

Thailand: Educational Statistics

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The author of this article was Philippine delegate to the Unesco Seminar on the Standardization of Educational Statistics, which was held in Bangkok, Thailand (Siam), on Nov. 15-27, 1957. The purpose of the Seminar was to consider proposed Unesco recommendations for the standardization of educational statistics to insure international comparability.

Need for the Standardization of Statistics

Unesco has been publishing a Yearbook in Education, and the educational data presented for each country could be interpreted in various ways, depending on what is meant by certain terms. Unesco has also been publishing some data on illiteracy, and yet there has been no common understanding of what is meant by the term. It varies in different countries. In Japan, for instance, a person who can read and write both the "kanji" (Chinese characters) and the "katakana" (modernized characters) is considered literate, but one who knows only one of these types of writing is considered semi-literate, for the reason that in modern Japanese writing, both kinds of characters are used. Then, there is the matter of the age when literacy is expected to be acquired. Illiteracy in some countries is reckoned beginning at age 10, while in other countries it is reckoned at age 15. There seems to be little difference between the data produced by the two schemes, but the scheme at 15-years of age seems to yield more accurate figures because a 10-year old who has completed the first four grades may be presumed to be literate. Where reading materials are not adequate, however, there is a chance that fourth-grade graduates may eventually revert to illiteracy. The five-year period after, say Grade IV, will give a good picture of the number that have remained literate.

There are many terms that mean one thing in one country and another thing in another country. What is a private school, for instance? In the Philippines we say that an educational institution is private if it is financed by private funds. In some countries, the government supports fully or aids "private" schools. Any educational institution organized and

supported by a "public" authority, such as parent-teacher associations, charitable institutions and the like, are considered "public" schools. And, of course, this dig about English schools is well known: The English call an educational institution "public" if it is supported by private funds and "offers an academic curriculum with a major in soccer football." What is "school age population," for another instance? In some countries, this means the number of children and youth with ages comprehended by the compulsory education law, which varies in different countries; in other countries it means "ages 5 to 16." If one wishes to compare the percentage of the school age population with the school enrolment, he would get figures with varying meanings. There are other terms with varying meanings, such as the following: pre-school age, primary education, secondary schools, collegiate level, post-graduate, etc.

And so, Unesco is trying to standardize the meaning of terms used in educational statistics, so that data may have the same international meaning. Unesco is also trying to standardize methods of collecting data, classifying data, and tabulating them, to insure international comparability. That was the objective of the Seminar at Bangkok. There has been similar seminars in other regions of the world, and there will be two or three more, before a final international conference is held to standardize educational statistics. Before that final conference is held, therefore, the agreements at Bangkok cannot be considered final. All that is to be stressed in this paper at the moment is the fact that we must use international terminology in connection with our own educational statistics in the Philippines, and we must apply methods and techniques of collecting data that conform to international requirements. What is perhaps very urgent in the Philippines is to collect more precise and complete educational data pertaining to private education, which appear to be less precise and complete than data pertaining to public education. And another point that may be stressed at the moment is the need for a coordinating office for educational statistics in the Department of Education, so that we could have something that looks like a national picture in respect to educational data. Until recently the only figures on survival (from Grade I through college) were

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those for public schools only, which meant we had only one-half of the national picture. When we had only the survival figures for the public schools, it was known both here and abroad that of 100 pupils entering Grade I, only 0.29 students survived to Second Year college. When public and private school figures were put together (these were not even complete at the time), the survival figure became 2.64 to Fourth Year College.

The world conference on educational statistics in November 1958 may have rough sailing, even with these preliminary seminars to seek international agreements. For it is reported that in Europe the statisticians are not yet sold to the idea of international standardization. There are statistics people in that region who are so set in their ways of doing things that there is little enthusiasm for standardization.

The Seminar Itself

There were supposed to be 16 countries of East Asia in the Seminar, but Cambodia and Burma could not send delegates. The countries represented in the Seminar were: Afghanistan, British North Borneo, Ceylon, the Republic of China, Hongkong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Malaya, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

The Seminar was held at the Santitham Hall, a very modern three-story, aircooled building with modern equipment and facilities. It has a huge auditorium with a seating capacity of 3,000, for international congresses. (There were six international gatherings going on in Bangkok at the time of the Seminar. The International Scientific Congress, which was held almost simultaneously with the Seminar, had its opening session in this auditorium.) The seats are in semi-circular tiers descending upon a platform. Each and every one of the seats is provided with earphones. Speeches are immediately translated into the official languages of the conference, and one using the earphone set to the particular language that he uses gets the speech almost simultaneously as the speech itself is being given. The conference room of the Seminar is a small replica of the the auditorium. And there are other conference rooms similarly appointed. The lounge rooms in the Hall are commodious, with upholstered seats. It seemed that toilet or comfort rooms were found in all nooks and corners of the building. The lobbies are very specious. There is a bank and a post-office in the building, and of course a soda fountain, which is well patronized during coffeebreaks.

