

Title : **First Decade of Suranaree University of Technology :
The First Autonomous Public University of Thailand.**

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Abstract

The research project “First Decade of Suranaree University of Technology : The First Autonomous Public University of Thailand” is intended to study and analyze historical data concerning the establishment and development of Suranaree University of Technology (SUT) as to commemorate the 10th anniversary of its establishment and to provide recommendations for future development for both SUT and the higher education system in general. The study uses document analysis and interview with selected informants as research methodology. The main findings include :

1. In regard to the development of higher education administrative system in general, it was founded that the domination of bureaucratic culture since the establishment of the first university in Thailand, coupled with the lack of political support, are the main reasons behind failure in higher education reform, even though the call for reform from academic community had started as early as B.E.2506. However, the “Brain Drain” crisis in early 2530 decade along with the perceived lack of higher education innovation responsive to social needs and the political drive for further expansion of regional higher education have resulted in the establishment of SUT as the first public university being “outside” the bureaucratic system.

2. With regard to the historical development of SUT itself, the starting point was the massive call in the mid 2520 decade from a number of House Representatives for the establishment of more regional universities in various regions, followed by the significant drive by Chatchai Choonhawan Government for establishing a new university in Nakorn Ratchasima, coupled with the recommendations from academics who wanted to see this new institution bring innovation into the system. The collective result was the founding of SUT in 1991 not only as the first autonomous public university but also the first university of technology of its kind in Thailand. Early development includes the transfer of Suranaree College Project affiliated with KhonKhan University (a small project started before Chatchai Government took office) to be under

jurisdiction of the Ministry of University Affairs with a special committee chaired by Permanent Secretary of University Affairs to prepare the proposal to establish this new institution as a full-fledge university.

3. SUT in its early days rendered many interesting historical facts and reflections. Among them include the selection of the location of the university and, most importantly, the historical dialogue between SUT administrative team and the members of the House Special Committee reviewing the SUT Act B.E. That showed many historical moments and challenges faced by SUT administrators in the effort to clarify and demystify the outstanding characteristics and ideologies of SUT to the representatives of the public.

4. The first 10 years of SUT saw its accomplishments in various ways, include the provision of higher education opportunity to students in the northeastern region, the production of graduates with high quality perceived by the labor market, the successful establishment of many graduate programs along with impressive research productivity being a young institution. SUT also proved to be a management model for other public universities, especially in personnel management that showed extreme success in recruiting and retaining highly-qualified staff, the management system that showed intensive use of information technology, the internal quality assurance system, the teaching evaluation system, etc. SUT also proved to be the innovation hub by successfully inventing many innovative programs such as the Cooperative Education Programs with industries in the area and the Technopolis for the incubation and transfer of new technologies in cooperation with a number of major companies.

5. The future challenges for SUT may come from the fact that the university must see itself an entrepreneur who never stop learning and improving its effectiveness in all its missions and functions. Among the more important functions that need special attention are : the personnel management for support staff, the enhancement of university's capability in initiating innovations, the quality enhancement of graduates in various fields, the improvement of local participation in a number of university affairs, and most importantly, the recruitment and retention of high-performance leadership who can lead this young university to an even more successful and innovative university in the decades to come, to continually be a model for others to follow and , last but not least, to build "SUT Spirit" among administrators, professors, staff, students, as a foundation for cooperative working environment that will lead to its everlasting success in the future.