

Historical and Contemporary Relations between the Peoples of Southeast Asia and China: Enhancing Future Collaboration among ASEAN and Chinese Youths (Lu Jianren 2006-5-8)

Dear H.E.Mr.Ong Keng Yong, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good afternoon!

Today I'm very pleased and honored to attend the ASEAN-China Lecture Series as a Chinese representative and enjoy the friendly atmosphere of China-ASEAN cooperation. This year is the 15th anniversary of the establishment of China-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership, as well as the Year of China-ASEAN Friendly Cooperation. A series of activities will be held by both China and ASEAN. This lecture is one of the activities. As I indicated in the title of this lecture, I will be mainly talk about communication among the peoples of China and Southeast Asia, especially communication between the youth.

As we all know, China and Southeast Asian countries are either connected by mountains and rivers, or not far from each other across seas. We have a long history of interactions. According to Chinese historical literature , as early as the 2nd Century BC, in the *Qin* Dynasty 2200 years ago (221 BC to 206 BC), the Chinese ancestors had established communication with Vietnam and Burma by land. In the Western *Han* Dynasty, that is 206 BC to 25 BC, Chinese ancestors explored a "Marine Silk Road", and started interactions with people on Southeast Asian islands. During the reign of Emperor Wu (140 BC to 87 BC) of Han Dynasty, Chinese ships disembarked from Nanhai (now Xuwen of Guangdong Province) with loads of gold and silk, traveled by today's Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar and India to exchange for their local products, and returned from Sri Lanka. Through marine silk trade, this route connected China with Southeast Asia including Sumatra, with South Asia including India, with the Arabian region including *Da Shi* (as it was called by ancient China). Those regions were hubs of Chinese silk trade, as well as central locations of world political, economic, religious and cultural centers. While developing silk trade, the Marine Silk Road also promoted the communication between the peoples of China and Southeast Asia.

In about the 3rd Century, several kingdoms appeared on the Indo-China Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago. They sent delegations to China, and began friendly interactions with the dynasties of *Wei*, *Jin*, and the South and North Dynasties of China (3rd to 6th Centuries). In *Sui* and *Tang* Dynasties in the 6th to 9th Centuries, the Chinese maritime transportation was highly developed, in particular the route between Guangzhou and the Malay Peninsula. China and Southeast Asian countries sent delegations to each other, and were engaged in frequent trade and economic exchanges. Archeological study proves that during the *Sui* and *Tang* Dynasties,

China exported a lot of porcelain and silk to Southeast Asia, and imported a lot of perfumery, jewelry and medicines. Later in the *Song* and *Yuan* Dynasties (9th to 13th Centuries), Chinese marine businessmen explored another trade route on the Eastern Seas from the Southeast coast of China to the Philippine Archipelago. The communication between the peoples of China and Southeast Asia thus expanded further.[1]

During 28 years of early Ming Dynasty from 1405 to 1433, Zheng He, as a Chinese friendship envoy, traveled to the “Western Seas” seven times with his huge fleet and crew. His destinations extended east from Liu Qiu (Ryuku-gunto), the Philippines, and the Maluku Sea of Indonesia and west to the Mozambique Strait and wide coastal areas of Southern Africa. Along a mileage over 500,000 kilometers, he interacted with over 30 countries on the way, which is remembered as a miracle in world navigation history. Southeast Asia was a necessary path of Zheng He’s voyages, and the Malaka Kingdom at the Malacca Strait became an important place for Zheng He’s crew to meet and store supplies. The Malaka Kingdom also became a trade center of Southeast Asia. The voyages of Zheng He to the Western Seas greatly promoted the friendly relations between the countries and peoples of China and Southeast Asia. The principles advocated by Zheng He, that is “not to discriminate against the minority; not to bully the weak; to interact friendly; and, to share peace”, expressed the concept of peaceful diplomacy of the Chinese nation since ancient times. Under the influence of Zheng He’s voyages, many residents of the southeastern coast of China traveled overseas to settle in Southeast Asia and contributed to the development of the South Seas. In the 1840s, there were about 1.5 million overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia.[2]

