

Chinese Cultural Diplomacy towards ASEAN Countries: Case Study of Confucius Institutes in Thailand

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Abstract

Having successfully developed itself under the concept of "Chinese Socialism." China has stepped forward to become a global superpowers in politics and economics. Also, China is eager to strengthen its power in the cultural sphere through cultural diplomacy. This can be seen from President Xi Jinping's strong will to promote China's cultural soft power by disseminating modern Chinese values and showing the charm of Chinese culture to the world. As such, China's cultural diplomacy has become stronger in many countries in recent years since Chinese leaders realize the significant role of culture as a strategic means to expand its influence in the global community. This cultural diplomacy strategy has been implemented since the 1990s and has shaped China's foreign policy towards Southeast Asian countries including Thailand. This paper aims to discuss how China uses this cultural diplomacy strategy towards Thailand, Thailand's responses to the diplomacy, and the

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changing roles of Chinese communities in Thai society. Also, it will explore the contribution of Confucius Institutes as part of the strategy to propagate images of China, as well as the impacts and limitations of Confucius Institutes. Finally, this paper will examine the role of Confucius Institutes in the newly established “One Belt One Road” strategies, which are expected to have a strong impact on ASEAN countries including Thailand.

Keywords: Chinese Cultural Diplomacy; Confucius Institutes

การทูตวัฒนธรรมของประเทศสาธารณรัฐประชาชนจีน ต่อประเทศอาเซียน : กรณีศึกษาสถาบันขงจื่อใน ประเทศไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

หลังจากที่ประเทศสาธารณรัฐประชาชนจีนได้ประสบความสำเร็จในการพัฒนาประเทศภายใต้ระบอบ “สังคมนิยมจีน” และได้พัฒนาประเทศจนสามารถก้าวขึ้นมาเป็นหนึ่งในประเทศมหาอำนาจทางการเมืองและเศรษฐกิจของโลกในปัจจุบัน นอกจากนี้ จีนยังพยายามที่จะเสริมสร้างอำนาจของตนโดยอาศัยวัฒนธรรมโดยผ่าน “การทูตวัฒนธรรม” สิ่งที่เราเห็นได้จากเจตจำนงอันแน่วแน่ของประธานาธิบดีสี จิ้นผิง (Xi Jinping) ที่พยายามส่งเสริมอำนาจอ่อนหรือซอฟท์เพาเวอร์ (Soft Power) ผ่านการเผยแพร่ค่านิยมของจีนสมัยใหม่ และแสดงเสน่ห์วัฒนธรรมจีนไปทั่วโลก รวมถึงการเปิดอบรมการเรียนการสอนภาษาจีน วัฒนธรรม ดนตรีจีนไปทั่วโลก ด้วยเหตุนี้ การทูตวัฒนธรรมจีนจึงแข็งแกร่งขึ้นในหลายประเทศในช่วงเวลาไม่กี่ปีที่ผ่านมา ทั้งนี้ เนื่องจากการที่ผู้นำจีนได้ตระหนักถึงบทบาทที่สำคัญของวัฒนธรรมในฐานะวิธีการเชิงกลยุทธ์ในการขยายอิทธิพลในประชาคมโลก อย่างไรก็ตาม กลยุทธ์การทูตวัฒนธรรมถูกนำมาใช้ตั้งแต่ปี 1990 ยุทธศาสตร์ใหม่นี้ได้กำหนดนโยบายต่างประเทศจีนต่อประเทศในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้โดยเฉพาะประเทศไทย

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาถึงการที่จีนใช้กลยุทธ์ทางการทูตเชิงวัฒนธรรมต่อประเทศไทย การตอบสนองของประเทศไทยต่อการทูต และบทบาทที่

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เปลี่ยนแปลงไปของชุมชนจีนในสังคมไทย นอกจากนี้ ยังได้ทำการสำรวจการมีส่วนร่วมของสถาบันขงจื้อซึ่งเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของกลยุทธ์ที่มีต่อภาพลักษณ์ของจีนตลอดจนผลกระทบและข้อจำกัดของสถาบันขงจื้อ ในที่สุดบทความนี้ยังได้ตรวจสอบบทบาทของสถาบันขงจื้อต่อยุทธศาสตร์หนึ่งแถบหนึ่งเส้นทาง (One Belt One Road) ที่กำหนดขึ้นใหม่ซึ่งคาดว่าจะมีผลกระทบอย่างมากต่ออาเซียนรวมถึงประเทศไทยอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ: การทูตวัฒนธรรมจีน; สถาบันขงจื้อ

Introduction

Thailand is the only country in Asia which has successfully assimilated Chinese migrants into the country peacefully. Some argue that this phenomenon was merely 'integration' and not assimilation since Chinese people in Thailand still maintain their 'Chinese-ness' or their Chinese identity. At the beginning of the migration flow, Thai people treated the Chinese with discrimination and contempt. However, later the "nationalism" policy helped Chinese and Thais blend together as one nation. An example of a good and conflict-free assimilation method is marriage.

