivalent), ISCED level 7 (master's degree or equivalent; the UIS data combines ISCED 6 and 7), and ISCED level 8 (doctoral degree or equivalent). According to this framework, enrollment in higher education in Thailand can be classified as in Table 9.2.

There are discrepancies in reporting on numbers of enrollments and number of higher education institutions, and numbers have continued to increase. According to OHEC (2016), total enrollment in higher education institutions was 2,076,074 in 2011, peaked to 2,139,922 in 2013, and leveled off to 2,079,315 in 2015, representing a 62% increase over that short period. While OHEC (2016) cites the total number of higher education institutions as 157, according to Thailand's Office of Education Council (OEC) as cited by Chaiyuth (2013), there are as many as 190 public universities and 109 private higher education institutions. This is likely because the OEC includes other genres of higher education institutions and those

Table 9.2 Enrollment in higher education

	1999	2004	2009	2013
ISCED 5	430,570	383,580	357,283	306,907
ISCED 6 and 7	1,381,802	1,860,149	2,043,267	2,075,427
ISCED 8	1724	7724	16,712	22,775

Source: UIS

not under the Ministry of Education. For example, there are postsecondary health colleges under the Ministry of Public Health.

9.2.6   Other Genres of Higher Education Institutions

In addition to higher education under OHEC, there are other postsecondary institutions under various ministries and units of the Thai government. Under the Ministry of Defense, institutions include the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy established in 1887, the Royal Thai Naval Academy established in 1898, and the Phramongkutkloa College of Medicine, designed to be a medical cadet school, which was established in 1975.

Additionally, the National Defense College was established in 1955 whose alumni include Privy Council President and former Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda. Originally this special college was for Thai government officials in different ministries considered to have leadership potential. Participants would take leave for 6 months to join the college. A major benefit was the valuable networking that this made possible among civil servants across ministries. Later the program was expanded to include leaders from the private sector and now even includes influential expatriates.

The Ministry of Culture supports a variety of postsecondary institutions including the Bunditpatanasilpa Institute which oversees education in dance, music, and arts to support national identity and preserve cultural diversity. There are also colleges specifically devoted to dramatic arts and fine arts. In addition to the autonomous Mahachulalongkornrajavidalaya University and Mahamakut Buddhist University, there are over 400 postsecondary Buddhist colleges throughout the nation for training and general education in Buddhism under the Office of National Buddhism.

Under the Ministry of Public Health, the Praboromarajchanok Institute for Health Workforce Development runs 29 nursing colleges, seven colleges of public health, the College of Medical and Health Technology, the College of Public Health Administration, and the College of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicines. Even the Ministry of Tourism and Sports has physical education colleges and sports schools to support its work.

There is also the international independent university, the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), a genre of its own and sometimes referred to as the "MIT of Asia." It grew out of the SEAMEO Graduate School of Engineering, founded in 1959. It became AIT in 1967. Its faculty come from around the world, and its students are primarily from the Asia-Pacific region, with around 30% being Thai. Its funding comes from multiple sources such as an annual subsidy from the Thai MOE, tuition, member nation contributions, gifts/donations, and various external grants. In the most recent U-Multirank, it was number four in the world in terms of internationalization.

9.3   Policies, Funding, and Quality Assurance of Higher Education

9.3.1   Organization

Major reform to the organization, structure, and purpose of higher education began with the first 15-year Higher Education Plan (1990–2004). The plan was largely stifled due to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 but reform was reenergized with the passing of the National Education Act (NEA) in 1999. The NEA was enacted largely in response to the economic and social crises facing Thai society and emphasized unity of policy, decentralization of education management, student-centered learning, quality assurance, and professional development of educators. The NEA continues to be a guiding document for higher education policy.

In 2003, the Ministry of Education Regulatory Act merged the Ministry of University Affairs with the Ministry of Education to become the new Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), becoming one of five other commissions in the newly restructured Ministry of Education (OHEC 2013). The rationale for this merger was to improve the articulation between basic and higher education and to ensure better coordination, for example, in planning for the training of new teachers. OHEC oversees private and public higher education institutions as well as community colleges. Supplementary professional training institutes are overseen by specific ministries such as tourism, defense, culture, agriculture, and public health. Interestingly, currently there are discussions related to the desirability of returning to the pre-2003 structure with separate ministries for higher and basic education as is common in many other countries. Universities are not particularly happy being under the Ministry of Education.

The mandates of OHEC include policy formulation, resource allocation, research coordination, institution organization, and evaluation. The organizational structure of OHEC includes the Bureau of General Administration, Bureau of Policy and Planning, Bureau of Community College Administration, Bureau of Cooperation and Promotion, Bureau of Standards and Evaluation, Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, Bureau of Student Development, and Bureau of Personnel Administration and Development.

According to OHEC (2013), the role of higher education is to foster economic development, promote peace in the region, and preserve Thai culture and values. Universities should reflect the "multifaceted and multicultural nature of a society" (OHEC 2013, p. 14). There are four key goals for higher education mandated by OHEC, namely, to produce graduates, conduct research, provide academic services to society, and preserve culture. These mandates embody the purpose of higher education in Thailand, and universities are responsible to fulfill these missions.

