

Thai-Chinese Relations

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My presentation will not be academic. It will mostly be about my experience, and will be grouped into 3 parts-historical perspectives, my personal perspectives and some activities that I have had with the Chinese. In fact, sometimes the historical and the personal parts cannot be separated.

1. Historical Perspectives

1.1 Long History of Good Relations

Thailand and China have had relations for a long, long time as we found pieces of Chinese ceramics or porcelain here and there in Thailand with inscriptions in Chinese characters. For example, this one had the characters *biqiu* (比丘) written on it, and even the Chinese experts do not know what it means. In fact, it could be a Sanskrit word, 'Bhiksu' meaning monk. It is about a Buddhist text. We have a lot of Buddhist canons, with Buddhist text written in Chinese. Later on in the 13th-14th centuries, at the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, we believe that there were craftsmen, the people who made porcelain from China to teach porcelain making in Thailand.

In the 13th-14th centuries, in Ayutthaya, the former capital, there were already a number of Chinese people living in Thailand. At that time, Ayutthaya was quite a cosmopolitan city. There were a lot of foreigners coming in, and there were Japanese Village, Dutch Village, and so on. But we never had Chinese Village, because the Chinese lived among us, and so we did not know who were Chinese, and who were Thai. It was difficult to distinguish.

At that time we had a system of trade with China. It was called the 'Tributary System'. In fact, the Chinese governments never invaded Thailand at all. It was just a formality, and because of the trade relations, the ambassadors from Thailand travelled a long way to Beijing and presented some gifts that were called tribute. I do not know whether it was in a hope for 'the big brother' to return the bigger gifts or not. But we usually got more in return, and all were more for trade relations than anything else. On a diplomatic trip, a business delegation always accompanied a diplomatic delegation. A diplomatic delegation would go to the capital, Beijing, but the trade delegation would stay in Guangzhou, Guangdong, to do business.

At that time, we also had our taxation system. Often the people who collected taxes were mainly of Chinese origin. If you look at the names of those people who worked in the ships, you would see that all were Chinese names. We also had Chinese boat builders, because the Chinese were quite good in boat-building at that time. We, Thai, were good mainly in building wood work.

1.2 Interruption of Relations

Such good relations went down during the opium war in China. I think at that time we stopped sending our emissaries. One reason was because the high sea was quite dangerous at the time, for it was full of bandits. There were also risks of Western imperialists. We were afraid that the relations between Thailand and China could be misunderstood, and we could be in difficulties. After that we had good relations, but then there was a long interruption in diplomatic relations after the World War II. At that time, I think it could be due to the bipolar world. Thailand, for the first time, chose to be in the so called 'free world', and China joined the Communist regime thereafter the *Jiefang* (解放) liberations.

¹ Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn was invited by Mr. Ronnie Chan, Co-Chair of the Asia Society and Chair of the Asia Society Hong Kong, to give a lecture on Thai-Chinese Relations on April 17, 2012. It was later transcribed from a videotape by the Office of the Education Council, with Chinese characters added for the Chinese vocabulary by the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.

I was born then and lived my childhood through that time. Even during the diplomatic interruption, we were familiar with the Chinese candy, called *shanzha* (山楂 in Thai ชันจ๋า). It was sour, and we liked it. It was made from plum that we liked to eat. When we got to the upper primary education level, we used fountain pens, and the fountain pens came from China. I asked my friend's father, who was in business, trading with China at that time, how he managed to bring in textbooks from China. He said that he did his business through Hong Kong. At that time Hong Kong belonged to England, UK, but its door was open to the mainland China as well. Especially during the Cultural Revolution we learned that everything stopped. At that time, around 40 years ago, I was 11, and stayed in England for 3 months. I heard that my cousin was born, and I wanted to get something for her, so I went to a shop and bought a fluffy toy. I found on the toy the 'Made in China' tag. It was from Shanghai. It meant that some production, even toys, continued in China.

1.3 Re-establishment of Relations

Then, we had our way in trying to re-establish the tie with the People's Republic of China, and we succeeded in 1975. This is the new era, and I will talk about other relations with China later.



