

The Quality of Higher Education in Public Administration in Thailand: the Side-Effects of Administrative Reform¹

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ABSTRACT

Since the current quality framework, called Thailand Qualification Frameworks for Higher Education (TQF-HEd), has been enforced in the past years by the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), the quality of the graduates produced and the quality of teaching Public Administration particularly graduate study seems to be in the opposite directions. This paper investigates the quality of higher education in Public Administration at Master level in Thailand. Data such as curriculums, program philosophy, etc. were collected from universities offering graduate study in Public Administration. In-depth interviews were conducted from public and private universities. In the midst of the Administrative Reform in Thailand during the economic crisis in 1997, the author analyzed the impacts of the reform, particularly the influential practice of New Public Management (NPM), on the quality of teaching graduate study in Public Administration in Thailand.

Key Words: Public Administration, Higher Education in Thailand, Quality of teaching, New Public Management

INTRODUCTION

The author will begin by giving the background of Public Administration education in Thailand and then move on to the theory of NPM that is used in this analysis. Research methodology and how the data used for this inquiry was collected are elaborated. The results of the findings and analysis to support the argument of the

impact of NPM on the quality of PA education, especially graduate study, in Thailand are discussed at the end of the paper.

BACKGROUND²

The education of Public Administration in Thailand has long been developed since 19th century. The teaching of Public Administration was first initiated by King Rama V as a training school to prepare young cadre to serve in the civil service in 1899 A.D. Those who completed the training courses and passed the examination had to attend field study, the practicum part, in different ministries. After a year of field work, they would be placed to work in government services to finally become career civil servants. In 1903, the training school was promoted to be “the Chamberlain School” providing the link between the King and the administrative system during that period (Pathumthani University, n.d.; Laohavichien, 1988).

Though it was apparent many years ago, the word “Public Administration” was only first introduced by King Rama VI seventeen years later in 1916. Prior to its establishment in any distinguished institution in Thailand, it had been swayed through the changing will of the national leaders over decades. The Chamberlain school was founded to be one of the four founding Faculties at Chulalongkorn University, the very first university in Thailand. It was named in the honor of King Rama I. Later in the year 1933, King Rama VII had transferred Law School from the Ministry of Justice to merge with Department of Public Administration and named as “Faculty of Law and Political Science”. Then it was transferred once again to the University of Moral Science and Politics in the same year. Fifteen years later, it was moved back to Chulalongkorn University and at the same time Faculty of Political Science was founded among other three distinguished faculties—the Faculties of Law, Commerce and Accountancy, and Economics

at the University of Moral Science and Politics, which was later changed to the present day, Thammasat University in 1949 (Laohavichien, 1988).

The United States of America through Indiana University had played an important role in providing support to strengthen the development of civil servants and the establishments of Public Administration Department at Thammasat University in 1955 A.D. (Kingsbury, 1962). The main purpose of this aid was to help Thailand in producing public personnel who had capabilities and knowledge in government services so that they would be able to apply knowledge, skills and experiences learned to the benefits of their country in the future. A number of scholarships were also granted to young scholars to study in the U.S. with the expectations that they would return to their home land to continue their contributions to the universities later on (Laohavichien, 2000). It was in 1966 when grants from the U.S. ran out; a first professional school of public administration was established by separating from Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University in the name of "National Institute of Development Administration or NIDA". Only graduate courses have been offered since then (Laohavichien, 2005).

The tragic incident on October 14th, 1973 of students' uprising, over 500,000 Thai citizens from all walk of life demanded democratic rule from the military government under the power of Colonel Thanom Kittikajorn. The political turmoil event brought about another new chapter to the teaching of Public Administration. Eight new state and autonomous universities were created consecutively, namely Ramkhamhaeng University (1973), Kasetsart University (1974), Mahidol University (1974), Srinakharinwirot University (1974), Pince of Songkla University (1976), Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (1980), Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (1984), and Chiangmai University (1986), whiles Public Administration was housed under various Faculties such as Faculty of Po-

litical Science, Social Science, Social Science and Humanity, Management Science, and Political Science and Public Administration. Ever since the educational development of Public Administration in Thailand has been flourished till the present time.

THEORETICAL BASES

For the purpose of the analysis of this inquiry, New Public Management (NPM) was employed as the development and changes of the PA field in Thailand was part of the Administrative Reform movement in 1990s. Theoretically, NPM was believed by the Public Management theorists, mainly Owen Hughes (1994, 1998, 2003, 2012) among others (Pollitt, 1993, Hood, 1991, Barzelay, 1992, Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, etc.) to be “a new paradigm” replacing the traditional thinking and practices of Public Administration of Max Weber, Frederick W. Taylor and so on.³ The theoretical foundations are basically based on economic theory and models, aiming at making the most out of the money spent on the activities. Performance Management is the obsession (Hughes, 2012: 76). In this particular manner, the main responsibility of a public manager, as it is called by this group of theorists, is to deliver services or, to be more specific, results to the “customers” (Hugh, 2012: 76).