To accomplish these mandates and support university personnel, the University Personnel Act (UPA) was passed in 2004 and revised again in 2008. This piece of

legislation seeks to develop university faculty and staff and promote quality, especially with reference to ethics. One of the main goals of the UPA is to decentralize authority and empower universities to create their own procedures related to management, academic tenure, and recruitment of faculty and staff (OHEC 2011). Similarly, the Administration of Higher Education Institution Internal Affairs Act (2007) granted authority to public institutions to regulate their finances and internal affairs. The Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education (2008–2022) furthers staff development initiatives to include scholarships for attaining higher degrees (OHEC 2011). There are also attempts at better staff exchange and degree recognition both within Thailand and internationally. In February 2016, a draft of the new Human Management in Higher Education Act (2016) was introduced, which would keep university faculty and staff accountable to standards of research and effectiveness, including penalties as high as dismissal (Royal Thai Government 2016). Still, it is unclear how these various goals are being implemented and monitored.

There have been many organizational challenges facing higher education, the most detrimental being continual high-level leadership changes. Amidst a tumultuous political context, the Ministry of Education has seen 20 different education ministers in the last 17 years (Chularat 2014) (see Appendix I). Changes in leadership have led to higher education policy lacking cohesion (Krissanapong 2001). Rattana (2015a, b) also elucidates the culture of borrowing prevalent in Thai higher education policy and practice that is synchronous with the "sociologic" of the Kingdom, which has led to policymakers selectively deciding which international policies to implement and which to reject.

9.3.2   Business Sector Involvement in Higher Education

As part of the trend of massification, the business sector in Thailand has made inroads in higher education. Some private universities have been founded by corporations, which allow them to educate their students with knowledge and skills needed to support their particular business needs (Bundit 2016). These corporate universities have appeal to prospective students by offering lucrative employment opportunities to many of their graduates. Examples of this business sector involvement include CP ALL Public Company Limited, established by Thailand's largest business conglomerate, the Charoen Pokphand Group, which founded the Panyapiwat Institute of Management (http://www.pim.ac.th/) becoming fully accredited to offer Bachelor and Master degrees in 2007. Nation University in Lampang Province, formally Yonok University, was founded in 1988 by Dr. Nirund Jivasantikarnin and the American-Thai Foundation. Nation Multimedia Group purchased Yonok, and it is now run as a pilot campus of Nation University in Bang Na, Bangkok (http://www.nation.ac.th/). PTT-Group (formally the Petroleum Authority of Thailand, Thailand's state-owned oil and gas company) established the

Vidyasirimedhi Institute of Science and Technology (VISTEC). Fully funded by PTT-Group (http://www.vistec.ac.th/), VISTEC promotes research and development in the sciences. The Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology in Bangkok was founded by the Technology Promotion Association (Thailand-Japan) and serves the needs of Japanese companies. The Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology guarantees employment upon graduation, with particular focus on Thai-Japanese companies. Additionally, business sector involvement in higher education can be seen in Thailand's Thai Union Frozen Products (TUF) awarding 100 million THB to Mahidol University to create a R&D database (*The Nation*, 16 December 2014c). Even the Central Group, which owns Central Department Stores in Thailand, has played with the idea of starting an institution of higher education. Other universities with links to the business sector include Dusit Thani College founded for training in tourism by the Dusit Thani Group and Shinawatra University (see Chap. 24). In addition to these corporate universities, there are also corporation-university partnerships such as the Chemical Engineering Practice School (http://www.cheps-kmutt.com), which is a partnership between King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUT Thonburi) and industrial sponsors such as Siam Cement Group (SCG), PTT, and Thai Oil Public Co., Ltd. to offer a 2-year master's degree in chemical engineering.

In many ways, this trend shows a deeper issue facing higher education in Thailand, i.e., the commercialization of higher education, which is covered extensively by Mounier and Phasina (2010) (see Chap. 10). This larger issue has led to corruption within the system. For example, selling of degrees was found at E-sarn University in Khon Kaen, which was soon shut down (Jakkrapan 2013). Cases of corruption have led to more rigid control by the government with quality assurance measures.

9.3.3   Going Beyond Commercialization

Though the commercialization trend in higher education is certainly a reality, there are encouraging counter trends. Mahidol University, for example, has given priority to developing an outstanding College of Music which offers degrees at all levels and has over 1000 students. It is considered Southeast Asia's leading music school (College of Music 2017). In 2013, it hired an outstanding Western musician, Dr. Kyle R. Fyr, who now chairs its Department of Musicology, is an assistant dean for Academic Affairs, and directs its MA program. In a recent study, a Japanese researcher has found that Thai college students show considerable interest in learning traditional Thai music and appreciate its importance (Takahashi 2017, see Chetana 2017). HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's mastery of traditional Thai music has been an inspiration for many Thai students (The Nation 2015). This contrasts with Japan, where the emphasis is on Western music, to the neglect of traditional Japanese music.

9.3.4 Funding of Higher Education

In recent years, government spending on higher education has increased dramatically. According to the OHEC (2016), public spending on higher education, both private and public (in millions of THB), has increased 62% from 71,053 million THB in 2011 to 115,292 million THB in 2017 (OHEC 2016). See Fig. 9.3.

Public universities receive most of their funding from the government. Each public university has its own governing act in the government structure, which allows its university council to act as a governing body (OHEC 2013). According to OHEC (2011), public universities are allocated budget from the Bureau of the Budget, and public university presidents are given status equivalent to the chief executive officer at the departmental level in the government. According to Suchittra (2009), on average, the Thai government's share of operation costs of limited admission public universities is around 75–80%.

Table 9.3 shows the 2015 funding for some of Thailand's major universities, including its nine flagship research universities. This table indicates three patterns: (1) There is great variation in the amount of funding received by these institutions. Mahidol, for example, receives ten times as much funding as Silpakorn or KMUT Thonburi. (2) Regional universities do surprisingly well. Chiang Mai (North), Khon Kaen (Northeast), and Prince of Songkhla (South) are relatively well funded, and (3) having institutional autonomy does not seem to jeopardize state funding in any way.

