

Chapter 1

General Background

The general background of *Thailand* presented in this chapter includes the following aspects : government and administrative structure ; society and economy ; and past development of Thai education.

1.1 Government and Administrative Structure

The governmental structure of Thailand has undergone gradual and practical evolution in response to the changing environment. After the bloodless coup in June 1932 demanding a change from absolute to a constitutional monarchy, *His Majesty King Prajadhipok* signed *Thailand's* first constitution on 10 December 1932. Despite the number of successive constitutions that followed over half a century, the basic concepts of constitutional government and monarchy laid down in the 1932 constitution have remained unaltered as follows :

The first and foremost concept is the status of the monarch as Head of Armed Forces and Upholder of the Buddhist Religion and all other religions. The King, as Head of State, exercises his legislative power through the *House of Parliament*, executive power through the *Council of Ministers* headed by the Prime Minister, and judicial power through the courts.

The second concept concerns the legislative branch. A bicameral *National Assembly* has been created with two categories of members; *Members of Parliament* and *Senators*.

The third concept concerns the executive branch. Every constitution holds that the Prime Minister is head of the government and chief executive. The *Council of Ministers* is responsible for the administration of 14 ministries, as well as the *Office of the Prime Minister*. A number of cabinet committees have been set up consisting of relevant ministers, such as the *Cabinet Economics Committee* and the *Cabinet Social Affairs Committee*, to coordinate major policies concerned.

Besides the ministers responsible for each ministry, there are a number of ministers holding the portfolio of "Minister Attached to the Prime Minister's Office." They take charge of various responsibilities undertaken by this office which in itself ranks as a ministry and is largely concerned with formulating national policy.

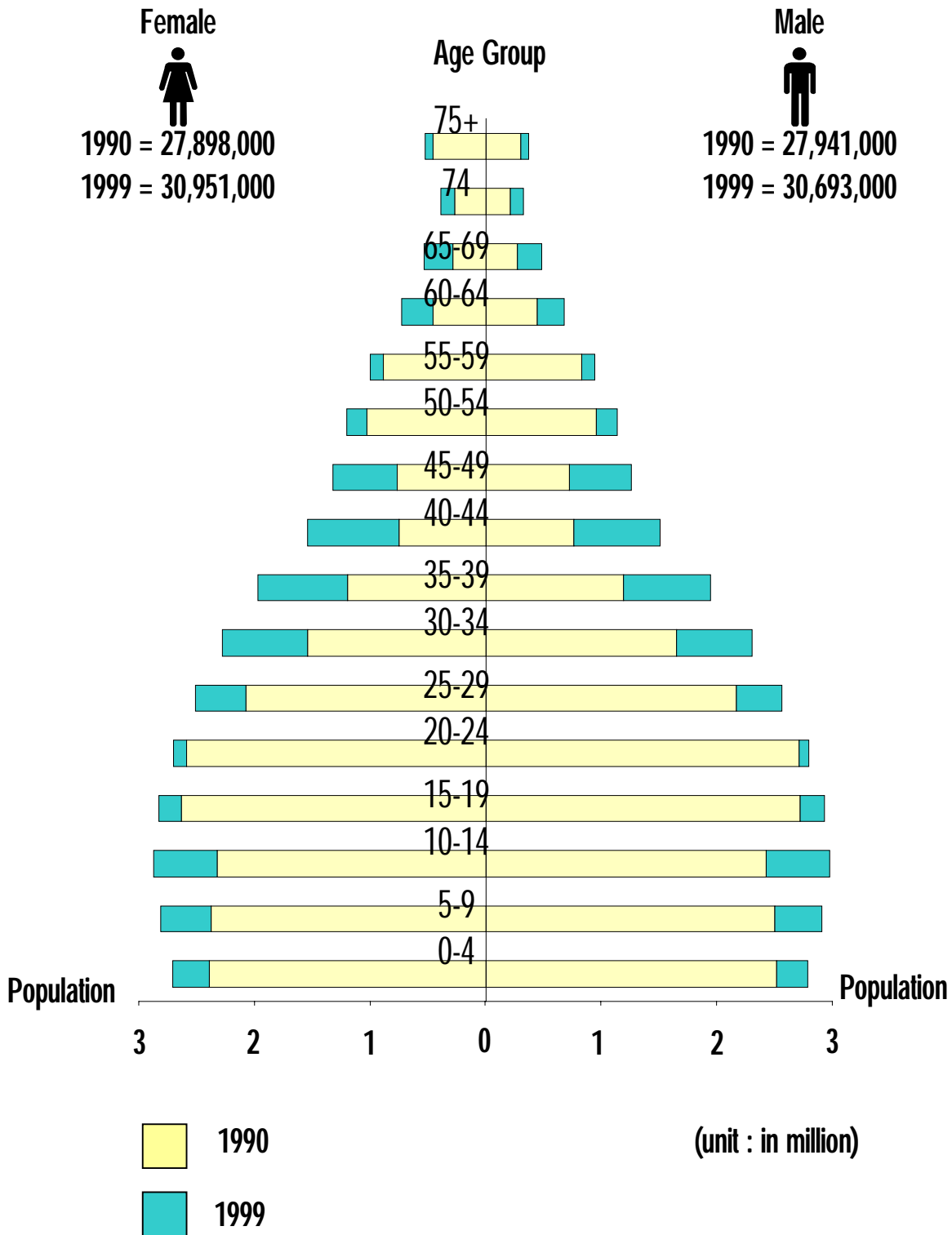
The country is divided into 75 provinces, excluding *Bangkok Metropolis*. Each province, which is administered by an appointed governor, is sub-divided into districts, sub-districts or tambons (groups of villages) and villages. The *Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA)* is administered by an elected governor and is divided into 50 districts.

