The Embrace of China’s Soft Power: A Case study of Confucius Institute, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

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A brief picture of how Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms in Thailand are operated in order to wield Chinese cultural influence to Thai society.

The four main factors which have assisted Thai society and Thai government to be able to embrace Confucius Institutes so smoothly and deeply.

Confucius Institute at Chiang Mai University.

A proposed cooperation strategic policy between China and Thailand on Thai studies Institutes.
A Brief relationship between China and Thailand

- The warm relationship between China and Thailand has started since the ancient times back in Sukhothai period.

- The overseas Chinese are serving as the connection to China and playing an important role in informal trade activities between the two countries (Chinwanno:2009 and Chuan:2012).

- Economy perspective, China has become Thailand’s largest exporter, second largest source of imports after Japan and second largest trading partner (Yanwu:2012 and Chinvanno:2015).
A Brief relationship between China and Thailand

- In an aspect of politics, the top leaders of the two countries frequently exchange their visits (Fangye:2013)
The strategic instrument of embracing Sino-Thai relations

- One of the strategies that Chinese government uses to nurture Sino-Thai relations is building connection through culture and Confucius Institute. These strategies come along with China’s Peaceful Development policy which has been widely employed to the foreign relation pursuit with its Asian neighbors.

- Moreover, the new foreign policies “one belt one road” and “peaceful development policy” have been formed under the Chinese effort to become a hegemon country in Asia and to expand its influence over other countries in the world.
The strategic instrument of embracing Sino-Thai relations

- Walsh (2013) explain that the Confucius Institute (CI) is a project initiated by the office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban). Its main purpose is to promote global knowledge of the Chinese language and culture and to deepen friendships between China and the rest of the world.

- However, Paradise (2009) and Cheng (2012) analyze that there are three main objectives of the Confucius Institutes, according to a Hanban program director. These are to teach Chinese, to promote cultural exchange, and to facilitate business activity.

- Also, the core functions and operation of CI claimed in the general charter can be summarized as Chinese language promotion, cultural dissemination, and Sino-foreign exchanges.
The strategic instrument of embracing Sino-Thai relations

- In the case of Thailand, they are all realized to great extent, becoming the envy of many of their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

- The Thai and Chinese universities are jointly responsible for CI operations. The host universities in Thailand provide working space, including offices, libraries, classrooms, and meeting rooms. The hosts also provide the salaries of Thai staffs and provide Chinese volunteer teachers with direct financial inputs such as assistance with water and electricity bills, sanitation and security services, lodging and lunch fees.

- Moreover, in term of financing, the Confucius Institute is supported by both China and Thailand. Through the Hanban in Beijing, the Chinese government provides each institute with an initial amount of USD 100,000. Hanban is also responsible for providing textbooks, teaching materials and monthly salaries for the Chinese volunteer teachers.
The strategic instrument of embracing Sino-Thai relations

- Confucius Institute at Chulalongkorn University
- Confucius Institute at Khon Kaen University
- Confucius Institute at Assumption University
- Confucius Institute at Prince of Songkla University
- Confucius Institute at Kasetsart University
- Confucius Institute at Chiangmai University
- Indeed, Thailand has 12 CIs
The strategic instrument of embracing Sino-Thai relations

- The Thailand’s so-called “constitution monarchy” is a combination between traditional and modern political system with the influence of Buddhism.
- Buddhism-Brahman-Hindu in Thailand had fairly well adapted itself to the Chinese social and intellectual environment.
The strategic instrument of embracing Sino-Thai relations

- The recent bomb explosion in a commercial and tourist center in Bangkok, Erawan shrine, is another example of a strong religious connection between China and Thailand.

- BBC News (2015) points out that in the wake of the deadly bombing of the shrine on August 17, 2015, Hong Kong superstars Michelle Yim, also known as Mai Suet, and Simon Yam Tak-Wah claimed to visit the Erawan shrine in Bangkok on September 22 to help restore the confidence of Chinese tourists.
The strategic instrument of embracing Sino-Thai relations

- The Erawan shrine is not only a tourist attraction for local or foreign tourists but also the place where both Chinese and Thai people can share their belief and faith. This can be implied that there is a religious connection between Thailand and Chinese people especially in regard to the Confucius doctrine and believe.
Confucius Institutes: the Case Study of the Confucius Institute in Chiang Mai University

- Confucius Institute in Chiang Mai University (CMU) has been established in 2005.

- It is operated via Chiang Mai Language Institution which is authorized by Hanban.

