

**Transition From a University
Under the Bureaucratic System To an
Autonomous University : Reflections on
Concepts And Experience of
King Mongkut's University of
Technology Thonburi**

by

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Office of the Education Council
Ministry of Education

Foreword

University autonomy was discussed right after the founding of Chulalongkorn University in 1916. During the last 30-40 years, continuous efforts have been made to transform administration and management of public universities under the bureaucratic system to autonomous ones. The purpose of such transformation is to attain freedom and flexibility, leading to enhancement of quality and standard of Thai higher education to the international level.

Up to present, not including the new establishment since 1992 of the five from the begin autonomous universities, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) could be regarded as the first and only one to benefit from such efforts so far.

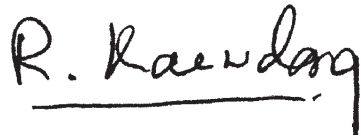
As a body responsible for formulating policy and plan for national education, the Office of the Education Council (OEC) highly appreciates the success of the transition of King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi from a university under the bureaucratic system to an autonomous one. Such success deserves our attention and should be further followed up. Apart from providing useful guidance for policy development in this

regard, the case study of KMUTT will be beneficial to other public universities/higher education institutions being transformed into autonomous universities.

In this connection, the OEC has been responsible for the Research Project for Development of Higher Education Reform Policy under the aegis of the U.S.- Thai Educational Policy Research Roundtable. The Sub-Committee for the Project is under the chairmanship of Prof. Dr. Sippanondha Ketudat. It is therefore deemed appropriate to publish this academic paper on **Transition From a University Under the Bureaucratic System To an Autonomous University : Reflections on Concepts And Experience of King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi**, prepared by Dr. Krissanapong Kirtikara, President of the University. The report will be submitted to the Thai-U.S. Roundtable scheduled to be held in the U.S.A. as well as disseminated to all agencies concerned as well as the general public.

The OEC would like to thank Dr. Krissanapong Kirtikara, President of King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, for authorizing publication of this most valuable academic paper. It is very much hoped that the report will be useful for policy development regarding higher education administration and management,

transformation of universities under the bureaucratic system to autonomous ones and reform of higher education in Thailand in general.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "R. Kaewdang". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Rung Kaewdang, Ph.D.
Secretary-General
Education Council

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1 Introduction

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) is the only state university under the Civil Service System of Thailand that has undergone transition into an autonomous university. The transition became effective, after publication of the University Act in the Royal Gazette, on 7 March 1998. The paper is written to document that the direction of and the decision on the transition into an autonomous university occurred nearly 2 decades before the transition. The decision was internally driven, not imposed from outside, and premised on the intention to develop the University into a leading university.

2

The Overwhelming Constraints Two to Three Decades Ago

2.1 Thai State Universities under the Bureaucracy

In the second half of 1970's Thailand experienced severe economic crises due to the oil shocks and the world economic depression. The bureaucratic system faced tough economic measures and limits on new positions were imposed. Existing state universities, all being under the Civil Service, shared the same fate.

At the same time, state universities were losing streams of competent lecturers to Thai industries due to better pays. The country economy was based on a market force but the Civil Service denied it. A starting salary of a bachelor graduate in engineering or technology then was 2-3 times that of a civil servant with the same qualification, and on par with a doctoral degree holder in the Civil Service. Universities, being the traditional magnet to the best and the brightest, became no longer attractive. It became

ominous on the future of universities and long term competitiveness of Thailand that mediocrity, not excellence, then best described new faculty staff recruited into limited new posts available.

The University, at that time being an institute of technology under the name King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Thonburi - KMITT, had some of its senior administrators working on national man power and technology projects. They were Dr. Paibool Hungspruegs, Dr. Harit Sutrabutr, Dr. Prida Wibulswasd including the author. We had warned the national agencies mandated to work on economic development, manpower development and budget allocation on the imperative of having high caliber people as university faculty staff and researchers. It is our belief in the saying that "*A great university begins with a good teacher.*" We wanted to develop a good Thai university for Thai students. We believed that the intelligence and capability of Thais are on par with other people.

We had seen that Thais working overseas in academic or professional circles performed on an equal footing with or, in many cases, better than natives of their

adopted land. Bureaucratic constraints of Thailand placed limits on performances and realization of full potentials of Thais.

2.2 Bureaucratic Regulations

Apart from limitation on new positions, bureaucratic regulations made implementations clumsy and messy. Conditions imposed by the Budget Bureau (determining the salary) on the qualification of a new post could differ from those of the Ministry of University Affairs - MUA (determining the post allocation). This in turn might be at variant with those requested by universities.

Disbursements of budgets were not conducive to university nature that requires a certain degree of flexibility and innovations. The Civil Service is essentially designed for repetitive works based on established guidelines and regulations. These rules and regulations were in turn imported in totality by all bureaucratic agencies. Regulations were made on the premise of prevention of irregularities. Bureaucratic assessments centered on regulations compliance, budget

disbursements and were activity - driven. Bureaucratic system was not output - based and outcome-based. Assessments based on outputs, outcomes and impacts became accepted not many years ago.

Budget allocation was based on incremental increase of previous budgets, not a zero based allocation. Budgets for state universities are adequate for their existence and routine operations. Long term development are difficult due to a yearly allocation nature. Moreover, congruence of budget allocation and requirements by universities (on what, how many, how much and when) is perennially problematic.

Procurements regulations designed for over one million civil servants then and for routine repetitive operations were applied across the board including state universities. Procurements of off - the - shelf items that could be bought in thousands or ten thousands, like class room desks or student shirts, followed the same rule like procurement of sophisticated made - to - order scientific equipment.

State universities used unimaginable efforts and time on paper works and lobbying to reconcile discrepancies in

budgets allocation and post allocation between various government agencies. Delegation of authority on authorization of minor changes took places few years ago.

Major bureaucratic mountains to be surmounted by state universities were the time consuming approval of academic programs and curriculums and establishment or dissolution of operational units, such as faculties or departments, within universities. Approvals were required at the MUA level and changes had to be enacted as Ministry Decrees or Royal Decrees before they were effective. Few bothered to change as the budget still regularly flew in every year. As a consequence, state universities have ended up with many ongoing outdated and irrelevant programs and operational units

2.3 The Conclusion

We at the University concluded nearly twenty years ago that the development of a good university, on par internationally, was impossible within the bureaucracy. The University must have a certain degree of autonomy in its academic matters, financial and budget management, and personnel management. After considerable efforts and

negotiations with concerned government agencies, it became evident that such autonomy was not feasible if the University remained a part of the bureaucracy. As an agency under the Civil Service, the University had to follow civil service rules and regulations on procurements, budget disbursements and operational structures. The University personnel were civil servants and treated accordingly. Flexibility and discretion by universities were possible only when decentralization or delegation of authority from concerned agencies were made. Management flexibility was also possible for operations funded by the university own incomes. Two decades ago, such incomes were not substantial, flexibility and discretion were not significant.

