

Education is the Golden Key

A Lecture by

Her Royal Highness

Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn

At the American International Club of Geneva

On December 14, 2005



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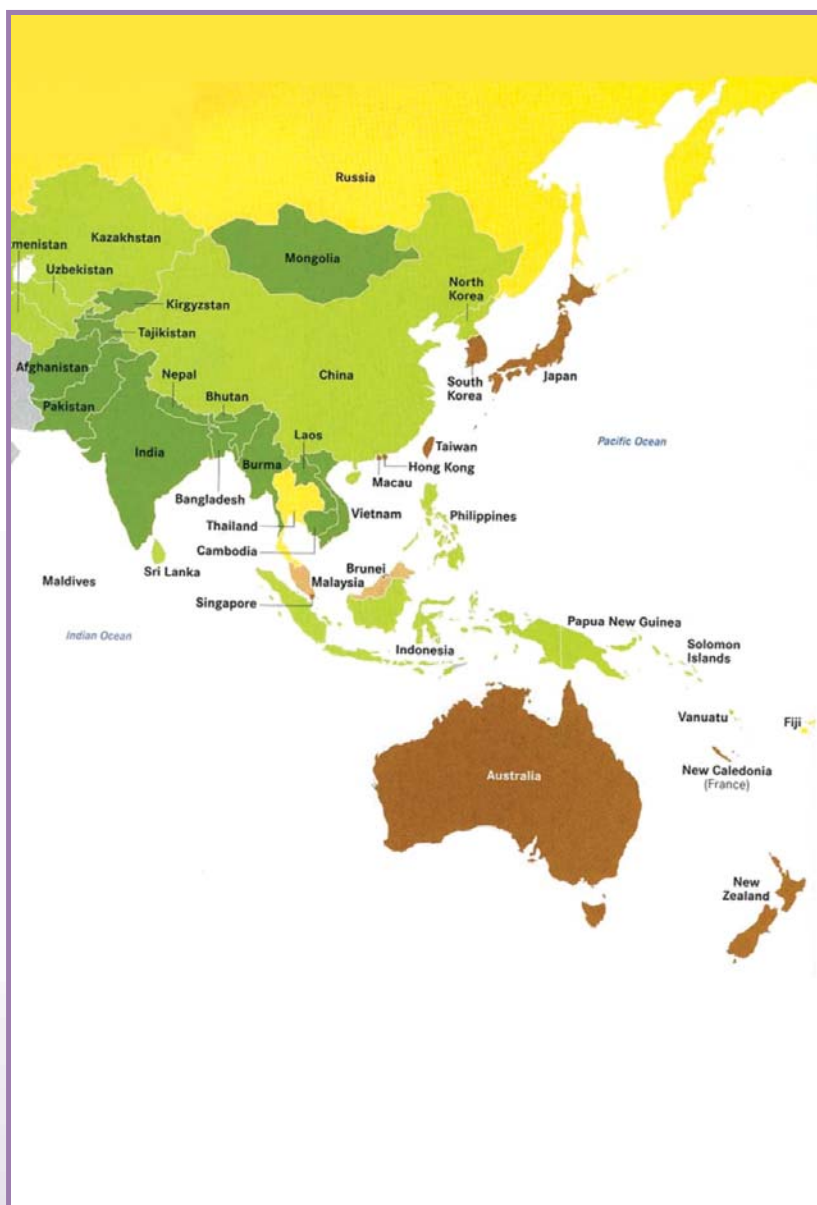
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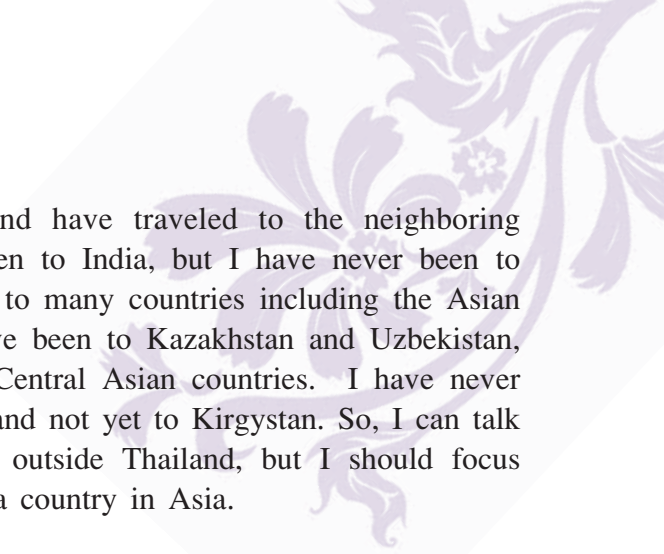
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Thank you very much for the invitation. I have just arrived from a very warm country. I am here in a very cool weather, but it is compensated by a very warm welcome. I would like to apologize for my English. I hope that you can understand some of my talk on the topic given to me by Mr. Peterschmitt.*

At first, he had suggested a longer title, Boosting Effect of Education in Strengthening Asian Position in the World. I think it is interesting, but it may be more difficult to talk about, since Asia is very heterogeneous. There are many countries that are quite different from one another. Asia is quite big to try to find the picture of Asian education.