There is no building in the Philippines that compares favorably with the Santitham Hall, not even the Congress building itself. It cost the Thai government something like \$2,500,000 to build it three years ago. The outside part of the building is not very im-

posing but inside it is a thing of beauty, not to mention its modern appointments. It is painted in pastel green and gray, with gold trimmings. The fixtures are chromium plated. The wooden paneling is teakwood.

The delegate from the Philippines nominated Thailand for the chairmanship of the Seminar; India and Japan were nominated for the two positions of Vice-President; and the Philippine delegate was nominated for the position of rapporteur. All nominations were approved unanimously.

For two weeks, the Seminar considered Unesco's proposals for the standardization of educational statistics. The proposals were thoroughly revised. (The report on the work of the Seminar was put together by the rapporteur and four other delegates, thoroughly revised by the Seminar, and submitted to Unesco for final editing. The report is therefore not yet available for publication.)

The Seminar was a meeting of statisticians. It cannot of course be expected that there would be anything but objective thinking and precise expression of ideas. But there were many issues that had to be resolved, and so there were divergent opinions, especially in the definition of terms. The chairman, because of his quiet dignity and magnanimous tolerance, had set the pattern of discussions: no rancor, no passionate "plea for a cause," no ruffled feelings, no violent disagreements. Whenever there was an issue difficult to resolve, the Unesco adviser on educational statistics (Dr. Liu, a Chinese) was always at hand to present a compromise statement of the issue. And when such a statement was ready to be voted upon by the Seminar, the chairman would always precede the show of hands with a compassionate plea, "I hope every one is now happy over the proposed consensus." And generally there were no strong minority votes. He did not ask "how many are in favor?" "how many agree to the statement?" He asked how many are *happy* about it? And from then on, the discussion of other items goes on as before. No wonder that when the Seminar was about to close, there was a prevalent feeling that "the ties of friendship that have been forged here giving assurance of international understanding will long endure." And when the delegates went on their separate ways, there was more than the sentimental feeling of parting in their handshake. "We must keep in touch with one another," was the common parting expression. Toward the end of the Seminar, many of the delegates felt like long-lost brothers determined to keep the feeling of international understanding and cooperation aflame, personally, educationally, statistically, and otherwise.

The Thais Are Gracious Hosts

That feeling of camaraderie included the Thai colleagues, of course; to them the attachment was per-

haps stronger because of their gracious hospitality. We in the Philippines pride ourselves in our own version of hospitality, but the Thais cannot be beaten in this regard. They did everything possible to make the Seminar a joyous and profitable experience.

The Thais are mostly Buddhists. Their graciousness to fellow beings, their peacefulness, their detachment from ostentation and sophistication, and their civic spirit perhaps stem from the principles of Buddhism, which are the underlying regimen of their everyday life.

Our hosts were very friendly, and this quality is not due to any desire to condescend or to regard other people as superior. As history tells us, Thailand has never been under foreign conquerors, except for a brief period during World War II, when the country was overran by Japan. They have always been an independent people, and so they have no "colonial mentality;" they feel equal to all other peoples. They have never been conquerors themselves, and therefore have no feeling of superiority over other peoples. Their kings have had an unbroken line of descent for over five hundred years of independence, and so they feel no awe for other people, except perhaps for their own king, who usually is a benign one, seriously and sincerely interested in the welfare of his people.

The Thais' hospitality manifested itself in several other ways. The delegates were treated to typical Thai dances, a trip to the old capital of Thailand, a three-hour boat ride home, a trip to a seaside resort (the Thais go to the seaside in hot weather, while Filipinos go to the mountains), luncheons with small groups of delegates ("Small groups are better than large groups, because the conversation involves fewer people"), a cocktail party, guided shopping, etc. But it was not only through these earthly aspects that they showed their hospitality and friendliness. These were felt rather than tasted. It came in subtle doses. They were very solicitous over our comfort. The lady owner of our hotel would ask the delegates, "Are you comfortable in your room? Please tell me how your convenience could be better served." Our Thai colleagues went out of their way to guide us through the large City of Bangkok, whenever we had errands to do. A lady professor at the College of Education drove us around in her own car. "What can we do for you?" was an incessant query. If you were by yourself, at a party or gathering, there was always a Thai lady or gentleman who would come around and engage you in conversation. Our hosts did not want to have any one bored. If a delegate was not enjoying himself fully, on any extra-curriculum occasion, someone would come around and ask, "You are sad?", perhaps in the spirit of solicitousness and interest in your actual feelings. "What does your country look like? Does it resemble Thailand in any way? What food do you eat? What fruits do you raise?

