

## CHAPTER 5

### FACTORS AFFECTING HISTORY EDUCATION IN THE PAST THREE DECADES

Objective of this chapter is to consider the political and social factors that have had some effect on conducting history education. The writer will discuss two issues, namely 1) domestic and international factors, and 2) the situation of teachers, students, and academics.

#### 1. Domestic and International Factors

Paying attention to the years of revision of the school curriculum in the context of Thailand's internal political situation, it becomes clear to us that the more politics are unstable, the more often the curriculum was affected. It was always the case that the curriculum was revised during a period of political instability.

Regarding the past three decades, the curriculum of secondary school level was revised in the years 1960, 1975, 1978, 1981 and 1990 as discussed in the previous chapter. Among these five revisions, those in 1978 and 1981 can be numbered as one, since they were based on the same national education plan. Anyhow, action was taken at least twice to revise the curriculum within only six years. Moreover, there was a special revision of social studies carried out in 1977, the previous year of the revision of whole curriculum. Including this, there was a total of three revisions put into action during this short period of

time. This is in stark contrast with other periods in which the curriculum went through revision just once in one decade. This period parallels the "stormy" political situation of 1970s.

The helm of state affairs had been assumed by Thanom Kittikachorn and Praphas Charusathian since the demise of Sarit Thanarat in 1963. The Thanom-Praphas regime succeeded the powerful political control which Sarit initiated. Nevertheless, its authoritarianism was promoted on the basis of full military control. Thanom, Praphas and Thanom's son, Narong, accumulated wealth through continuous corruption, which provoked the antipathy of the public.

It was the students who began to act on a new political consciousness and gained much popular sympathy. By mid-1973, they had become a major political force. When critics calling for a constitution in public handbills were arrested in October, massive demonstrations including university students, secondary and technical school students demanded the release of the critics and the promulgation of a constitution. On October 14, 1973, Thanom and Praphas were obliged to resign and went into exile abroad.

The government was then succeeded by a civilian prime minister, Dr. Sanya Dharmasakti. A new constitution was promulgated, and elections were scheduled for January 1975. Students organized political instruction in the villages. Political parties sprang up everywhere and public expression became exceptionally free. Newspapers and magazines could publish all kinds of opinions including leftist ones.<sup>1</sup> Such liberal mood in the political sphere was maintained until reactionary measures were taken by the military in October 1976.

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<sup>1</sup>Wyatt, Thailand - A Short History, pp. 297-300.

The revision of the curriculum in 1975 reflects the political and social atmosphere during that period. The educational aims described therein became more politically-conscious, as mentioned in Chapter 4.

An air of crisis grew among the military, capitalists and the rightists when the students' anti-America campaign, and the political activities among young monks and laborers, and the farmers' demonstration became full-scale.

In the meantime, some drastic changes took place in neighboring countries in Indochina. In July 1975, South Vietnam collapsed under the predominance of Communist power. A year later, South Vietnam was socialized and brought under a single authority. In addition to that, Cambodia and Laos became socialist states. In particular, the abolition of the six-hundred-year old Lao monarchy, as well as the destruction of monasteries and the massacre of monks in Cambodia came as a great shock to the Thai monarchy, Sangha and the rightist groups. As a result, their feelings of crisis became a decisive factor to promote a campaign appealing that Communism would constitute a grave menace to the safety of the nation.

Under such conditions, a general election was carried out in April 1976. Candidates and supporters of the leftists parties were automatically labeled as "Communists" or "destroyers of the monarchy." After the home-coming of Thanom and Praphas in August and September respectively, the political violence of October 6 took place, which injured and killed a large number of students and citizens gathering in the campus of Thammasat University.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Suehiro, Akira, Tai - Kaihatsu to Minshushugi (Thailand - Development and Democracy,) (in Japanese) Tokyo: Iwanamishoten, 1993. pp.76-80.