In fact, before we established official relations, I heard that the diplomats who stayed in Western countries had tried to contact the Chinese counterparts. After that they sent athletic teams. The first delegation was a ping-pong or table tennis team, the ping-pong diplomacy just like anywhere in the world. I did not know anyone in that delegation except one reporter who accompanied the second Thai ping-pong team. He passed away about 2 weeks ago. I knew a police general who was in the shooting team, and he gave me these pictures. So we also had shooting teams. The third delegation was a badminton team led by a senior diplomat described himself as a team manager. Two former diplomats that I interviewed once said that they had never played badminton all their lives. They dressed in Thai athletic uniform, and they used this opportunity to negotiate diplomatic relations.



At the end the Prime Minister M.R.Kukrit Pramoj made the first official visit to China in July 1975 and established the official relations. He had a chance to meet *Mao Zhuxi* (毛主席), Chairman Mao.

2. My Personal Perspectives

2.1 China and His Majesty



I got some pictures of His Majesty the King, my father, talking with *Deng Xiaoping* (邓小平). I sat somewhere there, but not in the picture. After that there was the delegation of *Deng Yingchao* (邓颖超), the wife of *Zhou Enlai* (周恩来). At that time, there was a talk about an opportunity to go to China in the following years. I managed to be in the picture this time.

2.2 Chinese Tradition and Values



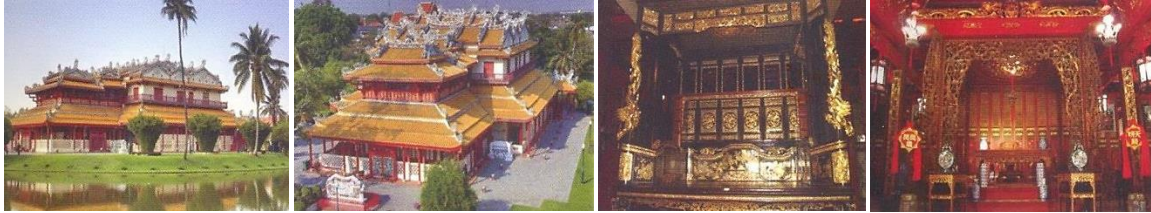
I think the important thing about the Chinese people in Thailand, as I said before, is that we do not really have the so-called Chinese community. They become mixed with the Thais. One value of the Chinese is the family value, and each year they have the tradition of paying respect to their ancestors during the Chinese New Year *Chunjie* (春节). So when they came to Thailand, they brought this and other traditions with them. Even in the Royal family, we have some Chinese blood, and so we have many old pictures, like the above picture, of myself or my younger sister, I am not quite sure, in a Chinese New Year celebration.



However, there is one place called Yaowarat, *Tangrenjie* (唐人街) or Chinatown, where there are a lot of Chinese people. Nowadays it is just a trading place and many Chinese have moved out.

2.3 Chinese Art

The pictures below show the Chinese-styled pavilion in the Summer Palace. When I was very young, someone told me that it was a haunted house. There were a lot of ghosts. In fact, it is a very beautiful pavilion in the Chinese style given to King Chulalongkorn, my great grandfather, by the Chinese nobles and Chinese merchants in Thailand.



The pictures below show another form of temple influenced by the Chinese art. There are some ballasts that merchants put in the ship. They are in form of dolls or lions. Some lions have balls in their mouths. I tried many times to get the ball out, but was not successful.



We have a lot of Chinese porcelains and ceramics. Some of them are in Thai style because we sent the pattern and had it made to order in China. I have some of these items. A lot of them are in the palace. Since I was young I have seen these things and learned a little bit about the periods and the art styles of Chinese porcelains and ceramics from people around me.

2.4 Chinese Opera and Music

Thai people like Chinese opera very much. It has been quite successful. Some Thai people do not know Chinese at all, but they can sing Chinese opera. We like Chinese puppet, and we play Chinese music from time to time. Some Thai composers have mixed Chinese songs with Thai songs. Some have composed songs that sound Chinese. Some of them have played Chinese songs with Thai musical instruments. A composer asked me to write a lyric for his composition of a Thai song with Chinese flavor. So I translated the poem “*Chunxiao*” 春晓 (of the poet *Meng Haoran* 孟浩然) into Thai and used it as a lyric for his song.