* Mr. Jean-Claude Peterschmitt, Chairman of the Refugee Education Trust (RET) in Geneva





I live in Thailand and have traveled to the neighboring countries. I have been to India, but I have never been to Bhutan. I have been to many countries including the Asian part of Russia. I have been to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, but not yet to other Central Asian countries. I have never been to Afghanistan, and not yet to Kirgystan. So, I can talk about some countries outside Thailand, but I should focus more on Thailand as a country in Asia.

Thailand itself varies from one area to another. The Northern part is in fact the most difficult part to work in, because of the mountains. It cannot be compared with Swiss mountains. Sometimes in the rainy season, it is like skiing down the slopes. If you want to climb up, you fall back down in the mud. So the access is not easy year round. In the North Eastern part, it again has some mountains and there is a whole range of mountains there. In the Southern part we have some forests and mountains as well, we have some difficulties. So, to deal with education for the whole country is not easy.



Asian Values in Education

If we want to talk about the thinking of the Asian people, I would like to mention the two big countries in Asia, India and China. The civilizations of these two countries are very ancient. They may be more than 2,000-5,000 years old. People in China and India always talk about the value of education.

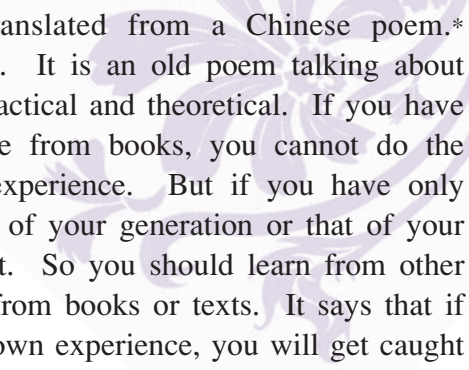
Asian people value education highly.

- *You should learn when you're young to be able to earn money when you grow up.*
- *When there is an opportunity to learn you should learn as much as you can. If you are in any trouble, only knowledge can help you. You should not think you are from a noble family, for life is not certain, there can be big changes anytime.*
- *If you have even one kind of knowledge, if you know it well, it will give yourself much benefit.*

I would like to show you some poems I learned since I was a little kid in school. These are translated from the Thai poems.* Our Asian people think that education is the process of transferring of knowledge from one generation to another. If we learn a lot, we can make a lot of money when we grow up. We can work better by using our knowledge. Knowledge is just like money, and that is why we have to learn. My teacher said that you should not think that you are a princess or a rich person, because you do not know what will happen in the future. But if you have knowledge, the knowledge can help you till the end.

- *To gain knowledge is to practise. If you do not seek experiences and learn only from text book, you will get only superficial knowledge because you do not have a hands-on knowledge. Nevertheless if you only do the practical work and do not study the texts, you will not be able to understand the essence of the theories and will be caught only in your own narrow views.*
- *Among all the properties, knowledge is most valuable because no one can ever snatch it away from you. It cannot be bought and cannot be sold. It is an indestructible treasure.*

* See statements in the box on p.5.



The first statement is translated from a Chinese poem.* I found it very interesting. It is an old poem talking about two kinds of education, practical and theoretical. If you have only theoretical knowledge from books, you cannot do the work because you need experience. But if you have only experience, the experience of your generation or that of your own alone is not sufficient. So you should learn from other people's ideas as well as from books or texts. It says that if you learn only from your own experience, you will get caught in your own narrow view and go nowhere.

The second statement is from India.* I translated it into English from Thai for my own interest. So, it might not be good English, but it is about the importance of knowledge, something like an inner property, that no one can take it away from you.

Goals of Education

In summary, those sayings indicate that the goal of education is knowledge transfer. When you learn something from other people or from your ancestors, you can make use of that knowledge, but the knowledge of just one generation might not be enough.

If you have good education, it is a good thing because it helps maintain your socio-economic status. It also plays an important role in social mobility. Although your parents are poor, but if you have access to good education, you can have

* See statements in the box on p.6.

prestigious work and positions. You can gain respect from others and enjoy the good result of education.

One important part of education is to help a person realize the importance of virtues and righteousness, so that you will not commit wrongdoings. If you are mindful and well educated, you will not do silly things. You should do only good deeds and have good conscience to serve your community and country. This is the expectation of good education. It is intellectual development and mental exercise.