After the incident of October 6, a former high court justice, Thanin Kraivichien was appointed prime minister by the military Administration Reform Council. "Ironically, it turned out that this man, a civilian and a lawyer, was more authoritarian and repressive than any of his military predecessors. Rigid censorship was imposed, labor unions silenced, the ranks of bureaucrats and teachers were purged of dissidents and required to undergo anticommunist indoctrination."<sup>3</sup>

It was during Thanin's regime that the curriculum of social studies went through a revision in 1977, and necessary arrangements were made for the whole-scale revision of 1978. (Thanin himself resigned in October 1977.) Reflecting the political condition of full authoritarianism, the newly issued curriculum of 1977 was characterized by its nationalistic color. Such expressions as "stability and safety of nation, religion and the king," "to love the Thai nation," "to be cooperative in the nation," and "to sacrifice oneself to the public" etc., are found in the clauses describing the aims of social studies.<sup>4</sup> According to the manual for teachers of the lower-secondary level, the history of the Thai nation as well as that of ancient kingdoms in Southeast Asia was newly added to the study course of mathayom 1 level,<sup>5</sup> which marks the importance laid on the concept of national history.

In the words of Jitlada, Supervisory Unit of the Department of General Education, the Ministry of Education, the idea behind the immediate revision of the curriculum was that schools needed more

<sup>3</sup>Wyatt, Thailand - A Short History, p.303.

<sup>4</sup>ศึกษาธิการ, กระทรวง, หลักสูตรประโยคมัธยมศึกษาตอนต้น หมวดวิชาสังคมศึกษา มหุทธศักราช 2520, กรุงเทพฯ: ห้างหุ้นส่วนจำกัด จงเจริญการพิมพ์, 2520.

<sup>5</sup>วิชาการ, กรม, กระทรวงศึกษาธิการ, หนังสือคู่มือหลักสูตรประโยคมัธยมศึกษาตอนต้น หมวดวิชาสังคมศึกษา มหุทธศักราช 2520 วิชาประวัติศาสตร์, กรุงเทพฯ: กรมวิชาการ, กระทรวงศึกษาธิการ, 2520.

regulations to control students "who gained too much freedom" which eventually caused the disorder of school education.<sup>6</sup> The freedom stated above was, needless to say, the fruit of the students' uprising in 1973 and the rather liberal political atmosphere of the following few years. But this freedom was consequently denied as a result of the reactionary coup and the change of regime.

The curriculum was revised again in 1978, shortly after the issue of the social studies' curriculum in 1977. It was based on the National Education Plan of 1977 and designed for use over a longer time span. "The 1977 curriculum was issued tentatively by way of experiment for the revision of the 1978, and although the 1978 curriculum gave more liberty to students than the previous one, social studies basically followed the same line."<sup>7</sup>

In October 1977, Thanin's regime came to an end, as a consequence of opposition against Thanin's excessive anti-Communism policy and patriotic ideology arising among ex-liberal parties and even the military. The succeeding prime minister, General Kriangsak Chomanand "was able at least to stem right-wing violence, and he encouraged the return of many exiles from the hills and abroad."<sup>8</sup> However, the fundamental line of educational policy was maintained in the direction of restricting students' freedom to a greater or lesser extent. This can be judged from the objectives of the curriculum which emphasize harmony among the people and national unity.

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<sup>6</sup>Jitlada Sirirat, personal communication, December 28, 1995.

<sup>7</sup>Jitlada Sirirat, December 28, 1995. (translated by the writer)

<sup>8</sup>Wyatt, Thailand - A Short History, p.303.

In 1980, Thailand entered the eight-year regime of Prem Tinsulanonda. Prem adopted a political measure rather than military force in confronting Communist power. Prem's government came out with the policy that the "Promotion of democracy will lead to the blockade of Communist power." It was announced that the government would not accuse any Communists and/or their supporters who surrendered themselves. It was mainly due to this policy that a large number of activists who had concealed themselves in the hills surrendered in the beginning of 1980s.