Unlike other developed countries, the public sector reform in Thailand and other Asian countries alike were more the attempts in response to the economic crisis enforced by the outside factor of International Organizations like World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) than the intention to systematically and consciously reinvent the government. Simply put, the adoption of NPM was more a political gain to get the economy moving forward than the genuine practice of bringing the public services to the world standard. There are numbers of economic theories that NPM was drawn from such as public choice, principal-agent theory and transaction cost theory (Hood, Hugh. This group of theories focuses the

important of individualism in making decisions and choices for themselves in the policy making process. It is expected that the policy outcomes would finally serve individual interests rather than public interests. In this case, the managerial and public sector reform was seen by the government and politicians as a political mechanism to get by the international pressures, disregarding the public service values of quality, equity and other administrative values worshipped by New Public Administration (NPA) and other followings, for instance, Blacksburg Manifesto Perspective, Communitarianism, Constitutionalism and the like.

The other theoretical basis of NPM is coming from the practices found in private sector, namely flexible forms of management to supplant bureaucratic form of Max Weber like autonomous organizational forms or agencification in practice, strategic planning and management, results-oriented not input or processes, entrepreneur or profit making, decentralization, flexibility in hiring, greater competition using market-like mechanisms in providing services, cost conscious, and so on (Hood, 1991, Pollitt, 2001). These private management practices seem to compliment the economic theory mentioned above in pursuing and optimizing the individual interests.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research method with descriptive analysis was employed in this project. Documentary research of curriculums from master and doctoral programs offered by State Universities, Autonomous Universities, Rajabhat Universities, and Private Universities was conducted. A number total of 11 universities were selected as samplings for the study due to the time and budget limitations for the study.⁴The criterion for selecting the sample universities were that they have to currently offer and teach courses in Public Administration at all levels of study from undergraduate to doctoral de-

gree, except for National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) which offers only graduate studies from the start. The universities and institutions purposively selected to represent all include Public Universities⁵, Rajabhat Universities, and Private Universities.

Documentary research of all programs aforementioned was collected from website and direct contact with each program's administration. A total of 56 programs from the sampled universities in Public Administration were explored, covering 17 undergraduate degrees, 25 Master's degrees, and 14 doctoral degrees. In this paper, the focus is solely on master degree programs.

In-depth interviews with five groups of stakeholders were conducted during September 2012 to February 2013, including 1) academicians, 2) program administrators, 3) students, 4) lecturer and professor in the program, and 5) public and private organizations who are the main recipients of Public Administration graduates such as Office of The Civil Service Commission (OCSC), Office of the Public Sector Development Commission (OPDC), Siam Cement Group (SCG), Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), and Charoen Pokphand Group (CP). The author also has had personal experiences from teaching master's programs, both public and private universities, and administering the program over the past decades.

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM IN THAILAND

In the history of Thai Bureaucracy, there were two major administrative reforms happened during King Trilokanart in Ayuddhaya Dynasty (1448-1529)⁶ and King Rama V⁷ in Chakkri Dynasty (1802), when modern bureaucratic form of governance was initially instituted till the present time. There were quite a numbers of administrative reforms in between, but none was considered as significant as the one created by King Rama V. Only minor changes and adjust-

ments in the numbers of ministries were made in response to the growing needs to carry the necessary missions and tasks in the economic growth and social development of the country. The fundamental ideas of managing government business had never been changed in delivering services as usual, efficiently, effectively, and economically or, in short, 3E's. Not until the recent public sector reform in 1994, forced by the economic downturn and the influences of globalization, information communication technology (ICT), widespread corruptions leading to inefficient administration, and political pressures from inside and outside the country, the government was submitted to the new thinking of doing public business by adopting the idea of Good Governance (GG). Embedded in the idea of having GG are six principles of rule of law, integrity, transparency, public participation, accountability, value for money, injected by World Bank and IMF which were later enforced in OECD countries (Executive Order on Good Governance, 1999). Among other things that had been clearly spelled out was the practice of NPM in Thailand in order to ensure that the new governance would be in place and government services would be carried out in an efficient way, timely manner, and with less costs.

