

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

1. Conclusion

The thesis was aimed at shedding light on the relations between the contents of history education in Thailand and the political and social situation since the beginning of the 20th century. The writer divided the time span into two parts; the early stage of modern education (since 1902 until the end of 1950s), and the past three decades (1960-1990).

As for the first part, it was discussed that such factors as modernization and educational reform in the reign of King Rama V, the formation of the nation state, and the rise of nationalism, directly or indirectly extended influence upon the state of history education.

With regard to the second part, it was found that the political unrest, both domestic and international, and related social phenomena, often became occasions for the revision of the study course. Therefore, when Thailand was undergoing some political crisis like the expansion of Communism in Indochina, and whenever the social conditions were rather unstable as in the period of events in 1970s, the curriculum was adjusted more frequently than in the time of political and social stability.

It is obvious that political and social conditions have influenced the state of history education to date. However, it is not likely that these are the only factors to have decided the nature of history education. Or perhaps it is more correct to say that history

education has not been automatically affected by political and social conditions. Upon political and social needs, some measures have been taken in the form of the National Economic and Social Development Plan and its attendant, the National Education Plan.

Besides, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the tradition of Thai historiography itself has had some effects on the trend of present history writing as well as on the fundamental character of history education. In other words, it is represented by a centralistic history writing whose main concern is the events and achievements of various dynasties put in linear order as Sukhothai-Ayudhya-Thonburi-Bangkok (Rattanakosin).

Such centralistic history writing has further been colored by nationalism which arose especially when Thailand faced internal and international crisis throughout modern history, and has shaped the main stream of Thailand's historiography. We cannot deny the influence of the basic nature of history writing upon the contents of history education, though the degree of its influence depends on the political conditions, which Thailand have experienced.

2. Recommendation

In order to improve the present state of history education, we may be advised to direct our attention to the following three points.

2.1 Adjustment of the Fundamental Stance for History, Historical Study, and History Education

In Thailand, history has, to some extent, assumed a political character until now. It was occasionally given a role in the process of

nation building, national integration, and ultimately, stabilization of political situations. To put it another way, history was apt to be the means of rulers and political leaders to fulfill a certain political purpose. Historical study and history education were therefore not free from such restriction. In Nithi's words, "History writing flourishes when the standing of the ruling class is threatened."¹

Under such circumstances, history, historical study, and history education have been a reflection of contemporary politics and social needs. They were subject to the influences of the time and were obliged to follow the visible and invisible "order of the establishment." What is lacking here is the recognition that history is a study which can be applied to create the future.

History is not just the course of events in the past. By learning history, we can apply "historical lessons" to the present world and further to the construction of the future. Without understanding this virtue of historical study, history would become a dead science and history education would not arouse students' interest.

In this sense, the recent trend which places importance on historical principles rather than on historical facts, is a favorable attempt to mark a new epoch of history education.

2.2 Acceptance of Variety at the Field of History Education

Variety, as meant here is ascribed to the varied background of teachers and to regional differences.

¹ นธิ เอียวศรีวงศ์, "200 ปี ของการศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์ไทยและทางข้างหน้า" ใน กรุงแตก พระเจ้าตากฯ และประวัติศาสตร์ไทย - ว่าด้วยประวัติศาสตร์และประวัติศาสตร์นิพนธ์, กรุงเทพฯ: สำนักพิมพ์มติชน, 2538. หน้า 3. (translated by the writer)

Teachers are the ones who put the aims of a curriculum into practice. But it is not likely that history education is conducted by the same means. It is natural that the teachers' outlook on history and historical facts differs depending on their thoughts which are influenced by the history education that they themselves received. In order to make educational activities more creative and lively, it is not appropriate for the authorities to lay emphasis on uniformity. In addition, other audiences, like parents and people in educational circles, should give a free hand to teachers. As long as it is within the scope of the study course, the educational means should be left to the discretion of teachers.

Moreover, regional background is also an important factor which characterizes the education of local history. For example, judging from the image of Burma in the descriptions of local history, residents of the central region conventionally looked upon the Burmese as enemies, while northerners have rather friendly feelings toward them, reflecting their historically close relationships.²

It is a matter of course that such regional backgrounds, at least partly, determine the tone of history education.

Under the necessity of integrating the nation, the tradition of Thai history writing has been centralistic, and the study of regional history has been restricted in the fear that it would foster regionalism and separatist movements in some parts near the borders. Nevertheless, it is now reasonable to say that Thailand has attained integration throughout the country. Historical study, together with history education, is about to enter a new era which recognizes regional

²Plublung Kongchana, personal communication, December 14, 1995.

differences and promotes the study of regional history. It will result in fertilizing the foundation of Thailand's historical study. (The theme of the annual conference of the Historical Society of Thailand 1995 was "Regional History in Thailand; Its Development and Continuity."* This shows the growing interest in the field of regional history among Thai academics.)

Accordingly, history lessons which are rich in regional color will possibly activate the educational activities by attracting students' interests.

2.3 Reconsideration of Thai People's View on History

The future of history education is not only in the hands of historians, teachers and educational authorities, but also depends on the public's view of history.

It has always been the case that the stagnation of historical study in Thailand is attributed to the tradition that history belonged to the ruling people and was thus beyond the reach of the public. Such discussion certainly has some truth in it. However, we cannot overlook Thai people's attitude which is rather indifferent to history and history writings, especially for those of the central stream.

It is an undeniable fact that Thai people have regarded history as something dry. They have been reluctant to read history or to be

* (translated by the writer) The original title in Thai is as follows:

การสัมมนาทางวิชาการ เรื่อง ประวัติศาสตร์ท้องถิ่นในประเทศไทย : พัฒนาการและความต่อเนื่อง จัดโดย สมาคมประวัติศาสตร์ในพระราชูปถัมภ์สมเด็จพระเทพรัตนราชสุดาฯ สยามบรมราชกุมารี, วันที่ 4-5 กุมภาพันธ์ 2538 ณ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย.

ordinary archivists in the society.³ Such phenomenon is an underlying cause to hinder the growth of historical study, and the betterment of history education.

The unchanging characteristics of history education, which are centralistic, linear and putting emphasis on the royal institution, are partly attributed to the indifferent stance of the public toward history and history education. It is true that there are structurally few channels to reflect the voices of the people in the policy making process. However, we should admit that people feel that history is apart from the domain of the "ordinary people" which makes them less positive in taking part in the construction of the coming history education.

Why is the distance between the people and history so far? Why do they just follow the stream of traditional history education, instead of trying to innovate it? To discuss further, the continuity of conventional historical study and history education has resulted from the fact that in Thai history, the monarchy has never been threatened or denied its existence by the people within its realm. It has always been the dynasties and the ruling class who had decisive power in Thai history. Under such a circumstance, it has been difficult for the people to be aware of their roles in "creating history." In other words, they lack in the sense of participation or the feeling that they are both the constituents and "weavers" of history.

There was a period of time when people were activated in the liberal atmosphere after the October 14 movement in 1973. Upon the allowance of freedom of the press, every kind of opinion was allowed.

³Plublung Kongchana, personal communication, December 14, 1995.

เฉลิมมลิลา, เทคนิควิธีการสอนประวัติศาสตร์, หน้า 43.

Nevertheless, in the fear that "too much freedom" would result in a social disorder, reactionary coup took place in 1976, which deprived of the possibility to bring about a drastic change within Thailand's press, academics and the educational world. It was bitterly realized that the "power of a pen" was still weak in Thailand.

It may take a long time to change the people's view of history, though it is a vital factor in changing the basic characteristics of Thailand's history education.



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