

CHAPTER IV

ZHOU EN LAI'S ROLE IN SINO-THAI DIPLOMACY

Despite a very long and impressive history of contacts between Siam/Thailand and China/the PRC, the cold war situation left no room for Thailand to manipulate foreign relations and diplomacy since the Thai governments most under military control, decided to side with free world against communism. Consequently, Thailand followed the US stance of non-recognition of the PRC and subsequently suspended her diplomatic relations with the PRC. However, in the mid-1950's, opportunity availed for Thailand to come into contact with the PRC briefly before breaking off again when Bangkok served as the headquarters of the SEATO the brainchild of the US. The futility of the Vietnam War was fully recognized by the Nixon administration while the Vietnam conflict caused grave dissension between the PRC and the Soviet Union. Nixon Doctrine and Nixon's overture to resume contact with the PRC necessitated Thailand to reconsider her position vis-à-vis the PRC, with the turn of the tide in Vietnam War, rifts also occurred in the Thai-US relations while Thailand too made her own successful approach to resume diplomatic relations with the PRC on July 1, 1975.

4.1 Sino-Thai Relations after the Creation of the PRC

4.1.1 The Winding Road of Development of Sino-Thai Relations in 1950s and 1960s

On October 1st 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded. As a result of continuous association with the US, Thailand, the recipient of economic, technical and military aids from the US by agreement signed in 1950, Thailand was influenced by the United States. Thereupon, in relations with the PRC, the Phibun government followed the US in refusing to recognize New China.

In terms of internal security, the aim was to implement a policy of anti-communism, and this even evolved into anti-communism and anti-Chinese sentiments. In November, 1952, Thailand adopted a new anti-communist ordinance, with the aim of arresting Thai communists and overseas Chinese, and forbidding the activity of overseas Chinese societies. Chinese schools were closed, and some overseas Chinese who had been residing in Thailand for many years was driven off Thailand. Moreover, the Thai government also announced an embargo against the socialist countries to prohibit Thai business trade with China. Prohibition included rice, rubber, tin and other materials transported to mainland China.

At the international level, Thailand used the United Nations rostrum and other situations to criticize China of founding Xishuangbanna Dai Nationality Autonomous Region in Yunnan Province with an aim to subvert Thailand.

The Pibun government's anti-communist policy presented no real benefit to Thailand. This was especially due to the embargo which affected Thailand's exports and had a serious impact on Thailand's economic interests. At the same time, the anti-China policy caused discontent among the masses. When the Bandung Conference was held in April 1955, the Pibun government's policy towards China started to appear the turnaround.

In April, 1955 at the Bandung Asia-Africa Conference, China and Thailand made first official contact. Premier Zhou Enlai and Thailand's head of delegation, Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs Minister Prince Wan Waithayakon, met at the meeting and Zhou Enlai invited the Prince to visit China (**Picture 4.1**).¹ This meeting had significant influence on Thai Government and the people, helping Thailand to understand New China.

¹ The Diplomatic History Laboratory of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **The Memorabilia of Zhou Enlai's Diplomatic Activities** (Beijing: World Knowledge Publishing, 1993), pp. 273-274. (外交部外交史研究室编:《周恩来外交活动大事记》,世界知识出版社,1993,第273-274页。)



Picture 4.1 Chinese State Department Premier Zhou En Lai met Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs Prince Wan Waithayakon in the time of convening Asian-African Conference at Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955.

After the Asia-Africa Conference, in December, 1955, The Thai government dispatched congressmen Sarin MaLankorn and other three members to make a secret trip visit the PRC. Chairman Mao Zedong, Premier Zhou En Lai personally met the Thai visitors. This visit improved the understanding between China and Thailand and has achieved positive results.

On the 16th and 17th of December, 1955, Mr. Lian Proasuwan (练·播素旺) and Mr. Sang Phathanothai (汕·帕他努泰), representatives of the Thai Prime Minister, and Mr. Yao Zhong-ming (姚仲民, 中华人民共和国驻缅甸大使), the representative of the People's Republic of China who was the ambassador to Burma, held a secret talk in the embassy of the People's Republic of China in Burma. After two day-long discussions, both sides signed a joint statement. The statement pointed out that, China and Thailand wanted to mutually respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual nonaggression, not to interfere in each other's domestic affairs, to share equality and mutual benefit, which were coexistence the Five Principles of which aimed to develop the friendly relations. China and Thailand as soon as possible would take measure to promote mutual exchanges, and establish trade and cultural relations, in order to finally

realize the normalization of relations. However, considering the situation that time, this joint statement was not made public.²

The various delegations made visit to China. From January 1956 to October 1958, there were 24 delegations. However, the development of Sino-Thai relations was not without difficulties. In October, 1958, the Minister of Defense Sarit launched a military coup and seized power. Phibun ran overseas. From 1957 to 1973, the military was in control of Thailand.³ After Sarit came to power, he changed the policy that the Phibun government had implemented to improve relations with China, and announced the prohibition of all contacts with China. In the 16 years from September, 1957 to October, 1973, exchanges between Thailand and China, whether it be government and non-government were completely stopped. Both countries' relations were in the trough.

4.1.2 Sino-Thai Relations under International Situation Changes in 1970s

The years 1950 to 1960 were an era in which the US proffered all-out resistance to communism. War was waged in Vietnam, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization was formed as a deterrent to the communist threat, and propaganda in a variety of forms was used to try and persuade countries in the region that communist China and North Vietnam were to be feared.

