

Keynote Speech

"Internationalization of Higher Education in Asia and
the Pacific and the Policy of the Thai Government"

by

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at the Third Session of the Regional Committee for
Application of the Regional Convention on the Recognition
of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in
Asia and the Pacific

December 14, 1994

Bangkok

Mr. Chauvinan.

Mr. Ahmad. Director of UNESCAP-PRAP---

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honor to be invited ^{give a} to talk
on "Internationalization of Higher Education in Asia and the
Pacific and the Policy of the Thai Government". May I, on behalf
of the Ministry of University Affairs, extend to you all my most
cordial welcome to Thailand.

Ladies and Gentlemen :

Before moving to the theme of Internationalization of
Higher Education, let me point out two significant movements that
affect the notion of higher education in Asia and the Pacific.

Some
examples
are \$

The advancement in telecommunication technology has become a major catalyst to the globalization movement as it enables us to understand the ways of life, the need and feeling of our fellow human beings from every corner of the world and thus gives us a true "international perspectives".

It gradually creates a kind of international way of living that influences all of us and also lays a foundation for a rapid globalization in societies around the world.

The implications of these developments have defined the path of development as well as common needs and problems to which all countries have to pay a serious attention. It is certain that with this globalization current, we will see more cooperation and competition among countries through common rules and regulations, and a stronger effort by every country in search of better living of mankind.

The second trend, but of no less importance to all of us, is the movement toward creating an information society with the support of computer and telecommunication technology that shrink our world into electronic mail and fax machine. Computer and telecommunication technology not only enable us to reach out to each other more quickly and conveniently, but also turn our society into a borderless community. The information-oriented society will certainly revolutionize our way of life and lead us to mutually understand ^{ing among} peoples ~~coming~~ from different cultures.

Having drawn your attention to the globalization movement and the creation of information-oriented society, I now wish to focus on the internationalization of higher education in the region. If we firmly believe in the globalization movement that affects every aspect of our life, we will see the necessity for the preparation of our manpower for global competence.

To achieve this goal, the internationalization of education system at all levels is essential. Higher education in particular should be more responsive to the global trend and provide prospective graduates with diversified academic and cultural surrounding as to enrich and enhance their "global awareness". *+ competence*

In this regard, language and communication have become a very important component in higher learning. Future citizens are to acquire proper skills in international language as a means of communication with foreigners who^m they increasingly come across. The international language I mentioned include both speaking language such as English or French, and computer language. Years from now, I believe our education will perhaps be conducted in a bilingual or trilingual system so as to assure our future generations' competency in communication. Our textbooks and instructional *materials* ~~media~~ will also be produced in multiple languages. International environment will be promoted at all levels of education. Our students will also be trained to be fluent in computer literacy as a means of keeping contact with their fellow professionals around the world. It will also be quite normal for our younger generations to learn fourth or fifth language other than national language, English language and computer language. Language learning will be made easier for them through the use of multi-media instructional package which can be conveniently accessed both at home and school. It will not be too surprising to see citizens of the future living in big cities that will eventually become more and more a cosmopolitan with people from various nationalities come to live and work together in a truly international environment.

Aside from internationalizing our educational programs, we also need to look into ways and means of making our educational systems more compatible and thus enhancing cooperative activities among countries. During the past decades, several measures have been undertaken to allow greater international academic exchange especially among countries in Asia and the Pacific region. Such measures include :

First, exchange of academic staff to familiarize one another with each country's educational structure, administration system, and academic endeavors. Exchange programs may include students with longer duration of stay and more specific objectives.

Second, joint cooperative programs for university administrators and lecturers to share expertise and resources with one another on projects that reflect common needs and problems. Many can be undertaken at the institutional levels with much emphasis on joint research projects which have revealed their significant contribution to the academic community in various disciplines ~~areas~~.

Third, institutional linkages in a form of partnership to demonstrate institutional capabilities to work alongside their foreign counterparts. This modality has increasingly been accepted as an effective means for universities to assist one another on a reciprocal basis when participating institutions learn to accommodate their own needs as well as those of their counterparts for mutual benefit, starting from joint planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

ERASMUS or the European Regional Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students is an excellent example for us in the region to explore further its strengths and weaknesses and to find out whether similar or different modalities will fit our communities.

In Asia and the Pacific, several programs are initiated with a view to facilitating university mobility in the region. Australia, through the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) has initiated UMAP or University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific aiming to achieve, by extended and enhanced cooperation between higher education institutions, a better understanding within the countries and territories in Asia and the Pacific and thus improving the quality of higher education in the region.

Relationship with business enterprises will also be fostered. In time, there will be a small cost-effective organizational structure for inter-country coordination. UMAP has already been well-accepted in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation or APEC and its implementation is forthcoming.

Let me now turn your attention to the Thailand's policy on internationalization of higher education. In Thailand, the notion of interdependent world and the network among countries within which Thailand being an active partner emerged very strongly alongside the pace of economic development. The need for Thailand to become more internationalized in various dimensions has eventually turned into a national priority. As a part of the national development scheme, higher education is being called upon to respond actively to this emerging interest of the nation.

