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"Academic-practitioner" as governance outcomes: a critical analysis of identity reinvention in Thai higher education reform 4.0 during the MHESI era

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Introduction: The article examines the rise of "academic-practitioners" concerning the reform of Thai higher education 4.0 following the putting into force of the 20-year long-term higher education plan 2018–2037, which has led to significant structural changes in higher education. This reform is situated within the global context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the competing demands of Education 4.0 and the emerging human-centric goals of Education 5.0.

Methods: The analysis employs a two-layered approach, combining critical policy analysis with the author's autoethnographic account of institutional implementation, grounding the claims in both top-down discourse and bottom-up experience.

Findings/discussion: The article reveals that the construction of academic-practitioner identity serves as the means and the ends, including as a key governance tool to re-orient higher education towards national economic priorities. Specifically, given the alterations occurring at the university level and the unique circumstances within individual universities, professors must alter the approaches in which they work. As a consequence, university lecturers have seemingly transitioned from being academics to becoming practitioners or mixed, the so-called "academic-practitioners." This is a compelling matter in an overview examination of the higher education reform process that impacts the standing and positionality of university professors, resulting in a transformation of lecturers' status. The identities of academics and practitioners are influenced by the creation of systems and mechanisms at the national and ministerial levels. Academic practitioners, in the case of Thailand, emerged from several factors, such as the middle-income trap, decreasing the birth rate, and the aging population, to which the government responded with the 4.0 strategic approach. As a result, universities are anticipated to co-produce innovation in accordance with this strategy. Nonetheless, there is criticism that an overemphasis on innovation may result in the oversight of other critical elements. Practically, the villagers participate in entrepreneurial endeavors, fostering sustainable development in collaboration with universities. An approach for improving the performance of Thai universities that is directed by quality assessments and tools to guarantee that operations align with global, regional, and national educational standards. Nonetheless, it remains a long journey towards sustainability and has faced considerable criticism.

Conclusion: An analysis of the Thai higher education reform during the MHESI Era can deepen the understanding of global-national social governance in educational policies in countries that are faced with changing systems and governance.

KEYWORDS

academic-practitioners, pracademic, higher education, education reform, Thailand

1 Introduction

The complexity of global social governance in education policies in the modern era arises from the diverse forms and processes influenced by various governance-related factors, including a substantial decline in birth rates, population aging, and the progress of ICT and generative AI. It offers easy access to information, at no cost, and does not necessarily wait for the professor to provide the desired learning materials. These contents are accessible via the Google search engine, YouTube channel, and others, and can also be studied using online platforms (e.g., Coursera, MOOC, Khan Academy, including particular personal channels). Learners' requirements are evolving. Hence, the pedagogical approaches and instructional techniques employed in higher education institutions may need to be adapted to align with the evolving global, national, and local contexts. Consequently, it is imperative to implement reforms in higher education.

Thailand, like other developing countries, has encountered persistent challenges in reforming its higher education system. These challenges date back to the establishment of higher education during the reign of King Rama IV (1851–1868) and its subsequent clear institutional development under King Rama V (1868–1910). Over time, various institutions such as the University Council (1971), the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) (2003–2019), and currently the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI) (2019–present) have played a role in shaping the system (Office of Permanent Secretary, 2014) (see section 4.1).

Putting in force the 20-year long-term higher education plan 2018–2037 has led to significant structural changes in higher education (MHESI, 2020). The management system and strategic operations of a university are influenced by the *strategic focus* of university clusters, which takes into account the *performance* and *potential* of established institutions. The term *differentiator* refers to the identification of specialization among a group of institutions and disciplines. This identification is done by the central committee and board of directors of higher education institutions, who assess and evaluate the specific cluster to which it belongs (MHESI, 2021). Specifically, given the alterations occurring at the university level and the unique circumstances within individual universities, it is imperative for professors to alter the approaches in which they work. As a consequence, university lecturers have seemingly transitioned from being academics to becoming practitioners or mixed, the so-called “academic-practitioners.” This is a compelling matter in an overview examination of the higher education reform process that impacts the standing and positionality of university professors.

The complexity of global social governance in education policies in the modern era arises from the diverse forms and processes influenced by various governance-related factors, including a substantial decline in birth rates, population aging, and the progress of ICT and generative AI. The imperative to reform higher education is globally situated within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). This environment necessitates a shift toward Education 4.0 (ED 4.0), where the primary goal is to prepare graduates for a technology-driven workforce and foster innovation (Chakraborty et al., 2023; Rane et al., 2023). Consequently, Thai higher education reform 4.0, guided by the national Thailand 4.0 strategy, operates as an institutional response to the skills required by the 4IR.

This article examines the impact of the Thai higher education reformation 4.0 in the MHESI Era on the development of “academic-practitioners” and its implications for global social governance in education policies. The subsequent questions are investigated.

- 1 What were the factors that led to the emergence of academic practitioners in the Thai higher education reformation 4.0 during the MHESI era, and what specific functions do they serve? What concepts do they put into practice?
- 2 How do the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI) and universities legitimize and incorporate the ideas and practices of the Thailand 4.0 strategy to form “academic-practitioners”?
- 3 What evidence exists to support the emergence of “academic-practitioners” and their practical projects in the fieldwork during the Thai higher education reformation 4.0 in the MHESI Era?

The article is organized in a simple way, beginning with a discussion of the definitions of “academic” and “practitioner” and the concept of an “academic-practitioner.” It also explores the relationship between these two concepts, acknowledging that in practice, individuals often embody both roles simultaneously. The second section presents a rationale for the case selection. The third section presents the findings, discussion, and conclusions.

2 Academic-practitioner constructed: devisionalization or multifunctionalization?

The term “academic-practitioner” has various definitions, but in general, it refers to individuals who are both involved in theoretical research and practical application in a particular field. The specific meaning may vary depending on the context in which it is used. According to Arko-Achemfuor and Romm, 2022 and Bartunek (2007), there are common interpretations of this term. Additionally, Cambridge Dictionary (2024) and Collins Dictionary (2024) define “academic” as pertaining to educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities, where the focus is on knowledge acquisition and intellectual development rather than practical skills. It can encompass the domain of academic inquiry and educational credentials, as well as books or textbooks. Alternatively, it can denote an individual who is intelligent and derives pleasure from learning. However, in theoretical terms, academics refer to concepts and ideas that are not directly connected to practical outcomes in real-world situations. However, when employed as a noun, it refers to an individual who engages in teaching and conducts research at a college or who engages in studying as a component of their occupation. Conversely, the term “practitioner” denotes an individual engaged in a specialized occupation or endeavor whose customary occupation necessitates extensive training or employment in a field that demands substantial expertise. In professional contexts, the term “practitioner” typically refers to medical doctors, also known as practitioners or medical practitioners. It can also refer to someone who practices a specific skill, or someone authorized to perform healing practices within a religious setting.

