

Thailand

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I. Brief Description of the Thai Higher Education System

Since 2003, both the public and private sectors of the higher education system in Thailand have been administered by the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) in the Ministry of Education. Prior to this, it fell under the aegis of the Ministry of University Affairs, in conjunction with the Office of National Education Commission, and the Ministry of Education.

Public vs. private universities

Public universities in Thailand began first with Chulalongkorn University in 1917, and they are those that initially received the majority of their funding from the state. Each public university has its own University Council, which functions as the governing body.

Private universities in Thailand came about only after 1969, following the passing of the Private College Act, which finally allowed the private sector to establish colleges and award degrees under the state's strict regulations. Each private institution has its own council, which is responsible for the institution's functioning and internal administrative structure.¹ The state does not contribute to the budget of private universities.² In 1984, the government granted four private colleges full university status and the capacity to teach not just matters of national priority, such as the social sciences, law and business administration, but also pure sciences, medicine, engineering and the humanities. In the 1990s, the number of private colleges grew, and in 2003, a subsequent Private Higher Education Act allowed for more flexible regulations and a greater proliferation of private institutions. Private universities have allowed more students to access higher education, since public universities do not have enough space to recruit all potential students.

As of 2012 (latest comprehensive data set available), there were 221 higher education institutions in Thailand, of which 150 were public and 71 were private. Table 1 on the following page lays out the different types of higher education institutions in the country, as well as the numbers of each type of institution and enrolment data, according to OHEC terminology, which we explain here:

- ***Limited Admission Universities***: universities for which students are required to sit for entrance examinations.
- ***Open Admission Universities***: universities for which students need not take any entrance examinations; they are required only to hold a high school diploma (the Mathayom 6 in Thailand).
- ***Autonomous Universities***: universities that have more power over budgetary, administrative and management matters than other public universities, but which still receive governmental financial support in the form of block grants.
- ***Rajabhat Universities***: a system of universities that had their origins as teacher-training colleges, and were upgraded to university status in 2004 (similar to how British polytechnics were upgraded in 1992).

¹ "Bureau Of International Cooperation Strategy". 2016.. Accessed June 28. <http://inter.mua.go.th/>.

² Lao, Rattana. 2015. *A Critical Study Of Thailand's Higher Education Reforms*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

- **Rajamangala Universities of Technology:** a system of universities that began as institutes of technology, and which were subsequently upgraded to university status (again, similar to how British polytechnics were upgraded in 1992).
- **Community Colleges:** these offer diploma and certificate courses, mainly in fields such as agro-industry, management and tourism; they offer students flexibility of entry, schedules, location and instruction method.

Table 1. Institution types, numbers of institutions and enrolments (from diploma to PhD level) in higher education in Thailand, 2012 (Sources: Lao, 2012; Office of Higher Education Commission, Thailand, 2012).

Type of institution			No. of institutions	Enrolment ³
Public	Universities	Limited Admission Universities	63	329,473
		Open Admission Universities	2	506,113
		Autonomous Universities	15	269,965
		Rajabhat Universities	41	572,517
		Rajamangala Universities of Technology	9	151,765
	Colleges	Community Colleges	20	No official data
Private	Universities		71	235,725
	Colleges			26,119

The “autonomous university policy”

Certain reformist groups and factions within the Thai state, however, have been working since at least 1964 to make public universities more autonomous, by which they refer primarily to the areas of finances, procurement and human resources. This was mainly driven by their concerns that the highly bureaucratic nature of university administration in Thailand, where university academics were considered civil servants and had to match the more modest pay scales of their counterparts in ministries, was not attracting qualified individuals. Any progress on what was termed the “autonomous university policy” had been very incremental, until the cathartic moment of the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Thailand was hit by a currency crisis. The Thai government’s budget was cut, and so was its expenditures in the education sector. This provided new impetus to the “autonomous university policy”, which culminated in the passing of the Autonomous University Act in 2003, whereby “autonomous” came to refer not just to less governmental regulation, but increasingly to lesser dependence on governmental revenues—and perforce more dependence on tuition and other fees.

Major contemporary issues

Since the latest coup in 2014, when a military junta came into power in Thailand, the education sector has been set to receive a generous 19.3% of the 2015 state budget, but outcomes were found to be wanting.⁴

³ All qualification types from diploma to bachelor degrees to masters degrees to PhDs.

