

RSU: University of Innovation

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In the Summer 2013 issue of the University of Chicago's magazine "The CORE", I came across an interesting news item entitled "A Race in the Sun". The article highlights the story of Kewin Wang, a student who founded the university's Solar Car Team with the ambitious goal of designing, constructing and entering his brain child, "Angstrom" in the 2013 American Solar Challenge Formula Sun Grand Prix. Even though the university has no engineering classes, his team received backing from the student government and the private sector, namely, Wells Fargo bank and Adams Foam Rubber. Meanwhile, Rangsit University newsletter No. 211/August 2013, reported on Nachapat Phusakol and Nathapol Swaitkitirath, fourth-year students in the Faculty of Engineering who developed a model for a LPG driven motorcycle whereby the alternative fuel not only reduces costs, but is more friendly to the environment through reduced emissions.

From the above examples, they shed light on innovation, a critical component of education today. It appears high in the agenda for development throughout the world. We can hardly mention higher education today without hearing the word "Innovation". In the United States, a strong State Department policy underscores the all-hands-on-deck approach to this key issue: "Educate to Innovate", a comprehensive plan to provide students at every level with the skills to excel in the highly rewarding fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). This also requires training of effective STEM teachers and enhanced public-private partnerships mobilising the business community to take part in improving STEM education. Elsewhere, like in Canada, the University of Guelph Kemptonville Campus's Dairy Education and Innovation Centre successfully developed and installed a robotic milking system that was found to work well in the production of milk. Likewise Sweden, once among the poorest nations in Europe, has become a world leader in innovation. 'Inventing Tomorrow's World' is the concept and practice in Swedish education. In 2011, the INSEAD Business School's Global Innovation Index ranked Sweden second place behind Japan. Among Asian countries, Singapore practices state-funded, strongly merit-based innovation in high education. What I cite here is less than a handful of sand in the vast global battlefield of competitive innovations. In our knowledge-based, increasingly high technology era, all players fully realised that investment in education, training and skill upgrades is vital if a country is to maintain its competitive edge and prosper in a volatile regional and global market place.

At Rangsit University, we deem as our duty to keep track of global and regional development, most particularly in terms of manpower and technology key to national development. Our mission is to assist the country to produce such manpower that will be competitive in the vast, rapidly changing and versatile world market. In our 2013 annual staff meeting, we reiterated the utmost importance of our five-year plan (2012-2016) under the stated policy, 'RSU: University of Innovation', that aims to produce a creative and skillful workforce who are mindful of good governance and social responsibility and ready to meet the new challenges of our rapidly changing world. From 2013 on, orientation of new students changes from the conventional ceremonial CEO's talk to students, welcome dances and the like to the digital presentation of the world in which they live, the changing situations, steps toward reinventing Thailand, its energy resources, etc., with the intention to inspire and install in our students the power of inspiration, creativity and readiness to thrive as good citizens in the country and the world.

For Thailand, we realize each nation gives importance to educational development. We are facing unprecedented challenges, brought by the convergent effects of globalization, and the increasing importance of knowledge as the principal driver of growth and the ICT revolution. It is unsurprising that all

governments commit to providing equal access to high quality education and learning to all their citizens. Quality in an education system, requires various components such as students, teachers, curriculum, learning materials and facilities and suitable environments for learning. These components interact in the process of teaching and learning to reach educational goals and objectives. Without doubt, great awareness interest and actions are taking place among ASEAN member countries to meet new challenges, make the best use of new opportunities and compete against their neighbours. All agree that the most important tool for attaining success is education, which must be reformed or reinvented in response to changing situations and needs. Therefore, quality improvement in education has become the ultimate goal in order to promote sustainable development. Human resource development is viewed as key to developing the whole nation, and education plays a pivotal role in developing human resources.

Our ASEAN neighbors, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam have taken progressive steps in response to the forthcoming ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) through human resource development including preparation for essential networking under China's 'New Silk Road of Oil and Gas' and 'String of Pearl Strategy'. In contrast, I must admit that Thailand has been slow to progress, particularly in education. In the latest Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2013 of the World Economic Forum, Thailand ranked 78 of 144 countries in its Quality of Education System. Within ASEAN, Thailand lagged Singapore at No. 3; Malaysia, 14; Philippines, 45; Indonesia, 47; Cambodia, 58; and Vietnam at 72. In terms of Quality of Primary Education, Thailand ranked 82, a little better than the Philippines at 86 and Cambodia at 87. When looking at the capability of Thai people in creating innovation, Thailand ranked 79. This has created great concern in the Thai education sector, particularly among private universities with a strong commitment in providing high quality manpower to the country's workforce for reinventing tomorrow's world.

