Conclusion

An array of data supports the conclusion that gender stratification is strong on both sectoral and subsectoral levels. Females are overrepresented in the private sector, and at the subsectoral level the gender gap manifests itself in all divisions (four-year universities, graduate schools, junior colleges, colleges of technology, and specialized training colleges); the prestigious sectors have the lower female enrollments. And across these sectors and subsectors the gender gap is aggravated by field-of-study differences. ■

Diversification within the Thai Private Sector

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Diversification has characterized private growth in higher education worldwide. As in many nations where diversification is a policy imperative to facilitate growth, private higher education institutions in Thailand have evolved diversely in their institutional configuration since the sector was legally created in 1969.

Literature suggests that, typically, institutional diversification signifies variation in private higher education by mission, clientele, source of control, size, and resources. Even where public institutions maintain a majority of enrollments, the private ones usually offer alternatives. Indeed, private institutions often find their niche in the specific interests of individuals and groups with somewhat distinctive characteristics from the general public's. As a typical example, Thai private higher education has become a principal industry producing labor for the job markets. However, while institutional diversification grows, a counterforce is that government policy may promote mimicked growth—distinguished by private sources of funding more than by academic differentiation. Also, apart from imposed policy, these private institutions are motivated by status and market competition to mimic more than to innovate. So, the relative weight of diversification versus copying can be a complex issue. In any event, we know that diversification has been notable and merits our exploration here.

The role of growth in Thai private higher education institutions can be identified and analyzed using Daniel Levy's 1986 three-part typology—wave I: Catholic universities; wave II: elite universities; and wave III: demand-absorbing institutions. Additionally, however, it is useful to develop a modified category—hybrids. The hybrids can blend any two of the above—and even have aspects of all three. Based on 2003 information, 54 Thai private higher education institutions are identified and analyzed using the following variables: mission, size, programs offered, faculty qualifications, and socioeconomic clientele.

To begin with, the growth of Thai private higher education institutions follows much that has been seen in other countries and conceptualized in international literature. There are eight religion-oriented institutions—all are Christian, except one that is Islamic. These institutions differ from others in that their prime mission is to provide religious service via the study of theology and philosophy. Several—such as nursing schools—follow the goal of ancient missionaries coming to Thailand to offer Western medical institutions. Most of the religious institutions are governed by priests as top administrators, and several have only priests as faculty members. As Thailand is mostly Buddhist, we see a reflection of an international pattern in which minority religions (or ethnic groups) develop their own institutions.

Private elite universities are rare in Thailand—as is the case in most countries outside the Americas. We can identify up to four such universities (three clearly secular). They constitute providers of advanced professional training for specialized business elite groups. These universities differ from others as they are the oldest among the private institutions and have a longstanding reputation in business-related fields. There is some echo of Latin American and other patterns in which the elite status may not imply broadly based excellence but rather niches. Thailand's private higher education institutions are distinctive due to their high socioeconomic clientele, faculty qualifications, and academic excellence in their job-market-attuned programs. As to access, even though elite status is often perceived as involving limited access, Thai private elite universities have been consistently large, each encompassing approximately 10 percent of total private enrollments. Whether for Asia or worldwide, 40 percent of the private sector's enrollments is a large share for the elite subsector.

Following the increasingly global pattern, the bulk of Thai private higher education institutions can be regarded as demand absorbing. Generally, demand-absorbing institutions intend to accommodate an overabundant demand for higher education and are often concerned more with quantity than quality. These institutions have grown enormously in the past decade. All but three hold only a tiny share of total private enrollments, whereas the three account for one-third of the demand-absorbing subsector's enrollments. Demand-absorbing institutions may be divided into two subcategories: (1) the ones offering programs emulating those in public or private elite universities, and (2) those focusing on professional training in limited specific areas. Both generally have high student:faculty ratios. Some have no faculty holding doctoral degrees in the entire institution.

This three-part classification notwithstanding, some private higher education institutions are really hybrids: blended categories among religion oriented, demand absorbing, and elite. After all, the three main categories are analytical constructs, and their purpose is to guide empirical investigation and then to understand findings and facilitate international comparison.

As Thai private higher education institutions have continued to grow, competition for clienteles is a key to their stability in the industry. Some religion-oriented institutions tend to behave increasingly like demand-absorbing ones in shaping their missions and increasing programs in high-demand fields. Likewise, elite universities have enlarged their size, extended programs, and progressively responded to market demands—though they remain "elite" given their high socioeconomic clienteles and research. To some extent we thus see reflections of a worldwide trend for even major universities to become more market oriented.

Aside from the market forces that partly limit clear differences among the three private subsectors, government creates a coercive restriction as private higher education institutions are subjected to the same regulations. Also, there is a kind of noncoercive copying choice: a "domino effect" is seen when private elite universities voluntarily emulate functions of public elite universities to attract similar clienteles and gain social recognition, and demand-absorbing institutions then imitate the prestigious private elite institutions.

Echoing global patterns, diversification among the three subsectors in Thai private higher education is notable. Yet, an increasing blurriness among these subsectors has appeared, as epitomized by the hybrids. ■

Recognizing the Subsectors in Mexican Private Higher Education

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Private higher education in Mexico is growing at a notable pace. Data from 2003–2004 show its 646,000 students account for 33.1 percent of national enrollments. The surge of the last decades has lifted the private sector well over the roughly 15 percent of a quarter century ago. However, private growth has not occurred evenly across all types or categories—based on evidence of the types of licensing and accreditation received.

Demand-Absorbing Institutions

The greatest growth has appeared in demand-absorbing institutions—which were still fairly limited when Daniel Levy first categorized Mexico's private sector, in the 1980s. Many of these institutions—popularly labeled as *patito* (little duck), in reference to low quality and other limitations—offer relatively inexpensive undergraduate programs relevant for service sectors (i.e., accounting, marketing, and business) and provide opportunities to lower-income students who have not been accepted at public institutions (because of limited, though expanded, slots). More than 300,000 students currently seek degrees from these institutions.

These elite institutions remain especially impressive since they attract accomplished candidates, especially from privileged backgrounds and secondary schools.

The proliferation of low-profile institutions is a double-sided issue. It provides modest-background students with a chance to get a credential, join the competitive job market, and climb the socioeconomic ladder. However, these institutions have no reputation for providing high-quality education, which means that students may not be prepared for a desired professional future.

The expansion of the demand-absorbing subsector follows a wider Latin American (and global) tendency, led earlier in the region by Brazil. Meanwhile, data indicate that the private subsector that dominated Mexican private higher education a quarter century ago—elite institutions—are still important. These elite institutions remain especially impressive since they attract accomplished candidates, especially from privileged backgrounds and secondary schools. Some of them have grown in regional breadth and, importantly, in the fields they offer—often adding components of research and graduate education. In contrast, religious higher education seems to be heading in two directions: focusing on middle-income, traditional-values families in large cities (becoming "niche institutions" in a sense) or trying to act like elite, secular universities.

License and Accreditation

It is necessary to differentiate between the license to operate as a higher education institution and being accredited as an institution (or having individual programs that are accredited).