China and Southeast Asian countries not only started friendly exchanges from a very early time, but also share similar historical experiences. After the Opium War in 1840, China gradually degraded into a semi-colonial semi-feudal society. Around that time, Southeast Asian countries and regions also became colonies of Western powers. Both China and Southeast Asian countries suffered from brutal invasions of imperialists including the Great Britain, France, Holland and Japan. However, the brave peoples of China and Southeast Asia did not surrender to cruel colonial rule, but fought together and supported each other. In the Asian revolution storm in the mid 19th Century, the *Taiping Tianguo* Movement [or, the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace Movement] in China and the anti-colonial movement of Javanese in Indonesia propelled and supported each other indirectly. The Xinhai Revolution in China in the early 20th Century also boosted the anti-colonial movements in Vietnam and Indonesia. During the Second World War, the peoples of China and Southeast Asia fought together against Fascist Japanese invasions and won the final victory.

After the PRC was established in 1949, the Chinese and Southeast Asian peoples have made important contribution to maintaining world peace. In 1953, countries including China and Myanmar proposed the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”. In 1954, China attended the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, when all parties united to fight against imperialism, colonialism and hegemony. In the 1950s to the early 1970s, the Chinese people actively supported the Vietnamese people to fight against invasion by France and America until the overall victory was achieved. China’s effort to resume the seat at the United Nations was also firmly supported by many Southeast Asian countries.

On August 8, 1967, the ASEAN was established. It was the first association in Southeast Asia made of independent developing nations. Southeast Asian countries came together for regional economic growth, social advancement and cultural development. Today, ASEAN has expanded from five member countries initially to an international organization that covers ten countries of Southeast Asia with wide influence, and plays a more and more important role at the Asia-Pacific and World stages.

When ASEAN was firstly established, the world was in the Cold War, which caused distrust and confrontation between China and Southeast Asia. This was just a short episode in history. In November 1978, the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping visited Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, and proposed to develop friendly relations with Southeast Asian countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Afterwards, the two sides made fruitful cooperation during the process of solving the Cambodia problem by political means. Moreover, the problems of communist parties and overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia were solved as well. These laid a foundation for the establishment and development of friendly Sino-ASEAN relations.

By 1991, China had established or resumed diplomatic relations with all Southeast Asian countries. The two parties entered a new era of dialogue and cooperation. In the past 15 years, bilateral relations have gone through three stages, from establishing full dialogue framework, to friendly neighborhood and mutual trust, and finally to the establishment of strategic partnership. In 1996, China became ASEAN’s full dialogue partner. In December 1997, when the Asian Financial Crisis was sweeping through the region, ASEAN proposed to hold 10+3 meetings. Within that framework the China-ASEAN Annual Summit, or 10+1, mechanism was established. The two parties established partnership of friendly neighborhood and mutual trust. In 2002, the two sides signed the *Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between China and ASEAN*, which aimed to build a China-ASEAN Free Trade Area by 2010. In end 2002, China proposed the diplomatic guideline of “treating the neighbors friendly, and regarding the neighbors as partners”. In October 2003, China signed the *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia*(TAC), the first dialogue partner of ASEAN’s to sign it. At the same time, China and ASEAN

signed the *Joint Declaration of Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity*. So far, the two sides have set up 28 mechanisms for cooperation in various areas.

