ASEAN Citizenship in the Internationalization of Thai Higher Education

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Abstract—This research aims to study on "ASEAN Citizenship in the Internationalization of Thai Higher Education." The purposes of this research are (1) to examine the Thai academics and scholars defined in the concept of internationalization of higher education, (2) to know how Thailand tries to fulfill its internationalization on education goal, (3) to find out the advantages and disadvantages of Thailand hub for higher education in Asia. Sequential mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilized to gather the data collected. By using a qualitative method (individual interviews from key Thai administrators and educators in the international higher education sector), a quantitative method (survey) was utilized to draw upon and to elaborate the recurring themes present during the interviews. The study found that many aspects of Thai international higher education programs received heavy influence from both the American and European higher education systems. Thailand's role and leadership in the creation and launch of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015 gives its unique context for its internationalization efforts. English is being designated as the language of all Thai international programs; its influence further strengthened being the current language of academia, international business, and the internet, having global influence.

Keywords—ASEAN Citizenship, Internationalization, Thai Higher Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE internationalization of higher education institution is a natural and inevitable consequence of the continued globalization of economies. Higher education institutions are now being called to produce professionals for an internationalized economy. The opening of national boundaries to foreign institutions that seek to offer higher educational services is a scenario that is very likely to become Thailand a reality in the medium-term. There is a need to understand the possible forms of these developments and to assess how the Thailand higher education system will respond to or be affected by these developments.

Understanding these phenomena should provide important insights and guides for policy formulation on these issues, as well as for local higher education institutions as they seek to redefine their goals and operations in an increasingly global educational environment. The term "globalization" represents the international system that is shaping most societies today. It is a process that is "super charging" the interaction and integration of cultures, politics, business and intellectual of

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cultures, politics, business and intellectual elements around the world. [18] Globalization of higher education is the flow of dominant technology and knowledge across borders, while internalization of higher education is one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalization, yet at the same time respect the individuality of the nation. [19] Globalization in higher education and science is inevitable. Historical academe has always been international in scope and has always been characterized by inequalities. Modern technology, the internet, the increasing ease of communication, and the flow of studies and higher educated personnel across borders enhance globalization, [1] English is currently the lingua franca of academia. Globalization Language is one aspect of our cultural "programming," so for non-English speaking cultures to work within an English medium is perhaps in contrast with their own cultural values, but done in order to operate in a more globalized world. [2] Therefore, the rationale for studying Thai universities is to obtain a non-Western perspective of internationalization and how the Thai educational infrastructure is affected by this concept.

This study examined the specific actions undertaken by Thai universities, other higher education institutions (HEIs), and the nation at large in addressing the roles and phenomena of "international education" and "internationalization" in higher education from a Thai perspective, with a close-up of three of the most active Thai universities with regards to internationalization – Ramkamheang University, Rangsit University, and Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University.

The Research Questions in this particular study was guided with the questions:

1. How do Thai academics and scholars define the concept of internationalization in higher education?
2. How is Thailand trying to fulfill its international education goals?
3. What do Thai educators and leaders perceive the advantages and disadvantages of making Thailand a hub for international higher education in Asia?

II. LITERATURE REVIEWS

A. The Role of the English Language

English language is one of the critical aspects to the rise of globalization and the implementation of internationalization. In the latter part of the twentieth century the United States became the most advanced economy in the world, a leader in the promotion of capitalism, and a primary enforcer of

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internationalization and neo-liberal economic policies. As a result, English has eventually become the new language of academia, the language of research, scholarship, and academic transactions on the internet. [1] In Thailand, there are wide-scale pushes to increase English language programs (often, simply referred to as "International Programs") at the undergraduate and graduate levels as well as great increase in English proficiency amongst Thai students. Chinnaworn Boonyakiat, Thailand's Minister of Education, bemoans the fact that not only Thailand ranked 47th out of 58 countries in the quality of higher education by the Institute for Management Development, but it also ranks 54th in English language proficiency based on TOEFL testing 2012. Inadequate development in international capabilities, specifically, language capability is a major challenge facing education and human resource development in Thailand. Former President of the Suranaree University of Technology, states that the first competence in a borderless world is language and communication with English becoming a must for international communication. [4] The significance of one language or dialect infiltrating foreign cultural systems is the irrevocable bond between cultural groups and their self-expression through language. [3] Languages are not isolated or self-referential and instead are social fields of force, power, and privilege constructed within particular social contexts. [5] Therefore, international students from China, Vietnam or elsewhere in Thailand have experienced that one's cultural identity and expression could be significantly inhibited if not allowed to be constructed or presented in one's own language or cultural norms. However, authors such as Hofstede and Hofstede (2010) articulate the notion that we are all culture bound and are collectively programmed in different ways from one another based on culture, although there are different dimensions of culture (language being one of them) and defining each dimension and consequence of cultural values is essential in all places, including the workplace. [2] Anne Wil-Harzing, Professor of International Management at the University of Melbourne, has indicated in her studies that instituting English as a common corporate language will not necessarily lead to cultural accommodation or loss of cultural diversity in the workplace at multinational companies, although language barriers at the workplace can increase anxiety, uncertainty, and loss of productivity if headquarter-subsidiary relationships are not managed well. [6] In all, standardizing frameworks and systems with mediums constructed within only one cultural context for use or reflection within different cultural contexts does have consequences. Therefore, as internationalization of higher education progresses, the utilization of language both within curricula and through instruction should be a carefully-administered process and one that maintains cultural sensitivity.

