

# CHAPTER III

## THE CONDUCT OF CHINA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THAILAND AND VIETNAM

### 3.1. China's policy on foreign cultural relations

Before any investigation on the conduct of China's cultural diplomacy in Thailand and Vietnam, it is important that China's general policy on foreign cultural relations be discussed as the spirit as well as contents of the policy will undoubtedly be applied to the case of both Thailand and Vietnam.

#### 3.1.1. General policy on foreign cultural relations

Cultural diplomacy has long been considered as an important component of the all-around diplomacy of China. According to China's Minister of Culture Sun Jiazheng in an interview with the *People's Daily* in 2004, the diplomatic function of culture has been elevated by the new leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), headed by Hu Jintao, to a position that "cannot be replaced"<sup>1</sup>. Later in 2006 he also asserted that cultural diplomacy has become the third pillar after economic and political diplomacy in China's general foreign policy<sup>2</sup>. Earlier the then General Secretary of the CPC Jiang Zemin also noted on the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the CPC's 14<sup>th</sup> Central Committee that "it will have important influence on our socialist modernization to make broad exchanges on economy, trade, science, technology, education and culture with the rest of the world". In the report of the 15th Congress of the CPC, Jiang further stated that "Chinese cultural development

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<sup>1</sup> "Cultural Minister on China's Foreign Exchange", *People's Daily Online*, available at [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200412/21/eng20041221\\_168135.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200412/21/eng20041221_168135.html); Updated December 21, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> "Cultural Minister Sun Jiazheng: Enhance the Ability to Bring Chinese Culture out to the World", available at <http://www.jxwhsc.com/gzck/show.asp?id=477>, updated January 10, 2006.

cannot go without the common achievement of human civilization. Based on the principle of self-concentration and using for us, [we should] develop various foreign-related cultural exchanges, absorb advantages of the rest of the cultures of the world, and demonstrate the achievements of Chinese cultural construction. [We shall be] persistent in resisting erosion of various corruptive ideology and culture”<sup>3</sup>. Hence, the external cultural policy of China has been designed in accordance with the spirit stated by the country’s highest leaders.

It is understandable that objectives of foreign policy of any state are often stated in a nicely-worded way. In this manner, the foreign cultural policy of China has the following elements<sup>4</sup>:

(1) Absorb and draw lessons from all excellent works of human civilization to serve the Chinese socialist modern construction;

(2) Introduce excellent Chinese culture to the world and promote China’s reform and opening-up policy and achievements of socialist construction to the world to build a world image of socialist China, to promote friendship and mutual understanding with other countries, and to achieve a favorable international environment for the four modernization of China;

(3) Increase cultural exchange with neighboring countries so as to develop friendly relationship with neighboring countries and to create a peaceful and stable surrounding environment;

(4) Develop cultural exchange with developing countries in line with China’s diplomatic policy to strengthen unity and cooperation with these nations;

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<sup>3</sup> “China’s Policy and Principle on External Cultural Exchanges”, available at [http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en\\_exchange/2003-09/24/content\\_36929.htm](http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_exchange/2003-09/24/content_36929.htm).

<sup>4</sup> “Formulation and Development of External Cultural Exchange Policy”, available at [http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en\\_exchange/2003-09/24/content\\_36939.htm](http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_exchange/2003-09/24/content_36939.htm)

(5) Develop cultural relations with countries from Western Europe, North America and Oceania in order to learn from their excellent cultural achievements as well as to make them recognize China and eliminate misunderstanding caused by false reports used by the West;

(6) Develop multi-level, multi-channel, and multi-form external cultural exchanges so that external cultural exchange can play a better role in socialist ethical culture construction and general diplomatic work. Multi-level means both mutual visit of senior government officials and various art groups and artists. Multi-channel refers to the use of official, semi-official, and public channels. The multi-formed cultural exchanges will cover the performance and exhibition of art groups and art exhibitions, profitable performances and exhibitions, commercial performances and exhibitions, sales exhibitions, teaching and research, various bilateral and multilateral cultural activities.

It can be seen that there are two aspects of China's foreign cultural policy being implied in these policy statements. Firstly, foreign cultural policy is one part of China's overall diplomacy. Secondly, as Chinese cultural workers have chances to interact with different cultures, the foreign cultural exchange is supposed to play an important role in the cause of socialist arts and culture of China. The spirits of these two aspects have also been incorporated into different documents regulating the foreign cultural exchange of China. For example, in the Regulations of Foreign Cultural and Artistic Performances and Exhibitions of the Ministry of Culture, the following items are encouraged:

- (1) Those that give rise to excellent cultural traditions of China;
- (2) Those that propagate the country's achievements in its modernization efforts;
- (3) Those that protect the country's unity and ethnic solidarity; and
- (4) Those that are conducive to promoting friendship between the Chinese and peoples of all other countries in the world.

Meanwhile, it prohibits the organization of cultural and artistic performances and exhibitions with the contents that damage its national interests and image; are against the country's foreign policies and principles; unfavorable to the country's ethnic solidarity and national unity; and advocate feudalism, superstition and benighted customs.

Despite all ideal words which can be easily seen in every policy statement of any state, from the political, economic, cultural context which has been analyzed in Chapter II, it can be concluded that China's cultural diplomacy from the early 1990s is aimed at dispelling the China threat theory, capitalizing on the long and great history of Chinese culture as well as the recent surge in the world interest in Chinese culture and language to promote friendly relationships with foreign countries so as to ensure a stable international environment for its economic development and national modernization. Moreover, when its economy is growing fast, more concerns are raised about a "cultural deficit" that China is facing. In enhancing cultural diplomacy, it is also hoped that China can fill in the blank and become a truly powerful state.

### **3.1.2. Administrative structure in cultural diplomacy**

The work of cultural diplomacy of China is centralized under leadership of the Ministry of Culture (MOC), the country's highest cultural administrative body, with specialized departments directly affiliated to the Ministry and at local levels. At the provincial level, cultural departments are responsible for implementing foreign policies and principles of the central government, studying and stipulating rules and regulations, planning, organizing cultural exchanges with foreign countries, and examining and approving cultural exchange projects with foreign countries within their authority. Meanwhile, the MOC coordinates and supervises the cultural exchange of various regions and departments, instructs the work of cultural sections of Chinese embassies in foreign countries, and investigates and penalizes those who seriously violate the country's external cultural policies and the disciplines in foreign affairs.

In the foreign affairs front, the MOC, with various specialized departments such as Department of Arts, Department of Education and Sciences, Department of Cultural Industry, Bureau of External Cultural Relations, and State Bureau of Cultural Relics, is in charge of the following responsibilities:

- + To sign agreements on cultural cooperation, make annual plans for implementing cultural agreements and executing cultural projects with foreign governments and arrange for their implementation;

- + To sign inter-governmental agreements on cultural exchange projects and on the participation in or withdrawal from international or regional cultural and artistic organizations;

- + To hold and participate in bilateral or multilateral cultural and artistic conferences, competitions, exhibitions and various art festivals;

- + To examine and approve items in business exchanges of various departments and regions that include cultural and artistic performances and exhibitions of China, or cultural and artistic performances and exhibitions that are organized or co-organized by foreign countries in China. These include domestic film, television, audio or video program producers going abroad or foreign producers engaged in the production in China; those engaged in professional activities such as holding, participating in or co-organizing cultural and artistic performances and exhibitions; various cultural and artistic groups and individuals participating in cultural and artistic performances and exhibitions at the invitation of embassies in China or international organizations with diplomatic prerogatives in China; foreign embassies and international organizations with diplomatic prerogatives in China organizing or co-organizing cultural and artistic performances and exhibitions at their working place or outside the residences of foreign ambassadors and consuls in China.

- + To offer and accept intergovernmental or non-governmental materials or economic aid in the field of art and culture.

