

Teaching international relations in Thailand: status and prospects

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Abstract

International relations (IR) as it is taught in Thailand possesses developmental characteristics that have curbed its growth in the past. Through a combination of institutional and trend analyses, it will be argued that IR teaching in Thailand is at a turning point where externally driven developments are compelling a certain level of professionalization and engagement with global debates.

International relations (IR) emerged as a field of study in Thailand following the establishment of Faculties of Political Science at both Chulalongkorn and Thammasat Universities about 60 years ago. This occasions reflection upon the state of the field. This article thus takes up that task exploring various aspects of IR studies in Thailand. Structured into three parts, the article starts with a review of the development of IR studies, discussing the characteristics of teaching institutions, lecturers and students, as well as assessing the popularity of the field. Then, it

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investigates both old and new approaches employed in teaching and research. The article concludes by indicating some problems and prospects of IR studies in Thailand.

1 The development of IR studies

How has the subject of international relations been developed in Thailand? This section addresses this question by examining teaching institutions, the popularity of IR, as well as the status of IR lecturers and students.

1.1 *Teaching institutions*

The field of IR in Thailand was initially developed to train students to serve as diplomats in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). This is similar to most fields of higher education in Thailand that aimed primarily to serve the bureaucracy. It is no surprise that IR has been regarded as a major schooling avenue for ‘diplomacy’ even today.

International Relations studies first appeared in Thailand not long after World War II. In 1948, the very first IR course started with the birth of the Faculty of Political Science at Chulalongkorn University. In the early days, IR studies at Chulalongkorn were established under the auspices of the ‘Department of International Affairs and Diplomacy’. Later on, in the 1970s, its name was changed to ‘Department of International Relations’. In 1949, Thammasat University also established its Faculty of Political Science, offering a master’s degree in ‘International Affairs and Diplomacy’. Many prominent guest lecturers were invited to teach, including Prince Wanwaitayakorn, the founder of the MFA, and Thanat Khoman, who later became foreign minister and played an instrumental role in founding ASEAN in 1967 (Wichien, 2000, p. 52). Though it had been taught at the graduate level for many years, IR was taught as an undergraduate major subject only in 1959 under the label of ‘International Relations Section’. Later on, it was renamed as the ‘International Affairs Section’, in order to be consistent with the title of the master’s degree.¹

¹ Unlike Chulalongkorn, the Faculty of Political Science at Thammasat is not divided into separate departments with distinct legal identities. Thus, the term ‘section’, and not ‘department’, is used.

Other major IR departments were founded at Ramkhamhaeng Open University in 1973 and Sukhothai Open University in 1982. By that time, the studies of Political Science were already well established in Thai higher education, featuring three fields – Government, Public Administration, and International Relations. This was a significant indication of Political Science's popularity in Thailand.

It is notable that all of these universities are located in Bangkok. For major provincial universities, Political Science itself had been a field of study for a minor degree. At Chiang Mai (in the North), Khon Kaen (Northeast), and Prince of Songkla (South), Political Science was not initially established as an independent Faculty, but only existed as a small section within the Faculty of Social Science.² Although the Political Science Section at Chiang Mai University is quite well known, it focuses more on Government and Public Administration; its original aim was to produce administrators for the bureaucracy. It was only within the past 10 years that Political Science was separated into independent Faculties at Chiang Mai and Prince of Songkla Universities. In line with this trend, Mahasarakham University in the Northeast only established the College of Politics and Governance in 2003. In short, IR is mostly concentrated in the capital, revealing the characteristics of elite education.

It is particularly notable that the founder of the Faculty of Political Science at Thammasat and its first Dean was Direk Jayanama, the Thai Foreign Minister during World War II. Upon setting up the Faculty, Direk looked for inspiration at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Harvard University, as well as Chulalongkorn University. While LSE and Harvard emphasized academic training, Chulalongkorn focused on training students to serve the bureaucracy. Direk thus geared Political Science at Thammasat toward a middle ground between professional (bureaucrat) and academic training. (Direk, 2000, pp. 14–16) As noted by Nakharin Mektrairat, the current Dean of Thammasat Political Science, Direk developed Political Science in the liberal tradition, aiming to create 'civilians', rather than 'national subjects', for the development of democracy (Nakharin, 2000, pp. 68–71).

2 This is also true for Kasetsart University, another major university in Bangkok, at which Political Science remains only a section in the Faculty of Social Science.