B. International Curriculum Development in Asia

An internationalized curriculum is considered the heart of the internationalization process by key Western scholars. [7]

Since the majority of faculty and students in both Asia and the West are currently not mobile, internationalization efforts at home are given increasing attention with regards to both academics and structure. The primary indicators of internationalized curricula in many Asian countries (primarily represented in the form of "international degrees") are courses taught in English and those that emphasize programs in business, ICT, and the sciences. Similar to the West, there are no clear or consistent conceptual frameworks for internationalizing curricula. Malaysia, for example, is more interested in the advancement of specific national goals and a nation building agenda that is reflected in curricular content and protective of Islamic, Malaysian, and moral studies.[8] In contrast, Japan seeks to offer curricula that attract international students and enable students to acquire a broader, more liberal type of education different from traditional Japanese frameworks. [9] While she defines a comprehensive international education plan for Thailand, she emphasizes that it is also desirable to promote Asian languages to "strike a balance between Asian languages and English and European languages." [10] Likewise, it is important to properly internationalize the hospitality and tourism curriculum in particular based on the preparation points, including: [11], [12].

1. Thinking globally and inclusively to consider issues from a variety of perspectives and world views;
2. Understanding the basic tenets of multicultural worldviews;
3. Being aware of their cultural traditions and perspectives in relation to other cultures and their perspectives; and
4. Appreciating relation between his or her field of study locally and elsewhere.

Those most critical of non-indigenous models of curricular development promote the embrace and sustainability of national or local values, an avoidance of a new dependence culture that is reinforced by American-dominated hegemony, and the preservation of traditional Thai knowledge. No distinction is made between primary, secondary, or tertiary education, neglecting to address the individual visions and requirements of each educational level in [13] the preservation of Thai identity, good citizenship, and desirable way of life, livelihood, and further education in the nation's core curricula are cited in the National Education Act of 1999. However, not all are concerned with the "evangelical outreach" of Western ideology regarding globalization as it relates to Thai higher education restructuring, and feel that cultures use and manipulate market strategies to accomplish political and economic goals in that society. [14]

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using sequential mixed methods, and both qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilized to gather the data in order to broaden the scope of the research. Sequential mixed methods afford the researcher an elaboration or expansion "on the findings of one method with

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another method." [15] Data was collected using a qualitative method (individual interviews from key Thai administrators and educators in the international higher education sector) and quantitative method (survey) was utilized to draw upon and elaborate on the recurring themes present during the interviews. Additionally, an essential aspect of this study was its inductive approach to data collection since it was the views and interpretations of internationalization and international education by the Thai higher education community that reflected the community's current status. The theory of Thai international education and internationalization at the higher education level was derived, as a result, of interaction with Thai scholars, educators, administrators, and institutions rather than tested against an already existing theory. "Researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research."[16]