Although the external cultural exchange is centralized under the administration of the MOC and its affiliated departments and organizations, it is also conducted by other ministries such as the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and organizations and agencies directly belonging to the State Council, such as the National Administration of Tourism, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, with the China Central Television (CCTV) and China Radio International (CRI) broadcasting programs in different foreign languages, the Xinhua News Agency, etc. Besides, Chinese government has created several government-linked institutions which are specialized in the job of promoting Chinese culture and conducting exchanges with foreign countries. The China Association for Cultural Exchange with Foreign Countries and the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries have heavily been involved in external cultural, people-to-people exchanges for many years. The "China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language" (NOCFL), established in 1987, is responsible for the promotion of Chinese language teaching and studying in foreign countries. It is special that this office is composed of the leaders of 11 ministries and departments of the State Council, including the Minister of Education, Vice-Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Culture and Education, and Deputy Directors of the Information Office of the State Council, the State Press and Publications Administration, the National State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, and Director of the State Spoken and Written Chinese Language Working Commission.

### **3.1.3. China's foreign cultural policy in practice**

To provide a brief picture of China's active cultural diplomacy, the government of the PRC up to 2006 has signed cultural agreements with 145 out of 166 countries with which it has diplomatic relationships. Besides, there have been 752 Executive programs for these cultural agreements. China has conducted various cultural exchanges with approximately one thousand international cultural organizations and associations. It has also maintained 95 cultural points and cultural sections at 80 embassies in foreign countries and set up cultural centers in France, South Korea and Egypt. By 2005, China had been undertaking

1360 cultural exchanges a year, a five-fold increase compared to ten years ago<sup>5</sup>. Recently, one of the most important tools in China's cultural diplomacy is the establishment of the Confucius Institute, modeled on the British Council, German Goethe Institute or Alliance Francaise. Its initial goal was to set up 100 Confucius Institutes all over the world by the year 2010 as a response to the world increased interest in and in order to spread Chinese language and culture. In fact, by October 2006 there had been 81 Confucius Institutes in all continents of the world while 99 foreign institutions had applied for the setup of the Institute. This quick success had moved China to a further ambitious plan that was to establish 100 Confucius Institutes by the end of 2006 and 1,000 by 2020<sup>6</sup>.

### **3.2. The conduct of China's cultural diplomacy in Thailand and Vietnam**

As discussed above, the cultural diplomacy of China in Southeast Asia in general and in Thailand and Vietnam in particular is aimed at increasing cultural and thus political influence of China and softening the perception of China as a threat. In Thailand and Vietnam, the main areas of China's cultural diplomacy include popularizing Chinese culture through various means, promoting the learning of Chinese language, increasing education exchanges, promoting tourism and media exchanges, some of which appear to be more dominant while in the other areas, China has still to face with several restrictions. There are also some other categories of activities in which China conveys their cultural diplomacy messages, such as sports exchange, trade exhibitions, publication, etc., but this paper will only focus on the most important forms of cultural diplomacy that China has been conducting in the two countries of Thailand and Vietnam.

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<sup>5</sup> "Cultural Minister Sun Jiazheng: Enhance the Ability to Bring Chinese Culture out to the World", available at <http://www.jxwhsc.com/gzck/show.asp?id=477>, updated on January 10, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> "Confucius Institute: Promoting Language, Culture and Friendliness", available at [http://english.people.com.cn/200610/02/eng20061002\\_308230.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200610/02/eng20061002_308230.html); updated on October 2, 2006.



### 3.2.1. Official frameworks

The government of the People's Republic of China has signed several documents with the governments of Thailand and Vietnam in the field of culture so as to create official frameworks for mutual cultural cooperation. Not long after China and Vietnam normalized their diplomatic relationship in 1991 was the bilateral cultural exchange brought back on track officially with the signing of an Agreement on Cultural Cooperation on 2 December 1992 between the Ministry of Culture and Information (MOCI) of Vietnam and the MOC of China. In order to put it into implementation, two countries signed documents of Executive Program for the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation every two years starting in 1993. From 2003 the Executive Program would be signed every three years and so far there have been these programs for the 2004-2006 and 2007-2009 periods.

Although diplomatic ties between China and Thailand were established as early as in 1975, the relationship went through ups and downs throughout the period up to the early 1980s, with a strong focus on the political and security aspects. Cultural contacts had been set up and maintained through official as well as people-to-people channels, especially via the contacts of overseas Chinese in Thailand, but the first document on cultural cooperation was not reached until mid-1990s. In 1996, the MOC of China and the MOE of Thailand signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Cooperation and for the purpose of implementing it, the first Executive Program for the memorandum was concluded in 1997, detailing exchange activities for the 1998-1999 period. The second Executive Program was for the 2000 – 2001 period and the third was for the two years of 2002-2003. To further boost the cultural relations, the two sides formally reached the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation in 2001. This agreement is valid for a period of five years and shall be automatically renewed for another five years each time if any side does not give any notice of the intention to terminate the agreement.

It is noticeable that a separate Ministry of Culture did not exist in Thailand until very recently. Before the administration reform in 2003, it was the MOE of Thailand which was responsible for the country's external cooperation in the field of education, culture, religion



and sports. Therefore, it is of no surprise that the Ministry of Education, not Culture represented for the Thai Government to sign the first MOU on cultural cooperation with China. As for the 2001 Agreement on Cultural Cooperation, the MOFA of Thailand was engaged in the negotiation and signing of the document. Earlier, the two Ministries of Education of the two countries signed a MOU on Cooperation for Higher Education in 1999. As the division line among MOC, MOFA and MOE has become clearer, there has been a plan to sign a separate official MOU on educational cooperation between the Thai MOE and China's MOE. So far the negotiation and document-preparation have been completed and China had proposed to have the signing ceremony during the scheduled visit to Thailand by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in 2006, but the visit was cancelled due to disrupted political situation in Thailand and the signing was hence postponed. As for cultural, artistic exchanges, the MOC of Thailand continues to attach to the 2001 Agreement and represents the Thai government to negotiate and sign Executive Programs with the MOC of China. The first document of type was the Executive Program for Cultural Cooperation for 2004 – 2006 and by the time of writing this paper, the two Ministries of Culture are preparing to sign the second one for the 2007-2009 period. Also from 2004, the document is to be concluded every three years.

In general, the official agreements on cultural cooperation between either China and Thailand or China and Vietnam clearly indicate the areas of culture in which both sides pledge to promote bilateral exchanges. These areas include visual and performing arts, language and literature, education, mass media, sports, youth activities and religious affairs. (See Appendix A for the sample copy of these agreements). These general outlines are then translated into more details in executive plans, in which the two sides agrees on concrete numbers of exchanges and activities in each area as well as administrative and financial matters related to the implementation. For example, in the Executive Program for 2004 – 2006 period between China and Thailand, the agreement went into such details as both sides sending three experts on ancient architecture, murals and sculpture for exchanges in 7 days in Thailand in 2004 and in China in 2005; sending a twenty five-member arts group for performance in 10 days in Thailand and in China in 2004; or exchanging visits of a five-

member delegation in library field to discuss library information management for a period of 7 days in 2005. In the same manner, the Executive Program for 2007-2009 between China and Vietnam also meticulously states that annually the two countries shall exchange an arts group of no more than 30 members for performance for a period of no more than 14 days and conduct one artistic exhibition in each other's country; during this period of three years, the two sides shall conduct one exchange between China's Research Institute for Arts and Culture and Vietnam Institute of Culture and Information; and that there shall be one exchange per year between the two countries' Associations of Writers, Dancers, Photographers, Musical Composers, Performing Artists, and Cinema. As for financial arrangement as agreed upon in the documents, the sending side shall cover all international travel and transportation while the receiving side shall pay all internal expenses such as local transportation, accommodation, meals and insurance for accidents. According to an official at the Thai MOC, these executive programs have often been fully implemented by both contracting parties.

In addition to governmental official agreements, there are several semi-governmental and non-governmental frameworks in which China conducts cultural exchanges with either Thailand or Vietnam. Prominent in the field of cultural exchanges between China and Thailand are the Thai-Chinese Friendship Association, the Sino-Thai Friendship Association, which were founded in 1976 and 1987 respectively, the Thai – Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and the Thai – Chinese Cultural and Economic Association. In the meantime, many of the exchange activities between China and Vietnam are conducted through the Vietnam – China Friendship Association, which was set up in 1950, the China – Vietnam Friendship Association, and the Club for Vietnam – China Cultural Exchanges.