The very first legal attempts to reorganize public services were promulgated in 2002, the Public Sector Reform Act No. 5 of 2002 together with the Public Sector Restructuring Act of 2002, officially adopting NPM's concept and approach while it was most impressed at that time. The Office of the Public Sector Development Commission (OPDC) was set up under the supervision of Prime Minister's Office to handle this particular mission to efficiently improve the public sector services. In carrying its first and foremost mission, various measures had been instituted and utilized. To name a few, The strategic administrative reform plan laid down in the Royal Decree on Good Governance issued by the cabinet in 2004, aiming to achieve seven main objectives for the pursue of happiness of the

people, results-oriented, efficient and parsimonious service delivery, shortened processes and procedures, in trend services with new administrative structure, responsive to the needs of the people, and periodic performance evaluation. To accomplish these grandiose, Five Year Strategic Development Plan (2002-2007) was announced to include seven strategies: 1) business process redesign, 2) a major overhaul of restructuring of government units, 3) budgetary and financial processes reengineering, 4) human resource rewards and incentive redesign to attract and retain the best and talented people to the service, 5) reconceptualization of bureaucratic culture, 6) modernization of public service, and 7) public participation. Various private management practices were adopted and applied to include Balanced Scorecard, Total Quality Management, value-for-money auditing, flatter and smaller service delivery units, comprehensive spending review, downsizing, early retirement policy, and unit cost analysis to cover the value for every baht spent.

At the end of the first five-year plan of NPM's concept in Thai bureaucracy, OPDC has claimed to get accomplish almost of all their missions. For instant, the restructuring the old system of bureaucracy, one-stop service, Government Financial Management Information System (GFMS), the institution of "I AM READY" culture⁸, and so on. A vital strategy achieved by OPDC and had significant impacts on current Thai governance today was to the integrative and comprehensive approach to reorganize the bureaucratic structure.

According to previous organizational structure, Thai bureaucracy composed of 13 ministries, one university administrative unit, and state enterprises. After the major reform, seven more ministries were created and the university administrative unit was merged into the Ministry of Education. The strategic plan to slim down the gargantuan bureaucracy has ended in the transformation of the old into the new and innovative forms. Autonomous Public Organizations

(APOs) have been created splitting from single function or any ministries that its task deems important to the people. Up-to-date, there are over 45 APOs and more waiting on the list to be approved by OPDC. Special Delivery Unit (SDU) was also established, but only in small number as it has learned from APOs that once it is created, it would be difficult to dissolve even if the task has been achieved. Lastly, an independent agency or public body or quango or quasi-government, whatever it may be called is also an alternative to make public services more manageable and flexible. This gave the opportunities for Public Administration Education in Thailand to flourish during the reform.

THE IMPACT ON QUALITY OF PA GRADUATE STUDY IN THAILAND

The following discusses what had happened to the teaching and education of PA at Master's degree in Thailand. The impacts identified in this research are the expansion of MPA and/or MA programs, the inefficient student selection process, the low standard of teaching, and inefficiency of program governance by the central government or OHED. These were due mainly to the adoption of NPM during the reform, the circumstantial development in the competitive economy, bringing in the marketization of PA education in Thailand.

THE EXPANSION OF PA PROGRAMS

With the influence of globalization and information technology, and the window of opportunity resulting from the economic bankruptcy, the societal demand for responsive graduates led to the creation of many more state and autonomous universities spreading around the country. To name a few, they were Burapha University (2002), Mahasarakam University (2003), and recently Silapakorn University (2008). Distinctively, the field of Public Administration

has been placed in different schools and colleges ranging from the original and typical umbrella of Political Science to Arts and Sciences or even Management with the influence of NPM.

The highnoon of Public Administration education came in 2004 when Rajabhat Universities Act was issued at the same time of the reform. The heart of the Act was to raise the status of Rajabhat Institutes which were originally from the teachers college system to be equivalent to other public universities. The university status laid down the legal framework for more flexibility in their administration, including recruitment and hiring, pay and benefits, and so on. At present, there are forty-one Rajabhat Universities offering courses in Public administration around the country mostly in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science (Rajabhat University Act of B.E 2547 (2004).

In private sector, sixteen out of forty-one private universities in Thailand also offer degrees in Public Administration. For instance, Bangkokthonburi University, Krirk University, North Bangkok University, North-Chiangmai University, Fareastern University, Pitsanulok University, and so on.

Over a century, since Public Administration has been introduced to public services from the beginning to the present time in Thailand, the teaching development has been facing the dynamic changes of political, social, and economic turmoil. Obviously, the field of Public Administration has been mixed and integrated into different disciplines—political science, law, humanities, social science, arts, science, management, and etc. It is truly “interdisciplinary” from the start. As the field faces the “wicked problems” demanding more innovative approach combining all scarce resources from every sector in the society aside from main actor like government, such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), private companies, civil society, Non-Profit Organization (NPO), the PA teaching is becoming more complicated in solving natural disaster issues, global warm-

ing, international crimes, drug in the community and so forth. All concerns of public affairs/issues require government agencies to pull human and non-human resources from different sectors together to solve in protection of public interest (Bowonwathana, 2007).

In all, there are currently approximately 187 programs in Public Administration today (as of March 2013), comprising of 96 undergraduate degrees and 91 graduate programs (71 Master's degree and 20 doctoral degrees) located in every part of Thailand. Within less than ten years, the academic institutions both public and private have grown more or less like an industry. Questions have been raised among professors, academicians, researchers, practitioners, and all parties involved in public and private sectors concerning the number and quality of the graduates from the field of Public Administration, the teaching methods, the knowledge taught, and even the quality of the teachers themselves.