Medhi (2005) estimates that government subsidies for public universities allow them to charge students half as much as private universities. Private universities are funded almost exclusively from tuition and private donors (i.e., owners, in the case of for-profit private institutions). In a study of 13 private universities, the percent of total income from tuition and fees was more than 75% for 11 of the private universi-
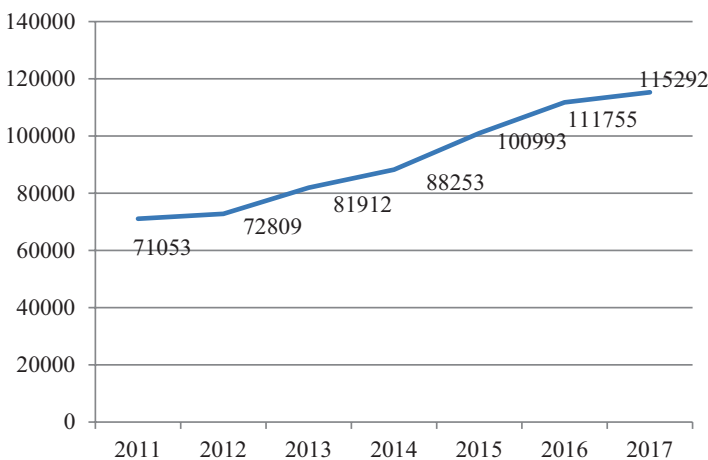

Fig. 9.3 Public expenditure in millions of THB

Table 9.3 2015 Government funding of some leading Thai universities (in millions of THB)

Name of institution	Annual government budget (2015)
Mahidol University[a]	13,159.0
Chiang Mai University[a]	5636.4
Chulalongkorn University[a]	5440.6
Prince of Songkhla University[a]	5023.1
Khon Kaen University[a]	4613.8
Kasetsart University[a]	4332.5
Srinakharinwirot University	3461.3
Thammasat University[a]	3299.9
Suranaree University of Technology[a]	1844.7
KMUT North Bangkok	1801.7
KMIT Ladkrabang University	1789.4
Silpakorn University	1364.3
KMUT Thonburi[a]	1360.8

Note: Universities which have been granted autonomy or had autonomy at their inception are indicated in bold

[a]One of Thailand's nine designated flagship research universities

ties studied (Prachayani 2010). Since many private university students receive government student loans, the cost of private university tuition and fees remains high due to lack of government support for the operation costs of private universities.

According to the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education (OHEC 2011), universities are encouraged to design ways of generating more financial support from the public, parents, and alumni as well as from research and academic services.

However, additional financial support from the public has been minimal, and there is no strong tradition of alumni giving or corporate philanthropy in support of higher education. Until only recently, a higher tax break was given to people when they donated to public universities, but this is not the same for donations to private universities. However, fundraising projects under royal patronage do help generate important additional revenues. The huge plot of royal land granted to Chulalongkorn University enables it to secure substantial discretionary funds through rents collected from private business entities such as the MBK Shopping Mall.

University tuition depends on a student's course of study and whether the student attends a public or private institution (Rangsit University 2014). Tuition and fees also differ depending on whether a student is a Thai national or international student. Table 6.5 shows a sample of the range of student tuition fees for undergraduate Thai nationals at several private and public universities accessed from each university's website (2014–2015) (Table 9.4).

In terms of university costs, faculty salaries tend to be low by Western standards with an average monthly salary of only $1545 (PPP) (World Salaries 2017). But Thai universities, with low labor costs, have extensive support staff such as secretaries, clerks, and drivers. A major problem in the funding of US higher education is high and rising administrative costs (Campos 2015). This is also an issue in Thailand.

Table 9.4 Undergraduate student tuition

University	Region	Degree (bachelor level)	Tuition (per year, THB)
Public			
Chulalongkorn University	Bangkok	Economics	39,250
Mae Fah Luang University	North	English	40,000
Prince of Songkla University	South	Law	32,000
Rajabhat Chiang Mai	North	English	13,000
Khon Kaen University	Northeast	Education	13,000
Rajamangala University	North	Business Administration	10,000
Private			
Assumption University	Bangkok	Law	106,800
Bangkok University	Bangkok	Accounting	73,200
The Far Eastern University	North	Business Administration	53,000

Source: OHEC (2016)

The excellent College of Music at Mahidol mentioned above currently has a dean, a principal, six associate deans, and 13 assistant deans.

9.3.5 Student Loans

Studying at a Thai university can be expensive when compared to the cost of living. In addition to tuition, there are many other fees involved. Rangsit University, a private university in greater Bangkok, outlines an example of some of the fees as well as the average fees for an academic year and total program of study. See Table 9.5. To make higher education financially viable for students, student loans have often become a necessity.

It is believed that one of the reasons for massification is the introduction of the Student Loan Fund (SLF) in 1996, part of the recovery package in response to the Asian financial crisis. From 1996 to 2006, the SLF lent more than 1.5 trillion THB to over 2.6 million students (Somkit and Areeya 2010). In 2006, the government introduced the Thailand Income Contingent and Allowance Loan (TICAL) scheme, which set out to make higher education even more equitable and accessible. It provided important nuances to the SLF by including elements such as allowances for daily living for economically disadvantaged students. It also allowed graduates to pay back their interest-free loans based on post-graduation income. TICAL was designed to apply to private universities on par with public universities.

