

Towards an ASEAN Community:

A Scoping Study and Case for Teaching the Geography of Thailand in the English Language

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Abstract



The discipline of geography has a long history in Thailand's education system and was foundational in the education reform process from the beginning of the 20th century. This research scopes the available literature and electronic sources of information related to the understanding and appreciation of Thai geography as a topic of historical, practical, and academic interest worthy of continued study.

The study finds that there is a knowledge gap regarding introductory English texts on Thai geography and existing texts are mainly in the gray literature, electronic resources, or rigorous geologic studies aimed at academics. The research suggests that a standardized and concise English language text of the geography of Thailand be developed to bridge the gap among Thai and international students, university programs and courses, and the diversity of language speakers in Thailand and the ASEAN region.

The paper offers a bibliography and appendix of academic resources on Thai geography. The approach employed is useful to academics and institutions seeking to develop the field of geography for ASEAN, Thailand, and other developing countries.

Keywords: ASEAN, English Language, Geographic Education, Thai Geography, Thailand

Brief History of Thai Geography



- As a Western discipline, modern geography was originally embraced by King Mongkut (1804-1868) and **“The field of study provided impetus to the overall educational reform process in Thailand”** (Winichakul, 1997).
- The **earliest known Thai geography textbook** was written by the American Presbyterian missionary Rev. J. W. Van Dyke in 1874 (Winichakul, 1997).
- In **1892** the Thai Ministry of Education made **geography a compulsory subject** at the junior secondary level.
 - At the dawn of the 20th century, a new model of Thai geography text was established with the publication of *Phumisat Sayam* [Geography of Siam] by W.G. Johnson (Winichakul, 1997).



