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RESTRUCTURING THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE<sup>1</sup> OF THAI HIGHER  
EDUCATION : A HISTORICAL APPROACH

สัมฤทธิ์ ยศสมศักดิ์

YOSSOMSAKDI, S.

ภาควิชารัฐศาสตร์ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์  
มหาวิทยาลัยบูรพา ต.แสนสุข อ.เมือง จ.ชลบุรี 20131

*Department of Political Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,*

*Burapha University, Chonburi 20131, Thailand*

[Samrit@buu.ac.th](mailto:Samrit@buu.ac.th)

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**บทคัดย่อ**

บทความนี้เป็นการนำเสนอผลการศึกษาโดยละเอียดให้เห็นถึง โครงสร้างการบริหารจัดการอุดมศึกษาของไทยในเชิงพัฒนาการทางประวัติศาสตร์ โดยเริ่มในราวปลายทศวรรษ 1950 เมื่อรัฐบาลไทยในขณะนั้นมีความมุ่งมั่นที่จะรวมมหาวิทยาลัยของรัฐ ซึ่งสังกัดอยู่หลายกระทรวง เข้าด้วยกันภายใต้หน่วยบริหารจัดการเดียวกันชื่อ สภามหาวิทยาลัยแห่งชาติ อย่างไรก็ตาม ตลอดระยะเวลากว่า 40 ปี ที่ผ่านมา มีเหตุการณ์ต่างๆ ที่เกิดขึ้น โดยเฉพาะบทบัญญัติทางกฎหมายและการต่อสู้เรียกร้องของผู้ที่อยู่ในแวดวงของมหาวิทยาลัย ซึ่งมีผลต่อการจัดรูปแบบโครงสร้างการบริหารจัดการจนกลายเป็นรูปแบบในปัจจุบัน การศึกษาได้แสดงให้เห็นถึงเหตุผลการจัดตั้งทบวงมหาวิทยาลัยขึ้นเป็นหน่วยงานอิสระจากกระทรวงศึกษาธิการ ตลอดจนทำการศึกษาถึงบทบาท อำนาจหน้าที่ของหน่วยงานต่างๆ ที่มีอิทธิพลต่อระบบการบริหารจัดการอุดมศึกษาของประเทศ พร้อมทั้งได้ให้ข้อเสนอแนะในการบริหารจัดการที่มีประสิทธิภาพ ในการตอบสนองต่อสภาพแวดล้อมที่กำลังเปลี่ยนแปลงในภาวะปัจจุบัน

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<sup>1</sup> "Governance" refers to the functions of the government in planning, coordinating, supervising, governing and administering higher-education institutions at the national and/or institutional level. However, the focus of this paper is on the governance structure at the national level.

**ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a comprehensive study of historical development of the governance structure of Thai higher education. Thailand's first governing structure began in the late 1950s when the Thai government determined to pull the public universities together under a single administrative body, the University Council. However, through a period of 40 years, some crucial factors, especially legal mandates and struggles of university staff, have designed and shaped the governance structure to its current form. The study also gives the reasons why the Ministry of University Affairs was established separately from the Ministry of Education. Major actors as well as their roles and influence in the governance system of higher education will be investigated. Some recommendations for effective governance responding to the current changing environment will also be suggested.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Education in Thailand is currently in the process of restructuring its system due mainly to the principles imposed by the Constitution of 1997 and the National Education Act, which was enacted the first time on August 14, 1999. It is no exaggeration to cite that the National Education Act of 1999 has introduced the roadmap of education reform in Thailand. Pertaining to the higher education system, the reform calls for the following changes:

1. restructuring of the higher education administrative system through merging of the Office of National Education Commission (ONEC), the Ministry of Education (MOE), and the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA);
2. changing of the public sector role in public higher education institutes from regulatory to supervisory through incorporating public institutes, presently part of Civil Services, into autonomous and public agencies;
3. creation of a national agency on education quality assurance that aimed set national education standards and undertake quality assessment;

4. extensive resources mobilization and investment in education; and
5. redirecting mission of higher education towards societal participation, student-centered learning and lifelong learning (Kirtikara, 2001).