Due to a major change in the government in 2006, TICAL was rescinded after only 1 year, and the SLF was reinstated in 2007. While it is helpful in many regards, the SLF has come under continued criticism. Somkit and Areeya (2010) show that the SLF has many weaknesses including low rates of collection and poor disbursement. The SLF has been highly subsidized, which has kept financial burdens for the

Table 9.5 Student fees at Rangsit University

Expense	Cost (in THB)
Application fee	300
Tuition fee (per credit)	3000
Academic service fee (per semester)	10,000
Matriculation fee	300
Health insurance fee (per year)	2600
Health examination fee	500
Student activity fee (per year)	2500
Student ID card	300
Average fees per academic year	165,000
Average total fees for entire 3-year program	480,000

Source: http://www.rsu.ac.th/ric/Ad_tuition.html

lowest-income graduates from increasing dramatically (Chapman et al. 2010). Kiatanantha (2014) shows that the SLF functions as a mortgage-type loan with a real interest rate of 3% that will likely lead to a loan recovery rate around 40–50%, which is a tremendous financial burden on taxpayers.

A return to an income contingent loan scheme may improve access, especially to the poorest in Thailand, and solve many of the criticisms of the SLF (Kiatanantha 2014). Moving to this kind of scheme comes with key burdens on the government. Firstly, it requires immense "administrative and collection infrastructure" especially related to taxes (Kiatanantha 2014, p. 105). Secondly, the eligibility criterion for students receiving loans must be clarified. In 1996 when the SLF began, eligibility was determined by a family income of 120,000 THB per year. This more than doubled to 300,000 THB in 1997 but then was cut down to 150,000 THB in 1999 (Ziderman 2003). There is increasing political pressure to expand the eligibility criterion to a higher family income, which greatly widens the target groups but also creates heavier burdens for the government. Ziderman (2009), however, is unsure if this move would truly increase access for the most economically disadvantaged, and he questions the validity of family income as the sole method for loan eligibility. Ziderman (2002) recommends converting loans for upper secondary students to grants and regulating repayment conditions to keep the repayment burden low, thus avoiding default. Ultimately, the issues of student loans and inequality are vital for comprehensive human capital formation in Thailand (Jimenez et al. 2013).

9.3.6 Standardization and Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality assurance practices have been implemented to ensure and improve quality in higher education. There are both self-assessment reports compiled by each university and external quality assessments conducted by the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA). ONESQA is a public

institution established in 2000 as part of the NEA responsible for external quality assessment in conjunction with OHEC.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education announced the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF). Adopted from similar frameworks in the United Kingdom and Australia, the TQF assesses programs and learning across five domains: knowledge, numerical analysis and communication/IT skills, ethics and morality, cognitive skills, and interpersonal skills and responsibility (Paralee et al. 2015). Part of the TQF system is to ensure quality of key elements in higher education such as credits and degrees. It includes in-depth reports filed by the university with evidence on key performance indicators. Site visits with presentations by university administrators to quality assurance auditors are also a component of TQF quality assessment.

Although quality assurance has allowed for the development of well-designed programs, there are also many criticisms of Thailand's current quality assurance methods. Rattana (2013) conducted 80 in-depth interviews, spent 3 months working with ONESQA, and wrote her doctoral dissertation on quality assurance in higher education in Thailand. She notes that while administrators tend to be favorable to these measures, many academics doubt the link between quality education and the quality assurance assessments. The system is also faulted for its excessive paperwork. Academics interviewed expressed doubt whether quality assurance forms are even used genuinely to improve practice (Rattana 2013). To make matters worse, standards and key performance indicators have changed nearly every year leading to frustration with the system (Kongkiti et al. 2011). The reality seems to be that recent attempts to use regulation to increase academic quality have led to higher education as a whole becoming more regulation-oriented instead of development oriented (see Chap. 10).

Many private university administrators have complained about an uneven playing field since the promulgation of the Private Higher Education Act (2003; 2007). Assessments of quality as a basis for certification and accreditation of programs and institutions have been carried out differently for public institutions, each of which operates under its own act of parliament, while private institutions are authorized and controlled as a group. It appears from conversations with university personnel that recent procedural changes made by OHEC have eased the situation by convincing quality assessment personnel that the same standards should be applied to all. Suspected infringements are being investigated impartially, and corrective actions are being undertaken.

9.3.7   Impact of Higher Education on Political Life

Higher education in Thailand has had major significance in the political landscape. It was at Thammasat University in October 1973 where students protested against the authoritarian rule of the military government of Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn. Between 200,000 and 500,000 students protested at Thammasat

demanding the release of prisoners charged with promulgating a call for a new constitution and on behalf of students expelled for their political positions (Prizzia and Narong 1974; Wyatt 2003). This led to a 3-day violent crackdown followed by victory of student/people power and the King asking the military dictators to leave the country. Then former Thammasat University Rector and Privy Counselor Dr. Sanya Dharmasakti became an interim prime minister to begin 3 years of an open and vibrant democracy.

Again in 1976, students protested at Thammasat University primarily because of the return to Thailand of the former military dictator Thanom, which brought about a severe crackdown and military coup on October 6 in which some students were "lynched, burned alive, and beaten" (Wyatt 2003, p. 292).