A moment ago, I discussed with Mr. Risch* about the study of Sanskrit. His wife studies Sanskrit and other classical languages. My father sees the importance of this too. So when I said I would like to study French because I was tired of practising the piano, he said, “Oh yes, you can but you have to study Latin first”. So, I had taken Latin for a year, and then he allowed me to study French. Then, when I took Pali and Sanskrit, he said, “If you don’t have enough time, you can drop Latin”. This does not mean that Latin is not interesting, but he wanted me to study languages with declensions and conjugations. It helps me exercise my brain.

* Mr. James H. Risch, President of the American International Club

Brief History and Some Comments on Asian Education

In ancient time, Thai education, knowledge and skills were handed down in family line, from one generation to the next. Sometimes some people kept their knowledge as a secret, they told it only to the members of their families. If my father was a fisherman, I would see him going out fishing everyday, and I wanted to be a fisherman like him one day because I knew the art of fishing. Later on, one might search for the teachers elsewhere. If he knew that there were good teachers living in the city, he would try to ask the teachers to accept him as their student. This was the way one was educated in Asia, not only in Thailand.

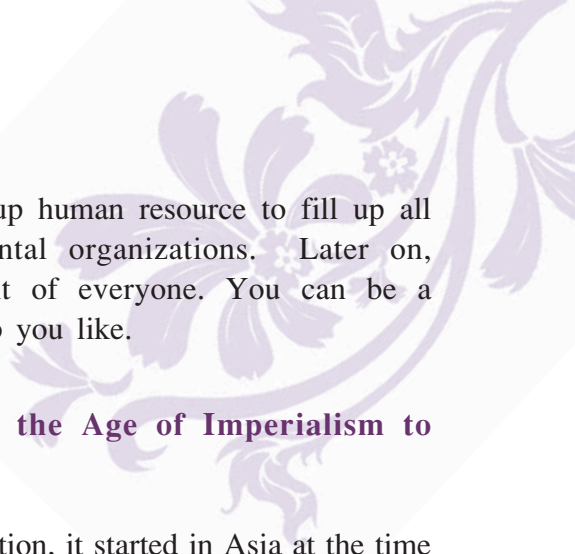
Another important way to get education is through religious education. It is still the case in Asia. We have Buddhist temples, Christian churches, both Protestant and Catholic, and Muslim schools. The Christian missionaries came to Thailand and other Asian countries and set up schools for Christians as well as Buddhists or anyone who want good education. Sometimes they send bright students to the USA and Europe. The Muslim schools are the places where a lot of subjects, not only religious education, are taught. At present, in Thailand we have many of those schools, both small and big. I have had an opportunity to cooperate with some of those schools. There are temple schools mainly for boys and not for girls.

I have just been to Cambodia to inaugurate a high school that I built in cooperation with the Cambodian Government.

The Cambodian Prime Minister told me that when he was young, he was quite poor. He needed to have good education. So, he came to the city and stayed in a temple because he had no house there. That was how he was educated. It is good that today he becomes the Prime Minister.

When my grandmother was little, the monks set up a school for girls in the temple. It was a day school, not a boarding school, giving an opportunity for girls to study. When my great grandfather started to modernize the country by reforming the government, it was more than one hundred years ago. At that time there were only 10 ministries. Now we have many new ministries because life nowadays has changed a lot since those days. At that time, we had to hire experts in various subject areas from Europe and the USA, for example, medical doctors, lawyers mainly from Harvard Law School, train and road engineers and engineers in other fields.

He sent some students, including his own sons and other people, mostly boys, to Europe, the USA and Japan. Some officials were sent on study tours to study things they were doing in Switzerland, the USA and Japan. They also studied how education was arranged or managed. Then, he set up the government schools and the university. In the beginning, the university he set up had small schools like School of Engineering and School of Law. Later a half brother of my grandfather became King Rama VI and set up the first university by joining those administrative schools into one.



The first aim was to build up human resource to fill up all positions in the governmental organizations. Later on, education is for the benefit of everyone. You can be a businessman or have any job you like.

Higher Education: From the Age of Imperialism to Globalization

If we talk about higher education, it started in Asia at the time that we called 'the Age of Imperialism'. The Asian attitude at that time, not only in Thailand but also in other countries like Japan and China, was that the people from the West thought of the Asians as underdeveloped people. There was no standard that could be used to compare. So if we could arrange our administrative process and other aspects of life according to the standards that could be understood by people in the West, it might be better. There were a lot of things to be changed, and it was better to change, even if there was no pressure from territorialism. So we had higher education for manpower development.


This was the period of rapid change, like globalization of our time today. It was the scheme that affected every country, which was not self-sufficient in everything. When I was in school, I learned about the two conflicting ideas, one is that we share things and depend on one another. If one is good at rice growing, he does rice growing. If other is good at working in the dairy farm, he has dairy products to exchange. We are not good in dairy farming in Thailand so we should buy the products from others. Now, it is not that simple.