1.2 Society and Economy

Population and Employment

The total population of *Thailand* increased from 55.8 million in 1990 to 61.4 million in 1998 and it was estimated to be 61.6 million in 1999. The number of females is slightly higher than that of males (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 Population Pyramid of Thailand : 1990 and 1999



Source : 1990 : National Economic and Social Development Board.
 1999 : Thailand Population Projection, 1999 – 2016.

In February 1999, 53.3 percent of the total population were in the labour force while about 24.2 percent were those over 13 years old but not in the labour force, which was about 2.4 percent higher than the year 1997. The rest of population or about 22.4 percent were still under 13 years old (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Percentage of Population by Labour Force Status : 1997-1999

| | Aug. 1997 | Nov. 1998 | Feb.1999 |
|--|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Total Population | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| A. Total labour force | 55.3 | 53.3 | 53.3 |
| 1. Current labour force | 99.7 | 99.1 | 96.7 |
| 1.1 Employed | 99.1 | 95.5 | 94.6 |
| 1) At work | 98.6 | 95.2 | 92.2 |
| 2) with job but not at work | 1.4 | 4.9 | 7.8 |
| 1.2 Unemployed | 0.9 | 4.5 | 5.4 |
| 1) Looking for work | 33.0 | 31.4 | 27.7 |
| 2) Available/ not looking for work | 67.0 | 68.6 | 72.3 |
| 2. Seasonnally inactive labour force | 0.3 | 0.9 | 3.3 |
| B. Not in the labour force>13 years of age | 21.8 | 23.9 | 24.2 |
| 1. Household work | 26.1 | 24.5 | 28.3 |
| 2. Studies | 42.2 | 41.2 | 41.9 |
| 3. Too young/old or incapable of work | 26.5 | 24.4 | 24.8 |
| 4. Others | 5.2 | 9.9 | 5.0 |
| C. Persons under 13 years of age | 22.9 | 22.8 | 22.5 |

Source : National Statistical Office.

Among the total number of employed persons in February 1999, about 42.9 percent were employees of which 4 in 5 were employed in the private sector where there was an increase, while those in the government sector increased from 7.3 percent in 1997 to 8.8 percent in 1999 (Table 1.2). The highest percentage of the total employed was the own-account workers which rose from 29.9 percent in 1997 to 32.1 percent in 1998 and 33.6 percent in 1999. The unpaid family workers lowered from 30.3 percent in 1997 to 20.4 percent in 1999.