For Rangsit University, to avoid missing the faster than a bullet train AEC Express and being left behind by our ASEAN partners, we need to strengthen our educational strategies to catch up with our neighbors whose progressive development relies on export oriented and high technology driven economies. Singapore and Malaysia, for example, have invested in innovation and higher education, and their graduates are ready to become productive and competitive players in the AEC open market. In Thailand, our urgent needs lie in human resource development, particularly reorientation and training for our less educated, unskilled or inadequately skilled workforce; foreign language lessons to facilitate easier access for jobs; and, more critically, to reinvent university education mere teaching and learning. I totally agree with what Benjamin Disraeli once stated that 'A university should be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning' and would like to assert that educational institutions should not only jump on trends but start new trends, that is, education must stay a step ahead of society and lead the nation.

Since we give priority to educational development, the following are the teaching and learning activities occurring at Rangsit University:

- Education is viewed as innovation and promotes creativity in teaching and learning without blocking staff and student inspiration and innovative ideas.
- Traditional teacher-centred methods focusing on textbooks were abandoned in favor of student-centered and tasked-based approaches to learning. Teachers assume the new role of facilitators to promote the liberty of lifelong learning while enhancing the inspiration, creativity and hands-on experience of students in real life situations.
- Education in Thailand must adhere to its stance, not to follow in the footsteps of the West, but to develop the Kingdom's firm foundation, its rich culture and indigenous wisdom, which means remaining Thai.

- With the advent of ASEAN+3, AFTA and AEC, networking at various levels of educational institutions is promoted. In this aspect, Rangsit University has entered into close and continuing partnerships with renowned overseas universities, educational institutions and industries for educational exchange, staff and student exchange and skill training.
- Since RSU's inception 27 years ago, Corporate Social Responsibility has been enhanced to nurture students to have a sense of responsibility for the country, to adhere to good discipline, good conduct, honesty, and good governance to become model citizens of the country and the world.
- Education is not a social or welfare service. It should not be divided by class or status, but open to all and free from discriminations.
- Education does not screen losers, but ensures that everyone wins by creating appropriate measures for continuing support and making the best use of all players, facilitators and students in their specific talents.

When considering the strengths of Thailand proven most competitive among other ASEAN nations, innovative development needs to be undertaken in the six areas:

- Agriculture: In terms of geographical location and quality of land, Thailand is at its best in growing rice, fruit and other crops, as well as animal husbandry of good quality for local consumption and export.
- Medical care services and technology: Thailand is renowned in medical care services in terms of caring and service-minded staff, well-trained and skillful specialists in all fields of modern and Eastern traditional medicines, and most of all, competitive pricing for examinations and specialized treatments that are an important point of sale for patients from overseas.
- Tourism and hospitality: Around the world, Thailand is said to be gifted with amazing tourist attractions, not only in Bangkok but throughout the Kingdom. Its growth and development have been promoted in many areas based on travelers' interests such as culture, heritage centers, Thai culinary arts, traditional arts and crafts, and community-based tourism such as home stays, massages, spas, etc. The Tourism Authority of Thailand is targeting niche markets such as golf holidays and holidays combined with spa and medical treatments while aiming to become the hub of Buddhist tourism in the region. In support of this development, Rangsit University envisages more creative tourism by having staff and students initiate new approaches and action-oriented models for community-based tourism with local people implementing them through R&D principles.
- Creative Arts: The first Creative Economy Report jointly issued by UNCTAD and UNDP in 2008 highlighted the rapidly increasing global exports of creative goods and services and envisaged creative industries as one of the most dynamic sectors of world commerce because of the great potentials it holds for developing nations. In the field of art and design, I believe a new breed of creative workforce needs to be generated, encouraged and supported to spur such innovations that could lead to creative products while providing jobs and tax revenue for the country. Rangsit University's Faculty of Art and Design, Faculty of Digital Arts and Faculty of Architecture strongly support creativity and hands-on experiences as much as R&D among staff and students in areas most needed by the country to the extent that new discoveries can be modified, upgraded, tested, verified and put into practice.

- Geo-political location: Thailand is fortunate to be geo-politically situated between the Indian and Pacific oceans as well as between Indochina and the Malaysian peninsula and amidst the New Power Pole, particularly near China and India and not distant from the Middle East. We need to be aware of current movements in fast-track infrastructure, communication networks and economic development of all players and potential customers and devise creative and competitive development strategies and implementation methods to meet the great challenges of Easternisation.
- Promoting Creativity and R&D: This is the area where education must take direct responsibility to develop the sense of creativity and come up with new ideas to gain more competitive power in the new market. Universities must be the source wisdom, new ideas, pools of knowledge and professional expertise in all fields of specialisation essential for reinventing Thailand towards good governance and a democratic society.

On the RSU campus, we will nurture our graduates whose characters embrace the following credo to:

Think creatively

Strictly adhere to virtues

Bring changes for betterment

RSU will continue to thrive with diverse curricula, to contribute our best to society with freedom of thought, and to challenge young generations to be the leaders of creativity.