This exchange may not be possible. So one should try to be self-sufficient.

Now intellectual property is a hot issue. So we, Asian people, should try to be aware of this too. We cannot do this without higher education. That is why people said that we should commit more to science and technology. We have to be interested not only in applied science and engineering, but also in basic science. In fact, we should be careful about the culture part, the humanity and also the social sciences.

To promote research in higher education is to promote research cooperation among all organizations and agencies at the universities and also the research agencies, for example, in Thailand we have so many agencies, for example, centers for informatics, computer and electronics, biotechnology and bioscience. We should cooperate not only among the governmental agencies, but also with corporates or companies in countries all over the world including here in Switzerland.

A moment ago I talked about the recovery work after the tsunami. We have helped the tsunami victims by providing them with their livelihood. They are fishing people, so we gave them fishing boats. But it is not possible now to go out and cut the trees to make that number of boats out of wood. So, we have to find other materials like artificial fibers. In this case, material scientists can play an important role to make materials that can imitate wood, and we are quite successful in helping the tsunami victims by this process.



Nanotechnology Center is a new center in Thailand, and we cooperate with the companies. The center cooperates with some of the R&D departments of some companies. For example, we produce microchips for a European company that makes medical equipments, and the company helps us develop the products.

We also have academic relations with academic and research institutions in Asia and also elsewhere. One moment ago, Mr. Spencer* talked about Webster University that has campuses in many European countries and also in Thailand. In Southeast Asia, we can work together on many projects of common interests, for example, the Mae Khong River Project. I just came back from India, and I got this newspaper, reporting that the Indian Prime Minister was talking about a new university at the summit of the South Asia. They are going to establish a new university for the study of new technologies, especially those that are important for the economy of the Region and for the humanity side as well.

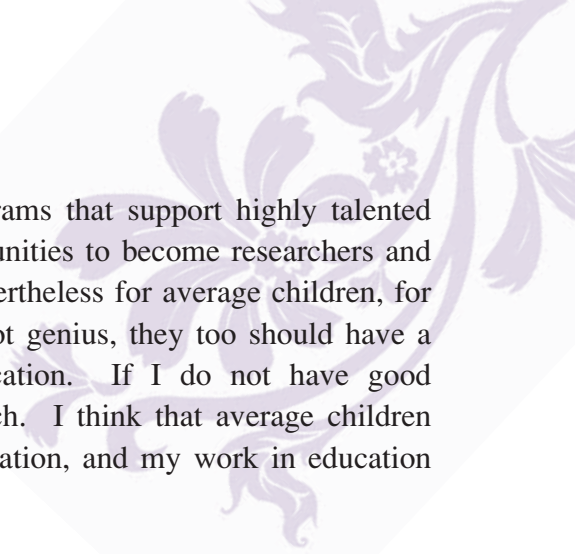
I will come back to talk about my grandfather. At first, he studied in a high school in the UK, and later he came to Germany to attend the Naval Academy before the first World War. When he graduated from there, he went back to Thailand, but he did not like to be in the Navy. So he went to the USA and studied at Harvard Public Health and Medical

* Mr. Robert Spencer, 2001-2002 President of the American International Club and current Speakers Chair

School. He came back and set up the medical school in Thailand with some cooperation with the Rockefeller Foundation. My grandmother also studied nursing in the USA. She returned to Thailand and played an important role in the education of Thai nurses.

The Anandamahidol Foundation was founded 50 years ago. The first recipients of the scholarships have done a great deal of work. The first one used to be the President of my university, Chulalongkorn University, the first university in the country. There were a lot of doctors who got the scholarships. Now there are 8 disciplines. We choose the best students in all disciplines to study for master's and doctoral degrees abroad, because we want them to be exposed to scholars overseas of the same discipline. So, they have friends and are exposed to good teachers in Europe and the USA. In this way they can benefit from knowing and working with top scholars. When these people from all disciplines come back to Thailand, they can come together and work together. Now it is the age of interdisciplinary approach and integrated study. I found out that people from many disciplines are doing the same kind of research. Nowadays it is very difficult to distinguish one subject from another.

My father also set up a school for administration. At first he would like to send hundreds of students to the USA, but he was advised that perhaps it was better to set up a school in the country and invited the professors from outside to come over.

