India-Thailand Relations: connected and cooperated in Soft Power Policy

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I. Introduction

Thailand is part of Suvarnabhumi territory, which finds mention even in Ramayana by written Valmiki in c.1000 BC. Buddhism was embraced in Thailand, while the kingdom of Thailand was small state in the year seven hundred in Sukkhothai period. Prior to that, Thailand had long history in which as per the legend, Thailand was the kingdom of Daravati, which was the city of Mons and Thais who lived in the basin site of Chao Phra ya river. U-thong was the ancient city, which is situated in Suphanburi province. Phra Pathom Cedi was the big stupa which was discovered and made in third century B.C. (272-232 B.C.). Accordingly, Venerable Sona and Venerable Uttara had been sent by King Asoka to Suvarnabhumi, (the land of gold) which was believed that gold was available in Southeast Asia, such as Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Many scholars believed that U-thong was the city of Funan, which was the first kingdom of Southeast Asia, in the capital of Vietnam. Therefore, India had been connected with Thailand since the ancient time by missionaries, trade, sea route and commerce. Alternatively, Thailand received religious, traditional, linguistic, and philosophy from India, and applied to use this style in daily life of people, such as Sonkran festival, and the holy day of Buddhism like Vesak Day. India and Thailand had deep rooted relations in religious and cultural dimensions related with the Buddhism and Brahmanism that maintained connection intact, according to Buddhadas Bhikkhu, in his book on "Phra Gun Thi India Mi To Thai" or "India's Benevolence to Thailand". Venerable Buddhadasa, the well known and respected Thai monk, said in one place: "Without Buddhism, we might have been unable to be what we now see them sitting in the rear. Without Buddhism there would neither be lay devotees, upasakas and upāsika, nor monks and novice." In another place he cited an example to show that Thai people of his times in the city of Chaiya, south of Thailand, paid respect to Brahmanic gods in the shrine situated in front of a Buddhist monastery before entering the monastery.

Missionaries had been sent by King Asoka to many territories in some parts of the world according to sources like, Dīpavaṁsa, Mahāvaṁsa, Samantapasādika which was confirmed by many missionaries who embarked to many parts of India and beyond India. Missionaries carried the gospel of Buddhism to Suvarnabhumi lands and spread the noble teaching to people in Asian territories such as China, Korea, Tibet, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, Siam, Laos as well as Malay Peninsula, and Indonesia. King Jayanaga of Sri Vijaya (Indonesia) sent a missionary to spread Mahayana cult of Buddhism in AD 1000(BE 1600). Most importantly, the Buddhist teaching carried to other parts of the world by all the missionaries who went there from Sri Lanka in the 13th century. In 1253 Thai Buddhist missionaries went to Sri Lanka and returned with the Pali version of the Buddhist Tripitaka. They also requested some monks from Sri Lanka to visit Sukhothai. Some Buddhist of Sri Lanka went to Siam. King Rama Khamheng advocated in the Theravada cult of Buddhism and exercised much influence on Thais. King Rama Khamheng embraced Theravada Buddhism and made it compulsory for all future kings of Thailand. Theravada Buddhism continues to be the state religion even today. Kingdom of Thailand had got the name, little India, for having received religion, especially Buddhism, which is the wisdom of the world, as Buddhism spread on tradition, culture, festival, language to the way of Thai people. Hinduism embarked to Suvannabhūmi, especially Thailand received Hindu in Drāvati and Srivijjaya period according to archeological evidence discovered in Thailand.

Dvaravati, the early Buddhist kingdom in Central Thailand , was first city connected to India and Thailand and linked religious and trade influence since the ancient time, as supportive   with archaeological evidence which discovered in central, northeastern of Thailand such as U Thong , Nakhon Prathom, Ku Bua in Rajaburi , Kancanaburi and so on. Furthermore, U Thong and Nakhon Phrathom city confirmed that Buddhism and Brahmanism embarked to Siam in the Dvaravati period which flourished in religious and trading enterprises carried by Indian missionaries and traders of the ancient time. According to literary and archaeological findings the central Thailand was a Buddhist