Research Hypotheses

Based on literature survey the following hypotheses have been derived:
1. The Role of the English Language was an effect to the ASEAN Citizenship in the Internationalization on Thai Higher Education
2. International Curriculum Development was an effect to the ASEAN citizenship and not ASEAN citizenship
3. ASEAN Citizenship in the Internationalization on Thai Higher Education effects the advantages and disadvantages of Thailand International Education Hub
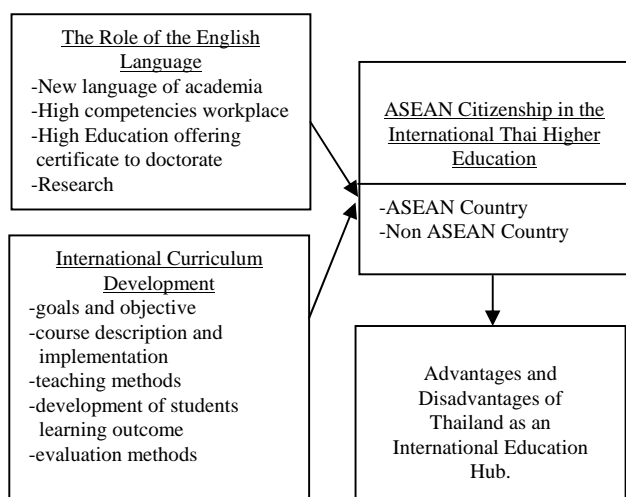
Research Framework

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework

IV. Findings

In findings, the Thai perspective of the "internationalization" of higher education was one that knew it faced systemic challenges, but had a lot of potential that hinged largely on Thai culture itself. The key aspects of current internationalization initiatives by the Thai government and Thai academic community were listed. This resulted that

Thailand had and continued to make strides towards fulfilling its international education goals, but not with the kind of clarity, consistency, and resource management that it needed. Though Thailand incorporated a lot of influence of internationalization and international higher education programming from Western countries – specifically, the U.S. and Europe – it had both a commitment and solid presence in the development of a Southeast Asian regional bloc known as the ASEAN Economic Community that demanded more regionally-specific solutions to regionally-specific issues, making aspects of Thai internationalization unique from its Western and East Asian counterparts. Cultural and infrastructural aspects distinguished Thailand even more from its Southeast Asian counterparts. Hard data reflecting Thailand's success in Southeast Asia was influenced by unique variables specific to the region and therefore could not be met or judged at face value with internationalization activities in the West and in other parts of the world. However, the data did reflect an underserved international education community in both Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia that could theoretically be improved with better domestic infrastructure.

V. Discussion

A. Definition of Internationalization

Theoretically, curriculum development can be attained both domestically and internationally by Thai students through on-campus learning or experiences abroad. Though as more international academic partnerships occur (collaborative degree programs, study abroad/exchange programs), curricular integration between two foreign institutions will continue to develop and make domestic internationalization stronger.

However, there was a slight contradiction to this summation during the course of this study. English-medium international business graduate programs in Thailand, and English-medium degree programs, particularly in business, aided in establishing a social status and an English fluency. Therefore, English was the singular hallmark of international degree programs offered in Thailand. There still existed a strong notion amongst some Thai universities and private institutions that English as a medium of instruction was either the sole or primary indicator of international higher education program in Thailand rather than one component out of many. Regarding the administration of international engagement (a.k.a. "Thai internationalization"), it was unquestionably being left to individual institutions to develop specific policies appropriate to them while no formal, detailed policy or definition existed at the national or government level. Though supportive of internationalization, the Thai government did not have an official policy or general national requirement for its implementation. This practice reflected at least superficially the same definitions of internationalization. [17] Though there was also a potential dichotomy sought between a uniquely Eastern definition and facilitation of internationalization and a

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Western definition, it was found that Western practices of internationalization and Western systems of higher education did remarkably influence the management of Thai higher education and the criteria for the internationalization of those institutions. However, the importance of the launching of the AEC in 2015, and its subsequent representation in the facilitation of international higher education was Thailand's strongest "indigenous" contrast to the adoption of many Western policies and practices.

"Global perspective," for example, was a commonly recurring answer when leading scholars and administrators were asked directly what internationalization meant to Thai higher education though it was not a term or phrase used repetitively throughout the remainder of the discussions.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

As it was not intended to develop a set of solutions to the state of international higher education rather than simply portray a uniquely Thai perspective to its own potential in this area without prescriptive influence from other parts of the world, the following recommendations for future research can be made.

A comprehensive study of Thai public and private colleges and universities' levels of internationalization with relevant distinctions based on policy management would delineate the broader objective of internationalization higher education into institution-specific issues and institution-specific solutions. Public and private universities in Thailand had distinctive differences that made implementing internationalization an "institution-considerate" process. Both types of institutions were equally capable of meeting internationalization needs to varied populations with different sets of resources.