As a result of the smooth assimilation in the past, it is no doubt that China and Thailand have always had a strong relationship, especially in cultural aspect via the cultural exchange between Thai and Chinese in the community. With this context of Thai society, Confucius Institute could be the effective tool for Chinese government to boost Thai-China ties.

Before talking more deeply about Confucius Institute and its influence, it is very important to look back to the historical background of Chinese language education in Thailand. It is one of the keys to make us more understand why and how Confucius Institute received the great welcome in Thailand.

Chinese Language Education in Thailand

Despite the great number of Chinese descents, the use of the Chinese language in Thailand barely existed after China established itself as a country in 1949. This could be attributed to the national policy of being wary of communist threats, or of nationalistic movements in the country. For whichever reason, the setback of Chinese language teaching and learning in Thailand

since then has resulted in a great number of challenges for Chinese language education.

However, after Thailand established diplomatic ties with China on July 1, 1975, the Thai government has become less restrictive in controlling Chinese language education, which has resulted in extensive cooperation in Chinese language education between the two countries (Chinese Studies Center, 2008). In 1978, Thailand and China signed the Agreement on Scientific and Technical Co-operation, and in 1999, the Joint Statement on a Plan of Action for the 21st Century. Nonetheless, the cooperation projects are only one part of the collaboration between the two countries. In addition to the government-to-government cooperation at the university levels, Sino-Thai bilateral cooperation is abundant in the private sector, both profit-making partnership and gratis support from various Chinese associations. Since then, Thailand has relied heavily on China when it comes to determine strategies for Chinese language education (Chinese Studies Center: 2008) which has led to the establishment of Confucius Institutes (CI) and Confucius Classrooms (CC) in Thailand to promote Chinese language and culture.

Review of Previous Research

The review of literature relevant to China's efforts to cultivate soft power by employing cultural diplomacy through the Confucius Institutes in Thailand falls into three broad categories of papers: those that discuss the Confucius Institutes in general, those that provide an overview of the Confucius Institutes in the Southeast Asian region, and those that give information specifically on the Confucius Institutes and Thailand. Aiming to analyze the Confucius Institutes as China's tool to expand its soft power in Thailand, this

paper will offer only a short literary review on the first category.

The Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (Hanban) claims: “Benefiting from the UK, France, Germany and Spain’s experience in promoting their national languages, China began its own exploration through establishing non-profit public institutions which aim to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries in 2004: these were given the name the Confucius Institute.” Today, there are more than 548 Confucius Institutes (CIs) and 1193 Confucius Classrooms (CCs) worldwide, with 16 Institutes and 20 classrooms¹ in Thailand, including a Maritime Silk Road Confucius Institute (Hanban, 2015), with King Mongkut’s University of Technology North Bangkok as the latest one to sign an agreement with Hanban in late May 2018.

However, according to XiaolinGuo (Guo, 2008), the Confucius Institute exists to support China’s ‘peaceful rise’ rhetoric and Chinese soft power. The founding of Confucius Institutes is an image management project to promote the greatness of Chinese culture while counterattacking public opinion of China as a threat in the international community. He says:

“The Confucius Institutes represent a coordinated effort by government, educational establishments, entrepreneurs, and individuals to revive and raise

¹ Names of 16 Institutes and 20 classrooms in Thailand Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, Khon Kean University, Mae FahLuang University, Chiang Mai University, Prince of Songkla University (in Hat Yai and Phuket Campus), Mahasarakham University, Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, Suan Dusit University (also in SuphanBuri Campus), Burapha University, Dhurakit Pundit University, Assumption University (ABAC), Bangkok university, Confucius Institute of Betong Municipality, Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, and Maritime Silk Road King Mongkut’s University of Technology North Bangkok.

the awareness of Chinese culture commensurate with that of a great power... Hence, the trend of an increasing number of foreigners speaking Chinese becomes an indicator of China's rising soft power."

David Volodzko (Volodzko, 2015) also opined that Confucius Institute 'wields considerable political power', and commented that Chinese soft power differs from other countries' as others promote positive images of themselves for the sake of political profit, whilst China resorts to lying and censorship, which many countries can see through.

Harry Painter (Painter, 2014) cited that critics accuse the Confucius Institutes of "being a propaganda arm of the Chinese government. In addition to fostering a better image of China, Confucius Institutes have pressured universities into keeping mum about Tibetan and Taiwanese freedom, as well as human rights abuses like Tiananmen Square, according to reports from numerous mainstream news outlets."

In China's charm offensive in Southeast Asia (Kurlantzick, 2006), Kurlantzick raised an awareness that "Many Southeast Asians now regard China as a benign presence to be emulated—a sharp contrast with current regional views of the United States." He opined that China's growing influence in Southeast Asia may have adverse effects on American interests and influence: "China may want to shift influence away from the United States to create its own sphere of influence, a kind of Chinese Monroe Doctrine for Southeast Asia."

In the essay titled *The Rise of China's Soft Power and its Implications for the United States*, published as part of the book *The Rise of China's Soft Power*, Joseph S. Nye and Wang Jisi (Nye and Wang, 2009) state: "...the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in place where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them

at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (then they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). It is obvious that he divides entirely between resources of soft power and hard power. If only in order to conveniently analyze a country's overall national strength, this division is reasonable and understandable. But when discussing influence hard power and soft power produced in practices of international politics, this division is not reasonable and scientific."