3

The Important Milestone : The Higher Education Long Range Plan (1990-2004) of The Ministry of University Affairs

3.1 Brainstorming to Chart the Direction of Higher Education

When Professor Vichit Srisa-an became the Permanent Secretary of MUA, he initiated the 15-year long range plan of higher education around 1986-1987. The Plan was intended to *“adopt the Long Range Plan as the proactive plan for the future. The Plan would be based on policy research on the socio-economic environments of the country and future scenarios and changes. The Plan must be dynamic and flexible and has continuous regular assessment mechanisms.”*

During 1987-1989, the Working Committee on the Long Range Plan was established and chaired by

Professor Vichit Srisa - an. Professor Pote Sapianchai was the deputy chair. Members were drawn from the academic world. They were Professor Chetana Nagavachara, Professor Paibool Ingkasuwan, Professor Tong - in Wongsotorn, Dr. Harit Sutabutr, Dr. Wiwat Mungkarndee, Dr. Methee Krongkeaw, Dr. Jira Hongsladarom, Dr. Suchart Prasert-rattasindhu, Dr. Yongyuth Yuthawongs, Dr. Wiwatchai Attakara, Dr. Niphon Puapongsakorn, Dr. Waraporn Borwornsiri, Dr. Kanok Wongtra-ngarn, Dr. Sriwong Sumitr and the author.

3.2 Planning from Facts and Research

Important inputs to the Plan was 23 policy research projects. Among these, 11 were on the higher education environments, 3 on man power, 7 on internal efficiency of higher education and 2 on the roles of private institutes and the private sector. MUA had invited leading university researchers to conduct the research, each lasting about a year.

I am of the opinion that Professor Vichit had successfully pooled the brain of Thailand as working members and researchers. If my recollection was correct,

we worked together once a week on Thursday afternoon from four to seven or eight o'clock. Either Professor Vichit or Professor Pote chaired the working committee meetings. The committee members and the researchers would discuss research issues and exchanged views on research findings continuously for nearly 2 years. The researchers also presented their research results and recommendations on wider circles to create *a national consensus* on the direction and scenarios of the Thai higher education in the next 15 years. Thailand was different and distinct from the then emerging newly industrializing economies that success in developments and implementation of national plans depended largely on consensus building, not top down approach.

When we were working on the Long Range Plan, the national economy was quickly recovering. The economy was connected more to the world economy. Bold fiscal and income policies under Prime Minister Prem Tinnasulanond and Mr. Sommai Hoontrakool-the Finance Minister were returning results. Internal insurgency was gone. Relationship with neighboring countries, previously embroiled in proxy wars with Thailand, were improving. The Plan was premised on such socio-economic and political atmosphere.

3.3 Autonomous University - One of the Flagships of the Long Range Plan

The Long Range Plan addressed 4 major issues for the Thai higher education, namely, *equity, efficiency, excellence and internationalization.*

One of the six policy recommendations to the government was “...*the State should reform the relationship between degree-level institutions and the State by developing state universities under MUA to become autonomous, responsive, efficient and academically excellent. This should be achieved by transition of existing state universities into autonomous universities while new state universities to be created should be autonomous from the beginning.*”

The concept of state universities being autonomous, neither a part of the bureaucracy nor under the Civil Service, was not firstly enunciated by the Long Range Plan. It was a reiteration of the concept propounded around 1963 - 1967 by the then leading Thai university figures such as Dr. Puay Ungphakorn, Professor Kasem Suwannakul, Professor Sippananda Ketduthat, Dr. Sawas

Sakulthai and Dr. Kamhaeng Palangkura. It was concluded nearly 40 years ago that to develop state universities, flexibility and autonomy should be achieved through autonomous university route.

Important goals stated in the 15-year Long Range Plan for the 8th and the 9th Economic and Social Development Plans are :

- Most of the states universities are autonomous
- By the end of the last year of the 9th Plan, students should cover all operating expenses through tuition fees increase. This occurs in conjunction with establishment of a students loan scheme and grants for less economically and less socially privileged students
- By the end of the last year of the 9th Plan the ratio of graduates in science and technology to those in social science and humanities should not be less than 50 : 50

From 1990 to 2003, over a decade has passed. History yet to be written would reflect the extent whether such targets were achieved and on what ground.

I deem it opportune that both Dr. Harit Sutabutr, the past President of the University, and I were both in the Long

Range Plan working committee. We worked continuously on this for 3 years. We were clearly aware of the research findings on the low internal efficiency of state universities. We were well advised on the research on future trends (socio-economic, politics, science and technology) of the country and the world. We also concluded that the goal of developing KMITT into a good and a leading university within the bureaucracy was unlikely to be reached.

The flagship concept on university autonomy stated in the Long Range Plan was the major roadmap on autonomous universities that followed.

3.4 From Suranaree University of Technology to King Mongkut's University of Technology and Other Autonomous Universities

When Professor Vichit was tasked by Prime Minister Chatchai Choonhawan to establish a new university at Nakhon Rachasima, he then founded Suranaree University of Technology as an autonomous university from the beginning (29 July 1990).

During the government of Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun when Professor Kasem Suwannkul was the Minister of Universities Affairs, there was an attempt to bring the transition of 16 universities, including KMITT, out of the bureaucracy and became autonomous. Strong oppositions were made by those ignorant of the concept. In March 1992 the draft bills on 16 autonomous universities were tabled to the Legislative Assembly, an appointed not elected Assembly, the Assembly President dissolved the Assembly thereby throwing out all the draft bills.

Local demand on a new university at Nakhon Srithammarach led to the establishment of Walailak University (7 April 1992) as an autonomous university from the beginning.

When 2 Buddhist ecclesiastical colleges, non juristic bodies, under the Religious Affairs Department made a transition to 2 juristic bodies as Maha Mongkut Rajavidhayalaya University and Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidhayalaya University, the 2 Buddhists universities became autonomous (1 October 1997). This occurred during the government of Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyut.

During the government of Prime Minister Chuan Leakpai, KMITT made a transition to an autonomous university as King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi - KMUTT on 7 March 1998 (one day after publication of the KMUTT Autonomous University Act in the Royal Gazette). The new university at Chiang Rai - Mae Fa Luang University became autonomous from the beginning during the same government.

Presently, there are six autonomous universities in the country, four public universities and two Buddhist universities. Five new universities were established as autonomous universities, only one university - KMUTT made a transition.

4 *Experiences of KMUTT in the Transition Preparation*

4.1 Simultaneous Transition of All State Universities : An Impossibility

After the failed attempt in simultaneous transition of all 16 state universities into autonomous universities in March 1992, we at the University reached a conclusion that it was impossible to make a simultaneous transition of all state universities. Each university differs in its characters, historical and constraining conditions. Each university nurtures its own values, visions and aspirations. We therefore decided to move ahead on our own on the transition into an autonomous university. It is the case of *united we perish, not united we stand*.