Similarly, though it was not a theme that recurred often enough for deeper analysis during the course of this study, intercultural development – its acknowledgment, purpose and role – should perhaps receive greater emphasis in international higher education in Thailand. Since AEC development was a key in distinguishing feature regarding the internationalization of higher education in Thailand, it curiously has greater evidence demonstrating a stronger, formal academic commitment (nationally and institutionally) to cross-cultural learning with other Southeast Asian cultures either was not emphasized much or did not exist. While English is being instituted as the AEC's official language of communication, the effort towards learning other ASEAN languages did not seem to give much priority and the overarching concept of teaching and training others to engage in cross-cultural affairs did not seem to be a part of internationalization efforts. Determining the full degree of this activity (or inactivity) and the reasons behind it would make for an interesting study. The "Human development, as a concept and as a policy objective, must encompass the economic, social and cultural dimensions of human life." [13]

Finally, it might behoove the Thai government, but perhaps most especially individual Thai universities and colleges, to conduct a financial resource management study whereby the amount of funds being directed towards "international activity" were gauged by the level of international activity output generated as a result.

A. How Thailand Is Fulfilling Its International Education Goals

In order to address how Thailand was currently fulfilling its international education goals, two specific questions were asked during the individual interviews, and both were used as a frame of reference when analyzing the survey results. These questions were "What are the major strategies?" and "To what extent is international higher education a priority Thai universities in particular were employing English as the designated language of all international higher education and increasing its scope to being the official language of the AEC. English had become a communicational "neutral ground" as opposed to Bahasa, which was the most commonly spoken language, population-wise, in Southeast Asia. The reasons for this decision seemed to be practical: English had become the primary language of business and the internet, and choosing English prevented any cultural-lingual dominance of all ASEAN member countries. Support courses in English language training, Thai-English bilingualism requirements for campus staff, and scholarly publications in English also reflected the strong commitment to English language usage amongst the Thai international higher education community.

Aside from English, the curriculum for international education programs was starting to include alternative contexts regarding foreign cultures and foreign mechanisms within its content. However, more importantly, Thai faculty and administrators sought to develop courses that fulfill international standards and have equivalency to the best courses offered in more developed parts of the world. Gaining recognition by these types of entities by department and degree program would, in the Thai mindset, validate the worth of Thai academics, globally. Establishing one-on-one credit transfers for similar coursework with international partners via academic exchanges and/or MOUs (regional or international) was another way that Thai academics could receive validation, according to Thai administrators. Many references made in the interviews, and made in Thai national publications in deference to successful Western models of higher education. The Second 15-Year Long Range Plan of Higher Education (2008-2022) stated "Thailand could position herself as a leading player in ASEAN higher education, learning from experiences of the European Union. This statement dually reflected, on one hand, the influence of Western economic and academic models and, on the other hand, the need and commitment Thailand had for inclusion within a unique Southeast Asian regional bloc that addressed the needs of the region before any other. Additionally, 44 statements were made by 14 of the 23 interviewees regarding the comparison between Thai higher education and Western higher education, mostly indicating a desire for the former to parallel the latter. Western universities were seen as the provenance of

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innovative higher education, with the top 21-29 universities in the world originating in Europe and North America according to leading university ranking systems. Likewise, Thailand has subscribed to the 21st century notion that higher education delivers goods and services that have a role within the global market. Producing graduates to cope with an increasingly globalized world has many facets to it, but it was the existing and emerging structures within Thai international higher education that most effectively reflected Thailand's wish to engage in the global market by trading research, coursework, students, and faculty – starting at the regional level and expanding outwards. While the economic competitiveness of the ASEAN region has been influenced heavily by the machinations of the European Union, the re-structuring and implementation of higher education in Thailand has been influenced most heavily by the American system, though more and more outreach and collaboration was being undertaken with top universities in East Asia and Singapore, too.

The formal policies at the national and government levels that were evident included brief references within both 15-Year Long Range Plans of Thai Higher Education, creation of the recent "Best Practices Project on Student Exchange between Thai Higher Education Institutions under the Supervision of the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) and Foreign Higher Education Institutions," the active role of Thailand in launching the AEC by 2015, funding for and collaboration with the Thailand-Fulbright Foundation, international development initiatives including becoming a "donor" country to other Southeast Asian nations through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and also the establishment of both the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) and nine research universities to give standards in which Thai higher education in general could operate and benchmark.

B. Advantages and Disadvantages of Thailand Becoming an International Education Hub

Throughout the course of this research, consistent strengths and weaknesses emerged regarding Thailand's potential as an international education "hub" in Southeast Asia in particular. These strengths and weaknesses that Thailand faces were synonymous with Thailand's advantages and disadvantages in this endeavor.