Having been foreign minister and ambassador for a long period, Direk had a personal interest in developing the field of IR. He thus set up a Diplomacy Section and wrote many IR books, which later became classic readings in Thailand, including *Diplomacy* and *International Relations*. Direk designed the curriculum to include a broad range of courses, including history, economics, and law. Foreign language training was also compulsory (Direk, 2000, p. 16). In the development of the Faculty, Thammasat received assistance from the Fulbright Foundation, which both provided scholarships for lecturer development and sent experts to dispense academic advice (Thammasat Pol. Sci. website, 2008).

At Chulalongkorn too, the IR curriculum also saw a shift in the balance between professional and academic training. According to Kusuma Snitwongse, an emeritus IR professor at Chulalongkorn, the objectives of IR teaching in Thailand are twofold. First, it aims to generate understanding and analytical skills in the Liberal Arts fashion. Second, it aims to prepare professionals for careers in international affairs, especially diplomats in the MFA. Thus, IR teaching has been carried out with a mixture of both goals (Supamit, 2008, p. 65).

In the early days, those who joined MFA tended to come from well-established families. IR came to be regarded among the public as 'elite education'. As mentioned earlier, the concentration of major IR departments in the capital Bangkok further reinforced the image of IR as an elite project. The recruitment numbers for MFA officers are nonetheless low, selection being highly restrictive. Rather than IR, most Political Science students prefer majoring in either Government or Public Administration, as these fields are perceived to help them land a job more easily. It is quite a popular aspiration among graduates to join the Ministry of the Interior as local district administrators, with the long-term ambition to become governors, as they climb up their career ladders.³ Those who join the private sector tend to work in either personnel or general affairs departments.

Accordingly, IR is a minority field in Political Science, given the dominance of Government and Public Administration majors in most universities all over the country. This is evident in Table 1. IR exists as a major

3 Except for the capital of Bangkok, governors in Thailand are appointed by the Ministry of the Interior.

Table 1 Number of political science lecturers in major Thai universities by section

University	International relations	Government	Public administration	Total
Chulalongkorn	16	18	14	48
Thammasat	13	14	13	40
Chiang Mai	7	9	12	28
Ramkhamhaeng	16	20	24	60
Sukhothai	6	9	—	15
Prince of Songkla (Pattani Campus)	4	7	3	14
Maharakham	6	12	8	26
Total	68	89	74	231

Data are compiled by the author from interviews and private communication with IR lecturers in various universities and through websites (www.polsci.chula.ac.th, www.polsci.tu.ac.th, www.ru.ac.th, www.msu.ac.th).

only in a handful of universities, namely Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Ramkhamhaeng, Sukhothai and, more recently, Chiang Mai. Among approximately 70 higher education institutions teaching Political Science in Thailand, the teaching is dominated by Public Administration, which is considered as the field that has broader occupational applications.

Ironically, it is always the case that IR requires higher entrance examination scores than majors in Government and Public Administration. This is due to the limited supply of institutions offering IR as a major. There are only seven universities in Thailand that have Political Science Faculty. Among them, it is only Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, and Ramkhamhaeng that have substantial numbers of IR lecturers (16, 13, and 16 lecturers, respectively). This imbalance is evident in Table 1.

As shown above, IR lecturers are outnumbered by those in the fields of Government and Public Administration. Out of the total number of 231 lecturers in major universities, only 68 are in IR, whereas those in Government and Public Administration amount to 89 and 74, respectively. While Government lecturers occupy almost 40% of the total number of Political Science lecturers, only 29% represent IR lecturers. Though many other universities have Political Science lecturers subsumed under other Faculties like Sociology, the number is small; even among them, their specialization tend to be predominantly Public Administration rather than IR per se. This is particularly true for 46

Rajabhat Universities (former teaching colleges) nationwide, many of which recently opened their graduate programs in Public Administration. Since the market for mid-career training in administration and management is booming for both public and private sectors, such programs have become lucrative businesses for many Thai universities. Some of these universities even offer Ph.D. studies in Public Administration. In short, IR has existed somewhat in the shadow of Government and Public Administration departments.

1.2 *The popularity of IR*

As it has been argued earlier, IR appears to be less popular among the general public, in comparison with the academic profile of Government and Public Administration. The popularization of IR as a field of study only took off in the late 1990s, when IR became preeminent among students taking entrance examinations. Entrance examination scores are in fact a good indicator for gauging the popularity of any field of study.