(In September 1982, top executives of the Communist Party surrendered, and were followed by two thousand Communists surrendering in the northeast and north regions in December. Subsequently, in December 1983, five thousand Communists at the foothold of northern Thailand surrendered.<sup>9</sup>) This collapse of Communist power was quickened by the split inside the Party owing to opinionative discord.

The years of Prem's regime are also marked by rapid economic growth. Although he himself was a military man, he made an attempt to compromise with other interest groups such as political parties, groups of capitalists, economic technocrats, and academics. Particularly, he considered capitalists to be an established social power, and regarded their role as important in promoting Thailand's economic growth.<sup>10</sup>

Supported by satisfactory economic conditions, the political situation was stabilized, which consequently enabled Prem's regime to be sustained for eight years. There was no educational scheme initiated during his regime, which may or may not be a reflection of the stable political condition.

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<sup>9</sup>Suehiro, Tai - Kaihatsu to Minshushugi (Thailand - Development and Democracy,) Appendix.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp.98-100.

The year after Prem's resignation, the Anti-Communist Law, which had been enacted in 1952, was finally rescinded.

The latest revision of the curriculum took place in 1990, the third year of Chatchai Chunhawan's regime. This revision was in parallel with the enactment of the Sixth National Economic and Social Development Plan. Regarding the syllabus of social studies, the increase of economic focus implies that the rapid economic growth of the latter half of 1980s let economics-related issues occupy an important part in the study course. In addition, keen interest on environmental problems is reflected in the curriculum. This reminds us of the havoc in 1988 caused by the flood in southern Thailand. It made the government realize the seriousness of environmental matters and led to certain measures against deforestation.

We have so far discussed the domestic and international conditions of the past three decades in relation to the state of history education or social studies as a whole. As these factors can be seen to have influenced the study course, we should understand them as the political and social background on which history education was constructed and conducted. However, practically speaking, these factors did not exercise influence upon the study course directly. When necessity calls, a scheme of revision is formed, and it goes through the formalities in order to be enacted. In other words, certain social and political factors influence the curriculum indirectly in the form of the National Education Plan that is fundamentally designed to follow the National Economic and Social Development Plan. Therefore, the educational policy is, in a narrow sense, the outcome of the National Economic and Social Development Plan.

For example, the National Education Plan of 1960 was linked to the First National Economic Development Plan enacted in 1961. The prime

purpose of the two plans was to utilize education for further economic development. Firstly, moral education was emphasized in promoting modernization and economic development. Secondly, vocational education was also regarded as important in order to train a "driving force" for further modernization and economic development. Thirdly, the period of compulsory education was extended to seven years aiming at raising the intellectual standard of the citizens.

When the educational reform was carried out by the enactment of the National Education Plan of 1977, it corresponded to the Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plan. The 1977 Education Plan is also based on the recognition that education is an important part of the infrastructure for national development.<sup>11</sup>

History education is only one part of educational activities, and not the chief objective of these education plans. It is merely directed within the whole framework of educational schemes. However, we can find points of relevance to history education out of the stated educational goals. The point is that through these education plans, formal school education was, for one thing, expected to fulfill a social function to foster nationalism among the students; nationalism to unify the people, and to stabilize the society in which sound economic activities could be extended.

It is reasonable to say that Thailand's history education, since it began, has been burdened with the aim to develop a sense of nationalism. The degree or importance of this burden has depended on

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<sup>11</sup>Morishita, Minoru, "Taikoku ni okeru Gakkokyoiku no 'Seitosei' ni Kansuru Ichikosatsu (A Study of 'Legitimacy' of School Education in Thailand,)" Kyushu Kyoiku Gakkai Kenkyukiyo (The Proceedings of the Kyushu Educational Society) (in Japanese) Vol. 20, Fukuoka: Kyushu Kyoiku Gakkai, 1992. p.95.



the domestic and international conditions which Thailand faced. It has always been the case that nationalism arises when there is some tension within or surrounding a nation. Tracing history back to King Chulalongkorn's reign, there was a crisis caused by the threat of Western invasion. Speaking of more recent times, nationalism grew when many of Thailand's neighboring countries were communized. Each time, history education functioned as a means to create a common basis for the Thai nation. Such an aim lies at the root of the tradition of history education in Thailand. So far, history education has made steps toward achieving this initial goal. Reflecting on the "success" of history education, it can be assumed that the tone of nationalism will basically continue, even under the present situation in which domestic and international tensions have been reduced.