In the meantime, a 1957 schism between the two communist powers—the PRC and the USSR—resulted in China readjusting its policies regarding other nations, the PRC tried to use gentler diplomatic policy in foreign relations, establishing diplomatic ties with countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe.

² Further details see the Appendix VII.

³ Liang Yingming, Liang Zhiming, Zhou Nanjing, and Zhao Jing (ed.), "the Post-War of Politics and Economy of Thailand" in *Modern Southeast Asia* (Bei Jing University Press, 1994), pp. 414-415. (梁英明、梁志明、周南京、赵敬 (编), 《近现代东南亚: 泰国战后政治和经济》, 北京大学出版社, 1994, 第 414—415 页。)

After internal purges ended in 1968,* the PRC was still facing the increased military strength of the Soviet Union which used force to invade Czechoslovakia that year and at the same time skirmished with Chinese troops on the PRC's border at the Ussuri River (乌苏里江). In July 1971, US President Richard Nixon had clandestinely sent an envoy, his security adviser Henry Kissinger(基辛格), to China and things began to turn around. When Kissinger's trip became public, all UN members who had been opposed to the PRC's recognition began to change their policies (**Picture 4.2**).



Picture 4.2 Henry Kissinger and Chairman Mao, with Zhou Enlai behind them in Beijing, early 70s.

The UN victory did little to warm relations between the PRC and Soviet Union. However, there was improvement in ties between Washington and Moscow. They led to arms-reduction talks in 1968 and the agreements ratified in 1972 while President Nixon was pulling out American troops from Vietnam. Political tensions between the superpowers began to decrease.

Circumstances in Thailand and abroad between 1950 and 1970 contributed to Thailand's paranoia over communism in the early stages and to its policy of holding no diplomatic ties with the PRC, although political, economic and social links grew. This was particularly between 1957 and 1963, when Thailand was ruled by Field Marshal

* During Chinese Cultural Revolutionary period (1960s), China was limited more or less by the internal political problem to play positive or leading role in world policies.

Sarit Thanarat. He issued Revolutionary Party Decree No 53 (《革命团五十三号令》) on January 17, 1959, prohibiting the sale of products made in communist China. This was also forbidden to travel to the Soviet Union or the Chinese mainland, and when some did visit China they were charged on their return with engaging in communist practices.

After entering the 70s, the multi-polarization of the world tendency started to appear. On October 25, 1971, with the votes of overwhelming majority, United Nations General Assembly (联合国大会) passed the resolution that required reinstating all legal rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations. In case of Thailand, it was since January 12, 1971, then-foreign minister Thanat Khorman told American's CBS TV network that Thailand wanted to coexist peacefully with communist China. As such, it was prepared to begin trading with the PRC. In October 1971, he declared that Bangkok accepted the PRC as China's UN face. It was a dramatic change in Thai attitudes toward China, from strong opposition to outright accommodation.

On February 28, 1972, the Sino-US Joint Communiqué (《1972 年中美上海联合公报》) was announced in Shanghai. The breakthrough of Chinese and American relations had great repercussions around the world. The American policy towards China changed, the US troops' withdrawal from the Indo-China area and contraction in Asia had an influence on Thai relations closely. Under this situation, Thailand also started to change its policy towards China. When Thailand readjusted its policy regarding the political role of the PRC, becoming more active diplomatically with Beijing, there was a series of meetings, including an informal visit to the mainland by Thai representatives.

In May 1972, the Federation of Table Tennis of Asia (亚洲乒乓球联盟) invited the Thai delegation to Beijing to take part in the Asian Table Tennis Championships (亚洲乒乓球锦标赛) in September (Picture 4.3). The-Commerce

Minister Prasit Kanjanawat signed on as adviser to the Thai Ping-Pong Team for the tournament in Beijing. During the week-long stay in Beijing, the Thai Ping-Pong delegation met with Chinese high-profile leaders, including Premier Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and foreign ministry officials. The PRC and Thailand achieved direct contact through the visit of the table tennis team. In this way, the exchanges that were interrupted for 14 years between the people of China and Thailand began to be restored. From an historical point of view, it was the beginning of a much grander endeavor that would bring to fruition the establishment of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations.⁴



Picture 4.3 On 2 September 1972, Thai Ping-Pong players participate in the first Asian Table Tennis Championships holding in Beijing Capital Stadium.

In order to express the desire to improve relations with China, in June 1973 the Thailand Ping-Pong Union Association, invited the Chinese ping-pong team to visit Thailand (**Picture 4.4**). This was the first official delegation sent to Thailand since the founding of New China. The Thai government took the Chinese ping-pong team's visit very seriously.

Thailand's political leaders believed that the Chinese ping-pong team visiting Thailand was “a bridge of understanding between the peoples of Thailand and China”

⁴ Pana Janviroj, “A Winding Road to Friendship” in **Thai-Chinese Relations: 3 Decades of Trust**, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand (the Nation publication, Bangkok, 2005), p. 21.