Higher education continues to be of political significance today. Recent examples include students and academics protesting the amnesty bill of 2013, including a group of 5000 lecturers and students from Chulalongkorn University (University World News, 7 November 2013). Students have also played a role in the current government. Borwornsak Uwanno, chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC), called on groups of university students to share their ideas on the country's new constitution (*The Nation*, 21 December 2014a). Academics such as Thammasat University's Attasit Pankaew advocated for more participation of the public in the drafting of the most recent constitution (*The Nation*, 19 December 2014). Groups of students continue to protest peacefully against the military coup of May 2014, but there are serious violations of academic freedom (Arnold and Apisra 2014, Subhatra 2006). Unfortunately, new laws established by the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) may continue to constrain academic freedom (*The Economist*, 28 March 2015).

9.4 University Life

9.4.1 Admissions

Before 1961, universities ran their own entrance examinations and admission processes. With an increasing number of applicants applying to multiple universities, it was becoming expensive and time-consuming for students to apply. This led to collaborative admissions initiatives between universities like Kasetsart and Chulalongkorn, but it was not until 1973 that the Office of the National Education Commission handed over this major responsibility to the Ministry of University Affairs. In 1999, the Ministry of University Affairs created a process of university admissions where students were ranked according to an admissions score. This score initially was comprised of a student's GPA from upper secondary school, which accounted for 10% of a student's admissions score, and subject tests which accounted for the remaining 90% of a student's score. Later, the Commission on Higher Education established the Central University Admissions System (CUAS) in 2004, which was launched in 2006.

The CUAS is required for students applying to public universities and consists of four components: the Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET), the grade point average (GPA), the General Aptitude Test (GAT), and the Professional Aptitude Test (PAT). The PAT is made up of seven specialized tests including mathematics, science, engineering, and languages. The weight of the O-NET and GPA is 20% and 30%, respectively, for all applicants. The weight of the GAT and PAT, however, depends on the faculty to which the student applies. For example, a student applying to study pharmacy will have the GAT weighted at only 10%, while the PAT science test is weighted at 40%. In another case, students applying to study other languages can either have the weight of the GAT at 50% with no PAT test, or 30% along with a specific language PAT test counting for the other 20% (Association of University Presidents of Thailand 2010). Unlike the admission process to universities in the USA where students select a major once accepted into a university, students in Thailand apply to specific field, or faculty, at a university. In this system, admissions to a university like Chulalongkorn in a competitive field such as medicine or engineering are significantly more difficult than in a field like physical education. Thus, Thai students are sometimes strategic and apply for a field in which they do not have much real interest but as a way to enter a prestigious highly competitive institution such as Chulalongkorn or Mahidol.

The O-NET, which replaced traditional long-standing entrance examinations, is administered by the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS) and is part of a greater coalition to reform education. However, the O-NET has been a focus of continued controversy. In 2012, critics pointed out apparently illegitimate questions on the test that asked what you should do with a sexual urge and about the so-called defining characteristic of transvestite behavior (Chularat and Wannapa 2012). The GAT measures general reasoning ability and English language proficiency, while the PAT is a subject-specific test. The O-NET can only be taken once, but the GAT and the PAT can be taken up to three times a year. In 2014, NIETS launched the University National Education Test (U-NET) to test university graduates in their Thai and English language communication skills, critical thinking, and technology skills. Channarong Pornrungroj, director of the ONESQA, has argued that there is a need for a standardized test for university graduates (Inathep 2014). The U-NET, however, was met with criticism from university students and faculty members, which included several large-scale social media campaigns against the test (Fredrickson 2014).

According to Prasart Suebka, chairman of the Council of University Presidents of Thailand (CUPT), over 131,000 students applied to universities using the CUAS between May 10 and 17, 2015, which is up from 99,000 in 2014 (*The Bangkok Post*, 19 May 2015). This, however, is about 13,000 more than the 118,528 seats available. If students do not participate in the CUAS or are not accepted for admission, they may attain direct admission to a specific university. For direct admission, the university will have an entrance examination based on specific subjects depending on the university faculty to which the student is applying in addition to the aforementioned standardized tests. According to Varaporn (2006), around 45% of students achieve admission through direct admission. This occurs largely because

regional universities like Chiang Mai University and Khon Kaen University have a quota system to ensure 50–60% of students come from those particular regions (Varaporn 2006). Despite going through repeated reforms, current CUPT president, Udom Kachintorn has announced that there will be a new admissions system introduced in 2018 (Aramnet 2016; CUPT 2016).

9.4.2   Student Life

A Thai university campus looks like any other universities around the world while also maintaining its uniquely Thai characteristics and values (Mulder 1997; Theerasak 2002; Suchart 1973; Varaporn et al. 1996). The faculty (e.g., economics, nursing, arts) to which a student belongs plays a significant role in the academic and personal lives of university students. University teachers, or *achans* in Thai, are highly respected. Instructors in a student's faculty assume responsibility *in loco parentis* as in American higher education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Lucas 2006).

Thai higher education requires all undergraduate students (both at public and private universities) to wear a uniform. Women wear black skirts and white or light purple dress shirts. The dress shirts have special buttons and pins with the insignia of the university. Similarly, men wear black slacks, light white dress shirts, and ties with university insignia. Both men and women wear belts with university insignia as well. Students in professional programs (such as student nurses) have special uniforms related to their fields, as well as the regular university uniform.

Most students embrace wearing their university uniform and feel that it gives them a sense of community and pride within their particular university and in the larger society. In a study of over 1200 university students in greater Bangkok, 94% thought uniforms were "necessary," and 70% thought they should wear uniforms every day (*Matichon Online*, 17 September 2013). Students wearing their uniforms sometimes receive discounts at local markets and on public transportation. Still, some students do not like uniforms and have protested having to wear them (Fernquest 2013a).