On the other hand, Brantly Womack (Womack, 2005) has said in 1975 that he did not believe that "soft power is really a separate phenomenon from hard power. Perhaps it is only the halo of hard power, the gleam on the sword." He posed an interesting question: "Have there been major powers without soft power, or minor powers with world-class attractiveness?"

Ruji Auethavornpipatin (Ruji Auethavornpipat, 2014) examined the operations of the Confucius Institutes in contemporary Thailand in *Revealing China's Hegemonic Project in Thailand: How the Confucius Institute Furthers the Chinese State's International Ambitions*. Her essay abstract reads: "Despite its putative neutral objective of promoting Chinese culture and language globally, this paper argues that the Institutes closely affiliated with the Chinese government, and is in fact part of the Chinese government's broader hegemonic project... It shows that the Confucius Institute attempts to create the norm of international harmony which has its roots in the Chinese government's domestic policy to construct a harmonious society by 2020. Detailed analysis of qualitative data through the case studies of Princess Sirindhorn and Confucius Institute employees demonstrates that the Confucius Institute is an extension of the Chinese government's foreign policies to shape the norm of harmony internationally."

Sheng Ding (Ding, 2008) analyzed the implementation of soft power in Asia that China has portrayed itself as a country to offer cooperation and support peaceful resolutions, as demonstrated in its participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN+3 summit as well as hosting the Six Party Talks to resolve the nuclear issue in the Korean Peninsula.

Patcharee Makrachan (Makrachan, 2013) conducted a research comparing attitudes towards China of students studying in a Confucius Institute and those who did not. Subjects were undergraduate students from universities hosting a Confucius Institute and those from universities which do not host one. The research result finds no statistical difference in the overall characteristics between students taking courses with a Confucius Institute and those who did not. However, analyses on each area show a significant statistical difference of 0.05 in terms of attitudinal, belief and cultural outlooks between the two groups.

Chiangmai University (Chiangmai, 2012) says that the International Chinese Teaching Volunteers project is a cooperation program between Hanban and Thailand to promote Chinese language education, in which Hanban is to train and pay Chinese national volunteers and Thailand has to be accountable for the conditions specified in Ministry of Education 0211.5/11008.

Kasetsart University (Kasetsart, 2013) states that the number of Chinese nationals on the project to provide Chinese teaching volunteers to teach in Thai universities from 2006 - 2012 is 1,058, with the highest number of 204 volunteers in 2011, 97 of whom worked at universities and 107 at the Confucius Institutes.

The office of the Prime Minister (Chinese Studies Center:2008) has a foreign language education development plan, especially for the Chinese

language to improve Chinese language education with the emphasis on producing learners with knowledge of the Chinese language. It is expected that new textbooks and curricula will better the teaching efficiency, resulting in learners' ability to communicate in Chinese and self-study to advance their own knowledge.

Chinese people in Thai society and Cooperation between the Thai and Chinese Governments

The Changing Role of Chinese Community in Thai Society

According to the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy (Academy for Cultural Diplomacy, 2015), Thailand is the country with the largest Chinese population outside of China, with Bangkok as the city with the biggest Chinatown. The Overseas Chinese population in Thailand makes up approximately 11% of the entire population.

In the early years of the Rattanakosin Period or before 1893, the majority of overseas Chinese were men. With a short supply of women of the same nationality, those immigrants were interested in marrying Thai women. Being married to a Thai woman also benefited an overseas Chinese man financially as he could be more readily granted a loan to invest in starting a business. On the other hand, despite their low economic status and the language barrier, overseas Chinese men were attractive to some Thai women as they were found to be competent in business, hardworking, and willing to adapt into the women's Theravada Buddhist heritage.

Likewise, Chinese migrants' religious and cultural beliefs were comfortably accepted by Thai people as they are by nature very easy-going with high tolerance of other belief systems. Since Mahayana Buddhism practiced in China, though different in some rites and rituals, is acceptable to Thais, who practice Theravada Buddhism, to incorporate the new tradition into their belief system, especially the beliefs that they deem good and meritorious. Also, as Buddhism does not refute life after death and existence of heavenly beings, plus a great number of Thai people are rather superstitious (paganism), it is an easy step for many Thai people to welcome Chinese gods and goddesses.

Furthermore, as the teachings of Taoism and Confucianism are not much different from ethical guidelines long practiced in the Thai society, when an educational institute which names itself 'Confucius' wants to set up a branch in Thailand, Thai people basically have no objection to its establishment.

The role and status of overseas Chinese have changed from day by day. Nowadays, they are all considered as Thai people or Thai Chinese. It is very difficult to differentiate whether who are Thai or Thai Chinese and there is no point to do that. Kukrij Pramoj, the aristocratic former prime minister and distant relative of the royal family, once said that most Thais had a Chinese "hanging somewhere on their family tree". What is left of the Chinese ancestry in Thailand is probably the custom and traditions. While none of them are declared national holiday, Chinese New Year, Mid-autumn festival and Qingming (locally called "Chengmeng") are still celebrated widely across Thailand. Other customs are usually held in Thai style or hybrid in some cases.