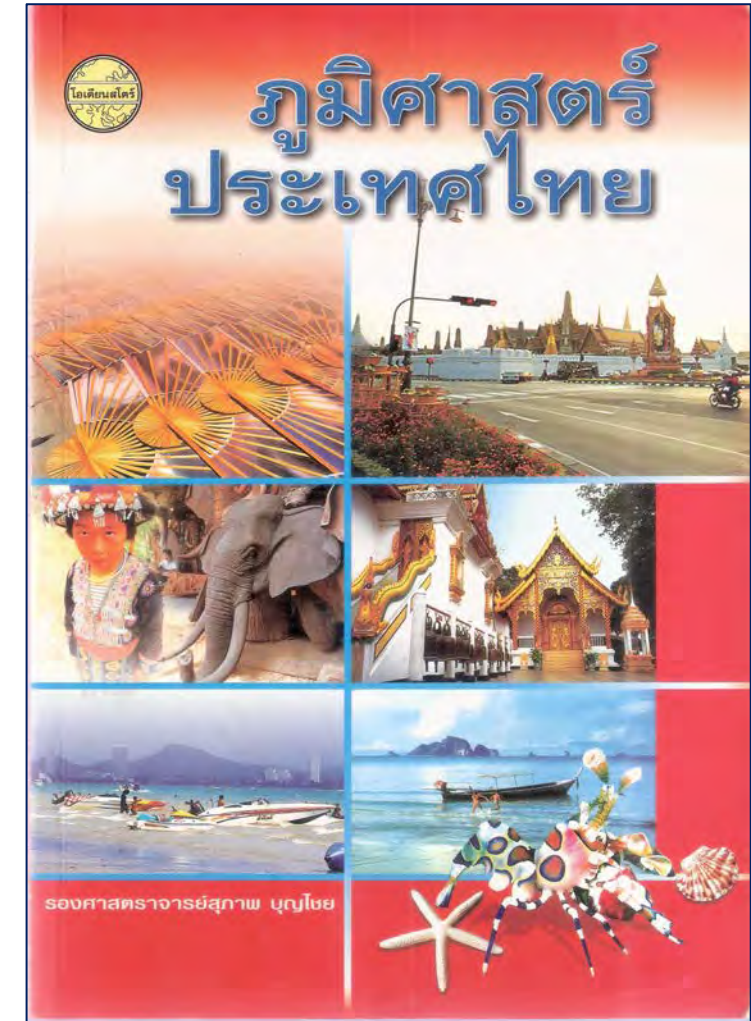
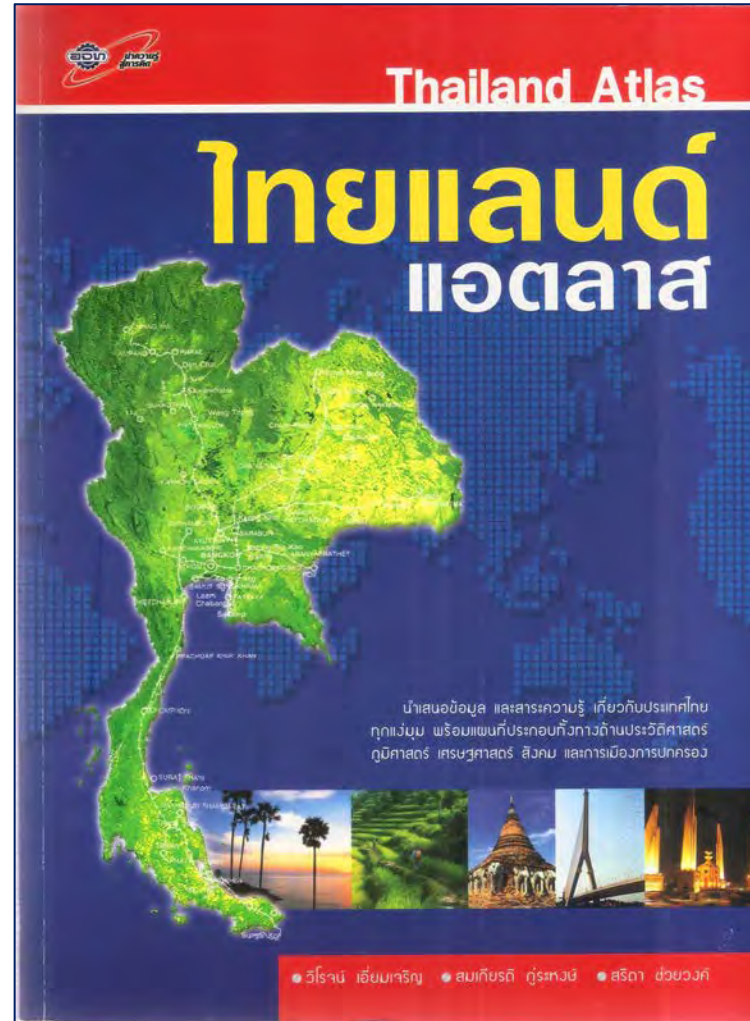
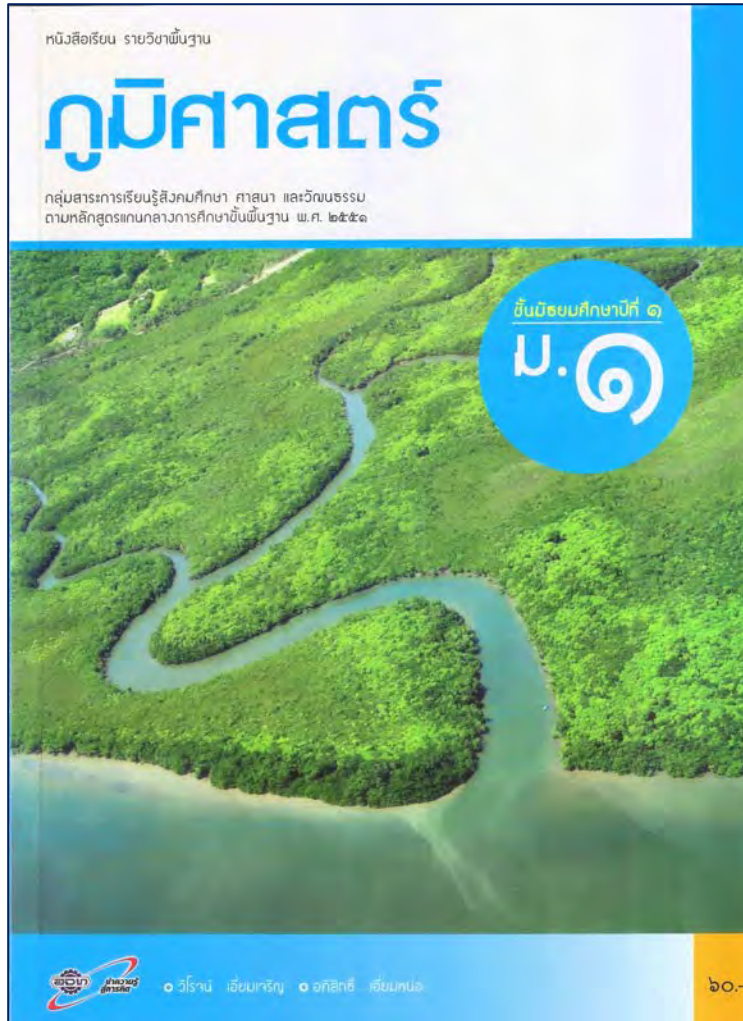
“Phumisat Thailand”

Introduction to the Study

- **The discipline of geography has a long history in Thailand's education system.**
 - Foundational in the education reform process from the beginning of the 20th century.
- **The research scopes the available literature and electronic sources of information related to the understanding and appreciation of Thai geography**
 - A topic of historical, practical, and academic interest worthy of continued study.