In our Long-range Plan on Higher Education from 1990-2004, the element of internationalization is heavily emphasized with several concrete measures being proposed. The ultimate purpose is to increase the global awareness and the international outlook of Thai universities. In order to achieve this goal, many concrete actions have been implemented such as the review of academic programs that will help enrich language proficiency of graduates and personnel to enable them to communicate adequately with foreign counterparts; the promotion of international programs in various fields conducted in bilingual system; the provision of study programs on international and cross-cultural issues; the increase and relocation of resources to accommodate the growing international activities; the expansion of research and development collaboration with foreign universities; and the establishment of joint international degree programs in various fields particularly in science and technology. More importantly, the Ministry of University Affairs has also looked carefully into the ways and means of building up structures and infrastructures to accommodate the increasing exchange activities. Some areas of focus are :

1. To create common perspectives among all parties on the objectives and scope of exchange activities, especially with the notion that exchange activities should be a two-way street with all parties having something to teach and something to learn from each other. It is also important that the foundation of understanding needs to be laid out on the notion of mutual sharing of resources, expertise, and experiences.

Let me cite the project between the Thai Government and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in which this notion of mutual benefits and the sharing of resources and expertise are strongly emphasized and very much reflected in various project activities involving more than 30 Canadian and Thai Universities. For instance, not only the Thai government provides a counterpart funding for the project, but it also encourages active exchange of faculty members and post-graduate students between Canadian and Thai universities through which not only language and cultural benefits are secured, but the academic fruitfulness is also achieved by the unique expertise of individual universities and their members involved.

2. To work out the modalities of exchange programs, especially the various alternatives of the country-to country or institution-to-institution agreement which is within the scope of bilateral cooperation. Such programs may take different forms as : exchange of academic staff, joint cooperative programs and institutional linkages in the form of partnership programs. This modality has increasingly been accepted as an effective means for institutional building in which universities can assist each other on a reciprocal basis and work closely together in the project. In 1995, The Ministry of University Affairs plans to extend our institutional linkages to Israel, China, Europe and America with the aim to improve our institutional capabilities as well as to encourage our institutional awareness of existing opportunities in the international arena.

3. To look at exchange and cooperative activities from regional and international perspective. This has led us to the notion of networking among institutions, the issue that is gaining wider interests among the APEC member countries. An input to this concept has come from the desire for multilateral cooperation to foster human resource development, skill training, and technology transfer, by utilizing the existing expertise and experience from institutions in member countries, be they universities, research institutions, or industries. Institution networking can be pursued on a small scale by groups of countries with common interests in particular areas or disciplines. SEAMEO Members have also shown strong interest to establish networking relationship among institutions of higher learning and research institutes as evident in the recent reconstitution of the SEAMEO Regional Center for Higher Education and Development (RIHED). There is also a promising trend towards utilizing such regional network to strengthen the existing partnership with universities in Europe and North America. For example, Thai universities may work with partner institution in the United States to set up a regional training center in certain areas to serve countries in the rapidly recovering Indochina. Such idea may not be too far-reaching since there have already been talks among countries in this region regarding the needs and possibilities for such institutional network.

Let me further elaborate a little bit about recent developments under some regional bodies. This coming April, MUA will hold a meeting on "ASEAN University Networking" to be participated by all ASEAN members from related ministries and

universities. Discussion has been made for quite a while on the establishment of an ASEAN University, yet without success. Only recently has it been agreed that university networking be a more appropriate set-up. In this meeting therefore it is expected that universities in ASEAN will create a better flow of information among themselves. MUA has indeed valued such initiatives and will be prepared to secure some start-up budget, particularly at the try-out period.

MUA has also seen SEAMEO RIHED as another avenue to promote academic cooperation in the region. Thai Center under the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization has gained support from all the nine members which include six ASEAN and three Indochina countries.

Though SEAMEO RIHED has just been reconstituted and in its Interim Period, it has earned a reputation as a regional body to potentially strengthen further academic cooperation at the higher education level.

On APEC, MUA has also been participating in its Working Group on Human Resource Development and APEC Education Forum. Thai higher education institutions have been informed of the practice of cost sharing, and found it worthwhile to participate in such APEC activities as seminars, training and research.

MUA has also played a role by proposing and coordinating a research project on "Modalities of University-Industry Cooperation in the APEC Region". It is hoped that the outcomes

of the project will be a baseline information for APEC members when setting up their respective APEC Study Centers which will help accelerate the academic cooperation and exchanges among the member countries.

Distinguished scholars, ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to conclude that the international education is the crucial means of bringing countries of different social and economic backgrounds closer together to enjoy the sharing of experiences and expertise in regional development process. The main objective of cooperative and exchange activities is to lay a foundation for our future generation to enjoy peaceful and productive coexistence among countries in the region. In the case of Thailand, with a strong policy support from the Thai government and the awareness of the Thai University community in regard to internationalization of education, the prospects for international and regional collaboration are promising. It is hopeful that the future will only bring about clearer concepts and perspectives on internationalization of higher education and also more diversified measures for the advancement of international education among universities in this region.

Thank you.