

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on change and change management in higher education in Thailand, specifically in six Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok during the period 2004-2006. This period was chosen because all Rajabhat Institutes became Rajabhat Universities as a result of the Rajabhat University Act (2004) and the researcher was interested in identifying how Presidents and Vice-Presidents responded to such a transformative change.

Systems thinking, as outlined by Senge (2006), is linked to chaos and complexity theory to provide a theoretical framework to help explain and interpret fieldwork findings in this thesis. These theories suggest new perspectives for thinking about research which includes how people respond to change and how leaders manage change. Change is unpredictable and people who are leading change in higher education have to understand their environment and the impact of change upon the behaviour of their members of staff.

The Change in Change Management in Thai Culture

Before beginning to outline the research conducted for this thesis, it is important to note that the word and concept of change has a strongly charged meaning in Thai culture, which is markedly different from its meaning in most Western cultures. Obviously, this will have an impact on change in the higher education sector.

Generally, Thai people do not like change and as Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2007) point out that the meaning of change “in past-oriented cultures, typical of Asian societies, poses considerable challenges” (Mellahi, Frynas, & Finlay, 2005, p. 327). This concept can be applied to Thai culture and most Thais interpret that change is associated with something bad (Wyatt, 2002). The word ‘change’ in the Thai language is construed with a negative meaning and in an organisation, typically when leaders or managers talk about ‘change,’ employees are likely to feel that

something bad might happen. In Thai culture, people think that no matter what happens, if you are performing well, you do not need to change (Wyatt, 2002).

An important example of how the word ‘change’ is to be avoided in Thai language can be seen from the statement of King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who instead of talking about change, stated that a ‘new theory’ was needed to deal with the financial crisis in 1997. He promoted new guidelines for how the Thai people should think about and manage their lives, but he avoided the use of the word ‘change’ in order to reduce resistance from the prevailing Thai cultural understanding.

In the current research, this resistance to change as a cultural artefact is important to keep in mind. Resistance to change has deep cultural origins and it is anticipated that those leaders who work with the King’s way of communication – talking about the new – rather than speaking about change are likely to have more success than those who ignore historical and cultural tradition.

Numerous educational reforms have been introduced in Thailand since the financial crisis which began in 1997. The first changes were introduced through the National Education Act of 1999, and then in 2004 the Rajabhat University Acts transformed the former Rajabhat Institutes to the status of universities. A case study approach has been adopted to analyse the changes and the change management practices occurring in six of the 40 new Rajabhat Universities, all six located in Bangkok. Systems theory, adapted to explain organisational change in Figure 1.1 shows the environments that have been changed, affecting Thai higher education and the new Rajabhat Universities.

The four major environments that have changed the policies and the strategies of Thai higher education (Figure 1.1) are Western ideas, especially globalisation, the Thailand financial crisis in 1997, which has been affected by the role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Political-legal changes and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

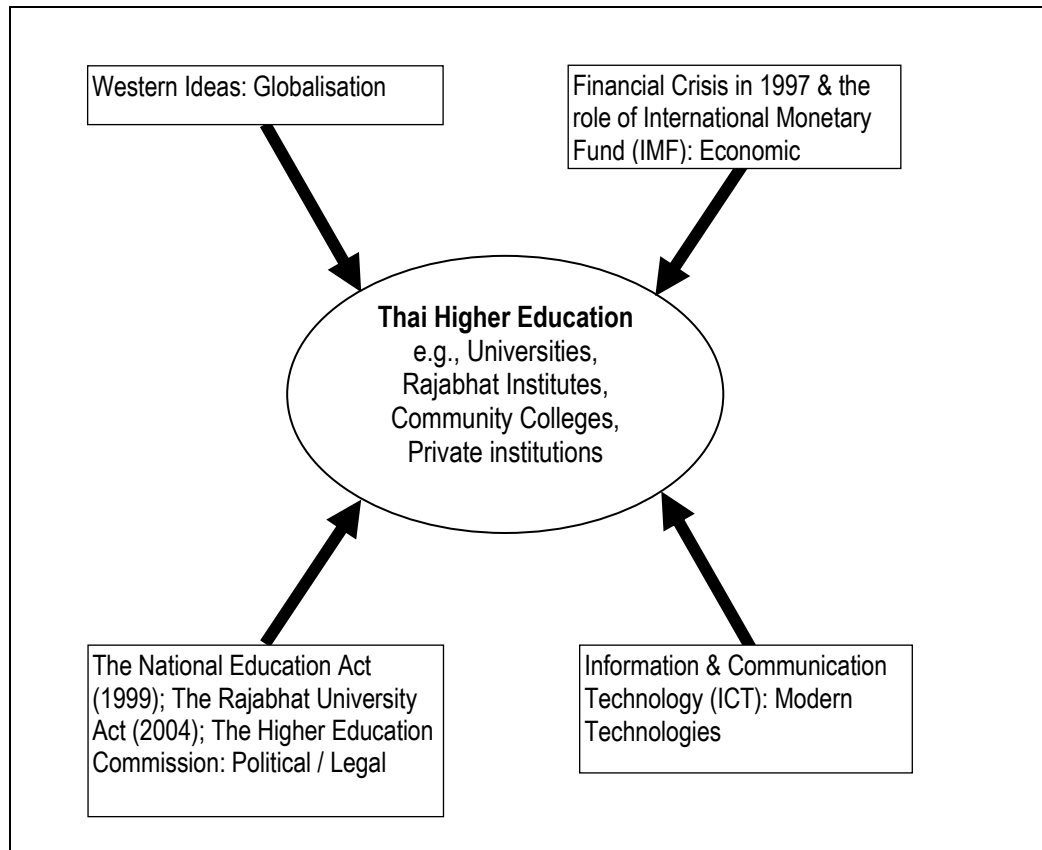


Figure 1.1 Environmental Impact on Thai Higher Education since 1997.