In Thailand, a collectivist society according to Hofstede et al. (2010), university students rarely study alone. Unlike the Lamont Library at Harvard College where hundreds of students individually study quietly in a single room, in Thailand, groups gather to study together in dorms, libraries, and academic buildings throughout campus, especially during exam periods. Varaporn et al. (1996) highlight these unique cultural influences on the campus atmosphere and culture of Kasetsart University.

At the beginning of the year, upperclassmen lead first year students through initiation rites called SOTUS (seniority, order, tradition, unity, and spirit). During SOTUS, first year students within each faculty of the university wear name tags, learn songs, and participate in games and activities. SOTUS, which has roots in

military practice, first began at Kasetsart University in 1953 and has come under criticism including one student who likened his experience to hazing (Nattha 2014). As with hazing in other countries, some SOTUS events, particularly unsupervised and unsanctioned ones, have been humiliating to participants, and some accidental deaths have led to demands that universities bring these practices to a halt. Official pronouncements from the government and from universities about these initiation practices, and an official date to end them each year, are routine (Chularat 2015).

Ratanasiripong and Rodriguez (2011) note that many Thai students suffer from mental and physical issues while studying at university and that universities can promote wellness of students through educational programs and student activities. In response to the growing need for mental health services in light of Thailand's recent history, counseling services are becoming increasingly widespread (Arunya et al. 2012). Crocco and Wakeman (2014) also note that the promotion of cocurricular programs such as student activities, residential life programs, and student leadership programs on Thai university campuses are being used to build community and facilitate academic success. Despite any stress associated with performance and university life in general, Thai students remain abundantly happy (Nyamkhuu 2014). In fact, perhaps the most exceptional part of Thai higher education is the visible happiness on the faces of most Thai university students (see Fig. 9.4). Whether groups of students are eating lunch, walking through campus, or waiting outside class for an exam, it is more common than not to see smiles and hear laughter.

Fig. 9.4 Happy university students in uniform
Source: Courtesy of Payap University

9.4.3 Graduation

Graduation from university has tremendous significance in Thai society. For many years, the King of Thailand himself presided over the graduation ceremony of every public university and personally conferred the diplomas to each graduate. This practice began with King Prajadhipok (Rama VII), 1933–1941, and continued with King Bhumibol until the 1990s. Royalty still preside at all graduation ceremonies of public universities. For example, HRH Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn conferred degrees to graduates of Rajabhat Universities and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. HRH Princess Sirindhorn presides over the graduation at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), the major selective public universities such as Chulalongkorn, and a joint ceremony in Bangkok for all the Rajamangala universities (see Fig. 9.5). Normally for private universities a member of the Privy Council confers the diplomas as well. Graduates give places of high honor in their homes to their pictures that show them receiving their degrees from a member of the royal family.

Preparations for commencement ceremonies involve 3 days of practice including a full dress rehearsal usually on the day before the ceremony. Some students wake up as early as 4:00 AM to put on makeup, take pictures, and prepare for graduation. Extended families are expected to fill the grounds around the commencement venues. Students wear gowns arranged according to their faculty. It is a gendered event with men and women wearing different outfits underneath their robes. The Higher Education Commission recently gave limited permission for universities to allow graduates to wear clothes they feel best represents their gender identity (*The Nation*, 16 August 2012). Some universities have also dispensed with the designations "Mr.," "Miss," or "Mrs." as graduates' names are called and in printed programs.

Fig. 9.5 HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn hands out degrees at Chulalongkorn University graduation ceremony (Photo courtesy of HRH and Chulalongkorn University)

9.4.4   Academic Integrity in Higher Education

Plagiarism and cheating have been persistent issues on Thai university campuses. In a study of 106 undergraduates at a Thai university, 47% of respondents confessed that they knew people who had cheated on tests (Young 2013). Young (2013) believes cheating and plagiarism in Thai higher education are linked to an implicit no-fail policy found on Thai campuses and reflect the extent to which corruption is countenanced in Thai society. The use of closed book examinations probably also contributes to the problem.

On one level, plagiarism may be linked to the Thai value of respect for expert authority and not wanting to go beyond that. On another level, cheating in general may be understood as an attempt to avoid losing face, which is a common characteristic of collectivist cultures (Hofstede et al. 2010). Trends of cheating raise questions as to what students see as the purpose of their university education and to what extent coursework and learning are viewed as a necessary evil to arrive at graduation with solid social connections. The Thai value of respect for hierarchy, which is linked to privilege and status, is also seen in cafeterias and canteens where students and teachers rarely sit together. This may also be the result of Thailand's high level of power distance – the acceptance of inequality and social stratification within Thai society (Akin 1969).

Lecturers also face challenges related to academic integrity. In addition to the aforementioned quality assurance paperwork and general focus on documentation, there is no formal tenure process for professors. On the other hand, everyone is tenured informally as very few staff or faculty members in Thai universities are fired unless they commit a major malfeasance, particularly one that brings public discredit to the institution. Thai labor laws reinforce the employment protections upon which faculty and staff rely. This brings up controversies of accountability, deadweight, and promotions. Some universities have processes similar to tenure, but they remain largely a formality and are not effectively implemented.

Though Thailand is generally a very free and open country, academic freedom has also been an issue in higher education. In 2010, a message went out from the Higher Education Commission asking universities for cooperation in controlling anti-government student protests (*The Bangkok Post*, 11 August 2010). Additionally, Midnight University, a free public "university" but functioning more as a database of scholarly articles, was shut down as a result of protests of the coup in 2006 (*The Nation,* 2 October 2006).