The first explicit principle of this new law is to combine the management of national education, religion and culture into one single body, the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture. This new Act clearly stipulates that the structure of the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture must be divided into four public bodies: (1) the National Council for Education, Religion and Culture; (2) the Commission for Basic Education; (3) the Commission for Higher Education; and (4) the Commission for Religion and Culture.

National Education Reform Office (NERO) which is a specialized and temporary public agency was set up with the task of preparing the new administrative structure of the new ministry, the new personnel management system, requisite draft bills and the foundation of financing the overall education reform including higher education. The nine qualified members widely selected from prominent scholars and practitioners constitute the committee and supervise the work of NERO. NERO is in charge of presenting its work, including draft bills, to the government for consideration. According to the National Education Act of 1999, the structure of new ministry must be adopted within three years or by August 2002. Over the last two years since the enactment of the National Education Act of 1999, there have been many seminars and workshops in terms of paperwork to pave the way for implementation of reforms. However, progress in terms of action plans to achieve the objectives of reform could not be realized extensively.

It is said that the present Thai government led by Thaksin Shinawatra is putting off the reform deadline. The Education Minister in charge, Suwit Khunkitti, is now proposing the new structure of the Ministry of Education against the NERO's proposal. Participation of the public and stakeholders has been crucial factors to the success or failure of education reform in this transitional period. This paper, therefore, presents a comprehensive study on the historical development of governance structure of Thai higher education with the purpose of gaining an insight of current governance structure and its restructuring process.

## **THE CURRENT MODEL OF THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THAILAND**

In Thailand, many government agencies involved in planning and administration of higher education. The three Thai government agencies that have a direct role and influence in policy formulation and implementation of higher education are the ONEC, the MUA, and the MOE. This part aims to clarify the existence and the role of these three agencies.

### ***The ONEC***

The National Education Commission Act B.E. 2535 (1992), which contains 16 sections, outlined the role and functions of the ONEC and has been effective ever since. According to the Act of 1992, the National Education Commission (NEC) has a Prime Minister or a Deputy Prime Minister as Chairman. The Vice Chairman is a Minister of the Prime Minister's Office designated by the Prime Minister. Other members include the Minister of Education; the Minister of University Affairs; the Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister; the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defense; the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior; the Permanent Secretary of Science Technology and Environment; the Permanent Secretary of the MOE; the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Public Health; the Permanent Secretary of the MUA; the Director of the Bureau of the Budget; the Secretary-General of the Office of National Economic and Social Development Board; and twelve other commendable members appointed by the Cabinet, at least five of whom must come from the private sector. The Secretary-General of the ONEC is a member and serves as the NEC secretary. A Deputy Secretary-General, assigned by the Secretary-General acts as a member and the assistant secretary of the NEC.

The functions of the ONEC could be divided into two distinct and separate levels: Policy function and administrative function. The policy function is vested in NEC, while administrative function belongs to the ONEC. The Act of 1992 authorized the ONEC to perform three major functions: (1) to set national education policies and plans; (2) to coordinate the

implementation of educational policies and plans of all public agencies; and (3) to follow up and evaluate the progress of the work of all public agencies. The increasing role of the ONEC in recent years is due mainly to the legal provisions of responsibilities, as well as the composition of the members of the NEC.

### ***The MUA***

The establishment of the MUA as a ministry in 1977 was legalized by the Act of B.E. 2520 (1977), An Annex of the 216<sup>th</sup> National Executive Council Decree dated September 29, 1972. The MUA then consisted of the Office of the Secretary to the Minister, the Office of the Permanent Secretary, and a certain number of public universities. The MUA was also authorized to supervise the operations of private universities and colleges in 1979.

At present, the Ministerial, Bureau, and Department Reorganization Act B.E. 2534 (1991) specifies the broad scope of responsibilities of the MUA and its subsidiary organizations. The MUA also has authority to provide and oversee both public and private higher education with the exception of some specialized professional training, which falls under the jurisdiction of other ministries.

On April 12, 1977, the Act on Bureaucratic Practice of the Ministry of University Affairs B.E. 2520 (1977) was enacted to replace the 320<sup>th</sup> National Executive Council Decree of 1972. The Act, which was slightly amended in 1994 to cover the expanded role and functions of the MUA, has been effective since 1977.