Firstly, Western ideas have influenced Thailand with concepts about a modern education system. English language was recognised by King Mongkut, King Rama IV, in 1851 as the most important language to facilitate communication with Western people (Wyatt, 1969). Learning the English language is not separate from learning Western culture and the influence of Western ideas has been embedded in Thai education since that time.

One example of Western influence on Thai society is that, in 1859, King Mongkut sought an English teacher for his sons and “asked an American medical missionary, Dr. Samuel House, to organize instruction within the palace....In 1862, the well-known Mrs Anna Leonowens was hired to teach English language, science, and literature to Prince Chulalongkorn until 1867” (Wyatt, 1969, p. 37). Leonowens’s book on her experiences in Thailand was made into the Hollywood movie, ‘The King and I.’ King Chulalongkorn did not receive Western ideas only by studying with Western teachers and from English literature, but his education also came from travelling to Europe and other countries. Wyatt (1969) explains that after his trip to Europe, King Chulalongkorn “continued the program of municipal improvements

begun by his father, constructing more streets and modern shops, and he began to change traditional patterns of education” (p. 41).

The introduction of Western style education started within the walls of the Grand Palace in 1870 and after a few years Western style schools and teaching had expanded throughout the kingdom (Wyatt, 1969). Western education has played an important role in Thai society since 1870 (Ratchawqrin, pseud., 1963 as cited in Wyatt, 1969) especially for boys from the upper classes, as explained by Wyatt (1969):

This pattern showed signs of change in the Third Reign, when men, particularly of the nobility, began to seek instruction in foreign languages and sciences from the American missionaries....It was these men who were the first to send Thai students abroad, and it was their sons who were to consider offering to others, in a more systematic manner in Bangkok, the opportunities for modern education which they had so imperfectly been afforded. (p. 64)

Western ideas and Western education have now expanded to every school in Thailand and in higher education. People from every country can contact each other and transfer their knowledge more easily than in the past. Now not only Western ideas, but also global ideas, have influenced the whole kingdom. It had been accepted from the reign of King Chulalongkorn that knowledge was sharing ideas with everyone and learning was not just happening at schools, but everywhere and all the time. Thus, higher education has to understand its role and respond to the new demands of the society.

Secondly, the financial crisis in 1997 overturned the Thai economy. The Thai Government had to ask the IMF for assistance. One of the strategies to assist the economy to recover was to reform education at every level and to decentralise (Fry, 2002). For higher education, there was “flexibility of university operation with universities having their own administrative structure and budgeting system for self-governance and full autonomy, allowing decision making on administrative and management matters of the university to be handled by the university itself” (Thailand. Office of the Education Council, 2006, p. 14).

As well as the policies from the IMF as a path to restore the Thai economy; political reforms were effected, such as the new National Education Act (1999), which mandated education reform, and the Rajabhat University Act (2004), which changed the status of all Rajabhat Institutes to that of universities. These reforms have had an impact on higher education and are the third major factor in Figure 1.1. In response to the government policy, the Office of the Higher Education Commission proposed a roadmap which “consists of measures to enhance the quality of graduates, lecturers, research projects and management of higher education institutions” (Thailand. Office of the Education Council, 2006, p. 71) to serve as guiding principles for promoting and developing the quality of Thai higher education.

Fourthly, the attempt of the government to use the new equipment and ICT adapts new techniques of teaching and learning to create a modern education system. The Internet and computers led to the need to learn and access knowledge from around the world in every Thai higher education institution. With the provision of a World Bank loan in 1998, for the purchase of equipment for Thai public universities; an opportunity was provided to enhance teaching and learning using the latest technology, with the goal of improving undergraduate teaching and research (Miller, Lu, & Thammetar, 2004).

The National Education Act (1999) serves as a basis for reforming higher education in Thailand and the National Information Technology Policy (2001-2010) or IT2010 was set up in 2001 by the National Electronic and Computer Technology Centre under the supervision of the Ministry of Science and Technology. All the higher education institutions in Thailand have been affected by this policy. This policy stipulates five major strategies composed of e-government, e-commerce, e-industry, e-education and e-society. For e-education, it specifies that there needs to be development in:

training teachers; developing content; networking education administration systems; increasing information and communication technology (ICT) usage; and developing ICT infrastructure. In 2003, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of University Affairs established an IT plan for higher education. Each university has provided for IT planning also. The objective of those IT

plans is to encourage and set the guidelines for IT activities. (Miller et al., 2004, p. 93)

The four major factors of environmental impact on Thai higher education have continued until today. The greater the length of time since the implementation of the changes, the greater the numbers of changes that have been made to the universities in Thailand. The economic crisis in 1997, which led to changes in the National Education Act in 1999 and the Rajabhat University Act in 2004, has had an impact on the Thai people and Thai society, with the result that most people understand the new environment in different ways than they did in the past. Universities have adopted a new role to change the Thai people into higher quality workers, enjoying a higher quality of life.

The Significance of this Study

In 2004, the Office of the Higher Education Commission proposed a plan to improve the quality of higher education and to transform existing public institutions into autonomous universities. Rajabhat Universities throughout Thailand have changed their organisational structures and policies in response to the new government policy. It has been accepted that “higher education is essential to human resource development, especially in this era of globalisation, where a country’s international competitiveness depends a great deal on the capacity of its citizens to thrive in a knowledge-based economy and society” (Thailand. Office of the Education Council, 2006, p. 71). However, the change under consideration in this thesis has been a major transformational change which created the new Rajabhat Universities from the former Rajabhat Institutes, which had begun as teachers colleges, with the first one being established in 1892.