(架起了泰中两国人民了解的桥梁) that helped to "shorten the distance between the two countries (缩短了两国间的距离)." The Thai deputy minister of Foreign Affairs Chatchai further pointed out that with China's ping-pong team visiting Thailand, Thai-Chinese diplomatic relations experienced "a glimmer of dawn" (泰中建交已露出“一线曙光”). In Thailand all sectors praised the Chinese ping-pong team's visit, and the Thai people expressed hope that the friendship with China would continue to blossom, as would the desire to normalize the relations between the two countries. Thenceforth, Thailand and China worked toward bolstering their relationship. Leaders of their respective foreign missions met more often.



Picture 4.4 During 17-24 June, 1973, Chinese Ping-Pong delegation makes a friendly visit to Thailand. This is PRC's Ping-Pong Team visiting Thailand for the first time. In the evening 21st June, Sino-Thai Ping-Pong players carry on mixed doubles by mixed group.

On October 14, 1973, the large-scale student demonstration erupted in Thailand, causing the Thanom military regime to collapse. After civilian government came to power, inquiries began about realizing the normalization of diplomatic relations with China. According to incomplete statistics, a year from October 14, 1973, there were 13 larger-scale Thai delegations to visit the People's Republic of China (**Picture 4.5**). China's basketball, football, and badminton teams also visited Thailand. This further deepened the mutual understanding between the two sides (**Picture 4.6**).



Picture 4.5 On Dec 26th, 1973, Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier Li Xiannian met Thai trade delegation, Chatchai Choonhavan, the Thai deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, as the head.



Picture 4.6 On Feb 12th, 1974, Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping met the chairman and delegation of Thai Olympic Committee.

In 1974, an oil cartel boosted prices and caused a global crisis. Thailand was affected by this global oil crisis and by economic hardship. The impact on Thailand was great. This served as a catalyst to the establishment of full relations between Thailand and China. To help Thailand overcome the difficulties, China came to its aid by selling 50,000 tonnes of diesel fuel at the special price which lowered the international market price of crude oil and 75,000 tonnes of high-performance diesel at

a “friendship price” (友情价) to Thailand (**Picture 4.7**).⁵ The initiative has been praised from all circles in Thailand. The move lifted Bangkok’s confidence in Beijing and it amended Decree 53 on December 18.



Picture 4.7 On Dec 22ed, 1973, the Director of Chinese Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) Wang Yaoting meets the Thai delegation of Thai Under-secretary Ministry of Foreign Affairs Chatichai Choonhavan-led at Beijing. After negotiation, Chinese government provides 50,000 tonnes of diesel fuel at the special price which lowered the international market price to Thailand to help Thailand to deal with the temporary problem of lack of oil.

Throughout 1974 there were more official visits between the two countries. Thailand meanwhile set up task forces to study ways to open diplomatic relations. China’s ambassador to Tokyo, Chen Zhu, invited then-deputy premier Sukit Nimmanhaemind to visit the PRC, and it was decided that the best time would be after Bangkok rescinded Decree No 53. On December 6, 1974, the National Assembly of Thailand (泰国立法会) passed a proposal that repealed "Revolutionary Party" Decree No 53 in Thailand, and announced that it would allow direct trade between Thailand and China.

On March 15, 1975, the Thai Prime Minister M.R. Kukrit Prajmo announced the decision of Thailand to recognize the People’s Republic of China and established

⁵ Pana Janviroj, “A Winding Road to Friendship” in **Thai-Chinese Relations: 3 Decades of Trust**, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand (Bangkok: the Nation publication, 2005). p. 13.

official diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, when he announced Thailand's foreign policy in the National Assembly.

4.2 The Shift in Thai Relations with PRC

At the beginning of the creation of the PRC, China faced a tough international environment. At that time, two big camps sharply opposed each other. After more than 20 years, Sino-US relations have been eroded by the confrontation of ideological, economic, military and other aspects. A very long time after the end of the Korean War, US-led western countries continued to carry out economic blockades, while forcing political isolation and military threats upon China.

Therefore, China objected to the American policy of aggression and war. China sought to consolidate the unity of Soviet-led socialistic nations, and actively sought to establish and develop friendly relations with Asian-African independent nations, which were guidelines of foreign relations in earlier PRC. The establishment and development of friendly relations with Thailand remained a key component. In addition, China began to explore different ways to sustain the development of friendly relations with Thailand.

4.2.1 Nixon Doctrine and Impact on Thailand

At the time of the gradual reduction of the American presence in the region, the decreasing support from the United States had pressed the Thai government to reform its basic assumption in both its domestic and foreign politics. J.L.S Girling remarked in his article "even since the American about-turn on Vietnam, Thai leaders have realized the need to prepare for a new alignment of forces in Asia."⁶ Some confusion was generated within the Thai government by the rapid withdrawal of Americans from

⁶ J.L.S Girling, "Strong-Man Tactics in Thailand: The Problems Remain" in *Pacific Community* 3, 3 (April 1972): 538.

South Vietnam and the US détente policy with the People's Republic of China.

The Thai Foreign Minister, Thanat Khoman, felt that the withdrawal of the American troops from Vietnam should be carried out in accordance with the capacity of the South Vietnamese soldiers to undertake the burden of fighting. However, the Nixon administration also declared a desire for troop reduction in Thailand, as well as reduction in military advisers, economic planners, and economic aid, as a logical consequence of the scheduled Vietnamization of the war in Vietnam. Fearing that the United States would discontinue all military aid and eventually completely destroy the Thai-American alliance, Thanat stated, "we have no intention of driving American Forces out of Thailand, but to confirm our policy of relying on our national forces, especially in terms of manpower....and to show the sincerity of self-reliance, we have suggested...discussions to redeploy and to withdraw those forces in conformity with the requirements of the war in Vietnam But, we have no desire of hastening the withdrawal of those forces."⁷ Many Thai observers realized that since the United States' troop withdrawal had injured the nation's defense capability, its dependence on US military capacity should be eased. The nation should have been improving her own ability to secure the country and conduct her own diplomatic flexibility.