The current Act, which contains 15 sections, authorizes the Minister of University Affairs with legal powers to administer the work of the MUA. The Act designates the University Affairs Steering Committee and authorizes the Cabinet to appoint a chairman of this Committee. The University Affairs Steering Committee consists of both ex-officio members and the commendable members, all of whom are appointed by the Cabinet. The Steering Committee is in charge of advising the Minister of University Affairs and also engages in the consideration of higher education policy and planning issues, including establishment, merging, and

dissolution of departments; budget allocation; and evaluation of the educational provisions for public higher education. The Committee also considers matters relating to accreditation and standards of private higher education institutions.

Furthermore the Act designates the Office of the Permanent Secretary to be in charge of supplementing the operation of the University Civil Service Commission and the Higher Education Institution Committee. This implies that the Office of the Permanent Secretary is also responsible for the secretarial work of these two public bodies.

### ***The MOE***

It is interesting to learn that in Thailand not only the MUA is in charge of higher education, but also the MOE providing higher education through its subordinate organizations. However, the main function of the MOE is to provide education at all levels. Only two sub-organizations under the MOE, the Office of Rajabhat Institutes Council (ORIC) and Rajamangala Institute of Technology, are directly involved in providing higher education at undergraduate and higher level.

Rajabhat Institutes have been developed from teachers' colleges. The Teachers' College Act of 1975 established teachers' colleges with the purpose of providing academic knowledge and training qualified teachers to the bachelor's degree level. However, owing to a surplus of teacher education graduates, the Teachers' College Act of 1975 was revised in 1984. As a result of this revision, the Teacher Education Department, represented by the 36 teachers' colleges, diversified its curricula to train manpower in various fields other than education. In 1992, the teachers' colleges were renamed to Rajabhat Institutes in order to reflect their new tasks and functions.

The Rajabhat Institute Act of 1995 designed the institutional structure, administration, and autonomy of the RIs as well as the Office of Rajabhat Institute Council (ORIC). The ORIC, led by a Secretary-General, is responsible for supervising the administration of all 40 RIs located around the country. The Rajabhat Institutes Council (RIC) is the governing authority of the RIs, chaired by the Minister of the MOE. The Permanent Secretary of the MOE is the Vice

Chairman of the RIC. The Academic Board is the principal academic body of the ORIC and advises the RIC on matters relating to teaching, scholarship, and research. Each RI has its own President responsible for administering the institution.

Rajamangala Institute of Technology (RIT), or its former name, the Institute of Technology and Vocational Education, was first established by the Act in 1975 as an educational institution having a departmental status in the MOE. In 1989, the name of the institute was changed to Rajamangala Institute of Technology with a commitment to provide technological education, undertake research, and extend services to society.

RIT is governed by the RIT Council chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the MOE and assisted by its Council members. The administration of RIT is under the responsibility of the President with the assistance of Vice Presidents, Assistants to the President, deans, and directors.

As of 2001, 12 campuses are located in the Bangkok area, and 28 campuses are in other regions. In addition, RIT trains teachers for certificate and diploma programs, and bachelor's degree programs have been developed since 1981 in response to the needs for higher-level technical manpower. With the resources of 15 faculties and 40 campuses, RIT has the capacity to provide up to 237 fields of study. Among these fields, 129 are at the degree level and 108 are below degree level.

## **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE<sup>2</sup>**

Through the period of 40 years, some crucial factors have designed and shaped the governance structure to its current form. This part provides the reason why the MUA was established separately from the MOE. Major actors as well as their roles and influence will be investigated.

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<sup>2</sup>This part is mostly excerpted from Chapter 5 of Yossomsakdi's dissertation cited in the references.

### ***Governance Structure in the Early Period***

The history of Thai higher education can be dated back to the reign of King Chulalongkorn when the first medical school, Siriraj Hospital, was established in 1889. The law school under the Ministry of Justice was then opened in 1897. The Royal Pages School and the Engineering School were subsequently established in 1902 and 1913. In 1917, the first university in Thailand, Chulalongkorn University, was instituted by elevating the Civil Service College to university status. It incorporated the existing schools of medicine and engineering with the newly created faculties of Arts and Sciences, Law and Political Science.