INEFFICIENT SELECTION PROCESS

Prior to getting into the analysis of the characteristics of students applying for the graduate studies in Thailand, the program's philosophy and its curriculum are elaborated. The author collected all data from 11 sample universities on the program philosophy and curriculums. In this part, the degrees are compared to those used in other countries for their common recognizable names, namely Master of Arts in Political Science or M.A., Master of Arts in Public Administration (M.A. or M.P.A. or M.A.P.A), and etc. At the Master's degree level, it is found that there are two main kinds of master programs: one gear toward academic, while the other is more practical-oriented. The former is mostly the old-school of teaching public administration, the content of the courses are focusing on theories and approaches-based for the continuation towards doctoral degree. The degree given is Master of Arts degree in Political

TABLE 1 : LIST OF DEGREES OFFERED BY SAMPLING UNIVERSITIES

Universities	Master's Degree Programs		
	M.A.	M.P.A.	M.P.P. (Management focus)
PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES			
Chulalongkorn University		Master of Public Administration Program	
National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA)		Master of Public Administration Program (regular weekday class) Master of Public Administration Program for Executive (Bangkok campus, weekend class) Master of Public Administration Program (regional campus, weekend class)	Master of Public and Private Management Program. (regular weekday class) Master of Public and Private Management Program. (weekend class)
Ramkhamhaeng University	Master of Arts in Political Science Program in Public Administration for Politicians* Master of Arts in Political Science Program in Public Administration for executive * Master of Arts in Political Science Program in Public Management *		
Maejo University			Master of Public Administration Program (Public and Private Management): regular program Master of Public Administration Program: special program (for monks)
KhonKaen University (College of Local Government)		Master of Public Administration Program in Local Government	
Burapha University	Master of Arts in Political Science Program in Political Economy and Governance Master of Arts in Political Science Program in Security Resources Management Master of Arts in Political Science Program in Justice and Social Administration Master of Arts in Political Science Program in Thai Local Government		
Thaksin University	Master of Arts Program in Criminal Justice Administration	Master of Public Administration Program in Management	
RAJABHAT UNIVERSITIES			
Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University		Master of Public Administration Program	
Rajabhat Maharakam University		Master of Public Administration Program	
PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES			
Krirk University	Master of Arts Program in Criminal Justice Administration	Master of Public Administration	Master of Arts (Organizational Administration)
Eastern Asia University		Master of Public Administration Program in Public Administration	

Science (M.A.). On the other hand, the latter kind of program is designed to prepare those working, particularly in the government services or practitioners to be ready for leadership role as executives in the future. Its philosophy is to be a platform for exchanging of work experience among practitioners from different sectors.

From Table 1, based on the programs survey, it is discovered that three different program names were used: Master of Arts (M.A.), commonly known Master of Public Administration (M.P.A.), and Master of Public and Private Management (M.P.P.) to reflect the unique emphasis of each program. According to the law, namely Announcement of the Ministry of Education on Criteria for Determination of Degree Name (Edition 1) B.E. 2549 and (Edition 2) B.E. 2551, there are only two kinds of degree names given: Master of Political Science (M.Pol.Sc.) if Public Administration is one major in the Faculty of Political Science and Master of Public Administration (M.P.A.) if it is a separate and professional field of study. Since it is the regulations that all programs have to be revised every three years, different degree names shown above will be changed to comply with the Announcement sooner or later as confirmed by OHEC (interview with Director of Program Criteria of OHEC).

However, from the above information, it is noticeable that the M.A. degree is offered by the universities that Public Administration is one subfield of study in the Political Science, Law, and other Humanities Faculties such as Ramkhamhaeng University, the first Open University in Thailand, Burapha University, where PA is under the umbrella of Faculty of Political Science and Law, Thaksin University and Kirk University, where the emphasis of the programs is on Criminal Justice Administration. The common 10 M.P.A. degrees are provided by Chulalongkorn University, NIDA, Thaksin University, BansomdejchaoprayaRajabhat University, RajabhatMaharakam University, Krirk University, Eastern Asia University, and KhonKaen University with an emphasis on Local

Government. Public Administration programs that recognize and respond to the need of private management, the call from New Public Management idea during the Administrative Reform, is seen in Master of Public and Private Management Program of NIDA, Private University like Krirk University, and Maejo University, where the university history is well known for agricultural technology. Formerly known as Maejo Institute of Agricultural Technology, from the interview with Maejo University's MPA program administrators, the MPA initiated will be approved by the university council, if it is designed to link with business management in the School of Administrative Studies by taking advantages of existing courses in Business and Agricultural Departments.

