

Luban Workshop Boosts China-Thailand Humanities Exchange Research Under the Belt and Road Initiative

Yaowen Ge

School of International Relations, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin, 300270, China

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Abstract: China-Thailand Luban Workshop, as a “small and beautiful” project in the construction of the Belt and Road, follows the basic principles of friendly cooperation, equality and mutual benefit, which further promotes the multifaceted cooperation between the two countries' economy and education. However, the research on people-to-people exchange in China-Thailand Luban Workshop is still insufficient, and there is even a certain academic gap. The exploration of the path of people-to-people exchange programs in China-Thailand Luban Workshop is also not sufficient. Based on this background, this paper further defines humanistic communication in the context of constructivism. It also proposes a new path to promote the construction of people-to-people exchanges in China-Thailand Luban Workshop — “Learning Together, Working Together, Living Together”. This approach provides practical new ideas for realizing heart-to-heart communication between China and Thailand, building a pattern of mutual trust and win-win structure, and realizing a community with a shared future of mankind.

1 INTRODUCTION

The world is in the midst of a major change not seen in a century. In response to this trend of world multipolarity and the general background of weak global economic recovery, China has put forward the initiative of building the Belt and Road Initiative. As one of China's fundamental national policies to open up to the outside world, the Belt and Road initiative is dedicated to building and strengthening connectivity partnerships in countries along the Asia-Europe-Africa continent and nearby oceans. However, in the process of further promoting the construction of the Belt and Road, all kinds of contradictions and problems are gradually revealed. Against this background, China has put forward the idea that the key to state-to-state relations lies in close bonds between peoples. In order to improve all-round cooperation in various fields among the countries along the Belt and Road, it is necessary to strengthen friendly exchanges among the peoples of the various countries and to enhance mutual understanding, so as to lay a solid foundation of public opinion, public sentiment and society for further regional cooperation (Xi, 2013). Therefore, the construction of the Belt and Road not only relies on the benefits offered by the economic and trade cooperation among countries, but

also cannot be separated from the people-to-people exchanges to provide assistance.

China-Thailand Luban Workshop is a new mode of international cooperation based on the image of Luban as a “national-level master artisans”, following the basic principles of equal co-operation and integration of industry and education and the concept of global governance of “common cause, common development and sharing”, and cooperating with vocational education institutions in Thailand to carry out vocational education and technical training, and to share China's excellent vocational education achievements and vocational culture. As a representative case of the Belt and Road people-to-people exchange, the goal is to strengthen vocational technology cooperation and vocational culture exchange through the vocational education of vocational colleges and universities in the two countries. To enhance national identity, promote heart-to-heart communication between China and Thailand, serve the sustainable development of the regional economy and society, and promote the building of a community with a shared future of mankind. Therefore, as an important brand for the internationalization of vocational education in China, China-Thailand Luban Workshop provides an excellent opportunity to practice the model of “economic cooperation+people-to-people exchanges”.

However, existing research and practice on people-to-people exchanges between the China-Thailand Luban Workshop is still insufficient, and the meaning of people-to-people exchanges has not yet become a very precise concept even in the Chinese context. For example, the English translation of 《关于加强和改进中外人文交流工作的若干意见》 is China to Improve People-to-people Exchanges with Foreign Countries. When the Chinese Foreign Minister met with a delegation from the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, he proposed to “promote people-to-people exchanges”, in which people-to-people exchanges were translated as “cultural and people-to-people exchange”. In Chinese academia, the definition of people-to-people exchanges or in the analysis of the path of people-to-people exchanges, also often falls into the trap of focusing only on cultural exchanges. Based on this research background and practical context, this paper will discuss the construction of the China-Thailand Luban Workshop Humanities Exchange Program in order to provide new ideas and paths for promoting humanities exchange and cooperation between the two countries.