⁴ "Political Uncertainty In Thailand Slows Planned Education Reforms". 2015. *ICEF Monitor*. <http://monitor.icef.com/2015/01/political-uncertainty-thailand-slows-planned-education-reforms/>.

Critics point out that the junta's significant emphasis on "Thai values and morals" – possibly the area where the increased education budget is going towards – comes at the cost of ignoring other, much-needed education reforms. Critics say that Thailand has only two universities among the top 100 universities in Asia, according to the *Times Higher Education* University Rankings of 2014, and none of the universities are in the top 50. To make matters worse, no Thai university has been ranked in the *Times* ranking of the world's top 400.

Meanwhile, a 2013 UNESCO report described Thailand's higher education system as one "facing a crisis".⁵ In particular, there is a surplus of graduates in the field of social sciences, but a lack of qualified graduates in the technological and professional fields.

The OHEC plans to introduce higher standards of learning through various methods. It will leave each institution to decide how specifically it will work to meet the standards (as part of making each public university autonomous), but it has laid out a system of bodies that will supervise the institutions, and it has outlined key problem areas, such as the current paucity of internships and apprenticeships.

Potential students are also not receiving the opportunity to attend colleges and universities. Whereas currently each college or university itself decides which applicants to admit for the most part, the OHEC is calling for greater use of the Central Admissions or Network Admissions System, in which the students list universities in order of their preference, and could enrol in one of those universities if the combined scores of their GPA and their national entrance exams (O-Net and General Aptitude Test) were high enough. This, the OHEC says, would give applicants a fairer chance of entrance into universities, as they would not be "blocked off" by other candidates who would be admitted to the university, taking up a spot, but declining that spot anyway.

II. Financing Higher Education in Thailand

According to the World Bank's 2013 data, Thailand spent 7.8 per cent of its GDP on education, with less than 20 per cent of this budget going towards higher education. The state contributes approximately 75 per cent of the total budget for public institutions, and its contributions to the range of universities are unequal. While the status of the Rajabhat Institutes has been transformed from polytechnics to universities, for example, the government still does not allocate them equal resources as it does to some other, more prestigious universities. Rajabhat Institutes receive approximately \$223 of subsidies per student per year, while other, autonomous universities receive approximately \$2,721. Meanwhile, Open Admissions universities receive approximately \$39 only⁶.

Rattana Lao suggests that "the government is already providing substantial financial resources to education as a whole" and "therefore, it is difficult to argue for more resources to be allocated". She therefore identifies the main problem as lying in the process of budget management, which is "too rigid and restrictive." In traditional public universities, for instance, the budget has to be drafted by line-item, and governmental revenue leftover in one area cannot be used in other areas, unless the Budget Bureau approves (after a long bureaucratic process). For ease, universities spend their entire declared budget, even without necessity.

⁵ UNESCO, 2016. *The International Mobility Of Students In Asia And The Pacific*. Fontenoy: UNESCO.
<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/international-student-mobility-asia-pacific-education-2013-en.pdf>.

⁶ Lao, Rattana. 2015. *A Critical Study Of Thailand's Higher Education Reforms*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

The 1997 Asian financial crisis, which led to a 49 per cent decline of state expenses on higher education between 1997 and 2001, lent traction to calls for the “autonomous university policy” that had been made by reformist bureaucrats since 1964. Moreover, the Asian Development Bank, which had lent money to the Thai government in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis, stated specifically its condition that at least one university needed to become autonomous by 1998, and all universities by 2002. That 2002 deadline was unmet, however. In 2013, only 15 of Thailand’s 80 public universities were autonomous, as defined by the government (presumably taking “autonomous” to mean “self-sufficient”). In 2004, approximately 75 per cent of a typical public university’s budget still came from the government, while 20 to 25 per cent of its income was derived from student fees. The remaining few percent of income sources consist of hospital fees (for universities with a hospital attached to its medical school) and consultancy work.⁷

Trends in tuition fees

Since those years in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis, the consensus of leading policymakers seems to have shifted towards having students bear more of the cost-sharing burden for higher education. Between 1998 and 2006, public university tuition fees rose by 300 per cent.⁸ Some universities have increased the tuition fees by approximately 50 per cent over the course of a few years, after becoming “autonomous” as defined by the government.⁹

Note on “Thai language programs” versus “International programs”: International programs, those taught in the English language by local institutions or with cooperation from foreign institutions, increased dramatically, from 100 to over 727, between 1992 and 2006, and the number of programs is continuing to increase today. The boom in international programs followed the economic crisis of 1997, when many students could not afford to go abroad.¹⁰ It must be noted, however, that due to the relatively expensive fees of international programs, students who are now enrolled in such programs, almost two decades after the crisis, are often from upper-middleclass or wealthy families. Many choose to study in Thailand not for financial reasons anymore (they have enough money to be educated abroad). Compared to those students who attend Thai language programs, international program students often lead a more extravagant lifestyle, and the cost of their living expenses in the table below reflects that difference.

