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## **KEYNOTE: Branding a nation in the 21st century**

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# Branding a Nation in the 21st Century

**Dr. Kriengsak Chareonwongsak**

The concept of a "Nation as a Brand" is not new, but has already been a historical reality. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century however, it is necessary for each country to pay much more attention to this topic due to the greater and increasing interconnectedness and globalization of our world in every aspect; economically, politically and socially, as illustrated by the KOF Index of Globalization in 2011 which collected the data of 186 countries from 1970 to 2008, concluding that our world is more globalized (KOF Swiss Economic Institute, 2011).

As globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has had an effect on greater economic connectivity, so the level of international trade and foreign direct investment has increased with greater ease. Branding a nation will therefore be essential to attract foreign investment, investors, skilled labour and tourists. Thus, it will help to generate national income and to enhance the competitiveness of the country's export products.

Political connectedness can be seen in the tremendous increase to the number of international treaties between countries or in their membership of international organizations. Therefore, branding a nation will become more important to all countries. This is because national branding is an important part of the process to create national soft power. This kind of power will help to increase the nation's influence on other nations in political ways. It will also help to gain approval and positive public opinion more easily and at lower cost from international governments on the international stage. For example, countries that are seen to infringe on human rights may find total opposition on the international stage, rather than support.

Another aspect to the creation of nation branding is the continual benefit and support that comes from social and cultural connection, for example, helping to prevent national stereotypes or to erase any negativity that is an obstacle to cross-cultural communication. For example, though they have their many good points, Thai people are always assumed to be lazy; the Chinese stingy or loud and Korean people are mostly considered rude, among other such stereotypes.

Actually, a country is neither a company nor a business organization. Nation branding and product branding sound similar conceptually, but are different in goal and practice (Fan, 2005). However, the creation of national branding would be undeniably vital to the success of a country, just as product brand creation is to the success of business organizations. Because the world is mostly moved by economics, each country must prioritize to create its national brand name seriously, which will take time, perseverance, and stability. It will not happen if there is no long-term plan, and the leader must also be a person of vision.