Traditionally, while medicine and engineering are the most difficult Faculties for high school students from the science program to gain entry to, the highest entrance examination score for arts program students belonged to the Faculty of Arts, mostly offering Language and Literature studies. From the late 1980s until the late 1990s, the top position in popularity was occupied by the Faculty of Journalism, thanks to the growth of the mass media following industrialization and the economic boom. Around the turn of the century, the highest score was held briefly by IR. The limited intakes of Political Science in general and IR major in particular (less than 100 students a year at Chulalongkorn and Thammasat) also contributed to the high-score requirement. More recently, the Faculty of Law came to be very popular due to the increasingly legal approach in politics and economics following the Asian Financial Crisis. The Faculty of Arts later regained its top post. Though the apex of IR did not last that long, it has always been in the league of Faculties highly favored by students. Most importantly, within the same Faculty of Political Science, the required scores for entry into the IR major are always higher than those in Government and Public Administration.

Figures 1 and 2 reveal the entrance examination scores of top-ranked Faculties in the social sciences and humanities at Chulalongkorn University during 2000–2003 and 2006–2008, respectively. Chulalongkorn

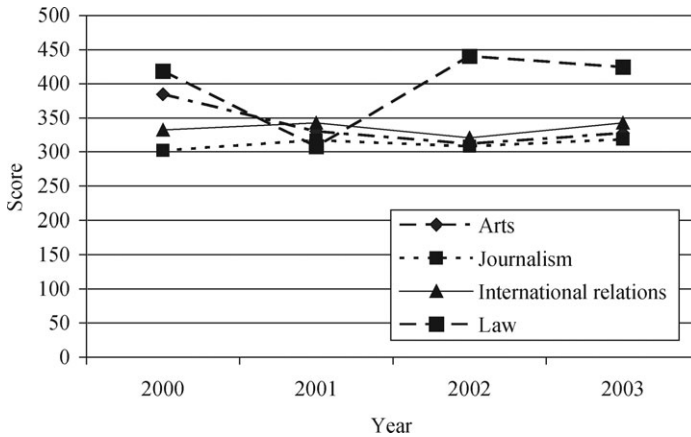


Figure 1 Chulalongkorn's entrance examination scores 2000–2003 (Commission for Higher Education, 2008).

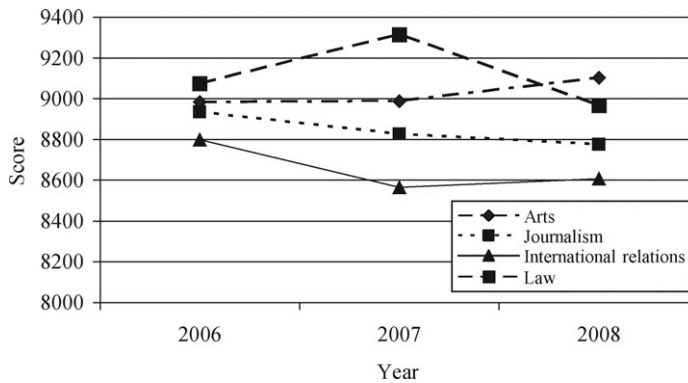


Figure 2 Chulalongkorn's entrance examination scores 2006–2008 (Commission for Higher Education, 2008).

is treated as a representative sample in this instance, since any Faculty there tends to require the highest scores among all Thai universities. The score scales in the two periods differ due to a change in scoring systems. The entrance exam scores for IR reached a peak in 2001, the year of the events of 9/11 in the United States. More recently, Arts and Law are competing for the top spot.

The boom in IR can largely be explained by the increasing awareness of international issues among students. Two incidents especially stimulated the interest in IR. First, the 9/11 attacks obviously induced many students to study IR; many perceived these events to directly affect their

lives. Second, the Myanmar hostage incident in 1999 was also an inspiration. The incident started with a group of student refugees from Myanmar besieging the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok, asking for the release of political prisoners in Myanmar. To solve the deadlock, M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, then Deputy Foreign Minister, came to mediate. The group agreed to withdraw provided that a helicopter was arranged to take them to the border with some hostages; they wanted to guarantee their safe conduct. Sukhumbhand offered himself as a hostage so that the Myanmar students would withdraw from the embassy. The dramatic live coverage of the event cast the diplomatic career in a heroic mould of crisis solver (Thammasat Admission Official interview, 2008). Moreover, some journalists of the younger generation on the international affairs desks of major newspapers became idols for students during that time. Among them was Columnist Nitipoom Nawarat of *Thairath*, the most popular newspaper in Thailand, and Jakrapob Penkhae who had a television program featuring international news analysis. These two journalists were instrumental in stirring interest among students in studying international affairs and majoring in IR (Thammasat Student interview, 2008).