Regardless of the variation in the degree names, core content of courses offered in both programs are quite similar. They lay down the foundations of Public Administration to all PA programs into five original core areas of 1) PA theory, 2) public policy and policy analysis, 3) organizations and management, 4) public personnel or human resources, and 5) public budgeting and finance. One more core course added in response to the urgent need of the analytical and integration skills is research methodology, combining both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Minor variation may also be found in the emphasis of each program to create uniqueness of the locations of the universities. General and universal knowledge of PA, plus research methods are the main focus of universities located in the central part, such as Krirk University, Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, Sripatum University, etc. The advantages of the locations in other provinces in the North, Northeastern, and Eastern part of Thailand, the programs have added the touch of local knowledge. Local government oriented creates distinction to these programs, for instance, most Rajabhat Universities in other regions, Khonkaen University, Mahasarakham University, Maejo University, and so on.

For certain universities, law, as its affiliate field in the same faculty, is also provided to be selective courses, including constitutional law especially administrative law which are increasing in its important to public administrators nowadays. What the master students would learn from PA program in Thailand is basically quite similar. The inheritance and legacy of Public Administration from the Classical Theory to the present are the principal content of coursework. Little variation can be found in the emphasis on local practices and the recognition of local wisdom which is becoming more popular with the invention of New Public Management during the administrative reform in 1990s.

SELECTION PROCESS:

As for the selection process of students to join the master programs, the data from in-depth interviews with administrator, academicians, professors and personal experience revealed different story. The academic program is very competitive because number of seats available is limited; the selection process would base solely on their ability to compete in the written test and the minimum requirements of English language proficiency. This particular program is financially supported by the university. If, in some cases, they do pass the exam, but are unable to past the language test, they will have to take and pass English language courses during their study in the program. On the contrary, the professional master program is not so competitive, partly due to the number of programs offered in the market around the region. A minimum number of students of 50-60 are a must to keep this kind of self-support program running. From the interview, every program administrator agrees that all applicants will be accepted to the programs to ensure that the programs can make profit and stand on their own budget. Thus, the marketing campaign like, in most private universities, such as, free iPad, all included, one year graduation guaranteed, etc. are part of the promotion. Evidents can be seen from the advertisement in

most read Thai daily newspaper, for instance, *Matichon*, *Manager*, etc. A chance for getting the best is very slim. The written test, if there is any, would be just for formality purpose only. All would be accepted to the study in the program.

In all, we see PA education at master level is becoming more like business. However, the main purpose of master program is to provide continuing education platform to those working and give them opportunity to freshen up their knowledge. It is also found that the philosophical statement and objectives of the program are not drastically distinct among public, private, and Rajabhat Universities.

Students:

In coherent with different kinds of Master's degree program, the students as input to the academic degree are those newly graduates who just complete the undergraduate degree and go straight to the graduate study. This group of students has no prior work experience and fresh out of college with little knowledge of jobs. Studying is the alternative while waiting for job opening opportunity. As for the practical master degree, the entrance selection process is more flexible for mid-career, having three to five years of work experiences. The application process would give more weight to their work skill and experience than the theoretical test. Distinguish work experience, self achievements, and good recommendations are important as well. From the interview with OHEC's personnel, MPA program is very popular among politicians in other provinces. It is the belief and values of most Thais for higher education that drive people to get a master degree or even better, doctoral degree. People with university degrees, especially from famous universities, will gain respects from the public at large. With many universities competing for the same group of "customers," the chances of acceptance to advanced study are wide open. It is an opportunity for those with undergraduate degree from less popular universities to pursue their dreamed public universities such as Chulalongkorn University,

Thammasat University, Kasetsart University, Silapakorn University, Mahidol University, and so on. It is found that all applicants, nowadays, has zero chance of getting rejected.

INEFFICIENT PROCESS OF TEACHING:

Three different, but related issues of teachers, teaching methods/approach, and teaching materials used in class are discussed. The quality of products rests on the skills, knowledge and experience of the masters who skillfully craft their own fruits. They are the heart of the successful story of their products. The findings from the document and the in-depth interviews revealed that teachers from public universities, like, to name a few, Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, ChiangmaiUniveristy, Mahidol University would hold at least doctoral degree from abroad, mostly United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, or equivalent in the field of Public Administration or Political Science. For private and especially Rajabhat Universities, most teachers hold Master's degree in Public Administration, Political Science, and other social science degree, not so directly related to Public Administration—Geographic Information System, Mathematics, and so on. The degree earned would come from major universities in Thailand such as Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, ChiangmaiUniveristy, NIDA, etc. Some of them are doing their doctoral degrees in their own universities or other major universities in Thailand while teaching doctoral courses in their universities. However, this situation is now being mitigated by the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), requiring teachers in the PA programs to have PA or Political Science degree. As it appears that some are acquiring another master degree in Public Administration and some are in the doctoral programs. Otherwise, their PA programs will not be accredited by OHEC, resulting in closing down the program the following academic years.