Following the Revolution of 1932, there was a growing need for higher education from political leaders and civil servants. Accordingly, the University of Moral and Political Science, now known as Thammasat University was founded in 1933. In 1943, three more universities, which included the University of Medical Science, the Agricultural University, and the Fine Arts University were created.

Therefore, in the early 1950s, Thailand had only five universities, all of which were attached to different ministries. Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University were under the Ministry of Education. Mahidol University, formerly known as the University of Medical Sciences, belonged to the Ministry of Public Health. Kasetsart University, formerly known as the Agricultural University, was under the Ministry of Agriculture. Silpakorn University, formerly known as the Fine Arts University, was attached to the Ministry of Culture, which ceased to exist in 1966 (Watson, 1980).

Unlike many countries where universities were engaged in the pursuit and the dissemination of knowledge through teaching and research, Thai universities were originally designed to train people for government service (Ketudat, 1972; Bovornsiri, 1985). Since Thai universities operated under a bureaucracy, their officials were obsessed with a bureaucratic mentality. They favored official uniforms, government ranks, and social prestige while resisting any change in the status quo. Furthermore, most faculty members still focused on teaching students rather than conducting research (Suwanagul, 1988).



At that time, each university had its own governing board, consisting of both ex-officio members and honorary members. The government was a main source of funding for all universities, and all board members were government officials. There was little cooperation between universities, which were generally coordinated through the ministries that supervised them.

Each university planned its own programs and budgets and then submitted them through its superior ministry. The final authority over the budget rested with the legislative branch of the government. Each year when the annual budget was passed, the universities would receive money allocated to them, and the expenditures had to follow the rules and regulations laid down by the Ministry of Finance.

Like other government agencies, Thai universities had to follow all of the government's rules and procedures. The budget and the appointment of staff members were channeled through the superior ministry. Salary scale and personnel administration of faculty members were the same as for those who worked in other government agencies (Suwanagul, 1988). However, there existed the diverse nature of the university system because the universities were scattered among several ministries. Therefore, it was more difficult for the government to effectively coordinate the functions of program administration of these universities.

In 1954, the College of Education was founded in the Department of Teacher Training under the Ministry of Education and was assigned the task of producing teachers at diploma and degree levels. The College later expanded to several branch campuses in and outside of Bangkok, all of which still focused on teacher training.

In the late 1950s, most universities began to expand their missions to cover broader areas of study. These expansions would later make the government more determined to pull the universities together under a single administrative body.

The idea for coordination of higher education in Thailand was influenced by Sir Charles Darwin, a well-known expert in higher education. He came to Thailand under the auspices of the UNESCO in 1953 to assist the Thai government in investigating the condition and status of

higher education. Darwin's report prompted the Phibunsongkhram government to reform the administrative structure of higher education in Thailand in order to provide more trained professionals in addition to skilled manpower to accelerate national development.

#### ***The University Council Act B.E. 2499 (1956)***

On January 11, 1956, the University Council Act B.E. 2499 (1956) was enacted. This Act created a council of 25 members chaired by the Prime Minister. Its primary purpose was to improve and expand higher education to regional parts of the country. Half of the members of the Council were ex-officio, representing all universities and some government agencies. The other half were appointed because of their prestige and interest in higher education.

The University Council had an office equivalent to a ministerial department. This office, headed by a Secretary-General, was attached to the Office of the Prime Minister and was under the direct control of the Prime Minister, who was chairman of the Council (Sripahol, 1971). However, before the University Council was fully operational, the Phibunsongkhram government was overthrown by a coup led by Marshall Sarit Thanarat in 1957.

#### ***The Universities under the Office of the Prime Minister***

Following the coup, Sarit attempted to enhance national economic development through the introduction of manpower and development plans. He appointed Wichit Wathakan as chairman of the Committee with eight members and three consultants to be in charge of improving the educational scheme of the country. The Committee was responsible for planning improvements at all levels of education. The Sarit government, based upon the Committee's report, rearranged the scattered university system by pooling the five universities together under the Office of Prime Minister.

There were several technical and professional colleges established during that period; however, these educational institutes did not offer college's degree programs (bachelor's level and higher). Therefore, the universities were distinctly different from the technical and professional colleges. Higher education was then under two separate administrative agencies.