Most research refers to the collaboration between academics and practitioners (Bartunek and Rynes, 2014; Bennett and Fiske, 2013), also known as *pracademics*. This concept highlights the significance of coordination between these two groups, who are typically separate individuals or academic-practitioner divided. They collaborate on specific objectives, such as the development of local communities in various projects. This can be seen as ‘academic capitalism,’ (Münch, 2020) which is defined as a unique hybrid that unites the scientific search for truth with the economic maximization of profits. Münch (2020) asserted that ‘academic capitalism’ could turn universities into (social) enterprises competing for capital accumulation and businesses into knowledge producers looking for new findings that can be turned into patents and profitable commodities. Barrett and Oborn (2018) propose the establishment of an academic-practitioner collaboration framework that integrates diverse levels of expertise and forms to enhance the reach and influence of research. Kaufman (2022) highlights the academic-practitioner gap as an asymmetrical relationship from the perspective of practitioners, where the roles of academics and practitioners are frequently unequal. Scholars serve as mentors and instructors to educate practitioners while also overseeing and assessing their performance. Conversely, practitioners are individuals who work in the field and have direct involvement and proximity to the community. The behavioral asymmetry is attributed to the inclination of academics to perceive themselves as superior scientist-scholars who lecture and patronize practitioners rather than engaging in collaborative dialogue with them (Jean M. Bartunek and McKenzie, 2017). Regarding academics, a portion of the work focuses on the distinction between academics and practical application, aiming to incorporate research that is a result of academic endeavors, which is a collaborative research project involving both scholars and practitioners (Levine, 2020; Orr et al., 2009). The project recognizes that individuals can possess both academic and practical expertise, which is believed to enhance the agility and efficiency of their work (Thomson and Colechin, 2021).

The article examines the concept of academic-practitioner, or “Pracademic” in the context of Thailand’s higher education reform 4.0 (Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Policy Council, 2022). This approach encourages university lecturers and academics to actively engage in the implementation of the concept. The United Nations’ global development theory and guidelines have been implemented to promote sustainable development in local communities, including communities where activists are active and higher education institutions that are facing challenges in maintaining their independence and avoiding consolidation with other institutions (Arko-Achemfuor and Romm, 2022). The global education discourse is evolving from Education 4.0 to Education 5.0 (ED 5.0), a concept that corresponds with the Japanese vision of Society 5.0 (Akturk et al., 2022; Chakraborty and Galatro, 2025). ED 4.0 prioritizes technology and efficiency, whereas ED 5.0 underscores a human-centric paradigm that integrates technology with social responsibility and sustainable development (Rane et al., 2023). The Thai reform’s emphasis on Area-Based and Community Engagement (Cluster 3) and its efforts toward sustainable development goals (SDGs) suggest an implicit alignment with the social and collaborative goals of ED 5.0, framing the “academic-practitioner” as a role designed for the hybrid demands of 4IR technology and 5.0 social sustainability. Bori and Block (2024) address the connection of the aforementioned approaches to governmentality utilizing technologies such as accountability measures, performance

metrics, and competition to impose the principles and rationalities of academic capitalism that emphasize market-driven knowledge and research. In sum, the article reconceptualizes the Thai “Academic-Practitioner” as a governance outcome—a role mandated by the state (Governmentality) to meet market demands (Academic Capitalism).

3 Methods

3.1 Justification of case selection

Thailand transitioned from being a low-income country to a middle-income country in 1988, and then further progressed to become an upper middle-income country in 2011 (Jitsuchon, 2012). Thailand has been stuck at middle-income status for 35 years and is projected to take another 20–30 years to achieve high-income status. This means it will take a total of 60 years for Thailand to transition out of the middle-income category, which is longer than what wealthy countries have historically taken to escape from middle-income status. Thailand has not yet reached that stage and has faced significant crises on at least three occasions since the “Tom Yum Kung” crisis in 1997 (Yamazawa, 1998). These include being impacted by the subprime crisis and the current effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

Thailand underwent a phase of swift economic expansion from its first National Economic and Social Development Plan in 1961 until the 1990s, when it was interrupted by the financial crisis in 1997 (NESDB, 2024). The growth rate is evident, but even with a highly favorable economic situation, Thailand cannot avoid falling into the middle-income trap. The Prayut Chan-o-cha government (2014–2023) aimed to implement a 20-year national strategic plan (2018–2037) in order to elevate Thailand from its current status as a developing country/upper middle-income country to that of a developed country, with a per capita income exceeding \$12,235 (National Strategy Secretariat Office, 2018). Additionally, all ministries were harnessed to prioritize the incorporation of the national strategy into their working plans. This study focuses on the MHESI, a recently established ministry that has implemented policies for all affiliated agencies to initiate strategies, plans, and projects in line with the 20-year national strategic plan (Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Policy Council, 2022). The ministry has also reformed the administrative structure by classifying higher education institutions based on their areas of expertise, with participation in each group being voluntary and based on consultation with the educational institutions. Additionally, the ministry supports university lecturers in adapting to the rapidly changing world by utilizing their knowledge and expertise to contribute to the local community development. This process involves changing teaching methods and working processes so that they can create a greater impact on society and the community, thereby creating a new identity for university teachers that places more emphasis on how to translate knowledge into practical solutions for society and community.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

This study employs a qualitative research approach based on two integrated layers of data: a primary layer of document analysis and a secondary layer of illustrative qualitative data.