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kingdom of Dvaravati in seventh and eleventh centuries. Reference to the existence of the Dvaravati, (name of a town in Gujarat state in India) might have existed before seventh century, but if so, it was only as a vassal state of the Funan Empire. Evidence to the existence of the Dvaravati kingdom is found in several Chinese accounts. Such as The "Annals of Tang" (A.D.627-645), Hiuen Tsiang, who visited India during A.D. 629-645 and I-Tsing, who was there in the later part of the seventh century. Buddhism entered to Siam along with Brahmanism since the ancient time, Brahmanism embarked to Thailand in the southern parts of Siam in Malay Peninsula such as Takue Pa Nakhon Sri Dhammarat. From time immemorial, India had trade and cultural relations with West Asia, Rome, China, and Southeast Asia. Indian trade went to the cities of Mesopotamia, where their seals that belong to the period between 2400 and 1700 B.C.E. have been found. India also sent its missionaries and traders to the neighboring countries where they found settlements. During Darius the Great, Greece and India had earliest contact in about 510 B.C.E. Before the beginning of the Christian era, there was a large volume of sea borne trade between India and Western countries as far as Africa. Indo-Roman contact declined during third and forth centuries C.E. But India's relationship with Southeast Asia continued. With other significant factors in spreading of Indian cultural influence in Southeast Asia particular by Thailand. The ports were the important places that connected between India and outside.   Mishra explored that most of the trading activities were carried on from the ports lying on the large seacoasts of India. There was also a land route to Myanmar through northeast India. The wealth of Southeast Asia was an attraction for the Indians.The Ramayana, the Pali Nidesa, the Jatakas and many other works refer to Suvarnabhumi (land of gold),Karpuradvipa(Island of camphor), Yavodvipa (island of barley)etc. Inscriptions had attested the arrival of Indian Brahmans to Cambodia and settling there after marrying the royal families. Many of missionaries had been sent from India to Southeast Asia in these regions in order to spread religion.

The religious and cultural ties between India and Thailand contributed to the good relations in terms of promoting people to people, and tourism in both sides. Consequently, Thailand received Buddhism and Hinduism from India. Thailand adopted both religion and applied in their daily life .Therefore Buddhism can be the soft power which India and Thailand can play the role to connect and cooperate to enhance their bilateral relations, as India had established diplomatic relations since 1947.The influence of the great civilization, India on Thailand was the ancient linkage contributed in cooperation which India played in foreign policy through formulation in Soft Power diplomacy with Southeast Asia, particularly, Thailand. The bilateral relations is growing when the new era of relationship started in 1999s onwards, when India started to open liberalization of economic system and initiated new foreign policy as "Look East Policy" launched by Prime Minister, PV Narasimha Rao Simultaneously policy of "Look West" was initiated by Prime Minister, Chon Leekpai in 1997 to enhance economic and boost bilateral relations between the two countries.

II. A Theory of Soft Power Framework

The concept of soft power is popular in the international politics. The theory was propounded   by Joseph Nye, as opposed to concept of hard power.   According to Nye (2002:4a), power in this ability to affect to outcomes you want, and if necessary, to change the behavior of others to make this happen, the ability to gain the result one wants is usually associated with the scope of different resources such as territory, population, natural resources, military force, strength or economy, political stability. As Robert A.Dahl gives explanation that Power is the ability for one actor to influence the actions of another actor that would not have occurred otherwise. Carr also writes that power over opinion is not less essential for political purpose than military and economic power, and has always been closely associated with them. These ideas have since been summarized and popularized in recent year by Nye. Raven and French give opinion that there are five bases of power i.e., reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert. The thinking behind the concept of soft power can be traced even back to more than two thousand years. Joseph S.Nye Jr. has elaborated the concept of the influence that derives from intangible sources, like culture, basic principles and values, public diplomacy defined by him as "soft power.

Nye emphasized "Soft power" first in 1990 in his book "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power". Consequently, as Nye claims, "soft power" is an important reality for today. Joseph Nye is the first person to explain about fragility by "rigid methods" in order to change ways of

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the US foreign policy implementation. As to his opinion, US preferred to use their policy from a position of "hard power" for many decades when the economic and military potential are used.

Joseph Nye analysized the concept of soft power of a country that rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in place where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.)Nye explored the meaning of "culture" as the set of values and practices that create meaning for a society. It has many manifestations. It is common to distinguish between high culture such as literature, art and education, which appeal to elites, and popular culture, which focuses on mass entertainment

Nye explains "soft power" as an ability to co-opt people, to achieve political ends through attraction rather than coercion or payment. While "hard power" rests on threats (sticks) and inducements (carrots), "soft power" relies on the ability to shape the agenda in the world politics, based on principles and ideas. As Shashi Tharoor(2008:42) argued that after all Mahatama Gandhi won us our independence through the use of soft power, because non-violence and Satyagraha were indeed classic uses of soft power before Joseph Nye was a gleam in his mother's eye.

Nye highlighted that the U.S. was the archetypal exponent of soft power, home as it is to Boeing, Intel, Ford, the IPod, the Iphone, Microsoft, MTV, Hollywood and Disneyland, Starbucks and most of the major products that dominate daily life globally. In the book, *The Paradox of American Power*, Nye took the analysis of soft power beyond United State. He also wrote on three types of countries that are likely to gain soft power and so succeed:

Those whose dominant cultures and ideals are closer to prevailing global norms which now emphasize liberalism, pluralism, autonomy, those with the most accessed multiple channels of communication and the more influential over how issues are framed, and those whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international performance . Tharoor explored clearing that no country over the last few decades has scored more highly on all three categories than the United States. But Nye himself differs as Soft Power has been pursed with success by other countries over the years.