At local levels, various cities and provinces in China have established and maintained relationships in the areas of politics, economics and culture with cities and provinces in Thailand and Vietnam. At present, there are 7 pairs of friendship cities and provinces between China and Thailand: Beijing-Bangkok, Shanghai-Chiang Mai, Yuannan-Chiang Rai Province, Henan Province-Chon Bury, Kunming-Chiang Mai, Yantai-Phuket, Nanning-Khon Kaen. Equivalentents can be seen in Vietnam, as several Vietnamese cities and

provinces have signed cooperation agreements with Chinese partners. For example Yunnan has maintained cooperation with the Vietnamese cities of Hai Phong, Quang Ninh and Lao Cai. The Vietnamese province of Lao Cai has also paired with Hekou in Yunnan province to establish friendly brotherhood, while Da Nang city and Macao Special Administrative Region have reached a bilateral agreement to promote friendly exchanges. At a higher level, the MOCI of Vietnam also signed a cultural cooperation document with China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in November 2006 to set up a three-year cultural exchange program between the two sides<sup>7</sup>.

Regarding multilateral frameworks, all three countries are members of the ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and South Korea) and ASEAN Plus One (China) mechanisms, which also include culture as one area of cooperation. Within the framework of ASEAN Plus Three, there is a biennial meeting of ASEAN + 3 Ministers responsible for Culture and Arts, starting in 2003, to discuss issues of cultural cooperation. More significant is the ASEAN – China Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Cooperation signed in August 2005. As China has been actively engaged in comprehensive cooperation with ASEAN as an association, it comes as no surprise that China is enthusiastic in promoting cultural relations with the Association. Several initiatives for cultural, educational and youth exchanges have been put into effect, such as the China-ASEAN Young Leaders Conference, China-ASEAN Young Entrepreneurs Association, China-ASEAN Young Civil Servants' Exchange Program, the China ASEAN Scholarship, and the Center for ASEAN and China Studies. A series of cultural exchange activities have been organized, such as the grand exhibition of China – ASEAN's Cities of Charm in Nanning in 2005, with the participation of Beijing of China, Bandar Seri Begawan of Brunei, Singapore city of Singapore, Siem Reap of Cambodia, Jakarta of Indonesia, Luang Prabang of Laos, Putrajaya of Malaysia, Myanmar of Mandalay, Cebu of Philippines, Chiang Mai of Thailand, and Hanoi of Vietnam; the China ASEAN Youth Camp, China ASEAN Cultural Week, China-ASEAN jointly-organized cultural performance in front of Angkor Wat in

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<sup>7</sup> Websites of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at <http://www.mfprc.gov.cn>; and Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs at <http://www.mofa.gov.vn>.

Cambodia, and China – ASEAN tour of friendship in 2006. In such frameworks and activities, China has the chance to present its cultural image to and promote mutual understanding with not only Thailand and Vietnam but also other ASEAN member countries. However, this paper will be limited mainly to China's efforts to promote cultural relations bilaterally with Thailand and Vietnam.

### **3.2.2. Promotion of Chinese culture**

China is always proud of its long history of traditional culture. In making its culture popular in other countries, it is hoped that a more favorable image of China is perceived by foreign audience. As Prof. Du Ruiqing, former president of the Xi'an International Studies University says, promoting its culture overseas is one way to dissolve the China threat, because when foreigners come to know more about Chinese culture, they would find out that harmony is an essential part of the Chinese tradition and a country that highly values harmony would absolutely pose no threat to the rest of the world<sup>8</sup>. The Chinese government also acknowledges the significance of promoting its culture through cultural exchanges, since cultural exchange activities can “carry forward and spread China's brilliant, traditional, national culture and colorful socialist culture and arts, and make contributions to enable people from the rest of the world to share in excellent achievements of Chinese nationality, improve China's international reputation, enhance friendship among people, develop a friendly diplomatic relationship and maintain world peace and advance the cause for human progress.”<sup>9</sup> The pride in Chinese culture and the belief that the rest of the world can benefit from studying Chinese culture can also be seen in Present Hu Jintao's saying that “the Chinese culture belongs not only to the Chinese but also to the whole world ...

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<sup>8</sup> “China Promotes Its Culture Overseas to Dissolve the “China Threat””, People's Daily Online, updated on May 28, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> “Status and Role of External Cultural Exchanges”, at [http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en\\_exchange/2003-09/24/content\\_36934.html](http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_exchange/2003-09/24/content_36934.html).

We stand ready to step up cultural exchanges with the rest of the world in a joint promotion of cultural prosperity.”<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, in its cultural diplomacy toward Thailand and Vietnam, a variety of cultural exchange activities have been carried out so as to demonstrate the greatness and uniqueness of Chinese culture in these two countries. There have been exchanges of art groups, art teachers, archeologists, ceramic experts, experts on ancient architecture, murals and sculpture, cultural study experts and other cultural personnel, along with such cultural activities as film show, photo exhibitions, art exhibitions, art performance, etc. At governmental level, these exchanges are strictly in consistent with the executive programs that both sides have agreed upon, because both sides normally set up a fixed budget for the exchanges as per the agreements. According to the *People’s Daily*, cultural exchange projects between China and Thailand had leaped from four around the time of diplomatic relations establishment to about 300 by the end of 2001<sup>11</sup>. Meanwhile, the *Xinhua* reported that China and Vietnam had been engaged in vigorous cultural and educational exchanges, with up to 200 delegations taking part in cultural activities in each year in each other’s country<sup>12</sup>. However, in practice, the numbers are even greater since many Chinese cultural activities are organized in Thailand or Vietnam by non-governmental organizations and business sector from China and Thailand or Vietnam. Many arts groups have staged their performances in Vietnam on their own initiatives for the purposes of both cultural exchange and business benefits. For instance, the Yunnan Arts Delegation arrived in Vietnam in September 1993, the Hangzhou Model Group performed in Vietnam in June 1994 and the Chinese Central People’s Arts Delegation sent their famous artists to join the Chinese Cultural Days in Vietnam in October 1995. In another way, many members of the business

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<sup>10</sup> “Hu Jintao’s Speech to Australian Parliament in October 2003”, available at <http://www.australianpolitics.com/news/2003/10/03-10-24b.shtml>.

<sup>11</sup> “Sino-Thai Economic, Cultural Cooperation Grows Smoothly”, *People’s Daily*, updated on January 22, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> “China, Vietnam Committed to Developing Comprehensive Ties”, *People’s Daily*, available at [http://english.people.com.cn/200611/15/eng20061115\\_321480.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200611/15/eng20061115_321480.html); updated on November 15, 2006.

sector in Thailand, especially those who have ancestral or business links with China, or some Thai Royal family members who are interested in Chinese culture, usually invite Chinese artistic performers to Thailand. For example, the Siam Commercial Bank arranged the “Sino – Thai relations art exhibition” in October 2005 to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sino – Thai diplomatic relations. In the same month, Thai Royal Princess Chulabhorn also hosted a music and cultural performance, inviting eight performances from China, including a folk dance of a minority group in China and a puppet show<sup>13</sup>.

In conducting its cultural diplomacy, China often makes use of special occasions in the bilateral relations with Thailand and Vietnam, such as China’s National Day, Vietnam’s National Day, Thai Royal family members’ birthdays and the anniversaries of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Thailand and Vietnam. For example, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China National Day, China sent the Jilin provincial Arts Delegation to perform in the Vietnamese cities of Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi and Vung Tau. On the 55<sup>th</sup> National Day of China in 2004, the Chinese General Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) in collaboration with the HCMC Union of Friendship Associations and Vietnam – China Friendship Association organized a photo show under the title of “Discover China”. The exhibition’s objective was introduce to Vietnamese public about China’s 5000-years-old civilization as well as social, political, economic and technological achievements of present-day China<sup>14</sup>. On 5 – 18 December 2003, joining Thailand in celebrating the 76<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Thai King, China held a Tibetan Cultural Week in Bangkok, an act that was called a “cordial gesture” by the Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawattra. Meanwhile, with Tibetan songs and dances, pictures, paintings and movies, the event was a good chance for China to present to the Thai public a panorama view of

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<sup>13</sup> “Charmed by Oils, Anxious About the Future”, Bangkok Post, 13 October 2005; and “Concert Highlights Diplomatic Relations between China and Thailand”, Bangkok Post, 25 October 2005

<sup>14</sup> “Photo Exhibition “Discover China””, Nguoi Vien Xu, updated on September 29, 2004.