Table 1.2 Percentage of Employed Persons by Work Status : 1997-1999

| | Aug. 1997 | Nov. 1998 | Feb.1999 |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Employers | 2.2 | 2.2 | 3.1 |
| Government employees | 7.3 | 8.9 | 8.8 |
| Private employees | 30.3 | 30.2 | 34.1 |
| Own-account workers | 29.9 | 32.1 | 33.6 |
| Unpaid family workers | 30.3 | 26.6 | 20.4 |

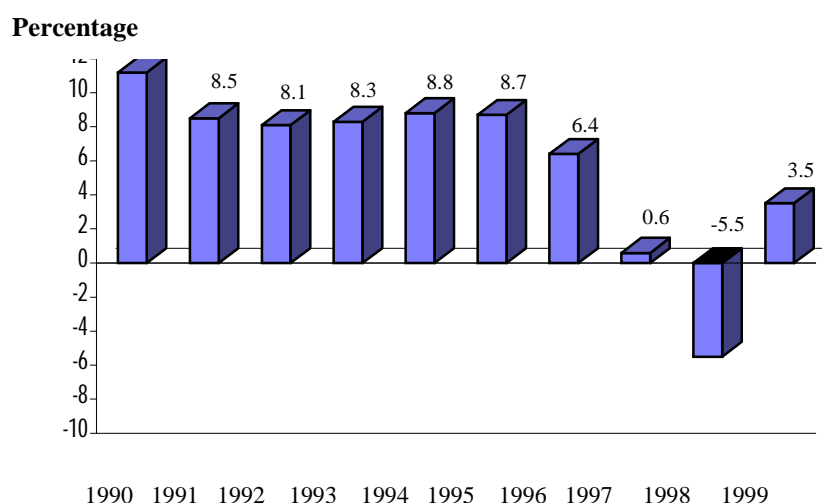
Source : National Statistical Office.

Economic Performance

In 1998, the Thai economic and financial system underwent a significant adjustment and restructuring, resulting in an economic contraction of 8 percent. Concurrently, however, the progress in pursuance of the macro-stabilization programme and implementation of financial reform measures have reaped significant benefits, namely: (1) Notable improvement in macroeconomic stability, (2) Strengthened market confidence, and (3) The recent movements in the indicators of economic activities in the second half of the year were providing growing evidence of a levelling-out in activities, though still at levels below those in the corresponding period of the previous year.

As a result of the progress made in resolving economic and financial problems, the Thai economy showed recovery signs in 1999 as GDP expanded a by 3.5 percent in the second quarter compared to 0.8 percent in the first quarter on a yearly basis. The positive growth can be seen in both supply and demand.

On the supply side, contribution to growth stemmed from the manufacturing sector with a 7.7 percent growth rate for both exported goods and domestic consumption sectors, while agriculture slowed down towards the end of the cropping season. On the demand side, it was evident that household consumption, mainly in durable goods such as automobile and electrical appliances, grew by 0.9 percent as compared to negative growth of 0.4 percent in the first quarter. Government expenditure for both current and capital consumption also showed a strong positive growth owing to the implementation of various economic stimulus plans.

Figure 1.3 Real GDP Growth, 1990-1999

Source : Bank of Thailand and National Economic and Social Development Board.

1.3 Past Development of Thai Education

The development of education in *Thailand* has stretched back along her history for nearly eight hundred years. It can be now divided into four main periods : traditional education, foundation of formal education, modernized education for national development, and the new era of national education.

1) Traditional Education (about 1220-1868)

During this period, there was no formal education in the modern concept. Education was offered in the temple, the King's palace and the family. Children were offered non-formal learning of agricultural and social skills in the context of the extended family social norms. The temple provided for boys a broader framework of socialization and intellectual quality highly valued by the society. The aims of the monastic education were essentially ethical and religious, with literacy as a preparation for the monastic life. Education later became both ecclesiastical and secular. It was organized in the temples for commoners and in individual scholars' houses for princes, princesses and the children of nobles and courtiers. In those days, the monastic schools served well as community schools preparing their pupils for life in society at large.

As for girls, they were given no formal education at that time. In the ordinary households, girls were taught by their mothers and relatives the arts of handicraft, weaving, sewing, cooking and helping in the fields. In royal circles, the Inner Palace became a school for women and girls, usually of the middle class, and many people sent their daughters to live in the palace so that they could gain some kind of education in craft and etiquette.

