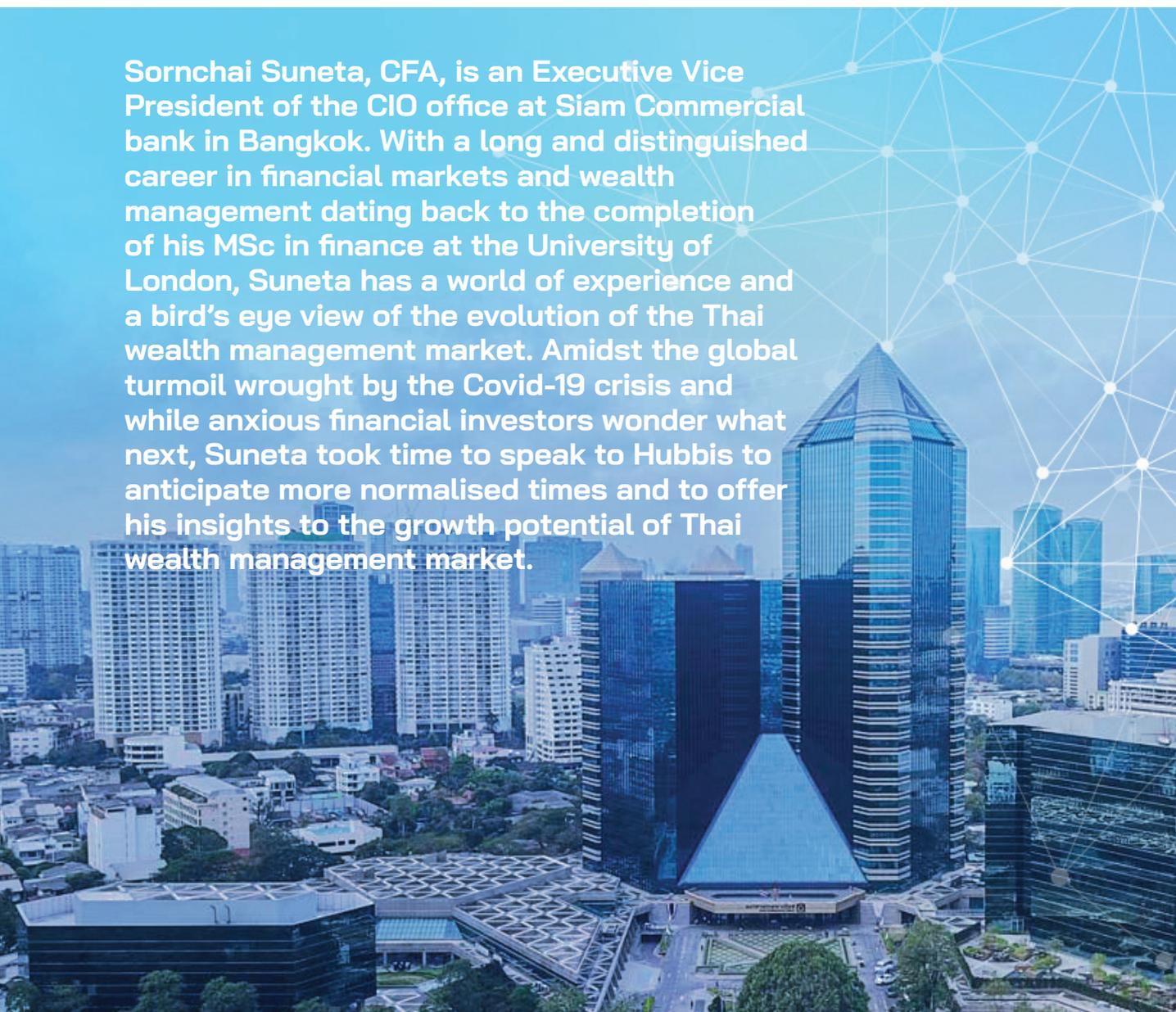


Siam Commercial Bank's Sornchai Suneta on Tailored Solutions and Astute Financial Planning

Sornchai Suneta, CFA, is an Executive Vice President of the CIO office at Siam Commercial Bank in Bangkok. With a long and distinguished career in financial markets and wealth management dating back to the completion of his MSc in finance at the University of London, Suneta has a world of experience and a bird's eye view of the evolution of the Thai wealth management market. Amidst the global turmoil wrought by the Covid-19 crisis and while anxious financial investors wonder what next, Suneta took time to speak to Hubbis to anticipate more normalised times and to offer his insights to the growth potential of Thai wealth management market.



Siam Commercial Bank

is one of the biggest universal banks in Thailand. The bank has teamed up with Julius Baer to form Julius Baer SCB, which will focus on the higher end of the actual and potential private banking clients. SCB Asset Management is one of Thailand's leading investment product houses, giving Suneta a remarkable perspective on the evolution of supply and demand in the country.

He begins the discussion by commenting on the need for good advice and smart planning. "It is vital to plan ahead for your retirement and for future events, and investments are of course one way in which people can grow their wealth," he says. "For the higher end categories of wealth, the HNWIs and ultra-wealthy, well-designed asset allocation strategies are essential, and we of course work with them to tailor and customise this planning. Good advice helps them with the allocation between what is core to their portfolios and what is satellite type investments and trading. At the upper echelons of customer wealth, we deliver advice on a customer visiting basis, building and enhancing our relationships all the time."

