

Address

by

Prof. Dr. Kanok Wongtrangan

Deputy Permanent Secretary for University Affairs

at the Seminar on

Higher Education Systems and Thai-Australian University Partnerships

31 January - 1 February 1994

Indra Regent Hotel, Bangkok

-----

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, may I express how happy I am to be among Australian and Thai educators and academics whose efforts exerted have enabled universities of both countries to collaborate more closely and build a strong base for mutual partnerships and prosperity in the future.

My presentation today therefore places emphasis on current policies and measures of the Thai Government which are in support of collaboration between Thai and Australian universities. I wish to present my talk focusing on policy and plan at the national and ministerial levels.

At the national level, our Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan is in effect spanning from 1992 - 1996. Under this Plan, human resource development has been given a very

high priority as the country is in need of higher-to-middle level manpower to firmly found its economic and industrial base. Higher education has been regarded as a moving vehicle to provide training and to conduct research that will help produce qualified manpower and technical know-how to accommodate the needs and developmental goals of the country.

Accordingly, this Seventh Plan has stressed the importance of cooperation with foreign countries in various forms and aspects. Encouragement is made for higher education institutions to avail the services of foreign experts in jointly undertaking research and development activities. Research funds amounting to approximately 70 million Australian dollars have also been established by the Thai government. In addition, employment of foreign academics as temporary lecturers is also open in order to cope with the shortage of highly qualified staff in the areas of engineering, science, mathematics and technology. Thai research agencies are also urged to invite foreign agencies and renowned institutions to provide training in some specialized fields. Special attention has been given to the development of higher education institutions to provide quality graduate programs in science, mathematics, and technology by cooperating with well-established foreign institutions.

At the ministerial level, the Ministry of University Affairs has also developed its Seventh 5-year National Higher Education Plan, further specifying policies and measures to make academic cooperation with foreign countries viable and profitable to all parties concerned.

The effort of the Ministry was first facilitated by its Long-range Plan on Higher Education, covering the 1990-2004 period, in which the notion of internationalization was one of the main developmental issues identified. The long-range plan thus acted as a springboard for translating national needs into higher education priorities and subsequently putting them to action through the Seventh 5-year Higher Education Plan.

The Ministry has given its full support to higher education institutions, both public and private to cooperate with their foreign counterparts in developing international curriculum and providing international programs, for example, in International Business, International Law, etc. To facilitate smooth and effective collaboration, guidelines have been laid for higher education institutions which are ready to offer joint degree programs with foreign institutions. Furthermore, 90 scholarships have been given out annually to successful candidates to further their Master's and doctoral studies in the areas where shortages are still acute.

The Ministry has also been playing a more vital role on the international arena, realizing that it will open up more avenues to achieve academic excellence of the Thai universities. At present, the Ministry is actively involved in ASEAN, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization or SEAMEO and APEC. By so doing, Thai higher education institutions have been supported to work closely in a number of cooperative projects with members of all the regional organizations and been able to expand its cooperation both bilaterally and multilaterally.

As regards funding, the Ministry recognizes that cooperation with foreign counterparts could not possibly generate mutual benefit without financial support. It is welcoming to mention here that the Ministry has successfully sought increased budget from the Thai Government for our universities, allowing them to launch new joint cooperative projects in research, training, and teaching. It is hoped that more financial allocation will be made in this coming fiscal year which will escalate the mobility of lecturers and students alike within and beyond the Asia-Pacific Region.

May I now talk more specifically on the Ministry's support to nurture Thai - Australian university partnerships. Having recognized the importance of collaboration between Thai and Australian higher education institutions, the Thai Ministry of University Affairs and the Australian Department of Employment, Education and Training jointly signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Educational and Research Cooperation with a view to promoting a broaden scope of activities between academic institutions of the two countries.

A number of activities have been undertaken to facilitate more and closer cooperation between the two sides. The MOU Implementation Sub-committee comprising senior academics from universities has been established to identify plan of actions and oversee the cooperation under the framework of the MOU. Consultative meetings between Thai and Australian university representatives have also been held both in Thailand and Australia to further determine feasible actions and agree on the order of priority of activities to be undertaken.

In addition, background information and E-mail addresses of universities of both countries have been exchanged. Translation and summarized versions of some relevant documents have also been made to facilitate growth implementation of higher education institutions. At the moment, we are also in process of surveying the academic readiness, particularly the expertise and experiences in offering area studies of both public and private universities/colleges. The information gathered could then help us determine our present status and capabilities in order to consider setting up an Australian Studies Centre in Thailand.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I think the initiatives taken by MUA and DEET have only served as catalysts for possible closer collaboration. Thus, having given our full support, we count on the potentiality and intellect of our Australian and Thai universities to pursue this cooperative program through joint planning, implementation and evaluation.

Let us all renew our commitment and propel our activities toward the directions that will contribute to the higher education development of our two countries.

Thank you.