



The Centre for Chinese Language and
Cultural Studies
Mae Fah Luang University

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Thailand and People's Republic of China have had a long-standing strengthened relationship for centuries. The close ties between the two nations have continued to be reflected in similar ways of life and culture of the two countries. Chinese immigrants residing in Thailand resided in the country happily and in harmony with the local Thais. Chinese-Thai descendants always had a role in national development. When China opened the country, formal diplomatic relations were established at the governmental level with the start of closer contacts and cooperation, from economic, social to political and cultural. Such good relations have expanded quickly though one main obstacle about language continues to exist where English has become the common language of communication. Despite the fact that quite a number of Thais of Chinese descendants are able to communicate in Chinese, the number is far from adequate. Ideas to promote Chinese language courses have risen again among the Chinese community in Thailand and the Thais who have been working with China after years of slow growth in Chinese instruction.

Efforts to establish a Chinese language and culture center were made from both the government and the private sector many times without success until 1999 when the issue was reconsidered.

Background

In March 1999, Minister of University Affairs (H.E. Mr. Prachuab Chaiyasan) together with Permanent Secretary for University Affairs (Dr. Vanchai Sirichana) and delegates conducted a visit to China to explore possibilities in educational cooperation between the two countries and their universities. One of the issues raised during the discussions with China's Minister of Education (H.E. Mrs. Chen Zhili) was the proposal for the Chinese Government to set up a language and culture center at Mae Fah Luang University (MFLU) to signify the centennial anniversary of the Princess Mother in the year 2000.

The request was closely pursued by the Ministry of University Affairs. On October 7-12, 1999, H.E. Minister Chen Zhili undertook an official visit to Thailand. On this occasion, the matter was raised again for discussion and the Thai side was informed that it was under the consideration of the Chinese Government with a possibility to see a favorable result.

H.E. Minister Prachuab during that trip, invited H.E. Minister Chen to visit Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai with Dr. Vanchai, then also



H.E. Madame Chen Zhili on the discussion with Dr. Vanchai Sirichana at Mae Fah Luang University, Chiang Rai



H.E. Madame Chen Zhili during her field trip to Doi Tung

Acting President of the university, accompanying Minister Chen to brief her on the university site and objectives of founding MFLU. The group also went up to Doi Tung Royal Project to learn of the commitments of the Princess Mother to develop environment and quality of life of people in the upper North of the country. The visit evidently proved to Minister Chen and her delegation that MFLU and the people of Chiang Rai had a serious determination to have a language and culture center which could become a center for the countries under Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).

The matter was seriously considered by the Chinese Government and an official announcement was made by the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok that the Chinese Government has approved the establishment of a center for Chinese Language and Cultural Studies at MFLU. The news brought delight to the university and the Chiang Rai people as well as the Chinese community in the country. Subsequently, a committee was formed to make necessary preparations for the construction of the Center in the future.

On August 7-27, 2000, an advance team from China Southwest Architectural Design and Research Institute, headed by Mr. Chen Kai Mei, visited the university for 20 days to do a preliminary architectural survey of the construction site of the Center. After the design was completed, the survey team and the university agreed that the whole area of the Center should be 3,500 square meters, decorated in the Suzhou garden style. The actual working space of 1,100 square meters would consist of one main building with four classrooms, a laboratory, three offices, a library and a multi-purposed room.

On August 15, 2000, Chinese Ambassador in Thailand (H.E. Mr. Fu Xuezhong) sent a letter to Minister of University Affairs, indicating the Chinese Government's support in form of grant aid to establish the Center for Chinese Language and Cultural Studies at MFLU and to provide instruction-related equipment. The matter was endorsed by the Cabinet on August 29, 2000.

The Crown Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn graciously presided over the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Center on December 9, 2000. Then, the Chinese Government commissioned China Yunnan Corporation for International Techno-Economic Cooperation (YIET) to build the Center and to sign an agreement on the construction plan with the time-frame to complete the work within seven months.



Mr. Zhang Guoqing, Consul-General of the P.R.C., Mr. Pang Rongqian, Economic and Commercial Counsellor in the Opening Ceremony on the construction of The Centre for Chinese Language and Cultural Studies on December 29, 2001



H.E. Mr. Yan Ting'ai Ambassador and Plenipotentiary of the P.R.C. to the Kingdom of Thailand and delegates paying a visit to Mae Fah Luang University, Chiang Rai on April 26, 2002

The construction has made good progress and is expected to have been completed by August 2002.