2 MEANING OF HUMAN EXCHANGE

In Chinese, “人文(humanity)” should literally and connotatively include “人(person)” and “文(culture)”, and the combination of the two can be regarded as a people-oriented culture. “People-oriented” is in itself the essential requirement of the word “人文(humanity)” from the beginning to the end, and is a human value worthy of promotion (Zhuang, 2017). Communities and nations are made of people. Interaction between people constitutes society, and interaction between States constitutes the international community—in other words, it is “the interaction of actors that leads to the formation of social structures”, which is a typical constructivist explanation in international relations theory (Qin Yaqing, 2001). Although constructivism also emphasizes the influence of “culture”, it is also based on human agency, sociality and practice.

There are numerous examples of the practice of “communication” in Chinese social relations. Chinese exchanges or transactions are largely based on and facilitated by a relational quality, and relationships are the manifestation of this quality permeating social practices. So this Chinese relationship is a way of subliminally reciprocating

and providing access to goods and services that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. The nature of this relationship has been the result of a typical long-term “people-to-people exchange”.

Therefore, this paper argues that people-to-people exchanges is in fact a methodology of constructivism, which is a kind of people-oriented, spontaneous, daily, extensive communication and interaction behavior, and “people are close to each other, heart to heart” as the ultimate goal.

3 MOTIVATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHINA-THAILAND LUBAN WORKSHOP

In the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has relied on international cooperation among vocational colleges and universities to establish the Luban Workshop. On the basis of foreign education and technical exchanges of vocational colleges and universities, through the international cooperation model of Luban Workshop, China and the countries where the projects are located carry out academic education, technical training and teacher training to serve the economic and social development of the countries along the routes. At the same time, China also encourages students from vocational colleges and universities of different countries to participate in the National Vocational Colleges and Universities Skills Competition held in Tianjin to showcase, exchange and further strengthen the friendship among young students.

The China-Thailand Luban Workshop, as the first Luban Workshop, closely follows the requirements of Thailand's industry and China's Belt and Road construction. Supported by high-quality educational resources of Tianjin Bohai College's mechatronics technology, Internet of Things technology, CNC machine tool technology, new energy automobile technology, and Tianjin Railway College's (High-speed Railway) rolling stock overhauling technology and (High-speed Railway) railway signaling automatic control. It is a carrier of technical skill training organizations based on deepening school-enterprise cooperation and using the Engineering Practice Innovation Program (EPIP) as the teaching model, sharing China's high-quality vocational education and vocational technology with Thailand (Lv et al, 2023).

The motivation for the construction of the China-Thailand Luban Workshop is twofold. The first

reason is that Thailand has repeatedly reaffirmed its traditional hedging strategy as the strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China in Southeast Asia continues to escalate. However, judging from the trend of trilateral relations between China and the United States, Thailand's strategic center of gravity has clearly shifted in the direction of friendship with China. In the medium to long term, in order to prevent Thailand's "non-neutral" hedge reversal, it is necessary to further strengthen the foundation of China-Thailand strategic cooperation in terms of geographic connectivity, industrial integration, and people-to-people communication (Zhou, 2022). Therefore, China has gradually begun fruitful cooperation with Thailand in many fields, including politics, economy and trade, culture, science and education, further strengthening the friendly relations between the two countries; The second reason is that, from the point of view of vocational education, China's long history of importing advanced foreign vocational concepts and educational models has shown the phenomenon of focusing on "importing" rather than "exporting". So it makes our vocational education not in line with our status and image in the international community. The construction of the China-Thailand Luban Workshop is a kind of attempt for vocational education to go out.

4 STATUS OF THE CHINA-THAILAND LUBAN WORKSHOP HUMANITIES EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Heart-to-heart communication is the social foundation of national exchanges, which can lay a solid public opinion foundation for deepening China-Thailand all-round cooperation (Zhao, 2019). The fundamental way to realize Heart-to-heart communication is through people-to-people exchanges. In order to further promote people-to-people exchange, China-Thailand Luban Work-shop has built practice bases for international students, overseas expansion bases for teachers and students of vocational colleges and universities, and so on. In addition, events such as "Tianjin Bohai Week" and "Thai University Week" were organized under the theme of "Celebration". It aims to create a new platform for international exchange between Chinese and Thai colleges, and to create a new pattern of international exchange work between the two colleges.

