

# Overview of the Development and Educational Institutions of Anthropology in Thailand

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**Abstract:** Anthropology in Thailand began during World War II and has a history of nearly a hundred years. This article intends to use the development history of Thai anthropology as a clue to discuss the important institution of Thai anthropology, the Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, and three major universities in Thailand that offer anthropology and sociology, including Chulalongkorn University, Law and Politics University, and Chiang Mai University. The curriculum and research expertise in sociology and anthropology will be discussed. The aim is to sort out the development of anthropology in Thailand, provide a comprehensive understanding for future research in this field, and also provide support for higher education exchanges between China and Thailand.

**Keywords:** Thai anthropology; Discipline development; Teaching institutions

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## Introduction:

Anthropology in Thailand began during World War II and has gone through three stages of development since then. During the initial stage (1957-1972), the main research areas included ethnology, social system management, and modern change; The second stage (1972-1982) was a period of development and growth, initiated by multiple Thai anthropologists, all of whom had a background in studying abroad; In the third stage (1982 present), during the period of academic progress, there were numerous research achievements in various fields of anthropology.

## 1. Thailand Sirindhorn Anthropology Center

Her Royal Highness Princess Sirindhorn Royal Highness Princess pointed out in the opening speech of the center, The center aims to Establish a database center for anthropology and related disciplines in Thailand, encouraging good communication and understanding among various ethnic groups and countries. Respect different life philosophies and lifestyles around the world, understand the changes happening in the contemporary world, and prepare for them. Further understand the history, present, and future of Thailand's own ethnic group. Accept various differences. Encourage the collection, preservation, and research of cultures from different groups in Thailand and neighboring countries

The development of the center is divided into three stages:

Phase 1: the beginning of its establishment: In 1991, Princess Sirindhorn of Thailand realized that there were no databases in anthropology and sociology in Thailand, nor were there professional talent training institutions related to anthropology and sociology. In order to facilitate the collection of information by relevant personnel and the development of related professions in Thailand, it is hereby ordered to establish the Thailand Sirindhorn Anthropology Center. At its inception, it was a fully funded government institution.

Phase 2: restructuring stage: From 1992 to 1994, the center was included in the five-year development plan for higher education in Thailand (1992-1996), becoming an important component of Thailand's higher education development. In the same year, the management of the center was delegated to the Archaeological College of the University of the Arts of Thailand. The land used for the office building of the center is supported by the Thai Ministry of Finance.

In 1994, the University of the Arts applied to the Thai government cabinet to carry out internal reforms of the center's government institutions in order for the Central Committee to more effectively achieve the purpose of establishing the center and tap into its potential at a deeper level. That same year, this application was approved by the cabinet. The center eventually broke away from complete government management and transformed from a government unit into a domestic public institution.

Phase 3: from 1995 to present: the stage of development and growth. During the period of 1995-1999, the management and budget expenditure mode of the center underwent significant changes. On March 9, 1999, Princess Sirindhorn participated in the unveiling ceremony of the center. The central building has officially begun use, located on Rajani Road in Bangkok. On November 16, 2000, the government stipulated that the center was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education under the Thai Ministry of Education. Since 2002, it has been taken over by the Ministry of Culture of Thailand.

The center has its own library and office, and conducts academic exchange and cooperation with multiple domestic universities such as Peking University. In addition, the center has long invited anthropological experts from various fields in Thailand to give academic lectures, and uploaded the results to the center's website for sharing. The center has played a crucial role in promoting anthropology in Thailand.

## **2. Introduction to the Development of Anthropology in Three Universities in Thailand**

This article mainly introduces the development and research directions of anthropology disciplines in Chulalongkorn University, University of Political Science and Law, and Chiang Mai University in Thailand.

### **2.1 Chulalongkorn University**

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Chulalongkorn University can be said to be the beginning of this discipline in Thailand and an important base for cultivating talents in sociology and anthropology. Most of the early teachers in the department had experience studying in the United States, so the academic achievements of the department are mostly in line with mainstream American theories. At present, the department has 11 full-time teachers, all of whom have obtained doctoral degrees in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other countries. The Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Chulalongkorn University is affiliated with the School of Political Science, which also includes the Department of Government Management, Department of International Relations, and Department of Politics.

Sociology at Chulalongkorn University was introduced by Professor Kasem Uthayanin. In 1948, sociology teaching began, and thereafter sociology courses were included in the Bachelor's degree program in Political Science. In 1950, Professor Kassem served as the Dean of the School of Political Science. In 1960, the sociology course was introduced into undergraduate teaching, and an official department was established, named the Sociology Department. The Department of Sociology is co chaired by Professor Kasem Palin and Dr. Jacques Amiott, with Dr. Jacques Amyott serving as an assistant. The first undergraduate course was not offered until 1963. In the following 30 years, graduate courses such as demography, anthropology, and criminology were offered.