Five universities were under the Office of the Prime Minister and the rest, including the College of Education, were under the Ministry of Education.

***The National Education Council Act B.E. 2502 (1959)***

In order to guarantee the coordination of educational programs at all levels, the National Education Council was created in 1959 by the National Education Council Act B.E. 2502 (1959) to act as an advisory body for the government in matters relating to national educational policies. The Council also undertook the role of the University Council for coordinating the universities. In practice, the National Education Council and the Ministry of Education seemed to be well-coordinated in that the former performed most of the functions of planning and coordinating higher education, while the latter was in charge of planning and administration of education at lower levels (Techakumpuch, 1973).

According to the National Education Council Act of 1959, the Prime Minister became chairman of the National Education Council. Other members of the Council included the Deputy Prime Minister as Vice Chairman, Presidents or Rectors of all universities, and the Director of the BOB. The Secretary-General of the Office of the National Education Council acted as both member and secretary. Five cabinet members were assigned as consultants to the Council. These were the Ministers of Finance, Agriculture, Interior, Education, and Public Health. In addition, there were also 67 members appointed by the Cabinet selected from a pool of educators, soldiers, and high-ranking government officials from various government agencies. Finally, the Cabinet had the authority to appoint nine members to the Executive Board, which acts as the main body of the Council.

According to the Act of 1959, the National Education Council had authority to perform various functions, such as the review of the annual budgets of the universities and the consideration of all matters relating to the establishment, transfer, and dissolution of universities as well as faculties within the universities.

The Secretary-General had authority to enforce the resolutions of the National Education Council, to control the secretarial work, and to supervise officials in his office.

The Office of the National Education Council was concerned primarily with secretarial work and academic administration such as facilitating the National Education Council meetings, calling meetings for the Council or subcommittees, preparing the agenda, recording minutes of all meetings, and so forth.

***The National Education Council Act B.E.2512 (1969)***

In 1969, the National Education Council Act B.E.2512 (1969) was enacted to replace the National Education Council Act B.E. 2502 (1959). Its main objective was to improve the efficiency of both the National Education Council and its office. There were significant changes in both the composition and the functions of the Council as well.

The functions of the National Education Council could be divided into two distinct and separate levels: policy function and administrative function. The policy function was vested in the Council body. Section 9 of the Act of 1969 authorized the Council to consider suggestions, recommendations, or opinions submitted by the Office of the National Education Council; to carry out any functions as prescribed by law; and to submit its opinions to the Cabinet or the Prime Minister. The new law also authorized the Executive Board to perform the duties of the Council if so entrusted. The administrative function belonged to the Office of the National Education Council.

The revision of the Act in 1969 empowered the Office of the National Education Council with a wide scope of responsibilities for the formulation of policy and planning at all levels of education. Even though the Office of the National Education Council under the Act of 1969 had expanded the scope and complexity of its functions, it still performed the role of supervising and coordinating public universities. The revision of the law degraded the role of the National Education Council toward higher education and created a negative attitude from university administrators. It later became one of the major reasons for restructuring the governance structure of higher education in Thailand.

### ***The Transitional Period before the Current Governance Structure***

The year 1971 was the starting point of the present governance structure for Thai higher education at the national level.\* Thailand faced another political dilemma when Marshall Thanom Kittikachorn staged a coup against himself in November 1971. He dissolved Parliament, banned political parties, and again ruled under an interim Constitution that restored military dominance over the government (Wyatt, 1984).

The military government had a strong intention to reform the Thai bureaucracy so that the efficiency and effectiveness of the central administration could be enhanced. The government, therefore, laid down two policy guidelines for all public organizations in order to implement bureaucratic reform. These policy guidelines were aimed to dissolve any public agencies that had unnecessary and overlapping functions, and to reorganize public agencies within the Prime Minister's Office so that their functions would focus on policy planning and evaluation instead of implementation. The guidelines of the government strongly affected the work of the National Education Council because the Council also dealt with implementing functions, such as the approval for the establishment and the dissolution of universities and academic units, the approval of university curricula, and the suggestions for annual budgetary preparation.

The government appointed the Committee for Government Bureaucratic Reform with Major General Siri Siriyothin as chairman. Thamrong Buasri, a well-known educator attached to the National Education Council, was one person in a group of experts to give advice to the Committee for the improvement of higher education.