At about this time, Thai-US relations became worse when a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee declared that under a secret agreement signed in 1967 between Thai rulers and Washington, the US had paid Thailand more than \$200 million to send troops to Vietnam. Moreover, in order to encourage Thailand to assign the 11,000 man division to Vietnam, the United States agreed to increase its military assistance and to supply Thailand with anti-aircraft missiles. The publication of the secret agreements caused increasingly troubled relations between the two governments. The Thai Foreign Minister gave a speech in which he showed bitterness towards the American Congress,

⁷ Astri Suhrke, "Smaller-Nations Diplomacy: Thailand's Current Dilemmas" in *Asian Survey* 11, 5 (May 1971): 431.

“one may ask in bewilderment why those immature and irresponsible elements in the United States have shown persistence in persecution and molesting such a loyal friend and partner as Thailand.... In time of stress and strain the scum comes to the surface. It was those unwholesome elements which poisoned the hearts and minds and adulterated the sound and solid traditions of a great people.... For having cooperated wholeheartedly with the United States, Thailand has had to endure and suffer at the hands of those ugly Americans.... It seems inescapable that relations between Thailand and the United States will evolve toward a more selective basis.”⁸

Since Thailand had lost confidence in the United States and its leaders tended to diminish Thailand's identification with the US, they sought alternative relationships. They preferred not to maintain as close a relationship with the United States as previously. Thus, instead of resisting or protesting the United States move to loosen the Thai-US alignment, the Thais took the initiative of requesting that US forces be withdrawn from Thai territory. Thailand decided to play down its close connection with the United States and emphasize its self-reliance. A new attitude for Thai leaders was that they desired that the big powers recognize Southeast Asia as a zone of peace and neutrality, as was proposed in 1971 by foreign ministers of the states constituting the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Furthermore, the Thai government hoped to improve its diplomacy with both the Free World and the Communist bloc.

During 1971-72, Thai troops withdrew from South Vietnam. The nation also took initial steps towards some replacement of American support by seeking closer trade with Asian nations. It sought to open a channel of communication with Beijing.

Another major result of the Nixon Doctrine was to push Thailand to establish relations with communist countries. During 1971-73, commercial and air agreements were signed and cultural groups were changed with East European countries. Trade

⁸ Thanat Khoma's address to the American Chamber of Commerce, see Clark D. Neher, "Thailand: Toward Fundamental Change" in *Asian Survey* 11, 2 (February 1971): 137.

with some ten of Thailand's ideological opponents began with countries such as North Korea, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. These actions would have been regarded as heresy a few years earlier. Furthermore, Thailand launched talks with Beijing and Hanoi through third countries. These were low-key because Thailand did not want either Beijing or Moscow to dominate the region after the United States' disengagement from Asia.

Further, the Thai government soon began to conduct direct informal talks with Hanoi to see whether some basis for coexistence and good neighborliness in Southeast Asia was possible. These talks took place in Bangkok during 1970-1971 under the auspices of the International Red Cross. But Thanat Khoman, Foreign Minister, in explaining the overtures stated :

“...sometimes the talks go beyond Red Cross matters. We have told them we have no ill intention against them. We have never tried to send the troops against North Vietnam. We do not seek their destruction. We are even willing and prepare not only to look on them as a sovereign entity but also to see them participate in regional activities, especially the Mekong Project. We are willing to extend to them the benefit of the sizeable project.”⁹

While the negotiations did not yield much progress, the two countries agreed that North Vietnamese forces would not directly threaten Thai territory and that neither Thai nor North Vietnamese forces would intervene independently in Cambodia or Laos. Thus, a clash between the two military forces appeared to be impossible even though the two governments were backing different contenders for power in Laos and Cambodia. However, the question of the repatriation of the 40,000 Vietnamese living in Thailand was a touchy one.

By early 1976, it appeared that the American withdrawal from Thailand would not affect the close relations between the two countries. They looked forward to

⁹ Press Release, “Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations”, No.20, (May 12, 1971).

continued economic cooperation rather than military assistance. Thailand expected that its future would be based on self-reliance and full jurisdiction over any foreign troops stationed in the country.

Perhaps, as a result of the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine, Thai leaders saw some value in the Soviet proposal of 1969 for an Asian Collective Security system, but they remained suspicious of the possibility that the Soviet might seek to fill the vacuum of power in the region.

4.2.2 Sino-Thai Relations after Nixon Doctrine

The former Foreign Minister, Thanat Khoman, declared in September 1971, "...events in our part of the world are bound to be affected by the attitudes and policies of big powers in and outside the region: the United States, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, Japan and, last but not least, the European powers."¹⁰

In light of Thailand's and America's close association, it came as a great shock to Thailand, therefore, in 1969, when American foreign policy toward Asia changed with the announcement by President Richard M. Nixon of the "Guam Doctrine", which implied that there would be no more substantive United States military involvement in Asia. As Richard Butwell states, "The President emphasized the importance of increased self-reliance on the part of Asian nations. He also stated repeatedly that the United States would not again become engaged in a Vietnam type war."¹¹

The doctrine shook Thailand's confidence in the United States' commitment to Southeast Asia which directly affected Thailand's security and the platform on which her foreign policy was based. Thus, after 1969, Thai foreign policy changed to meet the

¹⁰ Press Release, "Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations", No. 33 (September 8, 1971).