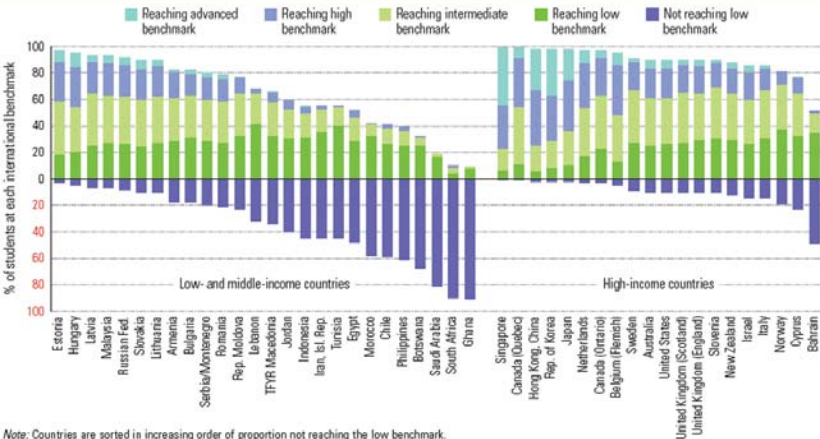


It is important to have programs that support highly talented students to give them opportunities to become researchers and to create original work. Nevertheless for average children, for a person like me, who are not genius, they too should have a chance to have higher education. If I do not have good education, I cannot help much. I think that average children are the majority of the population, and my work in education has been focused on them.

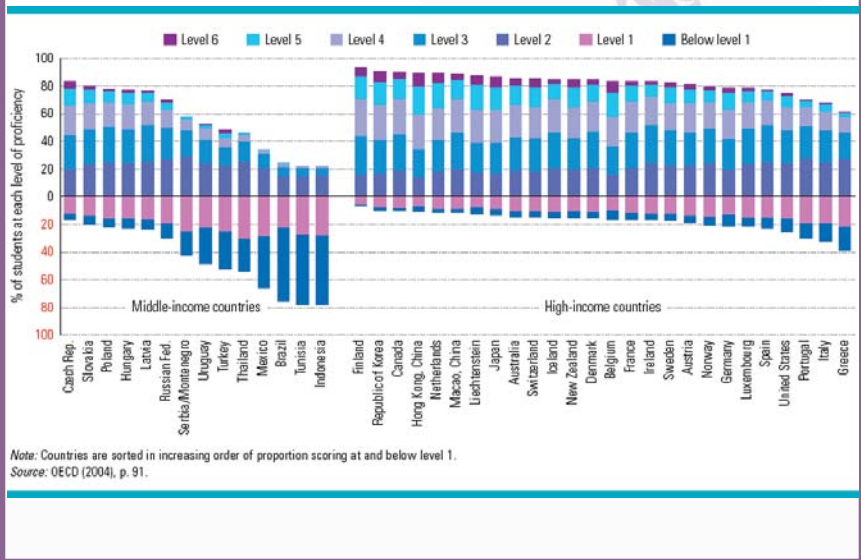
One thing that I would like to talk about is the language skill. Now it is not enough to know only Thai or only native language. If we know more languages, we can get involve with more people all over the world. We also have a chance of reading more materials and learning more, especially from the Internet. Of course, we have a lot of Thai websites, but there are more websites in English language. As there is a translation mechanism from English to Thai, it is still not very good. The translation among European languages is more readily available. I notice that we are still not very good in making a voice command in Thai language. If we have a voice command available, we should be able to speak and the computer types the voices into words. At the moment if we speak Thai, we can do only some, but not all. We have to set up a new laboratory to do some of the work. Now the companies that produce equipments just send their latest products to the universities in Asia. In fact they should work together to test the equipments. Before I came here, I went to a conference on Asian Digital Library. Now we try to find the way to share information all over the world.

