



## Towards the 21st Century

by  
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IN THIS WEEK'S HRI-POST CO-OPERATION COLUMN, Dr. Chira discusses some of the views on doing business in Thailand which are commonly held by foreign executives, and allays fears of political instability so long as the bureaucracy continues as a linchpin.

Those people who have followed my column over the past several months may have noticed that I have not travelled overseas for a long while. However, as you read this article I am travelling to Hong Kong, at the invitation of Professor K.C. Mun, to be a guest speaker to a group of MBA Executives at the Chinese University. I'm also spending a day in Taipei to discuss a separate project there.

The topic I will address in Hong Kong will be 'issues surrounding the conduct of business in Thailand' - a subject with a lot of scope for discussion. I will probably tell the audience about some of the strengths and weaknesses in my own country, and try to give them some idea about the future outlook.

Coincidentally, at the same time as this trip to Hong Kong, the HRI has just launched an intensive course on 'Understanding Thai Economy and Business' intended for foreign executives living and working in Thailand. The first intake for the course comprised top executives from several countries, and I find it quite refreshing to share ideas about how outsiders look at the Thai economy.

In general the executives are very surprised about the consistent economic growth, but they are also worried about the long term prospects for sustainable development. On the whole they seem to feel that the Thai economy is expanding too fast, and that this is creating a number of problems with respect to the following:

- Environment
- Human Resources
- Infrastructure
- Bureaucracy

I feel one is fortunate as a Thai to be in a position where one hears realistic and frank views about Thailand expressed as foreigners see things. I would also agree with them on at least one point: the Thai business community should not feel over confident about their short term successes.

As far as human resources shortages are concerned, the foreign executives also seem to feel quite strongly that there has been a lack of progress in terms of the relaxation of work permit regulations. The issue of work permits for foreigners is something that this government must tackle with more vigor. It is not helpful when our politicians make promises but do not deliver results.

Another interesting point is that many foreigners sometimes put too much emphasis on the political side of the coin. In fact, the Thai bureaucracy is still the key to our stability. In particular, agencies such as the Budget Bureau, the National Economic and Social Development Board, the Civil Service Commission and the Bank of Thailand, still exert a lot of influence on the way the country is run. Can you imagine what would happen to our economy if those agencies were unable to keep their good people? Another interesting point commonly made concerns the increasingly active role of the private sector.

Last week the HRI successfully staged the 'VISION II' conference which was attended by about 200 senior government officials. Vision is so important to the future effectiveness of our bureaucracy. This is why everybody in government agencies are looking for a new way of doing things, and trying to increase the quality of services that are delivered to the people.

Vision must be present within all the different departments of the bureaucracy, because if there is no vision, bright new recruits will not wish to join. As it is, the Thai bureaucracy tends to limit creativity and hold back the full utilisation of human potential.

Turning to our guest this week, I want to welcome a new friend, John who is a strong follower of Dr. Edward Deming's theories. I have read many books about Deming, and I hope that some of his philosophy can be useful to us. His work has already had a profound impact on Japan.

However, although it is very good to listen to different ideas, the most important thing is still to blend them with the local situation. Thailand certainly benefits from opening up its society to so many ideas, but we must be the final judge of their relevance and usefulness.

See you next week!!

### Using of Gov. Training Program Between small and large firm in USA.