### **2.2 National University of Law and Politics of Thailand**

The Sociology and Anthropology program at the National University of Law and Government of Thailand was established in 1965, and Professor Ban Chamin established the School of Social Work in 1977. In 1984, the Sociology and Anthropology majors were separated from the School of Social Work to establish the School of Sociology and Anthropology, which included the Department of Sociology and the Department of Anthropology. Among them, the Department of Anthropology has 21 full-time teachers, whose research areas include ethnology, archaeology, museum studies, cultural heritage, and many other fields. The following focuses on the five stages of development of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Law and Political Science:

Phase 1: Establishment period (1965-1967). The main task of teachers is to develop a curriculum outline for the discipline of anthropology, with the goal of cultivating individuals who are capable of conducting in-depth research on Thai society while understanding Western anthropological theories.

Phase 2: Improvement stage (1967-1977). Most of the first generation teachers in this major went to the United States to study after graduating from Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. These teachers have a relatively broad research topic. Excellent works can be divided into the following two directions. Firstly, the discovery and research of Ban Qing in archaeology. Secondly, research on social change, related to rural society and political economy in Thailand.

Phase 3: diversification period (1977-1994). At this stage, more and more new issues arise in the research of teachers, such as gender culture, power anthropology, slums, music, ecology, economy, etc. The research field has also shifted from rural areas to cities or abroad.

Phase 4: period of slow development (1994-2004). At this stage, due to the need for teachers to further enhance their academic qualifications, and some teachers retiring or resigning, there are serious problems with the teaching staff.

Phase 5: New Development Stage (2004 present). At this stage, due to significant changes in teaching conditions, the addition of many teachers who have obtained doctoral degrees has injected new vitality into the college. The 2009 version of the talent training program has added many emerging courses. After 2007, students focused more on new social issues in cities and certain abstract fields

in their research direction.

### 2.3 Chiang Mai University

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Chiang Mai University was established in 1964, and five years later, the Social Research Center was established. In 1975, the department began to focus on ethnic and Marxist group theory. In 1988, the Northern Agricultural Social Development course was added to the curriculum. In 2012, the Department of Social Work and the Department of Social and Anthropology were separated.

The graduate program was established in 1990, focusing on research in areas such as social development, northern agriculture, environmental resources, rights, ecosystems, and social systems. At the end of 1999, the master's and doctoral courses were revised to make research topics more diverse, emphasize academic theory and application, focus on creating new knowledge, and focus on social research directions.

The development of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Chiang Mai University can be divided into four stages:

Phase 1: influenced by American capital, the research direction of this stage mainly focuses on two parts. The first part focuses on population concepts, mountainous populations, and vulnerable groups; The second part focuses on the research of folk wisdom and Lana culture.

Phase 2: from 1973 to 1977, was considered a significant period for the student movement in northern Thailand due to social conflicts and the formation of democratic ideologies. Students opposed dictatorship, during which teachers paid more attention to Marxism and studied topics related to social influence and power relations.

Phase 3: resource conflicts, community rights movements, and social diversity movements (1987-1997) were the golden age of the concept of "negotiation".

Stage 4: A changing society. Since the end of 1997, globalization and blurred borders have led the department to pay attention to cross-border issues. The border areas and the Mekong River basin are important research areas for anthropology at Chiang Mai University.

### 3. Summary

The development of sociology and anthropology in Thailand began in 1906, when Mahadarak School recommended students to read books related to anthropology, which was considered the beginning of the promotion of this discipline in Thai educational institutions. In 1935, the School of Political Science at the University of Law and Political Science established criminology. In 1949, Dr. Wiboon Thamwitya wrote the first book on Thai sociology. Afterwards, Thai universities successively offered undergraduate and master's programs related to sociology and anthropology. The religious college established by Mahidol University holds a pioneering position in its achievements. Until the establishment of the Sirindhorn Anthropology Center in Thailand in 1991, the center regularly held annual anthropological conferences, becoming the most representative institution in Thai anthropology.

In summary, it can be seen that the disciplinary development of Thai anthropology has the following three characteristics. Firstly, each university has its own research field of expertise; Secondly, focus on interdisciplinary integration; Thirdly, keep up with the times. Since receiving attention from the Thai royal family, there has been a new development trend. I hope that there will be broader opportunities for cooperation and exchange between China and Thailand in this field.

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