Tibet nature and culture as well as the message about inter-ethnic harmony within China<sup>15</sup>. To celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations in 2005, China organized a Chinese Cultural Year in Thailand with a great variety of cultural events and typically Chinese cultural performances. The 2005 Chinese Cultural Year began with the Chinese Spring Festival Cultural Week in February. It was attended by a 145-member Chinese Arts delegation, including the Fujian Provincial Song and Dance Ensemble, Fujian Provincial Peking Opera Theatre, Quanzhou Puppet Show Theatre as well as Henan Shaolin Temple Martial Arts Troupe<sup>16</sup>. While it was intended to be an opening for the Chinese cultural year in Thailand, China made a step further in showcasing its friendship with the Thais when this cultural week was made an event to mobilize funds for tsunami victims in Thailand. The artistic performances were first shown in Bangkok's Chinatown area and later in Thailand's tsunami-hit southern provinces. Chinese Premier was reported to express his hope that "by hosting the cultural week, Thailand will show its courage, confidence and capability to defeat the disaster, as well as the profound friendship between the two peoples."<sup>17</sup> Also within the theme of the Chinese Cultural Year was a Chinese Movies Week in September. Six Chinese movies were shown in 12 cinemas in Bangkok with an aim to enhance understanding by Thai people of Chinese traditional culture, history and social life in today's China.

The Chinese Lunar New Year is another occasion that China often takes advantage of in order to showcase its culture in both Thailand and Vietnam. Though it is not a public holiday in Thailand, the Chinese New Year has been celebrated at quite a large scale in Thailand for the past several years. While the Chinese New Year festival in Thailand is organized by the Chinese-Thai community, whose political, economic influence in Thai

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<sup>15</sup> "Thai PM Sends Greetings on '2003 China Tibetan Culture Week", People's Daily, updated on December 05, 2003 and "'Song of Tibet' Unveils Tibetan Movie Exhibition in Thailand", People's Daily, updated on December 07, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> "The Bridge of Arts Brings China and Thailand Closer", available at <http://www.xwwhjl.com.cn>.

<sup>17</sup> "Chinese Cultural Week Shows Sino-Thai Friendship", People's Daily, updated on February 10, 2005.

society has been growing, China often sends high-ranking officials from the MOC and Chinese embassy in Bangkok to attend, and art delegations to perform in the festival. In Vietnam, that the Lunar New Year is the biggest national holiday just as in China and due to cultural proximity, people in Vietnam are quite familiar with what are supposed to be the Lunar New Year festival. That may possibly explain why China appears to organize fewer cultural activities in Vietnam during this time. In February 2006, about two weeks after the Lunar New Year, China staged a Chinese cultural week in Vietnam, with many cultural activities like art performances by the Hei Long Jiang provincial art troupe, a photo exhibition with 90 pictures under the theme of “Lively Beijing”, a film show and a picture book issuance. In February 2007, a live television bridge was organized in the Vietnamese Lunar New Year Eve for the first time, linking the Chinese city of Nanning with the Vietnamese capital city of Hanoi. In this program, cultural similarities between the two countries were emphasized and each side’s New Year traditions, folk songs, fashion and cultural uniqueness were introduced.

Chinese traditional culture and ways of life are also brought close to Thai and Vietnamese people through a great number of Chinese movies and television series on air in these two countries, especially in Vietnam. According to unofficial statistics from the Hanoi-based Center for China Studies, from 1995 to 1999 there were nearly 200 new Chinese films being screened in Vietnam, with up to 84 films of different types in only the year 1998<sup>18</sup>. It is striking that in the past few years, almost all channels of Vietnamese television screen Chinese movies almost everyday and even many times a day. Many were provided free of charge by the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi, especially the famous movies about China’s history, culture, social life and well-known figures, such as Zhou Enlai, Zong Qinglin and Sisters, Yang Guifei, The Romance of Three Kingdoms, Dream of the Red Mansions (Hong Lou Meng), Travel to the West (Xi You Ji), etc<sup>19</sup>.. Meanwhile, most of

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<sup>18</sup> Nguyen Van Can, Tim Hieu Quan He Giao Luu Van Hoa Trung – Viet Giai Doan 1993-1999 (Study on Sino-Vietnamese Cultural Exchange between 1993-1998), Hanoi: Center for China Studies, 2001, pp. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Le Thi Ngoc Bich, Giao Luu Van Hoa Viet – Trung Tu Khi Binh Thuong Hoa Quan He Giua Hai Nuoc Den Nay Va Trien Vong (Vietnam-China Cultural Exchange Since Diplomatic Relationship



these films must be offered to Vietnamese televisions at very low prices, because for expensive ones like American or European movies, the Vietnam's national television channel VTV1 has only one Sunday night and Hanoi's television channel has one Friday night every week shooting these films.

Moreover, China frequently participates in international film festivals hosted by Vietnam or Thailand. Since 1997 the Hanoi-based Chinese embassy has sent Chinese films to the annual Hanoi International Film Festival, organized by the Vietnamese MOCI. In recent years, several China-made movies that have gained international appreciation, such as the 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon', 'Hero', 'The Promise', etc. have also been introduced to the Thai and Vietnamese audience. Though it is actually a business of the cinema industry in these two countries, the shooting of these films has contributed significantly to increasing cultural influence of China among the public in Thailand and Vietnam.

It is not surprising that in cultural exchange, China has been very active in and supportive of Thailand and/or Vietnam's initiatives on cross-culture studies and exchanges of experience and knowledge in the field of culture. These items have always been included in bilateral documents on cultural cooperation and also been realized in practice. As an example, under the 2002-2003 Executive Program for cultural cooperation between China and Thailand, a comparative study on Ways of Livings between the Chinese and the Thais was conducted and both sides exchanged the Study of Rock Art and the Study of Bronze Drum<sup>20</sup>. In September 1995 China sent a group of performing artists to attend a Vietnamese seminar on a comparative study on Vietnam and China performing arts. Moreover, there have been many seminars, conferences and working sessions between China and Vietnam in which Chinese sides assist Vietnamese efforts to improve different areas of Vietnamese

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Normalization and Prospect), proceedings of the seminar "Vietnam-China economic and cultural relations: Present situation and Prospect", Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing, 2001, pp. 214.

<sup>20</sup> "Sino - Thai Cultural Cooperation", available at <http://203.150.20.25/beijing/sino-thaicultural.htm>.

arts, such as dance, theatrics and film-making<sup>21</sup>. These exchanges on the one hand are doubtlessly beneficial to both sides as far as arts development is concerned. On the other hand, these are opportunities for China to showcase the greatness in its culture, of which it is always proud.

### 3.2.3. Language education

In its cultural diplomacy, China also attaches much importance to the promotion of Chinese language studies. As asserted by China's Vice Minister of Education Zhang Xinheng, language is a comprehensive expression of a country's political, economic, diplomatic power and cultural and educational strength as well<sup>22</sup>. When foreigners can speak Chinese, it is much easier for them to communicate with Chinese people, do research on China and do business with Chinese people within and without China. At the same time, it is easier for China to approach those Chinese-speaking foreigners in its diplomatic, political or economic efforts. Moreover, the Chinese may possibly realize that at present, Chinese language is still a barrier to communication between China and the world and thus to success in exporting Chinese culture to the world. Therefore, in order to facilitate the worldwide spread of Chinese culture and to resolve the current problem of cultural deficit, China has embarked on a massive campaign to popularize Chinese language all over the world.

In fact, language education appears to be one of the most aggressive acts in China's cultural diplomacy. Its importance has long been recognized since as early as the 1980s when China set up a Chinese proficiency test (HSK), a Chinese version of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in 1984 and the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOCFL), better known as Hanban, directly affiliated to the State Council, in 1987. With its recently increased economic strength, China has

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<sup>21</sup> Nguyen Van Can, *Tim Hieu Quan He Giao Luu Van Hoa Trung – Viet*, pp.8-16.

<sup>22</sup> "Chinese Economic Development Pushes Chinese Language Education Ahead in the World", *People's Daily Online*, updated on March 17, 2004.

devised a new diplomatic tool that is the Confucius Institute. Several Confucius Institutes have been set up in many Southeast Asian countries with the mission of promoting Chinese language, culture and supporting local Chinese teachers. Beijing has also sent a large number of volunteers to many Southeast Asian countries to teach Chinese language and provided textbooks for schools in Southeast Asia with the catchy title of ‘Happy Chinese’<sup>23</sup>.