Before the Rajabhat University Act (2004) was enacted, every Rajabhat Institute was identical (Thailand. Office of the Prime Minister, 2004). All had the same organisational structure and curriculum. Students, lecturers and staff were able to move and work in any Rajabhat Institute around the country. Every policy had been provided by the Ministry of Education and was under the supervision of the Office of the Rajabhat Institute Council (ORIC). However, when the environment changed and the new Acts were implemented, every Rajabhat University had to adapt itself to the

new system, so that it could achieve its own objectives. Figure 1.2 shows the process of transformational change of the new Rajabhat Universities after 2004.

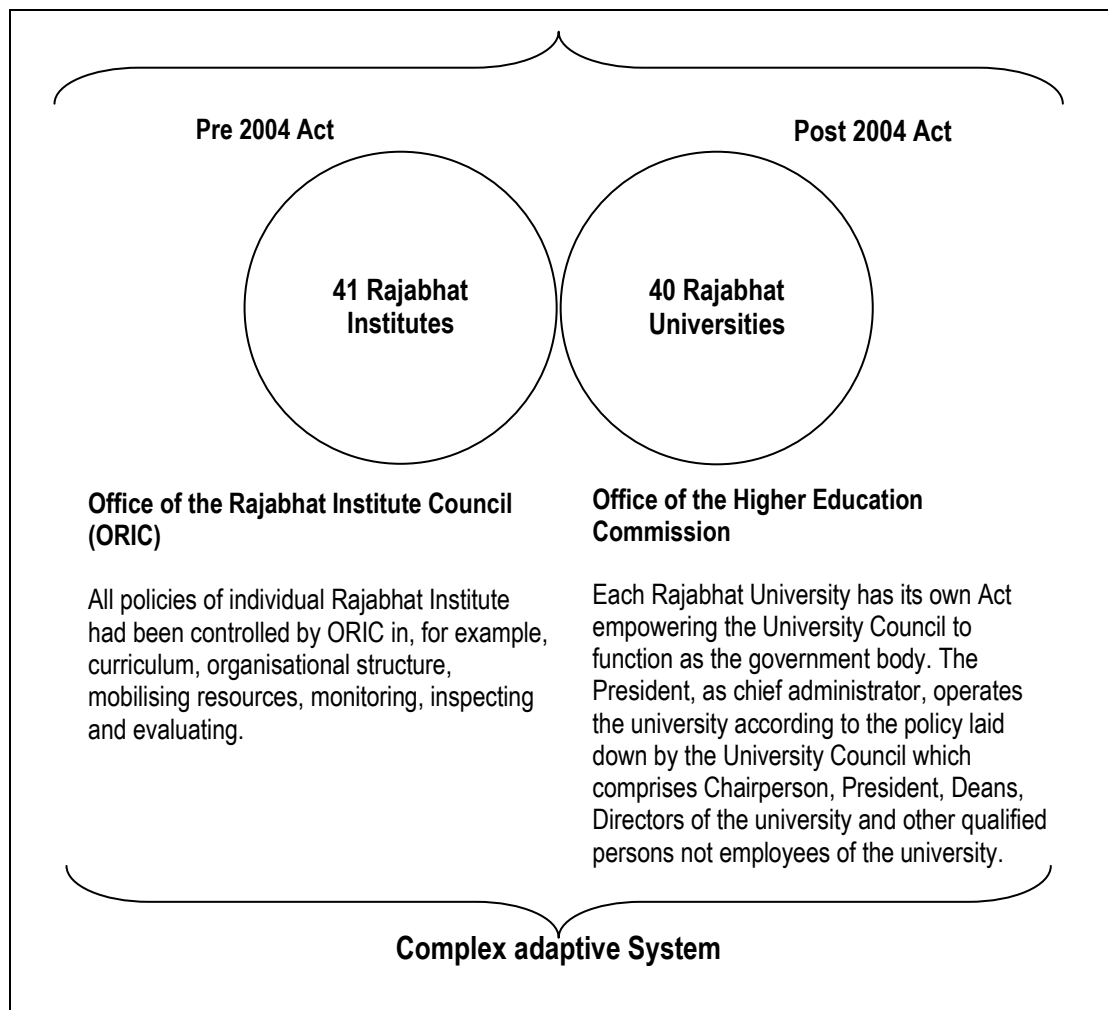


Figure 1.2 Transformational Change from Rajabhat Institute to Rajabhat University.

Figure 1.2 shows the major change of Rajabhat Universities as they reacted to this Act and how they became autonomous universities under the supervision of the Office of the Higher Education Commission. In the Thai context, autonomy is seen as a significant step toward strengthening public higher education institutions so that they will be more accountable to the public, more adaptive to educational and social needs and market demands, and more proactive and dynamic in prioritising their goals, outputs and outcomes.

To understand the way in which the newly created Rajabhat Universities responded to the transformational change can be facilitated by considering each university as a complex adaptive system. Dooley (1997, p.89) writing about complex adaptive systems, concludes as follows:

there is not necessarily a consistent pattern of change. Change may occur rapidly or slowly; it may accumulate linearly or nonlinearly; it may be constant or have bursts of punctuated equilibrium; it may be resisted or encouraged; it may take little or many resources; it may have a profound or no effect on system outcomes.

To consider Rajabhat Universities as complex adaptive system (CAS) can facilitate an understanding of the roles of leadership in the changed higher education environment. The changed qualification requirements of the labour market and the impact of globalisation suggest a new paradigm for leadership is required to manage change in higher educational institutions. “A leadership paradigm that focuses on enabling the learning, creative, and adaptive capacity of CAS within a context of knowledge-producing organizations” (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007, p. 298) will be more beneficial than the old model of leadership.