Table 2 proves the point that the popularity of IR surged at the turn of millennium. Table 2, which has been provided by Ramkhamhaeng Open University, shows the number of enrolled students in the Faculty of Political Science, which increased steadily from 23,631 in 1997 to more than 30,000 students annually during the period 1999–2005. The figure peaked after 9/11 when as many as 37,722 students enrolled in the academic year 2002.

Ramkhamhaeng's admissions contrast against the intakes at Chulalongkorn and Thammasat, each of which accepts less than 100 students per year. This is due to the fact that Ramkhamhaeng is an open university accepting almost unlimited numbers of eligible students armed with high school certificates. Furthermore, the Open University does not impose any age barrier to entry. However, the quality of the students and the sustainability of their interest is quite another matter. It is ironic that the number of Political Science graduates from Ramkhamhaeng is low each year, ranging from around 150–250 per year, as many students either drop out midway or fail to complete the degree within the time limit of 8 years. At any rate, although drawn from the overall Political Science cohort, rather than IR majors, the numbers are indicative of the tremendous popularity in IR during the early 2000s.

Table 2 Enrolled political science students at Ramkhamhaeng open university (Registration Section, Faculty of Political Science, Ramkhamhaeng University.)

Year	Number of students
1997	23,631
1998	29,893
1999	33,582
2000	36,344
2001	36,393
2002	37,722
2003	31,044
2004	31,359
2005	32,453
2006	27,045
2007	25,288

Yet, in spite of the popularity of IR, there has been virtually no increase in IR departments in Thai universities unlike what happened in Indonesia.⁴ One would have expected that when a field of study becomes popular, private universities will expedite teaching in order to capitalize upon a growing market. But it was not the case for IR. Two reasons account for this. First, there are not enough scholars to fill IR teaching posts. Most universities continued to concentrate their lecturer development funds on the fields of engineering, economics, and business administration. Second, the number of students who wanted to study IR, though growing, remains comparatively small in number, mostly confined to students from well-to-do families. In other words, both the demand and supply factors constrained the expansion of the field in IR. Accordingly, the already limited supply of IR institutions in the closed university system made IR even more competitive as a field for student entry.

1.3 IR Lecturers

Unlike the American academia, their Thai counterparts are generally not under high pressure to produce research or publications. As most

4 See Hadiwinata's contribution in this issue (Hadiwinata, 2009).

major universities are under the bureaucracy, teaching and supervising these represent the main obligations for Thai lecturers, including those in IR. It is important to note here the promotion criteria for Thai university lecturers. First, the promotion requirements for assistant, associate, or full professorship also focus more on teaching, less on publications. Second, the substance of works is somewhat compromised by the need to fulfill all forms of required works first, namely teaching materials, teaching evaluation, journal articles, research works, and textbooks. Accordingly, many lecturers ended up producing similarly titled textbooks and teaching materials like Thai foreign policy, so as to fulfill the form criteria first. Interestingly, international publications do not carry much weight in promotion consideration, compared with domestic ones. The emphasis on teaching results in the lack of outstanding works and textbooks on IR published in Thailand. Even translated versions of well-known western books remain limited.⁵

Regarding the expertise of Thai IR scholars, a preliminary survey shows that they are predominantly area studies specialists. Accordingly, scholarly works (books, articles, and research) tend to concentrate on area studies, particularly Southeast Asia. Table 3 roughly divides subfields of expertise among IR lecturers in major Thai universities. Each lecturer can have more than one subfield. Area studies is a predominant subfield in several universities, particularly those located outside Bangkok (e.g. Mahasarakarm, Chiang Mai, and Prince of Songkla).