Asian Position in the World and Cooperation Among Universities

Result of TIMSS 2003 : Mathematics achievement of Grade 8 students

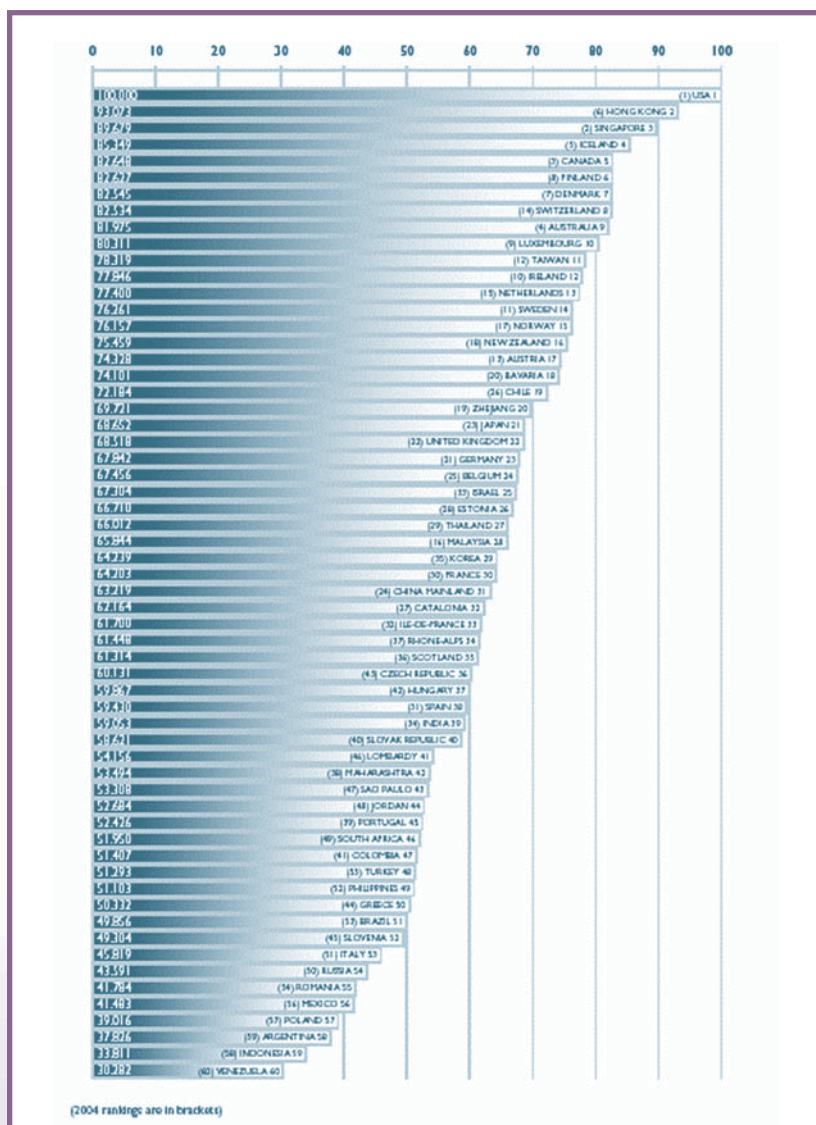


Result of PISA 2003 : Mathematics skills of 15-year-old students



The two graphs show comparisons of the two international test results of mathematics among the countries all over the world. The results showed that some Asian countries did quite well. Thai students were at about the average, but Singaporean students were among the upper groups. I hope that Asia can be quite competitive or be in a good position in the future. I hope the results will be better and better year by year.

The 2005 World Competitiveness Scoreboard



Source: IMD (2005), p.5.

This is the 2005 World Competitiveness Scoreboard. Among 60 countries, Thailand ranked the 27th, and Malaysia the 28th.

There are more and more research cooperation among the universities in Thailand and overseas. We can have joint degree programs in which students study 1-2 years in Thailand and another 2 years in, for example, Switzerland. We arrange conferences in which people from all over the world can come together. We try to have as frequent visits as we can, sending some people to visit schools and universities here and there. All is to expose ourselves to the world.

Talented Programs

There are many programs for talented students in Thailand. At first, I was not very interested in talented students. I just worked with average students as I told you before. But in fact, if you want to be in the phase of excellence, you need to take a shortcut. The Anandamahidol Foundation that I talked about before is to support the brightest students to further their education in top universities abroad.

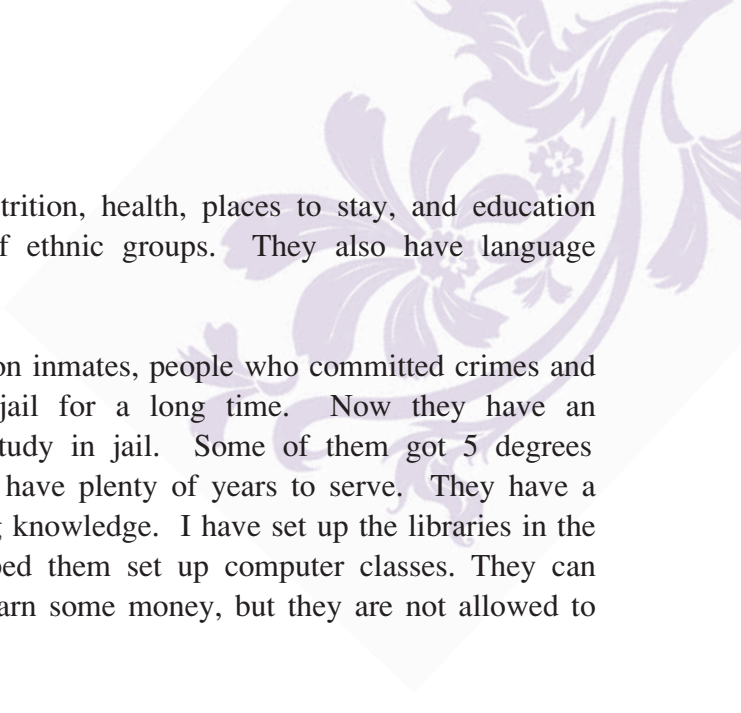
Early this year, I went to Kazakhstan. This is a very rich country now because they have oil. It is like a tug-of-war. China, Russia, Europe and the EU all want to use oil, and Kazakhstan has a lot of oil. So, they get a lot of money from oil. I have an opportunity to listen to the view of a minister. He said that the country got a lot of money, but they would not use it to buy more cars. They would support

students to study in engineering, management, and all disciplines in order to come back and to manage the companies themselves. In this way, they can be sustainable and survive as a country.