According to Thamrong, the major concept of education reform was to transfer all educational institutions to the Ministry of Education. Under the new structure of the Ministry of Education, there were groups of institutions classified by levels of education. Each group would accommodate its own coordinating board and supporting agencies. The new structure was expected to solve the problem of coordination between different ministries. It was believed that since there were different ministers supervising higher education, their roles would often prevail over the role and functions of the National Education Commission (MUA, 1992).

### ***The Role of the Council of University Presidents of Thailand***

The proposal of transferring all public universities to the jurisdiction of Ministry of Education was submitted to the Bureaucratic Reform Committee. At the same time, a draft proposal was given to the Council of University Presidents of Thailand (or the Rectors Conference of Thailand) for comment.

The Council of University Presidents of Thailand was formed by the joint agreement signed by representatives of 12 institutions of higher education<sup>3</sup> on January 29, 1972. These institutions were Kasetsart University, Khon Kaen University, Chulalongkorn University, Chiang Mai University, Thammasat University, Mahidol University, Ramkhamhaeng University, Silpakorn University, Prince Songkla University, NIDA, the College of Education, and King Mongkut's Institute of Technology. The main purpose of forming the Council was to provide a place for high-level executives of public universities to share opinions and experiences concerning the issues of higher education through meetings.

Most of the members of the Council of University Presidents of Thailand were opposed to the idea of placing all public universities under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Education, based on the experiences of Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, once under the Ministry of Education. The Council believed that such an idea would eventually aggravate the university's situation. However, the Council also realized that the policy guidelines for bureaucratic reform needed to be implemented at some appropriate degree. To be optimistic, the Council of University Presidents of Thailand appointed its representatives to negotiate with the military government in order to clarify its concerns. Several meetings between the university and the government culminated in the establishment of a new public agency under the Office of the Prime Minister.

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<sup>3</sup> In 1972 the College of Education and King Mongkut's Institute were still under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

### *The Establishment of the Office of State Universities*

On September 29, 1972, the military government under the leadership of Marshall Thanom issued the 216<sup>th</sup> National Executive Council Decree<sup>4</sup> transferring the authority and responsibilities of the universities to a new office, the Office of State Universities (OSU), which was established under the Office of the Prime Minister. With the establishment of the OSU, all public universities were brought under the jurisdiction of one administrative body. By the same decree, the Office of the Private Education Commission was established under the Ministry of Education to undertake responsibility for the country's private colleges.

Accordingly, the military government issued the 320<sup>th</sup> National Executive Council Decree<sup>5</sup> on December 13, 1972, empowering the Minister who supervised the OSU to perform several functions concerning higher education administration.

In 1974, the Government under Sanya Dharmasakti proposed an amendment to the 216<sup>th</sup> National Executive Council Decree by transferring the control of private colleges from the Ministry of Education to the OSU with the purpose of uniting all higher-education institutions under a single public body. The Act of Transferring a Part of the Ministry of Education to the Office of State Universities, B.E. 2517 (1974) was passed on November 21, 1974. Accordingly, the Sanya government promulgated the Royal Decree of Organizing the Office of the Permanent Secretary under the Office of State Universities in 1975. As a result of this Royal Decree, the Private Higher Education Institution Division was created in the Office of the Permanent Secretary. Therefore, in 1975 there were five divisions and one center including the General Affairs Division, the Personnel Division, the Planning Division, the Education Affairs Division, the Private Higher Education Institution, and the English Center.

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<sup>4</sup>This National Executive Decree was an administrative law equivalent to an Act of Parliament. It was later replaced by the Ministerial, Bureau, and Department Reorganization Act B.E. 2534 (1991).

<sup>5</sup>This National Executive Decree was equivalent to an Act of Parliament.

Under the government led by Thanin Kraivichien, the status of the OSU was raised to a ministry by the Act of B.E. 2520 (1977) in 1977, An Annex of the 216<sup>th</sup> National Executive Council Decree. The name of the Office of State Universities was changed to the Office of University Affairs (OUA) in 1977 and again in 1982 changed to the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) to reflect its ministerial status.