The strength of Thailand as an international education hub is due to various factors. One of the advantages is its location, that is, it is in the center of Southeast Asia. It is very accessible to many countries, in other words, it is a gateway that links it to them and vice versa. Thailand has blessed with wonderful, natural environments. It is also renowned for its customs and traditions. Furthermore, its civilization has been much improved. All of these have given a very good impression to the foreigners here and abroad.

Thailand's core weaknesses from the Thai perspective involve foreign language ability (particularly English language ability), funding and proper allocation of resources, and educational infrastructure that especially hindered by a perceived inefficient government policy and the current lack of highly qualified, or world-class, faculty and students. These primary indicators ultimately affect the branding and reputation of Thailand as an international education hub. Not having suffered direct colonization, a culture that has regards for the concept of preserving "face" and public reputation, and a widening rift between socioeconomic classes all greatly contribute to a society that struggles with English language comprehension and usage. The struggle with the English language – a language designated as the communication element of both globalization and internationalization in Thailand – is recognized at all levels of higher education by higher education professionals. The dual purpose of the English language – the chosen language for AEC affairs and the language of international higher education programs other than foreign language programs – places an inordinate amount of pressure on the international higher education community to develop and properly implement this sort of communication. Both Thai students and faculty struggle with the language. Faculty members from various institutions have, at times, resisted English language training and teaching courses in English. Interestingly, so much emphasis was placed on English language skills for cross-cultural development that little attention seemed to be paid to the development of other languages spoken within the AEC (e.g. Lao, Khmer, Burmese, Vietnamese, Bahasa, etc.). While English may help to streamline communication within such diverse geographical area, assumption could be made in acquiring these other language skills – and their imbedded culture – could potentially foster better cooperation and relations with each other and show a deeper educational commitment to the community.

While Thai students were eager to study international programs, their willingness to speak English outside of classrooms was inhibited by a sense of cultural preservation amongst friends and family. There was also an inability for many students to have access to these programs and the training that they afford, primarily due to finances. The lack of fiscal resources had broad implications on international higher education programs in Thailand. Firstly, international education is an expensive venture. For a developing country that still maintained a large rural population and that had a large agricultural industry, providing access to basic education continued to be a challenge in the 21st century.

Thailand's educational infrastructure, while advanced compared to neighboring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, lacked cohesion between its goal declarations and actual policy. Though formal national policy in Thailand addressed the imminence of globalization and internationalization in higher education and with regards to the Thai workforce for the past 13 years, a follow through success did not currently exist. The task of internationalizing Thai higher education and of producing a globally competent workforce largely fell to individual universities. While granting this sort of autonomy had its pros, the struggle to accumulate fiscal resources for private universities and the

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regulations that public universities must face produced a contradictory set of cons, and ultimately exposed a lack of cohesion between the Thai government and all HEIs. Singapore, by contrast, had a smaller population, an export mentality, and despite rigid government controls, higher education, internationalization, and English language ability appeared to be systematic priorities. Coordination between the Thai government, HEIs, and the private sector was also disjointed

Compared to neighboring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, Thailand was many years ahead in terms of its educational infrastructure, from basic education to higher education. Thailand's national commitment to basic education, literacy, secondary education, higher education, and international education was re-focused with unprecedented support in the 1990s with both the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (1999), and both 15-Year Long Range Plans of Thai Higher Education established in 1990 and 2008. Thailand's main competitor for international education hub status was Singapore, and though Singapore has been ahead in the curve with regards to transnational partnerships, branch campuses, franchises, articulation agreements, "twinning" campuses abroad, corporate programs and online distance education programs, theirs is a nation with a heavy export mentality and a population 13 times smaller than Thailand's. Thailand's advantage, then, was to have the geographical and human resources necessary to facilitate internal development without heavy reliance upon external agents. There also existed stricter codes of social conduct in Singapore largely dissimilar to the behavioral norms that exist within Thailand. Therefore, while Singapore has a notable infrastructure, it is currently not considered a popular destination like Thailand.

VII. RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In general, further studies that facilitate Thai perceptions regarding internationalization are invited. Regardless of the degree of influence on higher education outside of Thailand and Southeast Asia, aspects of the country or region's development more than likely reflect unique geographical and cultural situations. Local perceptions on how this development occurs should have a stake in future efforts.

Finally, it can also be done on the current state of international student services in Thailand, specifically encompassing the enrollment, support, and participation in international student activity, coming from and going abroad. Relevant to the success of being an international education hub is the level of student services that can be performed prior to and post-arrival and departure in addition to academics and quality of living. Many intercultural specialists have argued that psychological support of students preparing to undergo a cross-cultural transition was equally important to the mere logistics of their activities.

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