As Supamit Pitipat of Chulalongkorn succinctly puts it, there are very few lecturers who pay serious attention to IR theories; although there are many Thai IR *theory lecturers* available, virtually no Thai IR *theorist* can be recognized in the universities and research institutes. (Supamit, 2008, p. 66)

Notably, there is no significant connection between IR teaching and actual foreign policy formulation. The path from academia to a political career is not a recognized one – unlike in Indonesia. There have been a few random cases but no significant pattern in political careers. The above-mentioned Sukhumbhand Paribatra was a rare example of professor-turned-minister, after he joined the Democrat Party as a politician. Furthermore, not unlike lecturers of other fields in Thailand, IR

5 Rare exceptions include Variya (2001) and Chulaporn (2005).

Table 3 Subfields of Thai IR lecturers

University	Subfields				
	Security Studies	International Political Economy	IR Theory	Area Studies	International Organizations
Chulalongkorn	3	2	3	9	1
Thammasat	4	3	2	11	2
Chiang Mai	1	—	—	4	2
Ramkhamhaeng	1	1	1	6	1
Sukhothai	1	—	—	4	1
Prince of Songkla (Pattani Campus)	1	—	—	4	5
Maharakham	—	—	—	6	6
Total	11	6	6	44	18

Data are compiled by the author through interviews and private communication with IR lecturers in various Thai universities and through their university websites (www.polsci.chula.ac.th, www.polsci.tu.ac.th, www.ru.ac.th, www.msu.ac.th).

lecturers tend to do policy-oriented research. Most research questions are derived from practical problems, rather than from theory. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks employed in their research tend to be traditional and loosely defined. Many works simply take the concept of national interest for granted without considering how the national interest is contested by many groups in society.

The lack of theoretical research is also attributable to the preference of agencies administering grants, most of which prioritize policy-oriented research. For example, upon giving a research grant, the Thai Research Fund (TRF) always consults relevant bureaucracies if the research serves their needs. Mostly, selected research themes should involve policy implications on current issues like FTA, terrorism, and major powers' policies. This is arguably not unique to Thailand, but similar to the situation in other countries in the region, where research has to provide some answers for practical policy problems. In all probability, the official mentality still holds that developing countries do not have the luxury to pursue abstract research with less practical applications. This also reflects the developmental mentality of a country like Thailand, where education is geared toward economic development, rather than for the sake of knowledge. As a result, the contribution of Thai scholars to IR studies

at the global level is limited. It is therefore not surprising that most Thai scholars fail to plant their footprint in international journals like *World Politics*, *International Organization*, and *International Security*.

1.4 IR graduates

The employment of IR graduates is indicative of how the outputs are utilized. At Thammasat University, about 70 IR major students are graduated each year. Table 4 shows the employment status of Thammasat's IR students who had graduated during 2003–2005. The numbers refer to those who responded to the university's questionnaires only, and not the total number of graduates in those years. As displayed below, the majority of graduates – averaging 50–60% of respondents – were able to find a job. However, the proportion of graduates who pursued their postgraduate studies is quite high, averaging 20–30%, and in some years even higher than 30%. This is attributable to the fact that many IR students come from well-to-do families. In the past two decades, it is very popular among affluent families to send new graduates for a master's degree abroad. Many go on to study MBA, even though they have no working experience at all. Interestingly, around 13% of graduates could not land a job. Since the questionnaires were administered when the graduates came back for the commencement ceremony held 4–5 months after they had been out in the job market, many of them might well have been able to find jobs soon afterwards. Despite this potential statistical distortion, this is indicative, at any rate, that IR majors may not have a broad enough job market.

More details on IR graduates' occupations can be found in Table 5. Unfortunately, the figures do not deal with IR graduates alone, but lump those in all the three majors in political science (including Government

Table 4 Employment status of Thammasat's IR graduates

Year	Total respondents	Employed	Graduate studies	Unemployed
2003	66	34 (51.5%)	23 (34.9%)	9 (13.6%)
2004	65	44 (67.7%)	12 (18.5%)	9 (13.8%)
2005	61	39 (63.9%)	14 (23%)	8 (13.1%)

Culled from Thammasat Political Science Annual Reports, 2003–2005.

Table 5 Occupations of Thammasat's political science graduates

Year	Total respondents	Government	State enterprises	Companies	International agencies	Self-employed (family and self-owned businesses)	Others
2003	98	11 (11.2%)	3 (3.1%)	73 (74.5%)	3 (3.1%)	6 (6.1%)	2 (2%)
2004	109	7 (6.5%)	1 (0.9%)	85 (78%)	2 (1.8%)	6 (5.5%)	8 (7.3%)
2005	113	8 (7.1%)	3 (2.7%)	83 (73.5%)	4 (3.5%)	6 (5.3%)	9 (8%)

Compiled from Thammasat political science annual reports, 2003–2005.

and Public Administration) together. Yet, we can obtain a measure of the occupations the IR graduates take up.

