

# BACK PAGE



<https://www.facebook.com/chinadailyhkedition>

## Vision into action

Forward-looking thinker with wide range of accomplishments encourages others to share his devotion to Thailand's future development

By **YANG HAN** in Hong Kong  
*kelly@chinadailyapac.com*

In the course of a lifetime, many people may rise to expert status in one or two fields, but this Thai man has managed to master six, and in seemingly perfect balance.

Kriengsak Chareonwongsak, president of the Institute of Future Studies for Development in Thailand (IFD), wears hats in academic, business, political, international, civil society and media spheres.

Previously an adviser to a Thai prime minister and an elected member of parliament before the country's 2006 parliamentary dissolution, Kriengsak holds a range of titles. These include academic dean of the Thailand Centre at the University of London and a director of Singapore-listed semiconductor equipment manufacturer ASTI Holdings. He is also a prolific writer, having published more than 200 books on various issues.

With little time left to himself, Kriengsak is devoted to national development and always encourages people around him to do the same.

The IFD was founded 37 years ago when Kriengsak returned to Thailand from overseas. He noticed that most development being discussed or happening within the region had only a short-term focus. "Especially in Thailand, there is no one really looking beyond the horizon into the future," said Kriengsak.

After high school in Thailand, Kriengsak pursued his studies in three countries — Monash University in Australia, Harvard University in the United States, and both Cambridge and Oxford in the United Kingdom.

Aiming to help guide the direction of Thailand's future, Kriengsak established the IFD together with some high-level people he knew from politics and academia. It remains the first and only institute in Thailand focused on future research — encompassing economics, human resources and national development, especially within the country and the region.

Kriengsak has always wanted his institute to be action-oriented, so that its ideas can become both policy relevant and implementable.

"It has to be very much linking the present and the future," Kriengsak said, referring to a framework

that continues to this day, which has made the IFD influential in policy-making in Thailand and elsewhere in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

For decades, the IFD has advocated the implementation of bilingual and trilingual education in Thai schools, believing that teaching only in the national language would not be sufficient for the future. Many schools have started to take this approach in recent years.

The IFD has also advocated many policies in Thailand that have since been adopted by the relevant ministries.

According to Kriengsak, the Ministry of Finance is now looking into a negative-income-tax deal as a means of helping the poor — an idea that the institute has supported for a long time.

He described the IFD's work as "meaningful" because, besides being a policy think tank, it is also a research and training institute. He explained that it works with the public, private and social sectors, educating people from politics, business and the wider community about nation-building. It is also working to move Thailand forward from a middle-income to high-income country.

Kriengsak believes that more and more people will start to appreciate the importance of long-term planning. Already, various Thai ministries have turned to the IFD for help, and even a friend of Kriengsak's from the African Union has requested his expertise to start a similar institute there.

For now, Kriengsak sees major hurdles that Thailand must overcome. These include finding ways to help the millions of people still living in poverty, mitigating the wide economic disparity, and moving to high income quickly.

The Asian Development Bank forecasts Thailand's GDP growth to be 3.5 percent this year — the third lowest within ASEAN, followed by Singapore and Brunei.

Kriengsak cited democracy and the huge societal gap in Thailand as other challenges that must be tackled over the long term.

He feels optimistic that opportunities exist for Thailand as a key member of ASEAN. Being the central country in the region, it shares borders with four of the bloc's nine other members — Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia. "Thailand



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

could play a big role as a gateway for ASEAN," he said.

As an economist and former politician, he became acquainted with the China-led Belt and Road Initiative from the very beginning during his previous participation in the World Chinese Economic Summit and the Boao Forum for Asia.

The initiative was introduced by Chinese President Xi Jinping as an economic belt reminiscent of the ancient maritime Silk Route to connect Asia and Europe. It will bring mutual benefits to Thailand, China and the rest of the region, Kriengsak noted.

The historical ties between China and Thailand can be traced back 600 years, when the great Chinese navigator Zheng He and his fleet made a stopover in Bangkok, marking Thailand as an important destination on the ancient Maritime Silk Road.

"We are naturally within the region of Belt and Road," Kriengsak said. He suggested that continuous cooperation between the two nations can take on a more modern form under the new initiative.

"Coming through Thailand is natural," he said, adding that a logistics route passing through Thailand will be convenient for traders to reach the middle and southern parts of

China. "You can link all modes of transportation — river, ocean, rail and road."

Being president of the IFD is just part of Kriengsak's multifaceted life, and he admitted it is "unusual" for someone to operate in six different fields.

"All you have to do is to think very fast, work very fast, work very hard and work wisely," he said. "How could you do it if you don't plan your time well? It's just a lot of planning, a lot of dedication, a lot of training."

He believes there are no shortcuts: Achieving his goals has required diligence.

But, to allow him to do the things that others cannot, he systematizes methods and trains those he trusts to accomplish the more "mundane" tasks. "I make myself not to do the same old things all the time."

And yet he is always challenging people, stretching their capabilities and pushing them to rise. Many of those he has trained have become young leaders in their own right.

As passionate as he is about the IFD, Kriengsak is not at all reluctant to plan for leadership succession at the institute. "You need to make sure that it continues to serve the purpose of the country without me around," he said.

### Bio

#### Kriengsak Chareonwongsak

President, Institute of Future Studies for Development in Thailand

#### Education:

PhD in economics, Monash University, Australia

Master's of public administration, Harvard University, the US

Master's degree from Cambridge Judge Business School, University of Cambridge, the UK

PhD in management and postdoctoral studies, University of Oxford, the UK

#### Career milestones:

President, Institute of Future Studies for Development in Thailand

President, Nation-Building Institute, Thailand

Academic dean, Thailand Centre at the University of London

Assistant executive chairman, convenience store firm CP All

Director, ASTI Holdings, Singapore

Senior fellow, Harvard University

Adviser to Thai prime minister

Member of Thai parliament, 22nd House of Assembly

National executive board member, Democrat Party, Thailand

Vice-chairman, Standing Committee on Economic Development, House of Representatives

Teaching fellow, Monash University

Research fellow, University of Melbourne

#### Quick takes:

##### Which role is the most meaningful to you?

Every single thing is meaningful by its own purpose, but to be honest, I love to teach. I am a professor by nature, so I like to explain. I feel happy when I train young people.

So yes, I gravitated toward knowledge. But I can't say that I will only teach, because sometimes you need to enter the public arena to make sure that your ideas are picked up.

##### How have your overseas experiences shaped your outlook on life, work and family?

I am a global citizen as well as a Thai citizen. It makes me more international-oriented, understanding other people of different cultures and different places.

I think there is a chance to make the world a better place, by combining all of the good things that we can learn from various places and various generations, and synergizing them together for a better world.

**Date of birth:** September 1955