Changes that have happened within six Rajabhat Universities are consistent with the explanation of Dooley (1997) and organisations are showing potentially chaotic behaviour. The Presidents from six Rajabhat Universities and their senior executives have played important roles in setting priorities and encouraging their staff in the move towards becoming autonomous universities that generate innovations, and address issues of cost-effectiveness, accountability, performance-based assessment, good governance and long-term social and economic development. This study involved interviews with each President and a number of Vice-Presidents from the six Rajabhat Universities in the Bangkok region. The ‘President’ of a university in Thailand would be called a ‘Vice Chancellor’ of a university in Australia.

Research Questions

Change management in higher education in Thailand has been considered as one of the most important factors that will affect the development of the country. However, to understand change and to implement changes are complex issues and the results are unpredictable. In this thesis, three major areas are the foci of this study into change and change management in Rajabhat Universities. The thesis focuses on the way in which the new Rajabhat Universities have changed as a result of the National Education Act (1999) and the Rajabhat Universities Act (2004). In addressing this issue, the following three major questions are posed:

1. How has the National Education Act (1999) and the Rajabhat Universities Act (2004) changed the way the new Rajabhat Universities operate in terms of policies, structures and programmes?
2. How did the senior management team of the new Rajabhat Universities respond to meet the requirements of the Acts? Why did they implement these changes?
3. How will these changes impact on the Rajabhat Universities in the future?

Thai Culture Conditioning to Leadership Styles

Geert Hofstede (1980) conducted research to understand different perspectives of people who live in different countries. He argued that the major concept that makes people interpret things differently is their culture. He wrote:

I define culture as the collective mental programming of the people in an environment. Culture is not a characteristic of individuals; it encompasses a number of people who were conditioned by the same education and life experience. When we speak of the culture of a group, a tribe, a geographical region, a national minority, or a nation, culture refers to the collective mental programming that these people have in common; the programming that is different from that of other groups, tribes, regions, minorities or majorities, or nations. (Hofstede, 1980, p. 43)

Hofstede (1980) explained that culture is difficult to change because it lives in people's minds and it is shared by the group of people. "The core element in culture are 'values'...so management is subject to cultural values. Cultural values differ among societies, but within a society they are remarkably stable over time" (Hofstede, 1999, p. 35). There are four major dimensions of culture that have been discussed in his works: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism-Collectivism, and Masculinity-Femininity.

In the societies that have high Power Distance, the members realise that power is not available for everyone. It is normal that some groups of people are more powerful than others. Hofstede and Bond (1984) suggest that Power Distance refers to societies in which there is an unequal "amount of authority of one person over

others” (p.419). The second dimension is Uncertainty Avoidance, which is labels the situation in which members try to avoid ambiguous situations and serious disagreement or argument. In countries that have been ranked as having a high Uncertainty Avoidance, people are likely to have or show good manners and respect for the feeling of others. The third dimension is Individualism, which is the opposite to Collectivism. Members in the countries that have been labelled as having Individualism “are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family only” (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, p. 419). On the other hand, the countries that have a character of Collectivism are defined as “a situation in which people belong to in-groups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty” (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, p. 419). The last dimension is Masculinity versus Femininity. The members who belong to societies that are examples of Masculinity are controlled by the values of successful hard work, having sound financial security and achieving career goals, which are opposite to the societies that have been recognised as showing Femininity. Members with high Femininity have been led by feelings and concern about the quality of life before other things.

According to Hofstede, Thailand ranks high on Power Distance, high as a Collectivist Culture, high on Uncertainty Avoidance, and high on Femininity. This means that Thai culture accepts that some people have greater authority than others, and Thai people are more concerned about ‘we’ rather than ‘I.’ Moreover, Thai people have a tendency to avoid conflicts and arguments and find that change is an uncomfortable situation (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). Hofstede’s research indicated the importance of maintaining good relationships with people rather than following rules or regulations.

Understanding the roles of leadership and how six Rajabhat Universities respond to change, the four dimensions of national culture were found as a set of criteria whereby the characteristics of leaders can be meaningfully described. Every policy that the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents introduced is related to the perspective of staff and the Thai culture. It is important to consider that Western styles of management are helpful to support change in organisations. However, as Hofstede says the most “important is that ‘management’ is always about people” (Hofstede, 1999, p. 34). If administrators are not able to understand the cultural values of staff they will not achieve the universities’ goals.

Higher Education in Thailand

Higher education in Thailand is recognised as formally beginning in late 1900 when King Rama V, King Chulalongkorn, planned to modernise the country after he had visited many countries in Europe (Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand, 1988). One of his main objectives was to establish formal education and universities throughout Thailand. Due to the lack of highly educated professionals in, for example, law, medicine and engineering, professional knowledge had not been taught to the same standards as Europe (Thailand. National Identity Board, 2000). The first university, established in 1917, was given the name Chulalongkorn University, and is the best-known university in Thailand (Thailand. Office of the Education Council, 2006). Most Thais regard the quality of students and standard of teaching in this university as being very high.

After the political transformation in 1932, when a national constitution was developed and an elected government was set up, more universities were established namely, Thammasat University in 1933, and Mahidol University, Kasetsart University, and Silpakorn University in 1942. Later, when Thailand developed a policy to expand higher education for people in regional areas, three provincial universities were set up: Chang Mai (1964), Khon Kaen (1964), and Prince of Songkhla (1967). During the 1970s and 1980s, more universities were established, such as the National Institution of Development Administration (NIDA), King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, and Srinakharinwirot University (Thailand. National Identity Board, 2000). These universities play an important role in developing the nation and raising the number of Thai people who graduate from universities each year, increasing Thailand's intellectual and skills capital.