2) Foundation of Formal Education (1868-1932)

In the 19th century, religious tolerance enabled the missionaries to appeal to Thai people extensively through various forms of missions from medical work to education. The missionary impact on Thai education increased enormously in the late 19th century with their introduction of the composition of the first Thai dictionary, the foundation of public education and an attempt to stimulate the monarchy to establish a state education system, which had influence on *King Chulalongkorn's* determination to launch educational reform.

However, the ideal of modernization and reform was based upon the threat of western imperialism and the pressure of internal political movements. Education was to assume a functional role as the major means of modernization. It was to help produce a new generation of qualified leaders and administrators in order to anticipate and keep pace with the momentum of the reforming process.

Being threatened by western military power, *King Chulalongkorn* gave the first priority to military education by founding a school within the palace for young princes and nobles which represented a major improvement toward systematic schooling. The King and his advisers also realized that they had to go beyond the palace walls and initiate educational innovations in order to produce competent officials so urgently needed for the reform of the government and administration. In 1884, the first public school for commoners was established and after that a large number of public schools for commoners were operated in Bangkok and other provinces.

In 1898, a reorganization of the school system took place with the proclamation of the first early form of "national education plan". In the reign of *King Rama VI*, a new educational system was formulated pursuant to the new "education plan" of 1913 and in 1918 the *Private School Act* was promulgated, drawing private schools, including the mission schools, under the supervision of the government. During this period, a law on compulsory primary

education was issued in 1921 requiring every 7-year old child to receive free primary education until the age of 14, and the first university in *Thailand* was also established in 1917.

3) Modernized Education for National Development (1932-1997)

In 1932, educational policies and plans were revised and the 1932 *National Scheme of Education* was promulgated extending compulsory education from five to six years. The 1936 *National Scheme of Education* divided the educational system into general and vocational streams and reduced compulsory education to four years. Higher education was promoted and adult education as well as special education was initiated. In 1951, the new *National Scheme of Education* was promulgated in which educational development was stated as prime concern of the government.

During the 1950's, the governments became much more concerned with the development of education as a part of national reconstruction and modernization in the post-war period. A reorganization of government administrative system at national, regional, and local levels took place in 1952 resulting in the establishment of many new educational units, including the *Office of the National Education Council*, which was later renamed as the *Office of the National Education Commission*. In 1960, another *National Scheme of Education* was promulgated as the long-term policy framework and the *First National Education Development Plan (1961-1966)* was formulated accordingly as a five-year plan which was an integral part of the *First National Economic and Social Development Plan*. Since then, education has been assigned to assume a full functional role as an instrument for development. Under the *1960 National Scheme of Education (1960-1976)*, three five-year education development plans were formulated. During this period, the main objectives of the policy were directly linked to economic development and focused on providing medium-and high-level manpower needed for the growing economy.

In the interim of the Third Plan, a student uprising took place in mid October 1973. After the success of the uprising, there were demands for changes of bureaucratic administrative systems, particularly in the area of education. The *1977 National Scheme of Education* encompassed three five-year educational development plans : the Fourth, the Fifth and the Sixth National Education Development Plans. The policy agenda began to widen its scope to address poverty and inequality issues. Educational policies were introduced to increase rural access to schooling, improve the administrative system, and strengthen curricula and the learning process. Priority was also given to issues of quality in education. In addition, science, technology, and non-formal education were strongly emphasized and the role of private education was encouraged.

The present *National Scheme of Education* has been promulgated since 1992 followed by the introduction of the *Seventh National Education Development Plan (1992-1996)*. The education system was then expected to provide equilibrium between development in the economic, social and cultural aspects. It should also facilitate linkages between these aspects as well as creating harmony and mutual benefit between urban and rural sectors. During this period, policies for the development of an educational information system were also introduced. At present, the development of education is under the *Eighth National Education Development Plan (1997-2001)* aiming at preparing the Thai people to cope with a rapidly changing world in the 21st century. This plan strongly emphasizes that the education system should facilitate the country's development process towards self-reliance, sustainability and enhance global competitiveness.

