Challenges in Fostering “People-to-People Bond”: Studies on China by Southeast Asia and Studies on Southeast Asia by China

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Introduction

In 2013, the Chinese government put forward an ambitious initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative (B&R), which brings the economic prosperity of China and nearly 60 countries along the road together. In order to achieve this goal, China proposed “five connectivity”: policy communication, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bond. As for people-to-people bond, President Xi Jinping pointed out that amity between people holds the key to sound relations between states. To make the B&R Initiative construction successful, we need to get the support from the people of the countries, strengthen the friendly exchanges among the people, enhance mutual understanding and traditional friendship, and lay a solid foundation of public opinion and social foundation to carry out regional cooperation. Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, issued by the Chinese government in March 2015, provides a detailed description of people-to-people bond. The Chinese government and its leaders have expressed the importance of people-to-people bond, but generally speaking, academics, business, media, and other officials in China (and other countries) have not paid enough attention to study and understand the essence of people-to-people bond and figured out how to strengthen communication between the peoples. This paper takes China’s studies on Southeast Asia and Southeast Asia’s studies on China as a case.