The most distinctive feature is the International Students Practice Base, which is an intern-ship and practice base for overseas students and teachers and a cultural experience base. The internship practice base aims to give full play to the resource advantages of the college, cultivate internationalized, comprehensive

Table 1: Categories of China-Thailand Luban Workshop Humanities Exchange Program Exhibition Area.

Name of Exhibition Area	Functions of the exhibition area
Banmo Culture and Craftsmanship Exhibition Area	The main purpose of the project is to publicize the culture of Banmo and to promote the spirit of traditional Chinese craftsmanship. It organizes the "Silk Road Flower Rain-Impression of Lu Ban" cultural and artistic performance. At the same time, you can experience the ladder, ink bucket, planer, saw, lock and key, mill, assault and grinding machine invented by Luban, and have 3D experience of mortise and tenon structure through the interactive intelligent tablet.
Red Triangle Cultural Exhibition Area	It mainly carries out the propaganda of Chinese modern chemical culture-Red Triangle brand culture, so that foreign students can perceive the glorious deeds of Fan Xudong, the founder of China's national chemical industry, and Hou Deping, a Chinese scientist and a pioneer of the chemical industry, and achieve the purpose of promoting China's modern artisanal spirit.
729 Interactive Area	It is divided into "729" cultural experience, product display and sales area, and sports training and competition area, aiming to promote the physical and mental health industry into the campus and carry forward the national ball culture.
National Calligraphy and Painting Experience Exhibition Area	Mainly for the display of Chinese calligraphy and painting, can provide the experience of calligraphy and painting creation.
Chinese Traditional Opera Culture Exhibition Area and Chinese Folk Culture Exhibition Area	Chinese Traditional Opera Culture Display Area and Chinese Folk Culture Display Area: displaying Chinese musical instruments such as guzheng, pipa, quick board, displaying Chinese opera costumes, which can provide an experience of playing musical instruments, face painting, etc., displaying Chinese traditional folk sports equipment (such as shuttlecock, air bamboos), ancient Chinese weapons, etc.

and practical talents, and provide a good platform for Thai students in Tianjin. Its main form is to provide international students with opportunities to experience and learn industrial processes through various practical training bases, training centers, and training rooms. The cultural experience base, on the other hand, focuses on mainly reflecting the characteristics of Chinese cultural diversity, and has constructed several cultural display areas as shown in Table 1.

These China-Thailand Luban Workshop people-to-people exchange programs for the in-depth implementation of the “Study in China Program” and the “Outline of China's Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development Plan” have indeed contributed to the cultivation of local technical and skilled talents who are familiar with Chinese technology, understanding of Chinese craftsmanship, and cognizant of Chinese products in the cooperating countries.

5 CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS OF CHINA-THAILAND LUBAN WORKSHOP HUMANITIES EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Programs similar to those mentioned above abound at numerous official events within China. These projects built under the traditional view of people-to-people exchanges will have a direct impact on the breadth and depth of people-to-people exchanges between China and Thailand. The reason for this is nothing other than the fact that they have all gotten into a bit of a rut.

5.1 Over-Emphasis on One-Way, Even Indoctrinating and Ostentatious “Communication”

True humanistic communication requires two or more people to engage in a shared dialogue, to further recognize their commonalities and to develop respect for their differences, and the process is a two-way street. The one-way “communication” may neglect to understand the other country's value preferences, core concerns, and cultural identity. The display areas of China-Thailand Luban Workshop, such as Lumo Culture and Craftsmanship, Red Triangle Culture and Labor Education Base, are the embodiment of this one-way nature. This kind of display rather than

interactive exchange-based “communication”, has the effect of the “go out”, but ultimately difficult to “go into”. It may even fall into the trap of the “China threat theory”.

