

Observation and Analysis on Obstacles to the Sino-Thai High Speed Train Project

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I. Introduction

- Sino-Thai high speed train project
 - Over 4 years since Yingluck government's initiative of Sino-Thai high speed train
 - December of 2015: the Foundation stone laying ceremony
 - Recently Prayut military government is strongly pushing the project with his special power.
 - It was expected that the project started this year
 - But impossible so far
- This paper would like to
 - observe and analyze obstacles to the project
 - Present recommendation to Both countries

II. What Are Obstacles

- **1. Thai government lacks overall planning and consensus opinion**
 - Yingluck government had no overall planning for high speed train system when she presented idea “rice for high speed train”
 - So far Prayut government has no this kind of overall planning either
 - Prayut government had not regarded Sino-Thai high speed train project as urgent one of inter-governments until May 2016
 - Only regarded as a general international project under the Ministry of Transportation
 - But China regarded it as an urgent and important project

– All major issues of the project are always changing in Thai side

- Speed of the train

- Yingluck time: 250 km/h
- Prayut early time: 180 km/h
- Now: 250 km/h

- Distance and lines

- Yingluck: from Bangkok to Nong Khai (640 km)
- Prayut: it was divided into a few parts
 - » First part: 3.5 km

- Investment

- At the beginning, Main investment and technology were from China
- Later, only technology from China, and main investment from Thailand

- **2. Obstacle from legal procedure**
 - 2007 Constitution: all agreements on international projects must be approved by the parliament
 - 2014 Constitution: this item was removed
 - Prayut expected that the project did not need to be approved by any legislature
 - But the new constitution took effect in April 2017
 - the above item was rewritten in the new constitution
 - That implicates that the project needs to be approved by the new parliament
 - But the parliament will only be formed after the new election
 - It is still not clear if the election can be held next year
 - It is also not clear if the parliament can really approve it

– 3. Obstacle from environment protection evaluation

- It is proved that a lot of large projects were apposed by NGO and other interest groups because of environment problem
- For this project, environment evaluation must be approved before it starting
- But on October 6th this year, it was declared that the environment evaluation on 3.5 km project was not approved
- That implicates that this project could not start even Sino-Thai agreement on the project was reached

- **4. Obstacle from social opinions**
 - Many people including academics and officials trend to cooperate with Japan
 - Low interest of Japanese loans
 - Although in fact Chinese interest is lower than Japanese
 - Japan provides more favorable treatments in labor training
 - Japanese technology is more reliable than Chinese, because of cooperation experience in subway project in Bangkok
 - Some Thai people misunderstand “sufficiency economy” theory
 - They think that Thailand needs meter gauge railway, and should develop and improve this railway system
 - To develop high speed railway is not in accordance with “sufficiency economy “

- Reportedly China required developing right of land along the high speed railway.
 - Some people thought that it would damage territory sovereignty
 - Ambassador Ning Fukui said that China has never presented this requirement
- Some people are worried that more and more Chinese people come to Thailand more easily by high speed train
 - More and more Chinese coming to Thailand will compete with Thai people for jobs
 - Two young Thai researchers' projects
 - “one belt and one road and Thai security”
 - “Thai employment opportunities are facing challenge under the one belt and one road”
- Some people said that this project benefits China more than Thailand

III. Conclusion and Recommendation

- Postponing of the project is mainly because of obstacles from Thailand,
 - but China also has some responsibility, for example , did not prepare translation of technology materials
- It is also a negative impact that China is too urgent and put some pressure on Thailand
 - Prayut was not invited to join the Beijing Summit on one belt and one road
 - Many Thai people felt surprised and didn't understand , (so good relation with China)
 - They complained that China would like to put pressure on us just because we have not finalized the high speed train project

- Recommendation to China's government
 - China should understand Thailand's difficulties from government, society, legal procedure
 - Making decision process were checked by many elements
 - China should understand Thai people's character and working style
 - Everything should be done gradually and slowly
 - China should be patient, and not be so urgent
 - Attitude of China treating small country like Thailand should be more generous and more inclusive
 - China should provide more favorability
 - China should not force others to accept something

- Recommendation to Thai Government
 - Thai government should set up a comprehensive and trans-department leading organization led by Ministry of Transportation to deal with this project
 - This organization should have much more power
 - It should include main functions in planning, technology and environment evaluation
 - Environment evaluation is very important, but this evaluation should be objective and true
 - Negative effect could not exaggerate and not shrink either
 - This project would not consume local natural resources and produced pollution
 - The evaluation should not be too rigorous

- Prayut government should explain importance and necessity of the project to the public
 - to make many more people understand it and gain more support from the public
 - Prime Minister Prayut as much as possible don't use item 44 special right to push the project
 - To do so may cause more resentment