

The Kingdoms of the Netherlands and Thailand have trade relations going back four centuries.

Today there is a brisk export from Thailand to Holland and the other way around. The major export products were electrical machineries and equipments, integrated circuit (IC) micro assemblies, plastic, and chemical products. Dutch imports from Thailand in 2007 amounted to EUR 2,267 million, around three times the export values. Dutch imports from Thailand comprised machines, transport material, food and living stock. The Netherlands is a relatively important trading partner for Thailand. This is largely because Rotterdam plays such an important role as a transit port for Thai products.

About 200 Dutch organizations are active in Thailand. The Dutch service sector plays a large role among them. Dutch consultancy companies, Unilever, KLM, Philips, Heineken, Numico, and several Dutch banks and insurance companies are well known in Thailand. In 2004, the EU invested EUR 7,453 million in stocks in Thailand. In this period the Netherlands invested EUR 815 million, putting it in third place in the EU after the U.K. and Germany.

Around 1900 His Majesty King Chulalongkorn extended the relationship between Holland and Thailand to include science and technology. He brought engineer Jan Homan van der Heijde to Thailand to assist in drainage work. That was the start of a fruitful scientific relationship that even today is benefiting prominent Thai citizens. Her Royal Highness Princess Siridhorn has been to the Netherlands on several educational visits. She presided over the official opening of the International Institute for Geo-information Science and Earth Observation ITC, located in the east of the Netherlands and one of the world's major centres in its specialist areas. The current Secretary-General of UNCTAD and former Director-General of the WTO, Dr Supachai Panitchpakdi, studied for his PhD at Erasmus University Rotterdam under Professor Tinbergen.

They are the top of a broad-based pyramid. Currently, three hundred Thai citizens are following their example by studying in the Netherlands. These students generally opt for one of the more than 1400 English-taught study programmes that Dutch institutes of higher education provide especially for foreign students. The study programmes on offer cover the entire spectrum of science, technology and the arts, from music to civil engineering, from media studies and management to agricultural sciences. The Netherlands now has a thriving Thai Student Association (<http://www.thaistudents.nl/>) that is dedicated to strengthening the ties of friendship between the two countries.

Thai students choose the Netherlands because of the high standard of education available. With its sixteen million inhabitants, the prosperity of this small kingdom on the North Sea depends on advanced hi-tech products and high-level services. This is why the country invests in the quality of higher education. This focus on quality also extends to promoting international cooperation between institutes of higher education and pursuing an 'open door' policy for young foreign talent.

There are no data available on the total number of Thai students abroad. However, in 2006, Institute for International Education: IIE's Open Door reported an estimated 9,000 Thai students in the United States. The numbers of Thai students in Australia is estimated to be between 9,000 to 10,000 students. The number of Thai students in the United Kingdom is estimated to be growing and should be in the range of 9,000 to 10,000 students. It is estimated that around 3,000 Thai students are in New Zealand and around 1,200 Thai students in Canada.

The U.S. is still the first country that most Thai students tend to consider. However, there has been a notable decline in the proportion of students considering studying there: in 1997 almost all Thai students (95%) would have considered the U.S., by 2000 this proportion had dropped to 67%. Nonetheless, the U.S. is still the most favoured choice of Thai students (49.5%). The U.K. has also decreased in popularity: the proportion of Thai students considering it dropped from 48% in 2000¹ to 14.8% in 2006.

The Netherlands and Thailand agree that a strengthening our relations in the field of education and research is in the interest of both countries - just as four hundred years of trade has been.