King Rama V, King Chulalongkorn, also created Phranakhon Teachers College, which opened in 1892, before any universities were established (Phranakhon Rajabhat University, 2005). King Chulalongkorn wanted to give all Thais a chance to study, regardless of their economic and social status by creating teachers colleges to train more teachers for the nation. By 1995, 36 teachers colleges had been established throughout Thailand. In 1995 the teachers colleges became known as Rajabhat Institutes (Thailand. Office of the National Education Commission, 2001a) and additional degree programmes in management science, science, engineering and

arts were introduced to broaden the opportunities for people to gain a higher education.

The present King of Thailand, King Bhumibol Adulyadej gave the name ‘Rajabhat’ to every ‘Teachers College’ in Thailand, emphasising that ‘Rajabhat’ means the people that belong to the King and the King always looks after his people. If you serve the King, you also have an obligation to serve the people (Phranakhon Rajabhat University, 2005). These institutes became universities in 2004. Today there are 40 Rajabhat Universities in Thailand, of which six are located in Bangkok. The objective of all Rajabhat Universities is to develop local wisdom and provide the necessary skills for students to become productive members of their society (Sangnapaboworn, 2003). Together with other higher education institutions in Thailand, Rajabhat Universities have been radically changed from single-purpose teacher education institutions to multi-faculty universities and have to cope with a new decentralised decision-making environment.

The Office of the Higher Education Commission is responsible for the standards and quality of all the higher education institutions in Thailand (Thailand. Office of the Education Council, 2004b). Every plan that has been formulated for the higher educational institutions has to follow the government’s policies, National Economic Social Development Plan and National Education Plan. Especially, the Ninth Higher Education Plan (2002-2006) states that four major strategies will be implemented by every Higher Education Institution: (1) building up the capacity of higher education institutions to reach quality at an international level by relying on local Thai wisdom; (2) supporting and providing opportunities for sustainable academic strengths in higher education; (3) creating a network of higher education institutions to enhance stability in communities and localities; and (4) restructuring organisations of higher education administration and management for quality and efficiency (Thailand. Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2007).

Currently, there are 163 higher education institutions in Thailand. The main objective of every higher education institution is “to produce Thai citizens who are of high quality both academically and professionally, equipped with knowledge and skills needed for national development” (Thailand. Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2007, p. 9). However, all the 163 higher education institutions can be

separated into the two major types of institutions, shown in Table 1.1. There are 96 institutions called ‘Public Higher Education’ and 67 institutions called ‘Private Higher Education.’ Rajabhat Universities are called ‘Public University’ and are supervised by the Office of the Higher Education Commission.

Table 1.1 Directory of Thai Higher Education Institutions.

96 Public Higher Education Institutions	67 Private Higher Education Institutions
20 Limited Admission Universities and Institutions 2 Open Admission Universities 4 Autonomous Universities 2 Buddhist Universities 40 Rajabhat Universities 9 Rajamangala Universities of Technology 1 Pathumwan Institute of Technology 18 Community Colleges	

Education at every level of Thai society is playing an important role in transforming Thailand into a learning society with a knowledge-based economy (Sangnapaboworn, 2003). Schools and universities are required to adjust their knowledge and practices, i.e. the way they teach people. The government wanted to use Rajabhat Universities to encourage students from a lower economic status background to acquire more skills and to increase their income. However, the government did not have sufficient financial resources to support each Rajabhat University at the previous level to improve their knowledge and equipment for teaching and learning. Every Rajabhat University is now more autonomous, but has to increase its revenue and performance to compete with other universities in Thailand (Thailand. Office of the Education Council, 2004b). It is a problem for every Rajabhat University to find solutions to these issues.

Much government funding is linked to the number of students enrolling at the Rajabhat Universities. If enrolments are to be increased, recruitment strategies must aim to widen access for every student to have a chance to go to university. In Thailand, Rajabhat Universities are the second choice for students who cannot gain entry to Chulalongkorn University or other longer established universities. There are also some effects when the students graduate, in that they are disadvantaged in the

labour market relative to Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University graduates who have applied for the same jobs. From the problems described above, it can be seen that Rajabhat Universities have become the group of universities that will face trouble in the near future, if they do not develop effective strategies to improve their reputations.

In 2006 a new student-loan scheme, Income Contingency Loan (ICL) was introduced in every higher educational institution in Thailand. The main concept of ICL focused on helping students who could not afford university fees. ICL is available to all students and it is an interest-free loan. There are no restrictions on the amount that each student can borrow, it depends on the tuition fees for a particular program offered at any university (Thailand. Government Public Relations Department, 2005). This means that students are permitted to borrow large sums to attend private universities if they wish. The stated intention of this measure was to encourage universities to offer interesting subjects and create greater competition for students. This had an adverse impact on Rajabhat Universities, which charged lower fees, because many students opted for higher cost alternatives. Under the ICL scheme “students need to pay back if they exceed an income threshold is tied to the consumer price index. Thus, the total amount of money students need to pay back is less contingent upon their future incomes” (Savatsomboon, 2004). It can be seen that the ICL programme will provide more opportunities and options to students regardless of their income status to access to the higher education institutions which are responding to their standards and requirements.

In 2002, the Ministry of University Affairs attempted to move public institutions out of a government bureaucratic system to become more autonomous. Autonomous universities would have a more flexible funding allocation, competitive personnel management and greater accountability for higher education quality (Thailand. Office of the National Education Commission, 2001b). The staff would be hired on a contractual basis with the status of employees (Thailand. Office of the Prime Minister, 2004). They are no longer given the status of government officers and do not receive the same benefits and pension funds, as was the case in the past.