In Thailand, Chinese government has also been very supportive of Thailand’s plan to introduce Chinese language to its educational system more widely. For the purpose of promoting Chinese language teaching, the Hanban signed a Framework of Cooperation with the MOE of Thailand in January 2006, thereby pledging to cooperate with Thailand to train 1,000 Mandarin teachers each year, as well as to provide Chinese volunteer teachers for Thailand. Hanban would also license the use of the ‘Happy Chinese’ textbook in Thailand and join efforts with the Thai side to improve Mandarin curricula used in primary and secondary schools, develop e-learning systems, and send its teachers to develop the Mandarin teaching software for Thailand. This agency would also work with the Thai MOE on the possibility of setting up a joint university degree program to train new Chinese language teachers for Thailand, thereby providing 100 scholarships a year to cover the tuition fee for the part of the program taking place in China<sup>24</sup>. It is noteworthy that China has effectively cashed in on Thai eagerness for developing Chinese language teaching in their country and its efforts must have been highly valued by the Thai side when it responds to all the needs of the Thais. While there were only between 100 – 200 Chinese volunteer teachers in Thailand in 2004 and 2005, China decided to increase the number of teachers up to 500 a year from 2006. The offer of training 1000 Mandarin teachers for Thailand per year could not even be met in 2006 as Thailand was able to gather only 350 teachers for the

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Vatikiotis, “The Soft Power of ‘Happy Chinese’”, International Herald Tribune, January 18, 2006, Internet version.

<sup>24</sup> “Framework of Cooperation between China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a foreign language (Hanban) and the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Thailand (the MOE of Thailand) on Cooperation in Chinese Language Teaching”, signed on January 11, 2006.

program. Hanban has also been working closely with the Thai experts in order to produce Chinese language textbooks that are exclusively designed for use in Thailand<sup>25</sup>. As part of a textbook pilot project, 1,500 sets of teaching materials were provided by Hanban for distribution to Thai schools in 2006, according to an officer at the Bureau of International Cooperation, MOE of Thailand.

At present, there are quite a number of mechanisms in which Thailand's educational institutions receive supports from China's various organizations and universities in terms of Chinese language teaching staff and materials and Chinese practicing opportunities for Thai students. Most universities in Thailand maintain cooperation with Chinese universities, either within government-to-government or university-to-university framework. For example, Chiangmai University runs an exchange program with the Yunnan Nationality University in Kunming, through which Chinese experts come to help the Chinese language program at Chiangmai University. The Chinese Language Department at Chulalongkorn University cooperates with Beijing Language and Cultural University on annual student exchange program. The Chinese language Rajabhat Institute in Chiang Mai also has a one-year lecturer exchange program with Beijing Foreign Language University, in which two Thai lecturers teach Thai in Beijing and two Chinese lecturers teach in Chiang Mai. This Institute is also involved in student exchange programs with several other universities in China in order to provide students with opportunities to practice and improve their Chinese skills.

The aggressiveness in China's language diplomacy in Thailand is further indicated by the number of the Confucius Institutes established in this country. With 11 Confucius Institutes by the end of 2006, Thailand, along with the United States, has the highest number of such institutions in the world. These are Confucius Institutes at Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, and Traimit Withayalai High School (in Bangkok), Suan Dusit Rajabhat University in Suphanburi, Mae Fah Luang University (Chiang Rai), Chiang Mai University, Khon Kaen University, Betong International Chinese University,

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<sup>25</sup> Thailand's MOE' report on 15 November 2006.

Maharakham University, and Prince of Songkhla University, and Confucius Institute in Phuket. It can be easily seen that these Institutes are hosted by Thailand's most prestigious universities which are located in all parts of the country. This certainly works to the advantage of the Institutes. Main businesses of the Institutes are offering Chinese language courses at various levels to the Thais, providing training course for Thai teachers of Chinese language, administering exams to issue Certificate of Chinese proficiency. Many of them also provide information and consultative services regarding Chinese education, culture, economy and society as well as organize Sino – Thai cultural exchanges. Though all of them have just come into existence for a short period of time, they are very active in their activities. For example, the Confucius Institute in Mae Fah Luang University, Chiang Rai since March 2006 has received 800 person times for Chinese teaching and Chinese language teacher training, 170 person times for two cultural promotion activities and over 200 person times for two Chinese contests, and organized one summer camp and one winter camp with the participation of over 50 person times<sup>26</sup>.

Unlike the Japan Foundation, British Council, Goethe Institute of German and Alliance Francaise which are under the sole governmental sponsorship, the Confucius Institute is jointly ran by Chinese government, represented by the NOCFL and local institutions. When it is approved by the NOCFL, the establishment and operation of a Confucius Institute will normally involve the NOCFL, a Chinese university and a foreign university or school which hosts the Institute. For instance, the Confucius Institute in Betong is collaboratively established by Betong International Chinese University of Thailand, and China's Chongqing University. Participants in the Confucius Institute at Chiang Mai University are the Hanban, Chiang Mai University itself and Yunnan Normal University. The Chinese partner supplies teaching staff and materials while the host universities or schools house the Institutes. This apparently helps the Institutes maintain a sound financial basis. In the case of Thailand, a starting capital is often provided by the Chinese government to the host universities so that the Confucius Institutes can be put into

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<sup>26</sup> "The Confucius Institute of Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand", brochure book provided at the Sirindhorn Chinese Language and Culture Center.

operation. For example, the Confucius Institute at Mae Fah Luang University received an initial budget of US\$100,000 from Hanban and the Confucius Institute at Kasetsart University got the same amount from the Vice Minister of Education of the PRC during his trip to the University in January 2005<sup>27</sup>.

It is significant that along with the mission of promoting Chinese language in foreign countries, the Confucius Institutes carry with them many cultural and even political messages to foreign audiences. Firstly, the figure who is chosen to name the Institute is Kong Fuzi (551-479BC), better known in the West as Confucius, but not revolutionary leader Mao Zedong or the communists' favorite famous writer Lu Xun. It should be noted that Confucianism was heavily criticized in China during the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution. However, in contemporary context, it appears to be a safe choice as the name of Mao Zedong may remind other countries, especially those in the region, of the past communist threat and China's present official ideology which is still Marxism. Meanwhile, "to name this institute after him [Confucius] shows the longevity and profundity of Chinese language and culture", as an official explanation goes<sup>28</sup>. The choice of Confucius also "speaks volumes about the country's soft power ambitions", as Howard W. French writes for the AP, because Confucius, the oldest and most famous philosopher in China, stands for peace and harmony, values that China relentlessly asserts today, in a hope to assure other countries of its peaceful rise<sup>29</sup>. Secondly, any partner who wants to contract with the NOCFL to set up Confucius Institutes have to acknowledge the 'One-China' Policy. They are expected not to have similar arrangements with Taiwanese partners or Taiwanese government on terms that China finds politically unacceptable. Thirdly, as Bate Gills and Yanzhong Huang analyze, "by teaching Beijing's preferred version of Chinese, and

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<sup>27</sup> News on Confucius Institutes posted on Mae Fah Luang University's website at [www.mfu.ac.th](http://www.mfu.ac.th) and Kasetsart University's website at [www.ku.ac.th](http://www.ku.ac.th).

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Hamish McDonald, "Confucius Says: It's Time to Learn Mandarin", <http://www.theage.com.au/news/World/Confucius-says-its-time-to-learn-Mandarin/2005/03/04/1109700672609.html?oneclick=true>; March 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Howard W. French, "Foreign Students Clamoring to Learn Mandarin", *Bangkok Post*, Learning Post Section, 23 May 2006.

utilizing readings from a Beijing perspective, rather than the traditional Chinese characters used in Taiwan or Taiwan-based point of view, the Institute also serves to advance China's foreign-policy goal of marginalizing Taiwan's international influence<sup>30</sup>. One article on the Asia Time Online even goes as far as predicting that the Confucius Institutes may become agents of Beijing foreign policy in the future<sup>31</sup>.