For the political role, mince the Siamese Revolution which made Thailand becomes a Constitutional Monarchy, a lot of Thai politicians are Thai Chinese with 17 being former prime minister (Supaporn, 2015). For the economic role,

more than 80 percent of the top 40 richest people in Thailand are Thai of full- or part-Chinese descent. Thai Chinese entrepreneurs are influential in the sectors of real estate, agriculture, banking, and finance, as well as wholesale trading. Ninety percent of all investments in the industry and commercial sector and at least 50 percent of all investments in the banking and finance sectors is controlled by ethnic Chinese. Just walk in some old commercial areas in Thailand and you will be able to notice Chinese name besides Thai and English names in some shops outside the Chinatown area.

The New Chinese Migrants

Nowadays. There are no Chinese migrants as the unskilled labor as in the past. However, there are new migration of Chinese people which are totally different from the previous generations. Their place of origin is more diverse, they have higher education levels and women make up a greater percentage of the migrant population. They migrate for various reasons including job opportunities, study and investment (Fernquest, 2016).

A survey by the Institute of Asian Studies' Asian Research Centre for Migration at Chulalongkorn University found many new Chinese migrants bring significant funds to invest in start-ups in Bangkok.

The survey of 119 Chinese migrants living in Huai Khwang for over a year found that 68.9% had a bachelor's degree. For 97.5% it was the first time they had migrated outside China.

About 74.8% came for employment such as white-collar jobs, Chinese-language teachers and tour guides, while 21% came for study and 4.2% to accompany their family. Some intend to return to China once they have made their fortune or succeeded in their endeavours. As far as the

growth of Chinese business in Huai Khwang is concerned, in shipping and logistics, there were 30 Chinese operators, while there were 14 restaurants and 18-20 beauty product shops. Some pass themselves off as a Chinese-Thai joint venture but local officials suspected some businesses are 100% Chinese owned and operated.

As China continues to expand economically, its cultural influence is also spreading throughout the world and one way this is being expressed is in the increasing interest in learning Chinese as a second or third language. Although there are many different dialects in China such as Cantonese, Teochiu, and Hokkian, the language of business is Mandarin and interest in learning it is skyrocketing.

Consequently, the Thai government wants more Thai people to learn Chinese and in support of this it has signed an agreement with the Chinese government to train 1000 Mandarin language teachers every year to teach in Thailand's schools. China has also agreed to provide 100 scholarships for Thai students and is sending 500 young volunteers each year to teach Chinese in Thailand. We cannot deny that Chinese language is now increase its significance in Thai society in term of economic opportunities.

That is why it is very important to explore the cooperation between Thai and Chinese government on the cooperation of Chinese language education and their strategy on this issue.

National-level Cooperation between Thailand and China, and the Policy on Chinese Education

Thailand and China signed the Agreement on Scientific and Technical Co-operation, and in 1999, the Joint Statement on a Plan of Action for the

21st Century. Thailand's ministry of education and China's counterpart have worked and have been working on the following:

1. Education cooperation

2. Memorandum of Understanding Between the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China in 1996, followed by two-year joint operational plans

3. Chinese language education cooperation: The Office of Chinese Language Council International or Hanban (formerly the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) was instrumental in driving the cooperation between China and Thailand's Ministry of Education in 2003, when Chinese representatives came to hold discussions with and to negotiate with the Office of the Private Education Commission to augment Chinese language education in Thailand.

4. Training for Thai teachers of Chinese language. The Chinese Ministry of Education has organized teacher training for Thai teachers of Chinese language since 2003.

5. Teaching resources: The Chinese Ministry of Education has provided text books titled “ภาษาจีนทรรษา 快乐汉语 (Fun with Chinese)”, and Thailand and China have worked together to produce a book called “สัมผัสภาษาจีน 体验汉语” (In Touch with Chinese).

6. Chinese teaching volunteers: The Chinese government established a program to send Chinese teaching volunteers to help teach Chinese in Thailand. The number of volunteers sent annually from 2003 to 2005 was 100. The number was increased to 145 annually in 2006, and again in 2007 to 600 annually.

7. Establishment of the Confucius Institutes.

8. Youth camp project.
9. Youth exchange program.

The Establishment of Confucius Institutes in Thailand

The Confucius Institute, which has great influence on Chinese language education in Thailand, was first established on November 21, 2004 in Seoul, South Korea by the Chinese government to promote Chinese language education and culture in cooperation with universities in host countries (Thailand Business Information Center in China, 2012). At the moment, hundreds of branches are operational around the world.