4.2 Continuity in Policy and Administration, and Strong Cohesion Within the University

During the 6-year preparation for the transition

from 1992 when we decided to move ahead on our own and the successful transition in 1998, the University was resolute in its determination and had a strong continuity in the policy on transition. The University had a continuity in the University Council. The Council President and members (from outside the University) served continuously without changes in composition during those 6 crucial years. They were Mr. Boonyium Meesook - President, Dr. Tongchat Hongsladarom, Professor Pote Sapianchai, Professor Sanga Sabbhasri, Dr. Yongyuth Yuthawongs and Mr. Khemmadhat Sukonthasingh

It was precedent and the practice of the University not to change the Council members from outside the University unless they were not ready to serve further when their 3-year term expired. Therefore, the University administrators neither need to explain the concept and seek policy decision on autonomy time and again, nor rehash on transition strategy. The author has observed that this has presently become tedious and futile exercises of many universities in their transition attempts. The university council members and administrators either lose interest and give up or the terms of both the council members or administrators expire. Then the whole

process of explanation and convincing starts all over again.

On the senior administration, there was an uninterrupted policy and continuation of concept on autonomy over the 6-year preparation at the highest level, the University President, from Dr. Pibool Hungspreugs, the KMITT President during the first transition attempt in 1992 to Dr. Harit Sutabutr, then in 1992 was the KMITT Vice President and, subsequently, became the first KMUTT President at the transition time. Other senior administrators at faculty level, even though there were changes but there was a continuation of autonomy concept and determination.

The other important player was the Lecturers Council. From the beginning, the Lecturers Council actively took part in the development of autonomy of the University, the drafting of the autonomous university bill and accompanying regulations and guidelines. They helped organize public hearings within the University on the autonomy. The KMITT Lecturers Council has, in the opinion of the author, a constructive role and positive impacts on autonomy development. This was in contrast with lecturers councils of many universities. In some

universities, lecturers councils become traditionally critical of university administrators. They assume roles, without any legal standings, of opposition groups to whoever are in the administration. It is a somewhat misleading role and had negative impacts on operation of many universities. KMITT had always recognized positive contributions that the Lecturers Council could make and had included the Council in all major decision making processes, even though the Council was not officially recognized in the KMITT Act of 1986. As the President, I always emphasize that the administration and the Council may differ in opinions on some issues but we are neither enemies nor opposing groups. Thais have peculiarities in taking those with different views as enemies or opposition. I always reiterate that the administration and the Council share the common goal of making KMUTT a leading university.

Most of the KMUTT faculty staff and personnel are dedicate, loyal and hard working, in comparison to many universities. They share a common purpose of working together for the betterment of the University. The University unity is exceptionally strong. These indigenous traits of cohesion and strong bindings, hard

working nature, dedication, continuation of autonomy concept and policy helped foster confidence and the sense of togetherness of the community during the transition into the unknown territory of university autonomy. These strong attributes were unique to KMUTT.

4.3 Learning from the Others : Learning from Inside Thailand

Between 1992 - 1998 KMITT was still a university in the bureaucratic system. Dr. Harit Sutabutr, as a KMITT Vice President at first and then the President, set up task forces and working groups to study issues pertaining to the drafting of the KMUTT Autonomous University Act and the requisite autonomy in the management of academic matters, university personnel and financial and budget matters, the three pillars of university autonomy. Examples were drawn from within Thailand and abroad.

There were 7 working groups as follows : Planning and personnel administration, Finance, budgets and procurement, Administration, Academic matters, Personnel remuneration and university welfares, Students affairs and Information services. There was an

umbrella working group on university autonomy, chaired by Dr. Harit Sutabutr, that coordinated outputs of the other 7 groups. The umbrella working group is now a standing body that still functions till this day as autonomy development is an on-going process, especially on continuous improvement of management mechanisms, personnel issues and compensations. An autonomous university draws its strength on dynamism, ability to identify niches, to adopt and innovate. It can no longer wait for directives or change signals from the bureaucracy outside.

During the 6-year preparation period of 1992 - 1998, Thailand had known only 4 autonomous organizations, all newly formed from scratch and had limited operation experiences. They were Suranaree University of Technology - SUT (founded in 1990), The National Science and Technology Development Agency - NSTDA (1992), The Thailand Research Fund - TRF (1992) and The National Research Fund for Public Health - PHRF (1992). SUT and NSTDA were similar to KMUTT in the sense that they are technically oriented and have operations. TRF and PHRF are funding agencies and have no operations. The common feature between

SUT and KMUTT is that they are both autonomous universities. The difference is that SUT was created as an autonomous university from beginning and could easily design its system and operating regulations. KMUTT had 4 decades of initial and boundary conditions. The common feature between NSTDA and KMUTT are that they are technical agencies and have research activities, but NSTDA is not academic institution. However, KMUTT draws lots of very useful ideas and practical guidelines on autonomy from both SUT and NSTDA. Encouragements and invaluable supports for KMUTT from the highest administrators of SUT and NSTDA were received, namely, through Professor Vichit - then the President of SUT and Dr. Yongyuth Yuthawongs - then the NSTDA Director.

It was also opportune that senior administrators of KMUTT had helped founded and run NSTDA and its national centers. For the National Center on Metals and Materials Technology (MTEC), Dr. Harit Sutabutr became the first Director and Dr. Panya Srichandr, a senior faculty from the School of Energy and Materials of KMUTT, was its Director. On the National Center on Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (BIOTEC),

Dr. Sakarindr Bhumiratana, a senior faculty from the Faculty of Engineering of KMUTT and Dr. Morakot Tanticharoen, a senior faculty from the School of Bio Resources and Technology were taking the same path. They were at first, the Deputy Director and later on the Director. The author was the Deputy Director of the National Electronics and Computer Technology Center (NECTEC) between 1986 until 1998. We were able to design and operate one newly created autonomous agency, NSTDA, and draw from its experience for subsequent uses in the creation and operation of another newly created autonomous university - KMUTT. This has indeed been opportune and fortunate.

4.4 Learning from the Others : Learning from Outside Thailand

In designing autonomous university administration, the University had looked at some universities abroad. A past President of the University of Michigan spent one month at the University advising, then, KMITT in the early 1990's. The Sukksa Pattana Foundation, set up by alumni of MIT, supported the University and MIT in academic and administrators exchanges and attachment in mid

1990's. MIT administrators visited the University and advised us of their system. KMUTT administrators also visited MIT and had observed the operation there. The relationship with MIT was closed due to Dr. Harit, an MIT alumni, and other alumni who wanted Thailand to learn from MIT as a leading world class university in science and technology. Management of a small, but yet world class, university like MIT serves as a useful model for the University that also focuses on science and technology and aims to develop into a leading university. The Thai University Administrators Shadowing - TUAS of MUA, placing senior Thai university administrators in UK and Australia universities, was also a major source of ideas on management of autonomous university.

4.5 Success After the Third Attempt

It should be noted here that it had taken the University 3 times to put the KMUTT Autonomous University Act through the legislative process before it got all passed and the Act enacted. The first legislative attempt was the failure in March 1992 when all 16 state universities trying for the transition. At that time the first KMUTT Act was common with all 16 universities. The

first failure allowed us ample time to think more thoroughly on essential features of the KMUTT Act and other subsidiary regulations and guidelines on academic matters, personnel management, finance and budgets.