Table 2. Higher Education Expenses in Thailand, Borne by Parents and Students, First Degree, Academic Year 2015-16 - Instructional expenses for one academic year

⁷ Kirtikara, Krissanapong. 2016. *Thai Public University System in Transition: Some Issues On Management And Financing*. Accessed June 28.

<http://www.kmutt.ac.th/pi/backup/fileKK/Issues%20on%20Management%20&%20Financing.pdf>.

⁸ Ziderman, Adrian. 2003. *Student Loans In Thailand: Are They Effective, Equitable, Sustainable?*. UNESCO Bangkok and IIEP..

⁹ "มหาวิทยาลัยขอนแก่น (2) : ความเปลี่ยนแปลงหลังออกนอกระบบ กรณีมหาวิทยาลัยบูรพา". 2012. *Thai Publica*.

<http://thaipublica.org/2012/10/autonomous-university-burapha-2/>.

¹⁰ Higher Education in the Asia-Pacific: Strategic Responses to Globalization, edited by Simon Marginson, Sarjit Kaur, Erlenawati Sawir, p. 278

[National currency Thai baht (THB) converted to \$US by 2011 ICP Purchasing Power Parity Estimate at US\$1 = THB 12.37]

NB. Fees given as for Thai citizens.

	Public		Private	
	Low cost A Rajabhat University in the provinces ¹¹	Medium cost A limited admission university in Bangkok ¹²	Medium cost A private university in Bangkok ¹³	High cost A private university in Bangkok (foreign branch campus) ¹⁴
Tuition fees	THB 12,000 (US\$ 970)	THB 54,000 (US\$ 4,365)	THB 117,050 (US\$ 9,462)	THB 396,000 (US\$ 32,012)
Other fees	THB 1,670	THB 6,570 ¹⁵	THB 31,185 ¹⁶	THB 30,000
Books, etc	THB 1,000	THB 2,500	THB 2,500	THB 15,000
Subtotal instructional expenses	THB 14,670	THB 63,070	THB 150,735	THB 441,000
Lodging ¹⁷	THB 4,000	THB 20,000 ¹⁸	THB17,000 ¹⁹	THB 35,000 ²⁰
Food	THB 10,000	THB 30,000	THB 30,000	THB 100,000 ²¹
Transport	THB 5,000	THB 10,000	THB 10,000	THB 80,000
Other personal expenses	THB 10,000	THB 30,000	THB 30,000	THB 30,000
Subtotal cost of living expenses	THB 29,000	THB 90,000	THB 87,000	THB 245,000

III. Financial Assistance

¹¹ A non-science bachelor's degree at Buriram Rajabhat University, in Buriram province outside Bangkok. "Admission Information". 2016. *BRU*. Accessed June 29. <http://www.bru.ac.th/bru56/index.php?lang=en&Itemid=413>.

¹² Taking the average of fees for all Thai-language bachelor degree programmes (i.e. for local Thai students) at Chulalongkorn University as a representative sampling.

¹³ Taking the tuition fees for the first academic year for an undergraduate degree in business administration at Assumption University (Bangkok) for Thai citizens, as a representative sampling.

New Thai Tuition. 2016. Ebook. 1st ed. Bangkok. Accessed June 29. : http://www.admission.au.edu/en/images/article/tuition/new_thai_tuition2013.pdf.

¹⁴ All courses at Webster University Thailand: "Undergraduate Tuition & Fees | Webster University". 2016. *Webster.Edu*. Accessed June 30. <http://www.webster.edu/admissions/undergraduate/tuition.html>.

¹⁵ "Undergraduate Fee: Thai". 2016. *Chiang Mai University*. Accessed June 30. <https://www3.reg.cmu.ac.th/cmr30-new/files-cmr30/undergraduate-feethai-356.pdf>.