2.5 Chinese Books

There are a lot of Chinese textbooks for teaching Chinese in Thailand. The Thai Kings since more than 200 years had the Chinese chronicles, literature and history books translated into Thai, for example, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms - Sanguo Yanyi* (三国演义) or *Journey to the West-Xiyouji* (西游记), etc.



2.6 Chinese Geomancy

A lot of Thai people believe in Chinese geomancy. When we build houses, we invite an expert to check on the geomancy.

2.7 Worship of Ancestors and the Deceased

Once I had some difficulties, and I thought it might be a good idea to pay respect to my Chinese ancestors. So I have arranged a ceremony, and later on I do it every year. Now my work seems to be better. In fact it may be due to my hard work, but the ceremony is a kind of consolation. Thai people like doing this.



Last year my aunt, the only daughter of King Rama VI, passed away. We had the Chinese ceremony to bless her soul. There was a Chinese music accompaniment in this event.

2.8 Chinese Medicine

Thai people like Chinese medicine and acupuncture *zhenjiu* (针灸). I have never tried it, but I put some Chinese herbs in my soup.

2.9 Chinese Schools

There had been a lot of Chinese schools before, but during the cold war they had to stop teaching. Even before the cold war the regulation allowed Chinese schools to open at the primary level only. Anyone who wanted to study at the secondary level had to go to China or Hong Kong, and a lot went to Hong Kong.

2.10 First Visit to China

In 1981, I managed to go to China. I met *Deng Yingchao* (邓颖超) again, and she asked me to call her *Deng dajie* (邓大姐), big sister Deng. In fact, I thought she was quite too senior to be my sister, but she said that in Chinese tradition if I called her aunt or something else, it would not be as close as I call her sister.



The right picture was me on *Changcheng* (长城), the Great Wall. This is another photo. The embroidery was by the School of Hunan.

2.11 Books on China



I have written a lot of books about my travels in China, in Thai, of course, but some were translated into Chinese, that is, *Along the Silk Road*. It was about a trip in the north western part of China.

I translated some Chinese Tang and Song poetry.

The pink book is the translation of *Wang Meng's* (王蒙) *Hudie* (蝴蝶), or "Butterfly"

I also wrote children books, and one diplomat in the Chinese Embassy in Thailand translated them into Chinese. Many children may have read this book.

2.12 Peking University



I had an opportunity to study in China, in *Beida* (北大 Peking University--PKU), only for one month. Apart from Chinese language and Chinese society, I had an opportunity to study painting, calligraphy, *erhu* (二胡) and some *taijiquan* (太极拳), *da taijiquan* (打太极拳), but I forget it now. At that time Beida provided a television set of me. I was told that if there was any place I saw on TV that I wanted to visit, they would take me there. So I visited a science exhibition. I also visited the secondary school for needy children, needy but good in education. I had the honor of receiving an honorary degree from Beida. This is quite rare, because the Chinese Government does not allow any university to confer honorary degrees to anyone except authorized by the Government.

2.13 Some Awards from China

The former Minister of Education is in the picture below when I got the **Award of Friendship on Literature**.