3.2.1 Primary layer based on policy and document analysis

The author collected data based on 20 selected key policy documents, directives, regulations and rules pertaining to the reform of higher education in Thailand, including Ministerial (MHESI) strategic plans (e.g., the 20-year long-term higher education plan 2018–2037), cluster classification manuals, National policy frameworks (e.g., Thailand's National Strategy 2018–2037), and Internal workload and performance regulations specific to Rajabhat Universities, covering the critical reform period of 2018–2025. Secondary sources included publications from affiliated agencies (grey literature), education news, and relevant domestic and international research. The analysis applied a critical discourse analysis (CDA) technique to examine how the discourses of Thailand 4.0, the Middle-Income Trap, and the “Academic-Practitioner” identity are constructed, legitimized, and translated into administrative mechanisms (KPIs, Cluster classification).

3.2.2 Secondary layer based on illustrative qualitative data (illustrative vignettes)

To address potential critiques regarding the lack of empirical grounding, this study integrates illustrative qualitative data derived from two sources, grounding the analysis in the reported realities of academic staff.

3.2.3 Participant observation and autoethnographic account (insider view)

The author engaged in participant observation over a period of at least 3 years (2021–2023). Serving as a lecturer within Rajabhat University (Cluster 3) for 10 years (since 2015), the author had direct involvement and proximity to the community engagement (Area-Based) projects. This insider role provided an autoethnographic perspective used to systematically document the tensions, resistances, and adaptive strategies employed at the institutional level. Data was captured via field notes and reflective journals to contextualize the top-down policy with bottom-up institutional realities.

3.3 Pilot interviews/vignettes

A small, supplementary set of pilot interviews ($n = 10$) were conducted with participants that were selected using a purposive sampling method based on their role such as Area Managers (AM) (project leaders) and their team members, lecturers from Rajabhat institutions involved in Area-Based projects, using open-ended questions focused on: (1) their perception of the shift, (2) their experience with performance metrics (KPIs), and (3) observed unintended consequences (see [Supplementary file](#)). These findings are presented in the discussion as illustrative vignettes to substantiate claims about identity transformation and practice, ensuring they are grounded in the reported realities of the actors involved, rather than solely being inferred from top-down policy (see Illustrative Vignettes presented by the University's Office of Learning Support and Academic) ([Office of Learning Support and Academic, 2021](#)).

The data analysis proceeds through a contextual and thematic analysis, examining how top-down policies and global concepts (SDGs, HiAPs, BCG) are harnessed, legitimized, and ultimately enforced through governance regulated by number (KPIs/OKRs) at

institutional and individual lecturer levels, creating the new “academic-practitioner” identity.

4 Findings and discussion

4.1 Placing the timeline of Thai higher education reform in context

4.1.1 The Ministry of University Affairs as the foundation of higher education in Thailand

Thai higher education and governance initially began during the reign of King Mongkut, also known as King Rama IV. During this time, higher education in Thailand was characterized by its diverse institutions into individual schools, depending on their expertise. During the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V), several educational institutions were established in Thailand. These included law schools, medical schools, and the Civil Service School, which was later merged with and elevated to Chulalongkorn University in 1917, the first university in the country. Subsequently, additional universities were established under different ministries, such as Chulalongkorn University under the Ministry of Education, the University of Medicine under the Ministry of Public Health, and Kasetsart University under the Ministry of Agriculture ([Office of Permanent Secretary, 2014](#)).

Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's administration, enacted legislation to reallocate all universities to be under the authority of the Office of the Prime Minister in 1959. The establishment of the National Education Council under the Office of the Prime Minister was deemed necessary by centralizing universities under a single council, as they believed that it would facilitate the acceleration of national economic and social development. In 1971, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, the leader of the Revolutionary Council, the National Education Council, and the Assembly of State University Presidents, collaborated to propose the detachment of universities from the bureaucratic system, resulting in its reorganization to establish the so-called ‘autonomous universities.’ Universities require autonomy for various reasons. Academic freedom is upheld when knowledge is transmitted and sought in accordance with the principles of academic excellence. An autonomous bureau or a bureau under the Office of the Prime Minister serves as the overseeing agency for multiple universities. Therefore, the University Bureau was founded on September 29, 1972, initially named “State University Office” and operated under the Office of the Prime Minister. Its responsibilities encompass the operation and oversight of higher education beyond and exclude from the jurisdiction and purview of the Ministry of Education. The Act established regulations governing the execution of governmental tasks by the State University Administration to grant the Minister of University Affairs the power to initiate policies and strategies for education and guidelines pertaining to educational curricula and personnel management. Review proposals and authorize the creation, termination, and closure of universities, faculty, and departments, serving as a central hub for overseeing and assessing educational management, as well as coordinating inter-university education management. As a result, the university bureau possesses distinct powers and responsibilities that set it apart from other ministries and bureaus that lack legal provisions delineating explicit responsibilities.

In 1977, during Thanin Kraivichien's administration, the government altered the name of the "State University Office" to the "University Affairs Office" and elevated it to an autonomous entity with the same level of authority as a ministry. It operates independently from the Prime Minister's Office, allowing for greater flexibility in management. This change was made to transfer the responsibility of overseeing private higher education institutions from the Ministry of Education to the University Affairs Office. The University Affairs Regulations Act 1977 was enacted in order to grant the University Affairs Office the authority to regulate both public and private universities and higher education institutions. In 1994, the Act was modified to grant jurisdiction over public universities that are not a part of state agencies and are not overseen by the University Affairs Office. These universities include Suranaree University of Technology, Walailak University, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, and Mae Fah Luang University. King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi is the pioneering university to transition from a government institution to an autonomous university, aligning with the government's initiative to detach all government universities from the bureaucratic chain of command. In 2003, the government led by Police Lieutenant Colonel Thaksin Shinawatra introduced the Act on Administrative Regulations of the Ministry of Education 2003, the University Affairs Office underwent a transformation and became the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), as mandated by the new legislation.

4.1.2 From the university affairs office (UAO) to the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC)

Under the provisions of the 1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, the government is obligated to ensure the provision of education and training, while also promoting the private sector's involvement in organizing educational programs to foster the development of knowledge and moral values. This includes enacting legislation pertaining to national education, aligning educational practices with economic and social transformations, promoting intellectual growth, and fostering a proper understanding of politics and governance within a democratic framework, with the King serving as the Head of State. Facilitate research in the fields of arts and sciences, expedite progress in science and technology, enhance education for the advancement of the nation, foster professional growth among teachers, and advocate for the preservation and promotion of local wisdom, national arts, and culture, including in the realm of public education. It is important to take into account the involvement of local government organizations and the private sector, as mandated by law, and ensure the safeguarding of educational and training programs conducted by professional and private organizations under state supervision. Hence, the National Education Act of 1999 was established as the primary legislation for the governance and oversight of education and training, in compliance with the stipulations outlined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand. This Act incorporated the original educational agencies, including the former Ministry of Education, the University Affairs Office, the Office of the National Education Commission, and the Office of the Prime Minister were merged to form a new ministry known as the Ministry of Education, Religion, and Culture. This ministry operated under a government division structure, which includes several committees. The Office of the Higher Education Commission will oversee the

education of religion and culture at the basic, including vocational, and higher education levels.