To help alleviate the situation of urgent need of qualified teachers, most master degree programs in PA have reached out to acquire retired professors from public universities to be their visiting or affiliated professors or guest lecturers. An alternative to this particular lack of qualified teachers is to hire retired high ranking public servants, who have long experiences in serving public offices, to be teachers in the program. The latter kind of teachers does have lifetime experiences in the field, but does not hold doctoral degree in the field of PA. However, they do teach master and doctoral students in certain private and Rajabhat Universities. At present, OHEC is trying to tighten its string on the quality of teachers by applying the Thailand Qualification Frameworks for Higher Education (TQF-HEd) on internal or self-assessment, working in co-ordination with the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) for external assessment and The Civil Service Commission (CSC). Various public universities find themselves in an uneasy situation to face three inflexible different standards of assessments aiming at strengthening and increasing the quality of education across nation.

In terms of teaching methods, as for the academic MA program, students will be assigned to read some English language textbooks, articles, and other materials. Theories are learned, criticized, and analyzed in details. Students are left to take their own path of taking classes at their own pace. On the other hand, different teaching and materials are used in classes. Class materials will be provided to all. From the interview, a number of the respondents affirmed that they have to find the books and have the program administration copy for everyone in class. Due to limited budget for books and reading materials, only a few or only one book will be bought for each student. However, they will be given a copy of power points from all guest lecturers, if they have any.

Courses are designed and arranged by “module” or “package” or

“block course”. NIDA, Ramkhamhaeng University, and Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University were found to offer courses in many campuses around the country at the same time. In the most competitive private and Rajabhat Universities, students are given one intensive course at a time for a month, during evening and most probably on Saturday and Sunday, 6 hours a day. Another subject will continue right after the first one completed and so on. A total of 9 credits or three to four courses are arranged each semester. In a way, this block course is to create job and extra income to most teachers in PA because of low salary. Recent evaluations by OHEC’s Department of Standard and Evaluations revealed an enormous closing of MPA’s program located off main campuses by private and Rajabhat Universities around the countries due to management inefficiency and the lack of quality teaching.

More case study approaches and project-based learning are deployed in class and outside classroom. Students will be assigned to work in group on group projects, creating opportunity for them to exchange and share knowledge, skills, and experiences from different agencies, public and private organizations. Since the class is large with a minimum of 50 students and a maximum of nearly 100 students, group report of 10-12 persons per group is favorable. Lecturing instead of seminar and class discussion becomes very common. Class interaction between teachers and students occurs sporadically only to a few interested individuals. Outdoor field visits during the semester as part of the course activities and site visits to other provinces in the country and abroad are part of the program to widen their horizon in practicum public administration.

After finishing all required course work, students are required to pass a written comprehensive exam. Upon completion of the written exam, they need to choose one of the two plans: plan A is thesis and plan B is mini research project or practicum research. Those who decide to take plan A track do not have to take extra selective

courses for 6 credits. If plan B is chosen, they are required to take two more arranged courses. Almost all master academic program students would do thesis, while practitioners would do practicum research. The differences between these two kinds of research lie in the scope and the nature of the research. Thesis paper is broader in scope, more intensive in literature review and theoretical comprehensive and larger sample size or case study than practicum research.

One indicator as good universities or programs is to have a large volume of books and materials in the library for professors and students alike to read, do research, and acquire more knowledge. It is the main source of wisdom. As mentioned earlier, textbooks and more academic like materials are used in class for the MA degree while different materials and preparation are prepared for the practitioners in the MPA program. Since the practitioners work during the week and attend classes during weekend, they have little time to search for more books and reading materials. The program administrators from the interview, therefore, would provide them with all necessary readings selected by the teachers.

From the survey of Thai textbooks on PA over the past 15 years, it is found that there are not many books written by Thai scholars in the market. One reason is that the salary for university lecturer is not so rewarding. Extra teaching work is necessary to earn more living by teaching more master degree courses with various programs offered by other universities around the country. Research work, mostly applied and practical research will be paid by government agencies to help improve government services. Little time would be left to write unrewarding books for teaching because most students do not buy books for their study. Moreover, one lecturer is required to teach at least 4-5 courses a year. In reality, he or she would teach 8-10 different courses every year. Heavy minimum teaching workload does not give a junior lecturer to crystallize and create thoughtful textbook and meaningful research to the field.