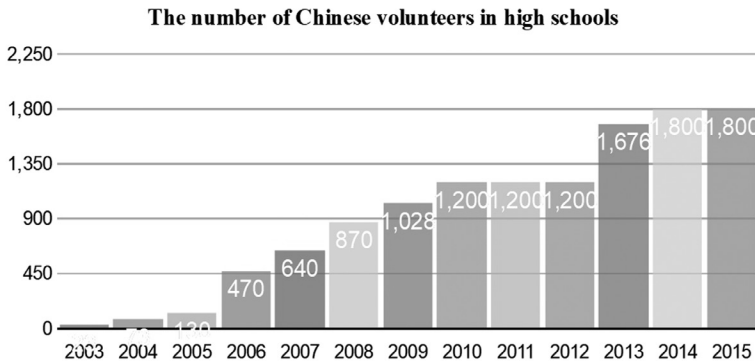
The difference between the Confucius Institute and other language institutes is that the Confucius Institute, though supported by the Chinese Ministry of Education's Office of Teaching Chinese International, or HANBAN, can work autonomously with host countries' local institutions.

The first Confucius Institute in Thailand was established on August 3, 2006 at Khon Kaen University under a collaboration between Thailand's Khon Kaen University, China's Office of Chinese Language Council International or HANBAN 汉办, and China's Southwest University 西南大学 (Confucius Institute at Assumption University, 2015). Over the years, China has successfully set up Confucius Institutes in all parts of Thailand, including in 14 major universities nationwide.

Chinese teaching in Thailand has been most popular next to English; however, one of the many obstacles that hinder successful learning is a lack of qualified teachers. At present, Thailand's Ministry of Education has had to request China to provide over a thousand teachers from China to help in all levels of education as shown here:

Numbers of teachers of Chinese language in elementary and high schools in Thailand			
Nationality of teachers	Types of schools (Number of schools)		
	Chinese (92)	State (240)	Private (70)
Thai nationals	367 (54.5%)	360 (50.9%)	152 (43.9%)
Chinese nationals	306 (45.5%)	347 (49.1%)	194 (56.1%)
Total number of teachers	673	707	346
Average number of teachers per school	7.31	2.94	4.94

The table shows that the ratios between the numbers of teachers of Thai and Chinese nationals in all types of schools are similar, but the number of teachers in the Chinese schools is higher than that in private and public schools respectively.



The graph above illustrates that the International Chinese Teaching Volunteers project has been well received, which indicates continuously increasing demands for Chinese learning. The total number of volunteers

during the past 13 years is 10,310, and the number of students learning Chinese in 2015 has exceeded 800,000 (Hanban, 2015). Apart from being based on a very conservative estimation, the number above does not include teachers in China directly contacted and hired by Thai schools.

However, it should be noted that though the number of volunteers teaching at universities has increased every year, only a few of them came to Thailand through Hanban's project. Most of them were directly hired by the universities.

Director-general of the Tourism Authority of Thailand Arnupap Gaesornsuwan on March 17, 2015, said that the number of Chinese tourists to Thailand in 2015, compared with that of last year, has seen a sharp increase at the rate of 16.30, 29.60 and 27.60 per cent in January, February and March respectively. The number indicates the market's need for more Chinese-speaking personnel to serve the business and tourism sectors. In response, educational institutes have placed more importance on promoting Chinese learning. However, the China Xinhua News reported that despite the efforts of schools and the increased number of Confucius Institutes and classrooms, educational institutes are still unable to meet the increasing demands of people interested in learning Chinese. Consequently, China has a legitimate reason to expand the operations and branches of the Confucius Institutes. At the opening ceremony of the latest Confucius Institute, Chinese ambassador to Thailand Ning Fukui said that the 'Confucius Institute of Maritime Silk Road' would be a forum for cultural exchange between Thailand and China as well as a training center to promote personnel development (Thairath Online, 2015)

Meanwhile, Hanban has planned to produce at least 10,000 graduates in Chinese language, plus several more tens of thousands of graduates from other fields with potential to teach Chinese. These people will become new resources to export to other countries to meet the demands of Chinese learning

and alleviate the teacher shortage in those countries.

Apart from alarmingly close collaboration between Thailand's Ministry of Education and Hanban, Thailand's Office of National Research, whose responsibility it is to conduct research in the national interest, has cooperated closely with the Chinese government through the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), an institution directly under the State Council and the highest academic research organization in the fields of philosophy and social sciences. CASS is a national center for comprehensive studies in the People's Republic of China. Their research and seminar cooperation includes only language and cultural topics, but excludes political issues and sensitive topics, a practice with which the author disagrees; academic research should be inclusive and comprehensive under the philosophy of academic freedom.

Analysis of China's Cultural Diplomacy in Thailand

"Confucius Institutes are "an important channel to glorify Chinese culture, to help Chinese culture spread to the world", which is "part of China's foreign propaganda strategy."

Li Changchun (U.S. Committee on Foreign Relations, 2011)

Defensive realist theorists posit that China employs a search-for-allies strategy because China, though aiming to rise in the region and drive the U.S. out of East Asia, does not yet possess the required military capacity. The rise of China has been based on the power transition theory, in which China employs intention together with capability in the forms of policies toward and treatment of other countries. In short, China's goal is to employ diverse policies,

including the use of both soft and hard powers, to ensure its established influence in the global arena. The use of soft power has reflected China's contemporary hegemonic strategies in Asia, particularly in Thailand.