Subsequently, Thaksin Shinawatra's administration launched policies aimed at bureaucratic transformation into a "modernized bureaucracy" by aligning the public sector with principles of good governance. The objective is to enhance proficiency and optimize the performance of government organizations in order to effectively address the various requirements of individuals, society, and the country. Consequently, the roles, missions, and structure of the public administration system have been modified. It has been decided that the missions concerning arts and culture should be separated from the missions of the Ministry of Education, Religion, and Culture, which was established under the National Education Act of 1999. To reorganize government agencies and personnel management systems, the "Ministry of Culture" was established regarding the amended National Education Act of 2002, to restructure the government administration within the Ministry of Education. Four primary organizations consist of a council/committee: the Education Council and the Basic Education Commission, the Vocational Education Commission, and the Higher Education Commission are expected to provide recommendations and guidance to the Minister and the Cabinet.

The Higher Education Commission is tasked with the responsibility of evaluating and recommending policies and strategies for the advancement and growth of the education sector. The aim is to establish higher education standards that align with the requirements of the National Economic and Social Development Plan and the National Education Plan. This involves providing necessary resources, and monitoring, and evaluating the higher education governance. Considering the autonomy and high quality of higher education institutions as mandated by the legislation governing their establishment and operation. The Office of the Higher Education Commission possesses legal entity status. The division of government departments is based on the 2003 ministerial regulations, including the Office of the Higher Education Commission under the Ministry of Education, the administrative structure was divided into nine offices, Thailand has a total of 156 higher education institutions, with 84 being government-affiliated/autonomous universities and 72 being privately owned ([Office of Permanent Secretary, 2014](#)).

4.1.3 From the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI)

The MHESI is a recently established ministry in 2019 ([Office of Permanent Secretary, 2014](#)) to consolidate the higher education and research and development entities by merging the Ministry of Science and Technology with the Office of the Higher Education Commission, the National Research Council and the Thailand Research Fund collaborate with the government to acknowledge the significance of fostering and overseeing higher education institutions and affiliated organizations. Consequently, it is to cultivate a skilled workforce that aligns with the country's progress, encompassing governance and innovation advancement.

Enhancing the nation's human resources to possess the capacity and preparedness for thriving in the modern era is a crucial factor in propelling the country's progress toward stability and enduring prosperity. The government's objective of developing manpower to

meet the needs of national development is of utmost importance. The government's policy is to utilize science, research, and innovation to propel the country's progress and enable it to compete globally. The aim is to utilize scientific research and innovation in order to achieve maximum efficiency in agriculture, industry, and service sectors, thereby promoting economic development within the community and society. In addition to prioritizing the advancement of social innovations and space innovation, the goal is to address challenges and generate opportunities while fostering the growth of human capital in academic and professional domains in order to be prepared for the digital era and effectively implement Industry 4.0 in alignment with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (MHESI, 2020).

The establishment of the MHESI does not provide an immediate solution or answer to current problems. The MHESI plays a crucial role in establishing the country's groundwork for the future. It believes in formulating policies and strategies to prepare individuals for the challenges of the 21st century. This is achieved by offering equal opportunities for lifelong learning, with the aim of reducing inequality, minimizing the disparity in society, enhancing the standard of living, and fostering happiness among all citizens of Thailand. This is a crucial and demanding objective that will serve as a catalyst for the progress of the nation. By adhering to the economic principles of the Sufficiency Economy, the goal is to achieve stability, prosperity, and sustainability, thereby enhancing the country's strength. By fostering the growth of the local economy at its foundation, we aim to propel Thailand towards its vision of Thailand 4.0. This involves instilling trust and enhancing the country's ability to compete globally, both in the short term and the long term.

Although it presents another obstacle to the advancement of the national economy, it is imperative to prioritize the advancement of science, technology, and research in order to expedite the knowledge production in these fields, as well as the higher quality of higher education institutions. To do so, effective coordination and collaboration with research and development institutes as a catalyst for change is crucial in equipping Thai individuals for the challenges of the 21st century. This collaboration serves as a driving force for economic structural reform to achieve an innovative-driven country.

Therefore, the recommendations are to alter the roles and missions of higher education institutions and research and development institutions to fully harness and achieve their potential in transformative changes that would be compatible well with the ways of doing things and the needs of the country and its citizens. The policy framework is structured into four dimensions (MHESI, 2018):

Dimension 1: Fostering the growth and advancement of Thai individuals in the 21st century.

Dimension 2: Generating and developing knowledge.

Dimension 3: Fostering and creating innovation.

Dimension 4: Reforming higher education.

MHESI will offer abundant opportunities and foster wisdom while establishing groundwork for the future. It has the potential to propel the economy and society towards prosperity and stability, ultimately benefiting the nation and the Thai people in a sustainable manner. In order to achieve the goal of transforming MHESI into a

truly visionary institution, it is imperative for all sectors, particularly those under its jurisdiction, to collaborate and synergize their efforts.

