

BOOK REVIEW

Education in Thailand: An Old Elephant in Search of a New Mahout. By Gerald W. Fry (Ed) (2018), 744pp. ISBN: 9789811078552, Singapore: Springer.

Many books have been written about Thai education but this book, *“Education in Thailand: An Old Elephant in Search of a New Mahout”*, truly gives comprehensive information about the educational system of this country in almost all aspects. The editor starts the book by making certain that the readers will understand “Thainess” and how this unique background in the past five decades has continued to shape the present Thai educational system.

This book consists of six parts beginning with Part I: the Thai context and its uniqueness in terms of historical, social, cultural, political and economic backgrounds. These diverse perspectives and theoretical frameworks give a fruitful picture of the development of Thai education. Besides the foreword chapter by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, the most interesting chapter in this book is found in Chapter 3 in which Gerald Fry analyzed the religion foundation of Thai education. The author pointed out the topic of religion and education as a neglected one. With his experience as a Buddhist monk, he has been able to highlight this chapter as one of the most insightful discussions of the impact of Buddhism and other religions on the development of Thai education, and why Thailand emphasizes “happiness education” and “education for optimal living” as core values of education.

Part II provides a description of contemporary Thai educational system. It covers every levels and types of education from preschool to higher and vocational/technical education as well as non-formal and informal education. Separate chapters were also allotted to topics of autonomous universities and the internationalization of Thai higher education, which are two of the most important policies that have both promising and challenging impacts for the Thai. It is also interesting to read about ‘shadow education’ which has become somewhat a ‘tradition’ for Thai students, and the topic of ‘alternative education’ which also has strong influence in Thai education which are discussed in the first two chapters of Part VI of the book.

Parts III, IV and V deal with the issues of inclusiveness, quality, and accountability of education. As a result of educational massification, Thailand has now faced many quality problems at all levels. The four chapters in Part III provide a critical analysis of the issue of inequalities and disparities, especially Chapter 12 in which Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn discussed inequalities in 15 groups, among others, people in disadvantaged remote areas; people with inadequate funds to study; people with physical or mental disabilities; child laborers, soldiers, and sex workers. Other chapters in Part III deal with educational disparities among regions, educational attainment and the issue of multilingual education. The editor devoted Part IV to the issue of quality in relation to research and development, STEM education and an interesting chapter on the redesigning of teacher education- which is one of the priorities in the ongoing education reform of the country. Part V focuses on educational policy and planning with an emphasis on educational reforms. In this section, past reforms are critically discussed.

The final chapter of Part VI gives an impressive touch for the book with the analysis of paradoxes, trends, challenges, and opportunities of Thai education. As a foreigner who has had a long experience in Thailand and Thai education, the editor has given thoughtful recommendations relating to financing, management and policy, curriculum and instruction, educational assessment and quality assurance, and ‘education beyond government’ which he hopes will enable Thailand to escape the middle income trap and, enhance the quality of its education to ensure its long-term developmental success

I find this book to be comprehensive and insightful. It is impressive that Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn has contributed two chapters in the book. The other 24 Thai and 8 international contributors are all well-known academics and practitioners. It is important to note though that at this moment, Thailand is undergoing another educational reform, but the situation is uncertain due to the recent change of government, where the Ministry of Education was reformed and a new Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation was established. Moreover, a new national educational law has been drafted and many new policies and processes are awaiting to be implemented. It will be interesting to see how this book will relate new educational reforms in Thailand.

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