There are many government officers who already work in these universities who feel worried and disagree with these policies, but the government has given the reason

that when the universities' managements have adjusted to the new environment; they will have increased flexibility to provide a higher quality of employment for their staff. It has been argued that such changes in the practice and nature of their employment will lead to increased salaries and benefits (Thailand. Office of the National Education Commission, 2002).

The noted policy changes have had a large impact on the attitudes of the Thai people. In Thai society it is believed that working for the government provides secure, life-long employment (Mulder, 1996). Government officers are mostly people who have been used to working within these organisations until they retire (Thailand. Office of the Prime Minister, 2004). They have seen this as a lifetime career and do not expect to lose their jobs, so long as they do nothing wrong, and the organisations do not become bankrupt. Many university employees, presently government officers, are concerned about the effects of this new employment policy on their careers (Sundarasaradula, Hasan, Walker, & Tobias, 2005).

To further complicate and increase competition among higher education providers, many foreign universities from developed countries look at Thailand as a big market to expand their student base (Thailand. Office of the Education Council, 2004a). Many countries have staff with more advanced skills in teaching and learning than the staff in Thai universities (Sangnapaboworn, 2003). This situation will make Thai universities pay more consideration as to how they construct plans to achieve their future strategic objectives (Thailand. Office of the National Education Commission, 2000).

Recent Education Reform in Thailand

In this section, recent reforms in Thai education will be discussed with reference to the higher education sector and the establishment of the new Rajabhat Universities. The Education Reform Act of 1999 was a wide-ranging act, which emphasised government support for nine years of basic education for all, and the concept of life-long learning (Thailand. Office of the National Education Commission, 2001a). This Act affected all levels of education in Thailand. The Rajabhat University Act of 2004 related specifically to the conversion of the existing 41 Rajabhat Institutes into

autonomous universities designed to serve the local community (Thailand. Office of the Education Council, 2004b).

The National Education Act (1999)

Three principles underpin this Act: the provision of lifelong education, the participation of the community in every level of education, and the continuing development of knowledge and learning processes (Thailand. Office of the National Education Commission, 2002). Section Nine of the National Education Act (1999) provides a master plan to reorganise the structure of all higher education institutions (Thailand. Office of the National Education Commission, 2003). In Section Nine of the Act, mention is made of unity in policy and diversity in implementation, decentralisation of authority to educational service areas, educational institutions and local administration organisations, and the setting of educational standards and the implementation of a system of quality assurance for all levels and all types of education (Thailand. Office of the Education Council, 2006).

To ensure the quality of the academic programmes offered, The National Education Act (1999) required all Thai educational institutions to implement a system of quality assurance. Every year the Office of the Higher Education Commission makes visits to assess the quality of all universities to ensure improvement of their educational quality and standards. Every university has to submit annual reports to the Office of the Higher Education Commission and make these reports available to the public for the purpose of improving the educational quality and standards and for the external quality assurance process (Thailand. Office of the Education Council, 2006).

The Rajabhat University Act (2004)

After June 2004, all the Rajabhat Institutes which were established under the Rajabhat Institute Act (1995) became Rajabhat Universities. This legislative change meant that all the Rajabhat Universities became independent and were able to develop their own administration and management systems. Prior to this Act, Rajabhat Institutes had been centrally controlled through a Council which set the policies, the staffing levels and conditions of employment, the budget and the curriculum. The previous centralisation of authority meant that all 41 Rajabhat

Institutes were similar throughout Thailand (Thailand. Office of the Prime Minister, 2004), having identical administrative structures and the same curriculum.

Section Seven of the Rajabhat University Act (2004) specifies that the main purposes and responsibilities of all the Rajabhat Universities are that they are to be institutions for local development, to maintain Thai arts and culture, and to provide lessons, research, and academic services to society. This general idea from the Act has been implemented in every Rajabhat University and has changed the ways they provide education and service to their local communities (Thailand. Office of the Prime Minister, 2004). According to the Rajabhat University Act (2004), each Rajabhat University can develop their own administration and management system, with academic liberty and greater freedom in making financial decisions. The Presidents and the Vice-Presidents play an important role in implementing this Act.

The Rajabhat University Act (2004), Section Seven, states:

The University is an institute of higher education for local development in order to help reinforce national intelligence, revive the learning force, promote local wisdom, create artistry for secure and sustainable prosperity of the people, take part in managing, maintaining, utilising natural resources and environment on balance and sustention basis under the objectives of providing education, enhancing advanced knowledge and professionalism, providing lessons, researching, providing academic services to society, improving, transferring and developing technology, maintaining arts and culture, generating teachers and enhancing the academic standing of teachers. (Thailand. Office of the Prime Minister, 2004, p. 2)

Every Rajabhat University has adopted the Rajabhat University Act (2004) as the master plan for their policies and their objectives. However, each Rajabhat University has been implementing the Rajabhat University Act (2004) in different ways and they all believe that they are doing the correct and appropriate things for their universities. Rajabhat Universities were given a high level of autonomy and were able to interpret the new policies in a number of different ways, which included creating a variety of projects and activities, depending on their resources and their expertise. The most common change was to empower more people to make decisions

by devolving authority from the former National Council to the President, the Vice-Presidents and the deans.

In the first year after the Rajabhat institutes became universities, new faculties were created and the number of students increased. If they had not decentralised, they would not have been able to compete and provide a good quality education service, as did the more established universities. Decisions about which changes to introduce needed to be made quickly, so that it was very important for each President to have a senior executive team whose members could contribute to the decision-making process.