The Sirindhorn Chinese Language and Culture Center, officially opened in August 2002, attached to Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai, is an interesting case which indicates how sensible and delicate China is in its cultural diplomacy. Chiang Rai is a northern border province which has been deeply engaged in trade with southern China and is populated by many people of Chinese ethnicity. Therefore the demand for Chinese language is understandably high. Furthermore, Beijing has been able to consolidate its friendship with the Thais and its close connection with Thai Royal family when the Center, being the first of this type in Thailand and even in mainland Southeast Asia, is housed at Mae Fah Luang University which bears the name of the present King's Mother, and intended to be part of the Princess Mother's 100 birthday anniversary. The Center is then named after the Crown Princess Sirindhorn, who has herself shown passionate interest in developing Sino-Thai relations. Remarkably the Center's building complex, designed, constructed and financially supported by the Chinese side, is totally in Chinese style. The missions of the Center include teaching Chinese language, training Chinese-language teachers, and further promoting people-to-people contacts between the two countries. The Center is also designed to develop into a regional one serving countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Bate Gills and Yanzhong Huang, "Sources and Limits of Chinese Soft Power", *Survival* Vol. 48, No.2, Summer 2006, pp. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Purnendra Jain & Gerry Groot, "Beijing's 'Soft Power' Offensive", *Asia Time Online* at [www.atimes.com](http://www.atimes.com), updated on May 17, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> According to Mae Fah Luang University website, at <http://www.mfu.ac.th>

The teaching and studying of Chinese language have also been promoted in many other ways. The Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) has been launched by the Chinese government in Thailand. China also coordinates with Thai educational institutes to organize the Chinese Bridge – the Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students, which is aimed at further promoting the teaching of Chinese in the world, motivating young foreign students' enthusiasm for studying Chinese, and increasing their understanding of China. By 2005, the Education Section of the Bangkok-based Chinese Embassy had successfully held four annual Chinese Bridge Competitions in Thailand.

Meanwhile, in Vietnam, some equivalents can also be found. A Chinese language center has recently been founded in Lao Cai province, which borders with Yunnan province of China, with the proclaimed aim of enriching Vietnamese officials and students' knowledge of Chinese language, culture and people. It is sponsored by the Hanoi-based Chinese Embassy and supplied by the Honghe Institute in Yunnan with teaching staff, materials and facilities. It is noteworthy that Lao Cai province has been deeply involved in economic transactions with southern provinces of China. The province is one important point in the Kunming – Lao Cai – Hanoi – Hai Phong – Quang Ninh economic corridor that the two countries have been promoting, along with the Nanning – Lang Son – Hanoi – Hai Phong – Quang Ninh economic corridor. In 2006, the value of two-way trade conducted via Lao Cai border reached approximately US\$ 464 million<sup>33</sup>.

In addition, various educational institutions over all Vietnam maintain cooperation with Chinese universities in order to provide Chinese language training programs for Vietnamese people. For instance, Guangxi Normal University runs a joint Chinese language training program at bachelor's degree level with Hanoi University, Hue University of Foreign Language Teachers and HCMC University of Foreign Languages and Informatics. Under this program, students study two years at their universities in Vietnam and spend the last two years in China. Moreover, Hanban also send volunteers to teach Chinese language and experts to train Chinese-language teachers in Vietnam. For example,

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<sup>33</sup> Report No. 132/BC.BQL, dated 18 December 2006 by the People's Committee of Lao Cai province.



in August 2004 two experts from Sun Yat-sen University and Nanjing Normal University were sent to a Chinese-language teacher training course in Hanoi and two experts from Tianjin Normal University were lecturers in a similar course in HCMC. These trainings were fully supported by Beijing's diplomatic offices in Vietnam. The HSK examination is also administered in this country and many activities aimed at promoting the learning of Chinese language, such as the Chinese Bridge Competition, Vietnamese Students singing Chinese songs competition and competition of writing about China, have been held regularly. However, China appears to be less active in its language diplomacy in Vietnam than in Thailand since its most important tool, the Confucius Institute, has not been set up in Vietnam. Anyway, many universities in Vietnam have been approached by Chinese partners on the issue of establishing Confucius Institutes and one is about to be set up within Hanoi University, as confirmed by a cultural officer of the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi. At present, the teaching of Chinese language in Vietnam is mostly limited to university-level and language centers, while very few high and secondary schools offer Chinese language courses. Nevertheless, Chinese language has become increasingly popular in this country, ranking only after English as a foreign language, with around 70,000 Vietnamese people learning Chinese, according to the Chinese Embassy<sup>34</sup>.

#### **3.2.4. Educational exchange**

In its cultural diplomacy, Beijing has also made use of higher education as an "instrument of statecraft". It is expected that coming out of those students will be future intellectuals, technicians and political elites of sending countries. Then China may have certain level of advantage in its relations with these countries, as those students who later enter officialdom may be more accommodating of Chinese interests and demands, because they have been sensitized with Chinese viewpoints and interests during their experience in Chinese educational institutions and also possess advanced knowledge of Chinese language as well as Chinese culture, society, history and politics. Personal contacts established

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<sup>34</sup> "China, Vietnam Committed to Developing Comprehensive Ties", *People's Daily Online*, updated on November 15, 2006 at [http://english.people.com.cn/200611/15/eng20061115\\_321480.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200611/15/eng20061115_321480.html).

among classmates during their study in China may also be capitalized on at later time in political and economic interactions between the two countries<sup>35</sup>. Although relevant information is not available for Thailand and Vietnam in particular, official statistics indicate that about 30 international students in China now hold minister-level positions and over 120 are senior faculty members at universities in their home countries, while more than 10 have served as ambassadors to China and over 30 are attachés posted in China<sup>36</sup>. It is certain that similar results are expected in the educational exchange with the two countries under investigation in this paper. Of course it is undeniable that attracting foreign students to China's higher education is also an important business that produces foreign exchange for the country.

Therefore, the PRC has encouraged and also provided scholarships to Thai and Vietnamese students to attend Chinese colleges and universities. As part of the agreement between the two governments, China provides 50 scholarships to Thai students to study in China<sup>37</sup>, beside the 100 scholarships to prepare new Thai teachers of Chinese language as per the Framework of Cooperation between the Thai MOE and Hanban. Every year, the Hanoi-based Chinese Embassy coordinates with the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Vietnam to select 130 students for the award of scholarship to study both undergraduate and graduate degrees in China<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, many Vietnamese receive financial support directly from Chinese universities at which they are studying. For example, annually 90% of the 80,000 Yuan-worth scholarship fund for foreign students at Guangxi Normal University is awarded to Vietnamese students, according to the University's website. The number of Thai and Vietnamese students studying in China has

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<sup>35</sup> David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order", *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Winter 2004/05, pp. 78.

<sup>36</sup> Bates Gill and Yanzhong Huang, "Sources and Limits", pp.17.

<sup>37</sup> According to an officer at the Bureau of International Cooperation, MOE of Thailand.

<sup>38</sup> Personal talks with an officer at the Culture Section of the Hanoi-based Chinese Embassy in December 2006.



also risen, with 1,737 Thais and 2,336 Vietnamese in 2002 and 2,371 Thais and 4,382 Vietnamese in 2004, representing a 36% and 88% increase respectively<sup>39</sup>.

There are several ways by which the PRC promotes Chinese education among the Thais and Vietnamese. The Chinese Embassies in both countries maintain an educational affairs function which is to provide to Thai and Vietnamese students with consultative information about Chinese educational system, universities and programs/courses offered. However, while only three staffs at the Hanoi-based Chinese Embassy are responsible for both cultural and educational affairs, the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok runs two separate sections for culture and education. Chinese universities themselves have keenly participated in educational exhibitions in these two countries to make them known to a wider public. These events are often received due attention from both sides' leaders. The third Chinese Educational Fair in March 2006 in Vietnam's two major cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, jointly organized by the MOET of Vietnam and China National Committee for Overseas Student Fund Management, was attended by the Deputy Minister of Education and Training of Vietnam, Vice Secretary General of the above-mentioned Committee and the Chinese Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Vietnam. This exhibition drew 33 universities in different parts of China.

Many universities in southern provinces of China have made use of geographical and cultural proximity to attract students from Thailand and Vietnam. It is often advertised that costs for studying and living in these areas are not as high as in central China, not to compare with other popular education destinations like in Europe, Australia and the United States. Furthermore, students would not find local culture and weather much different from those of their own countries. Accordingly, the number of Thai and Vietnamese students in these universities is significantly high. For example, in 2005 the Yunnan College of Traditional Chinese Medicine admitted 100 new Thai students, while there were 6,000

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<sup>39</sup> Michael A. Glosny, "Heading toward a Win-Win Future", pp. 41.