¹¹ Richard Butwell, *Southeast Asia Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), pp.81-83.

new realities that were a result of the Nixon Doctrine. The media and the public turned their attention to encouraging the government to hold talks with Beijing. This situation was another turning point in Thai foreign policy.

Thus the Nixon Doctrine, in the fall of 1969, heralded a shift in US policy towards readjustment in Southeast Asia and Pacific Asia, and raised difficult problems for Thailand and the US allies in the region. With the Doctrine, the old days of close friendly relations between Thailand and the United States were gradually modified. With much of American policy in Asia considerably changed, Thailand was concerned about US disengagement and withdrawal from Southeast Asia. Thai leaders felt that SEATO and the collective military security in Southeast Asia were weakened. While they could understand the Nixon Doctrine's endorsement of Asian self-reliance, they were apprehensive about the actual American commitments to its allies in Southeast Asia. They feared that American disengagement presaged a "vacuum of power in Asia" that either the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China would seek to fill unless a regional unit could be organized for collective defense in time.

Thailand's apprehension heightened with President Richard M. Nixon's state visit to Beijing in 1972 (**Picture 4.8**). A Thai journalist remarked that the relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China would change alliances and shift the balance of power in Asia and the world. Furthermore, some Asian leaders were disappointed that the US had not consulted with Asian governments before the talks between Beijing and the United States.¹² However, it was thought by many that the future of these small nations in Southeast Asia should not be dependent on the Sino-US decision. The Thai government hoped that the Sino-American agreement might lead to peace in the region.

¹² Dong Baocun, "The Founders of Sino-American relationship—Mao Zedong and Nixon, Kissinger" in *Mao Zedong and the Man of Time in the World* (Beijing: the People Publishing, 1993), pp. 135-141. (董保存 (编), 《中美关系的奠基人—毛泽东与尼克松、基辛格》, 人民出版社, 1993, 第 135—141 页。)



Picture 4.8 *On February 21, 1972, President Richard M. Nixon of American made the state visiting to the PRC.*

After the American turn-about in Vietnam, as has been noted, Thai leaders realized the need to prepare for a new alignment of forces in Asia. From the beginning of 1969, the Thai Foreign Minister, Thanat Khoman, proclaimed that Thailand was ready to open discussions with Beijing and that "... a stable settlement for Southeast Asia would require the agreement of China."¹³

In September 1970, the Thai government announced the withdrawal of its troops from South Vietnam and refused to send troops to Cambodia to aid the Lon Nol government in its fight with Communist insurrection. Thanat also used the term "the People's Republic of China" for the first time, and he declared to the public, "... the policy of relaxing tension with China had been approved by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet".¹⁴ The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Prapas Charustiara, in an interview stated that he would not oppose trade with Beijing (which had been banned in 1958 by the Sarit regime) if the Sino-Thai business practices proceeded as normal. In time, the National Security Council suggested that the business between the two countries should be under government control—in terms of state-to-state business—and declared itself in favor of sports and cultural exchanges.

¹³ **The Straits Times** (February 27, 1969).

¹⁴ **Bangkok Post** (May 15, 1971).

It is interesting to note Thailand's reaction to Beijing's being accepted in the United Nations to replace Taiwan in 1971. Thailand voted to abstain rather than vote and this brought new pressure on Thai leaders conducting foreign policy. The mass media and left-wing politicians tried to persuade the government to change. Three members of Parliament cabled congratulations to chairman Mao Zedong on the matter of China being seated in the United Nations, and both Thai and Chinese language newspapers in Thailand increasingly printed news and pictures about the events in the People's Republic of China. Moreover, Pridi Phanomyong urged the Thai government to recognize the People's Republic of China immediately, and strengthen its ties with its neighboring countries such as Cambodia and Vietnam, in order to meet the new challenges in Asia (**Picture 4.9**). He stated, as follows, "now that the People's Republic of China has been voted into its rightful place in the United Nations by overwhelming majority, it is placed in an advantageous position over us in any negotiations on diplomatic or any other relations.... We should approach the China problem as a commander would, study the situation realistically."¹⁵



Picture 4.9 On October 6 1965, the Chairman of Central Committee of Communist Party of China, Mao Zedong, met the former Regent of Thailand, Pridi Phanomyong whom came to join the celebrated activities that the People's Republic of China established 16 anniversaries.

Possible steps towards improving relations with the PRC. The National Security Council "...decided to remove three important barriers to friendlier relations with

¹⁵ **Bangkok Post** (November 7, 1971).

