THE MODERNIZATION OF CHINA'S MILITARY POWER: ITS IMPACT TOWARDS THE SOUTH EAST ASIAN REGION

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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2004/2005
ABSTRACT

China entered a new period of reform and development after the death of Mao Zedung in 1976. Chinese leaders in the era of post Maoist adopted a new pragmatic policy under the slogan of "Four Modernization" that stressed on political stability and economic development rather than ideology struggle and class conflict. Under Deng Xiaoping, China became a market economy and subsequently brought greater economic freedom to the Chinese. With the economic reform and open door policy, China economy experienced spectacular growth. It chalked up an average annual growth rate of 9.7 percent during 1978 to 1995, and double-digit rates for four consecutive years from 1992 to 1995. China ended 2000 with a strong 8 percent economic growth, compared to the 7.1 percent of 1999. Taking these advantages, China started to modernize her aging military force in order to protect her interests in the international community. The continuing growth of China's economy and the modernization programs of her military force has become an open concern for some scholars both in the West and in the regions adjacent to China. China's increasing influence in international affairs have caused worry to the extent that China was perceived by her neighboring countries including members of ASEAN as a threat. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to discuss on the modernization of China's military power and its impact towards Southeast Asian region. The research will only focus on the development program of China's military power after the end of the Cold War until the present day. The research will also attempt to prove whether China is really modernizing her military power for self-defense or to compete with other super powers such as the United States, subsequently posing a threat to Southeast Asian region. In discussing the so-called 'China threat', this research found that China threat is based on perceptions that were shaped by the historical experiences of a particular country with China. Although ASEAN's countries do not share a uniform perception of China's growing military power but they do agree with the collective ASEAN's strategy of engagement towards China. At the same, Beijing claims to seek a peaceful international climate whilst concentrating on domestic development that is vital for China's modernization programs. The recognition of China as a benign power has made China been part of ASEAN's collective strategic engagement for both parties. The impact of China's military modernization towards Southeast Asian region would be creating a more positive than a negative impact. Therefore, China would not create a potential threat to ASEAN despite of her powerful military and economic position.
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

Date: 24th April 2005

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