Most Common Thai Language Resources



2018 Undergraduate Course Description



- The **geographical classifications**, boundaries and characteristics of each region, including a basic understanding of the geologic processes responsible for **regional landforms**.
- The natural and human resources of Thailand at national, regional and local levels, including the **border areas** of neighboring countries.
- **Social, economic and political** geographies relevant to borders, trade, settlement, migration, urban poverty, rural smallholder and landless rural laborer poverty and livelihoods in Thailand.
- The **historical geographies** behind important **tourist destinations** in each region of Thailand.



Thai Geography Field to Krabi

Research Problem

- The push for international (English) curriculum in universities is spurred by policies relative to development of an 'ASEAN Community' (ASEAN, 2016a), especially given that English is increasingly the main language of instruction by institutions in the sciences (Kirkpatrick, 2010a, b; Durbin & Kellogg, 2012).
- Based on the review of current literature and electronic resources, and teaching and personal experience in the field of study, a lack of a knowledge synthesis was identified in the availability of English literature for teaching introductory Thai geography at the undergraduate level.



2018 – International students from Bunkyo University, Japan, studying Thai Geography (English curriculum) with the Faculty of International Studies, PSU, Phuket

Key Question – Thai Geography Resources



Does the current literature and publically-available **English language resources meet the academic needs** of Thai and international undergraduate students in the ASEAN region?



Results – Categories for Discussion

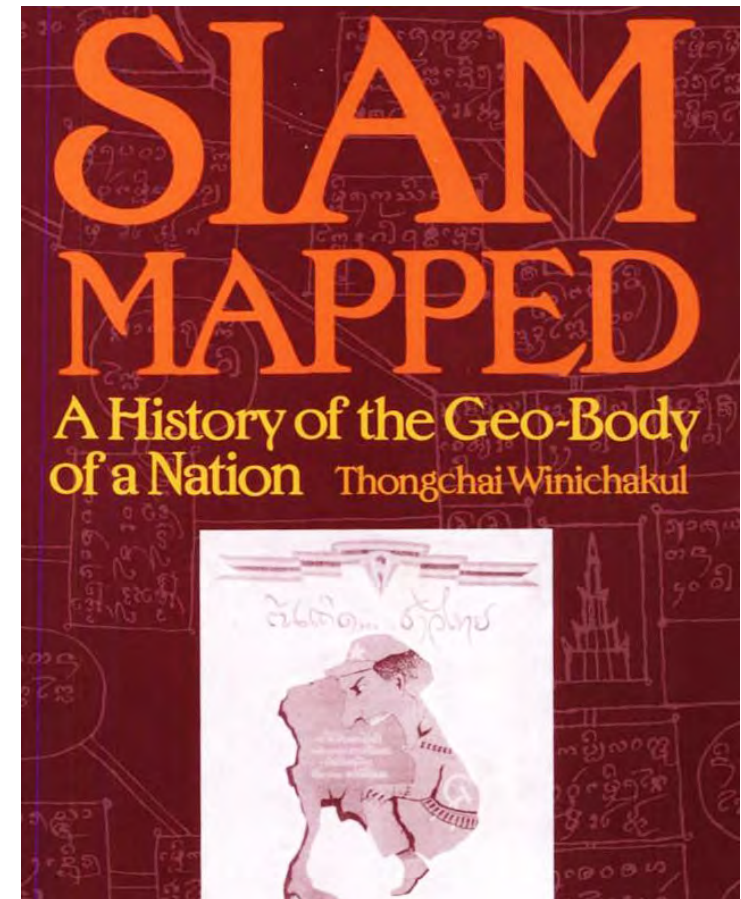


Types of literature and academic resources

- **Grey literature** and websites.
- **Environmental reports** from governments and not-for-profit organizations.

Sub-disciplines and areas of study

- **Physical geography** literature (including geomorphology and **geology**).
- **Social science literature** (including human, cultural, social, economic, political and historical geographies).
- **Regional geography** resources.
- **Tourism geography**, ecotourism and geotourism literature.



Siam Mapped by Thongchai Winichakul

Results – Online



- An **online database** of current English language resources in Thai Geography was developed for students.
- A shortlist of materials has been made publically available:
 - <https://www.stevenandrewmartin.com/thai-geography/>

Please feel free to visit this page on your mobile device



Thai Geography



Karst Topography at Phang Nga Bay, Southern Thailand [please click the photo to view this lecture in PDF] 18MB

814-113 THAI GEOGRAPHY

Course description

Geographical characteristics in each region of Thailand as well as the borders of neighboring countries; Regional resources; Geographic factors which cause local change, including careers, permanent settlements and important tourist destinations; Fieldwork is part of the course.



Course Syllabus

Discussion & Recommendations



- Significance of “**Grey Literature**”
- Shift toward **Remote Sensing** and **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**
- Recommendations
 - Development of concise **Thai Geography textbook in the English language**
 - Undergraduate **Thai geography curriculum should continue** and develop in ASEAN and International contexts.



Sam Pun Boak (3,000 Holes) along the Mekong River, a geographic wonder in Ubon Ratchathani province, Thailand

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