Most academic freedom issues relate to Thailand's Article 112 of the Penal Code, which states, "Whoever, defames, insults or threatens the King, the Queen, the Heir-apparent or the Regent, shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years." In a panel discussion at Thammasat University, Sulak Sivaraksa was accused of lèse-majesté based on reflections allegedly involving aspersions on King Naresuan who was King of Ayutthaya 400 years ago (*The Nation*, 16 December 2014b). Phiphat Krachaechan, a history lecturer at Thammasat and one of the orga-

nizers of the event, said that this interpretation of Article 112 is hurtful to the study of Thai history (*Pratchatai*, 25 December 2014). David Streckfuss (2011) has written extensively on the use of Article 112 for political purposes in his book, *Truth on Trial in Thailand: Defamation, Treason and Lèse-Majesté*, and has called Thailand a "defamation regime." There can also be harsh penalties for defaming individuals. After the military coup in May 2014, constraints on freedom of expression have become even more stringent.

Many questions regarding academic freedom remain. To what extent do universities, professors, and students have the freedom to express themselves freely? What fields of study may be off-limits in the Thai higher education context and not just those related to the monarchy? How, if at all, has business sector involvement limited universities in their research?

9.4.5   *Thai Higher Education in the Global Context*

Massification is occurring throughout Southeast Asia (Pan Maoyuan and Luo Dan 2008) and higher education is increasingly more important for the development of the region. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Education Ministers and the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) see higher education as vital to success in human resource development in Southeast Asia. Ponsan and Pimpa (2011) argue that globalization has led to more creativity among Thai university students.

As part of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, the ASEAN University Network (AUN) made up of 30 universities in the region was established to work on five core tasks: "(1) Youth Mobility, (2) Academic Collaboration, (3) Standards, Mechanisms, Systems and Policies of Higher Education Collaboration, (4) Courses and Programmes Development and (5) Regional and Global Policy Platforms" (ASEAN University Network 2014). Of the current 30 universities in the AUN, Thailand is represented by Chulalongkorn University, Mahidol University, Chiang Mai University, Prince of Songkla University, and Burapha University.

OHEC seeks to support global higher education initiatives in the region such as the AUN, including the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) and University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) while learning from the experience of the EU and the Bologna Process.

There have been calls by prominent scholars in higher education such as Gerald Fry to have an ASEAN university and an ASEAN development corps, similar to the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps programs in the USA (Fry 2014a, c). SEAMEO has also initiated Regional Integration of Higher Education in Southeast Asia (OHEC 2011), which aims to allow for more collaboration and mobility in higher education in the region.

9.5 The Future of Higher Education in Thailand

9.5.1 Private Higher Education: Competitor, Not Partner

Private higher education in Thailand continues to face immense and complex challenges. In many ways, private universities are treated more as competitors to public universities than as partners in the education and development of a nation (Welch 2011). Traditionally, the value of private higher education is in its ability to offer specific emphases, different admissions standards, and the ability to reach students for whom public education is not an option as the result of geographic or capacity constraints (Levy 1986; Prachayani 2010a). However, the government seems to treat private higher education as a legal necessity with which to compete and does not see itself as responsible for supporting private higher education. This contrasts with countries like Japan that have consistently helped fund the operating costs of private higher education institutions leading to greatly improved access and quality of higher education in Japan (Huang 2012).

There are serious disparities between public and private universities in funding and administration. According to Chaiyuth (2013), "The dominating role of the public universities comes from their long-term quality reputation and cheaper tuition fees compared to private universities" (p. 279). While OHEC claims that the Sixth National Higher Education Development Plan in 1991 began offering minimal financial support for private higher education, private universities receive no government funding to cover basic operations and are still held to the strict standards of the Private Higher Education Act (Prachayani 2010).

The Private Higher Education Institution Act of 2003, revised again in 2007, gave increased authority to private universities in Thailand, but regulation of private universities is still seen as excessively restrictive (Prachayani 2010). OHEC recognizes that private universities claim the close monitoring is rigorous and oppressive, but OHEC sees the strict monitoring of private universities as important to gain "public confidence" (OHEC 2013, p. 24). Private universities are required to consult OHEC regarding major amendments such as expenditure plans and financial donations as well as trivial issues such as gowns and pins (OHEC 2011).

While the Second Private Higher Education Act (2007) appears to provide more autonomy in general, it is a one-size-fits-all piece of legislation that does not recognize the unique character of some private higher education institutions. As challenges facing private higher education mount, enrollment in private institutions has decreased to only 15% of the total higher education enrollment, one of the lowest rates of enrollment in Southeast Asia (UNESCO Institute of Statistics as cited by Chaiyuth 2013).

Another challenge is the seeming favorable behavior by the government toward public over private higher education institutions. One cogent example of this is the purchase of several journal databases available in the Interuniversity Network Project (UNINET) (http://www.uni.net.th/UniNet/index.php) by the Ministry of

Education a decade ago. However, despite years of appeal, these databases are still only available on a limited basis to students of private universities.

Another challenge private higher education confronts in Thailand is the negative stereotypes about students at private universities. Many assume students at private universities did not do well on the entrance examination or their parents are rich enough to afford more costly private education. Thus, there is a mindset that students who study at private universities are "rich and lazy."

Other initiatives established by OHEC include the University Business Incubator (UBI) project established in 2004, which connects universities with industry in line with the government's development plan. UBI, while available in 53 public universities, is only available in three private universities (OHEC 2011).

For higher education to increase its quality, it should treat private universities as partners in terms of funding and policy and not see them skeptically as competitors. Policymakers must listen to the concerns of private university administrators and students and become aware of how inequitable policy hurts the overall human resource development of the nation.

