

China's Soft Power in Southeast Asia

Josh Kurlantzick
Carnegie Endowment for
International Peace
Washington, DC

The Situation in mid-1990s

- Disputes over S China Sea
- Border problems
- SE Asia has close informal ties to Taiwan
- Discrimination and violence against SE Asian Chinese
- Fear of China

China Shifts Course

- New Focus on Soft Power
- Born-again multilateralist
- Recognition of the value of average people
- Pragmatism; Cambodia and the Sam Rainsy Party

Chinese Strategies and Tools of Influence

- More sophisticated development assistance – biggest donor in Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar.
- Better public diplomacy; informal summitry for artists and writers, visitor programming, Chinese Peace Corps – promoting people-people contacts
- More skilled formal diplomacy – Chinese ambassador does Larry King in Thailand
- Outreach to ethnic Chinese in SE Asia; summer camps to discover your roots
- Outmigration to northern SE Asia – the allure of China as a destination

Promotion of Chinese Language/ Culture

- Confucius Institute project
- Funding for Chinese in SE Asian primary schools
- Scholarships to go on to study in China; 120,000 overseas students
- Xinhua tie-ups with SE Asian papers; CCTV in SE Asia – CCTV promotes culture over politics

Indicators of Chinese Success

- Growing demand for Chinese culture and language studies
- Polling data – warmth toward China.
- Positive SE Asian media coverage of China
- Much less criticism of China's economic competitiveness; Asean-China FTA vs Thai-US FTA
- Views of Southeast Asian Chinese

Policy Implications

- Defense and Intelligence Cooperation – Philippines and China
- A generation of SE Asian leaders studying in China, not the US, Japan, or the UK
- China leads regional trade
- China becomes a pop culture exporter