

Indo-Thai Cultural Linkages: Historical and Contemporary Dimensions

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Culture is a phenomenon which transcends boundaries. Since time immemorial it has played a crucial role in shaping the relations between different communities and countries. In today's world of 'Asianization' whereby the countries of Asia are reinventing their historical linkages and asserting their combined power on the world stage, an understanding of the cultures of neighbours and how reciprocal cultural contacts can contribute to enhanced cooperation among Asian countries assumes importance. Definition of the term 'culture' is important to even just begin the discourse on its presence and role in international relations. According to Welsh cultural theorist Raymond Williams, 'culture' is 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (Williams 1976: 76). He emphasised on four kinds of meaning of the term 'culture': 'a general state or habit of the mind; the state of intellectual development in a society as a whole; the general body of the arts; and the whole way of life – material, intellectual and spiritual' (Williams 1960: XIV). The classic definition of culture is attributed to Edward Burnett Tylor, an English anthropologist, for whom culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1871: 1). Similarly, Philip Riley defined culture as "a product of human activity and effort, the sum of knowledge which humanity has produced, accumulated, stored and transmitted throughout history" (Riley 2007: 22). The UNESCO General Conference in Mexico in 1982 defined "culture" as comprising "the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features

1 The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support and other facilities provided by the Indian Council of Social Science Research and the National Research Council of Thailand during a field trip to Thailand within the framework of ICSSR-NRCT Bilateral Programme.

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