4) New Era of National Education (1997-)

Despite putting much more effort into keeping up with globalization movements, *Thailand* is now confronting the most drastic social changes from within and from its interconnectedness with the complex and rapidly changing world. Such changes are too overwhelming for both individuals and society to cope with, thus causing imbalances in various aspects of development. The present social institutions have failed to adapt themselves to cope with the formidable changes. The result is organizational weaknesses, confusion, conflicts and suffering. Social reform is thus indispensable in order to strengthen all sectors of society. Reform of the education system is one of the most important areas of social reform, since it is believed that education is a very important process to enhance individual development which will contribute to the social and economic development of the country. It will enable *Thailand* to move through the current crisis.

During the past few years, there has been a growing demand in Thai society for a new radical reform in education. There have been continuous movements to push educational reforms by both public and private sectors. The first successful attempt was the inclusion of various provisions relating to education in the 1997 Constitution. Among these provisions, two have had paramount impact on education in *Thailand*, namely: Equity for All in receiving at least 12-year basic education of quality; and, the enactment of the *National Education Act* which is the first in the history of Thai education and will allow educational improvements on all aspects.

Since the promulgation of the new Constitution in October 1997, *Thailand* has started to look at the dawn of a new era of national education. Urgent steps were taken by agencies concerned to make preparations for the enactment of the *National Education Act* in order to meet many requirements stated in various provisions, especially in the universalization of 12-year basic education.

The drafting of the National Education Act was made on a number of significant bases, notably :

1. Basis of academic information With the most gratifying collaboration of academics, researchers, faculty staff and legal specialists, the ONEC conducted a detailed research on 42 major issues on education. It also played an instrumental role in synthesizing concepts and research results including relevant information from various sources, in particular documentary research based on sources available within the country and abroad.

2. Scrutiny by scholars At all drafting stages, the Bill was considered, examined, amended and scrutinized by specialists on education, and experts in economic, social and legal affairs, the first step being the scrutiny by the Educational Legislation Drafting Committee under the chairmanship of Professor Dr.Sippanondha Ketudat, Chairman of the National Economic and Social Development Board. The Bill was subsequently submitted to the National Education Commission, Council of Ministers, Juridical Council, House of Representatives and Senate respectively. The House of Representatives established a 45-member Extraordinary Committee under the chairmanship of Mr.Abhisit Vejjajiva, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office. Having been approved by the House Extraordinary Committee, the Bill was accordingly transmitted to the Senate, which appointed a 30-member panel of its own, under the chairmanship of Professor Dr.Kasem Suwanagul, to scrutinize the Bill. It was gratifying to note that members of all committees and panels devoted so much time and efforts to ensure that the Bill benefitted from their vision, wisdom and knowledge to the fullest extent possible.

3. Participation of all stakeholders Meetings, seminars and public hearings were organized on a continuous basis for the benefit of government offices, educational institutions, private sector and the general public both in Bangkok and in the provinces. A total of 254, 318 persons participated in these activities. At the House Committee stage, a total of 8 public hearings in all regions were conducted in order to listen to the opinions of 38, 942 persons - both individuals and representatives of various organizations.

4. Public relations The services of a variety of media - radio, television, newspapers and publications - were availed of in order to disseminate information on the Bill to teachers, educational administrators, parents, students and the general public.

5. Public polls The ONEC, in collaboration with the Suan Dusit and ABAC Polls*, sounded public opinion on major issues on education in order to arrive at conclusions and consensus. During the polls, conducted between January 1997 and October 1998, a total of 105, 376 persons provided their views and relevant recommendations. In other words, the public was given the maximum opportunity to voice its opinion; in fact almost to the same extent as that given for the drafting of the Constitution itself.

On July 1, 1999, the Bill received the final approval of the House of Representatives. Altogether a period of one year and 11 months was devoted to its drafting. On August 14 of the same year, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej graciously granted His Royal assent for the promulgation of the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (1999), which was subsequently published on August 19, 1999 in the Government Gazette.

In sum, education in Thailand has developed from traditional education offered in the temple, the palace and the family to modernized education for national development in accordance with the National Scheme of Education and the National Education Development Plan. From the year 1997 which is the beginning of the new era of Thailand's national education, the development of Thai education has started to move forward based on the provisions of the 1997 Constitution relating to education. The successful efforts of the Thai people for the enactment of the first National Education Act as provided in the Constitution is paving the way for a truly comprehensive reform of education in Thailand to meet the challenges of the next century.

* Public polls conducted by the Rajabhat Institute Suan Dusit and Assumption University respectively.