There were three main reasons explaining the changes in the status and the name of the MUA. Firstly, the MUA had already expanded its functions to supervise private higher education, so its former name did not reflect its current tasks. Secondly, under the Office of the Prime Minister, the Minister who supervised the Office of State Universities was regarded as a deputy Minister to the Prime Minister. The Minister, then, had no absolute authority in administering the university affairs since some authority was still vested in the Prime Minister who headed the Prime Minister's Office. And finally, the Office of State Universities under the Office of the Prime Minister was regarded as having a departmental status that was legally equivalent to the status of a public university. It was believed that its authority did not prevail over the University Councils of individual public universities.

### **REORGANIZING CURRENT GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE<sup>6</sup>**

As mentioned earlier, the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture (MERC) will be established by merging the ONEC, MOE and MUA by 20 August 2002. The process of organizing the structures, organs and division of responsibilities is underway. The Executive Committee of NERO has so far agreed that education in Thailand will be administered and managed at national and local levels.

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<sup>6</sup> This part is partly summarized from Part 4 of the book, *Education in Thailand 2000/2001*, published by ONEC.



At the national level, the education administration and management will be the responsibilities of Office of the National Council for Education, Religion and Culture; Office of the Commission for Basic Education; Office of the Commission for Higher Education; Office of the Commission on Religion and Culture; Office of the Permanent Secretary for the MERC; and independent public organizations which are legal entities under the supervision of MERC. At the local level, education administration and management will be under the responsibilities of educational service areas and local administration organizations as well as private and state educational institutions. This is not the case of higher-education institutions because all institutions providing education at degree level are legal entities and allowed to function with freedom. Each institution can develop its own administration and management system with flexibility and academic freedom under the supervision of the institutional council empowered by its own Act.

The administrative structure at the national level will be discussed briefly because it is the main concern of this study. According to ONEC, the new Ministry will be organized as follows:

***The Office of the National Council for Education, Religion and Culture***

This Office will take over the ONEC's original organs and responsibilities. Policies, plans and laws of MOE and MUA will be also transferred to this Office which is a legal entity.

***The Office of the Commission for Basic Education***

This Office will mostly cover original organs and responsibilities of various departments under the MOE. These are: Department of General Education, Office of the Private Education Commission, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Office of the National Primary Education Commission, and Office of the Teachers Civil Service Commission.

***The Office of the Commission for Higher Education***

This Office will cover original organs and responsibilities of MUA. These are Public and private higher-education institutions. Furthermore, some public organizations

providing education at degree level under the jurisdiction of MOE will be also merged into this Office. These include: Office of Rajabhat Institutes Council, Rajamangala Institute of Technology, some educational institutions under the Department of Vocational Education, some colleges under the Department of Fine Arts.

#### ***Office of the Commission on Religion and Culture***

This Office will take over the original organs and responsibilities of Department of Religious Affairs, Department of Fine Arts, and the Office of National Culture Commission which is now under the Office of the Prime Minister.

#### ***Office of the Permanent Secretary for the MERC***

This Office will be a central unit responsible for general administration and management. The Office will be in charge of overseeing, monitoring, and coordinating the overall administration and management of related affairs within the MERC itself as well as between MERC and other agencies. The power and duties of this Office will cover four types of education, which are not included in those offices as stated above, such as vocational, physical, non-formal, and informal education.

#### ***Independent Public Organizations***

Some public organizations have been established in order to improve the betterment of education. The NERO has so far agreed the establishment of (1) Office of National Education Standards, (2) Institute for Educational Technologies and (3) Institute for the Development of Teachers and Educational Personnel.

So far, related laws and regulations have been drafted by the NERO in order to implement the above guidelines and policies. These laws will include the Ministerial, Bureau, and Departmental Reorganization Act and the Act on Bureaucratic Practice of the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture. Other regulations will be Ministerial regulations on the organizational structure of the Office of the National Council for Education, Religion and

Culture; Office of the Commission for Basic Education; Office of the Commission for Higher Education; Office of the Commission on Religion and Culture; and Office of the Permanent-Secretary for the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture.

