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Abstract

The case of higher educational development in Thailand is intriguing in the sense that the country, with the deep religious root of Buddhism, was never colonized; however, the shadow of Westernization in the higher education system is strongly evident. The functions of Thai higher education have played a crucial role in shaping the country's modern society in political, economic, and social aspects. The five terms of the state, the university, society, changing environments, and higher education functionality are adopted as a conceptual ground of the investigation. The intertwined roles and power relationships of the three actors—the state, the university, and society—surrounding by the changing environments at global, regional, and local levels have largely influenced and determined the functionality of universities in the country's development. The paper investigates the actions and interactions among these three factors under the changing environments that have shaped the major shifts and incidents of the country's development. It highlights the universities' functions in modern Thai society in the different eras. With the conceptual framework,

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the historical account of Thai higher educational development is analyzed through six phases: (1) Buddhism and Thai higher learning; (2) the threat of colonialism; (3) the Siamese Revolution and the end of absolute monarchy; (4) the Cold War and the military regime; (5) the Student Uprising, democracy, and soaring population; and (6) the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and the forces of globalization. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Rungfamai, Kreangchai, E-Mail: kreangchaitdai@hotmail.com