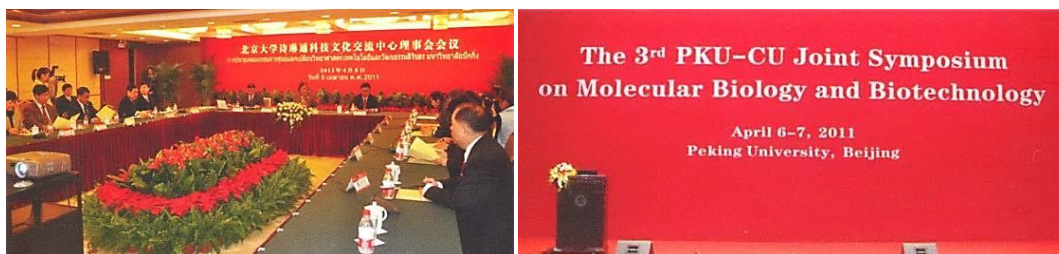


This is what Ronnie has just talked about. I was voted by internet users in China to be one of the **Top-Ten International Friends of China**. I did not know anything about that at all, but a Thai friend of mine who lived in United States, a retiree from the IMF, emailed to congratulate me on what I got. At first, I did not understand what it was about at all, and the Thai Ambassador in Beijing and the Chinese Ambassador in Bangkok did not know about that either. The people from CRI, the China Radio International, also did not know it, because it was on the net and no one knew. If they had known, maybe I could have asked my friends to vote for me. I was very proud because other awardees were very distinguished people whom we have learned about in our history books, and they have done a great deal for China. I got the 9th place, and a Japanese friend got the 10th place. So we are the only two alive on that occasion. I had the honor to make a thank you speech on behalf of everybody including the dead ones. So I said that if those dead awardees had known about this, they would have been very touched. I got the award from the Chairman of the National Committee of CPPCC, Mr. *Jia Qinglin*(贾庆林)

3. Some Activities with the Chinese People

3.1 Personal Interest in China

Let me talk about some other activities. I made 34 visits to China, because I have my personal interest in Chinese geography, culture, literature and history. My study at Peking University was the highlight of many co-operations. Before that I knew about only history and arts of china. At *Beida* I had an opportunity to see science and technology in China. Even though I had been to some institutes of the Chinese Academy of Sciences before, but had no idea about collaboration.



3.2 Cooperation with Chinese Universities

At *Beida*, they established a center bearing my name, for collaboration in science, technology and culture between Thailand and *Beida*. Since then we have arranged some conferences, for example, molecular biology conference. We have the double-degree program between *Beida* and Thailand in Biology. We have conferences and joint research projects in nanotechnology, and so on.

Besides *Beida*, I have been to many other universities, for example, *Huaqiao University* (华侨大学) where there are a lot of Thai students. They have given me scholarships to send Thai students and also Cambodian students. I visited *Xi'an Jiaotong* (西安交通), *Xiamen University* and many other universities in China.

3.3 Confucius Institutes in Thailand

In Thailand we have many Confucius Institutes. There is a Confucius classroom in Chitralada School (吉拉达学校孔子课堂). Chitralada School is the school in the palace. I can say that it was somewhat a home school at the beginning to educate myself and my siblings with about 10 to 20 classmates. My father decided to set up this school because he could choose the strictest teachers who could beat us and reported about us to them. Later on I have looked after this school. Now we have more than 1,000 students from K to 12, and I have added some vocational disciplines in this school as well.

3.4 Research on Old Maps



We have a project with Fudan University in Shanghai. The story behind this project was that some old maps were found in the Grand Palace in Bangkok. Many were maps of the wars in Thailand, but this map was for the travel from Thailand to China, to Beijing. There were many names written in Thai. We did not know for sure what the real Chinese names were because they were written in many dialects. So I went to Fudan University, and I saw that the university has more or less the same interest. So I asked them to collaborate in this map project. The collaboration is still going on.

This must have been before the Opium War because they still have the picture of 13 ทางการเมือง (十三行) in Thai or *Shisan hang* (十三行) in Chinese, the system of which was abolished after the Opium War. We have had meetings at Fudan and in Bangkok at Chulalongkorn University.

3.5 Chinese Academy of Sciences



I have known the Chinese Academy of Sciences for a long time. Later on they established the Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Sciences (GUCAS), and we have sent many students to study there. This year we have only 4 or 5 places, but more than 100 students have applied to pursue their master and doctoral degree programs at GUCAS. Besides sending students, we signed an MOU to collaborate in synchrotron light research between Thailand and Shanghai.

3.6 Nutrition and Demonstrative Farm



We once had a conference on nutrition in Bangkok, and we had some counterparts from China. This is the famous Professor *Chen Chunming* (陈春明).