By late 1994, the draft of the second KMUTT Act, quite different from the first draft Act and unique for the University, was ready. Drafts of supporting regulations and guidelines were also firmly in place. The University submitted the second draft Act for consideration of the Cabinet and got the approval on 18 April 1995. The draft was then forwarded to the House of Representatives on 25 September 1995. The House dissolution on 27 September 1995 effectively threw the second draft out of the legislative process again, and we failed to get the Act through for the second time.

After the second failure, additional time was available for us to work more on the details of KMUTT as an autonomous university and other supporting regulations. Waiting for the right political atmosphere, we resubmitted the draft without much alteration to the Cabinet again and got the approval on 20 February 1997. The House of Representatives passed the first reading on 27 August

1997, the Senate on 27 December 1997. The Act was published in the Royal Gazette on 6 March 1998 and became effective on 7 March 1998. The legal transition of KMITT to KMUTT as an autonomous university was complete. Nearly 2 decades had passed since we concluded that it was highly unlikely that a good university, on par internationally, could be developed within the bureaucracy, and that we had to chose the autonomous university route. It must be recorded that our success came with unwavering determination after 2 failures.

To date, out of the original 16 universities of the 1992 attempt, KMUTT is still the only state university that has made a successful legal transition to an autonomous university.

4.6 Continuity and Discontinuity in the Ministry of University Affairs

Between 1992 to 1998, the process of autonomy transition of KMUTT passed through hands of 9 Ministers of Universities Affairs, excluding acting Ministers. They were Professor Kasem Suwannakul, Mr. Suthep Attakorn,

Dr. Krasae Chanawongs, Mr. Tawil Praisont, Mr. Boonchu Treetong, Mr. Montri Danpaibul, Mr. Chatchai Ia-kul, Khunying Nongyau Chaiseri and Dr. Decha Sukharoms.

Appreciations, understanding and commitments of Ministers of University Affairs on university autonomy were markedly different. Few were even totally ignorant of it. MUA was an undesirable portfolio for many politicians as it carried no large political base, measured in terms of its personnel and impacts on constituencies. It had also a small potential as a source of ill-gotten gains, measured in terms of its budget that a minister could influence. MUA was considered “a Grade C Portfolio” by many politicians and was used as a stepping stone into the so-called Grade B and Grade A portfolios. This perception is very ominous on university education and education as a whole. In developed societies, universities are regarded as a bastion of learning, a beacon of social conscience and a major driving force in technological developments and innovations.

It was fortunate that there were continuity, understanding of and supports on university autonomy by senior officials in MUA at the levels of permanent secretaries, deputy

permanent secretaries and division directors. During those 6-year period of KMUTT transition, the 3 Permanent Secretaries of MUA, namely, Professor Vichit Srisa-an, Professor Kasem Wattanachai and Dr. Wanchai Sirichana fully understood and supported university autonomy. In fact, Professor Vichit and Dr. Wanchai later became presidents of 2 autonomous universities.

KMUTT staff put lots of efforts and time in lobbying politicians within the government and opposition wings, and with the House of Representatives and the Senate. This was to ensure that politicians understood the concept of university autonomy. We had to be certain that during the legislative process, the draft KMUTT Act was neither altered from its essence nor likely to deviate from its goals. Politicians were not well versed with the autonomy concept when KMUTT underwent a transition as the first case. *Strong doubts prevailed in the bureaucracy that university transition was for the better, measured in terms of operational efficiency, improved quality and possibility of government intervention when necessary.*

5

Life after the Legal Transition

5.1 Climbing the Bureaucratic Mountains

The legal transition of KMUTT occurred right after the economic crisis of 1997 which was followed by a long period of severe economic contraction. Even to this day, the country is still recovering slowly from the crisis. Before the crisis, the economy and the national mood were buoyant. Government budget flew easily. Large university projects were not questioned. The collapse of 1997 brought a loss of national confidence and strong cut in public sector spending. The government had more economic and social problems to attend to. Universities normally receiving less notice from the government than others understandably got even less attention.

The time of the transition of KMUTT was very different from that of the establishment of 2 new autonomous universities, SUT and Walailak University. Both universities

enjoyed strong backings of local politicians as their champions where the 2 universities are located. At that time the economy was buoyant and large public spending in both and other newly created universities were not questioned. Politicians could direct the bureaucracy to move away from its entrenched position into a new direction. For better or for worse, KMUTT has no political champions. The University found it extremely difficult to convince the government that if there was going to be life after legal transition to an autonomous university, large amount of political courage and supports were required to budge the bureaucracy.

The most contention issue was the extra budget to top up salaries. Personnel of autonomous universities are employed on a contract basis, not enjoying life long employment like civil servants. The discussion was on how much top up was sufficient to trade between the permanent employment in universities of the Civil Services world and the contractual employment of autonomous universities. This issue was at the back of the mind of most existing staff of KMUTT as they had 2 choices in the new system. The new employment system designed by KMUTT is one of *a dual track of*

employment or parallel employment. Original staff at the time of the transition are permitted to voluntarily leave the Civil Service system. The first option for the original KMUTT staff then was to remain as civil servants. Life of civil servants is comfortable and secure, especially in the aftermath of the economic crisis when employees in the private sector were laid off en mass. Punishment and assessment in the Civil Service are rare. In fact, Thai civil servants are afraid of assessment and associate assessment with bad connotations. Assessment is taken as a preamble to investigation. The second option was for KMUTT civil servants to quit the Civil Service and apply to be recruited into the new system after assessment, not a simple case of just walking in. They then become contractedly employed. Nobody had ever been through such a transition. Nobody was sure how fair the new system would be in terms of assessment. The specter of being unfairly assessed and got thrown out haunted everybody. It seemed foolhardy for somebody with a right mind to quit a secure civil servant job and walk into the unknown and untested world of contract employment. SUT and other newly created autonomous universities do not have this problem as all the staff are newly recruited and are contractedly employed from day one.

We at KMUTT were aware of the salary scale for SUT and Walailak personnel as autonomous universities and of NSTDA and TRF as autonomous agencies, and the quantum required for topping up civil servant salaries. However, we could not, with conscience and right mind, push for the equivalent amount as the country was in deep recession. Else, we would have been accused of making a transition for the money, this accusation was made in the public at the time of the 1992 transition attempt.

The second contention point was additional money for the university provident fund and staff benefits (such as various allowances for medical expenses and family, school tuition fees for staff children). Normally in the Civil Service, all these are available but paid from the central pool. Being an autonomous university, KMUTT has to provide all of these for its contracted employees. Nobody had any clear idea how much KMUTT should get for this extra work that nobody had done before.