- In the early stage, Chiang Mai University had signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Yunnan Normal University (YNNU) in Kunming city. Their main missions are to teach Chinese language, to promote and exchange culture, and to be the Chinese language testing center (HSK).
Confucius Institutes: the Case Study of the Confucius Institute in Chiang Mai University

- In the institute, most of staffs are volunteers who are supported the monthly allowance. Most of them are from Yunnan Normal University, including 80 percent of teachers in this institute.

- To be a Chinese teacher requires the knowledge of second language, which in this case is Thai. Normally, the staffs will be stationed at the institute for both teaching and administrative duty for only a year. Chiang Mai University Confucius Institute pays for facilities about 12,500 Baht per month (approximately 360 US$).

- The classrooms share facilities with other language programs such as English and Thai programs. However, there are also 5 more rooms for operation including meeting room, multimedia room, guest room, teacher room, and director room.
Confucius Institutes: the Case Study of the Confucius Institute in Chiang Mai University

- Interestingly, there are two directors in this organization culture, one is Thai and one is Chinese. However, Chinese director is the key man for the operation of Confucius Institute.

- To study Chinese in Confucius institute, class for beginners will be required to commence with Maoism and Communism ideology. It is quite clear that Confucius Institute is a proxy of Chinese government that uses “soft power” to dominate other countries especially, through a young generation who can easily absorb ideas and perceptions from academic materials.

- Increasingly take this opportunity to migrate to Thailand, Thai students’ job opportunities will be consequently lowered.
Confucius Institutes: the Case Study of the Confucius Institute in Chiang Mai University

- The majority of its students are those who desire to take extra courses to gain more Chinese efficiency and from high schools in Chiangmai and its neighboring provinces.

- Moreover, Confucius Institute also grants an undergraduate program scholarship for students who have passed Chinese language efficiency test (HSK) to study in Yunnan Normal University.

- While the institute in Chiangmai is doing so well, Yunnan Normal University has started to send their student to Thailand to study Thai language. The number has been increasing gradually from 400 students in 2014 to 600 students in 2015.

- After graduation or course completion, some Chinese students decide to look for a job and work in Thailand rather than going back to China. As Chinese students
A proposed cooperation strategic policy between China and Thailand on Thai studies Institute

- As to strive for an equal exchange on culture and education platforms and maintain a sincere relationship with China at the same time, Thai government needs to abruptly change strategic foreign policy position on China especially in education aspect.

- Thai government needs to propose a new initiative strategic cooperation policy which is establishing a Thai Studies Institute (TSI) in China rather than in Thailand.

- The Thai Studies Institute should directly receive supervision from Ministry of Education. Also, the TSI should have autonomous operation and administration rather than direct control from the Ministry of Education.
A proposed cooperation strategic policy between China and Thailand on Thai studies Institute

- Recently, “Thai Studies” in Thailand has been established in individual leading universities, namely Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, Kasetsart University, and Chiang Mai University etc.

- Only two universities from Thailand that have successfully established Thai studies institutes overseas, which are Suan Dusit University whose Thai Studies Center is in Guangxi Teachers Education University, China, and Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University whose Thai Studies is in Quang Tri Teacher Training College, Viet Nam.
A proposed cooperation strategic policy between China and Thailand on Thai studies Institute

- According to a number of Thai Studies Institutes established overseas, Thai government clearly does not take a serious action which will lead to the improvement of the bilateral relationships between Thailand and China, especially in cultural aspect.

- Apart from its main goal on promulgate Thai language, the Thai Studies Institute will able to provide more in different aspects. This could be a real representative organization that promotes and strengthens the relationship between Thailand and China.

- Also, it will yield Chinese people a proper understanding about Thai culture and Thai folk ways. Thus, Chinese people or Chinese tourists both from urban and rural areas who come to visit Thailand are acknowledged of the certain Thai values and way of life. This would not only help Chinese people to live harmoniously with Thai people in the society but also stimulate economic cooperation and investment in Thailand.
A proposed cooperation strategic policy between China and Thailand on Thai studies Institute

- On the other hand, Chinese government should cooperate, support, and promote Thai government to establish Thai Studies Institute by forming policy and regulation which enable TSI establishment in Chinese universities, especially Chinese Normal University.

- Also, Hanban could assist in creating the guidelines for TSI in China. The TSI operation and administration could be duplicated and adjusted from Confucius Institutes as a model.

- Therefore, the proposed initiative strategic cooperation policy which focuses on establishing Thai studies Institute could enhance strategic cooperation between the two countries.
A proposed cooperation strategic policy between China and Thailand on Thai studies Institute

- Finally, to be a true friend or a reliable ally rather than “a friend with benefit”, Thailand and China need to conduct the relationship with a sincere cooperation.

- One of the strategies is to “take turn” in culture and education exchanges. The “Thai Studies Institute” will rapidly strengthen the relationship rather than creating a steady progress.