Thammasat produced approximately 220 graduates each year in Political Science. Only about half of them were kind enough to further specify their occupation in questionnaires. As it is the case for almost all majors, most graduates are employed in the private sector. Close to 80% of political science graduates join private companies each year, while usually less than 10% of them work in the government. Those who are employed in international agencies are even fewer, only a few percent a year. In short, the majority of Political Science graduates, including those who are IR majors, work for private companies. Though some of them might deal with international affairs, it is likely that the IR graduates do not have many opportunities to utilize their college training in international relations.

2 The approaches

How has the subject of IR been approached in Thailand? Apparently, there are several characteristics of IR studies in the country.

2.1 *Traditional characteristics*

First, IR has been dominated by realist perspectives following the American tradition during the Cold War. The older generation of IR lecturers received postgraduate education in the United States under American scholarships, such as Fulbright, Ford, and Harvard-Yenching. Considering the scope and scale of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, it is not hard to imagine that IR in Thailand has been dominated by the realist tradition. As Thailand had always been the front line state both during the Vietnam War and the Cambodia conflict, security and survival were crucial issues of interest for Thai scholars. Khien Theeravit's works on the Cambodian conflict during the 1980s are representative in this regard (Khien, 1981a, b, 1982). At least until recently, Realist-oriented IR training may have contributed to the lack of faith among ASEAN members in international institution building along the lines of neoliberal institutionalism. Some exceptions exist, though. Several IR scholars within the network of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) from various ASEAN countries have tried to socialize the idea of institutionalism among their colleagues. They hoped

to foster regional cooperation through many conferences and workshops. This helps create a regional identity within an epistemic community.

Second, while Thai IR scholars are heavily subscribed to the Realist perspective, a historical approach is also evident, especially in area studies. The most heavily covered region is Southeast Asia followed by Northeast Asia, while works on Europe and North America remain relatively few. Published research by Thai IR scholars on Latin America and Africa are close to nonexistent. In many cases, the teaching and study of IR are not much different from those of history. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks employed tend to be limited. A brief survey of IR theses and mini-theses at the master's degree level reveal that many of them employed very traditional theories, particularly, the Realist concept of 'national interest' and James Rosenau's linkage theory. In applying the latter, internal and external factors are listed to explain international phenomenon, but are not quite linked in a systematic fashion. Accordingly, most research output is qualitative, and quite descriptive, while quantitative research is very rare.⁶

Third, until the 1990s, IR works tended to focus broadly on the foreign policy of a country, or specifically bilateral relations, rather than patterns of interactions among many states. More emphases have generally been paid to Thai relations with major powers, rather than interactions among Southeast Asian countries themselves. Numerous IR publications deal with Thai relations with major powers, particularly Japan and China (Khien, 1981a, b, 1982; Chulacheeb, 1998, 2005, 2008; Surachai, 1982, 1994; Prapat, 1999, 2007). There are some exceptions for works related to ASEAN, which are in plentiful supply.⁷ Scholarly works on Southeast Asian countries tend to focus on one specific country using the historical approach, rather than interactions among them. In this sense, many IR lecturers focus their writings on the domestic politics and histories of foreign countries.

However, publications on relations among Southeast Asian nations emerged after the Cold War when it became easier to access neighboring countries through transportation networks and educational visits, and

6 Corrine (1982) is a rare exception, employing quantitative methods to analyze determinants of Thai foreign policy. She came up with the argument that external factors mattered more than internal ones.

7 See, for example, Prapat (1998) and Pranee (2002).

the awareness of the need to understand neighboring countries was correspondingly heightened. Two volumes on the foreign policies of Southeast Asian nations, edited by Sida Sornsri at Thammasat, are indicative in this regard (Sida, 2003, 2007). Thailand's relations with Vietnam, its erstwhile Cold War foe, also drew much interest after Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia (Thunyatip, 1998; Thunyatip *et al.*, 2003; Noranit, 2003). In many ways, these developments transcended ideological divides that were deemed rigid during the Cold War. Interestingly, the Faculty of Political Science at Thammasat started the Minor program in Southeast Asian Studies in 1997. A few years later, the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Thammasat also launched a Major in Southeast Asian Studies, which has attracted many students annually since its inception. Chulalongkorn also opened an M.A. Program in Southeast Asian Studies that is taught in English.