4.2 Transformation of the Thai universities and emergence of academic-practitioner

4.2.1 Thai universities' transformation 4.0 during the MHESI era (2019-present)

During Prayuth's administration and his team, Dr. Suwit Maesincee, during his tenure as Minister of Science and Technology, introduced and advocated for the idea of Thailand 4.0 as a strategic plan for national development from 2017 to 2019. Thailand 4.0 is a strategic framework designed to reposition Thailand as a leading force to escape the middle-income country trap. For this reason, addressing the issues of inequality and imbalance is a must. Regarding the practical strategy outlined in the 20-year national strategic plan mentioned, how to adopt the "Sufficiency Economy Philosophy" concept (National Strategy Secretariat Office, 2018, p. 5). In addition, during 2019–2020, Dr. Suwit, the former Minister of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, introduced the BCG (Bio-Circular-Green Economy) model to promote sustainable economic growth and translate it into forms of a plan and practical program for a country. Whether it pertains to the environment, economy, society, or culture of that particular country. In the current era, various sectors face significant challenges. However, by utilizing the BCG framework, it becomes possible to unite stakeholders from different sectors and align them towards a common objective. In the BCG model, an economy must possess a minimum of five qualities, namely: first, It depends on the advantages of both biological and cultural diversity. Second, the allocation of strategic branches and target industries is sufficient. Third, the distribution of entrepreneurs encompasses various types of entrepreneurs, including those at the grassroots level, community enterprises, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), large entrepreneurs, and startups. Fourth, connecting the local economic system, regional economy, national economy, and global economy. Lastly, establish an equilibrium in the importation of technology. Following Dr. Suwit's departure as Minister in 2020, he assumed the role of co-founder in the Youth in Charge project 'Human Development'. The initiative provides a platform for individuals aged 15–22 to engage in the design and creation of their future across multiple domains and empowers the young generation from diverse backgrounds to drive crucial agendas. Youth in Charge serves as an intermediary platform to address the issue of adults seldom listening to the voices of young people, turning to active listening.

4.2.2 Emerging academic-practitioner in the higher education of Thailand

4.2.2.1 Reclassifying the Thai higher education institutions during the MHESI from 2019 to the present

This section investigates the rise of "academic-practitioners" in the universities in Thailand, specifically focusing on the university cluster, Group 3, particularly the 38 Rajabhat University groups, which are categorized as universities dedicated to the development of local communities and other communities. A significant transition is the endeavors of the ministry. To enhance the collaboration between

university lecturers and the community, it is essential to define their responsibilities and tasks. One of the primary obligations of university lecturers is to integrate their scientific expertise with academic services. This can be achieved by actively seeking research problems or addressing the specific issues faced by the local community. Nevertheless, there is a lack of stringent obligatory criteria regarding the organization and approach to higher education administration at the policy and planning level. This includes the allocation of university groups and the establishment of specific objectives for each group of universities. Thai higher education institutions are categorized into five groups according to the classification provided by MHESI in 2021 as follows (MHESI, 2021).

Cluster 1: Global and Frontier Research is a prominent research development group consisting of 17 institutions. It is a higher education institution focused on conducting internationally competitive research of the highest quality.

Cluster 2: Technology Development and Innovation (19 institutions) is a higher education institution that focuses on providing education in technology development and promoting innovation. Its goal is to meet the country's needs in the development of agriculture, industry, and services.

Cluster 3: Area-Based and Community Engagement consists of 48 institutions. These institutions aim to contribute to the development of local communities by providing learning opportunities and technological resources. The main goal is to promote lifelong learning, with a focus on sustainable development and co-benefit.

Cluster 4: Moral and Intellectual Cultivation consists of two higher education institutions to foster wisdom by integrating religious and academic principles into the curriculum.

Cluster 5: Development of Professionals and Specialists consists of 48 institutions, focusing on producing and enhancing graduates with specialized knowledge and skills, professional expertise, and specialists in line with the needs of the country. Doing that way is acquiring expertise and fostering creativity, while effectively applying and blending theoretical and practical aspects to specific settings.

Classifying Thai universities' clusters, to some extent, was influenced by global ideas that have been implemented and translated into their practical guidelines for higher education reform. As stated, the MHESI's documents explain how to establish performance indicators for higher education institutions.

"The idea for defining performance indicators began with a comparative study of competitive performance measurement frameworks used to rank global higher education institutions by organizations such as Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), U-Multirank, and the Times Higher Education (THE). The concept used to determine potential indicators in Higher Education (THE) is based on the model for university development towards excellence such as resource preparation, Organizing an efficient management system, and attracting talented human capital, which is presented

by Altbach and Salmi (2011) and provides a framework for developing higher education institutions that focus on nurturing entrepreneurs and community development" (MHESI, 2021, p. 9).

As per the regulations implemented by the MHESI on March 25, 2021, this is regarded as the initial progression. The objective of "Reinventing University" (Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Policy Council, 2022) is to concentrate on cultivating highly skilled individuals who can play a significant role in national progress. Additionally, it aims to encourage higher education institutions to strive for excellence by establishing distinct areas of expertise. Regarding private higher education institutions, there are presently 19 institutions that have been officially identified as part of the group. This clarification meeting facilitated the acquisition of knowledge and understanding regarding the structure and functioning of higher education institutions intending to foster excellence. The objective is to generate highly skilled professionals that align with the country's requirements. Additionally, key topics such as the Higher Education Development Fund, guidelines for crafting development projects for higher education institutions, financial aid for quality evaluation by international accrediting bodies, and institutional databases will be addressed in higher education and the assurance of educational quality, among other topics.

4.2.2.2 Re-standardization of university instructors' workload and tasks

Across the university, direction, strategy, work plan, and projects have been established in accordance with the ministerial strategy. This includes the determination of job descriptions and workload for university lecturers, which are governed by regulations based on specific criteria. The Thai Regulation on Academic Workload Standards of 2015 (Office of the Civil Service Commission, 2015), determines four main workloads for lecturers/professors: teaching, research, academic services, and arts and culture conservation/student development. Some universities may assign other workloads to lecturers/professors as determined by the university. Nevertheless, the workload in these four areas encompasses a comprehensive delineation of the specific domains to which university lecturers are anticipated to contribute to accomplishing the goals. The workload in each aspect can be determined by the 5 groups of universities/higher education institutions based on the group positioning. The significant overhaul of higher education has resulted in modifications to the methods and to what they prioritize, varying based on the institutional clusters. Specifically, the universities categorized as Group 3 focus on Area-Based and Community Engagement consist of 48 universities. Examining the case study of Rajabhat Universities, which consists of 38 institutions established under the Rajabhat University Establishment Act B.E. 2547 (2004) (Office of the Council of State, 2004), according to Section 7 given that universities must focus on local development must modify their working methods and the way they assess the performance of their lecturers based on the specific needs of each university. This adjustment should prioritize the workload in four different areas. As an illustration, the 3rd cluster of higher education institutions, the local community development group, and other communities (consisting of 48 institutions) have varying levels of importance in their work. Similarly, the 38 Rajabhat universities also have different degrees of significance in their tasks. The workload for performance evaluation for raising salaries at certain

Rajabhat Universities is divided into two categories (Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University, 2023).