Communist China...to remove the ban on trade with Beijing...to relax existing anti-communist laws...and to allow visits to Communist China by invited sports and non-political missions.”¹⁶

Once again, and under public pressure, the Thai government started considering Thanat Khoman, who directed Thai foreign policy from 1958-1971 and was the most skillful foreign minister Thailand ever had, announced on November 13, 1971 Beijing's readiness to enter into negotiations. At the same time, Thailand's new government, the military group, did not intend to give up the exploration of a new policy. Therefore, about ten months later, the military government accepted the invitation of Beijing to send a Thai ping-pong team to China in August 1972, and sent along with the team a governmental official “to sound out the Chinese on their attitude toward Thailand.”¹⁷ The “political advisor” to the sport group was Mr. Prasit Kanchanawat, former Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs and Director of Economy and Finance of the ruling National Executive Council, who met Zhou Enlai. According to Prasit, Zhou Enlai took advantage of the occasion to inform the advisor that Thailand and China should begin their relationship with non-political affairs such as sports, cultural activities, and trade.

The Thai ping-pong team was followed later in the year by a Thai trade mission. The government decided to open commercial relations with Beijing, and a Thai delegation departed for the Canton (Guang Zhou, China) Trade Fair in China. Again, Prasit Kanchanawat headed this group. Negotiations concerning the possibility of government-to-government trade, excluding private individuals and firms from the operation, first suggested by the National Security Council, were discussed.

4.2.3 The Problem of US Force in Thailand in 1975

¹⁶ Khien Theeravit, *China's Foreign Policy*, The Thailand research fund and China's studies center, Institute of Asian studies, Chulaongkorn University (Bangkok: Chulaongkorn University Press, 1998), p. 380.

¹⁷ *Nation* (August 4, 1972).

As has been indicated, Kukrit Pramoj pledged, on office in March 1975, the withdrawal of all American combat troops within one year "... through friendly negotiations, taking into account the situation in the region."¹⁸ The phrase gave the government room to maneuver with the United States over the American personnel in Thailand. The United States troop withdrawals from bases in Thailand began in 1972. However, the United States, according to American officials, wanted to keep about 3,000 military personnel in Thailand until the end of 1975 in order to operate sophisticated installations in various parts of the country. Particularly, the US wanted to retain the U-tapao facilities, bases in the Philippines, Guam, and with other installations in East Asia and the newly acquired Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

It was clear from the start that even among the Thai leaders themselves, the call for a total US withdrawal did not originate from a full consensus. In particular, the military leaders remained unwilling to see Thailand out of the American military umbrella so quickly. General Boonchai Bumroonpong, Commander in chief of the Thai Army, stated

"the main principle or policy of countries surrounding us is to make Thailand their satellite, or to join their socialist bloc. It is the fact that should we be off our guard any time they would swallow us up. If the government considers it no longer needs America, it is its affairs. We must carry on, using our own might, and not depending on anybody. This is most difficult because everybody else has friends, but we have none at all. Our nation might not survive."¹⁹

Furthermore, Thailand attempted to delay the withdrawal of US combat forces because of the border problem with Laos. Defense Minister Pramarn Adireksarn said publicly that "the pullout must be step by step." This meant that many Thai leaders continued to welcome American troops for a further period of time.

¹⁸ Peagan, Norman, "The American Shield Remains" in *Far Eastern Economic Review* (May 16, 1975), p. 20.

¹⁹ *New York Time* (March 1, 1976).

For many in the general Thai public, however, there was a feeling that after the collapse of America's efforts in Indochina, Thailand faced a crucial problem with the former enemy in the region, and that the continuing American presence would mean increasing difficulty in making friends with Vietnam as well as causing suspicion from ASEAN member nations. Therefore, American withdrawal from the country appealed too many.

In terms of China's reaction, it was clear that Chinese leaders now regarded the US military presence in Thailand as useful for China itself. China viewed the US forces in Thailand as a countervailing power to the Soviet Union in the Southeast Asian area.

Whatever the circumstances concerning American troops in the country, the former Foreign Minister Thanat, still a forceful man in Thailand foreign policy, made the following remarks concerning the US troop withdrawal from Thailand:

"I never had in mind to push the American troops out of Thailand. In these matters, we would have to have discussions with the parties concerned, namely, the United States and also other interested parties, like North Vietnam

The Thai people are asking whether we will gain anything by Asking the American forces to leave Thailand. Would we gain anything from North Vietnam, which has been demanding the withdrawal of foreign forces from here? I think North Vietnam is very pleased to see Thailand taking the step of total foreign troop's withdrawal, that is, the American forces.

North Vietnam has not offered to give Thailand anything at all in return for this agreement. What Thailand might be a halt in support and assistance to the communist insurgency in Thailand because North Vietnam has been, and still is, supporting them."²⁰

By early 1976, it appeared that the American withdrawal from Thailand would not effect the close relations between the two countries. They looked forward to continued economic cooperation rather than military assistance. Thailand expected that

²⁰ Theh Chongkhadikij, "Story behind the Mystery Delegate" in **Bangkok Post** (July 28, 1975).

its future would be based on self-defense and full jurisdiction over any foreign troops stationed in the country.

4.3 Zhou En Lai's Role in Sino-Thai Relations

4.3.1 Sincere Negotiation

In April 1955, the Asia-Africa Conference convened in Bandung, Indonesia was an important international conference, as it focused on some very important and serious issues, and it was a post-war great event of having epoch-making significance. In this conference, some issues were negotiated and exchanged between the heads of Chinese and Thai delegations by Zhou Enlai's friendly and sincere attitude (**Picture 4.10**).