Mr. Paron Issarasena, the first University Council President of KMUTT as an autonomous university, Dr. Harit as the Vice President of the Council and the author had to explain many times to the then Prime

Minister - Mr. Chuan Leekpai, Ministers of MUA, Ministers in charge of university transition and various government agencies on these two important issues. Numerous simulations were done to calculate the amount required under different scenarios on personnel expenses. What SUT and Walailak got as autonomous universities and what NSTDA and TRF got as autonomous agencies were not precedent for KMUTT. With severe economic recession, the government was unprepared to push the bureaucracy for more money for the University. Negotiations became protracted and frustrating, and led to nowhere. All the remaining state universities watched this closely and carefully. This was due to the fact that in order to get a rescue package after the 1997 economic crisis from the Asian Development Bank, the government made a commitment to make all state universities autonomous universities within a fixed time frame. Finally in August 1999, 17 months had passed since KMUTT became autonomous, the issue was settled by the government based on the ability to pay, KMUTT got what the country could afford under the circumstances, not what KMUTT should get. Those who helped KMUTT climbing this bureaucratic mountain were Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, Minister Apisit Vejachiva - Minister in

charge of university transition and Minister Prachuab Chaiyasarn - Minister of MUA. The government's commitment was in the form of the provision that the University could put up an official request for this extra amount in its annual budget submission. When the decision was made in August 1999, the University could not put up a request for its 2000 annual budget in time as the due bureaucratic process had passed. We had to wait for another year until the 2001 budget, starting in October 2000, before the money rolled in. It took us 30 months from the day of the transition to get what we originally thought was a straight forward affair. How wrongly we were in underestimating the bureaucratic mountains.

Essentially, personnel expenditures of autonomous agencies and universities were what deeply bothered the government and various government agencies. This concern was understandably justifiable under the gloomy economic climate then and the track record of inefficiency of civil servants. In the mind of the bureaucracy, autonomous agencies and universities could become non performing while drawing big salaries. Their large salaries could set precedence for future claims. The

University Council President told us not to bother the government further as the country was flat broke. We were told that we better build up our academic and technical capabilities and earn our incomes. This is essentially the position that KMUTT has since adopted.

5.2 More and More Bureaucratic Mountains to Climb - Autonomy is Incognito

After KMUTT 1998 transition, we regularly face, even until present, what the author terms official frictions. It is not because anyone in the bureaucracy wants to be obstructive. *The bureaucracy simply holds autonomous agencies and universities incognito.* The bureaucrats are simply aware of 2 types of government entities, namely, the government bureaucracy and the state enterprises. Anything that does not fit the two categories is incognito. This can be very frustrating as the state machinery is represented and operated mainly by government bureaucratic units. When the bureaucracy comes across an autonomous agency, it either goes into “a sleep mode” and back away or go forward in “a customary mode” with the usual set of bureaucratic rules and regulations. They do not know how to deal with

autonomous agencies. They refuse to advise how to proceed. We simply hope that with increasing numbers of state agencies with more autonomy like autonomous agencies and public organizations, the incognito mentality will fade away. Examples of bureaucratic instruments whose rules do not take into account autonomous agencies are the Public Administration Act, the Budget Act, the Customs Act, regulations of the Police Department on bails on criminal offences, government bondages for scholarship holders, the Provident Fund and regulations on royal declarations, etc.

Such frictions or obstacles facing autonomous agencies occasionally emerge, like old tree stumps or thorns that get in the way and catch us unprepared while walking. We simply deal with it case by case or endure it. Since our transition in 1998, various governments attempted to help by setting up working committees with ministers and agencies in charge to clear stumps or remove thorns. But political discontinuity makes this frustratingly slow.

6

Truths and Untruths on University Autonomy

Since the author has assumed his position in July 1998 as the first KMUTT President after the autonomy transition, he and his senior colleagues have given talks, possibly over few hundred time, on concepts and practice of university autonomy. The University has been very frequently visited and has given advises on these themes. It is found that most of the questions are similar and they reflect deep misunderstanding of the university autonomy concept. Ignorance is still prevalent deeply ingrained in the mind of the public, bureaucrats, students, parents including politicians, despite the establishment of SUT - the first autonomous university over a decade ago.

6.1 What University Autonomy Is About

University autonomy does not mean that a university is at complete liberty or totally independent from the state policy, directives and intervention.

University autonomy does not mean that the State no longer funds autonomous universities.

University autonomy does not mean that the accounts of autonomous universities cannot be audited and performance of autonomous universities cannot be evaluated by the State.

University autonomy means that the State allows autonomous universities to manage its own 3 major internal affairs, namely, academic matters (academic programs, university structures), personnel matters (personnel system, recruitment, remuneration, benefits), and finance and budgets (budget management, procurement system).

The State can direct, supervise, audit and evaluate autonomous universities. Autonomous universities have to follow government policy and the Minister in charge. The State Auditor audits accounts and assets of autonomous universities. In the case of KMUTT, 2 members of the University Council are appointed by the Minister of MUA.

7 *Misunderstanding and Ignorance That Must Be Corrected*

7.1 *Ignorance Number One : The State Will Not Fund Autonomous Universities and Make Them Self - Financing*

It is often said that government will not fund autonomous universities and force them to self-finance. This is because many think that autonomous universities are like private universities. Many say that autonomous university management will be business - oriented, students have to pay higher tuition fees like those in private universities and programs that have inadequate students will be closed and staff dismissed.

The fact is that autonomous universities are state or public universities. Autonomisation is in essence debureaucratization or publicly incorporating, not privatization.

Being public universities, therefore, entitles autonomous universities to be publicly financed, be responsive to government policy and is subject to auditing and evaluation by the State. The extent of public finance and support depends on ability of the government to finance higher education. This, in turn, is determined by economy and commitments of the government on other public agenda. It also depends on the public perception of roles and usefulness of higher education.

Offering new academic programs or termination of old ones has nothing to do whether a university is under the Civil Service or is an autonomous university. Neither is the employment of new staff nor termination of employment. Academic programs are offered or discontinued depending on societal needs. Universities need not always respond to the so-called market as there are private market/demand and public market/demand. Universities should be able to distinguish between price and value, whereas a general public may not. Universities must seek to determine their own values associating with the intangibles such as aesthetics, ethics, traditions, wisdom and drive to seek knowledge.

7.2 Ignorance Number Two : Students Pay More in Autonomous Universities

It is recognized that the annual budget that state universities receives is not sufficient to maintain quality education. Yet state universities normally refuse to increase tuition fees for ordinary students in a forthright manner because they are under the watchful eye of the parents and the public. State universities seek a caveat route to increase tuition fees. They offer the so-called special programs that tuition fees are substantially higher. Neither much notice is put on this nor the public makes an issue out of it. Special programs route has been a normal practice of all state universities under the Civil Services to raise fees and use the additional money to run the normal operation. It has become a necessary evil. Higher fees have nothing to do with university autonomy.

Initially, special programs were offered to working students already employed. Classes were held on weekends and sometimes away from main campuses. Higher fees were justified on the ground that working students could pay on their own. Weekend classes were cited as giving opportunity to working students to upgrade

themselves. Off campuses classes were explained as giving opportunity to rural students. The truth is that now many special programs are offered to nonworking students who are not yet employed, held in ordinary time and in main campuses.

The 1999 National Education Act puts great emphasis on education and learning of the population. The compulsory education is 9 years whereas the basic education is 12 years and free of charge. In addition, the education reform requires more money on basic education infrastructure and salary of teachers at that level. With everything being equal, this means that more budget will be spent on basic education while less will be spent on higher education.