In Track 1: the workload calculation is as follows: Teaching (40%), Research (30%), and Academic Services (30%).

In Track 2: the workload calculation is as follows: Teaching (25%), Research (25%), and Academic Services (50%).

While policy documents mandate a 50% academic service load (Track 2), the illustrative vignettes suggest this often leads to significant role conflict. One interviewee (a project leader) noted,

“The ministry demands international publications, but the university promotes it based on U2T impact. I am being pulled in two directions.”

In order to achieve the established objectives, the university has mandated that university lecturers and researchers must carry out research that aligns with the country's strategy and the objectives of their respective university clusters, such as the FF (Flagship Funds). If a researcher proposes a research project that does not align with the strategy and cluster of universities they are affiliated with, they will not receive approval for research funding.

4.3 Legitimization of ideas and practices on Thailand 4.0 strategy

4.3.1 Disruption

4.3.1.1 Rethinking universities' goal and its operations

The primary factor behind the changes in Thailand's population structure is the number of births has been steadily declining from around 1,000,000 newborns to a mere 600,000. This decrease resulted in an excess allocation of seats in universities, as the number of seats does not align with the decreasing number of students (UNESCO National Commission, 2022). Consequently, there is a possibility of faculty layoffs and the closure of certain fields of study. Thailand is experiencing a decline in student enrollment because of the decreasing birth rate (Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Policy Council, 2022). However, the Thai labor forces are also faced with the challenge of outdated skills and do need up-to-date knowledge and skills (reskilling and upskilling) for its tens of millions of workers in adaptation to technological advancements and the changing global landscape, and reinventing teaching and learning methods at Rajabhat University Group is necessary. Utilize scholarly expertise to attain tangible outcomes, specifically by fostering continuous education within nearby communities. Utilize the indigenous resources and knowledge within a community as a means of acquiring learning and fostering development within that specific community. However, in academia, it is regarded as the generation of knowledge starting from the basic level, through community research, for community development and knowledge production.

Furthermore, the wide range of scientific disciplines and areas of study offered at the university is regarded as an advantage when it comes to engaging in local community development or research that focuses on the development challenges and resources available in a

community. Thus, when researchers employ community-based research methods, they may come across community issues/problems for which they do not possess expertise and discipline. They can collaborate with faculty/instructors/professors who have expertise in a specific field. Thus, collaborating across various fields for the university engagement mission could provide learning experiences (UX) that are a crucial attribute of “academic-practitioners.” Within the jurisdiction of the Rajabhat University group or other universities seeking to undertake community development initiatives of a comparable or akin nature.

Furthermore, universities hold a highly esteemed position in society and a strong level of trust from the community. Consequently, the visits of university teachers to the area for the operation of local development projects were positively received. Nevertheless, there was still a lack of understanding among community members regarding the purpose and significance of teachers' presence in their communities. The typical responsibilities of a professor primarily involve teaching, doing research, authoring textbooks or books, and engaging in academic-support routine work in universities. It is frequently compared to other government agencies that undertake temporary projects and then vanish once the project is finished, these projects often undergo modifications and cancellations in subsequent years due to frequent changes in provincial governors. Differently, University professors' visits to the area aim to create trustworthy and continuity work, the university's strategy is dictated by the legislation that established Rajabhat University as an institution focused on local development. In sum, the long-term operation of local community development initiatives, spearheaded by university professors, blends elements of academic service and local research.

4.3.2 Blaming and shaming: national-local discourses and argument

This section is not just criticism but illustrating how policy discourse relates to higher education governance. Blaming and shaming can be inferred to another way and tactics to govern the mind of men through discourse (governmentality) and disciplinary discourses aimed at correcting and producing the desired subject (“Academic-Practitioner”). The consolidation of research agencies, including the National Institutes of Health and Technology, into a newly established capital allocation agency within the new ministry. Consequently, the development of research strategies is controlled by a single entity and is influenced by the policy direction set at the ministerial level. This policy direction, based on the “Thailand 4.0” development discourse (National Strategy Secretariat Office, 2018), guides the selection of research strategies, topics, and application of existing knowledge, and requires that the research output be innovative. There may be insufficient attention given to the process of generating knowledge or conducting fundamental research, which serves as the foundation for knowledge that can be utilized to drive innovation and produce adequate inventions. To gain research funding support or approval for a proposed project, it is necessary to produce a research proposal and adhere to the instructions and flagship guidelines provided by the MHESI. This ensures that the project aligns with the flagship guidelines and goals set by the Ministry.

The term “middle-income trap,” introduced by Gill and Kharas (2007), describes a common phenomenon in Latin America and the Middle East and includes an explanation of the trend for economic slowdowns in emerging economies in East Asia. Their account

explains that the transition from low-income to middle-income levels, which is driven by inexpensive labor, technological advancements, and the shift of labor and capital from low-productivity sectors to export-oriented manufacturing, often leads to a decline in growth (Larson et al., 2016). This decline occurs as the rural labor force diminishes and wages increase, causing the accumulation factor that previously drove high growth to lose momentum. If a country fails to discover new sources of economic growth, it may become incapable of competing against low-wage countries that dominate established industries or high-income countries that dominate cutting-edge, high-technology industries. The World Bank categorizes economies into low-income, lower-middle-income, upper-middle-income, and high-income groups, based on their gross national income (GNI) per capita in current prices (Felipe et al., 2017). Thailand is classified by the World Bank as a developing country with a middle-income. In 1988, Thailand had a per capita income that was higher than \$1,036. The country aspired to join the ranks of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore as one of Asia's newly industrialized countries.

"Ivory Tower Scholar" is a derogatory metaphor used to describe a professor or scholar who strictly follows textbooks and theories, and is seen as being in a prestigious position, like a scholar residing in a magnificent ivory tower. They exhibit indifference towards tangible reality and demonstrate a lack of concern for the improvement and advancement of society in their vicinity. They realize that it is beyond their responsibility to translate in-text ideas into practical solutions; the role of an idea translator would rather be played by practitioners.