I have another activity that I have been doing since 1992. In that year when Thailand celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Prince Mahidol, my grandfather, who died when he was 38 years old, we set up Prince Mahidol Award Foundation. In fact, it was not my initiative, but as one member of the family I have to work for this foundation. Every year we try to select a doctor or a person who has contributed good work in medicine and public health to the world, one award in medicine and one in public health since 1992. We have an international committee of many prestigious people from all over the world. The recipients of the awards are very outstanding. One person awarded by us in 2001 has been awarded the Nobel Prize of this year. The good part for us is that we also get technology transfer from these outstanding people and the international committee members, who are willing to help upgrade Thai public health and medical education.

Education for All: Equal Opportunity and Broader Education Base

This is the part that in fact I work more on. I have been working with people who have special needs, or are disabled. Schools in rural areas have the problem of distance, water



supply, food, nutrition, health, places to stay, and education of the people of ethnic groups. They also have language problem.

I work with prison inmates, people who committed crimes and have to be in jail for a long time. Now they have an opportunity to study in jail. Some of them got 5 degrees already and still have plenty of years to serve. They have a chance of getting knowledge. I have set up the libraries in the prisons and helped them set up computer classes. They can now work and earn some money, but they are not allowed to be on-line.

The sick children in the hospitals should also have a chance to study. Of course, when you help the disadvantaged groups, it would be slower than supporting talented students. We should have a broader base of education in the country, and I think this is healthy for the country.

We have ICT libraries, laboratories, and distance learning for the people in the remote areas. Sometimes we ask people who get only high school education to be teachers in the rural areas. Normally, the Ministry of Education recruits only those who have at least bachelor degrees to be teachers, but this does not work in some rural places with ethnic people. For the high school graduate teachers who have taught well, we have given them an opportunity to earn the bachelor's degrees by studying in the distance education program sent from Bangkok or other cities. We do teacher training by this means.

UNESCO


I recently attended the UNESCO High Level Group Meeting on Education for All. From the assessment, there are still about 100 million of school age children not enrolled, and 55% are girls. There are many problems that they cited, for example, the problem of fees and tuitions, which are too high, the problem of not enough teachers, and that of dropouts. Thailand has made a lot of progress, for example, 2 years ago we had around 96% of literacy, which is not bad if we count the people in the rural areas, who have to walk for hours to go to schools.

Funding for Education

The last thing I would like to talk about is the funding. We get the funding from the government. There is criticism of the Thai government spending too little proportion of its budget on education, i.e., just only 3-4% of GDP. In fact, the education part is in every ministry. So, in all, it may be more than that.

Schools have to try to get more money for themselves. They have many activities, even marathon running or playing music to get the money for education. It sounds very awkward, but this is the way schools get the money.

We also get donation from foundations, overseas foundations and individuals within and outside the country. I can cite an example. There were stewards and air-hostesses of the



Thai Airways International, not the Thai Airways International Public Company, but just its employees. They donated money to build a school. They went to this school themselves and had to walk 12 hours to get there. Some people knew about a place that need a school by networking and also got to know each other through the chat room of the website and agreed to go together to build the school. There are people like these too.

We can also get money for education by direct investment. Some organizations have factories. They can have products and shops to sell the products to get the money for education. Some may invest the money in stock markets or bonds. But there is limitation according to the law of each country. Sometimes we are not allowed to do any investment in one country, but we can do so in another country.

Companies help us as well. They donate their own products and their income for building schools and funding research. We also get grants and loans from international organizations, such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and so on. There are research funding agencies in the country and overseas. To apply for the funding, we should be able to write project proposals and progress reports. In the beginning, I did not get much money, because it was very slow for me and my friends to write proposals in English.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are some arguments whether we should do more on higher education or the grass root education, because higher education is very expensive. To fund one person to get a Ph.D., we can spend the same amount to build a hundred schools in the rural areas. It is the problem of how to choose. We should focus on how to do this.

It has a “trigger-down” effect. Those who are in the research centers can help the grass root education, for example, when I work on the health and nutrition program, I need some friends from the universities to help me. We just discussed about a professor in the USA, who likes to invent things. He must find the people who want to use his products. I work with the people on the problem-based basis. I find the people who need help, and I must find the way to help them. So, we need to cooperate with the rest of the world. There is always a mutual benefit from cooperation, for example, when a university in the USA admits students from a poor country in Asia, and if the university develops them well, they will have the best minds from all over the world working for the developed country as well.