9.5.2 The Homogenization of Higher Education

With increasing standardization, higher education is disempowered from being flexible and able to address more specific needs in diverse communities. Traditionally, primarily as a result of Thailand not having been colonized, there was impressive diversity among Thai universities. Kasetsart was more USA-oriented, while Chulalongkorn had strong royal traditions mirroring the British tradition, and Thammasat had remnants of French influence. While many universities were founded in Thailand with specific foci, the increasing homogenization of higher education is evident. For higher education in Thailand to be successful, it needs continued decentralization and ability to customize and contextualize its curricula and activities to respond to diverse regional and local needs.

Private higher education is effective often in its ability to customize its programs and execute in an autonomous way. Private universities offer the chance for more specialization and character. Recent trends in higher education in Thailand imply that an increased orientation toward regulation has limited private higher education in many ways. This increasing emphasis on regulation displaces emphasis on development and access and in many ways takes away the unique advantages of private higher education. Attempts to promote degree recognition and a credit transfer system have contributed to the homogenization of higher education in Thailand. On the other hand, public universities have both greater legal freedom and resources to innovate and extemporize but have tended to respond to stakeholders' preferences rather than to follow their instincts to open new academic frontiers. The commercialization of higher education is as rampant in public universities as in private ones. A wider variety of universities would allow universities throughout Thailand to develop unique niches to be relevant and attractive in the higher education landscape.

9.5.3 Inequality in Higher Education

While Thailand has been able to expand access to higher education dramatically in the last 20 years, there remains a serious issue of inequality in Thai society perpetuated by the higher education system. The most prestigious government universities have become extremely competitive. The move toward standardized admissions and testing has allowed wealthier students to thrive with expensive tutoring (Fernquest 2013b) (see Chap. 25). Additionally, since the top public universities are highly subsidized by the government, wealthy students who are accepted pay far less than a student unable to get in has to pay at a private university. When the elite monopolize the spots in the choicest universities, the opportunities for social integration and upward social mobility are actually hindered at government expense.

For Thai higher education to move forward in accomplishing the goals of OHEC, regions throughout the country will need more high-quality universities in proportion to their populations (Matichon 2018a). While Rajabhat and Rajamangala universities have helped with the spread of higher education throughout the Kingdom, 27% (46) of all universities are located in Bangkok which has 14% of the nation's population, whereas only 10% (18) are located in the Northern region which makes up 18% of the population, and 19% (32) are located in the Northeast region with 29% of Thailand's population (National Statistical Office, Thailand 2010). While access to university is widespread, most of the high-quality universities are in Bangkok. Increasing the quality of universities in regions like the North, Northeast, and South will allow more equitable higher education.

9.6 Conclusion: Final Reflections

Higher education in Thailand has played an important role in the nation's development. From unifying the nation through a shared vision to expanding access and quality, higher education has worked toward positive growth and change. The government has become increasingly inclusive of diverse ethnic groups, diverse religious groups, and the private sector. There has been more emphasis on research, developing university personnel, and increasing resources for higher education institutions. Higher education has been able to maintain its uniquely Thai characteristics while embracing what it can learn from other nations (Ma Rhea 2017). The physical infrastructure of Thai higher education has dramatically improved with attractive campuses such as the new world-class Assumption campus at Bang Na, the prestigious Chulalongkorn University campus, NIDA, and the AIT campus. While impressive progress has been made, particularly in terms of massification and improved infrastructures, a lack of policy cohesion, a tumultuous political situation, serious issues of quality, and inequities in the system threaten to prevent Thai higher education from reaching its full potential and goals.

Many questions remain. To what extent are Thai universities' development in innovative and dynamic ways limited by legal and administrative constraints (Suraphon and Kritin 2016)? Will the government differentiate between productive nonprofit private higher education institutions and for-profit diploma mills and provide more support for the former? With the massification of higher education, how serious is the "diploma disease" and to what extent are people judged by the prestige of the degrees they hold rather than what they can do or know? (Prompilai and Jones 2016) (see Chap. 19).

How will Thai universities respond to the changing needs of the workforce? Are students adequately prepared to find jobs in a rapidly changing economy and global/AEC era (Suthichai 2018)? Petch Osathanugrah, President of Bangkok University, and Anitka Limpiananchai, Marketing Dirctor of Jobs DB, argue that Thai universities must become more digital to respond to these challenges (Matichon 2018b). Though Thailand's overall unemployment rate is one of the world's lowest, a recent survey of the Ministry of Labor (May 2018) indicates that the largest portion of the unemployed are recent college graduates numbering 170,000 (Rattapong 2018). How will higher education in Thailand support a Thai identity that is increasingly pluralistic? Will academic freedom increase or continue to decrease? Will Thai universities enhance their R&D related to Thailand's escaping the "middle-income trap" and becoming a more competitive economy? These questions and more are worthy of both conceptual and empirical research as Thailand seeks to invest more effectively in human resource development, the key to its long-term future. With regard to the issue of R&D, in August 2018, Prime Minister Prayut ordered the formation of a new Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Development to promote innovation and R&D. This will result in the merger of the OHEC and the Ministry of Science and Technology (Chatrudee 2018; Dumrongkiat 2018).

As higher education continues to expand, a new period in Thai higher education is emerging, that of universal higher education. How stakeholders will work together to ensure high-quality higher education for the nation is yet to be seen. The future seems bright, however, as Thai culture, identity, and values continue to act as a firm foundation for the further development of higher education.

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