¹⁶ "Enrollment and Intensive Courses fee" for Thai students.

¹⁷ Most undergraduate Singaporeans students tend to live with their parents. Local students tend not to live on campus, given that Singapore is a city-state where commuting from home would be the cost-effective norm. Those who do stay on campus do so for the experience of college residential life.

¹⁸ "Dormitory". 2016. *Thammasat University*. Accessed June 30. http://www.tpm.tu.ac.th/main.php?page_name=dormitory.m1.p02.

¹⁹ "Dormitory". 2016. *Rangsit University*. Accessed June 30. <http://www2.rsu.ac.th/info/dorm>.

²⁰ "Residence Hall". 2016. *Assumption University*. Accessed June 30. <http://www.au.edu/images/pdf/2014/residenceHall2014.pdf>

²¹ "Expenses". 2016. *Chulalongkorn University*. <http://www.chula.ac.th/en/prospective-student/expenses>.

Since 1996, higher education students have benefited from Thailand's Student Loans Scheme (SLS), which have focused its efforts on two kinds of loan schemes: the Kor Yor Sor and the Kor Ror Aor loan schemes. Both schemes help to cover tuition fees, education-related fees, and the cost of living. While the Kor Yor Sor loan offers this for all recipients, the Kor Ror Aor loan offers this only for students with demonstrated financial need. The objective of these schemes was to give greater education access to poorer students, by providing loans to needy students under extremely favourable repayment conditions.

The eligibility criteria for Kor Yor Sor loan recipients include household income (no more than 200,000 baht), Thai citizenship, past academic performance, a clean criminal record, willingness to become a full-time student and age (the student must not exceed 60 years of age by the repayment deadline). Kor Yor Sor loans are also available for students in their final three years of secondary school. Kor Yor Aor loans are available solely for students pursuing tertiary education degrees, including both lower-than-degree level and degree level; it does not take into account household income; and its recipients must be under 30 years of age.

Repayments carry an interest rate of 1 per cent. The central institution for administering loans in Thailand is the Student Loan Scheme Committee (SLSC) and its administrative office, the Krung Thai Bank (KTB). Prior to 2013, recipients of both loan schemes had a two-year grace period after graduation to not pay off any part of the loan. Since 2013, however, only Kor Yor Sor recipients abide by that rule. A new rule states that Kor Ror Aor recipients must begin to repay the loan once his or her salary reaches 16,000 baht per month or 192,000 baht per year, and that the entire loan repayment must be completed within 15 years of the first repayment.

The first cycle of repayments took place in July 1999, with approximately a third of the borrowers from the first two cohorts of borrowers defaulting on the loan.²² Between 1996 and 2000, the number of borrowers increased from 149,311 to 903,228.²³ More recent official figures are not available.

Official data from 1999–2006 on loan repayments show that for each cohort of borrowers due to repay, about 40 per cent commence their repayment in July of the first repayment year, while 60 per cent fail to make any repayment. After the first five years of the repayment schedule, the proportion of payers improves to about 80 per cent of all due borrowers. This five-year period is also the cut-off point before the Legal Affairs Division of the Office of the Student Loans Fund intervenes to handle defaulted loans, a legal procedure which has had some success in enforcing loan repayments – every year, about 34,000 cases of delinquent loans are sent to law firms, to which the Office of the Student Loans Fund contracts the work of debt collection.²⁴

The decision process and means testing for loan financing is also a problem, leading to poor targeting of students who need (and deserve) the loans the most. The eligibility for a loan is solely defined by a household income threshold of not more than THB 200,000 – a relatively high sum for Thailand. Important factors such as need and the number of family dependents are not taken into account. Furthermore,

²² Ziderman, Adrian. 2003. *Student Loans In Thailand: Are They Effective, Equitable, Sustainable?*. UNESCO Bangkok and IIEP.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Financing Higher Education And Economic Development In East Asia*. 2011. Ebook. 1st ed. ANU E Press. <http://press.anu.edu.au/publications/financing-higher-education-and-economic-development-east-asia>.

because each institution decides on its own how much to lend each student, there is inconsistency in the amount given to students with similar needs.²⁵

²⁵ Ziderman, Adrian. 2003. *Student Loans In Thailand: Are They Effective, Equitable, Sustainable?*. UNESCO Bangkok and IIEP.