Asia is a big continent. So, we should help one another and share benefits among the citizens of the same country as well as other Asian countries. This is the problem that I have been asked to talk about, but I am not sure whether my talk can answer the question. Thank you very much.



AIC NEWS

November 16, 2005

American International Club of Geneva

Number 10

Education is the Golden Key

A Thai Princess on the strengthening of Asia's position in the world

Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand



NEXT SPEAKER LUNCHEON

Speaker **Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand**

Subject **Education is the Golden Key**

Date **Wednesday, December 14, 2005, 11:45**

Location **Swissôtel Métropole Genève, 34 quai Général Guisan**

ATTENTION
Note time & venue!

Thailand was one of the beneficiaries of the last great wave of Asian economic booms — as well as a victim of the more recent tsunami. When both the economic and oceanic tidal waves rolled back, some uncomfortably hard truths were revealed. Since then, Thailand has taken a commanding lead in promoting education for progress.

Working hard on this program is a remarkable multitasker, HRH The Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. The Princess is the holder of a Ph.D in Development Education from Srinakharinwirot University.

2005 marks a good year for Thailand in the United Nations

world. For example, in March the Princess became UNESCO Good Will Ambassador "for the empowerment of minority children through education and through the preservation of their intangible cultural heritage."

In the same month, the 2004 UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education was awarded to Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn, Professor of Law at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, while the Princess presided over the Fourth Session of the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST), which was convened in Bangkok from 23-25 March 2005 with over 500 participants discussing the benefits and risks of technology. COMEST is mandated to promote dialogue between scientific communities, decision-makers and the public at large.

The Princess began as a student of Thai history and culture and she continues to play an important role in the preservation of this ancient nation's enormous cultural heritage, but one of her biggest commitments today is to the needs of Thailand's youth, in particular those of poor students, in whose interest she founded the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Foundation, which we expect to form part of her talk to the AIC.

Among her many concerns is the education of refugee children. She is a member of the council of the Geneva-based Refugee Education Trust. The RET was established in the year 2000 by Mrs. Ogata, then UN High Commissioner for Refugees, to provide post-primary education to millions of refugee youths in the world. ★

INSIDE

Managing Migration

Pushkin Exhibition

AICConnections

Tennis

Civic Concerns





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Preface

The American International Club (AIC) of Geneva invited Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn to address the club members on December 14, 2005. The topic of the Royal Address was **Education is the Golden Key**. In this regard, Her Royal Highness succeeded in conveying a significant message on the roles of education to the audience.

At the beginning of Her address, Her Royal Highness touched on the Asian values in education, citing in particular the concepts of education of the two countries of great Asian civilizations i.e. China and India. She then proceeded to give a brief history and some comments on Asian education, after which Her Royal Highness expounded on higher education: from the age of imperialism to globalization. Her Royal Highness pointed out the values of cooperation among all sectors, both at the country and international levels. She provided information on the Asian position in the world regarding educational achievements and economic conditions. Her Royal Highness illustrated how the talented programs and the technology transfer from outstanding specialists have helped Thailand in its manpower development.

The thought-provoking comments and valuable information provided by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn in the Royal Address are greatly beneficial to the development of education. The Office of the Education

Council (OEC) therefore deems it appropriate to disseminate Her valuable information and views far and wide. It wishes to express profound gratitude to Her Royal Highness for authorizing OEC to publish the Royal Address, together with the relevant illustrating maps and charts.

Amrung Chantavanich

Amrung Chantavanich, Ph.D.
Secretary-General,
The Office of the Education Council
July, 2006



American International Club (AIC) of Geneva

The American International Club of Geneva was first established on May 17, 1951 as the American Club of Geneva by Mr. Henry St.Leger of the International Standards Organization and Mr. Henry W. Dunning of the League of Red Cross Societies to promote good relationship among Americans, men only, in Switzerland. Non-Americans could only be associated members. Since 1968 it has become an international club, in which associated members have become non-American voting members, and in 1993 the first woman joined in the executive committee. At present the AIC has about 1,100 members and the office is at the Intercontinental Hotel, Geneva.

The AIC promotes relationship among the members and their communities, develops and participates in activities on education, culture, charity and others of the members' interests and benefits.

The Speakers Program is a very important activity of the Club. Many prominent speakers in business, sports, entertainment, politics, etc., from all over the world have been invited, for example, Mr. Mikail Gorbachev, Mr. Shimon Peres, Sir Peter Ustinov, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and Madame Sadako Ogata. Speaker luncheon has become a strong tradition of the AIC.

Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn was invited by Mr. James Risch, President of the AIC, to speak on education and its role in strengthening the Asian position in the world on December 14, 2005, after which she attended the council meeting of the Refugee Education Trust (RET).