5.2 Too Much Focus on “Cultural” Exchanges

Although the exchange of culture has an indelible role in promoting people-to-people exchange, the youth of China and Thailand together only exchange culture, but also high-end Chinese fine culture, without the exchange of daily study and work, is ultimately superficial, the pursuit of form, lively for a moment, cannot be in-depth exchange. Apart from bringing a bit of exotic freshness to foreigners, it does not serve to model, share, and resonate with values and issues of public interest (Zhuang, 2017).

5.3 Too Much Reliance on Direct Official Coordination and Sponsorship

In the field of people-to-people exchanges between the China-Thailand Luban Workshop, there are many actors other than the government and its affiliated schools, such as cooperating companies, media, non-governmental organizations and even ordinary people. Civilian and non-governmental actors, because of their unofficial attributes, are often more flexible and diverse in their communication methods than governments, and are more likely to be accepted and well received by Thai students, and have a more lasting and far-reaching impact on the governments and populations of other countries (Payne, 2009). Therefore, if the actors keep insisting on the government, “public sentiment” will eventually become “government sentiment”. However, the state can still act as a macro-controller and policy maker to ensure that the international train of people-to-people exchanges will not go astray through forward-looking analysis.

In addition to domestic ideological factors, the differences in national political systems and the disruptions of international affairs have also had a significant impact on the development and promotion of people-to-people exchanges with China and Thailand. However, in recent years, Thailand has demonstrated a range of “non-neutral” positions in the strategic competition in Southeast Asia between China and the United States, and has gradually shown a tendency to be pro-China. A Thai scholar described it intuitively as “Today, Miss Siam (Thailand) is ready to leave ‘Uncle Sam’ (the United States) and

join the ‘Brother’ (China) in Beijing!’’. However, with the rapid rise of China and its active role in many regional initiatives, ASEAN members, including Thailand, continue to show concern and suspicion. To a certain extent, they see China as a potential threat, and thus vigorously resist the export and exchange of Chinese culture and higher education. The closure of a large number of Confucius Institutes around the world in recent times is a reflection of the Western political and academic elites’ high level of vigilance against the export of China’s cultural soft power (Cui, Wen, 2022). Thus, Thailand’s traditional diplomatic concept of “balance of power” is deeply rooted. Thailand does not want to be overly dependent on China or even turn to China, nor does it want China’s influence in the region to grow too quickly. Because of this concern about the strategic intent of the Belt and Road Initiative and its own interests, Thailand will remain on the “wait and see” side of the Belt and Road Initiative for a long time to come. Therefore, in this competitive international environment, it is difficult for China to quickly increase the recognition of the Belt and Road Initiative and Chinese values in Thailand in the short term. In addition to bilateral relations, some extra-territorial Powers of the Belt and Road Initiative will strategically and policy-wise hedge against the Belt and Road Initiative out of their own Asia-Pacific interests. At the same time, they also use the Western media to create “neo-colonialist” public opinion and spread the idea of preventing China’s “sharp power”. Therefore, the interference of these extraterritorial powers and Western media will also greatly influence the judgment of Thai youth, thus inhibiting the effectiveness of the Belt and Road people-to-people exchanges.

6 A NEW PATH OF PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE EXCHANGES BETWEEN CHINA-THAILAND LUBAN WORKSHOP

Under the framework of the Belt and Road, economic and trade cooperation and people-to-people exchanges are complementary and inseparable. The process of business and economic cooperation is essentially an exchange between people. When people interact for the first time, they complete a “social act” by sending and interpreting signals to each other and then responding to them, and the process of creating inter-subjective meaning begins. Subsequently, the parties proceeded further in the

same manner. The first social act creates expectations about each other’s future behavior: possibly wrong and certainly tentative, but still expectations. Based on this tentative perception, the self makes a new gesture (Alexander, 1992). Through this interaction over and over again, there will be a continuous increase in each other’s shared knowledge base. If repeated long enough, these “shared knowledge” behaviors create relatively stable concepts of self and others. Similarly, China-Thailand Luban Workshop, as an international program of industry-education integration and school-enterprise cooperation. It is also characterized by a long and gradual process of mutual cognition and is based on non-politicized and secular cooperative exchanges. In addition to this, in order to further promote this people-to-people, people-centered exchange and to strengthen the friendship between the youth of the two countries in the China-Thailand Luban Workshop. What government need is to raise the level of transnational culture and tolerance, not just to promote multiculturalism (Li et al, 2023).