My Role in the Study

The researcher is a lecturer who has worked in one of the six case studies Rajabhat Universities for 11 years. This experience has provided considerable background information and insights into the operation of these higher education institutions. It is difficult for someone who comes to the topic as an outsider to have the opportunity to interview the six Presidents and their Vice-Presidents, because they are very busy people and they do not want to give any opinion to anybody that they do not trust or do not know.

The Presidents are typically the busiest people in every Rajabhat University, because they are involved in all decision making and they are members of every committee, and have responsibility for every project. The researcher has the experience of working with the President and the Vice-Presidents of one Rajabhat University and also has had the opportunity to work with the former head of the Office of the Rajabhat Institute Council (ORIC).

In order to gain permission to interview the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents of six Rajabhat Universities, the researcher had to contact the former head of the Office of the Rajabhat Institute Council (ORIC) and ask him to send a letter to introduce the researcher and the purpose of this thesis. It might have been impossible if the researcher did not have those letters to use as the key to access to the leaders. It is complicated to explain the system of relationships and the feeling of trust within Thai society. However, it can be said that to complete the interview and gain access to the all important documents of each Rajabhat University it was necessary to know

someone who has the power and is respected by the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents of the Rajabhat Universities.

Thai culture and Thai tradition played an important role in gaining cooperation from the six Rajabhat Universities. There are many special techniques to gain access to all the information that was required in this thesis, which is different from conducting research in other countries. It was important that the researcher understood the Thai language and the Thai style of etiquette. The Presidents and the Vice-Presidents of six Rajabhat Universities are not only powerful people in higher educational institutions, but also have the experience to use political and complex language when they are interviewed. If the interviewers came from a different cultural background, they might not understand the subtleties of meaning of the words spoken in the interview.

Theoretical Approach

A systems framework, together with chaos theory, is used to provide a focus for this thesis. Many studies investigate human behaviour in organisations by using metatheories. Bunge (1999, p. 178) explains that “metatheoretical assumptions are the nutriment for reflections upon theories.” The researchers focus on the whole phenomenon and human behaviour to understand the problematic of the organisations.

Metatheories in this sense are not theories, as such, relating to an empirical (real) object of investigation like enterprise, management behavior, or market transactions, but come into play at an earlier stage. Looked at generally, a metatheory is a collection of fundamental assumptions on which the investigation of research and technological problems is based. (Reihlen, Klaas-Wissing, & Ringberg, 2007, p. 49)

Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1973) introduced the concept of general systems theory which attempts to explain phenomena in both the natural and social sciences. To understand organisations, such as a university, it is important to apply the concept of systems thinking and its characteristics.

Each Rajabhat University has its own function and organisational structure, which is different from the others and is referred to as one system. “A system is a thing with

mutually interrelated parts called subsystems. Each subsystem affects the others, and each in turn depends upon the whole” (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006, pp. 37-38). Six Rajabhat Universities are the entities that the researcher takes as the phenomena of interest. Each of the six Rajabhat Universities is referred to as a system, and the faculties in each are the subsystems. However, Hatch and Cunliffe (2006, p.38) explain that “any whole is greater than the sum of its parts and the essence of a whole can only be discovered when the system is confronted on its own terms.” In this thesis, there are many factors which the Presidents cannot identify and cannot control (e.g., the behaviour of their staff and administrators), and these factors are related to change and change management.

A number of different points of view on which each President and the Vice-President have based their new policies have been described in the study. What is an appropriate method for investigating and understanding the behaviour of people in a time of change? “Should we see the freedom of the individual (maximization of individual benefit) or his/her responsibility to the community at large (maximization of collective benefit) as the primary goal of socio-economic action?” (Reihlen et al., 2007, p. 50)

There are two major theories that have been used to explain human behaviour in organisations. They are usually called ‘individualism’ or ‘holism’ to reflect their individualist or holistic perspective. However, each of them approaches the issues in different ways and it will be more beneficial to understand organisations and people by combining these two theories. The new theory that integrates the two approaches is called ‘systemism’ which is defined as “a socio-cognitive approach that enables management researchers to envision the synthesis of individualism and holism within a coherent and internally consistent theoretical framework” (Reihlen et al., 2007, pp. 50-51).

The philosophy of Mario Bunge (1996) has been used to explain the emerging alternative new theory which is called a systems approach that enables researchers to “envision the synthesis of individualism and holism within a coherent and internally consistent theoretical framework” (Reihlen et al., 2007, p. 51). Bunge (2000) explains why a systems approach is necessary for social researchers to understand the behaviour of organisations:

Individualism is deficient because it underrates or even overlooks the bonds among people, and holism because it plays down or even enslaves individual action. By contrast, systemism takes room for both agency and structure. Moreover, it emphasizes the role of the environment, and suggests studying or altering the mechanism of both social stasis and social change. (p. 156)

In this study, systems theory has been applied in order to understand the situations in six Rajabhat Universities and how they responded to changes. It can be seen that everything has been related and individuals are part of the whole organisation. Bunge (2000) suggests that a systems concept supports the components of social systems and that managers should analyse their problems in a systemic way, rather than as independent issues and that all solutions should be combined into systems.

There are four major reasons that explain why a systems approach, complemented by chaos theory, has been used as a theoretical framework in this study. Firstly, chaos theory is used to explain changing phenomena without imposing a static structure. In a real situation, researchers cannot control every variable in order to define and understand what is happening. It can be demonstrated in this study that six Rajabhat Universities have changed in different ways, even though they are influenced by the same Acts and that they had the same history and philosophy before they became universities.