The term *"Research on the shelf"* is a derogatory metaphor used to describe discourse to blame that research is not actively used or applied to the real world. Lecturers and researchers engage in research activities aimed at developing theories, writing textbooks, and producing works for publication, without generating tangible socio-economic outcomes. There is a lack of interest from the outsider in picking up and reading it, as well as using it as a foundation for developing improved innovations, products, or services.

"From Stack to Stores" (*From Research to Revenue*) is the illustration that serves as a guide for educators and researchers to effectively utilize research knowledge for national development. This collective holds the belief that the existing body of knowledge worldwide is sufficient to be utilized for the betterment and advancement of society. Alternatively, one can utilize the knowledge products from existing research to generate national-local income based on innovations, inventions, and/or innovative services, product development, and community branding, among others.

The phrase *"Get out of the comfort zone"* is commonly used to encourage professors and researchers to actively engage in the development of the local community surrounding a university. Professors typically engage in teaching and research activities primarily conducted within the university setting, where the classroom serves as their primary domain, as criticized and suggested, students and universities should engage in sight visits in rural communities. Individuals within the community engage in activities aimed at enhancing their social development, which is considered a significant responsibility within the four aforementioned tasks. However, these activities are frequently criticized as being a source of complacency for university professors. For university professors to effectively engage in academic services for society, they must initially step out of their comfort zone.

Socially engaged scholarship refers to a type of academic work that involves actively interacting with different social groups, including rural and urban communities, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, socially responsible large businesses, government organizations, and non-profit organizations (Buranasuk, 2016). The term *"social"* encompasses these diverse groups, while the term *"engage"* emphasizes the importance of universities establishing meaningful connections and collaborations, rather than operating in isolation. However, the topic must be connected to the broader community beyond the confines of the university to ensure that both the community and the university can derive advantages, with a focus on enhancing co-learning and the university's local development. The term *"Scholarship"* refers to the academic mission that encompasses the university's three primary tasks: teaching, research, and academic services (Srimoragot, 2016).

The integration of scholarships in academic endeavors for the betterment of society can be achieved through various means (e.g., teaching, training, or other university-related activities). The MHESI asserted that the emphasis should be on producing tangible outcomes rather than solely addressing research inquiries, and a socially engaged scholarship now encompasses two distinct features. Firstly, it encompasses all three core missions of the university, namely research, academic services, and teaching. Secondly, academic work for society comprises two supplementary components. The issue originates both from upstream, indicating that the problem arises from society, and downstream, referring to the potential benefits that will be derived after the completion of the work. This aspect diverges from academics, which primarily focuses on addressing issues within the academic sphere but may not effectively address the challenges faced by neighboring communities. The university's engagement in community development can be justified by its contribution to academic endeavors that benefit society. The issue of academic service work in higher education institutions has been addressed through the discourse on academic practitioners. Previously, academic service work has been seen as a mere knowledge transfer without any new knowledge development, and academics and practitioners have been disconnected. All in all, the aforementioned discourses orchestrate the reinventing and working approaches of university professors to adapt and endure disruptive changes.

4.4 Showcasing global ideas and practices as a driving force

The Sustainable Development outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) (UN, 2015), has been endorsed in the developmental processes of several countries around the globe. In Thailand, the concepts of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are mentioned in research project proposals. These objectives have been transformed into strategic plans and initiatives, serving as benchmarks for measuring achievements in the context of national development, aligning with the United Nations' goals. At the university level, there are procedures in place to fulfill the requirements. The extent of university participation in SDGs varies based on the number of goals they engage in. For instance, certain universities may participate in 7 goals. Universities vary in their level of participation, which is determined by the university's strategic policies.

In some projects, there are references to the approach/concept for implementing projects according to the *BCG concept -- Bio-Circular-Green Economy (BCG) model* which was introduced by the Thai Government as a strategy to create sustainability and inclusiveness to Thailand's economy, society, and the environment, including the ESG concept – Environmental, Social, and Governance. In practice, the application of BCG and ESG concepts varies widely. For example, the MHESI's U2T project (Universities to Tambol), or the Integrated Sub-district Economic and Social Upgrading Project (Suindramedhi et al., 2023). This project, named “U2T for BCG and Regional Development,” is available to recent graduates and individuals residing in 7,435 sub-districts. A total of 68,350 individuals from 77 provinces are interested in collaborating with the MHESI. This collaboration will involve over 70 public universities, and 20 private universities, as well as civil society, local agencies, and related sectors. The U2T project for BCG aims to enhance the fundamental economy while also encouraging and assisting the university in utilizing its expertise, research, technology, innovation, and resources. Regarding the expansion of the region and the advancement of the nation, simultaneously, it can exacerbate the issues or challenges faced by the nation. The goals are: (1) to enhance the sub-district economy and society comprehensively by transforming the university into a System Integrator; (2) to establish a community-big data system; (3) to generate employment opportunities for the general public, recent graduates, and students, thereby revitalizing the local economy; and (4) to address the community's specific problems and needs through development initiatives. There are a total of 483 sub-districts participating in the project (NSTDA, 2022). These projects, regarding Münch (2020), proved how MHESI's shift towards innovation, BCG, and Flagship Funds aligns with the political economy of higher education, where institutions are increasingly positioned as agents of national economic growth.

HiAPs -- Health in All Policies, is a concept introduced in the Ottawa Charter (WHO, 1986, 2024). It emphasizes the notion that good health is influenced by various factors. Holistic health care encompasses various dimensions, including social, mental, and intellectual factors, among others. Moreover, it recognizes the influence of the environment on overall well-being. It provides protection against diseases and lowers the rate of premature mortality (WHO, 2018). This concept involves infiltrating local communities by providing operational funding for their development through the Thai Health Promotion Foundation. As part of a local development initiative, address the issue of the agency that submitted the scholarship proposal or become a network partner of the Thai Health Promotion Foundation. The Rajabhat University Group and other universities have collaborated to propose a project plan to secure funding for operating within the university network and the Association for University Social Engagement Thailand (EnT). The project plan is based on the concept of HiAPs and will be implemented for a specific duration of time (Association for University Social Engagement Thailand, 2024).

Lifelong Learning refers to the ongoing process of acquiring knowledge and skills throughout one's life (Laal, 2011). It often involves taking short courses or participating in credit bank programs, which allow individuals to accumulate credits for their learning achievements. This reveals how educational institutions prepare for the upcoming and ongoing education crisis. The National University of Singapore (NUS) has established a “Lifelong Learning University”

with the aim of offering educational opportunities to individuals of all ages (NUS SCALE, 2024). This innovative curriculum model has proven to be highly effective and fulfilling. Over the past few years, numerous universities in Thailand have begun offering a significant quantity of short-term training courses.