In addition, Yan Xuetong, the author of "Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power," (Yan, 2011) opined: "China's quest to enhance its world leadership status and America's effort to maintain its present position is a zero-sum game. It is the battle for people's hearts and minds that will determine who eventually prevails."

It appears that China's efforts have been reasonably successful when it comes to its use of CIs as a tool to expand its soft power in Thailand. An analytical study of China's cultural diplomacy in Thailand based on diplomatic relations, cultural exchange and educational cooperation between the two countries, finds that the cooperation in Chinese teaching has seen a very smooth and productive path with extensive official and unofficial in-depth relationships developing. The official channel initiated by both countries' public sector has been led by both countries' ministries of education, educational institutes as well as other governmental and non-governmental agencies. This is a result of the long-term close relationship between the two countries and China's motivation to promote Chinese-language teaching as well as Thailand's need to improve this under-developed field within the country. This seems to be in accord with President Hu Jintao's remarks at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 15, 2008, that China would use the soft power of social and cultural diplomacy to support her foreign policies.

"Culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity and a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength," Hu said on behalf of the 16th CPC Central Committee.

“We must enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people’s basic cultural rights and interests,” he said.

However, a study on the cooperation between the ‘Confucius Institute’ and ‘Chinese Language Teaching Volunteers Program’ shows both direct and indirect, and positive and negative impacts on Thailand in various aspects as follows:

Politics and International Relations

Though the Sino-Thai diplomatic relations have been positive for the past four decades and Thailand seems to benefit from China’s foreign policies, such as the program to send volunteers to teach Chinese in Thailand, China may have reaped some invisible and unexpected benefits to her national interests. In the past, Chinese was not an ‘ordinary foreign language’ like other languages. A research by Chulalongkorn University (Chinese Studies Center, 2008) indicates that the policy and strategy regarding the teaching of the Chinese language have reflected the identification of both negative and positive social impacts of the Chinese language on Thai society. For instance, the Chinese language’s role is to transmit Chinese characteristics, a language detrimental to national security, a language used to propagate communism, and a language for economic and social development. All those roles are related to the government’s policies. This highlights that education is a crucial mechanism to maintain a state’s power.

The teaching of Chinese in Thailand is also related to China’s politics. That Thailand recognized the One China Policy during the period when Thailand established diplomatic relations with China restricted educational cooperation between Thailand and Taiwan, even though Taiwan had a strong economic presence in Asia.

Another example of this practice is that both forms of the Chinese characters can be seen in Thailand. For instance, entrance examinations offer choices of working with Taiwan-oriented Chinese traditional characters and Mainland China-preferred simplified characters. The politics of ideographs to fight for space in Thai society has been employed in a similar fashion to that of the United States, which is not declaring which system will be used officially, in order to maintain relations with both camps.

Restriction of academic freedom is also found in Thailand. Managerial conflicts between the Thai and the Chinese sides occur in universities that have cooperation programs with the Confucius Institutes. The conflicts range from financial interests to encouragement to organize academic activities that promote the Chinese government such as inviting academics from the Chinese governmental sector to speak at different forums several times a year and to discourage the organization of activities on issues sensitive to the Chinese government as well as a strong discouragement to inviting leaders who oppose the Chinese government.

It might be surprising to learn that a Confucius Institute is not set up at Thammasat University, a famous social science university of Thailand widely known for its freedom of expression as well as the starting point of many political movements. When the Confucius Institute first came to Thailand, it targeted Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, both of which turned down the proposed cooperation program. Thammasat's Chinese Department in the Liberal Arts Faculty was in charge of considering the proposal and decided to turn down the proposal amid concerns over consequential restricted academic freedom as well as talks or seminars on sensitive issues. The possibility of having said problems in the future as well as of losing autonomy to the management of the institute was not worth the small amount

of financial support offered by China. Chulalongkorn University also turned down the proposal. However, due to the good relations between the Chinese government and Princess Sirindhorn, an alma mater of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Arts, a Confucius Institute was finally established in Chulalongkorn University.

Furthermore, some agencies commented that the role of the Confucius Institute has increased so that it overlaps the role of the faculty of arts / liberal arts/ humanities as some Confucius Institutes open new courses with no regard that the university's Chinese language department is already offering them, causing some discomfiture among teaching staff. Also, since both the Confucius Institute and the Chinese department belong in the same main educational institute, conflicts become possible as fights over potential students are inevitable, causing rifts between the two units both at the institutional level and at a personnel level.

The high number of Confucius Institutes in Thailand indicates that more Thai people are interested in learning Chinese. However, based on the number of high school students in the Chinese language program and university students majoring in English, it is obvious that the number of the Confucius Institutes in Thailand seems to be higher than necessary. Another crucial question is why a university should have a Confucius Institute when it already has a faculty or a department to manage Chinese language education.