When there was a celebration of my father's 60th year on the throne, the Chinese Government wanted to do some project on that occasion. So I found the place for them to do the experiment in a demonstrative farm in the North of Thailand. Later on the outcome of the research would be beneficial for local people there.

3.7 Tea Oil



Another Project is on tea oil. A professor from Chulalongkorn University asked if I had some tea nuts. I had never heard of nuts from tea. I like to drink tea, but never heard about its nuts, from which the chemical was used as pesticide. So I found out that there was tea oil, not *Camellia sinensis* for drinking, but it is *Camellia oleifera* from which we got the oil. We started this project by getting a sample from China, and we grew it on the deforested mountain at the border of Thailand and Myanmar. People were very poor, and I made sure that the benefit from this project would go to the poorest of the poor only. We were quite successful. Now we have a factory and have our own technology.

3.8 Tsunami in Thailand



Eight years ago when we had tsunami, the Chinese Red Cross helped by donating money to build a hospital, a school, a health station and the whole village.



This picture is the President of Chinese Red Cross. After a while China had an earthquake in Sichuan, the people in this village who are poor fishermen donated money and sent it to China to help the Chinese people, the victims of the earthquake.

3.9 Hope Project



希望工程
PROJECT HOPE



中国青少年发展基金会
China Youth Development Foundation

The Project Hope logo means society cares for the development of young people like the ocean supports the rising sun.

To advocate social responsibility;
To be innovative and make progress;
To focus on human development;
To pursue excellence.







I learned about the *Xiwang Gongcheng* (希望工程) or Hope Project during my stay in Beijing. The donors can be anybody, not necessarily wealthy, who can help children in the rural area to study. In the story it was *Ayi* (阿姨) or an aunt who spent her money to help the girls to study. I would like to be an *Ayi* (阿姨), and so I told the Chinese authority. They then asked me to give the scholarships to some Chinese and Tibetan students. The picture below shows the Tibetan students. Some students are from *Hongzhi Zhongxue* (宏志中学) and many of them have graduated. One boy told me that from his income he has saved some money to help other poor students to continue the philosophy of helping others. One student said that they were poor and they knew that love and friendship could be even from far away country. As they were poor, the only way to return this good feeling was to work hard, study well and help the community.



3.10 Thai Students in Beida



The above pictures show some Thai students studying in Beida. They study physics, mathematics and other fields of science. I also played a part in the International Mathematics and Science Olympiads. So once I was asked to talk to the Chinese counterpart to host an Astrophysics competition. Then we sent our students to the Olympiad at that time.

3.11 Earthquake in Sichuan



The picture shows the earthquake site, where we donated the money. It was in Sichuan Province. At that time, I built a primary school there, and then I visited the school. We sent Thai primary students from grade 3 to grade 6 to that school, and the school also sent children of the same ages to our school. This is the first time that we have an exchange of primary students. Before coming here, I met Vice president *Xi Jinping* (习近平) in Beijing and he talked about this project. So we have primary school students visiting us, and now we have cultural exchange between China, Thailand and Korea. (Pictures below)



3.12 Cooperation in Banking

The pictures below show my visit to the representative office of the Bank of Thailand in Beijing. It is the third office abroad that we have. The first one is in New York. We established that in 1990, and the second in London in 1993. Just last year, we had this representative office in Beijing, hoping that we can strengthen our economic bonding and relations. We can do trading in *Renminbi* (人民币), buy more Chinese Government bonds and join in many other activities. During that time the Bank of Thailand hosted lunch at the residence of the Thai Ambassador, and I had an opportunity to discuss with the ICBC Bank leader.



3.13 Vocational Education

I would like to explore more to establish relations between Thai vocational schools and Chinese vocational schools.

3.14 Buddhist Canon

This is a new direction, and perhaps there is something more to collaborate. Now we start to translate some Chinese Buddhist Canon from Chinese into Thai. It is very difficult to know the Chinese Buddhist technical terms, and we may send some translators to study in Beijing, and we hope that we can have some collaboration.

Thank you.