UNDERSTAND, ANALYSE, REACT

Suneta delves deeper into the needs and expectations of the firm's wealthy clients. "We have conversations with them revolving first around Investment Objectives, the target return and risk tolerance they need to reach their objectives, their cashflow requirements, and so forth," he

Suneta's Key Priorities for SCB Wealth Management

Suneta describes the first mission as improvement of the customer journey and the in-house talent in order to offer customers the best possible experience. "As we discussed, Financial Advisory is essential, and to support the customers with that it is really important to make their experience with us as enjoyable and easy as possible, to make these products and solutions much more accessible in all ways. If they can then blend advisory and investments through simply, easy execution, then this becomes part of their lifestyles, so that, we believe, is a key to their and our future success."

His second priority is getting to know the customers better. "We have new technologies available today, such as Big Data, to help us understand our clients better and therefore to help us tailor ideas and solutions directly to them," he reports. "Just asking people a few questions is not enough; we need to analyse their activities, their behaviour, learn more of their lifestyles and data helps in all these areas. This is also scalable, so we can be increasingly sophisticated and customised across a larger number of customers than ever before. But it all begins with understanding the clients."

A third priority is to encourage a longer-term perspective amongst local investors. "Most people's experience is mainly of equities and of course we are an emerging market, and equities have been volatile," he comments. "We therefore aim to encourage more of a financial planning mentality than the old, prevailing trading mentality. This is happening, especially in the past decade, I am pleased to say, and we are seeing customers gradually embrace a longer-term planning outlook. The CFPA, the Charter of Financial Planning Association in Thailand has been helping in this regard, and of course as more and more locals are university educated and have greater financial literacy."

explains. "This is then taken on board and we follow up with some tailored products and solutions that might be best for their situations, including potentially diversification into overseas assets, possibly some structured notes and derivatives, Alternative Investments and so forth."

He also notes that there are a number of the wealthier clients who prefer to effect some degree of wealth transfer and heritage at early stages to the next generations as well, so the firm advises on the segregation of their portfolios between their current needs and also their future expected requirements.



SORNCHAI SUNETA
Siam Commercial bank

“It is all about understanding these clients,” he comments, “and then tailored viable solutions for them. Dialogue is the key, so that we truly understand their objectives and the outcomes we propose fit accurately.”

WIDE ANGLE WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Suneta covers the full spectrum of investment clients from the ultra-wealthy to the small investor just dipping his or her toes in the markets. “We have roughly 2000 RMs today across the country,” he reports. “The way we deliver advisory to each segment of wealth is of course different, though. At the top end, the relationship is entirely personal, with solutions delivered by the RMs, with the advisers supported by Investment Digital platform to explain everything to these customers. In the middle segment of wealth, the affluent customers, we deliver through the RMs armed with iPads to help

Getting Personal with Khun Suneta

Suneta was born in Bangkok and turns 50 this year. He completed an MSc in finance from the University of London after achieving his BBA in banking and finance from Assumption University in Bangkok.

His very successful career to date began in 1996 after his MSc, when he moved to Hong Kong to become a Fixed Income and Derivatives Trader with Thai Military Bank’s local branch there. From 2002 to 2007, he was a Fund Manager at Bangkok Bank back in Thailand, and from 2007 to 2011 he was Head of Fixed Income with Government Pension Fund. In 2011, Suneta moved to join SCB Asset Management to become CIO, a role he held for five years before becoming the Head of the CIO office in Siam Commercial Bank, where today he remains as Executive Vice President.

“Over the years,” he remarks, “I have seen plenty of crises experience in Global, Asia, and Thailand and therefore plenty of volatility, so I hope my experience is valuable in my role today, especially as the world faces this latest threat from Covid-19.”

Married with one daughter aged nine, Suneta’s escape from the hectic working life in Bangkok is to play the golf courses around Bangkok, his favourite being a wonderful Pete Dye design named Subhapruek, which is located near his old alma mater of ABAC, out along the Bangna Trad Highway going south.

His fitness regime is achieved largely through his golf and his Thai boxing, although he hastens to add that he does the latter for health rather than in any way competitively.

Travel overseas would be to favourite destinations such as Zurich in Switzerland and to Northern Italy, but the virus outbreak has curtailed such pleasures for the time being. “We like Zurich as it is so friendly and relatively so quiet compared to so many cities in Europe,” he observes. “The people are very nice, and it offers great relaxation for us.”

explain ideas to the clients, and through a hybrid robo-advisory platform. At the retail end of the market, advisory is entirely through the fully automated robo-advisory platform, providing them with customised ideas and solutions, but without the involvement of the RMs.”

He believes there is considerably more that can be achieved to help expand the market in Thailand. “Financial literacy is very important, of course,” he comments, “but what I think is that there could be some form of mandatory retirement onboarding here, so that

everyone finds it easier to step into the world of investments and financial planning. We do not need a large amount of money to be involved at the outset, but I believe starting very small in this way would gradually help bring more confidence to the investors and that would, over time, result in more money committed later on as those investors familiarise themselves with the investment world, and as they increasingly see how planned savings and investments can really help them

as they move ahead with their life goals and then ultimately towards retirement.”

Suneta rounds off the discussion by highlighting the importance of diversification. “At the upper end of the wealth spectrum, Thai investors are looking into thematic strategies, alternative investments, overseas commercial real estate and private equity,” he reports. “ESG is another area that is gaining greater acceptance, especially

as the younger generations either build or inherit more of Thailand’s huge and growing private wealth.”

“The wealth market in Thailand has been evolving well for the past decade since the global financial crisis,” he adds. “There is no doubt that the onshore proposition here is developing to accommodate the needs and expectations of the investor base at all categories of wealth, from the biggest to the smallest investor.” ■