Previously, lecturers teaching Southeast Asia had to work hard to overcome the nationalist discourse nurtured by the official hostility toward neighboring countries, particularly Myanmar and Vietnam.⁸ Since the Cold War is now a remote history, the spirit of cooperation generally prevails, particularly with Vietnam. The relations with Myanmar remain somewhat uneasy with problems over border demarcation and drug trafficking, among other things. In contrast, it is now difficult to get students either to empathize with the intense emotions that had once bedeviled Thailand's relations with its neighbors or to appreciate the existing state of cordial relations.

2.2 Recent trends

Apart from the increasing interest in studying Southeast Asian nations, there are several changes occurring in the age of globalization after the end of the Cold War. First, globalization yields a thinner distinction between international and domestic politics, as transnationalism has come to characterize relations between peoples and economies. As a result, IR scholars have to study domestic politics more, and *vice versa* for scholars of Government.

Second, the intensification of globalization also gave rise to the subfield of International Political Economy (IPE). Thitinan Pongsudhirak at

8 For example, history textbooks in primary and secondary schools highlight the many wars with Burma during the Ayutthaya Period (fourteenth–eighteenth century).

Chulalongkorn, and Kitti Prasirtsuk, as well as Virod Ali at Thammasat represent this new genre (Thitinan and Sally, 2008; Kitti, 2006). However, with the 9/11 terrorist attack, Security Studies regained its primacy. In recent years, Surachart Bamrungsuk and Panitan Wattanayagorn at Chulalongkorn and Chulacheeb Chinwanno at Thammasat produced several works on security issues.⁹ IPE also remains salient with the rise of issues on free trade agreements (FTA) and regionalism, particularly, in East Asia.

Third, there is more coverage on non-traditional security issues that are integral to the linked conception of 'human security'. Plenty of issues are facing Southeast Asia, including immigrant labor, environment, pandemic diseases, drugs, and human trafficking. While IR courses used to concentrate on diplomacy and history, the latter proportions have been reduced in the curricula, and this has given rise to issue-based courses. Particularly notable are transnational issues such as human rights (Supamit, 2008, pp. 65–66). Furthermore, within the coverage of non-traditional security, the roles of non-state actors garner more attention among IR scholars in Thailand. While the state has prevailed as the unit of analysis in the realist fashion, now non-state actors, particularly NGOs and MNCs are covered in most classes.

Fourth, the sources and traditions of IR knowledge are more diversified. Younger lecturers are educated in various countries, apart from the United States, including Britain, Australia, and Japan. They are thus exposed to more varieties of theoretical and conceptual training. Reading materials now also come from various countries, namely Japan, Australia, and even China. Southeast Asians have started generating knowledge through their own local lenses through conferences and workshops organized in the region. These new materials and encounters help broaden teaching perspectives for Thai scholars.

3 Problems and prospects

There are at least three problems facing the field of IR in recent years. For the issues discussed below, some are specific to IR, whereas some apply equally to other fields in social science.

9 See, for instance, Surachart (1996, 2004), Panitan and Ball (1996), Panitan (1998, 2001) and Chulacheeb (2004).

3.1 *The dim side*

First, the field is suffering a succession gap. While the old generation of IR scholars is reaching their retirement age, their successors are few. Thammasat has been unable to fill all their vacancies with qualified IR lecturers. Why are IR lecturers so scarce? Thailand's industrialization is partly to blame. Aiming for industrialization, the Thai government has focused its grants for lecturer development in the field of science, particularly engineering. The fields in social science are generally overlooked, understandably, with the exception of economics. This led to a generational change problem, as the gap in age groups of IR lecturers became wider. Most IR lecturers are now close to their retirement at the age of 60. Meanwhile, most younger lecturers are either in their 20s or 30s. It will take a while for the new generation to produce substantial works even for domestic audiences. This situation is not helped by the tradition of having junior lecturers shoulder most of the administration in a regular department of political science. Such burdens deter them from engaging in serious research and producing high-quality scholarly works. There is unlikely to be a smooth transition in generational change.