Picture 4.10 *The discussion of Chinese delegation with the participating countries at Bandung*

At the Bandung conference, Premier Zhou Enlai cleared the Thai delegation of the fear of communism and China's attack. He pointed out that the establishment of the so-called Dai Nationality Autonomous Region (Xi-Shuang-Ban-Na Dai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan — 云南西双版纳傣族自治州)²¹ was not a threat to

²¹ On 31 January 1953 the PRC announced the establishment of the Dai Nationality Autonomous Area (Xi-Shuang-Ban-Na Dai Zu Zi Zhi Zhou) for the Dai-speaking people in the southernmost part of Yunnan. This area, known in Thailand as *Sibsongpanna*, was formerly a semi-independent state whose people were referred to as Dai Lu. The area in question, lying between 21-23 degrees North and 99-102 degrees East, is only about 150 kilometers from Thailand northern border. It consisted of parts of Cheli, Fuhai, Nanchao, Chen yueh, Szumao, Ningchiang and Liushun hsien (county),

Thailand as cited by the Thai delegation. He stated that the Dai Autonomous People's Government in Yunnan Province²² had no significance outside China, and Premier Zhou sincerely invited the Thai delegation to visit Xi-Shuang-Ban-Na.

Before the conference end, Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier, Marshal Chen Yi, met the head of Thailand's delegation, Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs Minister Prince Wan Waithayakon on 23 April at a luncheon hosted by the Indonesian Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo (**Picture 4.11**), at which the Burmese, Ceylonese, and Pakistani Prime Ministers, and the Philippine Foreign Minister, were present. During the meeting, Zhou Enlai again assured Prince Wan that the Dai Autonomous Area was not being built up as a centre of subversion and infiltration of Thailand. He then invited Prince Wan to visit the area in order to satisfy himself about the situation there. This had become the first contact between China and Thailand after the founding of New China.



Picture 4.11 China's Vice Premier, Marshal Chen Yi (left), was talking with the chief of the delegates of Nepal Jianger Da (middle), and the head of Thailand's delegation Prince Wan Waithayakon (right) in the period of Bandung Conference.

totaling some 25,000 sq. kilometers, with a population of about 200,000, 52% of whom were Dais, 18% Ainis and the rest being made up of Chinese, Lahu, P'umans, Yulos, etc.- 47 nationalities in all.

²² BBC/Summary, "Dai Autonomous Region in Yunnan" in **World Broadcast** (Part V), No.223 (1 February 1953); BPRO FO371/105341 FC1823/6 Lamb to F.O. No.207, 23 May 1953; and George Moseley, **Policy Toward Ethnic on the Southern Frontier of the People's Republic of China**, D.Phil. thesis (University of Oxford, 1970).

On the question of overseas Chinese in Thailand, Premier Zhou offered Prince Wan that the Sino-Indonesian agreement similar to that concluded with Indonesia under which persons of the Chinese race who had dual citizenship would be permitted to abandon it by making a free choice between the two countries.²³ According to this text of the agreement to deal the problem of dual citizenship, the same should be applied to Thailand to solve the nationality issue of overseas Chinese in Thailand. Prince Wan replied that he would have to wait and study carefully the text of the Sino-Indonesian agreement. And Zhou Enlai invited Prince Wan to visit to the PRC. The meeting of Zhou Enlai and Prince Wan had a significant influence on the Thai Government and the people, promoting Thailand understanding of New China.

4.3.2 The Founder of Sino-Thai Friendship

From the end of the 1950s to the beginning of 70's, although Sino-Thai intercourses of government and non-government was at a stagnant state, Zhou Enlai always worked with perseverance to seek the possibility that China and Thailand could establish diplomatic relations, and helped Thai friends as far as possible.

In 1956, with Phibun's government openly pro-western and anti-Chinese, Sang Phathanothai* and Phibunsongkhram devised a strategy to establish a backdoor informal communication channel with the Chinese government. They agreed to send two of Sang's children to be brought up under the auspices of Chinese Premier Zhou

²³ TMFA, L&A File (Miscellaneous) Pol.3/2497-98/6, "Memorandum of Conversation between Wan Waithayakon and the Chinese Charge d'Affaires (Patrick Pichi Sun)" (1 May 1955).

* Sang Phathanothai (1914 – June, 1986) was a Thai politician, union leader, and journalist. He was one of the closest advisors to Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram. In 1938, shortly after becoming prime minister, Phibun named Sang the official government spokesman and put him in charge of all government propaganda. In 1947 Phibun became prime minister once again and invited Sang to join the cabinet. However Sang refused, preferring to remain Phibun's confidant and advisor. He decided to take only the official post of President, and later General Secretary, of the Thai National Traders Union Congress. With a reduced formal role in government and more time available to other projects, Sang turned himself to journalism; setting up a daily newspaper *Satiennraparb* (edited himself), means "Forever" soon exerted considerable influence in Thai politics.

Enlai as their wards. A daughter aged eight and a son aged twelve secretly traveled through Burma to Beijing (**Picture 4.12**).²⁴



Picture 4.12 Zhou Enlai with Sang's family, from left to right, Wai (Sirin's brother), Mr. Liao Zhongkai, Deng Yingchao (Zhou Enlai's wife), Sirin's sister, Sang's mother, Premier Zhou Enlai, Sirin, and their caretakers Qiu Ji and Lin Shanan.