Vietnamese students taking long-term and short-term training courses at Yunnan Normal University and Guangxi Normal University<sup>40</sup>.

Bilateral educational cooperation has been conducted firstly within official frameworks created by governmental agreements. As mentioned above, the governments of Thailand and the PRC signed an MOU on Cooperation on Higher Education in 1999 and are preparing to conclude an educational cooperation agreement in the near future. Since 1993 the MOET of Vietnam and the MOE of China have held regular discussions and signed several documents on educational cooperation, such as the February 1993 MOU, the December 1993 MOU on educational cooperation for the period of 1994-1996, the September 1996 Agreement on educational exchange for the 1996-2000 period, and the 2000 Agreement on educational exchange and cooperation. Significantly, every year China helps to train hundreds of government officers and staff for Vietnam as agreed upon by the two governments. Under the bilateral Agreement on Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation signed in 2006, China grants 50 million Yuan to Vietnam as non-refundable aid for personnel training. The Chinese province of Yunnan annually provides training opportunities for 30 administrative managerial officers. There is also cooperation between individual universities in China with their partners in Thailand and Vietnam to upgrade human resources and provide various joint training programs. The Institute of Educational Executive development has signed an MOU on executive development with Beijing Institute of Education and also cooperates with Yunnan University for exchanges of executives in educational sector as well as academic works, research and personnel<sup>41</sup>. The Huachiew Chalermprakiet University in Bangkok joins hands with the Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine to offer a bachelor's degree program in Chinese traditional medicine, in response to increased interests in this medical area. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there were over 20 Vietnamese universities

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<sup>40</sup> "More Asean Students Pursue Studies in China", *Xinhua News*, available at [www.iGuide.com.cn](http://www.iGuide.com.cn) updated on March 25, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Thai MOE's report on November 15, 2006.

maintaining exchange and cooperation with over 40 universities and educational institutes in China<sup>42</sup>. These numbers must have become greater since then.

Not directly a part of the efforts to promote educational exchange, youth exchange with Thailand and Vietnam can produce similar results as educational exchange does in enhancing China's relationships with these two countries in the future. The exchange of youth not only helps to deepen mutual understanding between the two sides, but personal contacts among future leaderships of the two countries may be established as well. Therefore, China has eagerly encouraged youth exchanges with Thailand and Vietnam, either under governmental agreements or within cooperation frameworks among organizations from the two sides. During a state visit to Hanoi by former President Jiang Zemin in 2002, China agreed to set up a 120,000 renminbi fund for youth exchanges between the two countries<sup>43</sup>. Many programs have been created for this purpose. As part of the 2002 China – Vietnam youth border friendly exchange program, 15 Chinese youth volunteers worked with 15 young Vietnamese doctors to provide free medical care for local residents in the Vietnamese province of Lang Son, while a group of young Vietnamese attended a drug awareness event and other youth activities in Guangxi, China. The China – Vietnam Youth Friendship Meeting has been made an annual event, alternatively held in China and Vietnam and received strong backing from high-ranking leaders of the two countries. For example, in his visit to Vietnam in November 2005, China Communist Party Central Committee's General Secretary cum President Hu Jintao, together with Vietnam Communist Party's General Secretary Nong Duc Manh, attended and delivered a speech at the 6<sup>th</sup> China-Vietnam Youth Friendship Meeting in Hanoi.

Youth exchange is also one component of the 2001 cultural agreement between China and Thailand. Article 6 of the document has it that the two countries shall "endeavour to

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<sup>42</sup> Vu Minh Tuan, Giao Luu va Hop Tac Giao Duc Vietnam – Trung Quoc Tren Da Phat Trien (Vietnam-China Educational Exchange and Cooperation are Progressing Well), proceedings of the seminar "Vietnam-China economic and cultural relations: Present situation and Prospect", Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing, 2001, pp.230.

<sup>43</sup> David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia", pp.81.

promote youth exchanges and to encourage cooperation between youth organizations as well as youth workers". Accordingly, both sides have sent many youth and student delegations to each other's country, participating in various youth activities such as seminars and conferences, cultural performances, youth camps, study tours, etc.. For China's side, the All China Youth Federation and the Communist Youth League of China, both under the leadership of the CPC are among the main youth organizations deeply involved in these exchanges. For instance, at the invitation of the All China Youth Federation, a Thai delegation of young executives made a 7-day visit to China in July 2004. To celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations, the Communist Youth League of China received a Thai youth delegation of hundred students and dozen government officials on a 10-day visit to different cities in China and also organized a 100-member youth delegation to Thailand for exchange activities. There are also exchanges of youth between individual organizations and universities of the two countries. For example, the Thai Dhurakij Pundit University (DPU) in cooperation with the Thai – Chinese Cultural and Economic Association conducted a youth exchange program in 2006 with the Xiamen University in China, in which 80 Thai teachers and students were sent to China in May and 80 Chinese teachers and students arrived in Thailand in August.

In addition, the youth from China, Thailand and Vietnam have many other opportunities to interact with one's another within China – ASEAN frameworks of cooperation. As mentioned in (3.2.1), Chinese young people have been engaged in exchanges with ASEAN youth, including those from Thailand and Vietnam, through various exchange programs such as the China-ASEAN Young Leaders Conference, China-ASEAN Young Entrepreneurs Association, China-ASEAN Young Civil Servants' Exchange Program, and the China ASEAN Youth Camp. The China Guangxi International Youth Exchange Institute also provide training courses for young people from ASEAN countries for the purpose of enhancing friendship between China and ASEAN youth and has reportedly trained more than 200 young officials from ASEAN countries<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> [http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-10/29/content\\_426961.htm](http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-10/29/content_426961.htm)

### 3.2.5. Tourism

The cultural diplomacy has also been conducted through the encouragement of Chinese tourists to Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian tourists to China, as a way to enhance Southeast Asian understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture and way of life. Meanwhile, the recently increased economic strength has resulted in an unprecedented boom in Chinese outbound travel, with 32 million people traveling overseas in 2005, compared to only 4.5 million in 1995<sup>45</sup>. As Jane Perlez puts it, “when the new Chinese tourists from the rapidly expanding middle class travel, they carry with them an image of a vastly different and more inviting China than even just a few years ago, richer, more confident and more influential”<sup>46</sup>.

Amid this explosion in Chinese travel, both Thailand and Vietnam have been included in the list of popular tourist destinations for Chinese people. According to the Bangkok Post, between 2000 and 2004 Thailand was the second most popular tourist destinations for the Chinese, only after Hong Kong and Macau. Mainland China is among Thailand’s ten largest tourism markets, growing at an annual rate of 9% since 1993 and 20% over the past five years<sup>47</sup>. There were 779,000 Chinese tourists visiting Thailand in 2004 and the number is expected to rise up to 3 million by 2010<sup>48</sup>. Meanwhile, Vietnam has also been receiving an increasing number of Chinese tourists, rising from just 17,509 in 1993 and 420,743 in 1998 to 778,431 people in 2004, accounting for the largest proportion of foreign tourists to Vietnam in this year<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Howard W. French, “Next Wave of Camera-Wielding Tourists is from China”, The New York Times, May 17, 2006, Internet version.

<sup>46</sup> Jane Perlez, “Chinese Move to Eclipse Us Appeal in Southeast Asia”.

<sup>47</sup> “Chinese to Drive Growth”, Bangkok Post, Business Section, 11 May 2006.