The author believes that the best way to solve those challenges and dilemmas is to “Learn together, work together, live together”. Unlike the short-term approach, this path is more focused on relying on the Chinese youth in the workshops to build a good image and friendly gestures in the wide range of daily transnational interactions, and to share and build good things together. Because communication seems to work best among peers, it is not inhibited by hierarchy. The teacher-student relationship can be an obstacle when teachers need to ask students for advice (Nicholas, 2022). The establishment of the School of Chinese at the Shanghai International Studies University is a typical example. The institute provides a good platform for “Chinese and foreign students to interact”. Kelil, a Moroccan student majoring in Chinese International Education at Shanghai International Studies University, said in an interview, “As an international student, having the opportunity to be able to take classes together with Chinese students helps us a lot, and there are some things you might still want to go and communicate and discuss with a Chinese classmate.”

Surely the people-to-people exchange program of Luban Workshop is highly purposeful as an innovative national program. As far as the country is concerned, the promotion of “people-to-people exchanges” is aimed at utilizing “soft power” to create a “good image of China”. But a good image cannot be won by those historical, static images alone, but by the qualities and attitudes of the Chinese people and the humanistic landscape that is alive and

well in our society today. Hence, there is a need to change the traditional model of “people-to-people exchange”. This implies more of a “people-to-people” model. The government should not only send Chinese language teachers, but also provide a display area for traditional culture, and disseminate the international brand of “Luban Workshop” locally. Also, Thai students should be encouraged to “study together” with Chinese students and Thai teachers with Chinese teachers, and Thai students should be encouraged to “work together” with young Chinese employees in internship positions in related fields. This approach is conducive to the promotion of “organic docking” between Chinese civil society and Thai students, and even Thai civil society, and truly strengthens the social soil of inter-country relations. This paper argues that “learning and working together” is the best form of “people-to-people” interaction. This approach is more grounded than the exchanges generated by hours of arts and cultural exhibitions or a day-long forum. Only by studying and working together for a long period of time is it possible and necessary to get to know each other on all fronts, thus creating an atmosphere of teamwork and understanding and tolerance of each other's differences (Zhuang, 2017).

7 CONCLUSION

The ancient Chinese book, Zhou Yi, states that “in the observation of human relations, something of great value is gained that changes and forms a new world order”. Because of their common interests and emotional concerns, people in different countries aspire to “people-to-people” interaction in a certain “common social space”. In this long-term interaction, people will continue to develop common perceptions and eventually form a universal common value system of “living together”, thus creating new social constructs. When people reach a certain number of common ideas, a new world order is formed. Therefore, “living together” is the ultimate form of “learning and working together”, and a manifestation of the “community with a shared future of mankind”. As a “small and beautiful” project of the Belt and Road construction, the China-Thailand Luban Workshop has the prerequisites of “economic cooperation+people-to-people exchanges” and “living together”. In other words, China-Thailand Luban Workshop, as a “transnational common social space”, already has many attributes similar to “society”, such as mutual help, sharing and common negotiation, and it has more and more common

interests, norms and concepts. All in all, today's trends continue to present more opportunities than challenges. As one of the three pillars of the Belt and Road construction, the function of people-to-people exchanges is to truly realize “heart-to-heart communication”, and the purpose is to build an international pattern of mutual trust and win-win situation, so as to realize a community with shared future of mankind. In the future, Chinese academics need to further think about the difficulties faced by the China-Thailand Luban Workshop in the process of people-to-people exchange, and find a practical and feasible way to push forward the construction process of the Belt and Road, so that the Belt and Road Initiative will go steadily and reach a far-reaching goal.

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