Common sense would imply that the country has new public commitments and, as a consequence, more spending arising from the 1999 National Education Act, the Education Reform and the political reform associating with the 1997 Constitution. If the country economy does not improve substantially, less taxes will result and the government budget cannot increase. Given this situation and the fact that the country has to service its public debts

from various overseas loans and rescue packages after the 1997 economic crisis, education budget cannot increase. Higher education budget also cannot increase. The State and the public, without doubt, would put more importance on basic education than higher education.

It does not mean that higher education will be downplayed and not be publicly financed. What would happen is that funding of the operating expenditures of higher education will migrate from the supply-side financing, i.e. funding directly to higher education institutions, to the demand-side financing or through the students via student loans. This necessitates putting more money in to the students loans scheme for able-minded Thai. The State should provide free higher education for the underprivileged and the highly talented.

On higher education development expenditures, the government budget will be based more on merits such as competitive research grants and mission-oriented projects. Examples of these lately are based on the populists policy of the government such as grass-roots development projects and SME's development.

Studies all over the world on higher education have led to the conclusions that private returns on higher education are larger than public returns. However, higher education also provide public benefits in terms of manpower production for competitiveness, new knowledge from research and serves as a social beacon. It is accepted that higher education is both public goods and private goods. Expenses on higher education must be shared by the students who benefits and the public. The proportion of sharing depends on the state of the economy and competing public commitments.

It is high time that the higher education circle in Thailand faces the fact that public subsidy of higher education will diminish. Users will have to pay.

7.3 *Ignorance Number Three* : There Will Be Unfair Evaluation and Staff Easily Dismissed

It is always alleged, in state universities that have not undergone transition, that there will be unfair and biased evaluation in autonomous universities, staff can be easily dismissed. The employment will be no longer secure, depending on the whims of senior administrators.

This belief and misunderstanding have arisen from witnessing foul plays in some Civil Service agencies and extrapolate it to autonomous universities. University people are illusory that autonomous universities are under absolute control of senior administrators, and comprehend that there is no justice whatsoever in autonomous universities. In fact, foul plays or not in any community depend on quality of members of that community. It has got nothing to do with an agency is under the Civil Service or is autonomous.

The Thai society is becoming more opened and subjected to increasing scrutiny. The setting up of a good governance mechanism within a university will ensure that autonomous university personnel will be duly employed and rewarded based on their merits.

7.4 *Ignorance Number Four* : Autonomous Universities Personnel Will Get Higher Salaries

Compensations and rewards for anybody should depend on the efficiency and achievements of that person and his organization. If the system is efficient and achievement-oriented and a person performs accordingly,

then his compensation and reward must be duly reasonable.

If salaries of personnel in autonomous universities are high, it must be because they are efficient and perform work of quality according to proper guidelines and due evaluations. Higher salaries are not automatic because of the transition.

Higher salaries are neither the objectives nor goals of autonomous universities. It must be accepted that to develop a good university personnel must be of quality. The atmosphere must be conducive to good working and output-oriented. Personnel must be dedicated to the work, not worried about finding a second or a third job to keep his family alive.

We must accept that good work should command good pay.

8

What The Transition Has Brought About

8.1 The Legal Transition

In the opinion of the author, the transition of a state university under the Civil Service to an autonomous university involves 2 major transitions. First, the legal transition of the university and its personnel. Secondly, the transition of paradigm and working culture (and university system which is resultant of people's working culture).

The author has found that many state universities spend quite significant time and efforts in the preparation of the legal transition of the universities and their personnel. In fact, it cannot be denied that a lot of paper and administrative work needed to be done, whether the drafting of a new university act or regulations on new academic systems, personnel and finances.

The author has found that many universities spend very little time and efforts in preparing the transition or change or paradigm and working culture. *The real transition and the ultimate goals in the transition to an autonomous university are the change in the paradigm and working culture of university personnel, and the system. The legal transition is the tool or means, not the ends.* The transition of a university and its personnel are meaningless if only the legal transition is successfully addressed but the real changes in the system and people never materialize. Thailand and its higher education will not benefit from such transition, no matter how many universities have undergone transition.

8.2 Change in Paradigm and Working Culture

In order to change the paradigm and working culture of a university, the focus should be on the higher plane of common goals and aspiration of the university. Emphasis should be on what the university could achieve from the transition, not what each individual should get. Otherwise, discussion and debates will center on individual gains and benefits, and struggle to maximize short time individual benefits at the expenses of long term university

benefits. All concerned would lose sight of the ultimate goal. This personal gain and loss debate is understandable and should be permitted, as all involved are human beings, but should be kept secondary to the university gains. The change in paradigm may come with long term visions of a university after its transition when everybody is encouraged to look towards the horizon for future generation, not immediate gain or loss.

8.3 Some Anxieties at the Initial Stage

All changes would lead to some uncertainties. University personnel, being human beings, are accustomed to a familiar life in the Civil Service, Therefore, when faced with what they consider an unknown future, they demand ready-made answers, especially on personal benefits, to future hypothetical questions that have not occurred.

KMUTT became autonomous on 7 March 1998. Over four and a half years have lapsed since the first group of KMUTT civil servants had resigned from the Civil Service and be recruited into the new system of contracted employees in October 1998. By July 2003, the University has undergone autonomy transition for over five years. Its

personnel are now 57% contracted employees and 43% civil servants. A major milestone in the transition, more contracted employees than civil servants, has been reached. This, in some part, reflects a confidence of the personnel that their future in the new system would be comparable with the Civil Service, if not better. The author has found that there are no significant difference between various groups of personnel in making a choice to resign and recruited into the new system, i.e. academic staff vs supporting staff or staff with different length of services. Thus, the confidence is shared uniformly across the University personnel.

Initially, there was quite a palpable apprehension on life prospects in the new system, especially perceived threats of possible unfair evaluation and dismissal due to the aforementioned ignorance. At one and two years after the transition in March 1998, the University enquired its civil servants of the reasons for not chosen to resign and to be recruited as university employees. Similar answers emerged at those two junctures. They were as follows:

- First, they were reasons on personal benefits. Some civil servants would want to work for 10 years so that

they were entitled to pensions. Other were in the process of promotion for assistant or associate professorship. They wanted the process in the bureaucratic channel to complete, so that they would get even higher pay as contracted employees, rather than going through the promotion process in the new channel. Some cited parental objections as parents, being people of old generations, did not understand what autonomy universities were. Some said that civil servants could equally work hard and efficient.

- Secondly, some had reasoned on salaries and benefits. They deemed that the increase in salary and the benefits were not sufficient. They did not see clear future benefits that they would get, like what additional benefits would be and when these would occur. They could not fairly predict their future salary with certainty, like the Civil Service system. In the Civil Service system, an annual salary increase is based on fixed increments, normally one incremental increase each year fairly across the board. Thus, one can safely assume numbers of increments one would get over a number of years and, therefore, one's salary. In the employee system, there are no fixed increments. Each year, the University Council decides on

the University performance and its financial state, then the overall University increase is determined. One's salary increase is based on one's performance and the allocated overall increase.