KPIs / OKRs as governance – governance regulated by number --- Global governance through numerical indicators is an alternative method for international entities to propagate ideas and oversee the effectiveness and execution of policies (Berten and Leisering, 2017). Governance regulated by number does not just perform at a global scale but is also seen in the evaluation of the influence of the dissemination of worldwide concepts and the implementation of effective strategies on a domestic scale such as an education quality assurance (e.g., EdPEX, AUN-QA, and TQA), and KPIs/OKRs. This is evident that the ministerial strategy can directly impact individual behavior and research choice. In this scenario, the assessment of higher education institutions, particularly universities, can be conducted based on the institutional and organizational level. It is highly intricate. The Ministry of Education, MHESI, and all universities and institutions affiliated with it must develop a plan to execute the strategy. Strategic plans and initiatives are developed at the ministerial level to address specific objectives and goals, taking into account the unique circumstances of each institution. Tactically, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) play a crucial role in shaping work behavior by providing clarity and oversight regarding the objectives and direction of operations at various levels within an organization. This includes the organizational level, project/activity level, and individual level. At the individual level, KPIs/OKRs determine the significance of academic services, projects, and activities for society, which in turn impacts the evaluation score and annual salary increment of personnel.

4.5 Implications on the academic-practitioner as governance outcomes

The state-mandated establishment of the academic-practitioner identity has significant implications for the future of the Thai professoriate, necessitating critical reflection. Initially, the emphatic mandate to synchronize research with Flagship Funds and innovation signifies a clear transition towards academic capitalism. This emphasis, although facilitating swift technological transfer, may unintentionally marginalize fundamental, investigator-led research. This poses a risk that the fundamental capacity for knowledge generation—crucial for sustained, high-income development—may be compromised in favor of short-term socio-economic benefits. Secondly, although the area-based focus (Cluster 3) seeks to improve local equity and tackle rural development, the bureaucratic enforcement of a practitioner role, especially when associated with promotion metrics, establishes a dual system. The dual mandate of the academic-practitioner—to create innovation for national economic competitiveness while concurrently tackling local social challenges—illustrates a governmental effort to harmonize the frequently opposing demands of Education 4.0 and the nascent philosophy of Education 5.0 (Akturk et al., 2022). ED 4.0 imperatives, propelled by academic capitalism, emphasize outputs such as Flagship Funds and patents. In contrast, the community engagement (Cluster 3) and the focus on the Sufficiency Economy

Philosophy and BCG model align with ED 5.0's goal of creating a human-centered, sustainable society (Chakraborty and Galatro, 2025; Rane et al., 2023). The resulting role conflict experienced by lecturers is precisely a tension between these two competing education paradigms. Lecturers are evaluated by varied and occasionally contradictory criteria, which may result in internal conflicts and ambiguity regarding their roles (see Illustrative Vignettes) (Office of Learning Support and Academic, 2021). In addition, the main challenge resides in the disparity between the top-down policy narrative of "transformation" and the bottom-up experiences of academic staff. As my analysis shows, claims about genuine identity transformation must be contextualized by the bureaucratic pressures and individual adaptations observed in the field, confirming that the new identity is often bureaucratically imposed rather than organically embraced. Finally, the Thai experience is not isolated. Many peer nations in ASEAN (such as Indonesia with its Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka policy, and Malaysia with its institutional ranking models (Purwanti, 2021)) are similarly leveraging higher education reform to overcome economic development challenges by imposing market-driven expectations and reclassifying institutions. This Thai model of state-driven academic re-invention provides a crucial and underexplored case for comparative higher education studies and policy debates on the future of the professoriate in post-developmental contexts.

5 Conclusion

This article examines the rise and – compulsory emergence of the "academic-practitioners" role-- a multi-functional identity mandated through the Thai higher education reform 4.0 concerning the reform of Thai higher education 4.0 Above mentioned, The claims about the "emergence" and "transformation" of academic identities are not only largely inferred from top-down policy discourse (national and ministerial policy levels) but also grounded in the professors lived and collective experiences, including tensions during transition and the agency of the actors involved (individual university's rules and personal experiences of academia as practitioner). Thailand is endeavoring to evade the middle-income trap by implementing the 4.0 strategic approach. As a result, universities are anticipated to co-produce innovation in accordance with this strategy. Nonetheless, there is an apprehension that overemphasis on innovation may result in the oversight of other critical elements. Practically, the villagers participate in entrepreneurial endeavors, fostering sustainable development in collaboration with universities. An approach for improving the performance of Thai universities that is directed by quality assessments and tools such as EdPEX, AUN-QA, and TQA to guarantee that operations align with global, regional, and national educational standards. Nonetheless, it remains a lengthy journey towards sustainability and has faced considerable criticism. Ultimately, the rise of the compulsory "academic-practitioner" identity in Thailand is a strategic governance outcome intended to leverage higher education to navigate disruptive changes. By pushing lecturers into applied roles, the state is pursuing a blend of Education 4.0 objectives (economic competitiveness and innovation) with the socio-environmental resilience goals of Education 5.0/Society 5.0 (community development and

sustainability). This hybrid approach demonstrates the national policy's ambitious attempt to future-proof its workforce and institutions in a volatile global landscape. In sum, an analysis of the Thai higher education reform during the MHESI Era can deepen the understanding of global social governance in educational policies within countries that are facing the challenges, propelled by the impetus of higher education institutions. Even though a Thai case cannot provide the evidence and prove that the government harness will be able to overcome the disruptive changes and uncertainties, at least, a case witnesses the reasons why, how they process, how they legitimize their ideas, and how they assess policy outputs and outcomes.

Authors' note

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/[Supplementary material](#), further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the studies involving humans because all participants are not vulnerable, are at very little risk, and no participants have limited capacity for informed consent (e.g., due to illness, age, or cognitive ability) and are not subject to situational pressures like coercion or undue influence. The author confirms that informed consent was obtained from all participants. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

RS: Funding acquisition, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Resources, Visualization, Project administration, Methodology, Validation, Software, Supervision, Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation.

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The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1698553/full#supplementary-material>

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