## 2. Parties Concerned: Within the Field of History Education

According to the theory of pedagogy, the three constituents of educational activities are curricula, textbooks and teachers. However, the issue of teachers (and students), who also take part in history education, has not yet been dealt with in this thesis. That is because basically it does not form a part of the study of the problems of present history education in Thailand. The main concern of this investigation is how history education has been influenced by political and social situations at each stage. Therefore, discussion has been concentrated on political issues in relation to the curricula and textbooks in which the idea and features of an era are embodied. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the other constituents, teachers, is not worth discussing. Needless to say, it is the teachers who actually grasp the aims and instructions of the curriculum and put them into

practice in the classrooms. It is not too much to say that the role of teachers in education is as important as that of curricula and textbooks. In this section, the issue of teachers as well as some phases of history education in the eyes of those in educational circles will be introduced in order to draw a picture of history education in the coming age.

### 2.1 The Present Condition of History Education

Many scholars have discussed the state of history education in Thailand. The most general view is that too much importance is attached to the memory of historical facts. The conventional way of teaching history is to provide students with knowledge such as the years of historical events, names of the historic heroes and heroines. The main topics of the textbooks are usually the wars, and achievements of the kings of a given dynasty. As a result, students are apt to persuade themselves that they should memorize these facts simply because they may be questioned in examinations.<sup>12</sup>

Recently, there has been stream of teaching method that lays emphasis on interpretation and analysis of historical facts. With this method, both teachers and students are required to think of the factors behind some historical events. However, this method has not become widespread yet.

One obstacle towards this lies in the attitude of students. To adopt this new method, teachers should first mention their viewpoints on some historical facts and then let the students think and respond. But, "as is the tendency with Thai people," the students dare not speak of their own opinions in the public, which prevents Thai people from making

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<sup>12</sup> เฉลิม มลิลลา, เทคนิควิธีการสอนประวัติศาสตร์, กรุงเทพฯ: ไทยวัฒนาพานิช, 2523 หน้า 43.

use of historical study. Moreover, in the case that this method is not accepted and well understood by other people, these teachers tend to be criticized as "radical" "leftist" or even "Communist."<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2 Circumstantial Obstacles to the Progress of History Education

Judging from the surrounding factors, the situation does not seem to be favorable enough to support history education. For example, school authorities starting from education administrators, principals, to head teachers, as well as teachers on duty and students themselves do not recognize the merit of learning history very well.<sup>14</sup> Both teachers and students are apt to have the feeling that history is something that cannot be utilized in everyday life. They lack an objective sense for studying or teaching history.

On the other hand, teachers with enterprise complain of the shortage of budget and school hours for history education. (Budget to be used for special activities, such as renting a film which is beneficial to historical study, going on observation tour, and so on.)<sup>15</sup>

Basically, it is an undeniable fact that subjects like science and mathematics are regarded as "more important" than subjects belonging to the humanities and social studies.<sup>16</sup>

Speaking of the academic circle in Thailand, cooperation between historians and pedagogists is not intimate enough to grope for the

<sup>13</sup> วุฒิชัย มุลศิลป์, "ประวัติศาสตร์กับการศึกษา," หน้า 90-97.

<sup>14</sup> เจลิม มลิลลา, เทคนิควิธีการสอนประวัติศาสตร์, หน้า 268.

<sup>15</sup> เรื่องเดียวกัน, หน้า 273-274.