India Thailand relations are rooted in shared historical, cultural and religious ties since the ancient time. India, the Great civilization bonded culturally and religious aspect in terms of soft power to Suvarnabhumi territories in order to carry its culture and religions to Southeast Asian countries since 3th B.C.E. Consequently, Buddhism and Hinduism had been sent by the Great King to Suvarnbhumi areas particularly Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Siam and so on. King Asoka sent Buddhism which export production to aboard. Therefore the Emperor Asoka was the first person who played the soft power in order to propagate religions to Sunvarnabhumi territories. Buddhism and Hinduism were embraced in Thailand together which carried tradition, language, rite, ceremony, and literature to Thailand. The missionaries and traders from India brought religions and culture aboard by sea route, the cost in Orissa and some cost in South Indian ports from there of people went to Suvarnabhumi areas.

The relations between India and Thailand had been smooth and warm, while India struggled for Independence, Thailand also supported India in order to gain Independence from the British Raj. Eventually, some Indian politician moved to Thailand to do activity of politics against the British Empire in India. After India as gained independence in 1947, simultaneously, Thailand was the first country to recognize India the Republic of India diplomatically and politically.

The two mechanisms devised to establish new era of relations between the two countries

 In 1990s , Indian Prime Minister, PV Narasimha Rao began the soft power with new Indian foreign policy as 'Look East' in order to open India to liberalized economy and cooperation with East Asian and Southeast Asian countries to enhance strategic partnership in new foreign policy. The investment and trading is growing after India used new policy. In 1997,Thai government started with the policy of 'Look West' in order to look to India which is big market in the South Asia and emergence of new country with 1.25 billion people, 'Look West Policy' was launched by Prime Minister, Chuan Leekpai in order to enhance and cooperate economic and dimension of security of both sides. The first visit of the former Prime Minister Chartchai Choonovoon in1998, build Joint

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Commissions and Business Councils to enhance economic ties and establish constructive suggestions to promote bilateral economic relations, including the proposals for avoidance of double taxation.

Emergence of 'Look East Policy' in 1991 remarriage with Look West Policy in 1997 created and connect both countries in bilateral relations which improved economical and political ties between two countries in developing cordial relations, in which India looks up to Thailand as play maker to Southeast Asia which Asian countries have entrenched perceptions of India as a poor, backward, under developed country with overwhelming domestic and regional tensions whose future is hopeless. Therefore Thailand and India have deep rooted cultural relation for the long period. Both countries tried to cooperate, upgrade a dialogue partnership, and change of view at the highest level. Thailand' Foreign Affairs newsletter stated that the conceptual basis of the 'Look West policy' for Thailand is to cope effectively and efficiently with the rapid changes in the international political and economic environment in accordance with the reality of the post cold war era. The main objectives of the 'Look West policy' are follows:

1. To strengthen the existing bilateral relations with the target states.

To seek potential markets and investment opportunities overseas, and to promote foreign investment in Thailand, Prof. Naidu a conclude that 'Look East Policy' has once again emerged as a major thrust area of India's foreign policy after some hiccups in the mid-1990s.Although it is claimed that this policy encompasses the whole Asia-Pacific region, it is apparent that much of the emphasis has been laid on Southeast Asia. The 'Look East Policy' is responsible in making India as inalienable part of a vibrant relationship on the economic, political and strategic fronts.

 2. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation are important initiatives to work as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia. The two mechanisms cooperated in many factors such as Trade and Investment, Technology, Energy, Transport &Communication, Cultural Cooperation and so on. The BIMSTEC and the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation are also the major multilateral framework in regional metric of multilateral arrangements similar to the Asia –Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nation South Asia Association (ASEAN), East Asia Summit,(EAS),ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation+ China, South Korea, Japan(ASEAN+3) to deal with India, South and Southeast Asia.