- Thirdly, serious concerns were expressed by civil servants during the 18 months after the transition before the University secured the decision of the government on the extra budget to top up salaries, and the university provident fund and staff benefits (Section 5.1). The civil servants interpreted this as a lack of commitments of the government on autonomy as they were seeing senior university administrators feverishly running around trying to get the money. They cited this as a main reason for not joining the new employment system. Moreover, they were of the view that the University employment contract was not attractive as no definite commitment was made by the University on the permanent tenure.

In fact, staff in other state universities consider the great difficulty KMUTT encountered immediately after the transition, and before KMUTT got the money 30 months afterward, as a lack of seriousness and commitment by the government on university autonomy. This has become

one of the major objection for other state universities to make the transition.

- Fourthly, civil servants were concerned with “fairness” of the new system (Section 7.3). They were uncertain about the staff evaluation system. They wanted salaries of all employees be made public, a practice in every bureaucracy organization, so that they would see fairness in the evaluation. The author found this argument somewhat weird.

All the four explanations given above had more or less come to pass. More and more people are confident and have joined the new system. The author reckons that the percentage of KMUTT civil servants deciding to join the new employment system should reach a plateau of about 80% within 10 years after the transition. Those who remain will gradually retire and the number of civil servants drop accordingly.

8.4 Same Expectation on Quality and Only One Standard of Work

With the dual personnel management system, a

question was raised at the onset on the University expectation on work standards of its employees and civil servants. Some were talking about different expectations and work standards, due to differential pay. The author being the President was emphatic that the University has the same expectation of work quality and efficiency from its university civil servants and employees. Hence, only one standard of work and the same set of work load and evaluation. Being a civil servant or a university employee is one's personnel choice. Such principle has been in place for 5 years now.

8.5 Leaving the Bureaucracy by the Front Door and Sneaking back in by the Back Door : Change in the Paradigm and Working Habit

When the first autonomous agency, not autonomous university, was established in the early 1990's over a decade ago, a highly respected figure told the author involved in that agency that we had to be watchful and mindful that autonomous agencies might be non - performing and not better than bureaucratic agencies. This might be so because autonomous agency employees still harbor civil servants' paradigm and work

habits. It is the case of *“Leaving the Bureaucracy by the Front Door and Sneaking back in by the Back Door.”*

It was a common practice in the bureaucracy to focus input, activity, process and low costs. Budget disbursement was simply expenses. Plans were activity-driven. Importance were made on compliance with rules and regulations.

After the transition into autonomy was made, the author has always emphasized to his colleagues that we need to change our paradigm and work habits. One has to look at utilizing inputs for the highest cost-effectiveness. One has to look for outputs and outcomes, and if possible, likely impacts. Goal-oriented and output driven, not activity-driven, should be a nature of operating plans. Budget disbursement is considered as future investments.

To change our paradigm, we have to look ahead in the future and have visions. Visions should guide how we develop our community, our university. Visions are like a compass pointing us in the right direction. Development plans and operational plans are our maps and itinerary. Being autonomous allows us to look and plan ahead and

have more flexibility in block grant budget management. The University can manage its own resources according to its medium and long term plans according to its own visions and regulations. If a university is a part of the bureaucracy, its management tools are limited. Its annual allocation of itemized budget permits only a yearly operating plan and is not conducive to medium to long term plans and targets.

Owing to the long established bureaucracy, rules and regulations of every sort are abound. When an autonomous agency is found, there is a tendency, and in some part complacency, for its people not to think thoroughly with a new mind set. For convenience, they tend to borrow ready made rules and regulations available from the bureaucracy. If the relevant and good parts are taken, harms are not done. If not, it is the case of “leaving the bureaucracy by the front door and sneaking back in by the back door.”

The author always emphasizes to his colleagues that personnel in autonomous universities should have confidence in themselves in designing their own system. They should be dynamic and responsive, and are not

afraid to changes and failures. Successes and failures are normal. If we fail, we look for flaws and rectify them. Then we try again.

The author compares the transition of a bureaucratic university into an autonomous university to dismantling an old house and simultaneously building a new house using old parts, the house is still being occupied. To have the same old occupants changing their paradigm and work habits is like the traditional rites and ritual ceremonies of dismantle an old spirit house and ask old resident spirits to leave. Then new spirits deemed auspicious to new way of life are invited to reside in the newly erected spirit house.

8.6 Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation for Improvement

Lack of dynamism is characteristic of a bureaucracy. What has been lacking from a bureaucracy, compared with a corporate, is continuous monitoring based on set criteria and performance evaluation of individuals and organizations based on key performance indicators. In a bureaucracy, evaluation is perceived synonymous with and will lead to investigation. In an autonomous agency,

such misconception has to be corrected. Monitoring, assessment and evaluation should be considered as feedback tools so that a system can redirect itself to the required target. New cultures have to be cultivated.

Preparation of personnel and subsidiary units with the University on the new culture of evaluation was basic to the transition in 1998. The University had adopted a mechanism for academic and supporting staff evaluation few years before 1998. This was to prepare the new mindset. It had taught us that evaluation results were constructive and valuable, not a tools for destruction. Three to four years before the transition, students evaluated teaching performances of every lecturer in every subject and feedbacks from students were used to improve teaching performances. Supporting staff evaluation were tried out few years before the transition to test the mechanism and acceptance.

Up to this point, the University has devised guidelines and mechanism for its half yearly personnel evaluation, both employees and civil servants, based on set criteria of work loads. The guidelines and mechanism are constantly reviewed, in some way reflecting that the system is

adaptable and dynamic. We develop our own system and refine it ourselves without having to wait for external signals or having been prodded from outside. University personnel accept the system of workload and evaluation that we design. For example, initial emphasis five years ago was on research work load as research activities and research outputs were deemed low. Five years have passed, research outputs are rising. But staff tend to take students supervision and student mentoring lightly, and prefer to work individually rather than collectively. Now, the work load would put more weight on interaction with students and collective work of staff.

On organizational performance evaluation, the University has established evaluation panels based on invited outsiders and respected professionals for the evaluation of all its faculties, schools, research and services centers and its other subsidiary units. All units with the University were evaluated in 2001 and 2002. This exercise is planned for every 3 years. In addition, the external evaluation on education quality of the Office of the Education Standards and External Evaluation was successfully completed in the early 2003.

The author has found that the new culture of individual and organizational evaluation have taken roots. We have now accepted that evaluation is positive and constructive. Recommendations of evaluators are put to good use. Monitoring, assessment and evaluation are shown that they can be used to improve individual and organizations.

8.7 What We Have Achieved

From his point of view, the author has observed the following major transformation and achievements after the University transition:

- We have established a foundation and a system of administration for the University to reach its visions together with its stakeholders. The visions are to become a leading university of the country, the region and, ultimately, the world. A leading university will provide our country with high caliber personnel and strengthen the country competitiveness and standing in the world.
- We have surmounted the psychological barrier of civil servants normally passive and subservient to problems and tend to wait for external inputs for problem solving and

prevention. We have become proactive in directing and correcting our system.