Research on the attitudes of students taking courses at the Confucius Institute and students who don't (Makrachan, 2013) finds that there is no significant difference in terms of language knowledge, whilst in terms of attitudes, those who have studied at a Confucius Institute possess a more positive attitude toward China than those who haven't, which means that the Confucius Institute is instrumental in changing students' attitudes toward China.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Confucius Institute's aim is to advance Chinese culture as a tool of fostering China's soft power and as a diplomatic tool. Using education as a strategic method, this tool is very powerful in the international arena as it connects people in the country with those in the international community. Apart from being a soft power tool in the said aspect, the Confucius Institute can be instrumental in placing the Chinese language at the same level of importance as English. Considering the wide use of Chinese all over the world, this scenario is highly likely. A side benefit of this will be that China could raise its standing in the international arena, as Guo (Guo, 2008) has effectively states: "The trend of an increasing number of foreigners speaking Chinese becomes an indicator of China's rising soft power."

Labor

It has been 16 years since the establishment of the first Confucius Institute and the popular Chinese Language Teaching Volunteers Program in 2003, or 27 years since the government allowed Chinese language teaching at all levels of education in 1992. This has posed a curious question as to whether it is possible that after 16 years Thailand is still unable to produce effective Chinese language institutes and teachers to meet the demands of the country.

An answer may be seen in the statistics with an annually increasing number of Chinese language teaching volunteers, especially at the secondary school levels. Those teaching volunteers, after residing in Thailand for a while, will seek opportunities to remain in the country by seeking employment in Thailand to continue living in the country indefinitely. The fact that those

volunteers can find opportunities might be a result of an internal inadequacy in Thailand.

A shortage of Chinese language teachers and lack of effectiveness in Chinese language teaching in Thailand, combined with an attitude that native speakers are better teachers, opens a door for a great number of Chinese language teaching volunteers to come to the country. Lower compensation for those volunteers also adds an extra incentive to hire them. It has been known that Chinese workers are not choosy; despite low compensation, they are content to have a job. Also, the remuneration package for teaching volunteers is not at all unfavourable as in addition to a salary, the schools will be responsible for their accommodation and food allowances.

Moreover, the path to become a teacher is obstructed with the regulation that requires all teachers to possess a teaching certificate. In 2013, it was reported that many foreign language graduates both from overseas, especially those graduates from China, South Korea and Japan, as well as those graduating from Thai universities, are not allowed to teach in the schools under the Office of the Basic Education Commission of Thailand as they do not have a teaching certificate. Education Minister Suchart Thada-thamrongvech has said that schools are facing a shortage of foreign language teachers, especially Chinese language teachers, so the ministry has held a discussion with the Teachers' Council of Thailand and both agreed that an amendment should be made to the Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act B.E. 2546 so that qualified people can become teachers.

While the requirement has resulted in a shortage of Thai national teachers of Chinese, Chinese national teachers are allowed to teach freely, which has led to an increasing number of Chinese teaching volunteers. This phenomenon not only has a negative impact on Thailand's teaching labor

market but also worsens its situation in proportion to the increased number of volunteers.

In short, Chinese volunteers tend to seek residence in Thailand rather than going back to their home country. Also, more than half of the teaching volunteers are assigned to the Confucius Institutes, which indicates that the Chinese government places much importance on the operation of the Confucius Institutes. A question has been raised: why a small unit attached to a university like the Confucius Institute needs a great deal of manpower. Is it possible that it is a policy to provide employment to Chinese people as the unemployment rate in China has been on a worrisome increase?

The Confucius Institute, with an abundant number of Chinese volunteers, is a valuable resource in which the Chinese government has invested a large amount of money. According to a reliable source, interviewees have disclosed some corruption practices at Confucius Institutes. Some officials were reported to take bribes from scholarship applicants in exchange of their acceptance into the program to study in China. After receiving said reports, the CI headquarters summoned corrupt officials back to China, and sent replacement teams, as well as having made some change to each individual CI's organizational structure.

What is happening has greatly benefited China; not only can China promote Chinese-ness, or soft power, to the international community, but China can also alleviate the unemployment rate in China, especially among new graduates as the Chinese teaching volunteer program is open to graduates of all fields.

Consequently, a foundation on Chinese teaching has never been laid, resulting in the lack of a well-established syllabus and of university teaching personnel, and thus of qualified teachers. Despite the continuous flow of

Chinese teaching volunteers for over ten years, this policy has merely given a statistic of an increased numbers of students, not an assurance of their ability to master the language.

China's Agenda to Rise as Global Power

"The rise of China is not simply an expansion of hard power; it has also been accompanied by tremendous efforts to develop soft power. Soft power helps Beijing redraw geopolitical alliances in ways that will propel its rise as a global power."

Huang and Ding: 200

Chinese teaching in Thailand and the relations between Thailand and China are inseparable. As Chinese teaching is part of the national strategic agenda, it's only natural that Thailand has been given support in that area from China and is thus more receptive to this powerful form of cultural diplomacy. Thailand and China thus work together for mutual benefits under the theory of a zero-sum game. It is a win-win cooperation policy for both countries. Thailand gets support in Chinese studies, while China legitimately exports its cultural diplomacy with educational, political and cultural ideologies to Thailand at all levels, including government-to-government, business-to-business, and people-to-people. China regards Thailand as the center of ASEAN, an ally as well as a good employment market.