The launch of the construction ceremony was held on December 29, 2001 and was well attended by Chinese Commercial Counselor in Thailand (Mr. Pang Rongqian), Chinese Consul-General in Chiang Mai, President of MFLU (Dr. Vanchai Sirichana) and Chiang Rai's community leaders.

In regard to cooperation on curriculum development, the Ministry of Education of China dispatched two experts, namely, Professor Liu Ximing and Professor Shen Zhijun to work with the university from March 8- May 11, 2002. The programs of study comprise undergraduate degree programs, certificate and summer courses in Chinese Language.

It could be stated that the Center for Chinese Language and Cultural Studies has been established from the generous contribution of China's Government who has demonstrated her sincere wish for the Thais to study the Chinese language and culture. More importantly, it has shown the Chinese Government's determination to give the Center as a precious gift to the Thais as part of the celebration of the centennial anniversary of the Princess Mother. This Center is the one and only establishment in Thailand and the region built by the Chinese Government with the provision of experts to help with the curriculum development. The close cooperation of the experts with the MFLU team will ensure quality instruction of the Chinese language and cultural studies.

Objectives

The Center for Chinese Language and Cultural Studies is established with the following objectives:

1. To celebrate the centennial anniversary of the Princess Mother
2. To signify the strong relations between the peoples and the Government of China and Thailand
3. To serve as a center of the Chinese language and cultural studies for Thailand and the GMS

Operation

The operation of the Center is under the supervision of the university with the close technical cooperation of the Chinese Government. Students of the Center are from within the country and from countries worldwide. Besides language and cultural studies, research will be conducted covering a wide range of aspects including art, politics, social, administration, etc.

Building

The design of the Center for Chinese Language and Cultural Studies is of Chinese architecture surrounded by walls. Inside the wall are buildings, library, offices and multi-purposed areas. Gardens are of Chinese style to retain the genuine Chinese identity. The design is by Chinese architects while all the construction materials are imported from China. It is expected that the construction of buildings and facilities will have been completed by August 2002 to be ready for operation end of 2002.



The Centre for Chinese Language and Cultural Studies

Status of the Center for Chinese Language and Cultural Studies

The Center is an autonomous body under the Office of Academic Affair of the university.

Programs of Study

1. Two undergraduate degree programs are offered as follows:
 - 1.1 Business Administration (Chinese Language): a four-year program, using Chinese as the medium of instruction with an emphasis on business administration issues
 - 1.2 Liberal Art (Chinese Language): a four-year program, using Chinese as the medium of instruction with focuses on Chinese literature and culture (to be offered in the academic year 2003)
2. Certificate: a six-to-twelve-month program for beginners to gain proficiency in writing, reading and speaking the Chinese language and to learn the Chinese culture (in the curriculum development phase)
3. Short courses: a two-month course with a two-week study visit to Beijing to learn the Chinese culture, e.g. songs, gungfu, etc (in the curriculum development stage)

Funding Support

The construction costs of the Center for Chinese Language and Cultural Studies including all the construction materials, teaching-learning materials and equipments, and lecturers in the beginning are shouldered by the Chinese Government. The operating costs are under the responsibility of the university.



SINO - THAI RELATIONS FUND

Background

Mae Fah Luang Univeristy (MFLU) and the Thai people including Chinese-Thai descendants and Chinese citizens residing in Thailand are delighted to see the establishment of the Center for Chinese Language and Cultural Studies in Thailand. In order to express the spirit of cooperation from the Thai side to support the sustainability of the Center, MFLU has set up a committee to have necessary readiness preparations, chaired by MFLU President (Dr. Vanchai Sirichana). Meetings were called to discuss the operation of the Center and it was agreed that a Fund be set up to support the smooth operation of the Center in addition to the Thai Government's budget allocated. The Fund is named 'Sino-Thai Relations Fund' under the supervision of the Fund committee chaired by MFLU President. The Chinese Ambassador in Bangkok has also been asked to serve as the committee's honorary advisor while committee members are from various agencies.

The Fund is set up from the cooperation of all parties who wish to support the operation of the Center to ensure that it will be sustainable while benefiting the nation and her people. All are encouraged to donate to the Fund without any conditions imposed. The total amount of the Fund up to date is four million bahts.

Objectives of the Sino-Thai Relations Fund

The Sino-Thai Relations Fund has the following objectives:

- 1) To support the instruction of the Chinese language and culture and to provide scholarships to students enrolled in the programs
- 2) To promote education and research concerning China
- 3) To strengthen relations of the two countries and peoples
- 4) To demonstrate the spirit of cooperation of the Thai side in the setup of the Center