<sup>16</sup> เรื่องเดียวกัน, หน้า 267.

better state of history education.<sup>17</sup> In Chalerm's words, there are few pieces of research dealing with the philosophy of education and the philosophy of history in relation to the administration of history education.<sup>18</sup>

Another obstacle is the lack of literature which can diffuse reliable knowledge together with a way to grasp the concept of history.<sup>19</sup> This point can be attributed to the problem of history writing itself. Nithi discusses "the narrowness" of Thailand's history writing with the following points.

- (1) Narrowness owing to the imposition of the framework of nation state on the state which actually has not yet been a nation state
- (2) Narrowness owing to the placement of too much importance on the elite (of each era)
- (3) Narrowness owing to the neglect of various social activities\*

With regard to the first point, he explains that upon the introduction of new historical studies based on Western trends of thought in the reign of King Rama V, leaders tried to create political and administrative unity inside a territory, which made Siam gradually develop to a nation state. Various changes and reforms taking place during this period, directly or indirectly, had an effect on historians of those days, who were under the influence of political administrators

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<sup>17</sup> วุฒิชัย มุลศิลป์, "ประวัติศาสตร์กับการศึกษา," หน้า 101.

<sup>18</sup> เฉลิม มลิลลา, เทคนิควิธีการสอนประวัติศาสตร์, หน้า 268.

<sup>19</sup> เรื่องเดียวกัน, หน้า 269.

\* (translated by the writer)

or promoters of reformation. Historians applied the newly-adopted idea of "state" in explaining the ancient kingdoms which had never reached the stage of the state. This idea, along with the idea of placing the capitals at the center of histories, resulted in regional histories being regarded lightly. Under the necessity of having some "cores" in Thai society with diversified phases, historians directed their attention to 1) dynasties or government organs represented by dynasties and 2) the Thai race.

At any rate, the unity of Siam, which was imaged in history writings, fostered the sense that Siam has been one since ancient times. This ideal (or myth) has been promoted by the leading class and intellectuals from generation to generation.

The second point indicates that the main part of history has been devoted to the rulers topped by the king, and the division of eras has also depended on the line of dynasties.

In connection with this point, the third point regards the state as the main stream of historical studies, which does not manage to cover various domains of history, such as economic, cultural, intellectual and social activities.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.3 Toward the Betterment of History Education

As Chalerm suggests, the most indispensable factor is the spirit of "self improvement" among teachers and students. In order to awake teachers' consciousness, inservice training for teachers on duty would

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<sup>20</sup> นิธิ เอียวศรีวงศ์, "ปัญหาการศึกษาและยุคสมัยประวัติศาสตร์ไทย" ใน เอกสารการสอนชุดวิชา สังคมศึกษา 5 (ประวัติศาสตร์สำหรับครู) หน่วยที่ 11-15 (22432), กรุงเทพฯ: สาขาวิชาศึกษาศาสตร์, มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมาธิราช, 2534. หน้า 1020-1026.

be quite effective. It would be a meaningful opportunity for teachers to increase their knowledge of history and to renew their view on history education. Various new methods like the inquiry method, unit teaching, team teaching, and independent study can also be acquired through inservice training. At the same time, universities and teachers' colleges should cooperatively endeavor to educate able teachers-to-be.<sup>21</sup>

For changing students' feelings that history is something far apart from themselves, the adoption of regional history would be an effective means. By learning regional history, students can learn the role of something with which they are familiar, along with the development of their own region in the history, which makes them recognize that they themselves have roots in that regional society. It would lead to the flourishing of the study of regional history and finally to the progress of Thailand's historical studies as a whole.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> เฉลิม มลิลลา, เทคนิควิธีการสอนประวัติศาสตร์, หน้า 269, 270, 274.

<sup>22</sup> นิธิ เอียวศรีวงศ์, "ปัญหาการศึกษาและประยุกต์ใช้ประวัติศาสตร์ไทย," หน้า 1038.