

ABSTRACT

Although diplomatic relations between Thailand and Cambodia have fluctuated in the eyes of world communities, it is, however, undeniable that, for hundreds of years, the two countries have shared similarities in various aspects, through the process of borrowing and adapting, such as beliefs, values, religion, culture and traditional practices. They have at least served as major factors that helped nurture and develop the close relationship, trust, confidence and mutual understanding between people of the two countries, particularly in time of trouble and difficulty in their relations.

Based on historical records and academic research, the ties between Thailand and Cambodia could be traced deep into the ancient time when Thailand or Siam, or “Siem (ស៊ីម)” in the Cambodian context, found her first kingdom at Sukhothai. The new era of relations between Thailand and Cambodia came into existence when the diplomatic relations between the two countries were officially established on 19 December 1950. After Cambodia officially gained her national independence from France in 1953, the relations and cooperation between the two nations have developed considerably and they experienced the good and bad times as a result of the ever-changing circumstances of socio-political landscapes at domestic, regional and global levels. Notably, the involvement of Cambodia in ideological struggles between the communist/socialist and capitalist/democratic camps in the 1960s - 1980s later on made Cambodia fall into the hands of the Khmer Rouge, an extremist leftist regime that was responsible for the death of approximately 1.7 million Cambodians during the period from April 1975 to January 1979, followed by the Vietnamese invasion and administration by the Vietnamese-installed Cambodian Government until 1989 before the signing of Paris Peace Accord in October 1991 by all parties concerned as a first step leading to national reconciliation and peace in Cambodia.

Although Thailand and Cambodia are neighbors that share common boundary since the ancient time, however the relations between them are not smooth as many people have thought. Other than historical and nationalism factors, there are plenty of

elements that might cause the sense of mistrust, discord, prejudice and domination which would negatively affect their good relations and mutual understanding between the two countries, both at the government and people levels. At present, Thailand and Cambodia share a common land boundary at the length of approximately 800 kilometers. Unfortunately, most of 73 boundary posts, which were planted and built in conformity with treaties concluded between Siam and French colonists in the early 1900s, were damaged, removed, relocated or destroyed as the result of environmental changes and chronic wars in Cambodia. The uncertainty of the Thai - Cambodian boundary line and the fatal danger caused by landmines heavily planted along the Thai - Cambodian border areas have become major threats that prevent people from living peaceful lives and undermine the exchange of activities between the two people. They also deteriorate efficiency of authorities in their efforts to deter and suppress all kinds of illegal activities and transnational crimes in the border areas, particularly those related to drugs trafficking, smugglings of arms and explosives, trade of contrabands and smuggled goods, cultural artifacts, cars and motorcycles, etc. Among other things, the disparity of socio-economic development between people of the two countries is also a major root-cause of many problems such as Cambodian migrant workers who cross the border to illegally work in Thailand and who might become victims of human trafficking syndicates.

The interplay of domestic politics and the afore-mentioned issues sometimes affect the good relations to a larger extent and jeopardize mutual understanding between the governments and peoples of the two countries. It is realized that with the high spirit of “neighborliness” and the “invisible hands”, the severe and deteriorated situation could eventually subsided and be brought back to normal track. However, both countries were not lucky all the time as it appeared that one of the tragedies in their relations had occurred on 29 January 2003 as the result of the anti-Thai riot in Cambodia during which the Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh was burnt down and most of properties of Thai businesspersons were destroyed. That is why it is necessary for Thailand and Cambodia to explore their differences and take the correct ways and means to tackle all problems at their root-causes in order to achieve the so-called “eternal good-neighborliness” and “living in harmony”.

To determine appropriate answers to the raised notion, this thesis entitled the “Thai - Cambodian Relations under the Thaksin Shinawatra’s Administration (2001 - 2006)” is therefore made under the hypothesis of “The Thai - Cambodian relations under the Thaksin Shinawatra’s administration has reflected the sense of mistrust, discord, prejudice and domination as a consequence of history, nationalism and socio-economic disparity, eventually leading to misunderstanding and mistrust between the peoples of both countries”. The “international conflict” theory is used to prove the said hypothesis and analyze the formation and implementation of foreign policy of Thailand under the Thaksin Shinawatra’s administration.

I do fully hope that this thesis shall serve as solid groundwork for those who are interested in the study of Thailand’s foreign policy towards her neighboring countries and help build on what I have already done for the interest of the everlasting “peaceful co-existence” and “good neighborliness” between Thailand and neighbors, particularly Cambodia.