Related issue to teaching material and quality of teaching personnel is the number of research done by the teachers. Quality of teaching personnel can be observed from the experiences gained from time spent in doing research on the subjects of interests. Unlike most scholars from other Western universities, Thai scholars do not spend enough time studying, searching, digging, and investigating the topics/issues that interest them. Time would be exploited to find extra teaching work that quick and easy money can be found. It is rather difficult to get research grants from the university, currently supported by the government, or other research agencies like TDRI, Thailand Research Fund (TRF), or National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT). So far, government's policy on social research has not been rewarding. This year, less than 1% (0.56%, 20 projects) of NRCT's total research budget is allocated to Political Science and PA research combined, as compared to over 46.00% of research budget for agriculture and biology. As for TRF, most of its budget would be for research in science. Recent news released by Council of University Presidents of Thailand (CUPT), the government has cut down more next year research budget allocations from public universities by more than as mentioned by President of CUPT, about 3.3 millions dollars. With less financial support for research on national scale, the hope for Thai universities to gain world's ranking and create new innovations for the development of the country is dim, said Somkid Lertpaithoon, President of CUPT (Dailnews, April 25, 2013).

OUTPUT: QUANTITY RATHER THAN QUALITY

Job search is not the real issue for master students. The academic program is designed to train students to be future teachers or to pursue doctoral degree in the future. On the other hand, in the practitioners program, some students expect to advance their career and get promotion after their completion. For others, getting a

master degree, in a way, is for social upgrading and networking purpose. The saying that “Pay all and graduation is guaranteed” is one of the gimmick campaigns in private and Rajabhat universities. In all, a master degree for sale problem is becoming more serious, not to mention the problem of banal plagiarisms and selling of research paper. The problem of “degree for sale” has long been recognized and widely criticized (OK Nation Blog, 2011). The trading of degrees, especially master degree was found to disperse after the drastic Administrative Reform in 1997 due to the economic crisis. The root cause of the current situation derived from forcing previously state owned universities to become autonomous or public universities today away from bureaucracy, with the illusions of flexibility and academic freedom. The birth of large numbers of new autonomous universities and the transformation of originally teaching colleges to Rajabhat Universities have worsened the problem. The disparity between supply or the producers and the demand for the degree has elevated the trading and the competition for the “customers”. Quality of the products is not the factor to be reckoned. Only the quantity of the products, 100 percent graduation guaranteed, would draw enough customers to keep the program running. This issue needs urgent remedy from all parties involved.

CONCLUSIONS

Public Administration has a long history in Thai education. The increase in number of institutions—public, private and Rajabhat universities does not reflect the quality of the products. A total of 71 Master’s degree programs since the administrative reform in 1997 and the glory of Rajabhat universities in 2004 are more than enough to produce public civil servants. The need to provide advanced learning to mid-career bureaucrats was overcome by the triumphant of business.

The results of the administrative reform as part of economic

mismanagement, not to mention the much related influence of globalization has shaken the field of PA. Adopted the new ideas and tools of NPM, the Weber's bureaucratic system will never turn back to be the same. Within the next three years, Thailand and nine other ASEAN will have to be ready for the economic integration in the region in all three areas of security, cultural exchange, and most importantly, education.

The study of 25 PA master degree programs in Thailand over the past 10 years revealed that the education of PA has grown rapidly with most influences of what had happened in the country, politically and economically. There are five major points to be summarized as follows:-

Firstly, the initial purpose of producing competent and qualified graduates to serve public office was no longer relevant. The demand for the master's degree was high, but did not keep up with the growing number of the programs opened. As a result, the high number of persons graduated with master's degree in PA does not reflect the demand in the market. With the increasing competition of marketing campaign, the quality of the graduates has been compromised.

Secondly, the quality of the key persons in producing the products is also in question. As mentions, many universities have expanded the programs which would definitely need teachers in the production process. However, the existing teaching personnel they have do not hold at least master degree in PA. Simply put, they do not have foundation and knowledge in PA to teach in the field of PA. Even though OHEC, as a direct responsible agency, has tried to fix this problem, it comes in a little too late. Damage has been done to many graduates. Serious penalty should be enforced. Moreover, this problem is intertwined with less experience in doing research that can be applied to their teaching.

Thirdly, related issue to quality of teachers, monthly salary and

benefits should be reconsidered and increased. Teaching job in the universities is recognized as highly prestigious. However, the pay is incommensurable. It should have been raised to cover high cost of living and for investment on books and other teaching materials. It would also help draw and attract more qualified students to pursue academic career in the future.

Fourthly, the coming of AEC integration is a driving force for all MPA programs to move forward from one nation alone to regional. This is a new challenging task for all to improve and redesign the content of the subject taught to accommodate students from around ASEAN countries.

Lastly, it is an alarming issue that there are not many good books in the field of PA. Only a few are up-to-date in the market. Students do not like to read and do not have enough time to read and synthesize what have been learned within a short period of time. What more important is the time that teachers in the field of PA have seems to be major obstacle: too many classes to teach due to low pay, research to be done, lack of accessibility to new books and articles in the database, etc. Not to mention the English proficiency ability of Thai teachers, they are not capable of creating and producing research results that can be presented at the international level. Not many can do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the problems encountered in this study, the recommendations are as follows:-

First and foremost, the law and regulations on criteria for qualified programs are in place except for the enforcement of these measures. What OHEC, as a central regulatory agency, has to do is to strictly enforce the laws and penalize them by not giving them accreditations. However, doing so is like “to build the cattle-pen after the cow is lost” in Thai proverb. What should be done is not to

allow and give the universities the license or accreditations to open the program. Strong preventive measure is highly recommended. To do so, OHEC first needs the database of all programs and teachers personnel and their full profile in Thailand at all levels of education, which it does not have at present.