Second, there is a trend in recent years of commercialization in graduate programs in Thailand. This is also partially attributable to the semi-privatization of public universities, following the conditions imposed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) when Thailand received loans during the Asian Financial Crisis. Now, universities have to run themselves according to principles of profitability. IR is no exception when confronted by commercialization. Weekend or part-time programs were created at both Thammasat and Chulalongkorn, primarily for mid-career training and recent graduates who plan to work in internationally oriented organizations, either in the public or private sectors. Many of the latter group of students still harbor ambitions to enter the MFA. Chulalongkorn has an M.A. program taught in the Thai language, whereas Thammasat offers an international M.A. program using English as a medium. At any rate, extra programs translate into heavier teaching burdens for lecturers, thus reducing their time correspondingly for research and academic writings. As regular remuneration for university lecturers is not high, it is thus quite attractive for lecturers to teach such special programs to earn more income.

Having said that, the field of IR is comparatively *less* commercialized, compared with the fields in management like business and public administration. IR recruits only 30–50 students per program each year, compared with at least a hundred-strong intake in either a business or public administration master's degree program. IR graduate programs are only available at Chulalongkorn and Thammasat. Meanwhile, graduate programs in business and public administration are much more common all over the country.

Lastly, another negative factor is the fact that there is not much public space for IR, as the Thais are always preoccupied with domestic issues. International news hardly makes a headline in Thai newspapers or television programs. IR professors are rarely invited to comment on TV and radio programs or to be interviewed in any kind of media. Professors in the field of Government and Public Administration are more frequently consulted in this regard. IR lecturers who happen to appear on television programs are asked to make more comments about domestic politics, rather than international ones. Prominent examples of IR professors compelled to comment on domestic issues include Panitan Wattanayagorn of Chulalongkorn and Surachai Sirikrai of Thammasat.

3.2 *The bright side*

Though the prospects for IR seem to be somewhat bleak, some trends are promising. First, as mentioned above, with the emergence of non-traditional security issues, IR studies have developed more interesting content in recent years. Given the nature of transnationalism, more sophisticated theoretical and conceptual frameworks are called for in analyzing such complex international issues and actors. Since non-traditional security issues are relevant to many fields of studies, IR scholars will be prodded to have more dialogue with scholars in other fields and will be more exposed to multidisciplinary approaches.

Second, Thai IR lecturers, particularly among the younger generation, now engage in more dialogue with international scholars. Increased funding from both international and domestic sources enables scholars to attend more conferences abroad. Furthermore, some Thai lecturers have been invited to teach in renowned universities overseas. Kitti Prasirtsuk of Thammasat taught as a visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley, in Fall 2005, while Panitan Wattanayagorn of Chulalongkorn

lectured at the School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University in 2006 for a whole semester.¹⁰ Significantly, some Thai IR scholars are able to publish internationally some pioneering books. Chookiat Panaspornprasit of Chulalongkorn published a book 'US-Kuwaiti Relations, 1961–1992: An Uneasy Relationship' with Routledge in 2005. Thitinan Pongsudhirak of Chulalongkorn also recently co-published a work on Thai trade policy with Razeen Sally from LSE. Increasing interactions with international scholars should stimulate IR studies in Thailand to a more intense level and should also open up more opportunities for scholarly contributions at the global level.

4 Conclusion

To conclude, IR teaching in Thailand has many interesting characteristics. First, IR tends to be subordinate to the fields of Government and Public Administration in the Faculty of Political Science. The number of universities offering the major in IR is limited. Yet, IR is considered higher ranking as elite education, requiring higher entrance examination scores. Second, the majority of IR lecturers do not participate in theoretical debates, preferring to deal more with area studies. The knowledge of IR is not an end in itself, but can serve as practical application for national development.

Third, IR teaching has been dominated by realist perspectives, following the American tradition during the Cold War. This is not unexpected, considering the 'hot war' in Southeast Asia, with Thailand undeniably located as a frontline state. Yet, some changes have emerged with globalization after the end of the Cold War. The interest in studying neighboring countries has increased remarkably. There is also more demand to cover non-traditional security issues and the roles of non-state actors. Looking to the future of IR studies in Thailand, although some problems exist in relation to generational change and the commercialization of education, the diversification of knowledge sources and increasing dialogue with international scholars should broaden the perspectives of Thai IR scholars. This should also help uplift the quality of IR teaching

10 Among senior scholars, Kusuma Snitwongse of Chulalongkorn used to teach as a visiting professor at Pomona College in the 1990s, while Chulacheeb Chinwannoo of Thammasat recently served as a visiting fellow at the Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), a leading IR institution in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

and research in Thailand. Overall, the current period is arguably a turning point of IR studies in Thailand.

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