However, the NERO's proposal for reorganizing administrative structure mentioned above is far from realization and not smoothly implemented. The current Education Minister, Suwit Khunkitti, is now proposing an alternative by not including the cultural sector into the new structure of the Ministry of Education. Based on his idea, the cultural sector will be upgraded to a new ministry, Ministry of Culture. This new option goes against the National Education Act of 1999, which has created the controversy and confusion among educators over the educational reform, and seems to confirm the postponement of reform deadline stipulated by law.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The problems of governance in higher education elsewhere share common concerns. An improved governance structure of higher education in Thailand is a necessity and under way since the overall effects of the changed environment are forcing design of existing governance system. Thai higher education has experienced the evolution of its governance structure for many models since the mid 1950s. Since Thailand is a unitary state, the governance system of higher education has mostly been under the supervision of the government through the MUA. In addition, two other organizations, the ONEC and the MOE also play an important role in the planning and administration of higher education. The major policy of restructuring the current government structure of education to one ministry is the result of lacking unity in policy framework and unsound coordination between basic education and higher education in the past. The National Education Act of 1999 clearly stipulates the new ministerial structure, The Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture, which will be focal outcome to unity and coherence in education policy formulation, planning and education standard at all levels of education. However, this is not an easy task because the current Education Minister in charge strongly opposes this blueprint of ministerial structure.

Kirtikara (2001) suggests that the higher education reform will be pursued successfully only if all stakeholders take part vigorously in all procedures. Public awareness of roles and

importance of higher education to national development and competitiveness needs to be stimulated. Building of consensus on the goals, strategies and measures for the reform is important. The good coordination between the officials of all agencies concerned is required.

Salmi (1999) also clarifies the political management of reforms. According to his experiences, the successful launching and implementation of reforms and innovations are conditioned by the ability of decision-makers to build a consensus among various constituents of the higher education community. Many things can go wrong when governments attempt to introduce reforms likely to be negatively perceived without making deliberate efforts to mobilize support from the group involved. It is therefore important to address the political sensitivity of the proposed reforms. Reform implementation strategies must create conditions to make fundamental changes in higher education access, financing, management and governance politically and socially more acceptable. While involving potential opposition groups in the policy process, ignoring this dimension is a recipe for failure.

Not only the structure of existing governance needs to be examined solely, but the leadership style of decision-makers involved must also be evaluated. New and strengthened relationships, based on open communication, opportunities for responsible leadership, and mutual respects between state officials and educators are imperative if public higher education is to succeed. Communication, accountability and institutional autonomy should be jointly evaluated and enhanced. If higher education governance must be reorganized, the structure should be perceived as better than what preceded it by its various constituents.

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1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2540

1956 The University Council Act B.E. 2499

1959 The National Education Council Act B.E. 2502

1969 The National Education Council Act B.E. 2512

1972 The 216<sup>th</sup> National Executive Council Decree

1972 The 320<sup>th</sup> National Executive Council Decree

1974 The Act of Transferring a Part of the Ministry of Education to the Office of State Universities B.E. 2517

1975 The Teachers' College Act B.E. 2518

1975 The Technological and Vocational College Act B.E. 2518

1975 The Royal Degree of Organizing the Office of the Permanent Secretary under the Office of State Universities B.E. 2518

1977 The Act of B.E. 2520, An Annex of the 216<sup>th</sup> National Executive Council Decree

- 1977 The Act on Bureaucratic Practice of the Ministry of University Affairs B.E. 2520
- 1978 The National Education Commission Act B.E. 2521
- 1978 The Royal Decree of Organizing the Office of the Permanent Secretary under the Office of University Affairs B.E. 2521
- 1984 The Teachers' College Act B.E. 2527 (Revision)
- 1989 The Act of Changing the Name from the Technological and Vocational College to Rajamangala Institute of Technology
- 1991 The Ministerial, Bureau, and Department Reorganization Act B.E. 2534
- 1992 The National Education Commission Act B.E. 2535
- 1992 The Act of Changing the Name from Teachers College to Rajabhat Institute B.E. 2535
- 1995 The Royal Decree of Organizing the Office of National Education Commission under the Office of the Prime Minister B.E. 2538
- 1995 Rajabhat Institute Act B.E. 2538
- 1997 The Royal Decree of Organizing the Office of Permanent Secretary under the Ministry of University Affairs B.E. 2540
- 1999 The National Education Act B.E. 2542