(They have atis, chico and lanchat, which is lanzones.) Is the climate warm just like ours? Do many girls go to school? Do you happen to know so and so and so and so?" These questions and many others are asked, just to make you feel at home. If more of our hosts had had a good command of English (some of them spoke French to the delegates who spoke only French), perhaps they would have been more effusive in the manifestation of hospitality through conversation. Even those who knew little English wanted to talk to us. Thai English is tinged with Chinese pronunciation. Thai and Chinese seem to be more closely alike than Thai and the Filipino languages. Many of our Thai colleagues were educated in America or England; these were the more easy conversationalists.

Some Thai Characteristics

The Thais are not given to violent reactions. Buddhism teaches the peaceful way of life. The gesture of greeting is that of placing the hands upon the breast, palm to palm, in much the same way that Catholics do, in very formal prayer. The recent coup d'état staged by the head of the Thai army to oust the premier has not disturbed the country's life in any serious manner. After the transfer of power, the Thai people carried on as before. In other countries, there might have been a revolution. Nothing of the kind happened in Thailand. The deposed premier just left the country, and another one was appointed to replace him. There was no stir, no ripple generated by the change. And it seems that most of the people who understand public affairs are happy about the change. The former seems to have been quite impulsive and arbitrary in his actuations, that is why he had been deposed.

There is internal peace, there is very little said in the Thai newspapers about internal trouble or even communism. The appropriations for national defense are high compared with those for education, but that is because there are close neighbors who believe in another kind of life.

The Thais' lack of ostentation and affectation is shown even in their mode of dressing. The men have very little color, even in their neckties. These are mostly in subdued colors. The women's dresses, unlike those worn by other women of the Far East, are not colorful. The women generally wear a dark blue or dark (prescribed in the schools for both teachers and students) and a white or gray blouse. The Thai women's sex appeal perhaps lies more in her homelike qualities than in the slant on dress. Women of the educated class do not know what a night club looks like! There are no "social" dances in Thailand as we know them in the Philippines. Of course there are nightclubs and hostesses, and Thai men count among the customers of these places of entertainment. (Filipino orchestras provide music in

some night clubs.) The most common form of entertainment is their own native dances, which many young men and women learn with diligence and perform with grace. (Oftentimes, men's parts are played by women.) The Thai dances are very similar to Indonesian dances. Performance is good or bad depending on the preciseness of the rhythmic movements in fingers, hands and legs. The dance usually illustrates an episode in their rich legends.

Do Thai women then occupy a subordinate position in Thai society, because they do not go to social dances? Not at all. The women are very much in public life, some of them occupying important positions in the government. In a cocktail party tendered for the delegates by the Minister of Education, there were many Thai women. There are many women educators, and in the schools there are about as many girls as boys. This writer has formed the impression that the Thai women are as devoted home lovers as their counterparts else where. Educated women with whom the writer held conversations could talk expansively about cooking and other home arts. If the Thai women were occupying an inferior position in society, we would not see so many of them going to public places with their husbands. And this writer has seen many Thai women driving their own cars; there was even one who was driving a personnel carrier.

The average Thai is soft-spoken; he is not given to gesticulations and oratory. He speaks with subdued voice and generally with little emotion. He tries to carry a point, not by how he says it but what he says. People accustomed to contemplation in the Buddhist manner cannot be too outwardly expressive. But they are a happy and free people; they laugh wholeheartedly as the occasion and the spirit demands.

The Thai seem to be thrifty and economical. This is not due to the compelling necessity of poverty; they have rich resources and their economy is perhaps better than that of many countries of Asia. In this regard, it may be reported that the "tecal" (baht) is more stable than the Philippine peso.

More About the Thais and their Country

Thailand means *the land of the free*. The Thais are a blending of Malay and Chinese blood. They founded their kingdom about 1,500 years ago. When the Mongol emperor drove the Laotians from their home in Southwest China, the Laotians mingled with the Thais (Siamese), and so the Thais are today a mixture of Laotian (Chinese) and Siamese blood.

Centuries ago, the Thais had a literature of wonderful stories and thrilling poetry. These form the themes of their native dances. Their kings lived in splendid palaces and wore magnificent robes. Evidence of this is found in their national museum at Bangkok.

The language of Siam has mostly one-syllable words. Since there are only about 2,000 words, each of them means many different things. The tone or pitch of voice makes it possible to tell one meaning from another. There are five tones in use today. The tone determines the meaning of what is intended to be conveyed. There is a story about the Chinese language to the effect that Chinese do not whisper, that is, they always talk in loud language, because without the right tone it is not possible to understand the meaning to be conveyed. That may also be true in the case of the Thai language, since the Siamese and Chinese are very much alike. The words in the Thai written language run together; spaces are left only between sentences. The names are very long, but most names have beautiful meanings, e.g., one place is called "The Restaurant with the Divine Taste"; one girl's name is "Right Attitude."