In the short 15 years, bilateral relations between China and ASEAN have endured several severe tests, for instance, the Financial Crisis in 1997, the SARS epidemic in 2003, the tsunami in December 2004, bird flu, terrorist attacks, etc. In every crisis, the peoples of China and Southeast Asia have always supported each other hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, and overcame the difficulties together. During the Financial Crisis, China kept the *renminbi* from depreciation, and provided aid to crisis-hit Southeast Asian countries. When Indonesia and Thailand were struck by the devastating tsunami, many ordinary Chinese people offered a helping hand voluntarily, and set the highest record of unofficial donation. As the old Chinese saying goes, true friendship shows during hardships. After those difficulties, the friendship between the peoples of China and Southeast Asia has become unbreakable.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our bilateral relations are in a gold time today. The political relationship is very good, the economic relationship is developing fast, and cooperation in other areas is expanding. With the widening of bilateral cooperation, the interactions between the peoples are becoming more frequent. Southeast Asia is the most popular foreign destination for Chinese tourists. At the same time, with the growth of the Chinese economy, more Southeast Asian businessmen and tourists are coming to China. The interactions between ordinary people have enhanced mutual understanding and brought bilateral relations closer. The communication between the youth is particularly important because the youth generation shoulders a historical responsibility of consolidating, inheriting and developing Sino-ASEAN traditional friendship and promoting bilateral friendly relations.

The leaders of China and Southeast Asian countries pay a lot of attention to communication between the youth. On the 7th China-ASEAN Leaders' Meeting, Premier Wen Jiabao proposed to establish the China-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth in order to facilitate communication among the youth. In September 2004, the All-China Youth Federation held the First China-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth. 75 people took part in the meeting including ministers of youth affairs of ten ASEAN countries, high officials of youth affairs, entrepreneur representatives and representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat. The Meeting adopted the *Beijing Declaration for ASEAN-China Cooperation on Youth and Joint Work Plan for the First ASEAN-China Ministerial Meeting*. In order to implement the Joint Work Plan, China carried out the project of ASEAN Youth Leaders' China Visit Plan, and invited ASEAN national leaders and young entrepreneurs to visit China for ten days.

Furthermore, China has actively sent delegates to participate in the communication activities between the youth of the region held in ASEAN countries. For example, in August 2005, the representatives of the All China Youth Federation took part in the ASEAN Youth Festival held in Samarang, Indonesia, and won the “ASEAN Youth Award”. Besides, under the 10+3 framework, the youth of China and ASEAN have various chances for communication. For instance, in September 2005, the All-China Youth Federation held the first “Friendly Meeting between ASEAN, China, Japan and Korean Youth” in China. 82 people including young leaders, scholars and entrepreneurs from the 13 countries, and officials of the ASEAN secretariat participated in the activities in China. During the activities, meetings were also held among the ASEAN and Chinese, Japanese and Korean young leaders, young scholars, and young entrepreneurs.

Ladies and Gentlemen, looking back at history, youth are the power to create the future; they have always propelled the reforms and evolution of the society; and they are playing extremely important roles in every country. The 21st Century is a century of economic globalization and multi-polarization of the world, a century of liberalization and development, as well as a century for the youth to realize their ambitions. China and ASEAN have a population of 1.8 billion together, most of which are youth. Youth cooperation is an important part of Sino-ASEAN cooperation. The communication among the youth is beneficial to improving the friendship between the peoples of China and ASEAN countries, boosting economic and cultural communication and cooperation among the countries, and laying a wide social foundation for the development of inter-state relations. Therefore, we should encourage and promote bilateral communication between the youth, open more channels, and widen the areas for communication and cooperation. Apart from establishing government-level mechanisms, we should develop societal forces, facilitate face-to-face communication between the youth of China and Southeast Asia, and enhance mutual understanding.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the friendly interactions between China and Southeast Asian countries have never stopped in two thousand years. We have every reason to believe that the youth today will inherit and advance this honorable tradition, consolidate and develop our friendship through increasing and widening exchanges, and pass it on from generation to generation. I wish the friendship between the peoples of China and Southeast Asia live forever!

Thank you very much!

[1]See Dening Nie *et al.*, *Quanqiuhua xia Zhongguo yu Dongnan Ya Jingmao Guanxi de Lishi, Xianzhuang jiqi Qushi*[*The History, Current Situation and Trend of Economic and Trade Relations between China and Southeast Asia under Globalization*] (Xiamen University Press, 2006), p. 55.

[2]Fengbin Wu ed., *Dongnan Ya Huaqiao Tongshi*[*The History of Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia*] (Fujian People's Press, 1993), p. 259.