

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 7.1 Conclusions

In this thesis I attempted to outline the development of an industry that flourished as a result of Thailand's embrace of the global economy and its opening up to international trade and investment. In a way, this thesis also offers a glimpse of Thailand's development during that period, seen through the prism of one particular industry.

The industry of English conversation schools in the 1960s and 1970s was a small industry, dominated by a number of foreign government-sponsored institutes and private schools run by teachers-owners. Students attended these schools for the purpose of expanding their horizons and creating opportunities. Thailand's economy at that time was oriented towards import substitution. This meant that while foreign investors were welcome, the general orientation was towards the domestic economy. The focus was inward, rather than outward, looking. Except the contact with American military personnel stationed in Thailand, there was relatively scant contact with foreigners. Imported products were rare, due to the import substitution policy, and exports were mainly concentrated in a few agricultural commodities and were managed by a few specialized firms. The need for English proficiency among the general population was therefore minimal.

As the 1980s started, policy makers realized that the import substitution policies ran their course, and that the economy, also battered by the second oil crisis of 1978-9 and a deterioration in the relative price of Thailand's agricultural exports,

needed a new direction. This new direction was a shift towards export promotion. The new shift has unleashed a tremendous economic growth that lasted into the mid 1990s.

The new shift towards export promotion spelled, however, much more than simple concentration on export industries. More than a mere new industrial policy the shift from import substitution to export promotion has been a major change in the direction and the orientation of the Thai economy, and by implication, the Thai society. The shift has been followed by an increasing exposure to world's markets and a progressive opening up of the economy to imports, to foreign investments and, in general, to a growing foreign involvement in the Thai economy.

As the Thai economy progressively opened up to foreign influences, so did the demand for English proficiency skyrocket. The demand was not guided anymore by a vague desire to expand one's horizons and opportunities. Rather it was guided by an urgent sense of necessity. People saw English as a major instrument to find their way and promote themselves in the new economy and society. As we saw in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, the sense of urgency is so acute that we increasingly find third party sponsorship of English study. We see parents sending their children, young children and teen-agers to study English. We also see employers increasingly organizing classes for their employees to brush up and improve their English skills. Both phenomena demonstrate how acute the demand is.

The increasing demand for English was noticed also by the planners of the Ministry of Education. Even from the early 1960s, long before the Thai economy

made the shift towards the orientation of export promotion, the planners in the Ministry understood that there will be increasing need for English communication skills and tried to reform the curriculum so as to better cater to this demand. The correct vision of the planners failed, however, when it came to implementation. Reforms of the curriculum alone were not sufficient. The need was for teachers who could deliver these new teaching techniques, and it here that the Ministry failed to make the required investments in human resource development. The demand for English proficiency was not satisfied by the formal sector.

The developments in the industry of English conversation schools demonstrate the extent of this new demand. From the 1970s to the 1980s the industry completely changed face. Not only did it see a fast expansion but also it now operated in a completely different way. No more dominated by private teachers-owners, it was now dominated by professional business organizations, which increasingly operated extensive networks of branches. The schools were run by managers, had marketing strategies and policies, and hired teachers as per need. Many of the schools had international affiliations, either through franchising arrangements or through shareholdings. The schools now had the capital to expand in order to cater to the increasing demand. We see, very often, aggressive expansion followed by partial retrenchment and rationalization. In other cases, the expansion is more measured and slow.

Not only is there a growing foreign involvement in the management and ownership of these schools, but there is an almost complete reliance on a foreign labor force to execute its main mission, that is, to teach English. Whereas the teachers of the old teacher-owners schools of the past were primarily Thais, the teachers hired by

the new business oriented schools are primarily foreign nationals who come to stay some time in the Kingdom.

It is here that the English conversation school industry has outdone the Ministry. Instead of focusing on curriculum and content, it catered to Thais desire to learn English from native English speakers. This need is not a mere fad but is rationally related to the nature of the demand for English proficiency, namely, the fact that this demand is for English communication skills rather reading and writing skills. Hearing the English spoken in the correct accent and the opportunity to be able to speak with a teacher who can correct one's accent, are all in great demand. With a real English native speaker one can be exposed to and practice real-life English rather than the English of the books presented by teachers who never had the chance to spend time in a real English speaking environment.

The English conversation schools act, in fact, as a mediator. As a group of business operators who have chains of schools, administrative operations and capital, they mediate between a small community of foreigners residing for various periods of time in the Kingdom, and the Thai public who is eager to learn the language. The schools do not offer original new curriculum or new teaching techniques, but access to foreign English native speakers.

## **7.2 Recommendations for Further Researches**

This research has attempted to cover only private English schools, which put emphasis on communicative purposes. The study is also limited to the Bangkok

area. Further research on the same topic but in Thailand's provincial areas as well as research on English tutorial schools could be interesting to explore as it may add to this research higher degree of completion in the sense of macro perspective of the whole English teaching in the private industry of Thailand. In addition, ones can also observe and explore from the other side of the token meaning to engage in researches which primarily concern with students and teachers of English language in Thailand's private sector.