Thai people have never been wary about Chinese domination and soft power pouring into the country. On the contrary, Thailand considers that the close association between the two countries will get Thailand to tag along with China on the road to economic prosperity. Thailand seems to be the only

country which has never been aware of the threats from China even though almost all other countries are very concerned about the role and influence of China in every aspect and every dimension. Possible reasons for this include the Thai government's and the Thai people's deliberate ignorance and naiveté, as well as the fact that both countries do not share geographical borders with each other and have no direct conflict over the South China Sea dispute.

At this point, it appears that the aim of the establishment of CIs in Thailand is more for political affinity than for economic and cultural factors. Nonetheless, it does not stop China from enjoying the affinity that it has cultivated among Thai people for its own economic prosperity after seeing that the CIs and CCs have been well received in Thailand, except at Thammasat University, which prides itself for being academically independent with the highest academic freedoms. The number of CIs and CCs seems highest per capita, compared to other countries. After the 'Confucius Institute of Maritime Silk Road' at Dhurakij Pundit University was inaugurated, more than 26 agencies have shown interest in establishing partnerships with the Confucius Institute of Maritime Silk Road.

However, the establishment of the -Confucius Institute of Maritime Silk Road has indicated that China has been trying to build a network in Asia, in particular in Southeast Asia, to foster trust and friendships with its neighbors by employing an exceptionally shrewd strategy. In its apparent efforts to respond to the Master Plan on East Asian Connectivity, China has proposed the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, or the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. A study on the OBOR initiative, an ambitious national strategy launched by President Xi Jinping in late 2013, indicates that China may want to use this initiative for the following purposes:

- Counterbalance of the United States' pivot to Asia
- Chinese version of globalization, from language and culture to trade and investment
- Change of the roles of ethnic Chinese in the region as well as Sino-Southeast Asia interactions

Lucio Blanco Pitlo III, an Assistant Professorial Lecturer for International Studies at De La Salle University and Contributing Editor (Reviews) for Asian Politics & Policy, says: "The ASEAN Master Plan for Connectivity and China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative share striking similarities and parallels... Seamless transportation infrastructure can better spur trade, plans to enhance connectivity between the two sides [China and ASEAN] is mutually beneficial. China also puts great emphasis on neighborhood diplomacy, and extending investments and official development assistance to finance infrastructure projects is one way of winning the support and goodwill of neighboring developing countries." (Pitlo III, 2015) An outstanding example of this effort is China's attempt to secure an agreement with Thailand to invest in building high-speed railways.

What is noteworthy is that CI has earned a great amount of support from a senior Buddhist monk, Phraprommangkalachan (Assistant Abbot of WatTraimit Temple in Bangkok), who penned the book *Confucius Institute of Maritime Silk Road: A Diplomatic Strategy for World Peace and Development*. He was instrumental in establishing a new project to set up the 'Confucius Institute of Maritime Silk Road' at Dhurakij Pundit University.

At the opening ceremony of the "Confucius Institute of Maritime Silk Road" in Thailand in June 2015, Phraprommangkalachan is quoted as saying that Chinese President Xi Jinping's initiation of 'One Belt and One Road' diplomatic strategy embodies a great contribution China makes to world peace and to the mutual development of neighboring countries (Hanban, 2015).

This apparent blind admiration toward China and lack of 'China as a threat' awareness on the Thai side is of grave concerns, not only in terms of international relations as explained above but also in terms of academic freedom.

Marshall Sahlins (Sahlins, 2014) compares Confucius Institutes to Academic Malware. Several institutes in the United States, Europe and Australia have severed ties with CIs or refused to form collaboration under the CI umbrella due to the concerns over academic freedom as CIs oppose studies or discussions on sensitive or unmentionable issues, such as Tibet, Taiwan and human rights.

Even Vietnam, which is a close ally of China, has shown reluctance in accepting a CI. After the first CI was established, six years later than planned, several Chinese studies experts opined that China was expanding its power through CIs and CCs, and the country should be wary and cautious. Education is as a symbol of national sovereignty, and as a CI is a foreign educational institution, it should not be placed into the national system as it could be a sort of interference in a country's education (VOAnews online, 2013).

An article on the Parliament of Australia website (Wade, 2014) states:

“Communist Party of China (CPC) speeches and texts openly describe CIs as being designed to influence perceptions of China and its policies abroad... Clearly, these bodies are not simply Chinese versions of British Councils, Goethe Institutes or Alliances Françaises. Under the agreements signed with foreign universities, the CPC has ultimate control over CI teaching

content, hiring and training of staff, budgetary investment, and organizational structure and activities, thereby essentially creating 'extra-territoriality' within the foreign universities."

Wade (ibid) continued to opine that based on the growing backlash against CIs from several institutes in western countries as well as by some Asian countries, "a closer examination of the objectives and administrators of these PRC bodies, and their increasing activities aimed at influencing policy both within Australia and elsewhere, is warranted."

This is why the Thai government should pay heed to what Wade has warned his government and apply said recommendation to ensure our national interests by conducting a thorough research on the roles and influence of CIs and CCs on the Thai society and Thai students, and proceeding to review and amend the framework for the rules and regulations to dictate how CIs and CCs should be operated in Thailand.

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