The Thais have not been a conquering people. But they had constant defense wars with their neighbors, especially the Cambodians, whom they once overpowered. Since the Europeans came to the Far East, the Thais have been at peace.

The elephant is held sacred. The kings usually had favorite elephants in the compounds of their palaces, and they had names. The elephant is a symbol of royal power, that is why the figure of the elephant is found in their art work, and sometime in the past, the figure of the elephant was on the Thai flag.

The economy of Thailand appears to be strong. While salaries are low compared to those in the Philippines, cost of living is also low. Top professors get ₱350 a month, teachers less than ₱100 a month. What is surprising is the large number of motor cars, mostly of European make, of small size. The Thais seem to be more sensible in the matter of cars. But if the salaries are low, how can they afford to have so many cars? There is one answer: the Thais may have other sources of income than just their salaries. There are so many cars on the streets of Bangkok that traffic is just about as bad as in Manila. There are about as many taxis as private cars. These have no meters, and so you have to haggle about the fare, that is, if you know how far you are going, just like you would, with the cochero.

There are many parts of Bangkok that have residential buildings as durable and as well built in the same style as those in the best suburbs of Quezon City and Manila. Their public buildings are certainly better looking and better built than those in Manila. The House of Parliament at Bangkok is made mainly of marble. The King's palaces are ornate and rich with native Thai architectural motifs. One of the biggest palaces has a classical foundation but the upper structure has typical Thai architecture. The office and commercial buildings are about as substantial

as those on the Escolta and Rizal Avenue. The Irawan Hotel, their best in Bangkok, looks more imposing than any of the first class hotels in Manila, and the appointments are just as good, perhaps a little better. Food in the restaurants and hotels is good and relatively cheaper than in Manila (Thai food has a lot of chili). There are foreign commodities in the stores but native products predominate. There is very little consumption of foreign foods. Import and exchange control do not seem to be as stringent as in the Philippines but their balance of trade is definitely more in their favor than that of the Philippines. Their largest exports are rice, teakwood, and tin. They have a wider market for their exports than the Philippines has.

This writer noted three important features of Thai agriculture. On the way from Bangkok to the seaside, we saw vast tracts of land that can be developed for agriculture. These areas presumably are not good for rice cultivation, otherwise they would have been so utilized long time ago. The farmers are building large dikes in this kind of land, and they are planting coconuts on the dikes. What seemed to me to have been first-class fishponds if so developed were not being utilized for the purpose. There may be no need for fresh-water fishponds, because Thailand has many canals and other waterways that yield plenty of fish. The coastal waters also yield abundant fish. It was noted, however, that the waters were being fished continuously, just as in the Philippines, and one wonders if the fish supply will not one day give out, without fishponds.

This writer noted many windmills in the paddies. For every hectare of land there may be three or four of these windmills. Since there is plenty of water, it would seem that the windmills are used mainly for pumping water out of the paddies. The windmill seems to be made of wood. There are two cross-pieces that serve as blades. The blades are thin wooden pieces about three meters long. These four blades are turned even by a slight breeze. By means of gears, the power thus generated causes a tread or

chain of water containers to scoop up the water and pour it out. The orientation of the blades is regulated by means of a rudder piece that is firmed with a rope.

It would seem that this kind of native windmill could be used in the ricefields of the Philippines. This writer has been wondering if our specialists in agriculture who have visited Thailand have ever thought of adopting it for the use of our farmers.

The most important aspect of Thailand's agriculture noted by this writer is the "floating" rice. This variety of rice grows in well-watered areas. In the Philippines, when the rice is ready to harvest, too much water in the paddy causes the rice to droop and be spoiled. The floating rice does not droop even when heavily loaded with grain. As a matter of fact, the top of the plant is so high above the water level that abundance of water does not seem to affect it at all. The water is so deep in those areas that the farmers use boats to harvest the grain!

In Thailand, there are rice varieties suited to the amount of water on the land. There is a variety for highlands, one for fairly wet soil, another for well watered soil. This writer has been wondering if the Filipino specialists of agriculture have ever thought of developing varieties suited to the amount of water available in the ricelands. A story is told that the Thai students who studied agriculture many years ago at Los Baños have made Thai agriculture thoroughly scientific. And now we should send our own specialists to learn from the achievements of former Thai students. One aspect of agriculture that is worth noting is that the canals are used for three purposes: irrigation, raising fish, and transportation. We use them in the Philippines for irrigation purposes only.

All told, the trip to Thailand has been profitable. This author has acquired new insight into educational statistics; he has formed friendships that contribute to international understanding; and he has learned a little more about the neighboring Thais, from whom much can be learned about life and living.