BIMSTEC is similar to bridge India in forging a close link between Southeast Asia and South Asia. Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sector-oral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which was earlier known as BISTEC is a Grouping of seven members-Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand and was established in 1997. BIMSTEC is a unique initiative that provides a link between South Asia and South East Asia by way of economic cooperation and cooperation in other identified areas. Stating with 6 sectors, the BIMSTEC agenda of cooperation has expanded to 14 namely: 1)Trade and investment 2)Technology 3)Energy 4)Transport &Communication 5)Tourism 6) Cooperation in the field of agriculture and fisheries 7)Cultural Cooperation 8)Environment and Disaster Management 9)Public Health 10)People-to-People contact 11)Poverty Alleviation 12)Counter–Terrorism 13)Transnational Crime 14)Climate Change. The main motive behind the formation of the BIMSTEC is to set up a framework that is able to promote the regional economic development by utilizing the existing potential of the region. In this regard BIMSTEC formed various economic ventures, mutual assistance framework and building the mutual understanding of the member countries. In contrast to South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in South Asia and Association of Asian (ASEAN) in Southeast Asia, BIMSTEC is a unique regional grouping that is fostering economic and social development in both the sub-regions.

Interestingly, it is establishing the strategic links between the Mekong –Ganga Cooperation and Greater Mekong Cooperation. The regional economic integration is also an important factor behind the establishment of BIMSTEC. However, even the second summit of BIMSTEC failed to give any signal in this regard, as evident from the fact that no decision was taken to establish a permanent secretariat for BIMSTEC. This tendency reflects BIMSTEC only as a sub-regional framework of cooperation between South Asia and Southeast Asia. It also underestimates its potential of evolving as a regional organization like SAARC and ASEAN. Though BIMSTEC has provided a linkage between South and Southeast Asia, there exists an ample scope for strengthening

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multi-sectoral cooperation within BIMSTEC, which can facilitate its evolving as a viable regional organization. Therefore, BIMSTEC, in comparison to SAARC, offers an alternative and provides a bridge to other frameworks, especially the strategic link between India and Mekong –Ganga Cooperation (MGC). Both these sub-regional frameworks support the idea of a wider Bay of Bengal Community, which would also include Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was the original part of the "Suvarnabhumi programme" initiated by Indian and five riparian countries of the Mekhong River, namely, Cambodia, Laos, Mynmar, Thailand and Vietnam. The MGC initiatives were formally launched on 10th November 2000 in Vientiane, capital of Laos. The main adjective seeks to focus on building cooperation in sectors of tourism, culture, educational contacts and transport and communications between India and the five MGC countries. This project focuses on the 'natural connectivity' of India based on cultural and civilization similarities. In additional, this was aimed at the MGC in promoting culture and tourism by joining hands and pooling resources to re-enforce advantages of physical proximity, common heritage and Buddhist links.

The landmark between India, Singapore, Thailand, and China is reconstruction of Nalanda University in India in order to play the soft power between India, Singapore and other countries. It is the mark of region's strong knowledge and research bond between them. Consequently, The Mekong –Ganga Cooperation Initiatives (MGC) was launched in 2000, with a view to connect India and Five ASEAN countries as bridge providing a vehicle to pursue India's "soft power diplomacy" in those countries that have been culturally influenced by India considerably.

III. Conclusion

India and Thailand are strong in vibrant cultural relations and deep rooted historical connectivity since 3 century B.C.E. The influence of India still are in the Southeast Asia particularly, Thailand. Thailand received religions, traditions, languages, rites, from India and adopted to the way of life, Buddhism is state religion, where 95 per cent of Thai people profess to Buddhism. Brahmanism also find a place in the Royal ceremony and people go to worship in Brahmin Temple. Many people still believe in Brahmanism. Archeological evidence found in Thailand, such as Daravati confirmed that India had been connected to Thailand since the ancient time. The middle period of relations between India and Thailand started after India attained Independence in 1947. Relations between both sides had been warm and cordial. But after the Cold War era, India's relations with Thailand went up and down. Consequently, on the Cambodia Issues, India supported the Hamsamrin government which Vietnam was backing on the other hand. Thailand and ASEAN states stayed with China and United States. The new era of relations of two countries began when Prime Minister P.V.Narasimala Rao launched the new foreign policy as 'Look East' policy in 1990s. Simultaneously, in 1997, Thailand's 'Look West' policy was the perfect complement to India's 'Look East' policy which has been instrumental in promoting bilateral relations between the two countries. The sub-regional forms such as BIMSTEC and Mekong Ganga Cooperation are important mechanisms initiated to work like a bridge to connect and enhance India, South Asia, and Southeast Asia in many dimensions such as Transport &Communication, Tourism Cooperation, Cultural Cooperation, People-to-People contact etc. Nowadays, air fight navigation between India and Thailand is 170 a week, with millions of Indian people dwelling in Thailand. Additionally, 80,000 Thai people pay an exchange visit to India for pilgrimage in holly places and visit many tourist places. Many agreements in trading, cultural, educational spheres of both countries had been signed. Therefore, if is hope that the relations between India and Thailand will be cool and warm, based on deep rooted connections and cooperations of both sides in order to achieve prosperity and wealth, as associated benefits as part of soft power diplomatic engagement between the two countries in the 21st century.

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