- We have confidence in the potential and learning ability of our people in managing a university with quality and dynamism.
- We have put a system with good governance in place.
- Our people have demonstrated their potential and innovativeness in both the academic and administrative dimensions. The potential and innovativeness have resulted in cost reduction, sense of saving, higher productivity and innovative work, within the increasing constraints of diminishing government support per student. Awareness on quality and cost effectiveness are abound. Technical outputs increase. Revenues and assets of the University increase.
- The University personnel are confident in and accept its system of monitoring and evaluation of individuals and organizations. Evaluations results are used for improvement.

- The University is confident that it can increase its income and build up its assets based on its technical capability. It does not have to rely solely from the public inputs. Its incomes can be earned as well as given. In 2002, our earned incomes form tuitions and fees, and contract works exceeded that of the government budget.
- The University has cultivated the new working culture with its stakeholders, especially with its alumni, the private sector and the public.
- The University recruitment has become more open. Competent outsiders can become senior administrators at all levels from department chairmen upwards to deans and president.

9

The Unfinished

In order to further develop autonomous universities, the following issues should be addressed:

- Relationship with government agencies

Autonomous universities do not work in isolation from other existing government agencies within the bureaucracy, or those yet to be established. These agencies in some way control operation of autonomous universities. The principal ones are the Budget Bureau, Ministry of Finance, the Office of the State Auditor and the Office of the Civil Services. These agencies are unfamiliar with autonomous agencies and tend to apply the normal procedures dealing with civil service agencies to autonomous ones. The autonomy concept should be better appreciated and understood as a new type of state agency, i.e. public organizations with a certain degree of autonomy has been created during the last few years. Public

organizations are similar to autonomous agencies but having less autonomy. They are created by the executive branch through executive decrees while autonomous agencies are created by the legislative process through enactment of laws.

New educational organizations set up in July 2003 under the 1999 National Education Act such as the National Commission on Higher Education (replacing the Ministry of University Affairs) and the National Education Council (replacing the Office of the National Education Commission) with different mandates from their predecessors are unknown to autonomous universities. Their working relations with autonomous universities are yet to develop.

- Budget and Resources for Higher Education

Consensus must be reached on the public and private benefits and nature of higher education. As a consequence, the State can decide on its responsibility and the extents of the public financing of higher education. In addition, clear signals must be sought from the government on its possible instrument for financing higher education.

Examples of these are annual budget, students loans, development funds, etc. Mechanisms and incentives for private sector participation must be worked out as increasing roles of the private sector is anticipated.

- Quality Development

There must be mechanisms and incentives conducive to the development of the quality of academic programs, development of staff and establishment of good governance and management in autonomous universities.

10

Finale : Autonomous Universities - A Necessary But Not Sufficient Condition

The author has been frequently asked by those from civil service universities whether a state university has to be autonomous so that it can develop to become a good university in a universal manner.

The answer is that, in the opinion of the author, remaining as civil service universities cannot accelerate the development of state universities faster than in the past. Small incremental jumps may be possible, but not quantum jumps. What could possibly happen and does not augur well is that civil service universities supported by the public, being unable to quickly adapt and response to rapid societal changes and demands, would yield diminishing returns to the public. This, in turn, would reduce public expectation from and hope in public universities. Public universities would be increasingly

forgotten as a meaningful social and intellectual institution and would ultimately be forgotten.

If we want to revitalize public universities to be a meaningful social and intellectual institution and a strong driving force for Thailand, becoming autonomous is a small but necessary first step.

From this small step, people in autonomous universities have to work harder and smarter. They must recognize and develop their own potentials and those of their organizations. Leadership at various levels must be cultivated. Supports from the State and the public are essential. All these should make it sufficient to develop a good university.

About the Author

NAME Krissanapong Kirtikara

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Year	Institutions	Degree	Field
1965-1973	University of Glasgow, U.K.	B.Sc. in Engineering (First Class Hons.) Ph.D.	Electrical Engineering Electrical Engineering
1980	University of Florida Gainesville, U.S.A.	-	Alternative Energy

WORK EXPERIENCE

CURRENT POSITION

1998-present President, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

OTHER CURRENT POSITIONS

Presently serving in numbers of national committees on education, manpower, energy, science and technology and information technology. Major ones are as follow.

Public Sector

Economic and Social Development

Executive Member : National Economic and Social Development Board

Education and Manpower

Chairman : Council of Presidents of Autonomous Universities

Chairman : Executive Board of the Mahidol Science School

Advisor : Council of University Presidents of Thailand

Executive Member : National Education Commission (NEC), National Office of Educational Standards and Evaluation Board, Taksin University Council, Rajabhat Institute Council, Chombueng Rajabhat Institute Council

Leader : Junior Science Talent Program for Talented and Gifted Students (Lower Secondary), National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA)

Science and Technology

Vice Chairman : ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology - Thailand

Member : Committee on Engineering and Industrial Research, National
Research Council of Thailand

Senior Advisor : National Electronics and Computer Technology Center,
NSTDA

Energy

Executive Member : Committee on Energy Conservation Fund, Committee
on Electricity Load Forecast, Committee on Small Power Production
Using Renewable Energy

Private Sector

President : Hill Area and Development Foundation

Secretary-General : Chumbot-Pantip Foundation

Executive Member : Bhumi-Panya Foundation, Energy for the Environment
Foundation, Doi Kham Food Products Company (under the Crown
Property Bureau), Toray Science Foundation-Thailand (Research Grants
Committee)

PAST POSITIONS

KMUTT

Vice President for Research and Foreign Relations (1986-1992)

Dean, Faculty of Engineering (1982-1985 and 1994-1998), School of Energy
and Materials (1981-1983 and 1992-1994) and School of Information
Technology

Chairman, Department of Electrical Engineering (1974-1977 and 1981-1983)
and Materials Technology Program (1985-1992)

Director, Continuing Education Center (1986-1988)

Others

- Advisor to 4 Ministers of Science, Technology and Environment. Ministry of University Affairs
- Chairman, ASEAN Sub Committee on Non-Conventional Energy Research (1981-1992)
- Deputy Director, National Electronics and Computer Technology Center (1986-1997)
- Chairman, Working Committee on Food Processing Section under the Royal Project and Royal Recommended Project (1985-1994)
- Chairman, Committees on Evaluation of the 7th and 8th Higher Education Plans (1986-1991 and 1992-1996), National Education Commission
- Member, Committees on the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Science and Technology Plans (1982-1986, 1987-1991, 1992-1996, 1997-2001), Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment

PRIZES AND AWARDS

- 1965 Royal Prize, awarded by HM the King for being the first in the National Examination of Secondary School Students (Science Program)
- 1966 & 1971 George Young Bursary (1966), Grey, Law and Watt Scholarship (1971) of the University of Glasgow
- 1969 Gold Medal
- 1996 ASEAN Science and Technology Meritorious Award
- 1997 Distinguished Researcher (Engineering and Industrial Research), National Research Council of Thailand