China’s Soft Power in Southeast Asia

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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

- 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