Secondly, human behaviour is complex and understanding about change in organisations, organisational development and how people change their minds involves much qualitative analysis and draws implications for qualitative inquiry. Patton (2002) suggests that chaos theory provides a means by which it is possible to learn how to observe, describe and value complexity in human settings.

Thirdly, in chaos theory, a small factor or minute events can make a serious impact or critical difference to the whole organisation of changes (Patton, 2002). Six Rajabhat Universities have changed because of the Rajabhat University Act (Thailand. Office of the Prime Minister, 2004). There are, however, more reasons than the Act that made them change. Chaos theorists call it ‘the butterfly effect,’ because small events or insignificant factors can affect the whole organisation or make a critical difference in the future. Gleick (1987) compares the situation where a butterfly flapping its wings in Beijing can cause a tornado in New York in the

following year. The relationships between different elements of a system are nonlinear.

Finally, in order to explain change and change management in higher education in Thailand there is one factor that needs to be considered. It is the important variable of leadership. The six Rajabhat Universities have changed considerably, because they all have leaders who can manage change and who have sufficient skill and experience to make change happen. After all the Rajabhat Institutes became universities, the Presidents of those universities played an important role in changing their respective educational institutions to become different kinds of universities. They are powerful people who can persuade and motivate their staff to perform in the manner that they want.

This thesis investigates how current operations can be reconciled with the low student fee levels forced on Rajabhat Universities in the new socio-political environment in Thailand. Rajabhat Universities need to manage limited resources more effectively and efficiently, concentrating on input and output analysis, revenues and expenses, and course initiatives in order to maximise benefits from the new environment.

Research Methodology

The research approach adopted in this thesis is qualitative. Change and change management is studied in the actual settings of six Rajabhat Universities. The six universities are studied as six individual case studies, but similarities and differences between the universities will be identified. The data for this study were obtained through interviews with university Presidents and Vice-Presidents, as well as by analysis of reports and documents of the universities, the Ministry of Education, the National Education Act (1999) and other documents related to Rajabhat Universities.

The six Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok, Thailand have been chosen because they are closely located geographically and are partners in the Office of the Rajabhat Universities Council (ORUC), in which they collaborate to provide information about how they have responded to the National Education Act (1999) and the Rajabhat University Act (2004). This thesis focuses on change policies and practices

that have occurred and how the Rajabhat Universities plan to survive in the new milieu of higher educational reform in Thailand.

A multiple case study approach has been adopted because, as Yin (2003) suggests, “the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries” (p. 2). In this study, the researcher has no control over events. The focus is on the actual situations and the problems that exist in six Rajabhat Universities, and the questions that are addressed in this research are likely to lead to the generation of robust answers. For these reasons, it was decided to apply the case study methodology in order to understand what has been happening in six Rajabhat Universities and how they handle their new environments.

The main source of data used in this study is derived from interviews conducted with administrators from the six Rajabhat Universities. Pattern-matching will explain the relationship of the data to the core research questions developed as the basis of this study (e.g., policies of the Rajabhat’s administrators, National Education Act, 1999), and analysis of documents will be matched to data gathered in interviews with Rajabhat administrators. Similarly, reports generated from the government and outsiders about management and policies will be cross-matched and correlated with both documentary analysis and interview data. This triangulation process will strengthen the findings from individual participating parties.

The case studies are limited in size. Nevertheless, a smaller sample size allows the researcher to develop a depth of analysis of the issues (Merriam, 1998) of change and change management. In response to Yin’s (2003) suggestion, the case studies will collect data from multiple sources in a way that can be correlated. The use of documents, interviews, the National Education Act (1999) and the Rajabhat University Act (2004) will allow the researcher to establish relationships between management plans, management operations and management documentation. Finally, the key findings of the study will permit participants to review the findings and provide a reference of value to the Rajabhat Universities, other Thai universities and the Thai Government.

In this research, interviewing is the main method employed to find out the ways that administrators think about their Rajabhat Universities, what they plan or prepare for the future and how they interpret the policies they have been given by the Thai Government. The benefits of using interviews can be seen from Patton (2002) who states that, “we cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things” (p. 341).

Ethical Considerations

There are some ethical considerations that need to be addressed in this study. Firstly, there are considerations about informed consent. Neuman (2003) states that “a fundamental ethical principle of social research is: never coerce anyone into participation; participation must be voluntary” (p. 124). In this research, every participant received statements in English and Thai that informed them of the procedures and research questions, and in the informed consent statement there was a brief description of the purpose, a guarantee of anonymity, and the confidentiality of records. As well as this, the participants were permitted to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty or prejudice. The interviews were conducted in Thai and analysed in Thai. The analyses of interview transcripts were translated into English.

Finally, after the researcher had collected this information, it is important that this information was made available to the participants, universities, institutions, the public and the Thai Government. The researcher is aware of these requirements and will ensure that methods and outcomes are clearly stated to all participants. All aspects of the study were approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney and all ethical requirements were met at all times.

Structure of the Thesis

There are six chapters in this thesis. The first chapter is the **Introduction** which contains the background information, the purpose and significance of the study, as well its ethical issues. The second chapter is the **Review of Literature**, which reviews the recent research and theory, especially systems theory, chaos theory, change and change management, and leadership dimensions. The third chapter is the **Methodology** that has been used in this thesis, focusing on qualitative research

methods and using interviewing as the main source of data collection. The fourth chapter is **Data Interpretation and analysis from Case Studies**, which is written as six case studies from six Rajabhat Universities and a summary of each case study under the same themes. The fifth chapter is **Data Synthesis**, which synthesises the data collected, with the same headings and themes as written in Chapter Four. The last chapter is the **Conclusion**, which summarises the main findings and provides answers to the research questions and the opportunities for further research.