Second, there should be standard on quality of lecturer in each and every field, not only PA, saying that those who teach PA should at least hold master degree in PA because teachers are the role models to the students and should have known the subject. To the extreme, a certification for teaching PA may be issued to those who pass the bar exams as suggested by one leading scholar and university administrator from NIDA. However, this mechanism requires establishing an agency or body of administration to manage the national examination and monitor the quality of PA teachers regularly.

Third, to ensure that education is less businesslike, more regulations and better watch on the marketing campaign are needed.

Fourth, to provide support, motivation, and raise morale among university lecturers, monthly salary and pay should be raised high enough to guarantee market competitiveness to other comparable prestigious professions like lawyers. Though corruptions are not at issue here, this would help reduce the attempt to find extra teaching classes during weekend to have more time to do academic research and write textbooks.

Fifth, more research grants should be made available to stimulate new ideas and innovation for future development. Experiences and knowledge gained from doing research by university scholars can be transferred to students at the end. Universities should also promote and support the transfer of knowledge from research to textbooks.

Last, but not least, an academic community and network of those teaching PA in Thailand needs more financial support from the

government and other sectors for their research, both theoretical and practical, to help improve and solve wicket problems facing current administration at all levels of governance. Most importantly, the products of their efforts have to be lifted up to the international and world stage. This should not be an issue in the near future due to the fast development of information technology in the borderless world today.

In all, the teaching of Public Administration in Thailand has passed the highnoon period. We do have a lot to improve and create new body of knowledge to be competitive with other ASEAN countries and take this as opportunity, not obstacle. OHEC as a regulatory agency should provide preventive measures and fiercely enforce the law and regulations on any wrong doing, illegal and immoral practices by teachers and universities. Special attention and sufficient budget should be well spent on research and teaching personnel for future development of human resources in the country.

With the opportunity to address this research results to OHEC's executive at the Annual National Conference on Political Science and Public Administration in 2014, OHEC has released a new and even rigid Thailand Qualification Framework on Public Administration for the first time in June 2015. A number of Rajabhat universities and all public and private universities teaching Public Administration are immensely affected by this new tight regulation. It would be interesting to see the aftermath of this change at present and in the near future.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This paper is part of the research project on "The Evaluation of the State of the Public Administration Education in Thailand: Current State and Future Directions" under the project umbrella of *The Evaluation of the State of Education in Political Science and Public Administration in Thailand (from 1997 to present)*,

funded by Office of the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) in 2012-2013.

- ² It is not the intention of this paper to debate on this issue. However, if the concept of "paradigm shift" of Thomas Kuhn (1962, 1969) is applied to this argument, it can be seen that NPM has not yet replaced the old theories of Public Administration as the academic community has not shared the same foundational values and reality of management from national to local administration around the world, especially in developing countries. Only certain aspects of NPM have been put into practices at the national administration. Local administration, like in Thailand, has not been reform accordingly. Old approaches of Public Administration have been intact. Certain aspects of NPM can be traced back to Classic PA and other thoughts all combined. An in-depth analysis on this point can be found in details from Gruening, G. (2001). "Origin and theoretical basis of New Public Management," *International Public Management Journal*. 4: 1–25. Other interesting arguments can be read from Hughes (2003). *Public Management and Administration: An Introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Chapter 15, pp. 315-337.
- ³ As mentioned earlier, this paper was one of three research projects under the big research umbrella on the study and teaching of Political Science and Public Administration in Thailand in the last decade, including Government, International Relations, and Public Administration. In designing research methodology, all three research teams had to come to agreement on the criterion for the sample size, the framework of analysis and the analysis of the results in order that the research can provide macro interpretations of the overall findings of the study and teaching of Political Science and Public Administration in Thailand.
- ⁴ Public Universities were formerly known as government universities and fully funded by the government.
- ⁵ In this Period, only four ministries were set up to handle four different tasks, including Interior Royal, Household, Finance, and Agriculture.
- ⁶ The administrative reform during this time mostly replicated from Western democratic government. Three simple layers of administration have been structured from national, provincial and local administration. However, the decisions on all matters were coming from the national administration. Public participation from the bottom up had never happened. Decentralization of administration was only in the paper.
- ⁷ Each letter represents one value that public manager needs to possess: Integrity, Activeness rather and reactiveness, Morality, Relevancy to social needs, Efficiency, Accountability for performance and society, Democracy, and Yield.

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