<sup>48</sup> “3m Chinese Tourists a Year Targeted”, The Nation, Business Section, 22 September 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Nguyen Van Xuan, Tinh Hinh Du Lich Trung Quoc Va Buoc Dau Hop Tac Du Lich Viet – Trung (Chinese Tourism Industry And Initial Steps in Sino – Vietnamese Tourism Cooperation), proceedings of the seminar “Vietnam-China economic and cultural relations: Present situation and Prospect”, Hanoi: Social

In addition to bringing a cultural image of China with Chinese tourists, tourism can contribute to the promotion of Chinese culture in other countries in another way. According to Michael R.J. Vatikiotis, when more and more Chinese tourists visit regional countries and start to dominate the tourist trade, the service sector will respond by tailoring to Chinese taste and custom. This will eventually lead to a revival of Chinese culture and language in local Chinese communities that have even been assimilated<sup>50</sup>. In fact, this process has already begun in the two countries under research. Drawing more and more tourists, especially from China, is a reason, among others, behind the fact that the Chinese New Year has been recently made a big celebration in Bangkok China Town and that the Chinese community here shows its increased assertiveness by building the “Chinese Gate” at the western end of Yaowarat Road. Besides, in order to serve Chinese tourists, in popular tourist areas in Thailand, Chinese language is used in many road signs and advertisement boards as well as different cultural shows. For instance, transvestite cabaret shows have already catered to Mandarin speakers and the Patpong sex district in Bangkok has added signs in Chinese. In Chiang Rai, the northern province acting as a gateway to southern China, “to serve Chinese shoppers, signs in Chinese characters are appearing over all souvenir stores and stalls in the Golden Triangle area. Some traffic and tourist signs in downtown Chiang Rai also now feature Chinese characters in addition to English”, according to the Bangkok Post<sup>51</sup>. This trend is likely to stay on given that Chinese tourists have started to outnumber Western tourists and are catching up with Japanese tourists in both Thailand and Vietnam.

On the other hand, Beijing also encourages Thai and Vietnamese tourists to China as a way to see China for themselves, besides being an important source of foreign currencies for China. Given the strong presence of the Chinese ethnic minority in Thailand, the PRC

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Sciences Publishing, 2001, pp.252; and Mr. Vu The Binh, Director of Travel Department, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, in an interview with [www.business-in-asia.com/vietnam\\_tourism.html](http://www.business-in-asia.com/vietnam_tourism.html).

<sup>50</sup> Michael R.J. Vatikiotis, “Catching the Dragon’s Tail: China and Southeast Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 25, No. 1, April 2003, pp. 75.

<sup>51</sup> “Trade Benefits Start to Flow in”, *Bangkok Post*, 21 March 2002.



especially emphasizes on “root travel” to attract those people to their *homeland*. As a result, many Thai people of Chinese origins, among them was the Thai prominent leader Thaksin Shinawatra, have paid visits to different parts of China, making up an dramatic increase of Thai tourists to China of 77 per cent from 1997 to 2004<sup>52</sup>.

Just as in other fields, China has signed a number of cooperation documents with Thailand and Vietnam in order to promote the exchanges of tourists with these two countries. As with Thailand, an Agreement on Tourism Cooperation was signed in August 1993 and both sides have concluded several other documents to boost travel between the two countries as well as to tackle obstacles arising in the field. To solve the ‘zero-dollar tour’ problem, a type of tour package which is quoted under the actual rate but charges extra costs upon tourists’ arrivals in Thailand, the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) signed the “Implementation Plan on Joint Regulation of Tourism Market” in August 2000. The issue was further addressed in the October 2005 MOU on Tourism Cooperation between Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports and the CNTA. Between China and Vietnam, there are three important documents in the field of tourism cooperation, which are the 1994 Agreement on Tourism Cooperation, the 1999-2000 Executive Plan on Tourism cooperation and an MOU allowing Chinese people to visit Vietnam with their own currency. In addition, various localities of the two countries have joined hands with each other in exchanging tourists, through such official frameworks as the MOU on tourism cooperation between the Chinese province of Yunnan and the Vietnamese provinces of Hai Phong and Quang Ninh, and the similar MOU between Guangxi province in China and Hanoi, Hai Phong and Quang Ninh of Vietnam.

### **3.2.6. Media exchanges**

As media is an important channel for the conduct of cultural diplomacy, China finds it important to expand its media presence in foreign countries and establish good

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<sup>52</sup> Busakorn Chantasawat, “Burgeoning Sino – Thai Relations: Heightening Cooperation, Sustaining Economic Security”, *China: An International Journal* 4, 1 (Mar.2006), pp.94.

relationships with foreign media. In this way, information is more likely to be presented to foreign audience in China's favor. By the end of 2005, already six Chinese media organizations, including China Central Television, China News Service, China Radio International, People's Daily, Guangming Daily, and Xinhua News Agency, have their overseas offices in Bangkok and the Chinese also urge their Thai partners to open representative offices in China. The China Radio International has signed an MOU with Radio Thailand, by which the two sides supply each other with news, information, documentary materials as well as musical and cultural programs for broadcasting purposes, though much of the cooperation remains to be materialized in the future. In an effort to increase its presence in Thailand, whose standing in the region is considered significant, the China Daily cooperates with The Nation to publish the Thai edition of China Business Weekly, attached to The Nation every Monday, starting from January 2006. Significantly, in an interview relating to the launch of this paper in Thailand, Zhu Ying-huang, China Daily editor-in-chief emeritus spoke profoundly about peace, harmony and how China wants to live in peaceful co-existence with its neighbors and be a responsible member of the world community. As with the China Business Weekly in particular, the China Daily aims to provide "accurate and timely information" so as to meet growing shared interest of Chinese and Thai people in a wide range of issues, from trade to tourism<sup>53</sup>.

Since the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1991, China has also maintained cooperation with Vietnam in the fields of broadcasting, television, press and publication. MOUs on media cooperation have been concluded between the Voice of Vietnam (VOV), Vietnam National Television (VTV) and Hanoi Radio and Television (HTV) in Vietnam and China Central Television (CCTV), Shanghai Television, China Radio International and Pingqiang (Guangxi) Television in China. Under these agreements, both sides annually exchange delegations of high-ranking media officials, reporters and broadcasting programs with each other. Moreover, media organizations of the two countries work together in several joint projects to produce documentary films, such as the "Honghe River", completed in 1997 by CCTV, Yunnan Television, Sichuan Television and Vietnam's

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<sup>53</sup> "Making Media History, The Nation, 10 January 2006.

MOCI, “President Ho Chi Minh with China” in 1998 by China Cinema Association and Vietnam Cinema Association, and the “Uncle Ho in Yunnan” by China Writers’ Association, Yunnan Provincial Writers’ Association, and Vietnam Writers’ Association. Currently the CCTV has cooperated with broadcasters from Greater Sub-Mekong Region, including Vietnam’s VTV and Thailand’s Modern 9TV to make a 20-part documentary on the Mekong River.

### **3.3. Concluding remarks**

The problem of cultural deficit for China, a country with the great history of culture which has been long appreciated by the world, partly rests on the decline of power from the time of the Qing Dynasty, followed by a closed-door period under the rule of the Communist Party up to the late 1970s. On the other hand, the introduction of Chinese cultural products to the world has been obstructed by the language barrier, as the Chinese language is still not widely used outside the greater China. In order to enable the promotion of Chinese culture over all the world in general and in the Southeast Asian in particular, China has made a lot of efforts to introduce the study of Chinese language to foreigners, making it the most active area of China’s cultural diplomacy.

Despite the language barrier, Chinese art and culture have been introduced to a wide audience in both Thailand and Vietnam. It is because art and culture themselves are a language that can convey inherent messages to the audience. This is also the rationale for China to use its culture as a diplomatic tool. Moreover, people in Thailand and Vietnam are very familiar with Chinese culture thanks to their long-standing cultural interactions with the Chinese, making it easy for China to promote its cultural features in the two countries.

As educational exchange is also a crucial instrument in cultural diplomacy, China has also been active in drawing an increasing number of students from Thailand and Vietnam to China for higher education. Though it is not so attractive destination as the United States, Europe and Australia for education, and that Chinese language may become a difficult criterion for foreign students, more and more Thai and Vietnamese choose to go to China

because of the geographical proximity, low cost and certain difficulties in the procedures for entry into the United States and other educational centers.

It is likely to see China further promotes tourism from and to Southeast Asian countries, since it encounters almost no obstacles in this area. Meanwhile, in media cooperation with Thailand and Vietnam, language remains a big problem. When Chinese or even English language is used for Chinese broadcast programs in these two countries, they cannot reach a wide audience who speaks only Thai or Vietnamese. Furthermore, the cooperation is more of one-way than mutual because China itself is not really open to foreign media while it is trying very hard to set up its media bases in foreign countries.