After a sudden change of government resulting from a coup, Sang was arrested for his pro-Beijing policies and his newspaper articles about China by the Sarit government. From then on, Phibun escaped abroad, and Sang was imprisoned for several years under Sarit's military dictatorship. Consequently, Sang's arrest meant the loss of contact with Premier Zhou Enlai and his two children. Their secret plan lost its original meaning, too. Nevertheless, as a result of Zhou En Lai's concern for the two children for ten more years they had good experiences growing up among the family of China's elite.

4.3.3 Promotion the Normalization of Sino-Thai Diplomatic Relations

In December 1955, after the Asian-African Conference, the Thai government dispatched four members of Congress and Sarin Malankorn (沙荫·玛兰恭) to visit the

²⁴ Sirin Phathanothai & James Peck, *The Dragon's Pearl* (New York: SIMON & SCHUSTER Rockefeller Center, 1994).

People's Republic of China. Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai personally met with the Thai guests. Mao Zedong, Zhou En Lai and representatives welcomed Thai trade and cultural exchanges with China and hoped that the Thai people would rely on their own efforts to develop economic achievements (**Picture 4.13**).



Picture 4.13 In December 1955, Thai government dispatched congressmen Sarin MaLankorn and other three members on a secret trip to the People's Republic of China. Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou En Lai met them personally.

Zhou Enlai said that China hoped to develop friendly relations with Thailand and expressed his understanding of the current situation in Thailand. Zhou Enlai also invited guests to take the opportunity to visit the Xi-Shuang-Ban-Na Dai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture (西双版纳傣族自治州), and use to understand the true situation of Yunnan. Premier Zhou noted that people of all countries have the right to choose a social system suited to their national conditions. The fact that Thailand was a constitutional monarchy would not hinder the development of Sino-Thai friendship. The Thai delegation's visit had enhanced Thailand's understanding of China, and achieved positive results.

The most significant development in Sino-Thai relations during 1955-1957 concerned actual contacts, secret and public, with the People's Republic of China, with several groups of prominent Thai citizens visiting that country. The most notable, group to openly visit the PRC was the 12-man delegation of MPs, journalists, and

businessmen, led by Thep Chotinuchit (贴·触滴努七), leader of the Sethakorn (Economist) Party, which went to the PRC as guests of People's Institute of Foreign Affairs between 16 January and 21 February 1956. Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou En Lai met the Thai visitors (**Picture 4.14**).



Picture 4.14 On 10 February 1956, Chairman Mao Zedong met the visiting delegation of Thai People for Promoting Sino-Thai friendly Relationship led by Thep Chotinuchit.

This Thai delegation was in China more than one month, deepening the understanding of various aspects of the PRC. Under Premier Zhou En Lai's arrangement, a half part of Thai delegation members specially visited the Xi-Shuang-Ban-Na Dai Nationality Autonomous prefecture (云南省西双版纳傣族自治州). Members of the Thai visiting delegation believed that, visiting China of this time was a great victory that Thai people achieved in the process of making the mutual understandings with the people of the world.

In June 1956, the Phibun government announced that rice and the lumber were not the strategic resources, and allowed the Thai merchants directly to carry on the trade with mainland China. The non-government trade between Thailand and the PRC created a condition for Thai economic stability and industrial and commercial development.

There were various kinds of delegations visiting China like this, during 24 January 1956 to October, 1958. These delegations have nearly all met Premier Zhou Enlai and other Chinese government leaders. Zhou Enlai placed hopes on to the normalization of relations between China and Thailand. He met Thai visitors and friends from times to times in order to express the friendship of Chinese government and people to Thailand.

Conclusion

On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded. Because of the influence of world order and the restriction of respective dissimilar social systems of China and Thailand, Sino-Thai relations have experienced ups and downs. Thailand has been influenced by the US since economic, technological, trade and military assistance and other aid projects were signed in the 1950s; Thailand was under influence of the US and followed the United States to implement anti-communist policies against China. As a result of this policy, China and Thailand were isolated and confrontational for more than 10 years from the 1950s to almost through the entire 1960s.

By 1970s, the world changed and a pattern of world multi-polarization emerged. China gained, on the international stage, more prestige and influence. In spring 1971, the United States succeeded in contacting the leaders of PRC, and both sides opened the preliminary dialogues. Finally, in February 1972, President of the United States, Nixon, visited the People's Republic of China and signed the Sino-US Shanghai Joint Communiqués. The Sino-US Shanghai Communiqué opened the window to establish the friendship between China and the United States, and ended the deadlock of hostility and confrontation of more than 20 years. The change in the American attitude toward China and the establishment of Sino-US diplomatic relations had a direct impact on Thailand and finally resulted in the normalization of Sino-Thai relations.

Zhou Enlai was the creator of China's diplomacy and was very dominant in dealing with all matters of PRC diplomacy. Generally speaking, Zhou Enlai's diplomatic attitude represented Chinese diplomacy. He was the solid construction of Sino-Thai friendship with a special hope for the normalization of Sino-Thai relations, and he worked with painstaking care to see his hopes and ideas come to fruition. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s, while the government and non-government exchanges between China and Thailand had stagnated for more than 10 years, Zhou Enlai had made a huge effort to establish successfully Sino-Thai friendship. Furthermore, he gave the sincere friendly help and unlimited care to Thai friends who lived in China. Chinese people cannot forget him, and Thai people remember him also. Without him diplomatic relations and friendship between China and Thailand could not have come as smoothly, as well as in such an exciting manner.